KEN ALBALA, EDITOR

# FOOD CULTURES OF THE WORLD

## *Encyclopedia*

AMERICAS



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# Food Cultures of the World Encyclopedia

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# Food Cultures of the World Encyclopedia

## AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

**Volume 1**

KEN ALBALA, EDITOR

GREENWOOD

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# List of Abbreviations

c = cup
fl oz = fluid ounce
gal = gallon
in. = inch
lb = pound
mL = milliliter
oz = ounce
pt = pint
qt = quart
tbsp = tablespoon
tsp = teaspoon

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# Preface

This encyclopedia is the culmination of nearly a decade's work on the *Food Culture around the World* series. As that project expanded to 20 volumes, we realized that many peoples and places, fascinating and important in their own right, had not been covered. Considering that the cultural study of food has become more sophisticated and comprehensive over the past decade, that food has become a legitimate academic topic in curricula at every level of education, and that we seem to become more obsessed with food every day, we recognized that we simply could not leave out much of the planet. The only way to satisfy this growing demand is the set you see before you, which includes material covered in the series plus new articles that span the globe. We have gathered food scholars from around the world—people whose passion and expertise have given them deep insight into the ingredients, cooking methods, and ways of eating and thinking about food in their respective countries.

A number of questions regarding breadth and depth naturally arose in planning this work, particularly about the level of analysis for each article. Could we do justice to the vast array of distinct cuisines on earth? Could we include regional coverage for well-recognized food cultures? That is, rather than the nation-state as the criterion for inclusion, why not add Alsace, Provence, and Burgundy with France, or Sichuan, Hunan, and Canton with China? It became apparent that we would need another 20 volumes or risk very brisk, superficial coverage and that as arbitrary as the construction of nation-states has been historically, in particular the way minority cultures have tended to be obscured, the best way to organize this encyclopedia was by nation. Regional variations and minority groups can, of course, be discussed within the framework of nation-based articles. On the other hand, some groups frankly demanded separate entries—those who stood out as unique and distinct from the majority culture in which they happen politically to be included, or in some cases those people who either transcend national boundaries or even those very small places, whose great diversity demanded separate coverage as truly different from the culture around them. Thus we include the Basques separate from Spain and France, and the Hmong. We have not, however, included every single people merely on the basis of national status. This should not be taken to suggest that these cultures are unimportant but merely that many places share a common culture with those around them, though divided by national borders. In such cases we have provided cross-references. This seemed a preferable solution to suffering repetitiveness or unmanageable size.

The format for each entry also raised many questions. "Eating Out," for example, is simply not relevant in some places on earth. Would forcing each article into a common structure ultimately do injustice to the uniqueness of each culture? In the end it seemed that the ability to conduct cross-cultural analysis proved one of the most valuable assets of this set, so that one could easily compare what's for lunch in Brazil or Brunei. Moreover, tracing the various global currents of influence has been made possible since a shared set of parameters places each article on a common footing. We can trace, for example, the culinary influence of various peoples as they spread around the world. In this respect this work is unique. There are several excellent food encyclopedias on the market, all of which cover individual ingredients, topical themes, cooking methods, and sometimes recipes. None, however, treats individual food cultures as discrete units of analysis, and for students hoping to find an in-depth but succinct description of places, or for those hoping to compare a single food topic across cultures, this is the only source to which they can turn. We anticipate that this work will be invaluable for students, scholars, food writers, as well as that indomitable horde popularly known as foodies.

The other major question in designing this encyclopedia was how to define what exactly constitutes a *food culture.* This term should be distinguished from *cuisine,* which refers only to the cooking, serving, and appreciation of food. Naturally we include this within each entry and in doing so have taken the broadest possible definition of the term *cuisine.* That is, if a people cooks and recognizes a common set of recipes and discusses them with a common vocabulary, then it should be deemed a cuisine. Thus there is no place on earth without a cuisine. A nation, continent, region, and even a small group may share a common cuisine. This encyclopedia, however, covers much more. It explores the social context of consumption, the shared values and symbolic meanings that inform food choices, and the rituals and daily routine—indeed everything that constitutes a food culture. Thus we include religion, health, mealtimes, and special occasions, as well as the way certain foods confer status or have meanings beyond simple sensory gratification. Nor have we neglected the gastronomic angle, as recipes are an essential expression of what people think is good to eat, and their popularity is the outcome of decisions made at every level of society, from the farmer who grows food, and the environment and material resources that make it possible, to the government policy that promotes certain ingredients, to the retailers who market them, to the technologies by which they are transformed, and to the individual preference of family members at the level of the household. To this end we have added food culture snapshots to each entry, which puts a human face on the broader topics under discussion.

As with the series that preceded this encyclopedia, our aim is to present the panoply of human experience through the lens of food in an effort to better understand and appreciate our differences. We will find remarkably common experiences among us, especially as the world increasingly falls under the sway of corporate multinational food industries, but we will also find deep, profound, and persistent distinctions, ones that should and must be preserved because they are essential to who were are and how we define ourselves. These are differences that should not be effaced nor lost as our tastes become increasingly cosmopolitan. I hope that in

reading these articles you find, like me, that the world is a marvelously diverse place and what people eat tells us about them in such an immediate and palpable way that in a certain sense you feel you know the people at some level. This, of course, is the first step toward understanding, appreciating, and living with each other peacefully on this small lump of turf we call earth.

*Ken Albala*
*University of the Pacific*

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# Africa

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# Algeria

## Overview

The People's Democratic Republic of Algeria is situated between the North African countries of Morocco and Tunisia. It is the largest country bordering the Mediterranean Sea and the second-largest African country, with a total landmass as large as the whole of Western Europe. Algeria is divided into 48 *wilayas,* or provinces. More than 90 percent of the population lives in the most fertile and smallest region, called the Tell, which runs the entire length of Algeria's Mediterranean coastline. The remainder of the country can be divided into three parallel geographic bands that run east–west. South of the Tell is the Tell Atlas mountain range, followed by the Saharan Atlas mountain range, and finally the Sahara desert. Algeria's Sahara comprises more than 90 percent of the country and is bordered by Western Sahara, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and Libya.

Most Algerians are of Arab-Berber heritage; identification with either or both can depend on cultural ties or political beliefs. Arabic has been the official national language since independence from French colonial rule, as written in the constitution of Algeria in 1963. *Tamazight* (the Berber language) was recognized as a national language in 2002 by constitutional amendment. Although French is widely used in government, media, and education, it has no official status. In recent years, there has been a popular movement to emphasize a national Algerian identity, rather than regional ones.

Islam is the official religion of Algeria. The vast majority of Algerians are Sunni Muslims; Christians and Jews comprise less than 1 percent of the population. Pork and any food products derived from pork are forbidden from the diet in accordance with Islamic dietary laws.

Algerian cuisine represents a historically unique mix of Mediterranean and African peoples. Thousands of years of immigration and conquest by, and trade with, Phoenicians, Arabs, Jews, Romans, *Moriscos* (Muslims from Spain), Ottomans, Italians, French, and Spanish have left their mark on the basic Berber foundation of Algerian cuisine. However, like Morocco and Tunisia, the single largest influence was medieval Islamic cooking. Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco are collectively known as *Al-Maghrib* ("the West" in Arabic) to geographically and culturally distinguish the region from the Middle Eastern part of the Arab world, called *Al-Mashriq* ("the East").

## Food Culture Snapshot

Geographic location and social class play key roles in determining what Algerians eat. Lyesse and Chaima Chenna live in a middle-class neighborhood in Algiers, the capital of Algeria. Lyesse, originally from the Kabylie, is an architect; his wife, Chaima, originally from Tlemcen near the Moroccan border, is an attorney. Their lifestyle and diet are representative of educated urbanites living in a large cosmopolitan city, whose diet includes dishes from different parts of Algeria, France, Spain, Italy, and the Middle East.

Lyesse and Chaima begin their day at 7 A.M. with homemade *baghrir* (semolina pancakes) served with honey, or baguette bread, purchased from a bakery, served with jam and coffee. The Chennas eat lunch with coworkers at a diner that serves simple dishes such



Algeria, city and the main marketplace. (Corel)

as composed salads, *karantika* (chickpea pie), or lentil soup. Later in the afternoon, around four o'clock, the Chennas go to a tearoom to have traditional Algerian pastries or Ottoman-influenced baklava with mint tea or coffee. Dinner is around 8 P.M. and is the largest meal of the day. The main dish is roasted or grilled lamb or chicken (served with bread) or a *tagine,* a braised stew of lamb or chicken with vegetables served with couscous. Side dishes include salad, pan-sautéed or stewed vegetables, and lentil or chickpea dips. Dessert is typically fresh fruit.

Urbanization and globalization have brought rapid changes to Algeria. City dwellers tend to live in smaller family units away from large extended families, and urban women are more likely to work outside the home than their rural counterparts. The growing number of supermarkets in big cities not only has made shopping for meals more convenient but also provides access to a range of prepared and packaged foods that considerably reduce meal-preparation times. However, shopping in *souks* (outdoor markets) and small shops is still very much a part of daily life in Algeria. Chicken drumsticks purchased at a supermarket are seasoned with spice blends purchased at a small shop and served with vegetables purchased from a sidewalk stall.

Lyesse and Chaima have an increasing variety of restaurants to choose from when they dine out. Besides enjoying traditional Algerian dishes at small restaurants, street-food bazaars, and fast-food outlets, they go to French-style cafés for simple bistro fare and Italian restaurants for pasta or pizza. When entertaining foreign clients for business, they go to hotel restaurants where a range of international dishes are available, even Chinese specialties.

## Major Foodstuffs

Despite having an impressive share of the Mediterranean coastline, fishing in Algeria is an underdeveloped industry. Sardines, anchovies, squid, shrimp, and mussels are the most commonly available seafood. Algeria has very little fertile land; only 3.17 percent of the total land area is arable. Crop cultivation is heavily concentrated in the northernmost part of the country in the Tell region near the coast and in mountainous areas with high plateaus such as Setif and Constantine in northeastern Algeria. Major crops are wheat, barley, and potatoes. The remainder of the country is arid or semiarid and largely unsuitable for farming. The exceptions are oasis towns where dates thrive. Vast tracts of date palms in the desert create microclimates where apricot, orange, and olive trees also grow and smaller plant foods such as onions, tomatoes, and cabbages thrive.

The Algerian Sahara isn't entirely barren outside of oases; it is rich in petroleum and natural gas reserves. For the past several decades, the country's economic growth has been heavily dependent on high gasoline prices, making it one of the wealthiest African countries. Investment in the gas industry was at the detriment of other industries including agriculture, livestock, and fishing. The former breadbasket of ancient Rome has become one of the world's largest grain importers. By 2008, more than 60 percent of all foods were imported to meet demand. With falling gasoline prices, the Algerian government has recently taken measures to boost agricultural productivity.

Dietary staples are wheat in the form of couscous, bread, or pasta and chickpeas or lentils in dips or soups. Almost all Algerians eat a combination of grains and legumes daily. Common vegetables include zucchini, carrots, eggplant, cardoons, artichokes, okra, turnips, cabbage, spinach, tomatoes,

and peppers. It's difficult to imagine contemporary Algerian cooking without ingredients from the Americas such as tomatoes, peppers, and potatoes. Tomatoes were probably introduced to Algeria in two stages: first by the Spanish, who captured Algerian ports shortly after setting sail for the Americas in 1492, and then by the Italian immigrants who came almost 350 years later with French colonial rule. Evidence suggests three possible points of entry for chili peppers into Algeria: through the Mediterranean coast via the Spanish, through West Africa via Portuguese Atlantic trade, or through eastern Mediterranean land trade routes. Spanish or Italian settlers possibly introduced potatoes into Algeria.

Watermelon and other melons are valued for their high water content. Fresh grapes, apricots, apples, oranges, tangerines, lemons, kumquats, quince, and bananas are available seasonally. Fruit is dried or preserved in sugar for storage. Citrus fruits, lemons in particular, are preserved in salt and used to flavor tagines and sauces. Olives are brined or oil cured.

Algeria's growing dairy industry has failed to meet the even more rapidly increasing demand; in 2008, about 17 percent of all food imports were dairy products. The demand for powdered milk is especially high. Powdered milk is used by manufacturers in various products or reconstituted with water for drinking. Fresh milk is drunk plain, churned into butter, fermented into kefir or yogurt, or made into soft cheese. Gruyère, Parmesan, mozzarella, and spreadable processed cheeses are purchased in stores.

Lamb is the preferred meat. Beef is increasingly available because of globalization and a growing dairy industry. Chicken and eggs are relatively inexpensive sources of protein; Algerians have an astonishing array of chicken and egg dishes.

Since butter is highly perishable, it is often clarified or fermented to extend its shelf life. Clarified butter is used for cooking, and fermented butter is used as a flavoring agent. Margarine is increasingly popular as a relatively inexpensive alternative to butter. Olive oil is the most preferred cooking medium and is also highly valued for its purported medicinal properties. It is also used to flavor marinades, dressings, and dips.

Water is served with meals. Syrup-flavored water and carbonated beverages are drunk with light snacks. Coffee and tea are served at breakfast, with afternoon pastries, and after dinner. Mint tea is the national drink of Algeria.

## Cooking

Algerian kitchens are simple by North American standards. Most cooking is done on stovetops or propane-fueled burners using just a few pots and pans. Pressure cookers were introduced into Algeria in the 1970s and are used frequently for their time- and energy-saving benefits. Tagines that once took hours to cook in clay vessels now take about an hour in a pressure cooker. However, even in urban areas, tagines are still sometimes cooked in clay *tagines*—the dish and the cooking vessel are both called *tagine*—outdoors over braziers.

Tagines are simply stews or soups of meat, poultry, or seafood with vegetables. There are no codified rules as to how they should be prepared. Cooking techniques and ingredients vary from region to region and family to family within regions. Some cooks add ingredients in layers: a layer of sliced onions at the bottom, followed by lamb sprinkled with spices, and then vegetables such as celery, carrots, and zucchini. Other cooks place everything into the pot at once. Tagines with thick sauces are often eaten with bread, which is used to scoop up food. Soupy tagines are usually served with couscous. Every Algerian household owns a *couscoussier* (a large pot with a steamer insert) for steaming couscous over a pot of simmering soup or stew of meat, chicken, or seafood with vegetables.

Flatbreads and *warka* pastry sheets are made at home using a flat, round griddle called a *farrah.* Since many households do not have ovens, round leavened breads known as *khobz eddar* (house bread) are cooked in deep pans on the stovetop or purchased from a bakery. Leavened breads are also baked in a *taboun* (a large outdoor oven). In rural areas, tabouns are often community owned. Small bakeries in cities charge a baking fee to patrons who bring homemade dough.

Men are typically in charge of outdoor grilling. Grills for kebabs and sausages are simple metal grates placed on top of a metal box or clay brazier filled with burning charcoal or wood. Roasting a whole lamb is a bit more complicated: The lamb is rubbed with spices and cooked on a rotisserie spit over a large fire. The lamb is frequently basted with clarified butter or olive oil to keep the meat moist and to create a crispy skin. The spit is turned every 20 minutes to ensure even cooking.

Preparing Algerian food can be labor-intensive. Middle-class to affluent families often have cooks, called *dadas.* In rural areas, where several generations of a family live in one household complex, the older women supervise food preparation while their daughters and daughters-in-law do most of the actual cooking. Nuclear families living in cities often use packaged food products and convenience items to reduce cooking times and kitchen labor needs.

Spices are purchased ground or whole from spice vendors who also sell proprietary blends called *ras el hanout* ("top of the shop") consisting of a dozen or more spices. Whole spices are ground at home using a mortar and pestle or an electric grinder. The most widely used everyday spices are cumin, paprika, and turmeric. The use of other spices such as coriander, cinnamon, fennel, anise seeds, cardamom, and nigella seeds tends to have many regional variations. Expensive spices, for example, saffron, are usually reserved for special-occasion dishes.

Algerian cooks rarely dry-roast spices. Spices are usually added to soups and stews in several stages throughout the cooking process to create depth of flavor. Lemon juice or vinegar is sometimes added to finished soups and stews for acidity. Spice pastes and marinades are made with a mixture of spices, pounded garlic, grated onion, olive oil, chopped herbs, and citrus juice or vinegar. In wealthier kitchens saffron is used for color; sugar, honey, and dried fruits for sweetness; fresh citrus and vinegar for acidity; and nuts as thickening agents.

Tomatoes became widely used in Algerian cooking because they provided the culinary functions of quite a few ingredients, especially many that are beyond the budgets of humbler households: Chopped fresh tomatoes, fresh tomato juice, sun-dried tomatoes, sweet tomato jam, tomato puree, and tomato sauces are used to add color, sweetness, and acidity and to thicken sauces. Sweet bell peppers are used almost as much as tomatoes. However, the use of hot peppers tends to be more localized. *Harissa,* a hot chili sauce, is more commonly used in eastern Algeria near Tunisia than in other regions of the country. Overall, Algerian foods are not hot and spicy.

Tomatoes and peppers are also stewed, grilled, or stuffed, as are most other vegetables. Algerians have a fondness for vegetables stuffed with ground lamb or rice. A range of vegetables such as cabbage, zucchini, cardoons, artichokes, and eggplant are prepared similarly. Stuffed vegetables are called by Arabic and Turkish names, *mashi* or *dolmas,* respectively.

Potatoes are ubiquitous in Algerian cooking. They are a readily available and inexpensive starch that helps compensate for grain and cereal shortages. French fries are stuffed into baguette bread with spicy lamb sausages (*sandwich aux merguez*); sautéed potato wedges are used to garnish tagines; raw potatoes are hollowed out and stuffed with ground lamb; pureed potatoes are served as an accompaniment to roasted meats; and leftover mashed potatoes are shaped and fried into croquettes.

Deep-fried foods such as beignets, a kind of doughnut, and pastries are usually purchased from



Tagine, a braised stew of lamb or chicken with vegetables, served with couscous. (Laurent Renault | Dreamstime.com)

street vendors or at restaurants as snacks. Pickling and canning is still done at home in rural areas. Tomatoes are canned or sun-dried; citrus is preserved in salt or sugar; meat is preserved in fat or dried for jerky; fruits are preserved whole in sugar syrup, cooked into jam, dried, or coated with sugar; and peppers, turnips, and cabbages are pickled in vinegar.

## Typical Meals

Algerian meals vary depending on region, socioeconomic status, and urban or rural location. National economic growth during the past few decades has resulted in a growing middle class. However, Algerian society still tends to be economically stratified into two groups: the rich and the poor. Middle-class to wealthy Algerians often eat four times a day: three light meals of breakfast, lunch, and a late afternoon snack with tea, followed by a main dinner meal. Poor Algerians, particularly in rural areas, subsist on coarse grains and cereals supplemented with small portions of legumes and dates.

Couscous is the staff of life and the iconic dish for all Algerians. Couscous is often referred to simply as *ta'am* (Arabic for "food"). Couscous is the traditional meal after *salaat-ul-jumu'ah,* a congregational prayer held at mosques every Friday immediately after noon. There is no special occasion or holiday without couscous.

Traditionally, Algerians sit on the floor for meals, sometimes on a carpet or cushions. Most dishes are served at room temperature; tagines, soups, and meat dishes are served hot. A small selection of *mezze,* or appetizers, is served for guests or on special occasions. Main dishes may be served all at once or in courses. Food is eaten only with the right hand in accordance with Islamic tradition. The left hand is used for personal hygiene and thus considered unclean for eating. Couscous is eaten with the first three fingers of the right hand or a spoon, never with a fork.

The following are examples of typical meals in middle-class families in three regions of Algeria. The food of Setif in the mountains of northeastern Algeria is simple and rustic. Spices are used sparingly, if at all. The region has a long history as a center of grain production and trade going back to ancient Rome. Farming is done on the rain-inducing plateaus, and livestock graze in hilly pastures. The diet is based on whole grains such as barley, bulgur, and millet, which are all steamed for couscous. Lamb and chicken tend to be more abundant here than in many other regions.

Agrarian families rise at dawn to a breakfast of *kesra* (Berber flatbread made with semolina flour) and buttermilk. Fresh or dried fruit is packed for snacking while working in the fields. Lunch consists of couscous with buttermilk or kesra with a small piece of grilled meat and a salad of fresh herbs and wild greens. Mint tea is served late in the afternoon with semolina butter cookies or biscuits.

The main meal, dinner, is eaten around sunset. Dinner consists of couscous made from bulgur. The steamed bulgur is served on a large platter surrounded by the meat and vegetables from the tagine; the tagine broth is strained and served separately in a tureen or large bowl. Other dishes are soup with chickpeas and barley, grilled or braised lamb, and several vegetable preparations. Dessert is fresh fruit, followed by a selection of fried sweets soaked in syrup.

In the Mediterranean port city of Annaba, near the Tunisian border, the foods are hot and spicy; harissa and hot peppers are ubiquitous. Breakfast is eggs poached in a spicy tomato sauce with chickpeas. Italian settlers came with the French occupation of Algeria, and their culinary influence is very apparent in Annaba. Lunch is pizza topped with spiced lamb or pasta in a tomato sauce with seafood.

Dinner, typically served at 7 P.M., is the largest meal of the day. Couscous is served with seafood in tomato broth. The presentation for couscous is similar to Tunisian and Sicilian couscous: The broth is spooned over a large platter of couscous, and the seafood is placed on top. Fruit is served for dessert, followed by semolina cake drizzled with honey syrup.

The port city of Oran has a different meal structure. From Oran, it takes only nine hours by ferry

to reach Alicante, Spain. The city provided a refuge for Moriscos after the Christian reconquest of Andalusia. In 1509 the Spanish captured the port of Oran. For the next 300 years Oran would change hands back and forth between the Spanish, Barbary pirates, and the Ottomans. Oran was also where Spanish settlers came with the French invasion of Algeria. They brought with them rice dishes such as arroz con pollo (chicken and saffron rice) and paella (rice with seafood, vegetables, and/or meats). Oran is still famous in Algeria for exceptional rice preparations.

Breakfast in Oran is a scrambled egg dish called *shakshuka,* an Ottoman-influenced dish of sautéed bell peppers and onions with eggs stirred in. Lunch consists of Spanish-influenced *cocas* (puff pastry stuffed with sautéed vegetables) or *frita,* a pizza-like baked dish topped with olives, peppers, and tomatoes. Dinner is served at 8 P.M. The main dish is arroz con pollo made with long-grain rice or basmati rice, which is a new "foreign" ingredient sold in supermarkets. Dessert is baklava, a flaky pastry with nuts, drizzled with Seville orange syrup, served with cardamom-infused coffee.

## Eating Out

Algerian restaurants tend to be categorized according to specialties or type of cuisine. The capital city of Algiers, in particular, offers diners a range of Mediterranean dishes and cuisines. Restaurants serving non-Mediterranean foods are rare, although Algiers has a handful of Indian, Vietnamese, and Chinese restaurants. International dishes beyond Mediterranean cuisines are usually available in hotel restaurants.

Street food is very popular in Algeria. Vendors usually specialize in a single dish. Fried donuts called *sfenj* or *beignets* and *briks* (warka pastry stuffed with egg) are common breakfast items. Kebabs, merguez sausage sandwiches stuffed with French fries (*merguez frites*), and sandwiches of thinly sliced rotisserie-cooked lamb in baguettes are popular lunchtime fare. In the evening entire town squares are turned into street-food bazaars with vendors serving more extravagant dishes such as paella and *bastila* (a pie of chicken, eggs, and almonds in many layers of flaky phyllo-like dough). Roving mint tea and coffee vendors walk the streets throughout the day.

Fast-food restaurants in Algeria are similar to casual North African and Middle Eastern places found in Europe and America. They serve vertical rotisserie-grilled meats (called either Turkish-influenced *doner* or Arab-influenced *shawerma*); falafels stuffed into pita bread; and French fries. In recent years, globalization has brought in a Belgian fast-food chain, Quick. A McDonald's opened in Algiers in 2008.

Traditional Algerian restaurants tend to focus on a small group of related dishes such as couscous served with a choice of several tagines or soups; kebabs and *mechoui* (roasted or grilled dishes); or seafood preparations. The former European colonial presence is still very much alive in the restaurant world. French-style cafés serve simple bistro fare like *steak frites* (steak with a side of French fries) and *moules ail et persil* (mussels steamed in garlic and parsley). Italian diners serve pizzas and pastas.

Small Algerian bakeries and pastry shops typically specialize in only traditional Algerian breads and sweets. Larger bakeries in cities integrate French goods. Baguettes are ubiquitous in Algeria; croissants, éclairs, and European-style cakes are also fairly common.



Harira, a hearty soup made with lamb, legumes, grains, and spices. (iStockPhoto)

## Special Occasions

Algeria is predominantly a Sunni Muslim country. A small minority of Mozabites (a Berber group) in central Algeria are Ibadi Muslims. The most important holidays for Sunni Muslims are the holy month of Ramadan and Eid al-Adha. Ramadan falls on the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar every year. Fasting is one of the five pillars of Islam essential to Sunni Islam. During Ramadan, Muslims do not eat or drink from dawn to dusk. The fast is broken with *iftar* ("breaking the fast") immediately after sunset with a date and a glass of milk or *lben* (a thin yogurt drink). This is followed a large feast featuring many extravagant dishes such as *harira,* a hearty soup made with lamb, legumes, grains, and spices, or a sweet lamb tagine with dried fruits, nuts, and honey. Rich sweets such as *makroud* (a fried pastry stuffed with fig paste) and *zalabiya* (deep-fried fritters drenched with honey syrup) are common Ramadan treats. The second meal for Ramadan, *suhoor,* is eaten before dawn and morning prayers. Suhoor dishes often contain little or no salt, since salt induces thirst.

---

***Harsha* (Quick Semolina Bread for Ramadan)**

1 c fine semolina flour

1 c unbleached all-purpose flour

¼ c sugar

1 tbsp baking powder

¼ tsp salt

1 c buttermilk

½ c water (or more as needed)

1 large egg

5 tbsp unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly

Preheat oven to 400°F.

Sift flours, sugar, baking powder, and salt into a medium bowl. Whisk the buttermilk, water, and egg in another medium bowl; whisk in the melted butter. Add buttermilk mixture to dry ingredients; stir just until incorporated (do not overmix).

Bake for 20–30 minutes or until golden.

Serve with butter and honey.

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*Zakah al-fitr* is a form of charitable giving at the end of Ramadan. Muslims are expected donate food to the poor at this time so that all Muslims, regardless of their means, can celebrate Eid al-Fitr, the festival of breaking the fast, a three-day celebration beginning on the first day of the month after Ramadan. On the morning of Eid, Muslims gather for morning prayer at a mosque or in large public spaces. After Eid, people visit family and friends with platters of sweets and pastries and to exchange presents.

Eid al-Adha (the Festival of Sacrifice) is celebrated in the last month of the Islamic lunar calendar after the hajj (the annual pilgrimage to Mecca), to honor the prophet Abraham's willingness to obey and sacrifice for Allah. Muslims commemorate this day by sacrificing a lamb. Organ meats are cooked and consumed on the day of the sacrifice; the rest of the lamb is cut into portions, and much of the meat is donated to the poor. Platters of sweets, cookies, and pastries are also served.

In Algeria, sacrificing a lamb also commemorates the birth of a child, circumcision, and marriage. Traditional Algerian weddings can last three days or more, depending on the region and the family's wealth. Algerian weddings are comprised of several events celebrated on successive days or nights: the engagement party; the henna-painting ritual; the recitation of the *Fatiha,* the first chapter of the Quran, and *durud* (blessings); and the wedding celebration. Guests are served food every day. Contemporary Algerian weddings can be as short as a single day and take place in a banquet facility or hotel.

## Diet and Health

In some regions of Algeria, olive oil is highly prized for its purported medicinal value as a cure-all for minor ailments such as indigestion, headaches, and

irritated skin. Gently heated olive oil is rubbed directly onto the skin to treat problem areas. Folk remedies also include herbal infusions. For example, in the Kabylie, water infused with fresh mint is believed to be a digestive aid with antispasmodic and antinausea properties. Proper digestion is considered very important; certain foods are eaten or avoided to prevent upset stomach.

Islamic culture places great emphasis on maintaining good health through proper personal hygiene and dietary habits. Ablution (ritual cleansing) is performed before each of the five daily prayers of Islam, and food is eaten with the right hand only; the left hand is reserved for matters of personal hygiene. Foods are either *haram* (prohibited) or *halal* (permitted). Haram foods include alcohol and other intoxicants; pork and products derived from pork such as gelatin; and blood, including meat that has not been completely drained of blood. Animals must be slaughtered according to *zabiha,* the prescribed Islamic methods for ritual slaughter, to be considered halal. All plant-based foods are halal.

*Susan Ji-Young Park*

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# Angola

## Overview

The Republic of Angola is the seventh-largest country in Africa and the largest of the five countries in Africa where Portuguese is the official language. It covers about 482,625 square miles and is situated south of the equator on the southwestern coast of the continent. There are great variations in the climate and geography, including rain forests in the north, fertile central highlands, deserts in the Kunene and Kuando provinces in the south, drier coastal lands, and sandy soils in the east. The climate is characterized by both dry and rainy seasons that occur at different times in the various regions. Angola is bordered by the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the north, Zambia on the east, Namibia on the south, and the Atlantic Ocean on the west. Cabinda, an enclave that lies north of the Zaire River, is surrounded by the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of the Congo. Six major rivers flow westward cutting through the coastal lowlands and providing fertile lands for extensive agriculture. They are the Congo (formerly Zaire), Cuanza (Kuanza), Cunene (Kunene), Cubango (Kubango), Zambezi, and Kuando.

The country currently known as Angola was discovered by the Portuguese navigator Diogo Cão during his first voyage of exploration in 1482–1483. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to penetrate Africa south of the Sahara. The word *Angola* comes from the title used by the rulers of the Ngongo state. The title *ngola* was first mentioned in Portuguese writings in the 16th century. Before the arrival of the Portuguese, Angola was inhabited by the peoples of a number of ethnic groups in small kingdoms in the area known as Rio Kuanza (the Kuanza River region) from the 13th century until 1520, when the Portuguese began to impose rule over these people. At that time there were over 100 languages and dialects in Angola. Today, the three dominant ethnic groups are the Ovimbundu, Mbundu, and the Bakongo. The Ovimbundu, the largest ethnolinguistic group, are located mainly in the west-central part of Angola. Their language is Umbundu. The Mbundu comprise the second-largest group. They speak Kimbundu, and they have lived mostly in the plateau region north of the Ovimbundu. The Bakongo are concentrated in the Uíge and Cabinda provinces of the northeast, and even though their capital was Mbanza Congo in the Northwest of Angola, some members of their ethnic group are found in the present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire) and the Republic of the Congo (formerly Congo Brazzaville).

The official language of Angola is Portuguese, but many people are bilingual or even multilingual. The six most commonly spoken Bantu languages are considered national languages: Chokwe, Kikongo, Kimbundu, Mbunda, Oxikuanyama, and Umbundu. In total 40 languages are spoken in Angola. Though there is a sense of Angolan identity, the people are divided among various ethnicities, regions, and religious and racial groups, among other factors. In the 1970s there was a movement to discourage tribal identity. Out of that movement came the following, heard throughout Angola: *De Cabinda ao Cunene, um so povo, uma so nação* ("From Cabinda to Kunene, one people, one nation"). The Portuguese language has set Angola apart from its neighbors and created ties not only with Portugal but also with Brazil,




Fishing boats at sunset in Luanda, Angola. Luanda is the capital and largest port in Angola. (Corel)

Mozambique, and the other Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa and Indonesia.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Sara and José Santos live in a middle-class neighborhood of Luanda, and they own their home. José is a notary for a local bank, and Sara is a housewife. Their lifestyle and eating habits are typical of the middle class. They enjoy both traditional Angolan food and Portuguese-influenced dishes. They begin their day with a breakfast of bread (soft white rolls similar to the Portuguese *pão*) with butter, coffee, fruit, eggs, and cheese. Sometimes breakfast includes sausages or leftover fish or meat. The bread is purchased at a nearby bakery, and fruit, eggs, butter, and cheese come from the local open-air market or grocery store.

Lunch is usually the largest meal of the day and can consist of grilled fish, boiled manioc root, rice, seafood, chicken, or pork. Some of the most popular dishes are rice with fish or other seafood, meat stew, and *muamba de galinha* (Angolan-style chicken). Lunch usually ends with coffee and a dessert. Dessert can consist of cakes made with grated coconut, pineapple, chocolate, sweet potato, or bananas. Puddings are also common and are made with egg yolks, coconut, or tapioca. The egg sweets are a Portuguese influence. Coffee is prepared by placing the grounds in a muslin bag and placing the bag over an enameled coffeepot. Freshly boiled water is poured slowly into the strainer over the ground coffee. If the coffee is not strong enough, it can be poured back through the muslin strainer once again. Fish is purchased at the local fish market or the open-air market. Meat and poultry come from local farmers, small grocery stores, or supermarkets. Manioc flour and manioc

root are purchased at open-air markets, supermarkets, or corner stores.

The evening meal is usually served around 7 P.M. and consists of soup and bread or leftovers from lunch. The soup is sometimes made with rice mixed with pieces of stew beef, pumpkin, and beans, or fresh fish, dried fish, sweet potato, and spinach, all served with *funji* (a manioc puree).

Meals in many of the rural areas and small villages are quite different from those found in the urban areas. Many of the rural residents are farmers, and some of their meals are prepared with milk and curds and whey. Many dishes also consist of boiled green vegetables, beans, cereals, manioc, yams, and sweet potatoes. Most of the food is locally grown, and the milk comes from cows and goats owned by the farmers. Churned into butter in gourds, the milk of cows and goats remains part of the basic diet today. A typical menu for families of fishermen along the coast might include, for breakfast (*mata-bicho,* meaning "to kill the bug of hunger"), bread, coffee or tea, and sugar. For lunch, there would be a stew of potatoes and squid, and for dinner a beef soup.

In the interior of the southern province of Benguela, which borders the desert, breakfast for many is usually the largest meal of the day. It could consist of leftovers from the night before or a combination of the following: cereals, sweet potatoes, cassava, beans, peas, or boiled green vegetables. The more affluent enjoy a breakfast similar to that eaten in larger cities, like Luanda and Moçâmedes.

## Major Foodstuffs

Until the late 15th century the principal work of the indigenous peoples of these small kingdoms was agriculture. They cultivated cereals, such as sorghum, and grew corn. Legumes and vegetables, including beans, okra, and various types of pumpkins, were also part of their diet. These crops were grown on large farms. When the fields had been overworked and could produce no more crops, farmers simply moved to another area and planted again. This method of agriculture is called itinerant farming. Both men and women worked in the fields, but the men cleared the forests and the women did the planting. The instruments used to harvest these crops were the hoe and hatchet, both made of iron. The technique of casting iron for tools was utilized in West Africa since around 300 B.C. by the early inhabitants, who were known as Bushmen, Khosian, or San. It is believed that they came from present-day Cameroon through the old commerce routes that crossed the Sahara. They also fished and hunted to supplement their diet. This diet included wild animals and birds, insects, and domesticated animals such as chickens, goats, and cattle. The skins from the hunt were used for clothing.

In 1490, seven years after Diogo Cão "discovered" Angola, Portuguese ships arrived bringing presents from the king of Portugal to the king of the Congo, including a brick builder to construct a church. The first contact was friendly, and the king of the Congo was happy to receive the arms the Portuguese brought them. The ships then returned to Portugal with ivory, beautiful Congolese fabrics made by local artisans, and, sadly, some slaves.

In 1575, Paulo Dias de Novais arrived in the Bay of Luanda and landed on the Ilha do Cabo, which he named São Paulo de Loanda. He brought 400 soldiers and 100 Portuguese families, who came to cultivate sugar and tobacco and extract salt and palm oil for export. The salt was used as a product to trade for other necessities. European cattle, pigs, and goats were brought, which were raised in the central and southern regions. The locals drank the goat milk and also used it to make cheese. The goatskins were used for clothing, rugs, pocketbooks, and bags.

Various cereals were grown, including wheat, which was also used to make alcoholic beverages. In 1576 the Portuguese settlement moved to the mainland. Their influence in Angola was pervasive and in some cases subtle. To the African cuisine they brought the European sense of flavoring with spices and roasting and marinating techniques. The Portuguese also brought products from their gardens and orchards, some of which were influenced by Arabic culture and exotic plants from Asia and the Americas. These contributions, some more valuable than others, changed the cultural and economic face of the indigenous peoples and altered the nutrition of their population. The root from the cassava tree was one of the first plants to be brought to Angola from the New World at the end of the 16th century. One

of the advantages of this exceptional plant for many of the indigenous peoples was that the roots were able to remain in the soil as if they were in storage, without spoiling, and the by-products from these tubers—flour, tapioca, and starch—could be kept for a long time without spoiling. Corn, which originates in North America, was another food that was well received in Angola.

The Portuguese also brought the avocado, rich in fat and protein, peanuts, papayas, guavas, pineapples, and mango trees, which eventually spread throughout sub-Saharan Africa. From Asia they brought and planted lime, lemon, and orange groves along the Atlantic coast and introduced pawpaws and groundnuts into the Gambia region. They also introduced the domestic pig. It is interesting that the names of many of these foodstuffs that were brought to Africa are derived from the Portuguese language. Portuguese mariners also brought many fruits and vegetables from Brazil. Once the crops that were introduced from the New World became staples of the Angolan diet, land was developed for farming those crops, and settlements began to spring up in the forests.

Angola is one of the African territories that contributed significantly to the cuisine of the New World, especially Brazil. By 1667, Brazil, already a Portuguese colony in 1530, was also an important player in the culture and cuisine of Angola. Angola enriched Brazil with palm oil, salt, peanut oil, and coffee. Brazil supplied Angola with sugar, *aguardente* (a rumlike spirit distilled from sugar), rice, flour, dried beef, bacon, manioc flour, coffee, and beans. And both of these then-colonies supplied Portugal with these products. Slaves from the Congo-Angola region brought to Brazil such traditional Angolan dishes as *caruru* (shrimp and okra stew) and *vatapá* (shrimp and bread pudding) and condiments like *jindungo* (hot chili pepper). By 1796, most of the food products originally imported from Brazil were being produced in Angola. Angola has made contributions not only in the culinary area but also with regard to social and cultural customs in Brazil, including vocabulary such as *moleque* (street urchin), *samba,* and *macambúzio* (melancholic). As the saying goes, Angola is truly the "mother of Brazil."

## Cooking

Cooking techniques in Angolan cuisine vary throughout the country. In Luanda and all the larger cities, relatively affluent families have their meals prepared by cooks. Those meals are mainly Portuguese influenced and reflect Angola's prolonged contact with the former colonialist regime. Most Angolan kitchens are not as elaborate as Western kitchens. Food is prepared on a gas stove fueled by a propane tank that usually lasts about a month. Many households also have a charcoal grill on which meat and seafood are cooked. A large pot is a necessity for stews and soups, and large frying pans are used for sautéing and frying. A meat grinder is needed for meat, peanuts, and onions, as well as a grater for coconut, a mortar and pestle to crush spices, and a muslin strainer to make coffee. A clay water jug with a filter for purifying water is found in almost every Angolan kitchen along with a strainer (*paneira*) for washing rice and a set of wooden spoons for stirring stews. Some cooks even own electric blenders and grinders. Aluminum pots and pans have replaced the clay pots (*panelas de barro*), including clay dishes, because it is currently difficult to obtain them. In rural areas, however, many cooks still use clay pots. The use of the clay pots gives a special flavor to certain dishes, especially beans cooked in palm oil. The clay pots also hold the heat longer than aluminum ones.

The Angolan coast is very rich with fish and other seafood. Some of the crustaceans found in the waters are lobsters, shrimp, scallops, clams, mussels, oysters, crab, prawns, and crayfish. Not only does Angola have quality seafood, but the method of preparation results in succulent and most delicious meals. Lobsters and other shellfish are often cooked in seawater. The water is brought to a boil and seasoned with lard or butter, hot peppers (jindungo), and salt. The lobster is dropped into the boiling water, and when the water returns to a boil, it is reduced to a simmer and the lobster is cooked for about 10 minutes, depending on its size. Meats are prepared in stews, sautéed with vegetables, or grilled over open coals. Chicken is either grilled or stewed (*guisado*) with vegetables. A sauce called *refogado,* very popular in many of the Portuguese-speaking countries, is the basis for many

stews and soups. It is made with onions, tomatoes, and garlic sautéed in olive oil.

Rice is usually served as a side dish at each meal and is cooked with a *refogado* to which parsley or cilantro is sometimes added. Rice as a main dish is cooked with beans, fish, chicken, salt cod, sausages, or cabbage. Macaroni is also very common and is usually cooked with sausage (*chouriço*), beans, or meat. Potatoes are most often boiled and served with meat, fish, or salt cod. Potatoes are also stewed with fish, sausage, macaroni, or cabbage. Peanuts are added to many cooked vegetables such as greens, as well as to fish, chicken, and desserts such as *doce de amendoim* (peanut dessert). Most homes have stoves with ovens, so baking is common. Cakes, pies, tortes, and appetizers similar to *empanadas* are all a part of the Angolan diet. Deep-frying is not very common in Angolan cooking. Most appetizers are baked, although French fries and appetizers such as empanadas and certain pastries are cooked in about two inches of oil. Olive oil, peanut oil, safflower oil, and palm oil are used for cooking. Palm oil is used mostly in traditional Angolan dishes such as *muamba de peixe* (fish ragout), *calulu* (fish with okra), *muzongue* (hangover soup), and *funji e pirão* (manioc puree).

*Calulu,* which is known as *caruru* in Brazil, was brought to Africa by slaves aboard Portuguese ships returning to Angola to pick up more merchandise and slaves. Calulu was later introduced to São Tomé and Princípe by Angolan workers who went to work on plantations. The dish later became a part of the local cuisine. Although of African influence, calulu was first concocted in Brazil and then taken to Angola, where it became known as *kalulu,* today usually spelled *calulu,* but it is essentially an African dish. A prime ingredient in Brazilian caruru, as well as the Angolan and Santomean varieties, is okra. This vegetable pod originated in West Africa and was introduced into the Western Hemisphere in the 17th century. The word *okra* comes from Nigeria's Ibo language, and the Portuguese equivalent, *quiabo,* is a creolization of a word from Angola's Kimbundu language. Another ingredient of caruru and calulu that is of African origin is palm oil (*azeite de dendê*).

The important spices and herbs commonly found in Angolan cuisine are parsley, mint, cloves, bay leaves, garlic, nutmeg, ginger, cinnamon, cumin, oregano, paprika, cilantro, and hot chili peppers. Every kitchen has a supply of hot chili peppers (jindungo) hanging from a hook. These spicy peppers are essential to Angolan cooking and are usually prepared in a sauce served as a condiment with meats, fish, or other seafood or are added directly to certain dishes. Fruit preserves are also common in Angola. Preserves are made from pumpkins, papayas, mangoes, apples, and bananas and are served as desserts or with bread for breakfast. Bananas are also very popular as desserts. There are many types of bananas, but the most common for desserts is the *banana pão* (bread banana). It is usually cooked after it is very ripe and the skin is dark. Banana pão can also be served with manioc flour or mashed and served with meats. Most Angolan desserts consist of simple fruits, but there are also puddings like *cocada amarela* (yellow coconut dessert), an example of Portuguese influence. Its main ingredients are sugar, water, cloves, coconut, and egg yolks.

Many dishes are characteristic of the Angolan cuisine, and muamba is one of them. A similar dish is found in many cuisines of southwestern Africa, especially Namibia. The main ingredients are chicken, okra, pumpkin, onions, and palm oil. Palm oil is made from the red fruit of the African palm tree. Some cooks also add white potatoes to this dish. When this dish is made with fish instead of chicken, it is called muamba de peixe.

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### ***Muamba de Galinha*** **(Angolan-Style Chicken)**

*Serves 8*

#### Ingredients

4 lb boneless chicken thighs

2 large onions, minced

¾ c vegetable oil

2 large cloves garlic, chopped

1 bay leaf

½ to ¾ c palm oil, or half palm oil and half vegetable oil

4 fresh chili peppers (jindungo), chopped and seeded

1 lb pumpkin or butternut squash, peeled and cubed

1 lb okra, trimmed and cut in half if large

3 tbsp lemon juice

1 tsp salt

Cut the chicken thighs in half, and place them in a large pot with the onions, vegetable oil, garlic, and bay leaf over medium heat. Stir to mix the ingredients well. Cook for 20 minutes, or until the chicken is tender and the vegetables have formed a sauce, adding a little water from time to time to keep the dish from drying out.

Add the palm oil, peppers, pumpkin, okra, lemon juice, and salt. Cook over low heat for 15 minutes to allow seasonings to permeate the sauce. Serve hot in a large serving dish accompanied by manioc puree.

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***Funji* (Manioc Puree)**

Purees are served with stews, soups, or any meat, fish, or poultry dish that has a little sauce or liquid to make the puree.

**Ingredients**

4 c chicken broth

1 c finely ground manioc meal

Bring the broth to a boil. Slowly pour the manioc flour into the boiling broth, stirring with a whisk to avoid lumps. Continue stirring for 3 minutes, or until the puree is the consistency of cooked cereal. Serve with muamba.

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## Typical Meals

Angola, with its 18 provinces, has many regional flavors and ethnic food cultures. There are some differences between the cuisine along the coast and that found in the interior of the country. However, there are many meals that are typically Angolan and enjoyed throughout the country. The Portuguese influence is evident in dishes such as *arroz de mariscos* (rice with seafood), made with shrimp, lobster, clams, or cockles and red chili peppers (jindungu or jindungo); *caldeirada de peixe* (fish stew), prepared with thick fish steaks, potatoes, onions, tomatoes, green peppers, chili peppers, and olive oil; *guisado de bacalhau* (salt cod stew), made with salt cod, okra, jindungo, onion, tomato, and palm oil; and *rissóis Angolanos* (creamy shrimp turnovers), whose filling is prepared with shrimp, onions, tomato, garlic, and hot sauce in a white sauce. Most of the stews are served with white rice.

Dishes that are typical of Angolan cuisine include *muzongue com pirão* (hangover soup with puree), made with fresh fish, dried fish, spinach, and sweet potatoes and served with a manioc-flour puree; *couves cozidas com oleo-de-palma e amendoim* (collards cooked in palm oil and ground peanut sauce); *mariscos cozidos com jindungo* (shellfish in hot sauce), including clams, oysters, prawns, and lobsters; muamba de peixe (fish ragout), made with fish, potatoes, okra, and palm oil; muamba de galinha (Angolan-style chicken), made with chicken thighs, onions, palm oil, jindungo, pumpkin, and okra; *caldeirada de cabrito* (goat-meat stew), usually served




Caldeirada de cabrito, a goat meat stew, is typical of the Angolan cuisine. (iStockPhoto)

on Independence Day, which includes goat meat, onions, potatoes, bell peppers, port wine, and cognac; *calulu de carne seca* (dried beef stew); *galinha de cabidela* (chicken stew with blood sauce); and, for dessert, *cocada Angolana* (Angolan coconut candy), *bolo de maracujá* (passion fruit cake), and *bananas assadas* (baked bananas). A puree made with manioc flour or corn flour accompanies many meals.

The meat dishes in the Angolan cuisine are varied. The most common meats used are beef, pork, chicken, fish and other seafood, and, in some rural areas, game and goat. Soups are very common and often served as the main course of a meal. They include chicken or beef and are served with rice or funji (manioc puree). Snacks are usually eaten in the afternoon and can consist of fruit, fried manioc, fritters, sugared nuts, or pastry.

## Eating Out

Eating out is a luxury for most Angolans. Many of the restaurants, including those in hotels, cater mainly to foreigners and serve mostly Continental fare but also include a few local dishes. Breakfast in most restaurants includes cereal, yogurt, scrambled eggs, bacon, tomato wedges, sausages, toast, and exotic fruits. For lunch they will serve dishes like cabbage soup with white beans, rice with vegetables, grilled meats and fish, boiled potatoes, French fries, and salt cod croquettes. For dinner the choices might include seafood soup, grilled grouper or other fish, stewed chicken, cold shrimp and crab, and grilled lobster. Usually one or two of the following local dishes will appear on the menu each day: *cabidela e galinha* (chicken stew with blood sauce), caldeirada de cabrito (goat-meat stew), muamba de peixe (fish ragout), muamba de galinha (Angolan-style chicken), funji (manioc puree), *galinha com jingub* (chicken with hot sauce), *lulas guisada* (squid sautéed with potatoes), arroz de mariscos (rice with seafood), rissóis Angolanos (creamy shrimp turnovers), muzongue com pirão (hangover soup with puree), *doce de amendoim com cocada* (peanut dessert with coconut), *doce de banana* (banana dessert), cocada Angolana (Angolan coconut candy), and *banana frita* (fried bananas).

Many small restaurants, street stalls (*barracas*), and cafés where the food is relatively inexpensive are frequented by workers during breakfast and lunch. For breakfast these places might serve rolls, coffee, cheese, or fruit. For lunch they usually serve local fare including fried fish, grilled meat and chicken, French fries, hamburgers, meat patties, and other items such as ice cream, other desserts, and pastries. The barracas on the beaches do a lively business selling snacks and drinks to beachgoers. Drinks at all restaurants include cola, local beer, other alcoholic drinks, and local fruit drinks with and without sparkling water. The most popular fresh fruit drinks are made with banana, pineapple, and tamarind. There are also drinks that are fermented. The process usually takes about 80 hours before the beverage can be bottled. Two popular fermented drinks are *kisangua* and *kitoto.* The former is made with corn flour and sugar, and the latter is made with corn. There are also beers made from corn: *quimbombo, quissângua,* and *quitoto,* each in a different province of Angola.

## Special Occasions

Angola gained its independence in 1975, and the country then had a civil war that ended only in 2002. Because the majority of the population lives in poverty, many of the festivals formerly celebrated throughout the country have disappeared, are held infrequently, or now occur only in the larger cities. The public holidays are New Year's Day (January 1), National Holy Day (February 4), Victory Day (March 27), Workers Day (May 1), Independence Day (November 11), and MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola) Foundation Day and Family Day (December 25).

Other special occasions are the end-of-term parties for students, when arroz de mariscos (rice with seafood) is a necessity. Mariscos cozidos com jindungo (shellfish in hot sauce), rissóis Angolanas (Angolan-style creamy shrimp turnovers), and cocada Angolana (Angolan coconut candy) are specialties served at weddings, parties, holidays, and special dinners. At these occasions local beverages such as maize beer and palm wine are served, along with soft drinks and other alcoholic beverages.

Angolans celebrate Independence Day with the traditional dish of caldeirada de cabrito (goat-meat stew). It is a wonderful stew made with goat meat, onions, potatoes, tomatoes, and bell peppers, enhanced with port and cognac. The stew is quite easy to prepare, and delicious.

***Caldeirado de Cabrito* (Goat-Meat Stew)**

*Serves 10–12*

**Ingredients**

8 lb goat meat, cubed

Boiling water to cover goat meat

¾ c vegetable oil

2 lb onions, thinly sliced

6 lb white potatoes, peeled and sliced

4 lb tomatoes, peeled and thinly sliced

6 green bell peppers, seeded and sliced into strips

Salt and black pepper to taste

2 tbsp red pepper flakes

½ c chopped fresh parsley leaves

½ c chopped fresh cilantro leaves

2 bay leaves

2 c port or sweet red wine

1 c cognac

Wash the pieces of goat meat well, and place in a large pot of boiling water. Return the pot to a boil and remove the goat meat. Set aside.

In a large skillet, heat the oil and first sauté the onions, then the potatoes, goat meat, tomatoes, and bell peppers. Sprinkle with salt, pepper, and the red pepper flakes.

Sprinkle the parsley and cilantro over the ingredients. Add the bay leaves and cover with the port or red wine, 2 cups water, and the cognac. Cover tightly and cook over low heat for 30 to 40 minutes, or until the goat meat is tender. Do not remove the cover and do not stir. Just shake the pan occasionally to prevent sticking. This will keep the potatoes from breaking up. Serve hot with white rice.

**Note:** If you cannot find goat, most butchers will bone a shoulder or leg of lamb for this dish.

## Diet and Health

The foods that are the mainstays of the traditional Angolan diet are manioc prepared in many ways (including the leaves of the plant), palm oil, peanuts, beans, rice, okra, hot chili peppers, sweet potatoes, bananas, corn, cashews, coconut, dried or fresh fish, dried or fresh beef, pork, and chicken. A majority of the Angolan population is considered to be underfed. So it is rare to find obesity. Given that 70 percent of the population lives in poverty and over half are unemployed, hunger is a serious problem. People living in the coastal areas eat a lot of seafood, in the southwest herders live primarily on dairy products and meat, and farmers consume their produce of maize, sorghum, cassava, and other crops. Gathering firewood and water in some rural areas requires a great deal of energy.

Medical care is not available everywhere despite government efforts. In rural areas clinics lack staff and basic equipment, and thus most people rely on traditional healers whose practice depends largely on herbal remedies. In the larger cities Angolans have better access to public health care at hospitals and clinics. There are also hospitals specifically to treat women's and children's illnesses. Angola recently appointed a regional director to the World Health Organization to oversee the fight against HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases. The director will also work to provide better-quality health care to all citizens and to ensure better coordination of tracking diseases. Doctors of traditional medicine are also working with government approval to broaden their reach to people in the interior and introduce the use of medicinal plants as cures for some sicknesses.

*Cherie Y. Hamilton*

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# Benin

## Overview

Formerly known as Dahomey, the Republic of Benin is located on the southern coast of the West African bulge. It shares borders with Togo to the west, Nigeria to the east, and Burkina Faso and Niger to the north. Its southern coastline leads to the Bight of Benin. The country covers 112,622 square kilometers (44,484 square miles) and can be divided into four distinct geographic areas between south and north: a marshy coastal plain, the Guinean savanna, flatlands and rocky hills, and the Atacora range of mountains in the northwest along the Togolese border. The climate is hot and humid with two rainy seasons and two dry seasons a year. There are 42 different ethnic groups in the country, including the Yoruba, the Fulbe (or Fulani), and the Bariba in the northeast, the Dendi in the north-central area, the Somba in the mountainous northwest, the Fon in the south-central area and around Abomey, and the Mind and Aja on the coast. In the south there is also a sizable creolized Afro-Brazilian community descended from Africans, Europeans, and former slaves returned from Brazil. The capital is in the Yoruba city of Porto Novo, but the seat of government is located in the Fon city of Cotonou. Coastal Benin had early contact with Europeans, which led to it being one of the seats of the slave trade for more than 300 years; during this time, it was also known as the Slave Coast.

The majority of the population of 6.5 million lives in the south of the country, which, like many other countries on the West African bulge, experiences a distinction between the more westernized southern segments of the country and those to the north. In the 2002 census 42.8 percent of the population were Christian, 22.4 percent were Muslim, and 17.3 percent practiced the indigenous religion of Vodun or Orisa worship. The remaining people practice other religions or claim no religious affiliation. More than half of the population speaks Fon, but French is the national language, and English is taught in secondary schools.

### Food Culture Snapshot

Théodora and Théophile Grimaud are retirees. His career was in the airline industry, and she was a teacher and housewife. His career postings took them to various areas of western Africa and the world, and they are members of the westernized elite. Their diet combines Western dishes with traditional Beninese specialties, especially dishes from their Fon ethnicity. They may dine with friends either in their homes or in local restaurants. On special occasions or when guests are in town, they may dine in one of the larger restaurants in town. The family eats three meals a day. Breakfast is usually in the European mode—a Continental breakfast of some sort with French bread, coffee or tea, and fruit juice or fresh fruit. Théodora does the shopping, going to local and neighborhood markets where she knows the vendors based on ethnic identity or the quality of their goods. She also shops in the local French-style supermarkets and often at the larger city market in Cotonou known as the Dan Topka. Foods may be supplemented by specialties like agouti (bush rat) or land crabs that are sometimes sold on the side of the roads by young children. Local delicacies are purchased from special purveyors at local street stalls.

## Major Foodstuffs

As in much of West Africa, the basic meal consists of a starch prepared as a thick mush and eaten with a soupy stew that contains vegetables along with either meat or fish. The stews are prepared from a variety of ingredients, including okra, leafy greens, eggplant, tomatoes, onions, pumpkin seeds, and chilies. Meats include goat and lamb. In the south smoked, dried, or fresh fish is often a part of the meal; beef is more commonly found in the north. Christians raise and eat pigs. Seafood includes crustaceans such as crab and shrimp as well as Atlantic and river fish. Dried smoked shrimp are ground and used to season dishes, as are chilies. Okra, squash and pumpkin seeds, and peanuts are used to thicken some of the sauces. Cubebs, referred to as *piment pays* (pepper of the country), are ground and used to season traditional dishes like *kpete,* a savory goat stew.

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***Moyau* (Chicken Stew)**

1 smoked chicken, skinned (about 3½ lb)

5 large ripe tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and coarsely chopped

1 large onion, thinly sliced

1 tbsp peanut oil

1 cube Maggi or beef bouillon

1 habanero chili, pricked with a fork

Wash the chicken and cut it into serving pieces. Pat it dry. Place the chicken and the remaining ingredients in a Dutch oven, bring to a boil, and then reduce the heat and allow to simmer uncovered for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. When the dish has reached the desired spiciness, remove the pricked chili. Serve hot over white rice.

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In the south corn, rice, and manioc are the primary starches, while sorghum, millet, and yams have preeminence in the central and northern communities. Fruits are eaten and include tropical fruits such as soursop and mangoes as well as several varieties of citrus, pineapples, and papayas. Traditionally millet beer called *choukachou* or *chouk* is consumed in the north, while palm wine and *sodabi* (a stronger version of palm wine) are consumed in the south. French wines and brandies are drunk by the westernized elite, and gin is often used in ceremonies.

## Cooking

Throughout western Africa in general the main culinary techniques are boiling, steaming, stewing, frying, roasting, grilling, and baking. All of these methods are the basis for the traditional dishes of the country that were based on the use of the traditional cookstove. In rural areas the traditional three-rock wood stoves remain the standard, and many households still cook over wood or charcoal fires. In villages communal cooking is common. In the urban areas, the Western stove is used, but many Beninese cooks still prefer to cook outdoors over a small brazier called a *feu malgache.* Pressure cookers are used to tenderize tougher cuts of meat. Refrigerators are also the norm among those with sufficient funds and access to electricity.

Many urban households have some kind of household help. It may be a relative from the country looking for employment in the city and working in exchange for lodging, or a professional paid for services. Cooking therefore is often done by another person, overseen by the lady of the house. Cooking is considered women's work. Cooking, however, remains a family activity for festive foods. Extended families combine to prepare dishes at times of feasting, with the matriarch directing the kitchen. The myriad cultures of Benin are oral cultures, and this is the manner by which the youngsters of the household learn to prepare the traditional foods. Microwaves, freezers, food processors, and the full range of other Western culinary conveniences are de rigueur among the elite. French influence prevails among the elite as well, and in their households the full European *baterie de cuisine* may be found among those with means; there, adepts at the preparation of French *cuisine bourgeois* and/or *cuisine classique* can be found in many households.

## Typical Meals

Breakfast may be leftovers from the previous day's meals or something purchased from a street vendor. Alternately, in urban areas, it may be a French-influenced small meal of a hot beverage and a form of bread. The basic main meals consist of a soupy stew served with a starch that is then dipped into the stew. There is no major distinction between lunch and dinner. Alternately, the main meal may be grilled chicken or a grilled fish seasoned with chili or served in a sauce of tomatoes and onions. The Afro-Brazilian segment of the population eats dishes that hark back to Brazil, such as their own form of *feijoada,* a stew of beans and meat. In urban areas where men have traveled in search of employment, the meal may be taken at a small outdoor restaurant or in a local market. There are also night markets called *marché de nuit* that offer traditional foods that can be served in a bowl and taken for consumption elsewhere.

## Eating Out

Cotonou and Porto Novo have a number of small establishments in the style of the *maquis* (a small local restaurant of the Côte d'Ivoire). They are owned by women and specialize in serving *poisson braisé* and *poulet braisé* (grilled fish and grilled chicken) accompanied by a local starch or French fries. There are also restaurants in large and small hotels serving Beninese and European fare as well as a few French-style restaurants run by French



Chickens are wheeled around on the back of a bike in an open market in Cotonou, Benin. (AFP | Getty Images)

colonials who have remained in the country. American and West African fast-food chains are found in the major cities as well as marchés de nuit that sell local foods for takeout.

## Special Occasions

Like many in western Africa, the Beninese have a well-developed sense of ceremony, and religious holidays are celebrated with feasting by Christians and Muslims alike. Religious ceremonies in both Vodun and Orisa worship call for their own ritual meals as well. Weddings, and especially funerals, always involve a feast of some sort. Traditional funerals may require several days of feasting.

## Diet and Health

During the Socialist period (1972–1991) the government encouraged rural development and favored agricultural initiatives, and the country is self-sufficient in food production. Almost half of the population is involved in some form of agriculture. An internal system of trade still functions and has the ability to ensure food distribution from one area to another. However, the lack of rural infrastructure means that intermittent food shortages are faced by about 900,000 people, mostly in the hard-to-reach northern parts of the country.

*Jessica B. Harris*

**Further Reading**

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# Burkina Faso

## Overview

Burkina Faso, formerly known as Upper Volta (Le Haute Volta), is a landlocked country in West Africa, with an area of 105,869 square miles (274,200 square kilometers), which is about the size of the U.S. state of Colorado. The population of the country is about 15 million and steadily rising. As a former French colony, Burkina Faso's official language is French, but 3 of its more than 60 local languages are recognized as national languages: Moore, Jula, and Fulfulde. There are 63 ethnic groups living in the country, of which the most numerous are the Mossi, who make up almost half of the population and inhabit the central plateau. The country has a Sahelian climate with distinct dry and rainy seasons.

The Burkinabe are predominantly Muslim (55%); about 25 percent of the population is Christian, and the rest, around 20 percent, practice traditional African religions also referred to as animism. Religion, geography, and, to a lesser extent, also ethnic origin play a role in determining what Burkinabe eat. Muslims do not eat pork or drink alcohol, and they fast from dawn till dusk during the holy month of Ramadan. Discounting this difference, the diets of Muslim, Christian, and animist Burkinabe are very similar, with a typical meal consisting of a starchy staple served with a sauce that ideally contains a mixture of meat or fish and vegetables. Burkina Faso remains one of the least developed countries in the world, classified as a low-income, food-deficient country. The United Nations Development Program's 2006 *Human Development Report* ranked Burkina Faso 174th out of 177 countries. Over 45 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. This means that meat and fish, both expensive foodstuffs, are not consumed regularly.

## Food Culture Snapshot

The Bationo are a middle-class family, consisting of four generations living together in one compound. The first meal of the day is breakfast. At around 7 A.M., those adults in the family who have a job will have coffee or tea and bread; those who are less fortunate will either have leftovers from their previous meal, that is, dinner, or buy some millet gruel from a neighbor, or occasionally even go hungry. Children, who start school at seven o'clock, have already left and will have their first bite only during the first snack time at school, at around 10 A.M., provided they were given food money by their parents.

Lunch is the main meal, and the ingredients for it are provided by Mama Bationo, a widow in her sixties. Those of her adult children who have jobs also contribute some money for the meal, but she is the main provider. Lunch is ready at 12:30 or 1:00 P.M. at the latest, and the food is divided into several eating groups. Family hierarchy, linked to age, gender, and the individual's financial contribution to the family budget, is reflected in the portion a person receives. The portion one is served is expected to include dinner as well.

In the afternoon, those who are not at work and can afford to do so may send a child to get a snack from one of the street vendors. These foods are only occasionally shared with other members of the family. Dinner is usually the leftovers from lunch, but Mama's unmarried daughters, who both have well-paying jobs, will often prepare extra food and, depending on the

amount prepared, also share it with other people in the compound.

## Major Foodstuffs

Burkina Faso is predominantly rural, and much of the food is produced locally. Most meals are made from scratch, as there is little processed food. The only processed foods used on a daily basis are tomato concentrate and stock cubes, a ubiquitous ingredient in every Burkinabe dish.

In the north and northeast of Burkina Faso, where a dry, almost desert-like climate dominates, food is less varied than in the southern and southwestern parts of the country, where the climate is subtropical and the rich soil produces a wide variety of vegetables. Foods consumed also vary greatly according to the season, there being distinct rainy and dry seasons. After the rainy season, the markets offer a great variety of vegetables. Burkina Faso has a large production of green beans, which are grown throughout the year and are mainly exported to Europe, but the main harvest is in the winter months, when the price is also affordable for the local population.

The main grains are millet, sorghum, maize, *fonio* (*Digitaria genus*), and rice. Millet, maize, and rice are the ingredients eaten by most Burkinabe on a daily basis, with rice being more a town folk's food because of its cost. Rice is grown locally, but generally people prefer the imported varieties of Thai and Indonesian rice. Sweet potatoes, yams, and potatoes are also grown locally and used as everyday food, but of these, potatoes are the most expensive and therefore are not eaten on an everyday basis.

Groundnuts (peanuts), which were introduced to West Africa as a cash crop in the colonial period, are also an important ingredient. The Bissa people are particularly well known for their taste for peanuts. Various pulses, such as beans, chickpeas, lentils, and bambara groundnut (*Vigna subterranea*), are also part of the everyday diet. The Mossi people are known as great eaters of beans (*benga*). Beans are eaten boiled and served with salt and oil.

Vegetables that are grown locally are tomatoes, zucchini, carrots, leeks, onions, beets, okra, pumpkins, cucumbers, and various types of lettuce. They are mostly used in sauces, apart from lettuce, which is an expensive ingredient and is eaten only at festive meals or in wealthier families. Greens—spinach, sorrel, and cabbage, among others—are important vegetables that are used in sauces that accompany the main staple food of millet or maize porridge.



An African woman selling groundnuts (peanuts) by the roadside. (iStockPhoto)

Foods are seasoned using salt, stock cubes, and/or *sumbala* (African locust bean tree seeds—*Parkia biglobosa*). Hot peppers are added to sauces, but food is only mildly hot. A paste made of hot peppers can be added to the meal, especially when eating fried foods or meat. Traditional cooking fats such as shea butter and palm nut oil have largely been replaced by groundnut oil. Sunflower oil is used only in upper-class families.

Fruits are consumed as snacks and are sometimes used for making juices. Their availability depends on the seasons—mango season is from March to May or June. Water is served with meals. Milk is a drink that is popular among the Fulbe (Fulani) nomads, who also sell it at the markets. Locally produced juices made of hibiscus flowers, ginger, lemon, and baobab fruit (which looks like a coconut and contains

a sour powdery white pulp) are also popular, particularly at parties. Chinese tea prepared over several hours on small charcoal stoves, with large quantities of sugar, is very popular with men, many of whom belong to a regular tea group that meets on a daily or weekly basis.

## Cooking

Food preparation in Burkina Faso is rather labor-intensive, in both rural and urban areas, although in towns and cities, the task is made easier by the fact that most compounds have access to water through a water tap or a nearby public well. While women in the countryside often have to walk far into the bush to fetch firewood for cooking food and heating water, in urban environments this can be bought from ambulant sellers. Because of the hot climate, foods for cooking need to be bought on a daily basis (very few families have refrigerators, and those who do mostly use them to store cold water and ice), which means that the women in urban areas have to go to the market to buy ingredients for the daily meal every day. In rural areas, the market takes place every five days. Most Burkinabe families are large and include several generations living within one compound, which makes the task of cooking a demanding one; it is usually overseen by the eldest woman in the family, who is aided by her daughters, nieces, daughters-in-law, and/or a live-in maid. While child maids are common in Burkina Faso, they are often not entrusted with cooking the main family meal but are instead assigned the more menial tasks of washing the dishes, sweeping the kitchen floors as well as the compound, and doing the laundry.

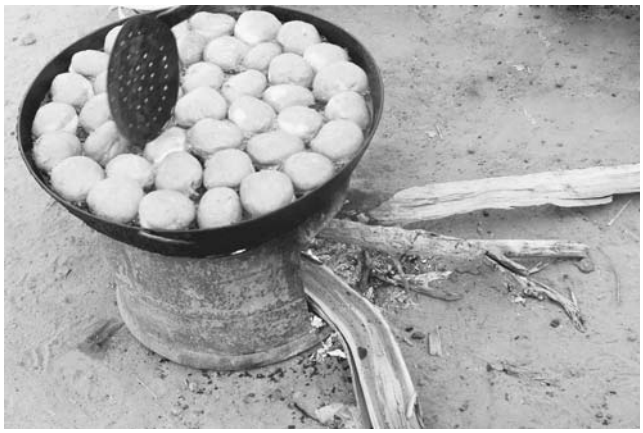
As Burkina Faso has a hot climate, cooking is often done outdoors in the yard, except when the weather (rain, dust, wind) prevents this. The kitchen is a small room with walls blackened from smoke. It has no furnishings other than a small stool for the cook, a stove composed of three stones used for balancing the pot (in town this would be a metal stove with a hole on one side for firewood), and sometimes pots and pans piled up in the corner. Upper-middle-class families will have a kitchen inside the house, with a sink and a stove with two or more burners fueled by bottled gas. However, gas is expensive and thus always used frugally. When cooking for large numbers of people, wood remains the preferred fuel.

When cooking lunch, women usually use two pots, one for the staple food and one for the sauce. One of the staple foods, the millet or maize porridge known locally as *tô,* requires particular skill and strength on the part of the cook, as the flour requires vigorous stirring while being heated over the stove and the cook needs to sit close to the fire to prevent the pot from moving. The irritation from the smoke, which gets into the eyes, is something the women get used to over the years of performing this demanding task.

Preparation of rice as a staple dish is less demanding, but the rice must be carefully cleaned before cooking. Dust, stones, and other dirt must be removed and the rice carefully washed. The Burkinabe like their food well cooked, so the rice will cook for well over an hour. Similarly, when pasta is prepared it must be totally tender to be considered edible. The Western style of cooking rice or pasta al dente is not appreciated by the Burkinabe.

The sauce for the main meal is cooked in the following way: First, oil is heated in the pan, and then once the oil is very hot, meat or fish is added and fried well. After that the cook adds the onions and then the rest of the vegetables; water is added, and then the sauce has to simmer until all the ingredients are well cooked. In case of *ris gras* or *spaghetti gras,* rice or pasta is added to the sauce and then cooked until all the water has evaporated and the rice or pasta is well cooked. Frying is common for fish and meat especially when these are purchased outside the house or served as a side dish; otherwise, it is first fried and then cooked in sauce.

The local specialties of fonio couscous and *attiéké* (fermented manioc couscous, which originates from Côte d'Ivoire but is very popular in Burkina Faso) are prepared by steaming, and so are some other cereal-based dumplings and pancakes. Other pancakes and doughnuts are either deep-fried or fried with a small amount of fat (oil or shea butter, depending on the region and the type of flour used). As oil is an expensive foodstuff, it is often used several times, as there is no belief or knowledge that



Cooking doughnuts over a wood fire in Africa. (iStockPhoto)

would forbid reheating used oil among the average Burkinabe. Oil that was used for frying meat can later also be used for seasoning salads.

## Typical Meals

Breakfast is not an important meal for the majority of the population, and it is mostly eaten by those who can afford it. Breakfast can consist of either leftover food from the day before or specially prepared or purchased foods, such as bread and coffee or tea, millet gruel, or fried eggs.

For the average Burkinabe, lunch is the main meal and is based on a staple food such as millet or maize porridge or rice, always served with a sauce. Meat is a favored food item, and ideally all sauces should contain at least a small quantity of meat or fish. However, due to poverty many people cannot afford to buy meat or fish on a daily basis, so small amounts of dried fish are used to give a meaty taste to the meal. In the most hard-off families, this will be replaced by a meat stock cube. Wealthier urban families may occasionally prepare macaroni with sauce as the main dish, or a yam ragout, but rice and porridge (made of millet in the rural and maize in the urban areas) remain the dominant staple foods. Some of the more popular sauces are *sauce oseille* (sorrel sauce), *sauce feuilles de baobab* (sauce made with baobab leaves), *sauce claire* (a light sauce made with grated onion and zucchini), *sauce arachide* (groundnut sauce), and *sauce gombo* (sticky sauce made with fresh okra), which is usually eaten together with *la soupe* (a meat-based sauce).

Lunch is eaten between 12:30 and 1:30 P.M. In rural settings, the tradition of women and men eating from separate dishes, using the right hand, is maintained, with women often eating after men. In urban areas, people often eat from individual plates, using a spoon or a fork. A full set of cutlery is used only in upper-class families. People in lower- and middle-class families don't eat sitting together at the table, nor do people in the villages. They either sit on the floor around the dish, eating together as a group, or on stools, holding their own plate. Dinner can be either a separately cooked meal or, as is often the case, the same dish as lunch, heated up on a charcoal or gas stove. It is eaten at 8 P.M. or later.

## Eating Out

Street food is typical of the urban areas of the country. Ready-to-eat foods can be bought immediately outside one's house, as there are many small stands selling foods in front of people's compounds. These mostly sell fried foods. Places around town cater for every taste. Food is available at virtually any time of the day, although certain parts of town, especially the central area around the markets, cater only to lunch customers.

Early in the morning makeshift breakfast places appear on the side streets of urban Burkina Faso. These are made up of a couple of benches and a table. On a small wood or charcoal stove the vendor boils water for coffee and tea, and a large cardboard box serves as a bread bin. The more prosperous cafés are built like a small bar with a roof and bar stools around the bar. These can be locked up at night and might even have a fridge and a gas stove inside. As a rule, they are run by men serving coffee or tea alongside buttered bread. The more enterprising vendors will also prepare fried eggs or omelets, and if they posses an icebox, or even a refrigerator, they might also serve yogurt and/or cold drinks. Customers are almost exclusively male; women rarely venture into one of these places. It would be inappropriate for an unaccompanied woman to be sitting in the street

in the company of unknown men. Men, in contrast, are free to sit at the café and chat with the vendor and other customers. Breakfast places often open in the wee hours of the day, at about 4 or 5 A.M. Some of them open at dusk and stay open until the early morning hours.

As breakfast is not one of the meals provided by the head of the family, the men who go out to work often allow themselves the luxury of eating breakfast at a café instead of just having a small bowl of *la bouillie* (millet or rice gruel) bought from a neighbor, as most of their family members do. Most people will have some gruel or a cup of coffee for breakfast at home. Some families prepare la bouillie themselves, or they may buy it from a neighbor who prepares it for sale every morning. This is the cheapest breakfast food available. It is mostly prepared with millet flour, which is slightly sour and therefore requires sweetening, so that most people end up spending more money on the sugar than on the gruel itself.

In Ouagadougou and Bobo Dioulasso, the capital and the second-largest city respectively, there are also patisseries and bakeries that serve breakfast. Apart from bread, coffee, and omelets, they also have croissants and other pastries, yogurt, juices, and sodas, and they serve the tea and coffee in pots and cups. These places are not within the reach of the average Burkinabe, and most customers are businessmen, tourists, and higher-ranking civil servants from another part of the country who are in town on an official mission.

Most breakfast places start packing up between 10 and 11 A.M. That is the time when stands selling lunch will start appearing. They offer the usual home fare and sell it by the plate to regular customers and passersby. As the lunchtime meal is something one should normally get from one's family, these places are most often frequented by people who are visitors or passersby and have no family in town whatsoever. If people are visiting a town where distant relatives live, ones with whom their own immediate family is on good terms, they will be fed once a day at least for a few days, unless the relatives live in extreme poverty and have trouble providing even for themselves. The many people who work for one of the numerous local and regional transport companies and travel back and forth on buses and trucks usually eat at one of the lunch places around the train station. Also, with the capital Ouagadougou growing significantly in size, people may work a long way away from their house and therefore have no choice but to eat outside, to save the money for the transport home and back to work again after the two-and-a-half-hour designated lunch break.

In the eyes of an average Burkinabe, lunch should consist of one of the staple dishes, such as maize or millet porridge or rice accompanied by a sauce, the value of which is determined by the amount of meat it contains. The types of foods that are offered at street stalls during lunch hours reflect this local concept of a proper meal. Since the types of foods sold are much like the main meal prepared by every Bobolese housewife, it is the women who prepare and sell lunchtime food in the streets. The women who sell these meals, sometimes alone, sometimes in pairs, prepare the food early every morning in their kitchens at home and then, with either a donkey cart or a taxi, transport the large pots to their vending spot. Some women have set up proper small restaurants, often linked to their own backyard, with a metal roof over some wooden tables and benches for customers to sit on and enjoy their meal. Most street stalls consist of a table on which the food is placed in large buckets, and there are a few benches for customers to sit down on while eating. A man will sit on a small wooden bench and eat from his plastic plate, usually using a fork. Women eat lunch in places like these only if they are accompanied by their husband or if they are clearly visiting from another town or village and do not have relatives who could provide for them.

Similarly to breakfast, lunch can also be eaten in restaurants that cater to a wealthier clientele. There is a great variety of restaurants around, from those serving the lower-ranking civil servants to those that are frequented only by the expatriate population and wealthy local businessmen and -women. The cheaper restaurants serve both Burkinabe and Western dishes, while the upmarket ones usually specialize in a particular cuisine. In the capital several restaurants serve Italian, French, Lebanese, or

another foreign cuisine. These places are open for lunch and dinner.

If the lunchtime foods are mostly the same as one would get at home, the evenings and nights on the streets of Bobo provide one with a true culinary experience. From the late afternoon, little street stalls selling ready-to-eat foods begin to appear. Most food stalls immediately outside compounds sell fried foods. These can include yam, sweet potato, and plantain chips; bean and sweet banana fritters; and doughnuts made from millet, corn, or wheat flour. For those who do not have the time or inclination to stop and sit down, the food is wrapped in pages of old newspaper or pieces of large paper flour bags. Those with more time to spare may decide to sit down on a bench next to the vendor and eat food off a plate and perhaps engage in some small talk with the vendor.

Since in the evening many single, and also married Burkinabe men, go out to bars with their girlfriends, or more rarely with their wives, the pavements outside these bars and clubs are packed with little food stands. At night the vendors tend to be men, but they never sell the types of foods associated with women's cooking. While women, some of whom also have stands in the street at night, sell mostly rice and sauce, tô and sauce, pasta, attieké, or sandwiches, men specialize in barbecued meat and poultry and in omelets or fried egg sandwiches. The typical location for the stands is outside popular nightclubs, so that customers can get a bite to eat.

Sometimes people leave their compounds and drive to a particular part of town in order to buy a dish that will satisfy their craving. Others walk onto the street outside their compound and buy a small plate of beans or rice with sauce if they have run out of food at home. Eating in restaurants is not a common practice for most Burkinabe, who cannot afford the expense, and even if they could, many of them prefer home cooking. People are generally very careful about where they buy the food they eat and do not trust that the restaurant food is prepared as carefully as a home-cooked meal. However, with westernization, one can now see more Burkinabe couples and families eating in restaurants than a decade ago.

## Special Occasions

Feasting in Burkina Faso is mostly linked to religious holidays or celebrations—Ramadan, Tabaski (Eid al-Adha), and Mouloud for the Muslims; Christmas and Easter for the Christians; days of sacrifice among the animists—and celebrations of life-cycle milestones (christenings and naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals). As there are few specific festive dishes, on such events what matters is the quantity of food and the quality of the ingredients, but the recipes mainly stay the same. In rural areas the dish served would still be tô, but for a feast the male head of the family usually slaughters an animal (if not a sheep or lamb, then a chicken), since meat is regarded as a particularly important ingredient of a festive meal.

In urban areas a dish that is served at every feast and celebration is *malo zaamen* (Jula), *moui nado* (Moore), or riz gras, a rice-based dish now synonymous with parties in urban Burkina Faso. Its origins may be traced back to the Senegalese rice-based dish *tiebou djen,* which is prepared with copious amounts of meat and fish. While the Burkinabe version is less elaborate than its Senegalese counterpart, it still contains large amounts of meat and vegetables (instead of fish) and is considered a rich man's dish. Good riz gras is made from top-quality ingredients and numerous stock cubes. The meat and vegetables are served on a bed of rice that has been cooked in the meat and vegetable stock.

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***Riz Gras***

4 c rice

1 large onion, chopped

Parsley

Garlic

18 oz lamb or beef

1 *goyo,* cubed (African eggplant)

18 oz ripe tomatoes (or a16-oz can of tomatoes)

1 green bell pepper, chopped and seeded

2 carrots, halved

Half a cabbage, cut into large pieces

2 Maggi meat or vegetable stock cubes

1 tbsp tomato concentrate

Salt

Oil

Heat the oil, and add the meat, cut in small pieces. While frying the meat, add salt, and as the meat turns brown, add the chopped onion, tomatoes, and pepper and stir well. Then add tomato concentrate, chopped garlic, and parsley and stir again. After sautéing the ingredients for about 10 minutes, fill up the pot with water. Add the cabbage, carrots, eggplant, and stock cubes. Allow to simmer until the vegetables are tender and cooked. Once the meat and vegetables are well cooked, use a spoon to take them out. Keep them warm. Pour the rice into the sauce in which the meat and vegetables were cooked and check for salt. If needed, add some salt and stir the rice. Continue cooking over a low fire and stir occasionally. Once all the water has evaporated, the rice should be cooked. Serve it with the meat and vegetables piled on top.

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No feast would be complete without drinks. Among the Christian and animist populations the festive drink of choice is beer, traditionally made of millet or sorghum, and in the southwest of the country also palm wine. In towns bottled beer is the drink of choice for adults and soda for children, although among the Bobo ethnic group, children are given millet beer at an early age. Muslims drink soft drinks, both homemade juices from the hibiscus flower, ginger, or lemons and bottled sodas. Some less pious Muslim men drink alcohol but never inside their home.

With Western influences particularly in the urban areas, some new foods are finding their way onto the festive menus of the Burkinabe. These foods are often referred to as "white man's food" and are served at civil wedding receptions and in smaller quantities to a select few special guests at traditional feasts. White man's foods can be locally grown, but when prepared in an untraditional manner, they become foreign. Salads of raw vegetables or *crudités,* popcorn, Chinese crab crackers, and vermicelli pasta are some of the foods served on such occasions. These foods are not meant to feed but to be seen, as they are expensive and will be served only in small quantities.

During the holy month of Ramadan, when Muslims fast from dawn till dusk, special foods are prepared for breaking the fast. The fast is usually broken by first taking some liquid, water, or specially prepared herbal tea. Then one drinks millet or rice gruel, followed by millet doughnuts, called *les gallettes du mil* in French. The food consumed after breaking the fast is usually a richer version of the daily staple. There are two main meals after breaking the fast, one around 8 or 9 in the evening and one at about 3:30 A.M. before beginning the fast. On the day that celebrates the end of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, additional festive foods, such as riz gras, are prepared in quantities large enough to be shared with relatives, neighbors, and friends. A sheep will be slaughtered by the head of the family, and the meat is used for the festive meal and distributed to relatives and friends. The same happens on another major Islamic holiday Eid al-Adha, locally called le Tabaski. Sending gifts of food to relatives, neighbors, and friends is an important part of everyday sociality in Burkina Faso and helps people maintain important support networks.

## Diet and Health

African ideas of healthy eating are very different from Western ones. Possibly due to food shortages in the past, people eat as much as they can. Fatness equals good health, life force, and wealth and is an appreciated feature. People who become rich will initially start eating larger quantities of fattening foods. They will add extra foods to the communal meal and go for particularly rich breakfasts and several daytime snacks. With time, the same people might become more health conscious and start buying better-quality ingredients instead of simply doubling the quantity of their intake. In urban areas people are becoming more weight conscious, and some women talk about reducing fat in their food intake. However, since oil is a cherished ingredient and communal cooking does not consider special

needs, those who wish to follow a special diet need to prepare their food themselves. This requires both time and money and is thus often not an option for many people. When people are unwell, meat soup and tô are considered as strength-giving foods. Tô is believed to be more easily digested than rice and thus more suitable for someone who is frail and ailing.

*Liza Debevec*

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# Central Africa

## Overview

The countries considered here as part of Central Africa are the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic (CAR). They all border the equatorial rain forest, home to a highly diversified fauna and flora and crisscrossed by numerous waterways. The Congo River, the fifth-longest river in the world, forms with its many tributaries the world's second-largest drainage basin. The navigable parts of these rivers often offer the best way to access the region. In the north and south of Central Africa, the rain forest gives way to grasslands, whereas in the east of the DRC the mountains indicate the transition to the Great Lakes region. In contrast to the rain forest, these areas are suitable for the cultivation of cereals and cattle rearing. The western border of Central Africa is formed by the Atlantic Ocean. At the equator there are two rainy seasons and two dry seasons, while further north and south there is only one distinctive rainy and one dry season.

Central Africa is home to a high number of ethnic groups, each with its specific food habits and taboos. The national borders do not reflect ethnic boundaries. Some groups are present in two or even more countries, such as the Fang, who live in Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and the Republic of the Congo. Most people in Central Africa speak Bantu or Ubangi languages, both language groups that belong to the Niger-Congo language family. In the north of the region, other Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan, and Afro-Asiatic languages are spoken as well. Even if these language groupings are sometimes used as ethnic labels, this does not reflect by any means a cultural, and certainly not a racial, reality. The hunter-gatherers of the rain forest, for instance, known as *pygmies,* a derogatory term, speak Bantu or Ubangi languages but are considered culturally distinct from peoples speaking the same or closely related languages.

In the DRC the hunter-gatherers are sometimes called *autochthons*. They are considered to be the first peoples present in Central Africa. Bantu-speaking communities, who now constitute by far the majority in this region, left the Nigerian-Cameroonian borderland only some 4,000 to 5,000 years ago, from where they spread toward eastern and southern Africa. These Bantu-speaking peoples developed an agricultural system combined with the procurement of wild resources. Some of the hunter-gatherers adopted the languages of these newcomers. The Aka of the CAR, for instance, are hunter-gatherers who speak a Bantu language.

The first Europeans to arrive in the region were the Portuguese, who were exploring the coasts of the Atlantic Ocean at the end of the 15th century. They introduced some plants they had acquired in the Americas, notably Brazil. The Columbian Exchange (the exchange of foodstuffs between the New and the Old World) resulted for Central Africa in the adoption of cassava, corn, sweet potatoes, the new cocoyam, peanuts, peppers, tomatoes, pumpkins, and several fruits. During the colonial period more foodstuffs were introduced and, more important, a whole array of European food customs, such as the three-meal day. The legacy of the French colonial past in the CAR, Cameroon, Gabon, and Congo involves,



Preparing beignets in Lieki, Orientale Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo. (Courtesy of Birgit Ricquier)

among other things, the consumption of baguettes at breakfast, whereas the Belgian ex-colonizer left beer breweries in the major cities of the DRC. Globalization combined with a strong urbanization tendency ensures that the Western influence is only getting stronger. Other legacies of the colonial period are the national boundaries and the official languages, that is, French in all countries, Spanish as the first official language in Equatorial Guinea, and English as the second language in Cameroon. As a consequence, French names are used for several food items and dishes. Finally, the Europeans also brought a new religion, Christianity. Even if traditional elements have often been incorporated into the new faith, others have been lost, and this also has repercussions on food culture, such as the loss of specific food taboos.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Mengue M'obiang Geneviève lives with her husband, Ndong Essone Jean-Baptiste, in Libreville, the capital of Gabon. They have three children of their own and take care of two children of Jean-Baptiste's brother. When Geneviève goes to the market, she must make sure to get the required starch foods, proteins, condiments, and vegetables. In the first category she purchases a package of 10 cassava sticks (*chikwangue, bâtons de manioc*) or two to three kilograms (4.4–8.8 pounds) of plantains, a quantity sufficient for a few days. Once a month she

buys a bag of 50 kilograms (more than 100 pounds) of rice. The protein intake is ensured by approximately two kilograms (4.4 pounds) of meat, such as chicken, and two kilograms (4.4 pounds) of smoked, salted, or fresh fish. Sometimes she opts for bush meat, but this is rare and quite expensive. As condiments she purchases peppers, onions, garlic, and Maggi bouillon cubes in various flavors. Geneviève takes particular care with respect to the vegetable choice since vegetables make the difference between one dish or another. This time she chooses to prepare beans, of which she buys approximately one kilogram, but she could as well have purchased three or four bundles of greens. Occasionally she may add some seasonal fruit, such as mangoes or *safou* plums. Geneviève now has enough groceries to prepare the main meal of the day, which is served at noon. The leftovers will be served in the evening.

For breakfast the family has bread, the French-style baguette, with butter or condensed milk, coffee, and cocoa prepared with powdered milk and sugar. The kids sometimes get cornflakes and occasionally baguette with chocolate spread, which is purchased as *pain chocolaté* at the corner shop. All breakfast items can be found at the market or in small quantities at the corner shop. However, middle-class families often prefer to get these groceries from the supermarket.

When Geneviève, Jean-Baptiste, and the children visit the family in the village, both the meals and the grocery shopping are quite different. Instead of three meals, they'll have only breakfast and dinner, with snacks appeasing their stomachs during the day. The fare is much simpler. Maggi cubes, for instance, are rarely used. In the rural areas people grow foodstuffs in their fields and gather them in the forest. Hardly any food is purchased, meat, fish, and rice being the main exceptions.

## Major Foodstuffs

In large parts of Central Africa starchy food consists mainly of tubers and plantains. Without any doubt the most important tuber is cassava (*Manihot esculenta*). There are "sweet" and "bitter" varieties, referring to the amount of cyanogenic glycosides. The bitter varieties require soaking in water for a few days to remove the toxins. Before the Columbian Exchange true yams (*Dioscorea*) were the most important root crops, and they still are consumed in a large variety. Some are cultivated, such as the aerial yam (*D. bulbifera*) and the yellow yam (*D. cayenensis*). Others are simply found in the rain forest, for example, *D. burkilliana.* Some of these yams attain a weight of several kilograms, *D. mangenotiana* being one of the champions, with a possible weight of over 200 kilograms (441 pounds), but it is no longer harvested when more than 5 kilograms (11 pounds). Some yam varieties are toxic and require soaking like cassava. Two tubers of Asian origin were introduced fairly early into Central Africa: the water or purple yam (*D. alata*) and taro (*Colocasia esculenta*). Other root crops are the new cocoyam (*Xanthosoma*), the sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*), and several species of African origin that today have only minor importance, such as the Hausa potato (*Solenostemon rotundifolius*), the Livingstone potato (*Plectranthus esculentus*), and several wild tubers. Another important starch food is actually a fruit, that is, the plantain (*Musa paradisiaca*) in the banana family. This originally Asian plant must have been present in the area for some millennia, but scholars disagree on the time and place of its introduction. Plantains are often considered as the food of the ancestors and play an important role in festivities.



Pulverizing and sieving soaked cassava tubers in preparation of making Chikangue in the Matombi, Kouilou Province, Republic of Congo. (Courtesy of Birgit Ricquier)

The largest part of Central Africa is not favorable to the cultivation of cereals. Corn (*Zea mays*) forms the exception and is widely grown. On the fringes of the forest, however, three cereals of African origin are found: sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*), pearl millet (*Pennisetum glaucum*), and finger millet (*Eleusine coracana*). Finally, rice (*Oryza sativa*) is cultivated in some areas, but it can be purchased at markets all over the region. These tubers, plantains, and cereals are used to prepare the starch constituent of the meal, snacks, and alcoholic beverages.

People in Central Africa grow and gather an amazing variety of greens, such as various species of amaranth (*Amaranthus*), the leaves of *Gnetum africanum,* bitterleaf (*Vernonia amygdalina*), the shoots and leaves of various *Dioscorea* and *Solanum* species, and so on. Also, the leaves of plants primarily grown for their tubers or fruits are consumed, for example, the shoots and/or leaves of cassava, sweet potatoes, taro, the new cocoyam, various legumes, and gourds. Some of these greens require extensive cooking to remove toxins.

Other vegetables include various legumes, cucurbits, eggplant, and okra. Legumes of African origins are, for instance, the cowpea (*Vigna unguiculata*), the bambara groundnut (*Vigna subterranea*), and the yambean (*Sphenostylis stenocarpa*), which also provides edible tubers. The bambara groundnut has been largely replaced by the peanut (*Arachis hypogea*), the name for the first now being used in many languages for its American successor. A recently introduced legume is, for instance, the common bean (*Phaseolus vulgaris*). In addition, the cultivated cucurbits include species from both African and American origins. A famous African gourd is the bottle gourd or calabash (*Lagenaria siceraria*), used for spoons and containers. Another example is the *egusi* melon (*Citrullus lanatus*), which is grown for its seeds. The African eggplant or garden egg (*Solanum aethiopicum* and related species) comes in many bright colors. It is somewhat smaller than its purple Asian counterpart, and its shape resembles an egg more closely. Some species can be eaten raw, and as already mentioned, the leaves are used as greens. Okra (*Hibiscus esculentus*) is one of the originally African food items that took part in the Columbian Exchange and is now also a favorite in New Orleans.

Fruits of certain trees have the same function as vegetables. This includes the safou plum (*Dacryodes edulis*), breadfruit (*Artocarpus communis*), and the African black olive (*Canarium schweinfurthii*). The same holds for the newcomers the avocado (*Persea americana*), green mango (*Mangifera indica*), and diverse citruses. Many of these can, however, also be eaten raw. Another important foodstuff is mushrooms. A high number of edible species are gathered, many of which are found on trees.

There are two main types of condiments in Central Africa: seeds and palm products. With respect to the first, the use of several cucurbit seeds as well as peanuts has already been mentioned. Other seeds are, for instance, those of the wild mango (*Irvingia gabonensis*) and sesame (*Sesamum indicum*). Seeds are usually pounded into a paste, which is added to the broth of various preparations. Two products of the oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) are common condiments: palm oil and palm butter. Both are extracted from the boiled palm fruits, which are pounded in a mortar, mixed with water, and filtered to remove the kernels and fruit skins. The resulting sauce is palm butter, better known as *moambe,* and from this substance the palm oil can be strained. It is also possible to extract palm oil from the kernels, but the resulting oil is rarely used in cooking (instead, it is used in medicine or cosmetics). It should be mentioned that the palm tree also provides palm wine.

A condiment that is present in almost every preparation is salt. In Central Africa salt is traditionally derived from plants. Herbs or greens are dried and burnt to ashes. These ashes are mixed with water and used as such, or boiled until the water evaporates. There is also salt from mines and sea salt, both available in the markets. Other condiments are peppers, tomatoes (often canned), onions, and garlic. In Central African cities it is common to cook with Maggi cubes.

Meat is available from domestic animals, such as goats, sheep, guinea fowl, chickens, and, to a minor extent, cattle and pigs. However, in the rural areas it is quite common to hunt or trap game: various mammals such as antelopes and monkeys, birds such as pigeons and herons, and reptiles such as crocodiles and snakes. This bush meat is a sought-after product for those who procure it at markets at the side of

the main roads. The trade in bush meat has become such a lucrative business that it threatens wildlife in some areas. Apart from the meat, also the entrails and sometimes the skins of these wild animals are prepared for food, and for antelopes and buffalo the contents of the second stomach. Thanks to the many rivers and the Atlantic Ocean, there is also a large variety of fish, as well as some shellfish like crab and prawns. People also gather caterpillars, beetles, and termites. The fat and nutritious larvae of the palm weevil (*Rynchophorus* sp.) are particularly popular, and the adult beetles are also eaten. Dairy products are not commonly consumed. Eggs occasionally appear on the menu, but the consumption of milk products is restricted to the grassland regions where cattle can be kept. It must be observed, however, that powdered milk is currently available all over the region. A final animal product is honey. This highly valued resource is, among others, used to prepare *hydromel,* a fermented alcoholic drink like mead.

Finally, several products are eaten raw as a snack. Those include various wild fruits, for example, the African star apple (*Chrysophyllum* sp.), gumvines (*Landolphia* sp.; a sour fruit about the size of an orange with seeds in a stringy pulp), monkey oranges (*Strychnos* sp.), and junglesop (*Anonidium mannii;* an odd light green fruit that looks something like a segmented artichoke). Many cultivated fruits have also been introduced, for example, the sweet or dessert banana (*Musa* sp.), pineapple (*Ananas comosus*), and papaya (*Carica papaya*). The stalks of several cereals and grasses, like sorghum, corn, sugarcane (*Saccharum*), and elephant grass (*Pennisetum purpureum*), are chewed for the sweet sap, especially by children. Cola nuts are another popular snack, reputed to have stimulating and aphrodisiac qualities.

## Cooking

Whereas the labor to procure food (cultivating, hunting, trapping, fishing, and gathering) is divided between men and women, cooking is foremost a female activity. Some foods, however, can be eaten only by men, and they often prepare these themselves on a separate fireplace in separate pots. In addition, some preparatory activities like butchering are men's tasks, but the remaining cooking activities are performed by women.

The organization of the cooking area in Central Africa is different from one ethnic group to another. Some kitchens are a separate building, for example, among the Yassa and Mvae of southern Cameroon. Others, such as the Songola (central DRC), prepare food under a veranda that also serves as the living room, whereas the kitchen of the Shi (eastern DRC) is situated in the hut, next to the bed. In all cases, the cooking area consists of one or a few fireplaces, a smoking shelf, and shelves to store food and cooking utensils. The fireplace is made up of three stones placed in a triangle with firewood in between. Cooking equipment consists of wooden mortars and pestles in various sizes, a wooden board for kneading cassava, aluminum pots (rather than the traditional ceramics), a long stirring stick or spatula used in making *fufu* (a thick starchy porridge), knives, and so on. In most villages all over the region a large number of preparatory activities are performed in the courtyard, where a large drying shelf is usually also placed. City dwellers have Western-style kitchens, but these often contain Central African elements as well, such as a wooden mortar, and urban cooks equally perform certain cooking activities outside, such as roasting meat on a fire placed under the veranda.



Chikwangue, or cassava sticks (bâtons de manioc), ready for steaming in Malemba, Kouilou Province, Republic of Congo. (Courtesy of Birgit Ricquier)

Few food items are stored. In the case of cassava, plantains, and wild yams storage isn't necessary, since these plants can be harvested year-round. Cultivated yams and taro, in contrast, have a harvest season and are sometimes stored in granaries. Meat and fish are often smoked to be preserved. Other items with a long storage time are the dried pastes of seeds and vegetable salt. Most food items are simply procured seasonally. Shorter-term storage does occur more often, in order to better organize the work. Women will, for instance, make an amount of chikwangue or flour that will suffice for several days. These are then stored in baskets. Of course, city kitchens usually have a refrigerator, thus expanding storage possibilities.

In rural areas meals are made from scratch. This implies that cooking is a time-consuming and labor-intensive task. Instead of simply purchasing cassava flour at the market, women in the countryside first need to harvest the tubers, peel them and leave them in water for several days, and then put the soaked tubers on a shelf to dry, after which these can be pounded into flour and sieved. Only then can the flour be used to prepare the staple food of the region, called fufu. Fufu, also called *nshima, bidya,* or *bukari,* is a sticky porridge made by stirring flour into boiling water with a long spatula or stirring stick. It is usually prepared with cassava or corn flour, but flour from plantains, rice, and millet can be used as well. This is the same dish as the East African *ugali* or Zimbabwean *sadza.*

***Fufu***

This version of fufu is made with cassava flour. You can replace it with another type of flour, but then the amount of water has to be modified. Some brands give indications for the quantities on the package.

5 c water

5 c cassava flour

Bring 5 cups water to a boil. When large bubbles appear, take 1 cup of the boiling water and set aside. Add the flour, and stir well with a long wooden spatula. To have better control of the kneading, remove the pot from the fire, sit down, place the pot between your feet, and stir with two hands. Add the remaining water as necessary. Scrape the sides and bottom of the pot while kneading. Keep on turning the porridge until it gets sticky and translucent and no lumps remain.

Fufu can also be made by mashing boiled plantains or tubers, such as yams. Another elaborate starch preparation made of cassava is chikwangue or bâton de manioc. In the south of Congo, it takes one to two weeks to prepare this staple. After several days of soaking, the tubers are pulverized by hand in water, passed through a sieve, and the fibers removed with a knife. Next, the water is drained off, and the remaining cassava paste is poured into a bag to drip for one or two days. The paste is kneaded on a wooden board, by hand and with a wooden roller. It can be left to rest for another day but often is immediately steamed, kneaded for the second time, and shaped into sticks, which are then wrapped in leaves, and finally these are steamed again. Chikwangue can be stored for several days and thus makes an ideal travel supply. Other, though less popular, starch foods take little time, for instance, boiled taro or fried plantains.

The foodstuffs served with fufu or chikwangue, be they vegetables or animal products, are usually



A libóké of fish baking on the ashes in Kimbonga-Louamba, Bouenza Province, Republic of Congo. (Courtesy of Birgit Ricquier)

boiled with diverse seasonings and in various combinations, for example, meat with eggplant, salt, and peppers. The most popular side dish, *saka-saka,* or cassava leaves, is again a time-consuming preparation, involving pounding and several hours of boiling. Another preparation method is to wrap a mixture, for instance, fish with salt and peppers, in banana or other leaves and steam, boil, or roast the package. The choice of the leaves used for wrapping is very important because of the flavor they add to the preparation. Other methods include frying and several ways of roasting, for example, on skewers or on the warm ashes of the fire.

## Typical Meals

As already mentioned, people have three meals a day, with a European-style breakfast, a main meal at noon, and leftovers in the evening. In villages, people have a small breakfast, snacks during the day, and the main meal in the evening, with breakfast often consisting of the leftovers of the meal they had the previous day. Beignets also make a popular breakfast food, especially among children. The main meal consists of a starch served with a stew or relish. For some ethnic groups, such as the Gbaya (CAR), there is no meal without the flour-based fufu. Elsewhere, the starch served can also be chikwangue, boiled or roasted plantains and root crops, or rice. With the starch a large variety of stews or relishes may be served. A popular dish known in Congo and the DRC as *moambe* consists of meat, fish, and/or greens prepared in a sauce made of pounded palm nuts.

### ***Poulet à la Moambe*** **(Chicken with Palm Butter)**

Like all recipes, *poulet à la moambe* exists in many variations. You can replace the cassava leaves with other greens, okra, eggplant, and so on, or the chicken with salted or smoked fish. The palm oil, canned moambe (palm butter), and saka-saka can be found in African stores. Of course, this is an expatriate version. In Central Africa, the moambe and saka-saka are made from scratch.

1 chicken, cut in bite-size pieces

Palm oil, for frying

2 onions, finely chopped

2 chili peppers (to taste), finely chopped

5 ripe tomatoes, chopped

1 large can of moambe (approximately 28 oz)

1 can saka-saka (approximately 14 oz), drained

1 or 2 Maggi cubes, chicken flavor (or cubes of another brand)

Salt

Fry the chicken in some palm oil until brown but not done. Heat some more palm oil in a large pot, add the onion, peppers, and tomatoes, and cook for about 5 minutes. Add the meat and 1 cup of water. Then pour in the canned moambe and dilute the sauce with an equal amount (1 can) of water. Finally, stir in the drained saka-saka and season with salt and Maggi cubes. Cover the pot and let simmer for 30 to 40 minutes. The moambe is ready when oil appears on the surface. Serve with fufu, chikwangue, plantains, or rice.

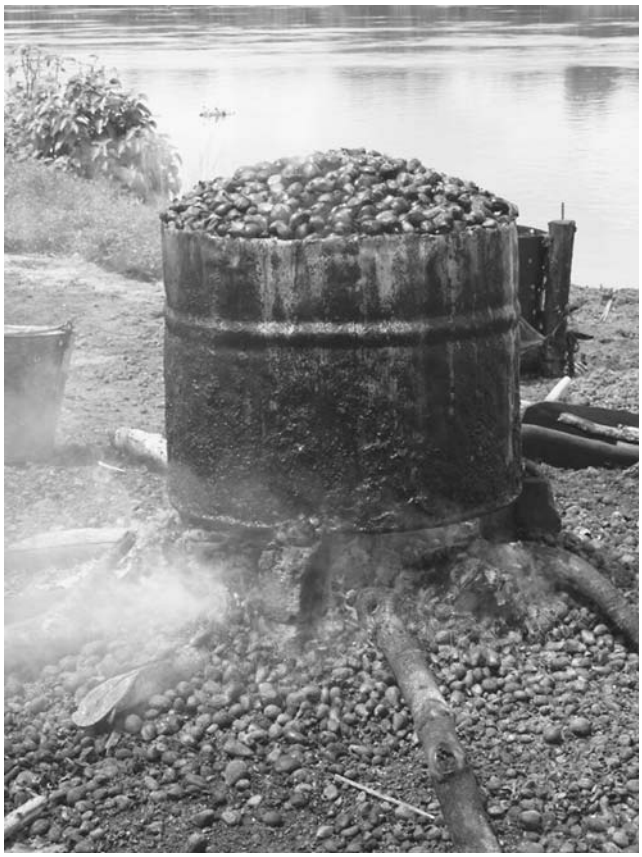
Another popular Central African dish is chicken or fish in peanut sauce, often with tomatoes and onion. Fish, shrimp, or greens can also be prepared *à la pépé-soupe,* the name pointing to the addition of peppers. In Cameroon one might be served *ndolé* soup, which consists of bitterleaf, shrimp, fish and/or meat, peanuts, and various spices. A particular dish from Equatorial Guinea is *pangolín con chocolate,* pangolin meat stewed with onion, garlic, and "chocolate." *Chocolate* refers to the grated nut of the wild mango, and this sauce is also used to prepare fish and other meat in Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, and Gabon. A final example is *libóké,* which is a Lingála word meaning "package" that refers along the Congo River to the preparation of fish or meat in broad leaves. All these dishes come in a high number of variations.

In rural areas men and women usually eat separately. The small children eat with their mothers, but older children form a third group. Each group shares the served starch foods and relishes. Sometimes

children have their own plates, just like the sick and the elderly, who eat alone. It is not considered polite to watch visitors eating, so they too eat alone. Children often have the liberty to prepare their own meals, and they gather, trap, or even hunt (for small animals) the necessary foodstuffs themselves. In the cities, as well as among certain ethnic groups, such as the Aka (hunter-gatherers from the CAR), the social organization is entirely different, the meals being shared by the nuclear family. A simple matter of hygiene is washing the hands before eating. Often a bowl of water is passed around, and every person has to offer the bowl, the towel, and soap (if present) to the next person. This is all the more important since the meal is eaten with the hands. People will take a bit of fufu and use it as a spoon to scoop up the relish. Nowadays, forks and spoons are used as well.

The snacks eaten during the day can be simply fresh fruits. When preparation is necessary, most often one cooking technique is involved and no seasoning. As such, tubers, plantains, corn on the cob, vegetables like gourds, various seeds, and legumes are either boiled or roasted. More elaborate snacks are, for instance, diluted porridges, sweet or savory, and preparations in leaves. A Cameroonian favorite is *koki,* a "pudding" made of ground beans, palm oil, pepper, and the tender inner cocoyam leaves that is mixed, wrapped in the outer cocoyam leaves, and boiled or steamed. In the south of Congo *mbwaata,* a diluted cassava porridge commonly served with roasted peanuts, is quite popular.

In many places, it is not the custom that drinks accompany the meal. However, especially in the cities, European habits have set in. Coffee and cocoa accompany breakfast, for instance. Traditional drinks include various juices (e.g., from monkey oranges), infusions (e.g., from lemongrass or ginger), soups (e.g., from peppers and eggplant), and several alcoholic beverages. Hydromel is made by dissolving honey in water and leaving the mixture to ferment for several days. It is a seasonal product, depending on the blossoms and flowers. Palm wine is the fermented sap of a palm tree (oil palm, raffia palm, etc.). It can be collected by two methods: tapping the sap from the inflorescence in the top of the tree or felling the tree. Fermentation of the sap takes only a few hours and is accomplished by exposure to the sun or by the addition of various plants or types of bark. Palm wine has a low percentage of alcohol and stays fresh only a short while, about 30 hours. There are many types of traditional beers, brewed with finger millet, sorghum, corn, cassava, and bananas, sometimes in combinations. The cereal beers are very different from European-style beers since they do not contain hops, which add bitterness and allow a longer shelf life. When fruits are in season people make wine of them, adding coloring, yeast, and sugar, for example, grapefruit wine. Wine can also be made of sugarcane. Spirits are distilled from various ingredients, such as corn and cassava (e.g., *lutuku*), palm wine, rice, pineapple, and sugarcane. Many European alcoholic beverages have become popular. Some are imported, such as red wine. There



Palm nuts boiling to extract palm oil in Bomane, Orientale Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo. (Courtesy of Birgit Ricquier)

is, however, an important beer industry in Central Africa, especially in the DRC. Congolese beers include Primus, Skol, Tembo ("elephant" in Kiswahili), and Simba ("lion"). Finally, the omnipresent sodas like Coca-Cola and Fanta should be mentioned. In Lubumbashi these are called *sucrés* ("sugared" in French).

## Eating Out

There is virtually no restaurant culture in Central Africa, but people still eat out. Eating out usually consists of visiting friends or relatives, and in the villages the men like to discuss the events of the day around some palm wine. These palm-wine gatherings are replaced by drinking (bottled) beer at the pub in the cities. A popular snack taken with the beer is roasted goat meat and onion served with chili powder and optionally slices of chikwangue. This snack is called *cabri* (French for "goat") in Kinshasa and *mícopo* in Lubumbashi, the second-largest city of the DRC. Another way of eating out is buying a snack from a street vendor, which varies from roasted corn, sweet potatoes, and peanuts to cookies, candy, ice cream, and so on.

There are some restaurants in Central Africa. People like to eat there on special occasions, and they are also frequented by foreigners. Many restaurants serve exotic food, mostly European. One can have French-style croissants and milkshakes for



Pounding cassava leaves, or saka-saka, in Bomane, Orientale Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo. (Courtesy of Birgit Ricquier)

brunch in a patisserie or Italian pizza for dinner. Fast-food restaurants have made their entry, such as the Katanga Fried Chiken [sic] in Lubumbashi. In other restaurants local foods can be ordered.

## Special Occasions

As anywhere in the world celebrations are paired with an abundance of food, especially rare and expensive products, such as bush meat and imported items like rice and red wine. Some preparations are indispensable at festivities, such as ndolé on the coasts of Cameroon. People celebrate many occasions, for example, the events of the Christian calendar year such as Christmas and New Year. Sometimes small things, like freshly prepared hydromel, are enough reason to throw a party. But it is the important moments in life—for example, birth, initiation, engagement, marriage—that require special attention. What foodstuffs are served depends largely on the ethnic group. The engagement ceremony of the Gbaya (CAR), for instance, involves preparations of chicken and smoked fish.

Other ceremonies are held for the ancestors. According to the Ambuun (western DRC), bananas are the food of the ancestors and hence are deposited at crossroads as an offering. And in the southern DRC people drink and offer sorghum beer during the commemoration of the famous 19th-century mwami M'Siri, king of the Yeke Kingdom.

## Diet and Health

Variation in the menu is considered the key ingredient of good health. The seasonality of many foodstuffs (vegetables as well as insects) is the first step toward a balanced diet, and women will juggle the seasonal products to prepare a different dish every day. Starch dishes rarely vary; only the relish changes.

There are many food restrictions in the Central African diet, all depending on the ethnic group. Some are permanent, others only temporary. Permanent restrictions can be taboos linked to the clan. They usually concern certain types of game that are rare anyway, for example, lion, heron, or python. Sometimes the prohibition is only on the killing, and the meat in question can be consumed if killed by another person. Women are prohibited certain foods, again usually scarce meat, such as baboon and crocodile. These items are linked to strength and masculinity. A taboo can also be linked to religion. Adherents of the Kimbanguist church, a Congolese branch of Christianity, don't eat pork or monkey and don't drink alcohol. Temporary restrictions are linked to pregnancy and giving birth, to initiation, and to mourning. In the case of pregnancy the prohibition is often linked to a characteristic of the food item. Pangolin, for instance, is a mammal covered with scales that moves slowly and rolls up in a ball as a defense mechanism. The Gbaya (CAR) fear that if the parents eat pangolin, the child will have skin problems and difficulty walking. In some places women who have their periods cannot prepare food for their family. Finally, food restrictions can be used as a remedy in case of illness.



Soaking cassava tubers in a pond to remove the toxins in Musana, Pool Province, Republic of Congo. (Courtesy of Birgit Ricquier)

*Birgit Ricquier*

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# Côte d'Ivoire

## Overview

The Republic of Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) is located on the southern coast of the West African bulge. The country shares borders with Mali and Burkina Faso to the north, Guinea and Liberia to the east, and Ghana to the west. The country's southern coast is a long shoreline on the Gulf of Guinea. The greater part of the country is a vast plateau, but the Guinea Highlands in the northwest have peaks that rise over 3,280 feet (1,000 meters). Like many countries in western Africa, the country is divided geographically between north and south. The coastal areas have two rainy and two dry seasons: one short and one long. The coastal area was formerly rain forest, but much of that has been cut down to make way for increased exploitation of cash crops such as cacao and coffee.

In 2008, the population was estimated at 18,373,060. The capital city is Yamoussoukro near the country's center, but the largest city and former capital is coastal Abidjan, which with a population of over three million is the most populous city in French-speaking western Africa. Metropolitan Abidjan is, after Paris and Kinshasa, the third-largest French-speaking city in the world. While French is the country's lingua franca, 65 different languages are spoken among what are usually divided into five major ethnic groups: the Akan, Southern Mande, Northern Mande, Kru, and Senoufo/Lobi, with the Akan group comprising 42 percent of the population. The population is 40 percent Muslim and 30 percent Christian, with another 30 percent practicing indigenous religions. Since 1999 ongoing conflict and a civil war have transformed what was once the jewel of French-speaking western Africa into a country with an uncertain future.

### Food Culture Snapshot

Maurice and Simone Yaba are westernized Ivorians who live in Abidjan. They are a part of the country's developing middle class. Maurice works in upper management at a private enterprise, and Simone is a housewife. They live in the upper-class suburb of Cocody, and their lifestyle is influenced not only by the traditional customs but also by international trends. Their diet crosses ethnic and national boundaries. In European fashion, they eat three meals a day. Breakfast is usually influenced by French culture and consists of a cup of coffee or hot chocolate with French bread or toast with butter and jam. Other meals may range from Vietnamese takeout from one of the many small local restaurants to a traditional *sauce claire* (a tomato-based fish stew) served with *foufou* (a thick starchy mush). Occasionally the family will drive out to purchase a local delicacy like *aloko* (deep-fried plantains) from street stalls.

The ingredients for the meals come from the local supermarket, a neighborhood street market, or the Marché de Cocody—the traditional market area. Like Abidjan's largest market, which is located in Treicheville, the Marché de Cocody offers an array of products ranging from fresh produce to live poultry. Nearby shops sell imported and manufactured foods. Most Ivorian households of any means usually have a household servant of some sort, and the Yabas do as well. But Simone likes to cook, and so she usually does the shopping.



Abidjan market, Cote d'Ivoire. (Corel)

***Aloko* (Deep-Fried Plantains)**

*Serves 6*

6 firm yellow plantains

Oil for frying (traditionally this is red palm oil, but any vegetable oil may be substituted)

Pour 4 inches of oil into the bottom of a heavy saucepan or a cast iron Dutch oven and heat it to 375°F. Cut the plantains lengthwise, then into ¾-inch pieces. Place half of the plantains into the oil and fry, turning if necessary, until they are golden brown. Remove and drain, then repeat with the second batch. Serve immediately. In the Côte d'Ivoire, they are usually served with a sprinkling of chili pepper and cooked onions as an accompaniment to grilled fish.

## Major Foodstuffs

The diversity of the Côte D'Ivoire has led to many different diets throughout the country. In the more westernized southern section of the country, commercial agriculture is an important industry, and farmers grow cacao and coffee for the world market as well as vegetables and fruits such as avocados and pineapples, among others, for export to France. Throughout the country, Ivorians generally rely on grains and tubers as the basis of their diet. Yams, plantains, rice, millet, corn, and peanuts are staples throughout the country. Those living near the coast have a wide variety of seafood available, including tuna, sardines, bonito, and shrimp. Those more inland depend on local game like guinea hen, bush rat, or agouti, another ratlike rodent (although game is eschewed by most Muslims); chicken is the most popular animal protein. The amount of meat served at any given table indicates how affluent a family is (or how honored the guest is at a festive meal). Fermented cassava forms the basis for *attiéké,* a couscous-like starch that serves as the basis for many of the traditional sauces. Okra is much used, as are eggplant, tomatoes, onions, and leafy greens. Cayenne pepper, allspice, curry, garlic, caraway, cloves, ginger, and a range of chili peppers are used to season the dishes, as are traditional West African peppers like *melegueta* peppers and cubebs. Many homes use French *cubes Maggi* (Maggi bouillon cubes) to season stews and sauces. Fresh fruits such as mangoes, soursops, pineapple, mandarins and clementines, and pomegranates are typical snacks and may also serve as the basis for desserts in more westernized households where French culinary influence is felt. Flag beer (a West African brand) is consumed throughout the country by those who are not Muslim, as are manufactured local beverages, like white palm wine called *bangui.* There are also homemade beverages sold by street vendors like ginger beer or *nyamakoudji* (a drink prepared from pineapple peelings). Among the westernized, French wines are also consumed.

## Cooking

Throughout western Africa in general the main culinary techniques are boiling, steaming, stewing, frying,

roasting, grilling, and baking. All of these methods are the basis for the traditional dishes of the country that used the traditional cookstove. Even today, many households cook over wood or charcoal fires. Kerosene stoves have supplanted many of the wood-burning ones, but in the rural areas the traditional three-rock wood stoves remain the standard. In the urban areas, the Western stove is used, but for some dishes cooks still prefer to cook outdoors over a small brazier called a *feu malgache.* Pressure cookers are used to tenderize tougher cuts of meat. Refrigerators are also the norm among those with sufficient funds and access to electricity.

Most households have some kind of household help. It may be a relative from the country looking for employment in the city and working in exchange for lodging, or a professional paid for services. Cooking, therefore, is often done by another woman, overseen by the lady of the house. Cooking, however, remains a family activity for festive foods. Extended families will combine to prepare dishes at times of feasting, with the matriarch directing the kitchen. The myriad cultures of Côte d'Ivoire are oral cultures, and this is the manner by which the youngsters of the household learn to prepare the traditional foods. Microwaves, freezers, food processors, and the full range of the other Western culinary conveniences are de rigueur among the elite. French influence prevails among the elite as well, and in their households the full European *baterie de cuisine* may be found among those with means; there, adepts at the preparation of French *cuisine bourgeois* and/or *cuisine classique* can be found in many households.

## Typical Meals

Given the regional diversity of the country, it is difficult to generalize about a typical meal. It can be said that in traditional rural households the typical heavier meals of the day consist of a soupy stew of some sort served over or accompanied by a starch such as the fermented cassava known as attiéké or the pounded cassava known as foufou. The starch may be dipped in the stew, or the stew may be scooped up with it. Rice is also an accompaniment for several dishes.

### *Foufou* (Boiled Cassava)

*Yields about three foufou balls*

2½ c cassava, peeled, with the fibrous center removed

5 ripe plantains, peeled

Prepare the cassava and the plantain as directed, then cut them into chunks and place them in a large saucepan with water to cover. Bring to a boil, then lower the heat and simmer for 25 minutes or until the vegetables are tender. Drain them and return to the pan over very low heat. Then, with a potato masher, pound, mash, and stir the mixture for 15 minutes or until it becomes elastic and smooth. (You may need to sprinkle it with water from time to time to keep it from sticking.) Form the foufou into balls and serve immediately.

Eating for some traditional Ivorians is a ritual act that situates them within their community and within the universe. For that reason, in some rural villages, the community will still eat together in a common area. Seated on a mat on the ground they eat from a communal bowl using their right hands. It is considered rude to grab or act greedy. Women and girls eat as a group, men as another group, and young boys as a third group. The eldest are served first, and during the meal talking is discouraged. It is a time of commensalism thought to build community.

Alternately there may be the European paradigm of three meals a day, but traditionally it is often replaced with a different one that includes one or two meals plus a lighter meal or two to three meals with snacks. In urban areas, breakfast may follow the French mode and include French bread from a local bakery or toasted leftover bread with jam and butter. Coffee and hot chocolate are the usual drinks. In more traditional areas, alternately, the daily diet might include one of the more traditional breakfasts like the fried bean cakes known as *kosai* that are eaten by the Hausa in the north of the country.

Lunch and dinner for the westernized are often interchangeable and range between European fare or Ivorian favorites like grilled or roasted fish or

chicken served with a piquant sauce and more traditional Ivorian dishes like *kédjenou* (a chicken stew).

***Kédjenou de Poulet***

*Serves 4–6*

1 frying chicken, cut into serving pieces
1 large onion, chopped
2 large tomatoes, quartered
1 tbsp red wine vinegar
¼ c red wine
½ c water
1 Maggi bouillon cube
1 pricked habanero chile, or to taste
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Place all of the ingredients in a pot over a medium flame, cover, and cook for 1 hour, shaking the pot occasionally to make sure that the ingredients do not stick. Serve hot with white rice.

## Eating Out

Unlike many of their West African neighbors, the Ivorians have a tradition of eating out in small local restaurants known as a *maquis.* Taking their name from the Corsican underbrush and the French resistance during World War II, these small restaurants often began as clandestine dining spots for the male migrant workers who flocked to the city. As their fame for various dishes grew, they became more public spots, and now no self-respecting Ivorian in any urban area would not know about at least a few of these small eateries where local specialties are served. They may be as simple as a terrace in someone's yard or can be a more commercial spot complete with a limited menu and a selection of beverages. The requirement for designation as a maquis seems to be that the food served is grilled over a low fire, so grilled chicken and grilled fish are the usual standbys; both are served with a sauce of onions and tomatoes and accompanied by rice, foufou, and attiéké. Meals are usually accompanied by beer, French wine, or bangui.

In the larger urban areas, there are white-tablecloth restaurants located in tourist hotels and the occasional colonial restaurant run by a homesick Frenchman where the clock seems stuck in the French provincial life of the 1950s. Sidewalk cafés exist in Abidjan's more European zones, while the more local areas have maquis and, in the evening, clubs where traditional grilled foods are served to the accompaniment of live music played by local bands. The influx of migrant workers means that surrounding most of the markets, bus depots, and taxi stands, women vendors hawk street foods that may range from plastic bags filled with beverages to entire meals that can be eaten while sitting on a stool or can be put in an enameled bowl and taken home. In the Abidjan suburb of Cocody, near the university, a night market exists where several vendors offer grilled fish or chicken and aloko to students.

## Special Occasions

As is true for many of their West African compatriots, Ivorians have a highly developed sense of the ceremonial. Funerals call for shows of family solidarity and often end in a communal meal shared by all. Roman Catholics celebrate all of the Christian holidays with ceremony, and the cathedral at Yamoussoukro has been visited by the pope more than once. Muslims feast and fast during the period of Ramadan and thereafter, and those following traditional religions, as well as others who combine the traditional with their other beliefs, celebrate events like the Yam Festival (Fete des Ignames) in Agboville in the east of the country. Like the Akan festivals of neighboring Ghana, this festival celebrates the food that has traditionally been the community's mainstay with dancing, drumming, and feasting.

## Diet and Health

The Côte d'Ivoire still suffers from the effects of its ongoing internal conflict. In 2006 the World Health Organization *Country Health System Fact Sheet* indicated that about 15 percent of the population was undernourished and added that 21.2 percent of the children under age five were underweight and more

than 25 percent were considered short for their age, or "stunted." In March 2008 the country, along with others in western Africa, experienced food riots protesting the rising cost of staples. The country's north/south divide coupled with the urban/rural one means that rural dwellers in the northern part of the country are more subject to interrupted food supplies in the rainy seasons. The same happens in the dry season if drought occurs. The southern regions are closer to seaports and have more stable climactic conditions. The more developed economy means that there are methods of food storage, and most people can afford to purchase food from markets and other sources if their individual food supplies are destroyed.

*Jessica B. Harris*

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# Egypt

## Overview

Egypt is geographically situated in northern Africa, bordering the Mediterranean Sea, between Libya and the Gaza Strip, and the Red Sea north of Sudan; it includes the Asian Sinai Peninsula. To the east of the Sahara desert, the Nile carves out a route to the sea. The river provides fertile silt and refuge from the arid land that surrounds the valley, and it was a welcoming environment to early populations. Egypt is comprised of 386,660 square miles of land. Natural resources include petroleum, natural gas, lime, phosphorous, manganese, potassium, zinc, iron ore, and more. Egypt is the most populous state in the Arab world, with over 80 million inhabitants. One out of every three Arabs is said to be Egyptian, and Cairo is Africa's most densely populated city. The median age of Egyptians is 24 years.

More than 43 percent of Egypt's inhabitants are urban dwellers living in the cities of Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said, Ismalia, Mansoura, Tanta, Luxor, Aswan, and other cities in the Nile Delta. Ninety percent of the population is Sunni Muslim, and 10 percent is Christian (a majority of whom are known as Copts). Most Egyptians are employed in the agriculture, manufacturing (textiles, pharmaceuticals, food products), and tourism sectors. Growing domestic sectors including technology, transportation, telecommunications, retail, and construction are also major sources of employment. Important agricultural crops include cotton, rice, corn, wheat, beans, fruit, vegetables, cattle, water buffalo, sheep, and goats. Sugarcane cultivation and fishing play important roles in rural and seaside communities where subsistence agriculture is still important.

Egypt has the longest continuous history of any country. To this day, 99 percent of the population resides in the Nile Valley and the Delta. Ancient Egypt was powerful and gave rise to a great civilization with relatively little interference from the rest of the world. The ancient Egyptian empire once spanned from northern modern-day Sudan all the way to Lebanon. As Egypt became increasingly wealthy, it continued to gain increasing attention from the outside world, which became tempted to invade. Subsequently, Egypt lost her autonomy to a succession of powerful empires: the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Copts, the Ottomans, the French, and the British. The interplay between the native population and those of the occupying forces enriched the nation's culture. Even the official language of Egypt, Arabic, has its own dialect that includes influences from various cultures.

Since the exploration and documentation of the archaeological remains during Napoleon's Egyptian Campaign (1798–1801), the Western world has been gripped by Egypto-mania, the fascination with ancient Egyptian culture and history. Egypt has had a significant impact on the cultural imagination of all Western cultures. Today, many aspects of Egypt's ancient culture exist in interaction with newer elements, including the influence of modern Western culture, itself with roots in ancient Egypt. Much as Egypt physically bridges the gap between Africa and Asia, she is culturally doing the same for the Western and Islamic worlds.



Market stall, Aswan, Egypt. (Corel)

## Food Culture Snapshot

Soad El Tanbedawy is the mother of three children and a retired mathematics professor living in a town named Shiben El Khom in the province of El Menofia in northern Egypt. Her daughter, Asma' Khalifa, is a doctor, her son Ahmed Khalifa is an information technology specialist, and her son Ossama Khalifa is a senior in college. Since none of her children is married, they live at home with Soad and her husband. Before her two eldest children began working and her husband, Mohamed Khalifa, was promoted in his municipal position, it was easy for everyone to enjoy most meals together at home. With increasingly demanding schedules, Soad has made alterations to her schedule so that everyone can eat together. She begins and ends her day with breakfast preparations. Since the typical Egyptian breakfast consists of *fuul medammes,* or pureed fava beans, which require eight hours of slow cooking, she soaks them the day before and puts them on a low fire before going to sleep at night. The next morning she arises, makes eggs, and sets out plates of tomatoes, watercress or arugula, carrots, cucumbers, and sheep-milk cheeses on her kitchen table to accompany the beans. Her husband buys fresh *aish baladi,* a healthful, bran-rich bread baked fresh in local bakeries, daily to accompany the breakfast. Prior to eating, everyone in the family washes their hands. After eating, they wash them again. Next, warm tea with milk is made and enjoyed only after the conclusion of breakfast. Since lunch is eaten at home and most members of her family can't return before 4 P.M., Soad often packs them light snacks such as cheese sandwiches and fruit.

Once everyone leaves the home, Soad begins her daily tasks of preparing her family's lunch. Since lunch is the main meal of the day, it is the one that most thought goes into. Most home meals begin with a soup, which can consist of a consommé and orzo or contain

vegetables or lentils. The main course usually consists of a variety of different rice-based dishes with fish, beef, lamb, or poultry. Small salads are placed around the table to accompany the meal, as are pickles and bread. Little dishes full of a mixture of salt, cumin, and ground crushed red pepper are also placed on the table. It is common for the family members to dip each piece of food in this mixture, if they desire more seasoning. At the table, dishes are never passed; everyone simply helps themselves to whatever they would like more of. For larger gatherings, Soad puts multiple serving dishes of the same food at different ends of the table so that everything is within reach.

Sometimes Soad makes her specialty dishes liked *mahshi*—a combination of stuffed baby eggplant, zucchini, peppers, cabbage, and vine leaves that she serves with roasted meat and chicken. Another family favorite is *koushari,* which consists of rice, elbow macaroni, lentils, chickpeas, spicy tomato sauce, and fried onions. Koushari is so filling that it is served by itself. When Soad needs to make a dish that she can rely on to reheat well later, she makes *macarona béchamel,* layers of pasta with a thick broth-and-egg-infused béchamel sauce and savory minced beef that is an Egyptian home staple similar to Greek *pastitsou.* It can be made up to a day in advance and baked the day of serving. When she doesn't feel like cooking, Soad asks her husband to stop at the local falafel (*t'amaya* in Egyptian) stand and pick up fava falafel batter that she forms and fries at home. Most days, desserts consist of fresh seasonal fruit, which could be mangoes, guavas, oranges, bananas, strawberries, grapes, pears, pomegranates, or coconuts. On special occasions or for the weekly congregational prayer day, Friday, Soad usually prepares a sweet. She may make *k'nafeh* (a shredded phyllo pastry filled with nuts or cream pudding and topped with a simple syrup), rice pudding, or baklava. For the Eid al-Fitr, or Feast of the Fast Breaking, a three-day holiday that marks the end of Ramadan, Soad makes butter cookies known as *petits fours* in Egypt along with *Eid kahk,* a crunchy cookie that dates back to Pharaonic times and used to be stuffed with gold coins and distributed to the poor by the caliph during the Fatimid era. Her family greatly appreciates her cooking, which they see as directly linked to their good health, happiness, and close relationship with one another.

Soad's love of cooking and willingness to let the importance of communal meals dictate her daily life are increasingly uncommon in Egypt. Most young women do not learn to cook, because it is not viewed as an important part of their cultural identity. Long work schedules and difficult traffic in cities make it almost impossible for urban women to cook. There is also a bit of a cultural stigma (North America suffered the same attitude when women began working in the 1940s) that promotes the idea that "smart" and "upper-class" women shouldn't be bothered with cooking. As a result, many women employ maids or order out instead. The popularity of foreign food chains also makes preparing traditional cuisine less enticing to young people. Even those who do cook are constantly searching for foreign types of recipes to try. Egyptian émigrés, however, often use the cuisine as a link to their homeland and culture while they are abroad. They, and their families, will continue to spread traditional Egyptian foodways, along with tourists who return from their trips craving "a taste of the Nile" from abroad.

## Major Foodstuffs

The main sources of the Egyptian diet are similar to others in the Mediterranean. Grains, bread, beans and other legumes, fruits and vegetables, dairy, and corn, olive, and other oils make up the majority of the diet. Seafood, meat, poultry and fowl, and nuts are also enjoyed. Both fresh herbs and dried spices are used in large quantities for daily cooking. Sweets consist of phyllo-based pastries, cookies, puddings, and European-style cakes and ice creams.

### *Grains*

Popular grains and breads include wheat, rice, and barley. Wheat is usually used to make pita bread called aish baladi, which consists of whole wheat and the bran layer. Refined white flour is used to make small hotdog bun–shaped fresh breads called *aish fino.* Kaiser rolls and European breads and pastries are also made with wheat. White flour is also used to make sheets of phyllo dough for pastry and a delicious Egyptian specialty known as *fateer.* Fateer is a homemade puff pastry that is made in special shops similar to pizzerias. They can be made with



Egyptian bread at a market. Similar bread has been made in Egypt since ancient times. (Shutterstock)

multitudes of sweet or savory fillings, or served plain with black molasses and an Egyptian clotted cream called *ishta* and honey. They are traditionally made in wood-burning ovens.

Whole wheat berries are boiled and made into a cereal called *bileela* with milk, raisins, sugar, and nuts. Cracked whole wheat, bulgur, is used to make *kobeeba* (meat and cracked wheat croquettes), *taboola* (a salad of cracked wheat, herbs, tomato, and cucumber), and other dishes. Hulled grain is made from newly harvested wheat, which has a green color and smoky flavor. It is called *freekh* and is typically used to stuff chickens, pigeons, ducks, and turkey. The heart of the wheat grain (semolina) is used to make cookies and pastries. Egyptian rice is a short- to medium-grain starchy rice (sometimes called Calrose rice) used to stuff vegetables, made into pilaf-style dishes, and cooked with vermicelli and served as an accompaniment to roasts, stews, or kebabs. It is also used to make rice pudding or is made into rice flour, which is used as a thickener in other puddings. Barley is used to make cereals, soups, and stews. Egyptian rice was introduced into southern Spain in the 10th century and is the grandfather of modern Spanish paella and Italian risotto rices.

### *Beans and Legumes*

*Fuul medammes,* a variety of fava bean known to be the world's oldest agricultural crop, is said to be Egypt's national dish. The dried beans are soaked in water overnight and then stewed for hours with cumin, coriander, oil, and additional spices. They are usually served for breakfast with accompaniments like chopped tomatoes, hard-boiled eggs, lemon juice, olive oil, tahini sauce (sesame puree), and other things. The skinned beans are also used to make Egyptian falafel (which is also eaten at breakfast—or any time).

Legumes including red, brown, and black lentils are used to make soups, stews, and dishes during the Christian fasting period. During antiquity, Egypt was the chief exporter of lentils in the world. One of the most popular Egyptian lentil dishes is called koushari. It consists of rice, pasta, lentils, chickpeas, a spicy tomato sauce, and fried onions. It is a typical street food that can be found anywhere. It is an inexpensive, delicious, vegan dish loved by locals and tourists alike.

The word *hommus* means "chickpeas" in Arabic. Chickpeas are widely used in soups and stews or as a puree. They are also roasted and spiced and served as a snack like nuts and popcorn. White beans are used in stews, soups, and easy purees as well.

### *Fruits*

The history of Egyptian fruits is both ancient and modern. Dates are said to have been the first fruits grown in Egypt, with a 5,000-year history. Pomegranates, figs, and grapes also flourished in the desert heat. Strawberries, bananas, tamarinds, kiwis, apricots, coconuts, peaches, oranges, lemons, limes, apples, pears, and blackberries are all very popular. In the 19th century, mangoes and guavas were introduced from India. They adapted well to the Egyptian soil and have been important parts of the culinary landscape ever since. Egyptians prefer to eat their fruit fresh, while it is in season. Fruit is usually enjoyed as a snack or after dinner in place of or prior to dessert. The fresh, in-season fruits are also displayed at street-side fruit juice stands where fresh fruit "cocktails" are made to order. Grape, tamarind, pomegranate, and strawberry juices are boiled and reduced into syrups and molasses, which are used to make drinks and flavor pastries.

### *Vegetables*

Leeks, cucumbers, lettuce, arugula, watercress, carrots, herbs, peas, okra, and green beans were all present in Egypt in ancient times. Depending on the

season, eggplant, zucchini, peppers, artichokes, cauliflower, turnips, potatoes, rutabagas, spinach, cabbage, onions, and garlic are all integral parts of daily meals in Egypt.

### *Fats*

The preferred traditional fat for cooking in Egypt is *samna,* a cultured, clarified butter similar to Indian ghee. Deeply rich and flavorful, samna can be made with sheep, cow, or water buffalo milk. There are also vegetable versions similar to shortening. In rural communities, some women still prepare samna at home. In urban areas, many people are opting to use olive oil for health reasons and corn oil for its convenience and economical price. Butter is used for pastries and for specific foreign recipes that call for it.

### *Seafood*

Seafood was the first form of sustenance in ancient Egypt. In antiquity, festivals would be held in honor of the Nile god named Hapi. No one was allowed to fish from the Nile during the festival, which often lasted for weeks. Instead, they would place flowers, food offerings, and prayers into the Nile to honor the god who allowed the river to flood twice a year and provide adequate irrigation, and therefore sustenance. Only when the festivals were over were people allowed to eat the fish. Since then, fish has held a special place in the hearts and palates of Egyptians and other Mediterranean communities that were influenced by ancient Egypt. Even though not as expensive as meat, it is prized and appreciated. Nowadays, seafood from the Mediterranean, Nile, and Red Sea and imports from around the globe are all enjoyed in Egypt today. Shrimp, squid, sea bass, bream, red mullet, prawns, and Nile perch, known as *bulti,* are the most common. Famous Egyptian seafood recipes include kebabs, fried fish with cumin, and seafood soups and stews, as well as roasted fish. *Saadilaya,* or "the fisherman's wife," is a rice and fish skillet infused with spices like turmeric. The northern Mediterranean coastal towns are especially famous for their seafood dishes, and fish can be purchased fresh from the boats that come in to shore.

### *Meat*

Ever since ancient times when nomadic tribes roamed the desert and meat was served only during important celebrations or to honor guests, it has held a special, ceremonial place at the Egyptian and Arab table as a whole. Beef, mutton, lamb, veal, and goat meat are all eaten in Egypt. Since meat is extremely expensive, many people cannot eat it every day. Traditional meat recipes include stews, roasts, kebabs, ground meat stuffing for vegetables, and meatballs. Serving meat to guests is a sign of respect and a way to honor them. Animals can be purchased live to custom slaughter, or meat can be purchased from butcher shops on the day of slaughter. Many butcher-shop owners also own and operate kebab shops. In Egypt, halal meat is available for purchase everywhere. *Halal* is an Arabic word that means "permissible." Permissible meat in the Islamic tradition comes from animals that have been treated kindly and killed in a way that minimizes the animal's suffering. The words *In the name of God, most beneficent, most merciful* must be uttered at the time of its death. All blood must be drained from the animal, and it must be cleansed before being eaten. Animals are not allowed to be killed for sport, and all parts of the animal are to be consumed. Sheep and cattle milk is used for dairy: milk, yogurt, and cheese making. Typical Egyptian cheeses have been made since at least 3200 B.C. and are similar to what we now refer to as Greek feta cheese and Spanish manchego cheese.

### *Poultry and Fowl*

Chickens, quails, pigeons, and ducks are all part of the Egyptian table. Pigeons and quails have been served grilled and stuffed since Pharaonic times when they were served to brides and grooms at wedding ceremonies. Egyptian pigeons and quails are raised in special environs specifically for culinary purposes. Chicken is served grilled, as part of kebabs, stewed, roasted, and fried. Ducks are also eaten roasted, grilled, and fried. Ducks from the El Fayyoum Oasis are known for their delicious taste and there are special recipes just for them. Eggs are a popular breakfast dish.

### *Herbs and Spices*

Most Mediterranean herbs such as cilantro, dill, mint, parsley, basil, thyme, chamomile, caraway, and oregano are used in Egypt. Multitudes of spices can be used. The most traditional are cinnamon, cumin, cloves, crushed red pepper, cardamom, paprika, black pepper, coriander, anise, turmeric, and nigella seeds. Hibiscus petals are sold at spice shops all across Egypt. Nubian in origin, these leaves are boiled and sweetened to make a delicious and nutritious drink that can be served hot or cold. Known as *karkade,* this drink is the best known of all Egyptian traditional medicinals. Rosemary, curry powder, allspice, and others are becoming increasingly popular in cooking. Egyptians drink herbal tisanes made from mint, anise, cinnamon, chamomile, and caraway for their health properties and taste.

### *Coffee and Tea*

Egyptians drink Turkish coffee with cardamom made in stovetop filterless pots called *kanaka.* Coffee shops are also called *ahwa,* which is the Egyptian-dialect version of the Arabic word *coffee* itself. Coffee made its way to Egypt by the 16th century, where hundreds of coffeehouses existed long before Europeans ever tasted it. Nowadays, Nescafé and European-style espressos are also very popular in Egypt.

Tea is by far the most common drink in Egypt. Egyptians drink black tea that is served with mint. Both coffee and tea are sweetened while they are made, with one to three teaspoons of sugar per person. Tea and coffee are traditionally served without sugar only at funerals.

### *Nuts*

Egyptians love to spend the late nights of Ramadan, visits with family and friends, and movie-watching nights with a variety of nuts. Peanuts, cashews, almonds, pistachios, and walnuts are all popular. Watermelon and sunflower seeds, popcorn, and spiced roasted chickpeas are all sold at street-side stores and vendors.

## Cooking

Popular contemporary cooking methods in Egypt are baking, grilling, roasting, frying, stewing, and salt curing. Many of the methods were developed during antiquity. The ancient Egyptians began salt curing, smoking, and sun-drying foods to make them last longer. They also invented sieves, pestles, mortars, and knives to aid in food preparation. Tomb scenes from the Old Kingdom (2700–2600 B.C.) depict bread being shaped and produced in mass quantities. Clay pot cooking is also very traditional. The word *tajin* (sometimes spelled *tajine*) is used to describe a clay baking dish in the Arabic-speaking world. In Egyptian dialect, the "j" sound is pronounced like a hard "g" so the word is pronounced *TAH-gin.* Clay baking dishes are a traditional way of baking and serving stews. Families serve meals in large ones, while restaurants serve individual portions in small ones. Keep in mind that only the tajines of northwestern Africa (namely, Moroccan and Tunisian ones) have conical lids. Before air-conditioning and home ovens were commonplace in Egypt, housewives and cooks would have children take their stews to the bread baker to have them cooked in the cooler portions of the oven while the bread baked. On their way home from school, children would stop at the bread shop and pick up their bread and stew for lunch. This method was very cost and energy efficient. In a hot climate like Egypt, it would take a lot of air-conditioning to cool down a home after turning the oven on. Sometimes, in very densely populated urban areas in Egypt, one can still see children navigating their way through the labyrinthine maze of shops in the *souk* (marketplace) to bring their tagins to the bread baker.

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**_T'amaya_ (Egyptian Fava Falafel)**

*Serves 4 (three falafel per person)*

This recipe became popular after the fourth century A.D., when Egyptian Christians (Copts) had to fast for 55 days during Lent. The Coptic fasting period prohibits meat, dairy, and seafood, so vegan diets are required. Being a meat-loving culture, the

Egyptian Christians developed ingenious ways of using beans and legumes to make enticing, hearty dishes that rival their typical meaty mains.

**Ingredients**

1 c peeled dried fava beans (broad beans),* soaked overnight in water and drained

¼ c fresh dill leaves

¼ c fresh cilantro leaves

¼ c fresh parsley leaves

1 small yellow onion, diced

8 cloves garlic, chopped

1 tsp ground cumin

1 tsp ground coriander

Pinch of cayenne pepper

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1 tsp baking powder

Expeller-pressed corn oil, for frying

¼ c white sesame seeds

**Variation**

4 white pita breads

2 roma tomatoes, thinly sliced

1 cucumber, thinly sliced

¼ lb feta cheese, crumbled

**Preparation**

Place beans, dill, cilantro, parsley, onion, and garlic in a food processor and mix until a smooth paste forms. Mix in ½ cup water (or enough to make mixture wet and loose—it should resemble a thin paste). Add cumin, coriander, cayenne, and some salt and pepper to taste. Stir in baking powder and mix to incorporate. Spoon mixture into a bowl and let stand at room temperature for 1 hour.

Pour 3 inches of corn oil into a large frying pan over medium heat. When oil is hot enough to fry, a piece of bread dropped in it will turn golden and float to the top immediately. Using two teaspoons, gather a heaping teaspoonful of the paste in one spoon and carefully push it off with the other spoon, forming a round patty in the oil. Repeat the process until the pan is full—leaving a ½-inch space between the falafel. While falafel are cooking, sprinkle a few sesame seeds on the uncooked sides. Fry until falafel are dark golden brown, approximately 5 minutes; turn over, and fry the other sides until they are the same color. Line a platter with paper towels. Using a slotted spoon, lift falafel out of oil and drain on paper towels. Repeat with remaining dough.

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### *Shorbat Maloukhiya* (Jew's Mallow Soup)

*Serves 4*

This soup is called Jew's Mallow in English because its main ingredient was the traditional bitter herb used on the Egyptian Jewish Seder plate. Jew's mallow, or *maloukhiya,* is a healthful green herb that grew in abundance in ancient Egypt. During the ninth century, when Caliph Al Muizz li Din Allah (a Fatimid ruler who founded Cairo) arrived in Egypt from Tunisia, he was very sick. The locals served him a bowl of maloukhiya, and he was instantly cured. He declared the soup a "royal broth." The name *maloukhiya* comes from the word *malook,* meaning "kings" in Arabic. Even though it is inexpensive, it is still coveted and beloved by Egyptians everywhere.

**Ingredients**

4 c homemade or good-quality chicken stock

1 (14-oz) package frozen maloukhiya*

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1 tbsp clarified butter (ghee)

6 cloves garlic, minced

1 tsp ground coriander

**Preparation**

Bring chicken stock to a boil in a medium saucepan. Add frozen maloukhiya and some salt and pepper to taste. Bring back to a boil, reduce heat to low, and simmer for 5 minutes.

In a small saucepan over medium heat, melt clarified butter. Add garlic and coriander and cook, uncovered, until garlic begins to turn color. Stir garlic mixture into maloukhiya soup, taste, and adjust salt and pepper, if necessary. Serve hot.

*Can be found in Middle Eastern specialty markets.

## Typical Meals

Egyptian breakfasts consist of protein-packed staples. Pureed fava beans, eggs (usually in the form of an omelet), falafel, vegetables, and cheeses are usually followed by tea with mint. Many Egyptians like to eat a small sweet or pastry at the end of breakfast. Wheat-based cereals, toast, and sweet cakes served with Nescafé are increasingly popular. Breakfast is eaten early in the morning at home before work and school, or on the street or in a restaurant anytime before noon. Hotels offer seemingly endless buffet bars of sweet, savory, and traditional items and are usually open from 6 to 10 A.M.

Egyptian lunches are usually served between 2 and 6 P.M. This is the important meal of the day, and families like to gather together to eat it. Because of increasingly busy schedules, the lunch time continues to get later. This also reinforces the importance of a hearty breakfast. Typical lunches consist of a lentil soup or pasta and consommé-based soup to start, Egyptian rice with vermicelli and/or grilled or roasted meat or poultry, or a seafood and vegetable stew, stuffed vegetables, salads, and fruit. Desserts are usually reserved for special occasions.

Egyptian dinners can be served very late in the evening, typically from 10 P.M. to 2 A.M., although the time may be earlier when entertaining or during the month of Ramadan when the meal to break the fast is served at dusk. The same types of dishes as for lunch may be served and eaten outside of the home. At home, lighter meals, leftovers, sandwiches, or bread, cheeses, pickles, and salads may be served. There is usually no distinction made between lunch and dinner foods, but the time of lunch and the amount of food eaten then will determine what a person or family eats for dinner.

## Eating Out

Dining options in Egyptian cities are endless. One can choose from street-side shops offering freshly squeezed fruit juices, falafel, koushari (lentils, rice, and pasta with a spicy tomato sauce), kebabs and *shwarma* (rotisserie-style shaved lamb served on a sandwich), fateer (homemade puff pastry filled with sweet or savory fillings like pizza), pastries, and much more. There is also a good selection of cafeteria-style restaurants, which are similar to American diners and offer endless menu options ranging from local and traditional dishes to burgers and fries.

In large cities, foreign fast-food, midrange, and upscale restaurants abound. French, Italian, Chinese, Turkish, Lebanese, and Japanese cuisine can also be found. Hotels and touristy restaurants serve endless buffets of "international" cuisine. In addition, many authentic restaurants serve grilled foods and traditional home-style Egyptian cuisine. These range in decor, price, and location from very inexpensive to five-star restaurants.

## Special Occasions

Religion has always been an important aspect of Egyptian life. Egyptians have believed in monotheism since antiquity. The country's three major religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—all have deep-rooted traditions and customs surrounding their holidays in Egypt. There are many monuments, tombs, and shrines dedicated to important religious figures in Egypt. Today, mosques, churches, and synagogues are an integral part of Egyptian life and constant reminders of the divine. Egyptian culture combines a spiritual zeal with a zest for life in its seasonal festivities. Christmas, Easter, Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, *moulids* (birthdays of important religious figures—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim), and national holidays like the "Smell of the Fresh Breeze" spring holiday are all part of the modern Egyptian scene. Marriages and birth celebrations are also extremely important community events in Egypt.



Egyptian Muslims break their day-long Ramadan fast during a group *Iftar* meal for the residents of a neighborhood in downtown Cairo, 2010. (AFP | Getty Images)

## Diet and Health

The diet and health of all Egyptians cannot be easily categorized or explained. Personal tastes, lifestyles, religion, and socioeconomic factors determine what individual Egyptians eat on a daily basis. Farmers and fishermen have the healthiest diets, consisting of grains, produce, pulses, fish, and small amounts of meat. Their active lifestyles help them maintain healthy body weights, and they have low stress-related issues. Unfortunately, even though the traditional Egyptian diet is healthful and balanced, it is increasingly less popular due to working women's time constraints and the affluent's new taste preferences. Meat is the most prized item at the dinner table, and it is extremely expensive in Egypt, which deepens its image as a luxury item. Since it contains fat and cholesterol, it is not as healthy as whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and legumes. High cholesterol and heart complications are on the rise in Egypt. Four or five pounds of meat in Egypt can cost the entire week's salary of a lower-class worker. For this reason, many people joke that the poorer people are healthier. Healthful traditional whole-grain breads are increasingly being replaced by white store-bought breads, and healthful herbal and flower-based drinks are being eschewed in favor of colas. Because the culture holds a strong respect for foreign (especially American and European) products, it is widely believed that American foods are better than Egyptian ones—even if they are of poor, mass-produced quality.

*Amy Riolo*

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Amy Riolo. http://www.amyriolo.com.

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# Ethiopia and Eritrea

## Overview

Until 1993, Ethiopia and Eritrea were one national entity. Thus, in discussing food culture, it is useful to consider the two countries together. This is particularly true when considering historical and cross-cultural influences. Ethiopia (the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia), located on the Horn of Africa, is an East African nation of about 437,600 square miles. The Great Rift Valley, running from southwest to northeast, divides a high central plateau into northern and southern lowlands. The largest river in Ethiopia is the Abay or Blue Nile. Ethiopia has three climate zones: cool, above 7,875 feet (freezing to 61 degrees Fahrenheit); temperate, at 4,920–7,875 feet (61–86 degrees Fahrenheit); and hot, below 4,920 feet (81–122 degrees Fahrenheit).

The population of Ethiopia was estimated to be more than 73.9 million in 2007. Most of the population is found in the highlands. The urbanized population makes up only about 15 percent of the total population. The government is attempting to relocate some highland farmers in an attempt to relieve population pressure on depleted lands.

Ethiopians are divided into at least 100 ethnic groups speaking 70 or more languages. Most of the languages spoken belong to the Semitic, Cushitic, or Omotic families of the Afro-Asiatic language family. A small number of Ethiopians speak languages belonging to the Nilo-Saharan family of languages.

The Amhara and Tigray are plow agriculturalists. Some of the Oromo are farmers, and some are pastoralists, while the Somali are pastoralists. The Sidama and the Gurage are hoe cultivators of *ensete* (a root crop in the banana family) and coffee. The distinctions between plow and hoe cultivation and pastoralism frame food culture.

Eritrea, on the northern and eastern borders of Ethiopia, has an area of about 46,774 square miles. Eritrea can be divided into three main areas: a north-central plateau region, plains in the western region bordering Sudan, and an arid coastal strip along the Red Sea. The only perennial river is the Setit River along the western border. There are other rivers, but they are seasonal. The highlands of Eritrea are cool, with temperatures averaging 60°F. The climate of the coast is semiarid, and temperatures average 86°F but can reach 122°F, while the Danakil Depression is one of the hottest places on earth. Eritrea also has 596 miles of coast along the Red Sea, which has fostered a long history of trade and interaction with other nations, particularly with Yemen, which lies only 20–80 miles across the Red Sea.

In 2004, the United Nations estimated the population of Eritrea at about 4.3 million. The urban population of Eritrea is about 20 percent. Nine major ethnic groups are recognized; however, as in Ethiopia, there is great ethnic and linguistic complexity. The ethnic breakdown is as follows: Tigrinya, 50 percent; Tigre and Kunama, 40 percent; Afar, 4 percent; Saho (Red Sea coast), 3 percent; and other, 3 percent.

Agriculturalists include the Tigray (central and southern plateaus), the Kunama (between the Gash and Setit rivers), and the Saho, who are agriculturalists or pastoralists depending on whether they live

**Table 8.1 Ethnic Groups**

| | Ethnic Group | Language | Population (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Semitic* | | | |
| | Amhara | Amharic | 30.10 |
| | Tigray | Tigrinya | 6.20 |
| | Gurage | Gurage | 1.74 |
| | Argobba | | 0.18 |
| *Cushitic* | | | |
| | Oromo | Oromo | 36.23 |
| | Somali | | 6.31 |
| | Afar or Denakil | | 1.89 |
| | Sidama | Sidamo | 4.55 |
| | Agew (including Falasha) | | 1.20 |
| *Omotic* | | | |
| | Welaita | | 2.29 |
| *Nilo-Saharan* | | | |
| | Anuak | | 0.09 |
| | Nuer | | 0.19 |
| | Berta | | 0.28 |
| | Gumuz | | 0.24 |

on the escarpment or the coastal plain. Pastoralists include the Afar (Red Sea coast), the Tigre speakers (northern hills and lowlands), and the Rasha'ida (Sudan border), who are Arabic speakers from the Arabian Peninsula.

Eritrea recognizes three official languages: Arabic, English, and Tigrinya. Arabic and Tigrinya are the most commonly spoken, though English is also widely known and is used as the language of instruction in middle and secondary schools and in higher education. As in Ethiopia, languages belong to three linguistic families: Semitic, Cushitic, and Nilo-Saharan.

Most of the people of Ethiopia and Eritrea are Orthodox Christians or Muslims. Protestants make up about 10 percent of the population. Smaller groups include Roman Catholics and Ethiopian Jews (Falasha), and those who practice traditional religions. Each religion has its own impact on dietary practices and food taboos.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Makeda Abraha prepares breakfast (*qurs*) between 7 and 8 A.M. for her husband, Tefere, and their three children. Breakfast is often leftover *injera* (a fermented flatbread), shredded and mixed with spices (*berbere*) to make a dish called *fitfit,* accompanied by tea or coffee. Or they might have *kitta fitfit,* made with an unleavened flatbread (*kitta*) and berbere and served with yogurt. Lunch (*mesa*) is the most substantial meal of the day, eaten at midday. Lunch is typically injera served with a variety of stews (*wat*), followed by coffee. The family eats a smaller meal (*erat*) in the evening.

Makeda shops for the ingredients for their meals both at the traditional markets where produce, especially, is always fresh and at a neighborhood shop or one of the supermarkets springing up in Addis Ababa. At the supermarket Makeda can find not only traditional Ethiopian foods, some now prepared and packaged, but also a range of imported foods, especially canned goods, powdered whole milk, pasta, and cookies and sweets. Meat may be purchased from a butcher shop or at the supermarket.

In agricultural villages mealtimes follow the same pattern, although breakfast is likely to come earlier and be a very light meal. Much of what Louame uses to prepare meals for herself, her husband, Bekele, and their five children comes from her house garden or wild greens she has gathered. Grains and other foodstuffs are purchased at the weekly outdoor market. Louame and her family eat meat only infrequently, when she might slaughter a chicken or when there is a special occasion for which Bekele slaughters a goat.

## Major Foodstuffs

The geography of Ethiopia has led to a wide diversity in agricultural production, practiced by peoples with equally diverse cultural systems. These range from people who practice intensive agriculture with ox-drawn plows (the Amhara and Argobba) to horticulturalists with hoes (the Gurage and Sidama) to pastoral nomads (the Rasha'ida). The staples of Ethiopia are dominated by cereals, pulses, and root crops. Although some crops are indigenous to Ethiopia, Ethiopian farmers have largely adopted



Oxen pull a plow in rural Ethopia. (Shargaljut | Dreamstime.com)

the Sudanic agricultural complex of sorghum, millet, and cowpeas. Ethiopian farmers have, however, improved the crops, introduced new varieties, and experimented with wild plants as new crops. Ethiopians were the first to cultivate teff, ensete, coffee, fenugreek, castor, safflower, *ch'at* (qat), and the oilseed *nug*. Until recently teff and ensete were not cultivated anywhere else in the world. Maize, potatoes, and cayenne pepper are the only New World crops added to Ethiopian agricultural production.

Among the cereals, teff is most important to the Amhara, though it is highly desirable in the cuisine of much of Ethiopia. Barley is foremost in Eritrea and Shoa, sorghum in the regions of the Harrar and Somali, and maize in the southwestern section of the country. All of the cereals are used to make porridge, fermented or unfermented flatbreads, raised breads, or hard bread balls carried by travelers. Some of the cereals have other uses, for example, in the making of beer (*talla*).

Since it is unique to Ethiopia, teff (*Eragrostis teff*) requires special note. It is a grass with extremely tiny seeds, making it labor-intensive to harvest and process and, thus, expensive. Its value is in its high nutritional qualities, far superior to other grains. It contains 11 percent protein, 80 percent complex carbohydrates, and 3 percent fat, and it has more lysine than barley, millet, or wheat. It is also an excellent source of iron and fiber and has much more calcium, potassium, and other essential minerals than other grains. It is nearly gluten-free, so it cannot be used to make raised breads. However, the short fermentation period used to produce the yeast for flatbreads (injera) generates more vitamins.

Next to cereals, ensete (*Ensete edule*) monoculture provides an important dietary staple. Known

as the "false banana," ensete is native to Ethiopia, some regions of Sudan, and the Great Lakes area of East Africa. Although it grows to a height of 43 feet, only the underground shoots and stem are utilized for food. Its banana-like fruit is inedible, though the seeds of the fruit are sometimes boiled and fed to children. Ensete is used for food only in Ethiopia, where it is cultivated by the Gurage and Sidama (Cushitic speakers) of the southern plateau. It is grown in huge plantations surrounding homes and villages. The nutritional value of ensete is not high nor balanced and is comparable to other starchy foods like manioc flour. In the areas of ensete cultivation, protein is derived from milk, meat, and legumes.

Pulses in the diet of Ethiopians include lentils (*Lens abyssinica;* Amharic *misir*), green peas (*Pisum abyssicum;* Amharic *ater*), chickpeas (*Cicer arietinum;* Amharic *shimbra*), horse (or fava) beans (*Vicia faba;* Amharic *bak'ella*), and haricot beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris;* Amharic *adanguarey*). Vegetables and fruits are grown but do not make up a large part of the traditional Ethiopian diet due to their high cost. Some of the vegetables included in the diet are the Galla potato (*Coleus edulis;* Amharic *dinitch*), squash (*Cucurbita pepo* and *C. maxima;* Amharic *dubba*), onions, shallots (*Allium ascalonicum;* Amharic *shinkurt*), Amharic cabbage or leaf mustard (*Brassica juncea;* Amharic *gomen*), peppers, carrots, tomatoes, spinach, radishes, eggplant, beets, taro (*Colocasia antiquorum*), yams (*Dioscorea*), and sweet potatoes (*Ipomoea batatas*). Wild greens are also gathered and incorporated in the diet as vegetables. Fruits include peaches (*Prunus persica;* Amharic *kwok*), oranges (*Citrus aurantium;* Amharic *burtikan*), lemons (*Citrus limonum*), citron (*Citrus medica*), pomelo (*Citrus decumana*), figs (*Ficus sycomorus*), and pomegranates (*Punica granatum*).

Spices are extremely important to Ethiopian cuisine. Among those used are cayenne pepper (*Capsicum frutenseus;* Amharic *berberi*), cone pepper (*Capsicum conoides;* Amharic *shirba*), Amharic cabbage seeds, black mustard (*Brassica nigra;* Amharic *sonafitch*), cardamom (*Aframomum coracima;* Amharic *kororima*), coriander (*Coriandrum sativum;* Amharic *dimbilal*), basil (*Ocymum basilicum;* Amharic *zaccavi*), black pepper (*Piper nigrum;* Amharic *k'ondo berberei*), ginger (*Zingiber officinale;* Amharic *jinjibil*), black cumin (*Nigella sativa;* Amharic *azmud*), fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum graecum;* Amharic *avish*), and garlic (*Allium sativum;* Amharic *mech'shinkurt*). The leaves of the shrub *gesho* (*Rhamnus prinoides*) are used much like hops to give a bitter taste to beer, mead, and *arak'i,* a distilled liquor.

Several oilseeds are important in Ethiopian cuisine, both for their oil and as seeds. Oilseeds include nug (*Guizotia abyssinica;* Amharic *nug*), sesame (*Sesamum indicum;* Amharic *salit*), and safflower (*Carthamus inctorium;* Amharic *suf*). Flaxseed (*Linum usitatissimum;* Amharic *telba*) is also used in cooking.

Animal foods include cattle, sheep, goats, and chickens and their eggs. Some Ethiopians avoid eating eggs. A taboo on the eating of pork is observed by Muslims and the Falasha Jews. Pork is also not eaten by Amhara and Tigrean Christians or by some other groups like the Qemant, Galla, and Sidama. Another food most Ethiopians avoid eating is fish. Only those groups living on the Red Sea coast or around Lake Tana consume much fish.

Milk and milk products are also utilized in Ethiopian cuisine. Milk may be drunk fresh or as a sort of yogurt; the liquid part of the yogurt is separated for drinking. This drink is called *arera.* Yogurt (*irgo*) is also a part of the diet, as is a sort of cottage cheese called *ayib.* Butter is also made and used, though it is usually kept in the form of clarified butter for preservation. The pastoral nomadic peoples of Ethiopia depend much more on milk and milk products, in addition to grains.

Coffee (*Coffea arabica* L.) is another important part of Ethiopian cuisine and hospitality. It is said to have originated in the Kaffa region, whence its name. This is an important coffee-producing area. Several alcoholic drinks are made and drunk. Beer (talla), made from barley and flavored with leaves of the gesho shrub, is made by women. Mead (*tedj*), sometimes known to Westerners as honey wine, is made from honey and water fermented with the leaves and bitter roots of *saddo* (*Rhamnyus saddo*) or gesho (*Rhamnus gesho*). Mead is highly alcoholic. A

distilled beverage, arak'i, begins as beer made from finger millet. The typical Ethiopian arak'i is a clear liquid that tastes like Italian *anice.* It is very strong and is drunk only in small amounts. Both mead and arak'i are also made by women.

## Cooking

The hearth is central to Ethiopian home life. In addition to preparing food and cooking there, members of the family traditionally ate in the hearth area. It was the place for socializing within the family, and visitors also gathered there. The traditional stove is the well-known three stones, on which the cooking pot or the stone or metal griddle used to cook flatbreads is balanced. The fuel is wood or charcoal. A charcoal brazier might also be used, especially in the preparation of coffee. Urban homes have Western-style ranges, fueled by bottled gas.

Cooking is the responsibility of women, who prepare and serve the food. In villages it is also women's responsibility to gather fuel and fetch water. Although women should have food ready when their husbands come home, it is also the responsibility of the husband to be there to eat what his wife has prepared.

Meal preparation involves making a flatbread, usually injera made from a slightly fermented batter of teff flour, and the stews (wat) or other vegetable dishes that accompany the flatbreads. These foods are cooked in two different processes. Traditionally, flatbreads, fermented or unfermented, are baked on a stone slab or iron-sheet griddle (*mogogo*) supported by the stones of the hearth. Urban housewives now have an electric griddle (*mitad*) on which to bake injera. Stews are boiled or simmered.

Making injera requires advanced planning. The first step is to mix the flour, usually teff or sorghum, with water. This mixture is then put into a pottery jar and stored for three or four days to ferment. After it is fermented, more water is added to make a batter the consistency of pancake batter. The griddle, which has been heated to a high temperature, is greased. Then, to make the large, thin injera (about 20 inches in diameter), batter is poured and spread onto the griddle, which is over an open fire. It takes a great deal of skill to spread a thin layer of batter over the griddle without tearing the injera. The batter must also be spread completely before the first edge of the injera burns. When it is done, the injera is peeled off the griddle and stacked on a tray. The finished injera is thoroughly cooked but not crisp. It should be full of bubbles and spongy. Other flatbreads, called kitta, are prepared in much the same way, except that the batter is not fermented.



Injera is a pancake-like bread made out of teff flour. It is traditionally eaten in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Yemen, and Sudan. (iStockPhoto)

***Injera***

This recipe is adapted for Western cooks.

1½ c teff flour*

2 c lukewarm water

Salt

Vegetable oil for the griddle

1. Mix the teff flour with the water and let the mixture stand at room temperature (covered lightly)

until it ferments, 2–3 days. The mixture should be bubbly and the consistency of thick pancake batter. Set aside about ⅓ cup of the batter to make the starter for another batch of injera. The starter can be stored in the refrigerator for up to a month.

2. Add salt until you can just taste it.

3. If the batter is too thick, add more water until it is the consistency of thin pancake batter.

4. Heat a griddle or skillet, preferably an iron skillet, until a drop of water skips over the surface. Then, oil the griddle with a small amount of vegetable oil.

5. Pour about ¼ cup batter onto the griddle, quickly spreading it. It should be thicker than a crepe but thinner than a pancake.

6. Cook until the injera has bubble holes across the entire surface, about 2 minutes. It should be firm but not browned, and cooked on one side only.

7. Remove the injera from the griddle and stack it on a plate. A piece of plastic wrap or foil may be placed on each one to keep them from sticking together.

8. Continue until all the batter is used.

9. Serve by placing one injera on each plate and topping with the stews. Or serve Ethiopian style, with the injera on a pizza pan placed in the middle of the table, with the stews around the edge of the injera in front of each person. Makes about 10 eight-inch injera.

*If teff flour is unavailable, whole wheat or barley flour may be substituted. However, neither of those flours will ferment as teff does. In this case, in place of the fermentation step, add 1tbsp baking powder, and substitute 2 cup club soda for the water, adding about ¼ cup lemon juice to approximate the sour taste of fermented teff. Sorghum flour will ferment like teff and is a good substitute, in which case you can proceed with the recipe as for teff. The result will be the Sudanese version of injera.

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The next part of meal preparation is to make whatever stews are to accompany the injera. The stews, or wat, might be a combination of meat and vegetables or only vegetables or pulses. Typically these dishes are highly spiced, well beyond the endurance of the average Westerner. Onions or shallots are a typical ingredient in most stews, so these must be prepared and chopped. Vegetable ingredients must also be cleaned and chopped. If lentils or dried beans, such as cowpeas, are to be used, they must be sorted, examined for small stones, and washed.

If meat is to be an ingredient in the stew, it must also be prepared, with the amount of preparation depending on whether the cook is a villager or an urbanite. A village woman planning on adding chicken to her stew is likely to begin by slaughtering, cleaning, and butchering the chicken herself. Other animals would likely be slaughtered by her husband for her to butcher and further prepare. Townswomen would be able to purchase meat ready for them to cut up for their stews.

Some stews include hard-boiled eggs. If eggs are to be part of the stew, they must be prepared ahead, ready to be added when the stew is almost finished cooking. Other ingredients, especially spice combinations, are also prepared ahead, ready to be added during the cooking process. One such spice combination is *berbere,* an almost ubiquitous requirement for most stews.

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***Berbere***

1 tsp ground ginger
2 tsp ground cumin
⅛ tsp ground cloves
⅛ tsp cinnamon
½ tsp ground cardamom
⅛ tsp ground allspice
¼ tsp ground nutmeg
1 tsp ground fenugreek
½ tsp ground coriander
⅓ tsp turmeric
2 tbsp onions, finely chopped
1 tbsp garlic, minced
2 tbsp ground cayenne pepper
2 c Hungarian paprika
½ tsp ground black pepper

1 tbsp salt

1½ c water

Toast the ginger, cumin, cloves, cinnamon, cardamom, allspice, nutmeg, fenugreek, coriander, and turmeric in a small frying pan (cast iron is good) over low heat for about 2 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and cool for about 5 minutes. Combine the spices, onion, garlic, and 3 tablespoons water in a blender and blend until smooth. Combine the cayenne pepper, paprika, black pepper, and salt in a skillet and toast over low heat for about 1 minute. Stir in water, ¼ cup at a time. Then stir in the blended mixture. Stirring vigorously, cook over the lowest possible heat for 10–15 minutes. Transfer berbere to a jar. Cool to room temperature, then cover with a film of oil. Store in the refrigerator in a tightly sealed jar.

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### *Doro Wat,* or *Zegeni* (Chicken in Red Pepper Paste)

*Ethiopian National Dish*

2½ lb chicken (a cut-up whole chicken, or use legs and thighs)

2 tbsp lemon juice

2 tsp salt

2 onions, finely chopped

¼ c *niter kibbeh* (spiced butter; recipe follows)

3 cloves garlic, minced

1 tsp fresh ginger, finely minced

¼ tsp ground fenugreek

¼ tsp ground cardamom

⅛ tsp ground nutmeg

¼ c berbere

2 tbsp paprika

1 c water

6–8 hard-boiled eggs

Freshly ground black pepper

Rinse and dry chicken pieces. Rub with lemon juice and salt, and let sit at room temperature for 30 minutes. In a heavy pot or Dutch oven, cook onions over moderate heat for about 5 minutes. Do not let brown or burn. Stir in the niter kibbeh. Then add garlic and spices. Stir well. Add berbere and paprika, and sauté for 3–4 minutes. Add water and bring to a boil. Cook briskly, uncovered, for about 5 minutes. Pat the chicken dry, and drop it into the simmering sauce, turning each piece until it is well covered. Reduce heat, cover, and simmer for 15 minutes. In the meantime, peel the hard-boiled eggs and pierce them with a fork. After the chicken has cooked, add the eggs, turning them gently in the sauce. Cover and cook for an additional 25 minutes. Add black pepper to taste. Serve a piece of chicken, an egg, and sauce to each person, placing them on top of the injera.

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### *Niter Kibbeh* (Spiced Butter)

2 lb unsalted butter, cut into small pieces

1 onion, coarsely chopped

3 tbsp minced garlic

4 tsp fresh ginger, finely minced

4 tsp ground turmeric

¼ tsp ground cardamom

1 cinnamon stick (1 in. long)

1 whole clove

⅛ tsp ground nutmeg

In a large saucepan, melt butter slowly over medium heat. Do not let it brown. Bring butter to a boil. Stir in remaining ingredients. Simmer uncovered and undisturbed for 45 minutes. The milk solids in the bottom of the pan should be brown, and the butter on top should be transparent. Slowly pour the clear liquid into a bowl, straining through a cheesecloth. No solids should be left in the niter kibbeh. Transfer niter kibbeh to a jar and store in the refrigerator.

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Almost all stews, or wat, begin with lots of onions. But not all include berbere. Some, the *alecha wat,* are milder. Stews can be made with chicken,

beef, fish, or lamb and a variety of vegetables. They may also be vegetarian, like *mesir wat,* which is a red lentil puree. Meat may also be sautéed to make *tibbs.* Tibbs can be "normal" or "special," the latter meaning it is served on a hot plate with a vegetable salad mixed in. Another favorite Ethiopian dish is *kitfo,* which is made with raw, minced beef marinated in *mitmita,* a spicy chili powder, and niter kibbeh. Other dishes include chickpea fritters made with chickpea flour, lentil salad, eggplant salad, *gomen sega* (mustard greens and beef), *sega wat* (Ethiopian lamb), *temiser w'et* (spicy lentil soup), *sambussa* (vegetable- or meat-filled pastries), *atkilt wat* (cabbage, carrots, and potatoes in sauce), or *inguday tibbs* (mushrooms sautéed with onions). The cooking techniques for all of these are similar, but there is great variation in the ingredients and the combinations of ingredients.

The cooking described so far focuses on cereals, pulses, and vegetables. The cuisine of the ensete complex requires some different techniques. The false stem and young shoots of the ensete plant are sometimes boiled and eaten as a vegetable. But the main consumption of ensete involves a long process. The mature ensete plant has a huge root (*wahta*) that is harvested, then scraped to extract the starchy pulp, which is edible. This starchy substance is buried in deep pits where it is left to ferment for at least two months and sometimes several years. The Gurage say that burying the ensete improves the taste, making it more highly favored than freshly harvested ensete. After fermentation the ensete is made into a heavy bread (*kocho*), about one inch thick. The bread is baked in an ensete leaf and tastes sour, rather like injera. This bread is eaten with kitfo, the raw meat dish already described, mixed with niter kibbeh and mitmita, a spiced chili powder made with the hottest of chilies. Fresh cottage cheese (*ayb*) is served with the kitfo. Another dish served with kocho is *gomen kitfo,* made by boiling collard greens, drying them, then serving the greens finely chopped and mixed with niter kibbeh. Ensete root is also powdered and prepared as a hot drink called *bulla.*

Ethiopians drink several types of beverages. Coffee is made in homes and in *buna bets,* or coffeehouses. Ethiopian coffee is made much like Turkish coffee, thick and prepared in a pottery pot (*jebena*). Sugar or sometimes honey may or may not be added to the brew. Coffee beans are typically roasted as a part of coffee preparation, pounded in a mortar (*mukecha*) with a pestle (*zenezena*), and then boiled in the jebena. Each person is served three rounds, known as *abol, tona,* and *baraka,* in small, handleless cups. Ethiopians say the first two cups transform the spirit, while the third gives a blessing (*baraka*) to the person drinking it. Sometimes the youngest child serves the first cup of coffee to the eldest guest.

The Majangir and Gurage, among others, serve coffee with niter kibbeh, clarified butter prepared with spices and onions. The Majangir prepare their coffee brew (*kari*) from the leaves of the coffee tree, which grows wild in the forests around their villages. Leaves of the coffee tree are infused in hot water, and niter kibbeh is added to the brew. Sharing is very important to the Majangir, and, interestingly, the sphere of sharing is delineated by the term *kari omong,* or "the same coffee," that is, the persons in the neighborhood close enough to share coffee drinking.



An Ethopian woman grinds coffee by hand. (Johan Bernspång | Dreamstime.com)

Other beverages include several types of *chilka,* each made from a different seed: nug, flax, sesame, or safflower. The recipe for chilka is 1 cup of seeds, 6 cups of water, and 1–2 tablespoons honey. First, the seeds are dry-roasted in a skillet for about 5–10 minutes and then, after cooling, ground to a powder. The powdered seeds are then added to the water and allowed to sit for about 20 minutes until the solids have settled out. Once the solids have settled, the liquid is strained into a pitcher, the honey is added, and it is chilled.

Chilkas are nonalcholic beverages, but as mentioned earlier, Ethiopians make and drink three main alcoholic drinks: mead (tedj), beer (talla), and arak'i. Mead is fairly simple to make. Honey is put into a pot with gesho (*Rhamnus pauciflorus*) leaves and water. The pot is covered and left to stand for 3–10 days, depending on the temperature. After the mixture has fermented the pot is opened, the gesho removed, and the liquid filtered, making it ready to drink. The process of making both beer and arak'i is more complicated and time-consuming. To make beer, first the leaves of gesho are dried, crushed, and soaked in a jug of water for three days. In the meantime, barley is used to make malt by soaking the grain in another jug for 24 hours. The water is then poured off the barley, and it is put between two layers of leaves and put into the house rafters until the sprouts reach 1½ inches. After it has sprouted, the barley is crushed until the grains are broken open. Then, the barley is placed in the sun on a metal sheet or a skin for a day, after which it is ground into flour. Flour from unsprouted barley is made into a paste, allowed to stand for three days, and then cooked on a metal griddle on an open fire. The resulting cake is broken into pieces, mixed with the sprouted barley, and added to the pot of gesho and water. The mixture is fermented for four days, then more water is added and the pot is allowed to stand for several days. The final step is to filter the beer from the fermentation pot into a freshly smoked clay pot. The resulting beer is a gray liquid with some grain floating in it and with a low alcohol content.

Making arak'i uses the same process as for making beer. But at the final dilution, only half the amount of water typically added to beer is added. The thick brew is put into a large pot, and the top is sealed with a mixture of cow dung, mud, and straw. Next, a bamboo tube is inserted into a small hole near the top of the pot, sealed with mud. Then the pot is placed over a fire; as the liquid boils, steam escapes down the tube and condenses into a special copper or brass kettle set in water.

## Typical Meals

Most Ethiopians eat three meals a day: breakfast (qurs) between 7 and 8 A.M., lunch (mesa) at noon, and supper (erat) after dark. They might also have a late afternoon snack with beer or coffee. Breakfast is usually a small meal and may consist of parched grain or porridge and coffee. Egg dishes may also be served. Lunch is the most substantial meal of the day, with injera, a main stew (wat), and perhaps several smaller accompanying dishes. Ethiopians may drink milk or beer with lunch and coffee after the meal is finished and cleared. Supper is a smaller meal, perhaps of leftover injera and stew.

Before meals are served a basin of water and soap are brought in for everyone to wash their hands and mouth. After the meal the hands and mouth are washed again. Meals are served on a low table (*mesob*) made from or topped with a flat basket, which also serves as the base for the injera. Injera serves as the plate, the utensil, and food. Several layers of injera are put on the mesob, and the various wats and other dishes are ladled onto the injera in front of each person. Small pieces of injera are broken off with the hands and used to scoop up the stews, vegetables, or salads. Only the right hand is used for eating. Food is scooped with two or three fingers. One should always chew with the mouth closed and along only one side of the jaw. Chewing on both sides is considered gluttony. A person eats slowly and with restraint in terms of how much is consumed. But others, particularly guests, are urged to eat. Women guests may show great reticence, claiming they have eaten already or are not hungry. During a meal with friends a person may tear off a piece of injera, dip it into the wat, then roll it up and put it into the mouth of a friend. This ritual is

called *gorsha* and is an act of cementing the friendship. Sharing meals incorporates a great deal of symbolism, as in most cultures, with commensality reinforcing bonds with kin and forging bonds with neighbors and strangers. The practice of eating in a circle, from a common round "plate," is rife with social meaning. If the meal is a family one, husband and wife will eat together, then the children. If the people sharing the meal are outside the family circle, men and women eat separately.

Younger Ethiopians are making more use of processed or prepackaged foods that are becoming more readily available in urban markets. These foods include packaged berbere, bread, and cookies. "European" foods are also more readily available now, like pasta, macaroni, and rice. Partly prepared or processed foods have helped women save time in meal preparation. These foods not only help women who are joining the labor force but are also partly an outcome of wage labor.

## Eating Out

Traditionally Ethiopians did not eat out, but meals outside the home were available. Until more recent times foods typically available in a market or street setting were mostly snacks (*maksas*). These street foods include boiled eggs or potatoes, boiled or roasted cereals, beans or peas, and breads. Street vendors might sell wats wrapped in a piece of injera. Drink stands serve a variety of fruit drinks, especially in larger towns and cities. In all cultures some accommodation must be made for travelers and other people unable to eat at home, so traditional market areas are likely to have clusters of open-air "restaurants."

These days a dining-out culture has been established in cities, where a range of restaurants from upscale to fast food can be found. Besides offering diners traditional Ethiopian fare, these establishments offer a variety of European cuisine. As with



A group of women cooking on the street in Ethopia, 2008. (Tiziano Casalta | Dreamstime.com)

globalization in all parts of the world, Western chains, like McDonald's, Pizza Hut, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Dunkin Donuts, can be found. There are also Ethiopian versions of Western fast food, catering primarily to teenagers and young adults but also to families.

## Special Occasions

The diversity of Ethiopian cultures means hundreds of celebrations and rituals celebrated with special foods, fasting, and feasting. The focus here is on the main festivals and holidays celebrated by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Ethiopia's Muslims. Practitioners of traditional religions also have their own rituals involving food practices.

Besides celebrating Christmas, Easter, and other familiar Christian holidays, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church practices fasting. The clergy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church fast about 250 days per year, while the laity fast about 165 days per year. In addition to special fast days, fasting is observed every Wednesday and Friday. On fast days, observers have nothing to eat or drink until after 3 P.M. During Lent practitioners abstain from meat, eggs, and milk, eating fish instead. The Lenten fast is for 56 days. Christmas (celebrated on January 7) is also preceded by a fast of 40 days. Orthodox practitioners also observe many saints' days as well as a personal saint's day, on which they give small feasts. In addition, local voluntary associations (*maheber*) honor their patron saint with special services and feasts two or three times a year.

Muslims observe the Ramadan fast, during which practitioners refrain from eating from dawn to dusk. Since the Islamic calendar is based on a lunar calendar, Muslim holidays come earlier each subsequent year. At dusk on each day of the 28-day fast Muslims break the fast with special foods and drinks. At the end of Ramadan come the Eid al-Fitr and the Eid al-Adha holidays, both of which are celebrated by slaughtering a sheep or goat and feasting with family, friends, and neighbors.

## Diet and Health

Even though the elements of the Ethiopian diet are quite nutritious, the food supply is not sufficient to meet the energy requirements of most of the population. Both man-made and environmental factors result in food insecurity. Food insecurity affects almost half the population. About 84 percent of the population is engaged in rain-fed agriculture; however, few households can produce all they need. There are few roads, and markets are not integrated, making the distribution of any surpluses across the country almost impossible.

Ethiopians do not eat much meat, eggs, or fish. Ethiopia has an abundant supply of fish, but the consumption of fish is low due to cultural taboos as well as inability to transport fish far from its original locale. Although the consumption of fruits and vegetables has increased over the past 10 years, it remains low. The per-capita supply of milk and eggs has also increased but remains low.

On the positive side, 96 percent of infants begin life being breast-fed. Most infants were found to be given the breast within one hour of birth, which is a crucial statistic because some cultures believe an infant will be harmed by the mother's first milk production. Interestingly, it has been found that Ethiopian mothers with no education were more likely to practice early initiation of breast-feeding. The median duration of breast-feeding is 26 months, though there is wide variation, and the duration of breast-feeding among urban mothers is much shorter.

Another dietary deficiency is the lack of iodine, particularly in mountain regions. Vitamin A deficiency is also a problem that affects young children and mothers. Anemia is another health problem due to the low consumption of animal foods. Anemia is also compounded by endemic malaria and other parasitic diseases. The consumption of teff protects against iron deficiency because the grain is high in iron. A Food and Agriculture Organization report (United Nations, 2008) suggests that food aid to Ethiopia, which primarily consisted of wheat, actually contributed to iron deficiency because

wheat, low in iron, was substituted for the traditional inclusion of teff in the diet.

*Barbara J. Michael*

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# Ghana

## Overview

Ghana is situated on the southern part of the western bulge of the African continent. It shares borders with neighbors Togo to the east, Côte d'Ivoire to the west, and Burkina Faso to the north, and it has a coastline on the Gulf of Guinea. The country has an area of 92,100 square miles (238,540 square kilometers). The country's population of over 22 million people is comprised of more than 60 different ethnic groups. Based on language and culture the people of Ghana are usually divided into five major groups: the Akan, the Ewe, the MoleDagbane, the Guan, and the Ga-Adangbe. Each has its own distinctive culture. No area of the country, however, is ethnically homogeneous, and no single group can be found in only one area. Ethnic groups are mixed in all urban areas. The Ghanaian government does not recognize any official national religion, but roughly 62 percent are Christians. The country has the largest percentage of Christians in West Africa. Fifteen percent are Muslim, and the remainder of the population practices various traditional forms of religion.

The main division of the country, as with many states on the Gulf of Guinea, is from north to south. The south, where Ghana's capital Accra is located, had the first contact with European culture, when the Portuguese arrived in 1471. Citizens of this region, therefore, are likely to have had a form of westernized education and are likely to be Christian. This is also true in the country's urban areas. Moving northward, the country becomes more rural, and Islam becomes the predominant cultural influence.

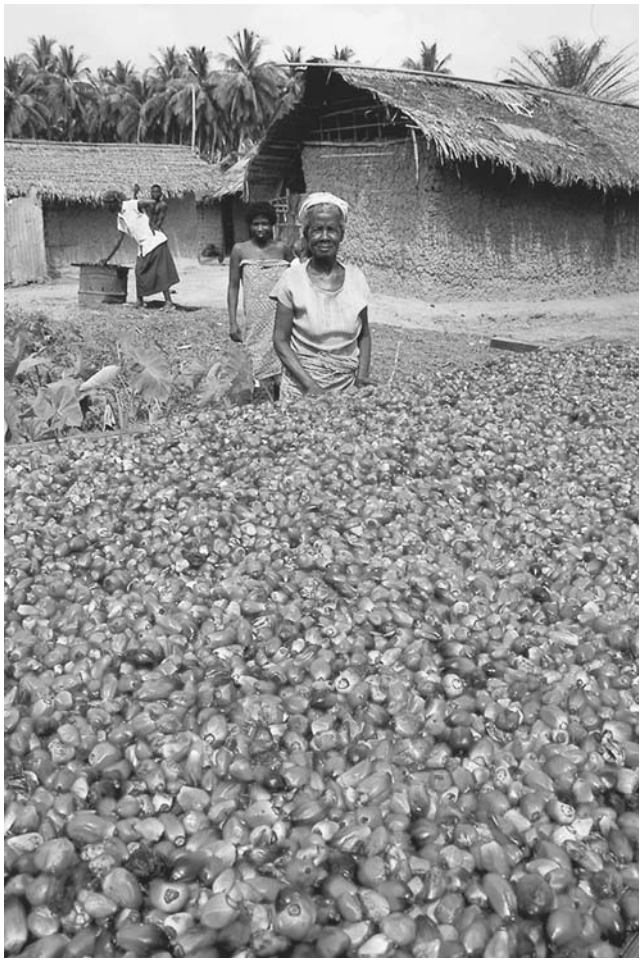
The climate is tropical with two rainy seasons: April through June and September through November. Northern Ghana has more extreme weather conditions than the south, which can lead to food shortages.

### Food Culture Snapshot

Kofi and Grace Armah are westernized Ghanaians who live in the capital, Accra. He is in private industry, and she is a teacher. Their lifestyle is that of the urban elite, and they are influenced not only by the traditional customs of their ethnic group but also by international trends. Their diet crosses ethnic and national boundaries. Ghanaians traditionally eat three meals a day, and each meal generally is comprised of only one course. The ingredients for their meals come from the local supermarket, a local street market, or from Osu, the traditional shopping area, or Makola market, Accra's largest market, where fresh produce as well as imported and manufactured foods is available. Most Ghanaian households of any means usually have a household servant of some sort, and so do the Armahs. The shopping is frequently done by the houseboy based on consultation with Grace unless a special dish is to be prepared, in which case she will do the shopping for particular ingredients. Grace also supplements the larder daily with items seen in markets as she commutes to and from work. Local delicacies are also purchased from street stalls.

## Major Foodstuffs

The cuisine in Ghana is a relatively simple one that depends on seasoning and preparation more than



Subsistence farmer stands behind palm nuts drying in the sun. (Corel)

on a variety of foodstuffs. The culinary paradigm for the country is a well-seasoned soupy stew served with an accompanying starch. The stews are prepared from a variety of vegetables and meats including leafy greens of many sorts (the country boasts over 47 varieties of edible greens, each with its own distinctive flavor), peanuts, eggplant (called *garden eggs*), cocoyam, cassava, and the true yam, which is so popular that it plays an important role in many traditional Ghanaian religious observances. Ghanaian food gets its flavor complexity from a variety of spices, including cayenne pepper, allspice, curry, garlic, caraway, cloves, ginger, and a range of chili peppers that are used to season the dishes. There are also traditional West African peppers like the *melegueta* pepper and cubebs. Other ingredients such as *egusi* or melon seeds, red palm oil, the palm nuts themselves, and a range of dried, smoked, and salted fish and mollusks are also used to season dishes.

Rice is a staple starch throughout the country, but there are regional as well as ethnic preferences. In the northern part of the country, millet, yams, and corn are more frequent, while the south shows a preference for plantains, cassava, and cocoyam (a tuber). Meat remains the food of the affluent and is relatively expensive, with beef, lamb, and goat predominating. Fish is readily available and may include sea bream, mackerel, sole, eel, herring, and more. Crustaceans such as crab, crayfish, and mollusks including mussels and oysters are also consumed. Snails are a particular delicacy, and Ghana boasts some of the world's largest. Fish and meat are often mixed in traditional dishes. Vegetables include tomatoes, avocados, green peppers, cucumbers, cabbage, and more. Fruits are widely available and include guavas, papayas, oranges, mangoes, pineapples, and bananas. Sorghum is used in the north and is the basis for a fermented beverage known as *pito.* In matters inebriating, the south shows a preference for palm wine, while the entire country (with the exception of the Islamic north) loves beer.

## Cooking

The most common types of cooking in Ghana are boiling, steaming, stewing, frying, roasting, grilling, and baking. All of these methods are the basis for the traditional dishes of the country that used the traditional cookstove. In the 1950s, Ghanaian households cooked over wood or charcoal fires. Kerosene stoves supplanted many of the wood-burning ones, but in the rural areas the traditional three-rock wood stoves remain the standard. In the urban areas, the Western stove is used, as are pressure cookers, which are used to tenderize tougher cuts of meat. Refrigerators are also the norm among those with access to electricity and sufficient funds. Microwaves, freezers, food processors, and the full range of other Western culinary conveniences are de rigueur among the elite.

Most households have some kind of domestic help. It may be a relative from the country looking for

employment in the city and working in exchange for lodging, or a professional paid for services. Cooking, therefore, is often done by another woman and not the lady of the house. It is done, though, in full consultation with her and is often overseen by her. Cooking, however, remains a family activity for festive foods. Extended families will combine to prepare dishes at times of feasting, with the matriarch directing the kitchen. The myriad cultures of Ghana are oral ones, and this is the manner by which the youngsters of the household learn the traditional foods.

## Typical Meals

Given the regional diversity of the country, it is difficult to generalize about a typical meal. In general, it can be said that the typical heavier meals of the day traditionally consist of a soupy stew of some sort served over or accompanied by a starch such as the fermented cornmeal known as *kenkey.* The starch may be dipped in the stew, or the stew may be scooped up with it. Rice is also an accompaniment for several dishes, as is the boiled, pounded yam known as *fufu.* There may be the European paradigm of three meals a day. That is often replaced with a different one that includes one or two heavy meals and a lighter meal or some snacking.

In urban areas, breakfast may follow the British mode and include a porridge of some sort like traditional European oatmeal, an omelet, or a sweet bread known as sugarbread, usually accompanied by the British legacy of tea with milk. Alternately, it might include one of the more traditional Ghanaian breakfast preparations like *ampesi,* a dish of cassava, yam, and plantain that is boiled with fish and onion and then pounded in a mortar and boiled again. Street breakfasts are also available around the country and usually consist of some form of an omelet and tea.

For the westernized, lunch and dinner are interchangeable and range between European and American fare like grilled or roasted chicken served with a piquant sauce and more traditional Ghanaian dishes like pepper soup or groundnut stew.

**Groundnut Stew**

3 tbsp vegetable oil

1 c chopped onion

½ c chopped carrots

Frying chicken, cut into serving pieces

½ lb fresh okra, topped, tailed, and cut into 1-in. rounds

1 large (28-oz ) can tomatoes and their liquid

3 c chicken stock

3 c water

Salt to taste

1 habanero chili, pricked

1 c chunky peanut butter

Heat the oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add the onions, carrots, and chicken and sauté, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables have softened and the chicken has browned. Add the okra, and continue to cook for 5 minutes. Stir in the tomatoes and their liquid, the chicken stock, and the water. Salt to taste and add the pricked habanero chili. Then lower the heat, cover, and allow it to simmer for about 45 minutes or until the chicken is cooked through. Taste occasionally and, when desired piquancy is reached, remove the chili. Finally, stir in the peanut butter and continue to cook for 10 minutes. Serve hot accompanied by the starch of choice. Usually the starch is boiled yam, cassava, cocoyam, or sweet potato, called *ampesi* in Twi and Fanti, *nuko* in Ewe, or *agwao* in Ga. It can also be served with kenkey (fermented corn dough wrapped in leaves) or *banku* or fermented, boiled cornmeal that is the ancestor of the *coocoo* and *fungi* of the Caribbean.

## Eating Out

Restaurants in the Western sense of the term are relatively new to Ghanaian culture. They are limited to the larger urban areas, and those that might be categorized as "white-tablecloth" restaurants are often located in the luxury hotels. Others are smaller

and not as fancy, and they serve local specialties or dishes prepared by women who are known for certain dishes. Sundays in the Christianized south of the country are often times for eating out. There is a nascent fast-food culture, with American imports and also Mr. Bigg's, a Nigerian chain of fast-food restaurants boasting four Ghanaian locations. There are also Chinese restaurants run by Chinese who hark from Asian areas of the former British Empire. Here, fried rice is a staple and is often served with noodles as well as fried chicken. There may even be the particularly British touch of baked beans. Clubs featuring various local dishes and live Ghanaian music are fixtures of urban areas throughout the country. Finally, for eating out throughout the country, there is the country's street food, accessible to all except the poorest.

The street food is based on the local cuisine and includes spots such as street stalls and pedestrian and market vendors as well as lower-priced establishments called *chop houses* that are also places for the growing middle classes; they, too, specialize in local favorites and in dishes like grilled fish, fried chicken served with savory sauces, and beef kebabs dusted with peanut flour and hot pepper called *kyinkyinga,* which are also sold by ambulatory vendors. Fresh seafood predominates along the coast. Also notable in this country where the water is not always drinkable are the street beverages. Alcoholic drinks are sold only in licensed establishments, and carbonated drinks are sold only in permanent shops that can collect the bottles for recycling and refilling. Coconuts, therefore, are popular, as are small plastic bags filled with purified water or different flavored juices.

## Special Occasions

Traditional life is extremely important to Ghanaians, and the country can boast that over 100 festivals take place annually. Many of them celebrate the harvest and pay tribute to ancestors. All festivals, even funerals, involve dancing, singing, and eating. Some of the most impressive festivals are the yam festivals like the Akan festival Odwira, the presentation of the new harvest of yams to the ancestors. It is a weeklong festival in September or October that celebrates the harvest of yams, which are a traditional staple. The major Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter are national holidays, while in the northern sections of the country and in Muslim households, Ramadan is celebrated according to Islamic tradition.

## Diet and Health

In 1995, the World Bank stated that 11 percent of the population was undernourished and added that 27 percent of the children under age five were underweight and more than 25 percent were considered short for their age, or "stunted." Between 1990 and 1995 one-third of all Ghanaian children had some form of goiter, which is indicative of thyroid disease. The country's north/south divide coupled with the urban/rural one meant that rural dwellers in the northern part of the country were more subject to interrupted food supplies in the rainy seasons when flooding might interrupt food sources. The same happened in the dry season if drought occurred. The southern regions are closer to seaports and have more stable climactic conditions. The more developed economy means that there are methods of food storage, and most people can afford to purchase food from markets and other sources if their individual food supplies are destroyed. The University of Ghana's Faculty of Science has a department of Nutrition and Food Science to address these issues, and the regional African office of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is based in Accra, Ghana.

*Jessica B. Harris*

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# Guinea

## Overview

Guinea is a French-speaking country with a population of about 9.5 million people. The Republic of Guinea, or La République de Guinée in French, sits nestled between the Atlantic Ocean, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, and Mali. It is sometimes called Guinea-Conakry to distinguish it from its neighbor to the north, Guinea-Bissau. Guinea has almost a quarter of the world's bauxite reserves and plentiful gold and diamond mines. There are four distinct geographic areas in Guinea—highlands in the interior, coastal plains and mangrove swamps, savanna, and rain forest. The capital, Conakry, is situated in the very wet, humid zone of southwestern West Africa located along the Atlantic coast. The area has a monsoonal climate and can easily receive over 157 inches of rain a year. The mountainous Fouta Djallon region also gets a lot of rain; the headwaters of three major rivers, the Niger, the Gambia, and the Senegal, are all located there.

The country has a young population—almost 50 percent of the people are 15 years old or younger—and it is quite ethnically diverse. The three largest ethnic groups are the Fulani (also known as the Peul or the Fula), the Susu, and the Malinké (also known as the Mandigo, Mande, or Maninke). Guinea is predominantly Muslim, with a smaller number practicing traditional religions and Christianity.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Lamine and Salamata Bâ are Fulani. They live in Dalaba near the city of Mamou in the Fouta Djallon; they have a five-year-old daughter. Like many Fulani, Lamine raises cattle and Salamata is a homemaker who tends the family's garden plot and gathers what they need from the nearby mountains.

The couple usually eats two meals each day, usually at midday and in the evening. Should Lamine and Salamata start the day with breakfast, they eat bread with a cup of tea or instant coffee (usually Nescafé) sweetened with condensed milk or fresh fruit. Lunch is a much heartier dish of *maffe hacco,* a sauce of pureed leafy greens—most often cassava or sweet potato leaves—cooked with palm oil and a bit of meat, usually beef or chicken, and served over rice. The couple will eat leftovers for dinner if food remains, or they may eat steamed millet, sorghum, or *fonio* (a kind of millet, *Digitaria exilis*) with buttermilk or cream.

The climate and a lack of refrigeration or reliable electricity due to a crumbling infrastructure and the government's mismanagement of resources generally mean that people do without rather than make frequent trips to the market for ingredients. Only the wealthy, usually government workers or expatriates, may have refrigeration. Supermarkets are rare for the average person, but the markets carry just about everything a Guinean cook needs in the kitchen. On a typical trip to the market, Salamata would purchase meat and fish to prepare grilled *brochettes* (kebabs) or to add to the many leaf and vegetable sauces she prepares. People buy seafood directly from fishermen where access permits, but those like Salamata who live far from the coast buy dried fish to flavor their food while cooking. Maggi cubes (bouillon), salt, chilies, and dried shrimp are essential ingredients available in the market.

## Major Foodstuffs

Most Guineans work in the agricultural sector in this predominantly rural country. The most important agricultural products are rice, cassava, oil palm fruit, plantains, and cattle. Meals in Guinea are generally higher in carbohydrates than protein, because typical starchy carbohydrates like rice, cassava, and plantains are cheaper than meat. The most common meal in Guinea is a vegetable-based sauce flavored with meat and seafood and always served with rice or cassava.

Rice is the most important staple crop, produced here in rice paddies in coastal areas where mangrove swamps have been cleared to accommodate them. Cassava is valued for the starchy tuber as well as the leaves of the plant, and Guineans also make a version of *fufu* from cooked cassava flour. (Fufu is a common West African dish that can be made from boiled, pounded tubers like yams, cocoyam, cassava, or plantains or from the flours of these products; it is eaten as an accompaniment to various soups, stews, and sauces.) The common potato, which is indigenous to South America and spread to the African continent through initial European contact, is known locally as the Irish potato and has made its way into sauces and other dishes. Sweet potatoes—the hard white variety and the softer orange one—are also grown for their flesh and their leaves, much like cassava. Millet and the indigenous West African grains sorghum and fonio are important as a bed for sauces or are eaten as porridges or, particularly by the Fulani, with thick, sweetened buttermilk. People tend to eat different grains or starchy staples at different times of the year.

Potato leaves are important ingredients and show up in dishes like maffe hacco, which can be translated from Fulani as "leaf sauce" and generally refers to cassava. Sweet potato leaves (*pouté* in Fulani), spinach, and jute leaves with their mucilaginous texture are also common in sauces. Okra, beloved throughout West Africa for the slippery texture and thickening properties it lends to dishes in which it is cooked, appears in Guinea in a pureed okra sauce. Onions and tomatoes are essential to preparing leaf sauces and the tomato-based sauce known in Fulani as *maffe soupou* (*soupou* means "tomato"). Fulani cooks use chilies sparingly, but they are essential to the fiery versions of leaf, peanut butter, and tomato sauces prepared in Malinké and Susu kitchens.

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### *Maffe Hacco* (Cassava-Leaf Sauce)

African food is really regional food; even within the vast region of West Africa where ingredients and techniques tend to be fairly similar, there are almost subregional differences. Leaf sauces are common in southwestern West Africa, particularly in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and, of course, Guinea. Here is the Guinean version of cassava-leaf sauce. The basic technique includes finely chopping or pounding leaves to puree them. Cassava leaves taste a bit like spinach with slightly tougher texture. Guineans may use any type of leafy greens as a substitute, often sweet potato leaves, which would make the dish *maffe pouté*. You can substitute collards, kale, mustard or turnip greens, spinach, or other preferred greens for the leaves in this recipe.

#### Ingredients

2 8-oz packages frozen, chopped cassava leaves or three medium bunches cassava leaves

1 large onion, finely chopped

1 tbsp red pepper flakes or chopped chilies to taste (optional)

1 c palm oil

1–1½ c water

2 tbsp dried, ground shrimp

1 bouillon cube

Thaw and drain frozen cassava leaves in a bowl and set aside. If using fresh leaves, wash, dry the excess water, and roll into a tight bundle. Using a sharp knife cut thin strips of the leaves to create very fine shreds. Finely mince onion while heating palm oil in a medium-large pot until it begins to smoke. Add minced onion and fry 1 minute. Add leaves and fry an additional minute. If using frozen leaves add liquid drained from leaves and 1 cup of water; if using fresh leaves use 1½ cups of water. Add dried shrimp

and stir well. Add bouillon cube and red pepper, if using, then stir. Cover tightly, and reduce heat to medium low. Leave mixture simmering about 30 minutes or until liquid has cooked away and mixture is moist but dry on top, stirring occasionally. Serve with rice.

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The tropical environment affords Guineans access to fresh fruits such as pineapple, papayas, mangoes, bananas, guavas, mangosteens, and sugarcane, all of which are grown commercially; people eat fresh fruits as snacks and prepare them as juices. Oil palm fruits, the source of both palm oil and palm butter, are another key crop. Palm oil is an important source of vitamins and perhaps the most important cooking oil. It is prized for the deep orange hue it imparts and the very distinctive flavor it adds to dishes.

Primary sources of protein are beans and meat, with one of the most regionally important being the peanut, called *l'arachide* or *le cacahuète* in French. Cowpeas (black-eyed peas), yambeans, and peanuts are important varieties of legumes in Guinea. Peanut butter is the key ingredient in a peanut butter–based sauce known as *maffe tegga* in Fulani. Beef, chicken, and goat and bush meat are sold in the market and eaten regularly by Guineans. Bush meat is wild game, usually from forested areas, and can include everything from snakes and rodents to wild pigs; it is an important and much-beloved addition to the Guinean table. Because Guinea is predominantly Muslim, most Guineans generally do not eat pork; however, bush pigs are a particular delicacy in the forest region. People tend to keep their own chickens in their yards; the breed tends to have tough flesh with a gamy flavor.

Seafood is an important part of Guinean cuisine. It may be purchased directly from a fishing boat on the coast and fried, grilled, or added to sauces, or it is consumed in dried, salted, or smoked forms by people living further inland where access to fresh seafood is limited or nonexistent due to a lack of refrigeration. Popular fish include tilapia, mackerel, black bass, and cod along with shrimp and crayfish. One very important seasoning that is a key flavoring in sauces is dried, ground shrimp or crayfish; it also appears across the Atlantic in the West African–influenced cuisine of northern Brazil.

Milk and milk products are important to the Guinean diet because the Fulani, one of the country's largest ethnic groups, are traditionally cattle herders. Newborns are generally given fresh milk while adults are more likely to eat products like butter, yogurt, buttermilk, and cream, usually eaten with grains. Sweetened buttermilk and thick cream are often eaten with steamed grains like millet and fonio.

Guineans drink coffee and tea throughout the day as well as soft drinks. Because Guinea is a Muslim country, alcohol is prohibited just about everywhere except in the forest region, which is predominantly Christian and animist. There, people may drink beer and locally produced palm wine.

## Cooking

Ingredients and cooking techniques are similar throughout West Africa. Foods are primarily boiled, fried, roasted, or grilled and are generally made from scratch, as Guinea does not have a developed food-processing industry. Few prepared ingredients are available. Those that are include smoked, salted, or dried fish and meat; dried herbs; various flours; sugar; condensed milk; tea; and instant coffee. Most food preparation takes place outdoors over a fire or in a separate building adjacent to a family's living area. Most households don't have stoves or ovens. Families generally do not have cooks—the wives and daughters in a family prepare meals. In polygamous households, women may share cooking and other household duties. Spices and grains are crushed or ground in mortars and pestles; a household may have several in various sizes designated for specific purposes.

## Typical Meals

Guineans typically eat from a communal bowl with spoons, exclusively with the right hand, because the left one is reserved for personal hygiene. Guineans, rich and poor, are very hospitable and welcome guests with food as budgets permit. Anyone visiting a family at or around mealtimes will be invited to



A woman cooks at a market in Gueckedou, Guinea. Gueckedou is a town in the south of Guinea, near the border with Sierra Leone. It has a large weekly market that attracts many traders, including those from across the border. (Travel Ink | Getty Images)

sit down and eat, and as a sign of hospitality they may also be given a kola nut to chew. It is polite for guests to leave a bit of food on their plates to show gratitude and satisfaction with the meal that has been provided.

While Guinea boasts a great deal of ethnic diversity, food and cooking are very similar among the groups, with the exception of flavor profiles. Of the three major ethnic groups, the Fulani tend to prefer less spicy dishes and may provide chili sauce on the side to add to taste. The food of the Malinké and the Susu is generally very spicy with chilies added directly to a particular dish while cooking. A traditional Susu dish is *achecké,* grated, fried cassava, which is usually used as a bed for grilled fish or meat, often served with chopped onions and tomatoes. A dessertlike porridge of steamed fonio is eaten with thick, sweetened buttermilk, much like the Senegalese dish *sow,* while fresh corn kernels are sometimes eaten in bowls of fresh milk. The dairy in these dishes shows the influence of the cattle-herding Fulani.

## Eating Out

There are plenty of restaurants in cities and towns throughout Guinea; however, dining in restaurants is not a common practice. At local *cookhouses,* people can find traditional sauces served with rice or cassava. One entrée commonly featured on the menus of these establishments is *riz gras,* a hearty dish of cooked rice fried in oil and piled with vegetables like carrots, cabbage, and squash. The dish is common throughout Senegal, Burkina Faso, Benin, and Guinea. It can sometimes contain meat and be cooked with tomato paste. There are also many Lebanese restaurants in larger cities and towns, where people can get Lebanese specialties.

## Special Occasions

Guineans celebrate religious holidays according to their faith, although recently Muslims have begun to hold small Christmas celebrations. Tabaski, the Islamic holiday Eid al-Adha (known in English as the Festival of Sacrifice), is an important celebration for Muslims throughout the country. For this holiday in Guinea, livestock, usually a goat or a cow, is slaughtered for a feast that is shared among community members, particularly the poor. Milestones in life, like engagements, births, weddings, and funerals, are celebrated with parties, feasts, and music among family and friends.

## Diet and Health

The Guinean diet is a healthy one with plenty of fresh fruit, seafood, and healthy palm oil. Minimal food processing and essentially no access to fast food have limited many diseases related to the overconsumption of highly processed, unhealthy foods. However, years of sporadic armed conflict along with governmental neglect and corruption have exacerbated poverty and accelerated the deterioration of the country's already-fragile infrastructure. Poverty has also caused ethnic tensions, while explosive population growth coupled with underdevelopment of the country's agricultural production systems has made malnutrition a real issue in Guinea, contributing to the problem of limited access to food even though a high percentage of the population works in the agricultural sector.

Overcrowding of the few hospitals and medical centers and a lack of doctors make treatment difficult even with large numbers of nongovernmental organizations running programs that target health. Only about half of all Guineans have access to clean water, and fewer than 20 percent have access to adequate sanitation. Poverty and corruption make maintaining adequate health programs a difficult task.

*Rachel Finn*

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# Kenya

## Overview

Kenya straddles the equator in East Africa, bordered on land by Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, and Tanzania and by bodies of water: the Indian Ocean in the east, Lake Victoria to the west, and Lake Turkana to the north. A bit smaller than Texas, Kenya has several, varied types of terrain: central highlands that are relatively cool and well watered; Mount Kenya, the second-highest mountain in Africa; hot and arid lands in the east, north, and northeast; and in the west the Great Rift Valley, through which many migrants and invaders have passed. Another conduit of invasions and influences—Islam and Christianity, for example—is the hot, wet, tropical Indian Ocean coastal strip and adjacent islands.

Kenyans are renowned for their hospitality, kindness, and industriousness. Kenya has long been a popular tourist destination for game-viewing safaris and beautiful Indian Ocean beaches. Nairobi, the cosmopolitan capital, has served for years as the regional headquarters of organizations like the *New York Times,* the World Bank, and United Nations agencies. Kenya is a center of scientific interest on many fronts, including important archaeological sites such as Koobi Fora, where fossils of *Homo habilis,* possibly the first of the genus *Homo,* were found.

In Africa the population is drawn to the cities for economic reasons, yet 75 percent of the Kenyan population is still agricultural (2003 estimate). Literacy is upwards of 85 percent. However, there is an unemployment rate of 40 percent (2008 estimate), and fully 50 percent of the population is below the poverty line (2000 estimate).

Swahili (called Kiswahili when one is speaking the language) and English are both official languages. Each ethnic or cultural group also has its own language—indeed, much of the categorization into groups is done on a linguistic basis. The wide variety of Kenyan languages, coming as they do from an array of unrelated language families, speaks volumes about the numerous migrations that brought people to what would later be called Kenya.

Swahili is a much-misunderstood language. A simplified, stripped-down pidgin version became the lingua franca—a language of intergroup communication—when East African groups had no other common trading language. This pidgin variety gets little respect as it is inelegant and able to discuss only commerce and work, with limited grammar and vocabulary: It is no one's native language. This pidgin should not be confused with the "real" Swahili language, spoken as the native language of the Swahili people who live on the Indian Ocean coast, which is grammatically very complex and subtle. Swahili has had a rich, mostly poetic literature for several centuries; the language was first written in Arabic script, but for the past 100 years has been written almost entirely in the Roman alphabet.

The people of Kenya are diverse: Depending on the criteria used, there are some 40 to 70 different African linguistic or cultural groups, whom anthropologists have traditionally categorized as either hunter-gatherers, pastoralists, or agriculturalists. Since populations of hunter-gatherers have unfortunately been greatly reduced over the course of the last century, the focus will be on the other two groups in the discussion of traditional foods. These belong to

the Bantu, Nilotic, Nilo-Hamitic, and Cushitic language groups.

Kenya's population in 2009 was almost 34 million, about 3 million of whom lived in the sprawling capital, Nairobi. The approximate breakdown of ethnic groups is Kikuyu, 22 percent; Luhya, 14 percent; Luo, 13 percent; Kalenjin, 12 percent; Kamba, 11 percent; Kisii, 6 percent; Meru, 6 percent; other African (Swahili, Maasai, Samburu, Gabbra, Okiek, and many more), 15 percent; and non-African (Asian, European, and Arab), 1 percent.

Kenya's culinary situation has come about from an amalgam of influences. The British, Kenya's colonial rulers for most of the 20th century, are important from a culinary standpoint. They tried to recreate English customs, dining rituals, and food anywhere they lived in the world. Colonial-age cookbooks attest to extensive experimentation with recreating their dishes using local ingredients—with widely differing degrees of success. British food is still popular in Kenya. Fish and chips, pasties, full English breakfasts, cheddar cheese, beef Wellington, and more can still be found.

Also of great importance are the people of the Indian subcontinent, referred to in East Africa as Asians. The effect of Indian cuisine on the food of East Africa cannot be overstated. The most popular gravy or sauce is curry; the national snack is the samosa; the favorite bread is a chapati; the most festive rice dish is *biryani,* showing pan-Islamic origins as well. Some of this is due to the influence of the British, too. The British Empire (the Raj) produced a pan-Raj set of standards, language, and, to a degree, food. Additionally there is Arab—or at least Muslim diaspora—influence, through Swahili food, and Italian influence, through the global ubiquity of pizza and a continually healthy number of Italian tourists, and also an influence of Somalis. Ethnic Somalis occupy a portion of northeastern Kenya that was previously part of the Italian colony of Somalia, which was taken from the Italians after World War II.



Bananas growing wild in Kenya. (iStockPhoto)

## Food Culture Snapshot

Grace and Joseph Matheka, a mechanic, live on a farm in the rural Mua Hills outside of Machakos, the capital of Eastern Province, in a semiarid area. Grace rises before dawn, and she and her nine-year-old daughter, Rose, take their jerrycans and walk a mile to a stream where they draw water and then, using tumplines on their foreheads, carry the heavy jerrycans back to their homestead. They make a simple breakfast of tea for Joseph and the seven-year-old son, Wambua, who enjoy it with some *mandazi* (fried donuts) or leftover food from last night's dinner. The main meal of the day is the evening meal, which they have around 8 P.M. when Joseph returns.

To celebrate today's public holiday, the family will have a special dinner; Grace has had Wambua chase down one of their chickens that has stopped laying eggs. She cuts off its head, lets the blood drain off, plucks it, cuts it open, and cleans the carcass. She retains the liver and gizzard and gives the rest to the dogs that are quietly seated a yard from her watching with anticipation. Grace cooks a large pot of *ugali* (cornmeal porridge). To accompany it she makes *sukuma wiki* (kale) and a stew of the chicken, which she flavors with *dania* (cilantro leaves) and a packet of *bizari* (curry powder). They have grown the corn and paid the shop owner down the road to grind it into

meal with his gasoline-powered grinder. Grace grows her own greens and onions. She goes the six miles into Machakos town on market days with her cowife Maria, who lives in the house down the hill from her, and sells her extra produce, using some of the cash to buy sugar and tea.

With the meal the children usually drink water and the adults tea, but sometimes Joseph will buy Fanta for Grace and the children and three Tusker beers for himself. Grace sends Rose out to her father with a basin of cold water so that he can wash his hands before he starts on his dinner, which Grace brings to him in his favorite chair where he is listening to the evening news on BBC World Service. Joseph calls out for Rose to bring him some more water and soap to clean his fingers. Joseph insists that eating ugali with a spoon makes it tasteless and prefers the common method of eating with his hand. Afterward, he goes to a neighbor's house where the wife brews and sells *uki* (honey wine), and a group of men come to sit and talk for a couple of hours, drinking the illegal uki and smoking Sportsman, Rooster, and Embassy cigarettes, until it is time for them to return home.

## Major Foodstuffs

The staple corn—the main source of calories for most Kenyans—as well as the tomato was originally from the Americas, brought to Africa. The rice in East Africa is *sativa.* Asian rice came via migrants from the Indonesian region through Madagascar perhaps 1,200 years ago. Other important carbohydrate staples of Kenyans, if not grains, are cassava (also called manioc or yucca), sweet potatoes, and potatoes, all three foods from the Americas.

Kenyans grow many types of bananas, both sweet and cooking types, as well as mangoes, passion fruit, pineapples, papayas, avocados, many types of legumes (including cowpeas, black beans, and kidney beans), millet, rice, cassava (manioc/tapioca), onions, garlic, and coriander. Fishing is an important food source as well as an export earner. Other main crops are wheat and dairy products. Kenya's colonial past resulted in a cheese-making tradition not shared by most other African countries. It produces, for example, superb Camembert.

Unlike the Western conception of what is the essence of a meal, usually a protein, Kenyans consider the grain (ugali, rice, or chapati) to be the main food of the meal, and the meat, fish, vegetable, or a stew of these to be the *kitoweo,* or accompaniment. Upcountry (away from the Swahili coast), the word *mboga,* literally "vegetable," but also "cabbage" (as the prototypical upcountry vegetable) or "pumpkin," is used in the same undifferentiated sense as kitoweo, as "something to accompany the main starch," even if the mboga be meat.

Important starches in addition to maize, rice, and breads are *viazi* (potatoes), *matoke* (plantain), and *muhogo* (manioc). Other main vegetables are *biringani* (eggplant), *saladi* (lettuce), *pilipili hoho* (hot peppers), *pilipili baridi* (sweet peppers), *ukwaju* (tamarind), *nyanya* (tomatoes), *karoti* (carrots), *kabichi* (cabbage), sukuma wiki (kale or collards), *mchicha* (spinach), *parachichi* (avocado), *vitunguu* (onions), and *vitunguu saumu* (garlic). Fruits (*matunda*) are varied and of high quality: *paipai* (papaya), *ndizi* (bananas), *tende* (dates), *pasheni* (passion fruit), *stafeli* (soursop), *madanzi* (grapefruit), *machungwa* (oranges), *mananasi* (pineapple), *ndimu* (limes), *dafu* (unripe coconut, for drinking), and *nazi* (ripe coconut, used for *tui,* or coconut cream). Also grown is *miwa* (sugarcane).

*Mchuzi* is the general word for sauce or gravy and sometimes, by extension, soup. *Supu* means only soup, a popular breakfast on the Indian Ocean coast (and many other places in the world). A common menu item in Mombasa restaurants is "special morning soup," usually made with goat. Mchuzi can also mean curry (sometimes called *kari*). Curries, for example, of *kuku* (chicken), *ng'ombe* (beef), *kima* (ground meat), *kofta* (meatballs), or *samaki* (fish), are probably the most popular type of mchuzi. *Masala,* or *mchuzi mzito* ("heavy mchuzi"), is masala, which in Kenya differs from curry most obviously in being heavier and drier. *Bizari* is the general term for curry powder, and premixed packets can be bought in any shop. A popular brand is Mchuzi Mix. However, at least on the coast, one can buy whole or ground spices, notably *pilipili manga* (black pepper; literally, "pepper of Oman"), *tangawizi* (ginger), *iliki* (cardamom), *jira* (cumin), *mdalasini* (cinnamon), *manjano*

(turmeric), and *karafuu* (cloves). (The punishment in neighboring Zanzibar for smuggling cloves, so important was the spice to the local economy, was death, well into modern times.) Salt is *chumvi*.

Popular meats are *nyama ya ng'ombe* (beef), *nyama ya ndama* (veal), *nyama ya mbuzi* (goat meat), *nyama ya kondoo* (lamb or mutton), kuku (chicken), and in some places *nyama ya ngamia* (camel meat). *Karanga* is a menu term for beef stew, and *ng'ombe* ("beef") is the menu term for a beef stew with less beef than karanga. *Nyama choma* is roast meat, and *mishkaki* is roasted skewered meat.

*Muthokoi* (a Kamba word) is dehulled maize, usually served with legumes like *kunde* (cowpeas). Other important legumes are *maharagwe* (kidney beans), *pojo* (green gram, or mung beans), *dengu* (lentils), *njegere* (chickpeas), and *mbaazi* (pigeon peas). Popular nuts are *njugu karanga* (peanuts), much used in cooking, and *korosho* (cashews). The latter plant also bears the tart and refreshing fruit called *kanju* or *bibo,* the cashew apple.

Some Kenyans do not eat fish or seafood of any kind, though some groups that traditionally did not have now started eating these. Coastal people have always eaten from the sea. Popular foods from the Indian Ocean are *pweza* (octopus), *ngisi* (cuttlefish or squid), *kole kole* (pompano), *changu* (emperor's glory snapper), *tafi* (rabbit fish), *mkesi* (mullet), *tewa* (grouper), *papa* (shark), and *nguru* (kingfish), as well as *ng'onda* (semidried fermented fish). *Kamba* means either shrimp or lobster (if necessary, one distinguishes between *kamba mdogo,* "little kamba," for shrimp and *kamba mkubwa,* "big kamba," for lobster). Swahilis and other coastals eat shrimp, but, though called by the same name as shrimp, lobster is not eaten. Swahilis also do not eat *kaa* (crab) or *chaza* (oysters), all of which are, however, enjoyed by many *wageni,* the Swahili word



Locals buying fish on the beach in Mombassa, Kenya. (iStockPhoto)

for visitors, strangers, and guests. Tilapia, a fish, is raised in ponds and, like other freshwater fish, is taken from the inland lakes.

### *Beverages*

Kenyan tea (*chai*) and coffee (*kahawa*) are famous and shipped worldwide. Kenya is now the third-largest global producer of tea, after China and India. Tea is the cornerstone of much Kenyan hospitality in the home and a common beverage in a restaurant. The normal chai one orders in a restaurant is made from tea leaves boiled with milk and sugar, sometimes with some spices like cardamom added. (To get black tea one orders *chai kavu,* literally "dry tea," and asking for *chai ya china,* literally "Chinese tea," will obtain a larger proportion of milk to water.) Also popular are bottled soda drinks such as Coke and Orange Fanta. Coca-Cola is an important and powerful industry. Soda can be found in the most rural, out-of-the-way places but is relatively expensive for much of the population, as is bottled beer. Kenya Breweries makes several varieties of pilsner-type beer (*bia*) much like those made worldwide. It can survive the long journey to the hinterlands that an unpasteurized beer never could. Also, some home brews are popular in Kenya, but they are technically illegal. Uki, *busaa,* and *muratina* are various (now-illegal) local brews, *cha'ngaa* is moonshine (illegal alcoholic spirits like gin or whiskey), and *mukoma* is tapped palm sap allowed to ferment into alcoholic palm wine. *Pombe* and *tembo* are the terms for alcoholic beverages in general. *Tembo* is also a word for elephant, and this play on words has resulted in Tusker (Elephant) brand beer (Tembo brand tembo). In a bar one orders bia either *baridi* (cold) or *moto* (hot, that is, room temperature). Many Kenyans never drink cold beverages, including soda.

Kenyan coffee is well known, though in the United States one often sees only "peaberry." A great deal of less expensive robusta (as opposed to arabica) coffee is grown and processed into instant coffee. A common restaurant drink is *kahawa maziwa* or *kofi,* instant coffee in hot milk. *Maji tamu,* literally "sweet fluid," is the term for fruit juice, of which there are *maji ya machungwa* (orange juice), *maji ya ndimu* (lime juice or lemonade), *maji ya nanasi* (pineapple juice), and *maji ya pasheni* (passion fruit juice). These are found fresh but often tinned. In addition, *maziwa* (milk) is also a popular beverage, most likely to be drunk in milk tea. Fermented foods are important and include locally fermented milk, *maziwa lala* (literally, "milk sleep"), beer, honey wine (uki), *uji* porridge (made from millet, corn, and/or sorghum flours), and distilled spirits, as well as European-style industrially produced yogurt, pilsner beer, spirits, and wine.

## Cooking

In more traditional houses, food is cooked on a three-stone (*jiko*) hearth, in aluminum cooking pots with rims (*sufuria*) on a fire of wood or charcoal. The family might use an "improved jiko," an insulated sheet metal cooker that will use less fuel (but also throws off less heat into the living space). It is the women and children's job to supply water, and this may be a difficult task requiring hours of walking to a water source and back carrying heavy containers of water. Similarly firewood is the women's purview. More urban or middle-class families will use kerosene or gas cookers.

In cooking dania is the typical flavoring. In English the seed is called coriander and the leaves cilantro. Especially upcountry (away from the Swahili coast), dania leaves are often the only spice or herb used.

Food and drink in Africa are changing rapidly. Many traditional foods are disappearing because of change from ecological degradation, population pressure, westernized tastes, and other agricultural and cultural change. One such food, actually a drink, is uki (pronounced *oo-key*), honey wine made by the Kamba (Akamba in their language) people of Kenya. Its production and consumption were in the past subject to clearly defined rules that wove uki into the dense symbol structure of a highly organized community. The beverage still has much traditional meaning, but uki is on the wane. As an emblem of the old, tribal order, uki's decline was probably

inevitable given the drastic upheavals of traditional society and the eagerness of young people worldwide for the new, the modern, the Western. But uki is a case where the demise of a traditional foodway was greatly expedited by the government, specifically, the hunger of a nation-state for tax revenue. Uki is hard to tax because its production is too hard to control. Beer and whiskey produced industrially are much more straightforward to tax.

In the past, pastoralists eschewed cultivated food and relied on food from their herds: milk, meat, and blood. Meat but especially milk, fresh or as a fermented product, provided the most nutrients and calories, with some essential nutrients provided by small additions of blood taken from live animals with a special arrow with a quite shallow half-moon arrowhead. This was shot at point-blank range into the vein of an animal and caused a shallow cut through which blood was collected in a gourd.

Settlement schemes, national borders, overgrazing, lack of water, encroachment on territory, and other influences have undercut the traditional culinary reliance on the herds and their milk. In the past, during famine Samburu would turn more to blood and to wild fruit. Nowadays, Samburu rely on store-bought food—cereals such as corn (or the more citified rice), beans, tea, and sugar. These they refer to as "gray food," which is cooked and eaten by the family domestic unit together. Morality, social distance, discipline, and respect were in the past bound up in separate eating. Milk could be taken at any time and not in a group—except a *moran* warrior's obligation to eat with an age-mate (another moran). Meat strongly showed appropriate separateness

## Typical Meals

The prototypical Kenyan meal—and here Kenya is similar to much of the world—consists of a grain and a sauce. For many Kenyans the grain is rice, or wheat flatbreads, but, most commonly, a thick, stiff porridge of cornmeal (maize), served with a sauce of greens like collards or kale with the addition of onion and tomato and, if possible, fat and meat.

***Sukuma Wiki***

This is a popular and inexpensive staple dish of greens to accompany ugali, chapati, or another starch. It is made from any type of collards, kale, spinach, turnip leaves, or other edible greens.

One can read on many Web sites that *sukuma wiki* means "push the week," the idea being that this poor person's dish of greens can get one through the week. *Sukuma* does mean "push" and *wiki* does mean "week," but that fanciful origin is unlikely, among other reasons because pay is not weekly but monthly in Kenya—indeed, the term *mwisho wa mwezi* (end of the month) is a common phrase to explain why one is *waya* (broke). More likely is that *sukuma wiki* is close to the name for greens in some other language—there are over 40 languages in Kenya—and when Swahili speakers heard the word it sounded like *sukuma* and *wiki* to them. Whatever the history, it is a nutritious, inexpensive, and quite tasty dish.

1–2 lb greens

2 tbsp cooking oil or shortening

1 onion, sliced

1 hot chili, sliced (optional)

1 tomato or 2 tbsp tomato paste (optional)

1 tbsp curry powder or other seasoning powder (optional)

1 c any type of meat, raw or cooked, chopped (optional)

Salt

Wash a large bunch of greens well. Holding the cleaned bunch firmly in one hand on a cutting board, cut thin (½-inch) slices through the greens to produce shreds.

Sauté onion in oil till translucent. Add chili if using, and stir for a minute. Add meat (if raw), if using. Add tomato and curry, if using. Mix well and allow to heat through. Add greens, and mix well. Add meat (if already cooked), if using. If the mixture is dry and threatens to burn, add a half cup water. Cover and simmer for a few minutes till greens are tender. This

time will vary considerably with the toughness of the greens used. Salt if necessary. Serve with ugali, chapati, bread, or rice.

Ugali, cornmeal (maize) porridge cooked till stiff, is the most common daily food. Typically a diner breaks off a piece, dimples it with a thumb, and uses it to scoop up the accompaniment of sauce, greens, or meat. On the Indian Ocean coast this corn porridge is called *sima* and *bodo,* cooked not as stiff as ugali but used essentially the same way for eating. Muslim coastal people and many others use only the right hand for eating. It is considered good form to use only the fingertips, though a very common technique is to roll the ugali or sima (or rice or other grain) using one's fingers and palm to form a ball (*kitonge*). *Wali* is (cooked) rice. Uncooked husked rice is *mchele,* while the rice plant and unhusked rice are called *mpunga*.

## Eating Out

In cosmopolitan Nairobi there are many different types of restaurants. A standout among Nairobi restaurants has for decades been the superb French restaurant Alan Bobbé's Bistro. Two other popular restaurant cuisines are Italian and Indian. Nairobi has many superb Indian restaurants. The Carnivore is a well-known all-you-can-eat meat restaurant and reflects the esteem in which Kenyans hold nyama choma, or roast meat. Their original logo was a man swallowing a whole live cow. The Carnivore's format appears to have come from the Churrascaria, a Brazilian cowboy restaurant. Format aside, the Carnivore caters to an important Kenyan tradition: A true feast involves eating quantities of meat, a highly desired food and a mark of status, sharing, and respect. Nyama choma, often washed down with beer or a local brew, is perhaps the most popular form of this. Many Kenyans are essentially vegetarian but not by choice. The economic situation of the vast majority—recall that half of Kenya is below the poverty line—places meat virtually out of their reach but makes it no less desirable. The Carnivore opened in 1980, to, as their ads say, "instant success." Indeed it is simply the most famous and upscale of the many nyama choma centers around the country.



Ugali, a cornmeal (maize) porridge, cooked till stiff, is the most common daily food in Kenya. Here, it is served with sukuma, or kale. (iStockPhoto)

The popular Nairobi Java House coffee shops provide a different angle on globalization. Their menu is indistinguishable—not virtually but literally indistinguishable—from that of similar coffee shop lunch places in any downtown in North America. The coffees on offer are house coffee, espresso, americano, macchiato, café au lait, cappuccino, café latté, mocha, and Malindi macchiato. The breakfast selections include cinnamon rolls, chocolate croissants, and Danish pastries; bagels toasted with cream cheese; guacamole and salsa; home fries; and a Denver omelet with ham, cheese, tomato, onion, and green chili. This is not a foreign food restaurant, as is a local Chinese or even an Ethiopian restaurant; it simply an urban Kenyan coffee shop.

An interesting contrast with the more upscale and middle-class restaurants is provided by local street foods sold in kiosks and other street-food outlets in lower-income neighborhoods in greater Nairobi. Few foods overlap with the upscale foods. Among cereals are chapati, the panfried unleavened bread made from wheat; mandazi, deep-fried, leavened buns like doughnuts made from wheat; *mahindi chemsha,* boiled corn on the cob; *mahindi choma,* corn on the cob grilled over charcoal; ugali; uji, a fermented porridge made from cereal flours; and *biskuti,* or cookies. Animal products include nyama

(roasted, fried, or stewed meat) and samaki (fish), usually deep-fried. Mixed dishes are, for example, *githeri* (a Kikuyu word), made from a mixture of maize and beans. In street kiosks, tea is common as well as *irio* or *mokimo,* a mix of corn, potatoes, greens (such as kale, collards, or spinach), and sometimes beans, mashed together. This is served in almost all urban areas to go along with nyama choma. Also popular are samosas or *sambusas,* Indian-derived deep-fried triangular meat or vegetable patties with a pastry crust. On the coast they are served with lime, and diners often bite off a corner of the crust and squeeze the lime into the filling inside.

## Special Occasions

Many Kenyans celebrate Christmas, and it is a period of travel and gathering of families in the ancestral home areas. Other important celebrations include naming ceremonies for children and weddings, and all have special food traditions attached. Food plays a central role in the important Muslim month of Ramadan. Devout Muslims fast during daylight hours. They are forbidden to eat food, chew *miraa* (a stimulant leaf, known elsewhere as khat), smoke cigarettes, or drink water. People rise before the morning prayer to eat a breakfast to sustain them throughout the day of fasting. The evening call to prayer signals each day that the fast is over. Restaurants in largely Muslim areas are closed during the day, as are many businesses. A special set of recipes are made and eaten at home during Ramadan. Eid al-Fitr is a festive holiday that ends the month.

## Diet and Health

There are severe nutrition problems for much of the nation, made worse by the fact that 50 percent of the population is below the poverty line (2000 estimate). About 80 percent of Kenyan land gets very little rain. Less than 20 percent of the land is good for agriculture, and this 20 percent feeds 80 percent of the population. This land is overused and is being degraded. Kenya's food supply is limited, and a third of the country is undernourished. Things are getting better but only slowly. Most people get their calories each day from cereals, sugar, and vegetable oil, but the availability of fruit, vegetables, and milk is increasing.

Young children are often malnourished. Although universal breast-feeding helps greatly, it is often mixed with nonbeneficial practices such as bottle-feeding, which are made more damaging by poverty. The Food and Agriculture Organization has concluded that long-term strategies are needed such as putting additives in common food to attempt to ensure that vitamins and other micronutrients get in the diet, promoting the consumption of more diverse foods such as fruit and vegetables, and in general educating the population about good nutrition.

*Robert A. Leonard*

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# Liberia

## Overview

The Republic of Liberia lies in the heart of West Africa, bordered by Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire. It and neighboring Sierra Leone are the only two countries created as a destination of resettlement for formerly enslaved Africans repatriated to the continent from the United States and the Caribbean. With a 360-mile coastline stretching along the Atlantic Ocean, the country has a population of about 3,500,000 people. The country is extremely hot and wet, with its capital Monrovia holding the title of wettest capital city in West Africa along with Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. Like the rest of West Africa, the dry winter season is signaled by the harmattan, the cool, dry, dusty wind that blows south from the Sahara desert and provides a bit of relief from West Africa's heat and humidity. In 2007, the citizens of Liberia elected the continent's first female president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.

Liberia's recent history is one of an almost-continuous 20-year civil war among indigenous groups and descendants of freed formerly enslaved people of African descent from the United States, who refer to themselves as Americo-Liberians. In 1822, the American Colonization Society (ACS), a group of whites dedicated to returning black people (freedmen and escaped slaves) to Africa, sponsored the first group to establish a resettlement colony for free African Americans, and by 1847, the Republic of Liberia was born. Today, the descendants of this group still live in the country as a small but powerful minority among the 15 different ethnic groups in the country, which include the Grebo, Mende, Gola, Kru, Krahn, Mandingo, Bassa, Kpelle, Loma, and Vai. The country's history has led to difficult and tragic interactions among the Americo-Liberians and indigenous groups, most notably civil war that lasted throughout the 1990s. The official language is English, but a creolized form of English is the primary form of communication among people who speak more than 20 different indigenous languages throughout the country.

Liberia is Christian, but many people also practice various forms of indigenous religion. Islam accounts for the beliefs of the remainder of the population. Liberia was never colonized by European powers, but due to its unique history it has a close connection to the United States and has had positive diplomatic relations with the U.S. government for most of its history.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Matina Kabba makes trips to Monrovia's Duala market almost daily for the provisions she needs to prepare meals for herself and her children. Matina is a seamstress and a single mother of two children; her husband was killed during the last of the civil conflicts, which ended in 2007. She is of mixed Americo-Liberian and Grebo heritage. Like most Liberians, Matina and her family usually eat only two full meals a day, but in the Americo-Liberian tradition, they sometimes eat a full breakfast of bacon and eggs with a cup of tea or coffee. More frequently, however, she and her family begin the day with a light meal of tea and bread or fresh fruits like pineapple, bananas, or mangoes that Matina purchases at the market.



An African woman beating cassava root in a mortar in Liberia, West Africa. (iStockPhoto)

Because most dishes contain palm oil or palm butter, which is prepared from palm fruit, Matina purchases both in bulk at the market and prepares various stews and sauces with them. A very simple lunch or dinner dish consists of red palm oil and rice, okra, chilies, and smoked fish. To prepare other dishes, Matina will purchase cassava and cassava flour, to prepare *dumboy* or *fufu,* respectively. Dumboy is a starchy dish of boiled fresh cassava root pounded until soft and pliable and eaten with various soups, while cassava fufu is generally made with cassava flour. Dumboy can also be made from plantains and breadfruit. Plantains can be eaten ripe or unripe; in either state, they are usually fried as snacks or accompaniments to a main meal. Unripe plantains have green skins, while ripe plantains are sweet and have skins that range from yellow to black; both are inedible raw.

Matina will stock up on the dried and smoked fish used to flavor the soups and stews that so frequently grace her table. Preserved ingredients are usually purchased in bulk while fresh ingredients such as meats, fruits, vegetables, and other perishables are purchased the day that they are used due to a lack of refrigeration.

## Major Foodstuffs

The staples of the Liberian diet are palm oil, rice, cassava, and fish or meat; these ingredients are usually cooked together in various combinations. Almost 70 percent of the population is employed in the agricultural sector, in which cassava and rice are the major cash crops. Liberia also produces a number of other important food crops such as cacao, coffee, sugarcane, palm oil, and bananas.

Palm oil and palm butter are important foods that are both culturally and nutritionally significant in Liberia and throughout West Africa. Palm oil is a deep red-orange color with a high percentage of beta-carotene. It is one of the few vegetable oils with a high percentage of saturated fat—about 44 percent. Palm oil is used for frying, flavoring, and coloring foods and is also an important ingredient in Brazilian cooking, having traveled with captured Africans to the Americas during the transatlantic slave trade. The oil remains semisolid in more temperate climates because of its high level of saturated fat. Palm butter is prepared by soaking the pulp of palm nuts, then cooking the liquid extracted from them. It is used as the main ingredient in palm butter soup or is simply eaten with rice or cooked with leafy greens. Burnt or boiled palm oil loses its red-orange color and much of its nutritional value but is also an important cooking oil.

Liberians favor leafy greens in their cooking; they are generally referred to as "leaves." Sweet potato and cassava leaves are used most often in the preparation of soups and stews, better known as sauces. *Palava sauce* is made from a puree of slippery *plato* leaves, also known as bitterleaf; the leaves have a mucilaginous texture much like okra. Collard greens and spinach are also frequently eaten. All greens may be boiled, finely chopped or pureed and stewed with meat, or fried. Other vegetables such as

bitter balls (eggplant); *pumkin,* which is similar in flavor and texture to butternut squash; cucumbers; mushrooms; and okra are prepared in various ways and provide great variety and essential nutrients in the Liberian diet.

Rice is an essential element of any Liberian meal and is often eaten for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. While rice paddies do exist within the country, indigenous rice is rarely eaten. Instead, cheap Asian rice is imported and consumed. *Jollof rice* is a beloved rice dish with many variations; it usually contains chicken and shrimp with vegetables like peas, carrots, and corn cooked in a spicy tomato sauce. It is a bit like West Africa's version of fried rice. Rice is also ground into flour and used to make *rice bread,* which is a heavy and cakelike bread that also includes mashed ripe bananas or plantains. Starchy foods are valued in Liberian cuisine because they are filling and nutritious and cut the richness of dishes that are oily from the prodigious use of palm oil mixed with herbs, spices, and other flavorings like chilies, onions, and dried or smoked fish or shrimp. Native to tropical South America, sweet potatoes (*Ipomoea batatas*) made their way to the African continent during the transatlantic slave trade and are eaten and cultivated throughout the region as an important food source for animals and humans. The tubers can range in color from white to pink, purple, yellow, and the familiar orange.

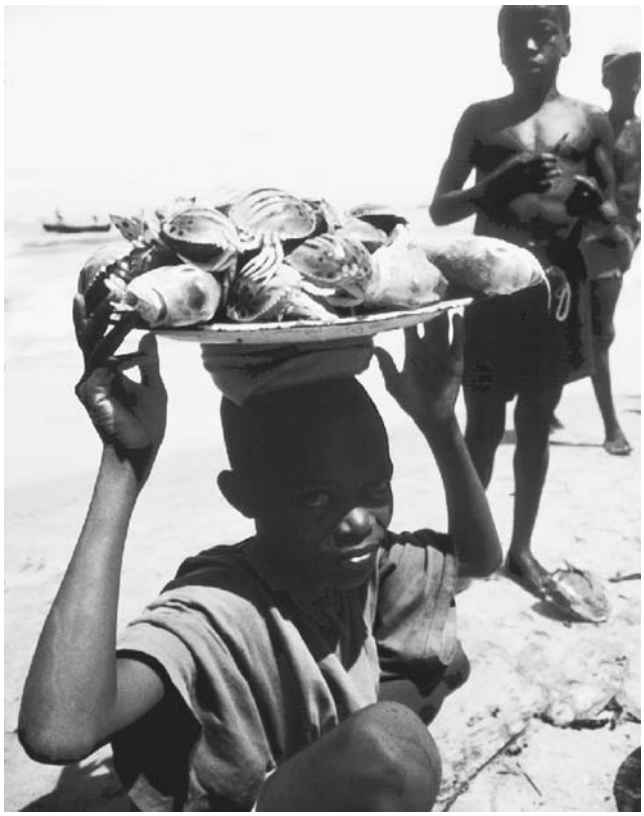
In other parts of West Africa, yams (*Dioscorea* spp.) are favored, but in Liberia the sweet potatoes are preferred and are eaten boiled, roasted, or fried and also make their way into dishes reflective of strong connections to the cooking of the American South, such as sweet potato pie and sweet potato pone made from grated sweet potatoes, ginger, and burnt palm oil. Sweet potato leaves are finely chopped and then cooked with ground shrimp, meat or fish, palm oil, and chilies in a dish called potato-leaf sauce; cassava leaves are prepared similarly. Cassava is a secondary staple in Liberia; it can be fried in palm oil, roasted, mashed, or processed into flour. Roasted cassava is grilled or roasted and then eaten with palm butter.

Liberians favor dishes with meat and fish cooked together and tend to consume all parts of an animal. Pig's feet, cow skin, and other viscera, collectively known as offal, are prized for the flavors and textures they bring to a dish. Typical of this style of preparation is *okra sauce,* a sauce that calls for pig's feet, chicken, beef, and dried fish in addition to chili peppers and fresh okra. Unlike in many countries throughout the region, pork is used to flavor sauces and is consumed frequently. Goat, chicken, and beef make frequent appearances in dishes, with goat soup being a dish prepared for very special occasions. Meats are boiled together with chilies, onions, and tomatoes for flavor, then left to simmer slowly in the resulting broth to develop the rich, intense flavors so typical of the cuisine. While most dishes do contain meat, it is often not considered the centerpiece of a meal but rather an essential flavoring component that may not be omitted. The heavy use of pork in Liberian cooking also reflects the influence of Americo-Liberians whose cookery is so closely tied to that of the American South. Pork can be the primary ingredient of a dish or used as a flavoring when it is smoked or salted.

Smoked and salted fish are used to flavor sauces and even consumed as the primary protein in dishes such as yam or cassava porridge, which is boiled yams or cassava cooked with onions, tomatoes, chilies, and fish until soft. For such purposes, cod is preferred, but salt cod on its own is the basis for a dish in which the cod is soaked, seasoned, fried, and then simmered in a chili-spiked tomato sauce. The long Atlantic coastline makes fresh seafood abundant and important to the Liberian diet, and fish, shrimp, crayfish, and other shellfish are eaten regularly, fried, grilled, and stewed in the ubiquitous sauces.

Peanuts (*groundpeas*) and peanut butter are important sources of protein and used in dishes such as groundnut soup. Pigeon peas and cowpeas, of which black-eyed peas are a well-known variety, are also stewed and eaten regularly. Kidney beans, a legume native to South America, are often mashed and used as soup thickeners. The beans were brought to Liberia during the slave trade.

A penchant for savory and sweet baked goods and desserts reflects the influence of southern U.S. food culture on Liberian cuisine. Rice bread, a



A Liberian boy balances his catch of fish on his head. (http://www.travel-images.com)

much-loved specialty, is but one cakelike bread that holds a place in the Liberian culinary repertoire. Cakes and pies are filled with all manner of fruits (e.g., pineapple, mango, pawpaw—of the American *Asiminia* spp.—or papaya) and, of course, sweet potatoes. *Liberian cake,* heavy, sweet, and studded with raisins, is another favorite. Shredded cassava and sweet potatoes are also transformed into cakes spiced with cinnamon and nutmeg; other sweets include stewed fruits like mango, pineapple, and pawpaw. Savory baked goods include cornbread, once again reflecting the roots of the repatriated former slaves who resettled among local indigenous groups.

## Cooking

The most common cooking techniques in the Liberian kitchen are stewing, boiling, and frying. Preparing meals is labor-intensive because most things are made from scratch. Dishes like dumboy, fufu, and palm butter all require much pre-preparation. In general, soaking, pounding, peeling, boiling, drying, and crushing of basic ingredients are often the first steps to be taken before any actual cooking can be done. Few processed foods are available for use by the home cook, and when they are, the preference is for homemade.

Mortars and pestles are used to crush spices and pound tubers like cassava and yams to the correct consistency for dishes like dumboy and fufu. Most cooking is done outside over a fire or in a building adjacent to the main living area. Wealthier families may have cooks, but it is primarily the women and girls of a family who prepare meals.

## Typical Meals

Throughout English-speaking West Africa, including Liberia, food is referred to as *chop*. *Chop* refers to food in general and to entrées of main meals, while *small chop* refers to snacks and smaller meals. Civil war crippled agricultural production during the 1990s, which changed typical eating habits throughout the country and made access to adequate nutrition difficult. Liberia is slowly recovering. Typically Liberians might eat two meals a day, usually lunch and dinner; however, wealth determines the number of meals a family might eat. Liberians eat many dishes with their hands. It is customary to wash hands well before meals and use only the right hand when eating, since the left hand is used for personal hygiene. A sauce with a starchy staple will be the focus of the main meal of the day, and if a second meal is taken, it will usually consist of leftovers. Rice, the country's main staple, might be eaten in some form or another for all meals, since few Liberians would consider a meal complete without it.

Breakfast might be fresh fruit or baked goods like coconut bread with tea or coffee or perhaps a bowl of rice eaten with milk and sugar. Lunch and dinner will consist of stewed sweet potato leaves with a bit of meat and tomato sauce spiced with chilies and served with rice, fufu, or dumboy. The average main meal in Liberia will be a spicy tomato-based stew or puree of leafy greens with meat, poultry, or offal, eaten with a cooked starchy dish.

**Palm Butter Soup**

Palm butter is a thick cream extracted from boiled, crushed palm fruits. In Liberia, people usually make it from scratch, but it is also commercially available. Palm butter soup, or palm butter stew as it is sometimes called, is a very simple dish once the palm butter has been prepared. It is a rich dish with a complex flavor that is most commonly prepared with a mix of seafood, just chicken, chicken and seafood, or chicken and beef.

2 28-oz cans palm nut cream

1 lb chicken pieces, cut small

1 c shrimp

1 c crabmeat

1 Scotch bonnet or habanero chili, finely chopped

1 medium onion, finely chopped

Salt and pepper

Fish stock (optional)

Season the chicken and shrimp with salt and pepper and set aside for 30 to 60 minutes. When the chicken is ready, place palm nut cream in a pot to melt. When the cream has melted, it will be rather thin. Add the chicken, onions, and chili and simmer over low heat until the chicken is done and sauce begins to thicken, about 25 minutes. Add shrimp, crabmeat, and all other ingredients and simmer 2 to 3 more minutes. If using fish stock, add to pot with seafood.

Small chop can be anything from a small fried sweet or savory fritter to roasted corn or pieces of fried cassava, yam, or plantain. Fresh fruit is frequently eaten as a snack along with freshly roasted peanuts or groundnuts. Cakes and stewed fruit are also considered small chop.

In Liberia changes in economic status and particularly the growth of white-collar employment in urban areas can affect mealtimes as men and women shop, prepare, and consume meals based on a much different daily schedule than in more rural areas, where most people are farmers. The physical demands of a particular job also determine the nature of mealtimes and food preparation in modern Liberia.

## Eating Out

While there are restaurants and food stands throughout the country, there is not a strong tradition of eating out in Liberia. Purchasing small chop in markets or on the streets of cities, towns, and villages is a common practice.

## Special Occasions

Food is always a central element of celebrations in Liberia. Aspects of Christian, traditional, and Islamic religious traditions blend with cultural elements of the various indigenous and Americo-Liberian groups to form a vibrant amalgam of culture that is uniquely Liberian. Independence Day, celebrated on July 26, marks the day of full independence from the United States with celebrations around the country. Christian, Muslim, and traditional religious holidays are celebrated with feasts, as are life's milestones such as marriages, births, and deaths. Liberians celebrate Thanksgiving on the first Thursday of November each year, as well as Flag Day and Armed Forces Day.

## Diet and Health

Liberians eat a variety of meats, fresh fruits, and vegetables; however, the starchy staples of rice and cassava that accompany nearly every meal make the cuisine a heavy one. With civil war and unrest, the diet and health of Liberian citizens have suffered immeasurably. The civil war left the country reeling, affecting all aspects of life, particularly food production and infrastructure, which has made it even more difficult for the Liberian government to feed its citizens. As such, malnutrition is a serious issue facing the country.

*Rachel Finn*

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# Maasai

## Overview

The Maasai are an indigenous African ethnic group, until recently seminomadic but now largely settled, located in Kenya and northern Tanzania. They speak Maa, a member of the Nilo-Saharan language family that is related to Dinka and Nuer. Maasailand today straddles the border of southern Kenya and northern Tanzania. Census figures for Kenya estimated 377,089 Maasai in 1989. Figures based on Maa speakers estimated 453,000 in Kenya (1994) and 430,000 in Tanzania (1993) for a total population estimate of close to 900,000 between the two countries.

According to their own oral history the Maasai originated in North Africa and migrated along the Nile River down to East Africa, arriving near Lake Turkana around the 15th century A.D. They subsequently spread southward, conquering other groups on the way, some of whom they displaced and some of whom they incorporated into their own group. By the end of the 19th century, the Maasai ranged an area of grassy plains 700 miles north to south, from Marsabit in northern Kenya to Kiteto on the south of the Maasai steppe in what is now Tanzania.

European contact from Germany and Britain did not occur until the 1840s. As a consequence of European contact at the end of the 19th century the Maasai suffered severe losses of people and livestock from diseases, such as smallpox and rinderpest, introduced by Europeans and exacerbated by severe famine.

### *Sections*

Under British Colonial rule Maasai groups in northern areas such as Laikipia were forced to move out of the highlands, which were earmarked for white settlers. The Maasailand Reserves were divided into separate geographically based sections: Ilkisongo, Ilpurko, Iloitai, Imatapato, Iloodokilani, Ilkeekonyokie, Ilkaputies, Ildamat, Ilsiria, Ilwuasinkishu, Ildalalekutuk, and Ilaitaytok. The largest sectional group was the Ilkisongo, who occupied parts of southern Kenya and Tanzania. Each section occupied a specific territory with well-defined boundaries within which all members of the section were free to graze their cattle; to cross into another section with cattle, permission had to be sought from that section. Theoretically, the section was the largest political unit, but, in practice, it seldom functioned as such except in disputes with other sections or other groups.

Each section was divided into localities (*enkutoto,* pl. *inktot*): self-contained ecological units with contiguous areas of wet-season pastures to which camps dispersed during the rains. In each locality the ruling elders formed a local council (*engigwa enktoto*) that had regular meetings to discuss and act on the public affairs of the locality.

### *Clans*

Maasai belong to any one of five clans whose members are dispersed throughout Maasailand, thus providing a wide network of potential support and obligation that supersedes section boundaries. Inheritance passes through the paternal line, and families usually acknowledge and remember a lineage of three generations, back to the father of the oldest living man. Clans have no formal clan leaders and

are not organized as geographically cohesive local groups.

In addition, Maasai are organized according to age-grade and age-set systems, and each age-set has its own spokesman appointed from among the group. Men proceed through different age-grades as members of named cohorts or age-sets that are formed every 14 or 15 years. Age-grades determine the formal political structure, and the system is based on the primacy of elder males over younger males and men over women. Women do not have an independent age-set system but automatically join the age-set of their husbands when they marry.

## Food Culture Snapshot

The ole Koringo family is a large extended family occupying several *engang* (bomas, a mud and cow dung–covered hut) in the vicinity of Loitokitok and Rombo in southern Kenya. Maasai are generally polygynous. Ole Koringo has two wives and many children and grandchildren. Each wife occupies her own house, to which her husband has access. Children live in their mother's house but often share in food from other households.

Little food is purchased except for grains to supplement the largely milk diet. Tea and sugar are highly prized and can be purchased or obtained in exchange for milk. Milk is also exchanged for some foods such as vegetables at the weekly markets. Honey is often acquired in exchange for milk or meat.

## Major Foodstuffs

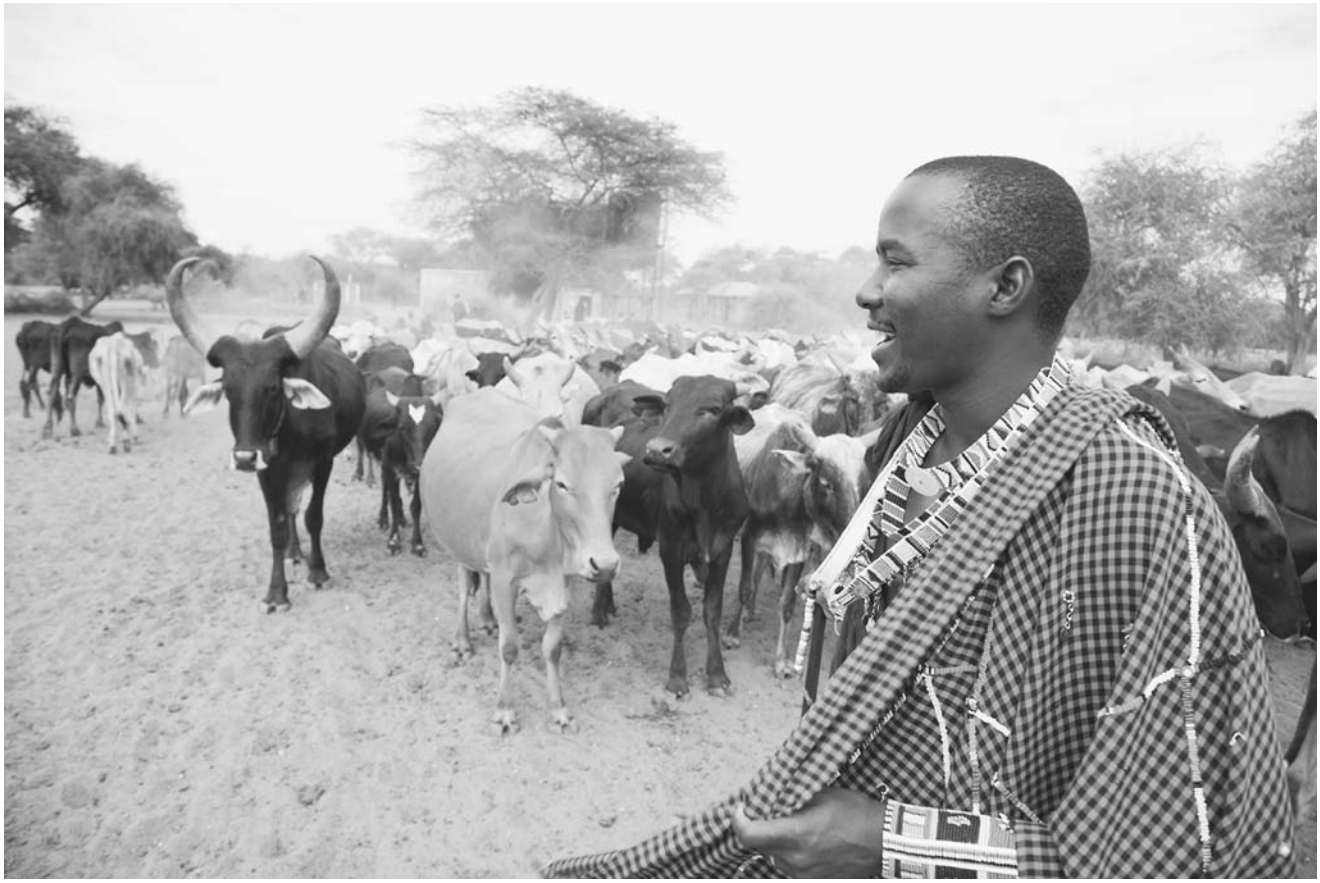
The traditional Maasai diet consisted of milk, meat, animal fats, and blood as well as wild plants, such as berries or wild greens. In recent times, these are being supplemented by tea sweetened with sugar; a variety of grains such as maize, rice, and wheat; and a limited range of cultivated vegetables. As in many pastoral groups, the symbiotic relationship between the Maasai and their livestock is reflected in specific behaviors that provide for the nutritional needs of herders' families while simultaneously ensuring the continued productivity of the herds. For example, herders rarely cull large stock for meat except on special occasions, when meat is normally shared among a larger-than-family group. They rely on dairy products, supplemented by occasional culling of small stock, for their daily needs. In Maasai society, men control the allocation of meat, while women control dairy products.

Most of the Maasai's food comes directly from their animals, in the form of milk, meat, blood, and animal fats. Milk is often sold on market days, and the proceeds are used to purchase vegetables such as cabbages, beans, and onions or grains such as maize, rice, or wheat flour. Milk may be exchanged directly with horticulturalists for a variety of vegetables to be cooked with meat in stews or with maize or rice.

Although individual yields of milk from cows in arid and semiarid zones of eastern Africa are low, the milk is of high quality. The fat content is as high as 5.5 percent, compared with the average of 4.8 percent reported for yields from sedentary herds in more humid areas of Africa or the average in European herds of 3.5 percent fat. The main deficiencies of milk are the absence of iron and vitamin C. However, if milk is drunk fresh without further processing, 1 kilogram (a little over a quart) of milk can supply 20 milligrams of vitamin C. Milk also lacks vitamin D, but this is hardly a problem in the tropics since vitamin D can be produced in the human body when it is exposed to sunshine.

Maasai depend on milk for a high percentage of their dietary energy, anything from 94 percent in the wet season to 30 percent in the dry season. Milk is plentiful from just after the rains until just before the dry seasons begin. If a Maasai mother has a son who is a *moran* (warrior), she will allocate one to two calabashes of about three quarts each to him; if she has two moran sons they would be given two quarts or more each. Moran eat with their peers and move from one house to another, each moran leading the others to his mother's house. A child of about 8 to 12 years would take 1.2 quarts in the morning before going out herding and 1.2 quarts in the evening when he gets back. A younger child will take about half a quart but spread throughout the day.

In addition, the moran and elders take about three quarts of yogurt per week, boys and girls about



A proud Maasi herdsman with his cattle in Kenya. (iStockPhoto)

two quarts, and women and older men one to two quarts. This is when the season is relatively good and the number of lactating cows averages 5 to 10 per household. In a time of severe drought at Ol Girra in January 2006, the women were subsisting on one quart of milk a day with no other supplementation from meat or grains. Children would fare relatively better because, according to the women, the children are fed first in times of crisis and both women and men will go without to favor the children.

There are times when there is more than enough milk; allocations would be high, and even the dogs would be fed milk. Passersby would be called to drink since storage and handling become a problem and the family would like to get rid of the surplus before the next milking. Things have now changed because there is a ready market for milk in the towns.

Maasai, like many other pastoral groups, consume limited amounts of blood from living animals. Cattle blood contains 7.6 percent protein, 0.06 percent fat, and 0.05 percent glucose. It also contains some valuable minerals such as iron as well as small amounts of calcium and phosphorus. An arrow is shot into the animal's jugular vein, and the blood is collected in a gourd. Later it is mixed with milk to make a protein-rich drink, often given to senior elders when they are ill and to women after giving birth, but all ages drink blood and milk during times of scarcity. Although consumed as snacks, fruits constitute a major part of the food ingested by children and women looking after cattle as well as morans in the wilderness.

## Cooking

Maasai men slaughter and butcher cattle at a kill site, which also is the site where the carcass is roasted

and some choice parts are given to the cooks. Only men roast meat, and it is they who divide and allocate the cooked meat. Meals prepared at the homestead are organized by the women and can include meat from goats and/or sheep and various types of stews. All milk products are controlled and allocated by the women.

## Typical Meals

Just before dawn the woman of the house rises and relights the fire, which has been left smoldering overnight. She then goes out to begin the milking. Calves are brought out one by one from the calf enclosure or house and led to their mothers. The calves are allowed to suckle from two teats while the milker milks the other two teats into a gourd. After enough milk is taken from any one cow, the calf can continue suckling its mother while the milker fetches the next calf. Milking can take an hour or hour and a half for each household. The woman of the house will then prepare breakfast, consisting of a thin porridge of milk and maize flour for the herdboys and other children; and milk, milky porridge, or tea for her husband and any of his guests. Warriors are given pure milk as specified by their status. Younger herders who may be away from the homestead until evening are given a calabash of milk or porridge to carry with them. Older herders may take breakfast and then go without eating until evening. After the herds have left the settlement, the women and girls clean their gourds with burning charcoal from special aromatic woods that give Maasai milk its characteristic flavor. When the herds return in the evening, the morning milking ritual is repeated.



Masai tribal people cooking meat over an open flame in Tanzania. (Randy Olson | National Geographic | Getty Images)

A study of the Maasai diet among the Laitokitok-Kisongo in 2007 included food diaries for adult male and female Maasai over a period of three weeks. The days were divided into five segments: daybreak, 10 A.M., lunch, 4 P.M., and dinner. All began the day with tea with milk prepared by the wives around daybreak. At 10 A.M. some but not all consumed tea with milk; yogurt; boiled fresh milk; or maize-meal porridge with yogurt. Lunch tended to be more varied, for example, boiled fresh milk, tea with milk, maize porridge with yogurt, *ugali* (maize) with bean stew, rice and meat, boiled banana and fresh milk, goat-meat stew with ugali, ugali with cabbage, ugali with beans, wheat chapati and tea, chapati with bean stew, or ugali with yogurt. Most took tea with milk at 4 P.M. At dinner, ingredients included chapati, rice, or ugali mixed with goat meat, beans, cabbage, potatoes, and/or fresh milk or yogurt. If milk was plentiful some took only fresh boiled milk for dinner.

## Eating Out

Maasai seldom eat out unless they are in town at the market or doing other errands. If they can afford to, they may purchase roast meat with ugali and green vegetables, onions, and hot peppers at a café or bar. They are, however, invited to share food at any settlements they visit. They may be offered fresh milk, yogurt, sweet tea with milk, milk with maize meal or rice, soup with meat (with or without vegetables), or roast meat.

## Special Occasions

### *Meat Feast*

Meat is just one of a wide range of primary and secondary products supplied by Maasai cattle herds. Although cattle provide herders with meat, they are seldom slaughtered to supply food for the family alone; instead, they tend to be part of a ceremony or celebration, with the meat shared among a number of participants. For example, during the ceremony of Eonoto, which marks the passage of a moran to elderhood, three steers are donated for the feast, including the required pure black steer for the ritual sacrifice. These are slaughtered and butchered by the moran. The meat is slowly broiled over smoldering fires of aromatic wood. The Eonoto ceremony occurs every 10 to 15 years, after the moran have spent the required amount of time together in a *manyatta* (warrior village). The ceremony itself lasts for over a week, with feasting and celebration. Lesser feasts include the initiation of boys or girls, weddings, burials, or hosting of important visitors.

Mature, fattened steers are chosen for most ceremonies. Slaughter of a malnourished animal is avoided unless the animal is near death and likely to die anyway. Every effort is made to keep animals alive, even through severe drought, so that they can be fattened later for more nutritive consumption. If an animal does die or is close to death due to disease or malnutrition, its meat will be consumed. A steer would be slaughtered for a number of occasions: the ritual feasting surrounding the initiation of morans or their subsequent passage to elderhood, the initiation of girls, dancing festivals, women's festivals, burial ceremonies, judgment of crimes, or a time of need. Traditionally, ceremonies for circumcisions and marriages were held during the "green" seasons, June/July and January, when everyone moved around to any home with an occasion to celebrate. Today, these ceremonies are held during the school holidays in August and December.

Men make all decisions on slaughter, cooking, and sharing of meat from cattle. Women can select small stock (sheep and goats) for family consumption and can give small stock as gifts to special recipients, such as new wives, daughters-in-law, or siblings. Under normal circumstances a family will slaughter about two goats and one sheep monthly and perhaps one steer every six months.

An ox is slaughtered and butchered in a prescribed fashion, and the meat is shared following a particular pattern of allocation. Even when the steer is slaughtered in a time of need and not for any ceremonial purpose, the pattern is followed. Most meat elements are paired, such as forelimb X being allocated to elders (or the moran cooks) and forelimb Y to wives. Some cuts can be allocated to elders or wives depending on the ceremony; however, out of 10 ceremonies listed, only 4, all involving women,

would allow wives to receive the choicest cuts. In contrast, women are automatically entitled to inner thigh X, forelimb Y, the meat around the hips, and the midspinal strip X. Boys and girls tend to be allocated the paired element of an elder's or a wife's allocation; for example, ribs for boys or inner thigh for girls. It does, however, seem that women may be discriminated against in regard to taste since they are allocated the neck meat, thigh bones, liver, spleen, rumen lining, and reticulum, which are so despised by the elders that they will not cook them. On a taste rating of 1 to 8, the Matapato rated tongue and flank as a 1, the choice of the elders, while the liver, spleen, and reticulum, allocated to women, rate a 7. The rumen, allocated to women, and the brain, allocated to dogs, are equally rated as an 8. Despite these taste rankings the women are not necessarily nutritionally deprived. The liver of a steer, weighing on average six-and-a-half to eight-and-a-half pounds, supplies iron necessary for women during their childbearing years. During the ceremonial feasting, everyone partakes of the daily stews, which are heavily loaded with fat. Two meat cuts, lung and heart, that might be expected to be relegated only to women or to children, are given to the cooks in some ceremonies or presented to the moran as they pass from moranhood to elderhood.

Taste is not necessarily a measure of nutritional value. However, the relative value of the hindlimb (taste-rated 2), which is allocated only to elders, and the forelimb (also taste-rated 2), which is the highest-ranking element allocated to women, suggests that Maasai men do have access to considerably more meat and fat by weight and quality than women or children.

Exceptions to the meat-allocation pattern occur when an animal dies away from home, when all members of the group (elders, wives, children) are not present, or when moran retire to the bush to slaughter and consume meat during their time in the manyatta (the ritual warrior village). Several moran may get together, beg animals from their fathers, and seclude themselves for up to a month or more, eating meat daily. Digestion of such large quantities of meat is aided by special plant-derived digestives. During this time of feasting the moran do not drink milk. Estimates of how much meat by weight elders, moran, women, and children might consume in a day of feasting suggest that elders could consume up to 8.5 pounds, women up to 4.5, children six to eight years of age about 1 pound, older children up to 2 pounds, and moran 13 to 17.5 pounds, the highest amount.

### *Fats*

Fat is greatly valued in the pastoralist diet. When the carcass of a steer is cut up, the fat is separated from the meat and grouped into three categories: (1) The hard white lumps from the stomach region and rump (taste-rated 7 or 8) have no ritual uses and are regarded with distaste by the elders. These, along with other stomach parts, are relegated to the women. (2) Fat from the ribs and hump gets a taste-rating of 2 and goes to the elders to be used as a relish. (3) A rating of 1 is given to the brisket fat, which is allocated to the father of the elder hosting the feast. This is the most sought-after fat as it will keep indefinitely once the fat has been separated from the tissue. The scrotal fat is allocated to the mother of the host. Other sources of fat come from bone grease and bone marrow. The absolute yields of bone marrow vary with the size, species, age, sex, and nutritional status of the animal, hence the preference for mature, fattened steers. Sheep are slaughtered for their fat, especially in the dry season, when sheep retain fat longer than cattle or goats do. Fat also comes from milk and butter. Infants are encouraged to drink melted butter to build up their strength.

### *Blood*

At the special rite-of-passage ceremonies such as entry into elderhood, blood is gathered in the dewlap of the slaughtered steer, mixed with milk. Each new elder is required to drink from it.

## Diet and Health

High blood pressure, cardiac disease, and diabetes would be expected to be common among Maasai given their high-fat diet, but this is not the case as long as they continue to exercise, mostly walking

long distances every day. Many Maasai succumb to disease when they give up the lifestyle of a pastoralist.

Soups are probably the most important medium for consumption of wild plant food by the Maasai. *Olkiloriti* (*Acacia nilotica*), a powerful digestive, is the most frequently used soup additive. The root or stem bark is boiled in water and the decoction drunk alone or added to soup. The Maasai are fond of taking this as a drug; it is known to make them energetic, aggressive, and fearless. Soups prepared during the time of a meat feast are laced with bitter bark and roots containing cholesterol-lowering saponins. Some that are added to the finishing stew on the last day of feasting have strong purgative or emetic effects.

Medicines derived from trees and shrubs are used in the treatment or prevention of a wide range of diseases and include remedies or prophylactics for malaria, sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis, diarrheal disorders, parasitic infestations, prostate problems, arthritis, and respiratory disorders. Particular attention is given to women's health during pregnancy and childbirth.

*Kathleen Ryan*

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# Madagascar

## Overview

The Republic of Madagascar is an island located in the Indian Ocean, about 250 miles off the southeastern coast of Africa. The nation sits just south of the equator and is separated from Africa by the Mozambique Channel. It is the fourth-largest island in the world, with an area of 227,000 square miles (587,000 square kilometers). The population in 2009 was estimated at 20.6 million, making it the 55th most populous country worldwide. Although three languages are officially recognized—Malagasy, French, and English—Malagasy, a derivative of Malayo-Polynesian languages, is the most commonly used.

Madagascar is divided into six provinces (*faritany*): Antananarivo in the central highlands, Antsiranana in the north, Fianarantsoa in the southeast, Mahajanga in the northwest, Toamasina in the northeast, and Toliara in the southwest. Antananarivo is the name of the capital city as well, which is located in the central highlands and the largest, most developed part of the country. The climate of the island is primarily tropical, especially along the coast. Inland areas tend to be more temperate, particularly the highlands surrounding the capital. To the south is an arid environment. Due to its relative isolation, Madagascar has an abundance of plant and animal species that are found only on the island, something that has attracted the attention of botanists, environmentalists, and tourists alike.

The people of Madagascar (the Malagasy) are of mixed ethnic descent including Indonesian, African, Arab, and European heritage. Evidence suggests that the first inhabitants of Madagascar were Malayo-Indonesian, arriving sometime around 500 A.D. Afro-Arabians are said to have appeared sometime thereafter, likely around 1000 A.D. Until it became a French colony in 1895, Madagascar had an independent kingdom, governed by indigenous ethnic groups, namely, the Merina and Sakalava tribes, who occupied the territory in the central highlands and along the western coast, respectively. Following independence from France in 1960, Madagascar became a democratic republic, but political instability ensued and government control fluctuated wildly, sparking widespread economic decline in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1992, a parliamentary democratic constitution was passed, yet political turmoil persists even to this day. In 2009, following the resignation of President Ravalomanana, a new leader, Andry Rajoelina, assumed control, backed by military support. Economic decline and political unrest have transformed Madagascar into one of the poorest nations in the world. Reports show that roughly 70 percent of the population lives on less than one dollar (U.S.) a day.

The history, people, and diverse terrain of the island have all played a role in shaping Malagasy culture and cuisine. Religion has also profoundly impacted the way people live, interact, and eat in Madagascar. Roughly 52 percent practice traditional beliefs (ancestor worship), 41 percent are Christians (both Protestant and Roman Catholic), 7 percent are Muslims, and a very small number are Hindus. The most common religiously based dietary restrictions imposed are food taboos (*fady*). Since many practicing Christians still observe ancestral rituals surrounding burials, and most of the remaining

population strictly adheres to traditional beliefs, fady have become commonplace in society. Variation occurs from one ethnic group to another, and between women, men, children, and expectant mothers. One such fady, originating in the Sakalava tribe, prohibits the consumption of pork. Another, belonging to the Antandroy tribe, forbids the eating of sea turtles or cows without horns.

## Food Culture Snapshot

The average household in Madagascar is made up of approximately six people, with a male and female head, children, and sometimes grandchildren. It is not uncommon to find an extended family living under one roof. Single females represent 12 percent of household heads; few of them are single men. Most of the time, meal preparation is the responsibility of women, although children are encouraged to help from a relatively young age. Young females begin to assist in cooking as early as five years of age.

Madagascar has an abundant market culture where the majority of foods are purchased. Supermarkets do exist on the island, but most of them are expensive and limited to urban areas. Daily markets run in cities and towns, and weekly rotating markets are held in rural areas. Men, women, and children participate in selling products, each with their own specified role according to gender and age. For example, men tend to sell meat whereas women sell dried fish and produce. Most of the goods sold at these markets are locally sourced, either harvested directly by the seller or bought from a nearby larger market. Teeming with activity, a Malagasy market represents an important part of social life.

The typical Malagasy family does nearly all its food shopping in local markets. Foreign residents, tourists, and affluent households may choose to patronize the supermarkets, but in rural areas markets may be the only substantial option for food. In some cases, small stores (*epiceries*) offer basic needs such as cooking oil, sugar, and matches. Everything else is found in the market.

A variety of meats may be purchased including beef (*zebu*), chicken (*akoho*), pork (*henan kisoa*), goat, and lamb. For everyday use, meat is bought in small quantities and served as an accompaniment to rice or used to make broths and stews. Larger portions are reserved for special occasions. Fish (*hazan drano*) and shellfish are plentiful on the island; thus it is common to find vendors selling lobster, prawns, squid, crayfish, octopus, eels, sea turtles, oysters, and sea cucumbers, as well as various kinds of fish. Much like meat, the average household uses seafood regularly albeit sparingly, with the exception of special occasions.

As a tropical island, fruits, vegetables, and spices grow in abundance on Madagascar, and markets are the best place to find them. Fruits such as mangoes, bananas, coconuts (the flesh and the milk are common in cooking), papayas, oranges, lemons, lychees, pineapple, and strawberries are everywhere. Among the many vegetables available, leafy greens (*bredes*) and tubers predominate. Cassava root and its leaves form an important part of the Malagasy diet, as do other types of leafy greens, sweet potatoes, corn, and taro. Additional vegetables may include tomatoes, beans, hot peppers, ginger, garlic, onions, and the like. Spices, nuts, and aromatics like vanilla, cloves, cinnamon, black pepper, peanuts, and cashews are used frequently, taking a prominent position in any market.

A typical Malagasy family cultivates their own rice, but since it is consumed in such enormous quantities, supplementing what is grown at home is necessary. Also, there are a few areas where rice is not grown, and markets may be the only place to find the staple. Additionally, (cow) milk may be sourced from within the household, provided the family has its own cattle. Otherwise, it can be found in markets or grocery stores.

## Major Foodstuffs

Madagascar's rich biodiversity makes it a place where food crops grow in abundance, and, consequently, the economy is largely agriculturally driven. Approximately 26 percent of the nation's gross domestic product is made up of agricultural products, employing nearly 80 percent of the domestic labor force. Surprisingly, many crops are grown almost exclusively for export. They do serve as ingredients in everyday Malagasy cuisine, but the finest of the harvest is reserved for the international market. Mad-

agascar produces more vanilla than any other country in the world, for example, yet its appearance in the local cuisine is not as prevalent as one might think. Some other examples are cacao, coffee, sugar, black pepper, cloves, and cinnamon. Cultivation typically occurs on large plantations introduced to the island in the 19th century.

The most abundant crop is rice, which alone accounts for around 13 percent of the gross domestic product. Unlike the cash crops, rice (*vary*) is grown mostly for domestic consumption and is the basis of the Malagasy diet. Many households cultivate their own rice fields. It represents nearly half of all calories consumed and about two-thirds of all available cropland. The average person eats more than 308 pounds of rice per year (2000 figures), an amount so high that Madagascar is now a net importer of rice to meet that demand. The Malagasy people perceive rice as a sacred gift and chief above all other foods, often appearing in religious rituals and festivals. The old saying "rice is a god" (*vary andriaminitra*) demonstrates the reverence with which it is regarded. The colloquial Malagasy word used for eating a meal (*mihinanabary*) literally translates as "to eat rice." The Malagasy believe they cannot in fact survive without it. Abundant yields of rice are seen as a sign of social status, a reflection of the blessing of God and the ancestors.

Rice is eaten at every meal—three times a day—and is considered the main dish. Any other food served is thought to be an accompaniment or relish (*laoka*). Several kinds are grown on the island, but those most commonly used are the partially refined "red rice" (*vary mena*) and the completely refined white variety. Rice is served at different consistencies depending on the time of day or the occasion. The dry method uses just enough water to cook the rice (*ampangaro*). When milk is used it is called *vary amindronono.* Alternatively, the wet or soft version is made using excess water, resulting in a soupy consistency (*sosoa*). Rice is sometimes ground into a coarse flour to be used in a variety of recipes. One such dish calls for the meal to be cooked in banana leaves, resulting in something akin to dumplings (*betrosa*). Roasting and crushing the grain (*lango*) is a traditional way of preparing rice, making it good food for traveling. Rice even serves as the basis for a common beverage (*ranonapango*), where water is boiled in a pot of leftover browned rice. It is enjoyed either hot or cold.

In Malagasy cuisine, beef (zebu) is second only to rice in importance. It is a local breed of humpback cattle that forms a substantial part of social and economic activity. Though sources vary regarding the origin of the animal—some believe it came to the island from southern Asia, and others insist it is African—zebu's place in Malagasy culture is in any case significant. Since it, too, is considered sacred, cattle is often slaughtered as a sacrifice to the ancestors at funerals, reburials (*famadihana*), and other special occasions. Much like rice, zebu is perceived as an indication of wealth. Furthermore, no part of the animal goes unused: The finest meat is eaten on special occasions; the tough, cheaper cuts are used daily in soups or stews; the hide is used for leather; and the horns are used in traditional medicine or as an offering at burial sites. Most of the time, zebu is used sparingly, as a relish for the rice. There are various ways of preparing the beef including traditional recipes and those that have been brought by immigrants. One common Malagasy snack (*sambos*), fried dough stuffed with beef and/or other meat and vegetables, suggests an Indian influence, even in the name (in India they are called samosas). An example of a traditional preparation for zebu calls for the meat to be boiled in water with onions and then grilled until brown (*varenga*). Since the consistency of the meat is relatively dry, it is usually served with soft or wet rice (sosoa).

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***Varenga***

**Ingredients**

2 lb beef, deboned and cut in 1-in. strips

1 tbsp salt

1 medium clove garlic, minced

1 small onion, sliced

Water to cover

Combine all the ingredients in a medium saucepan and bring to a boil. Cover the pan, and reduce the heat to low to maintain a simmer. Be sure to add

water as necessary to keep the meat covered. Cook the beef for about 2 hours, or until it falls apart with a fork. Remove the meat from the pan, drain, and shred using a fork. Spread evenly on a baking sheet and roast at 400°F until the meat is golden brown, about 30 minutes. Alternatively, the stewed meat can be grilled until brown (about 10 minutes depending on the heat), using a heatproof basket or aluminum foil to prevent it from falling into the fire.

In some areas of Madagascar rice is not cultivated; it is replaced by sweet potatoes, cassava, and corn. It is widely accepted that cassava found its way to Madagascar from the Americas via Africa, and corn from the Americas by way of the Portuguese. Meals might be accompanied by boiled cassava, sweet potatoes, or a cornmeal mush very much like grits. The leaves of the cassava plant (bredes) are used all over the island to flavor soups and other dishes. One of Madagascar's national dishes is a stew made with pork and ground cassava leaves (*ravitoto sy henakisoa*). Another very typical dish is a broth made with water and leafy greens (*romazava*), especially those from the cassava plant. Sometimes zebu is added to the soup as a flavoring agent.

The everyday mealtime rice drink (ranonapango) is unequivocally the most customary of Malagasy beverages, but other interesting choices can be found all over the island. Along with the introduction of sugar plantations came the production of a potent local rum (*toaka gasy*), sometimes homemade and always present on special occasions. Other alcoholic beverages typical of the island are lychee liquor (Litchel), local Three Horses Beer (*THB*), fermented sugarcane juice (*betsabetsa*), fermented coconut milk (*trembo*), and local wine from the southeastern province of Fianarantsoa. Coffee is becoming popular in urban areas and is locally grown. If someone asks for it "white," it is served with sweetened condensed milk. Lemongrass tea (*citronelle*) serves as an alternative to ranonapango at breakfast or following a meal. Many roadside restaurants (*hotelys*) offer fresh fruit juices including orange, mango, pineapple, strawberry, and the like. Sodas (both local and international) and bottled water are gaining popularity in cities throughout Madagascar.



Romazava, a typical dish of Madagascar, is made with water and leafy greens (romazava), especially those from the cassava plant. (Mark Waddle | Dreamstime.com)

## Cooking

Traditionally, the cooking area of most Malagasy homes was located in a kitchen outside the house to minimize the threat of fire. In some cases, this is still true today, but in urban areas houses will have kitchens. The dishes are prepared using various cooking methods including grilling, frying, or boiling in liquid (water, meat or vegetable broth, milk, and coconut milk). Milk is considered the most valuable of cooking liquids and is typically used to make a sort of rice pudding (vary amin-dronono) that is sometimes flavored with honey and vanilla. Foods may be grilled directly over the fire or on skewers (*tsatsika*), buried in the coals (root vegetables), wrapped in banana leaves and boiled, or cooked in a pot. Earthenware bowls were the preferred choice for cooking prior to the introduction of metal and cast iron pots. Most food is cooked on portable stoves made of metal or stone. The most typical fuel for home cooking is wood and charcoal. Historically, the chaff of rice grains made for excellent fuel in areas where wood was scarce.

Because rice is such an important part of the Malagasy diet, there is always a granary nearby where

rice is milled and stored. Granaries are elevated above ground to prevent excess moisture and rot of the grains. Mortars and pestles (*leona*) made of earthenware are equally prevalent as they are used to grind rice into a coarse meal, as well as spices, nuts, and other starches.

Smoked and dried meat or fish (*kitoza*) are popular and characteristically served with a cornmeal porridge or soft (sosoa) rice for breakfast. The protein is cut into strips and hung to dry before being browned over a fire. The result is something reminiscent of beef jerky. Pickling is another common method of preserving foods in Malagasy cooking. A variety of fruits and vegetables are used to make these sides (*achards*) served alongside rice at lunch or dinner. The ingredients are first rubbed in salt and left to sit overnight, then heated in a mixture of vinegar and spices. They are left to macerate for a minimum of three days before serving. One of the most popular is made with green, unripe mangoes (*lasary manga*).

## Typical Meals

In Madagascar, meals (*sakafo*) can vary from one household to another depending on ethnic identity, religion, social class, and locality, making it difficult to define a typical meal pattern. Nevertheless, some practices are common all over the island. Most Malagasy families, for example, eat three meals a day and two snacks. Broadly speaking, everyday dining tends to be light in fare, featuring a substantial amount of vegetables and broth flavored with meat. Heavier meals are enjoyed on special occasions and may include dishes with coconut milk and more expensive cuts of meat.

A traditional breakfast might consist of soft rice (sosoa) and dried meat (kitoza). When rice is not available, boiled cassava or soft cornmeal is eaten instead. Sometimes leftovers from lunch or dinner are enjoyed for breakfast the following day. Today, many Malagasy eat small fried rice cakes (*mokary*) or fried doughnut rounds (*mofo gasy*) with coffee. In cities, bread might be served with honey or jam and coffee, and in some cases eggs as well (in hotels), a reminder of the French influence. Typical beverages might include water, local citronelle tea (made from lemongrass), coffee, or a sort of browned-rice tea (ranonapango).



Women work in the rice fields of Madagascar. Rice is the nation's largest food crop. (United Nations)

Lunch is most often the largest meal of the day, featuring the obligatory bowl of rice and at least three relishes (laoka). Hot chili paste (*sakay*) is always present, along with pickled vegetable and fruit relishes (achards). Sakay is made with spicy chilies (*pilypily*), ginger, garlic, and oil and is very spicy. Malagasy food is not particularly hot compared to that of Indonesia or other African countries, and thus sakay is not used for cooking but as a condiment, added based on the diner's preference. An additional meat or stew might be served, as in the national dish romazava, made with beef and an assortment of leafy greens (bredes). The term *ro* literally means "juice" and is used to classify any dish with a sauce, or a soup. Some of the greens used have a slightly spicy flavor (*anamalaho*), somewhat like mustard greens but more pungent, while others are mild in flavor (*mamy*). Seasonal fruit may be served for dessert, sometimes flavored with vanilla and/or coconut milk.

### *Romazava*

Although this dish is traditionally made with beef, other meats may be substituted, including chicken or pork.

**Ingredients**

2 tbsp vegetable oil

½ large onion, diced

1 lb boneless beef, cut into 1-in. pieces

1 clove garlic, minced

2 tsp ginger, minced

1 chili pepper, diced

1 c canned tomatoes, diced

1 small bunch fresh spinach

1 bunch fresh watercress

1 small bunch mustard greens

Water, to cover

Salt and pepper to taste

In a large stockpot, sweat onions in oil over medium heat until translucent. Add beef and cook for approximately 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add garlic, ginger, and chili and cook for an additional 3 minutes. Add tomatoes and simmer for another 10 minutes. Add water and bring to a boil. Add greens and reduce heat to low. Simmer 1 hour or until meat is tender when pierced with a fork, stirring occasionally. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Dinner follows a similar pattern to the lunchtime meal but is sometimes slightly lighter. In addition to rice, sakay, and achards, meats or vegetables might also be served. A typical vegetable dish (*vary amin anana*) calls for mixed leafy greens, tomatoes, and onions to be simmered in water together with a small amount of meat. Fresh salads (*lasary*) also accompany the meal. Dessert usually consists of seasonal fruit mixed together with sugar and vanilla. Rice tea (ranonapango) is the beverage of choice served with both lunch and dinner, but water or lemongrass tea may be substituted.

Snacks are very popular in Madagascar and can be found in markets, street stalls, or roadside restaurants (hotelys). They can include rice flour and fruit cakes cooked in banana leaves (*koba ravina*), skewered beef (*masikita*), Indian-style meat or vegetable fritters (sambos), fried locusts and other insects, small doughnuts (*mofo menakely*), sweet rice and peanut cakes baked in banana leaves (*koba*), sliced fresh coconut, fruits and their juices, yogurt, and grilled cassava. In cities it is not uncommon to find French bread and pastries like croissants, cakes, and baguettes available throughout the day.

As in any culture, the way a meal is eaten in Madagascar is significant and shaped by social norms. Traditionally, all meals were served on the ground using mats for the food and for seating. In some rural communities this is still a common practice, but Malagasy people living in cities prefer to sit at tables during a meal. Typically, there is no progression of courses, as in many Western meals, with the exception of fruit and rice tea (ranonapango), which follows the meal because it is made from the browned rice left at the bottom of the cooking pot. Before the introduction of modern dinnerware, earthenware pottery was used for cooking and serving food. Historically, gourds were used as bowls for storing food and for individual use at mealtime, but in contemporary Madagascar the use of modern plates and bowls is the norm. All components of the meal were eaten together on the same plate or even shared out of a communal pot in the past, but today individual plates are favored. Spoons are the eating utensils of choice, traditionally made from zebu horns or pottery but mostly from stainless steel today.

In traditional Malagasy culture, social hierarchy surrounded the meal, dictating the order in which food was served to each person. When families ate together, older men were always served first and received the best share of the meal. Likewise, the youngest children were served before their older siblings to ensure adequate nourishment. When food was passed from one person to another, it was considered polite to hold the wrist with the opposite arm. It was not unusual for male and female family members to eat separately, and the eldest always received first dibs. Roles of men and women are somewhat less stratified today, but many of the old customs prevail in spite of these changes.

## Eating Out

Eating out is a relatively recent phenomenon in Malagasy culture, having been introduced by the French and other foreign inhabitants. The tourism industry

has also played a key role in its growth. However, many Malagasy people still believe the best food is found in the home. Restaurants (*restos*) are virtually exclusive to cities and towns, with only a few in rural areas. While they are becoming popular among Malagasy urbanites, the overwhelming majority of them cater to tourists, featuring a variety of Western foods like French or Italian cuisine. *Steak frites* (French-style zebu with fries), locally produced foie gras (French-style duck liver), pizza, and pasta feature prominently on menus. Chinese restos are beginning to appear as a popular alternative to traditional cuisine. Here, bowls of fried noodles with vegetables and meat (*mi sao*) and noodle soup with fish, chicken, or vegetables (*soupe chinoise*) are typical menu offerings. Indian restaurants are appearing in various cities and towns as well. Regardless of the type, every restaurant has something in the way of traditional Malagasy cuisine available. Many restaurants offer an assortment of beverages including local tea, wine, beer, and liquors. Some of the more expensive French restaurants carry a selection of French wines.

Malagasy locals tend to patronize small roadside eating huts (hotelys), as they offer fast service, inexpensive traditional foods, and a more casual atmosphere. Some can be found in smaller towns and less populated areas. These small stands serve classic fare including rice (vary) with assorted accompaniments (*kabaka*) like beef, chicken, pork, fish, or vegetables. In coastal areas they might serve boiled and roasted crayfish and other seafood dishes. Apart from the market, hotelys are the best place to find snacks. Fruit juices, local yogurt, and Three Horses beer might be available as well.

In the largest cities, especially Antananarivo, tea cafés (*salons de the*) have become prevalent, thanks to the French cultural influence. Most offer a selection of French breads and pastries, and sometimes sandwiches or light meals. Locally grown tea and coffee are always available.

Malagasy chocolate is highly regarded in places like Europe or the United States but is surprisingly scarce in local cuisine. It can be found in Malagasy markets, but the majority of the harvest is sent overseas. There is one French bakery in Antananarivo called Chocolate Robert that offers high-quality pastries, candies, hot chocolate, and the like. It is said to rival any patisserie (pastry shop) found in Paris and is very popular with Malagasy natives, foreign residents, and tourists alike.

## Special Occasions

Celebrations, festivals, and religious holidays are an important part of life in Madagascar. With such a large population of Christians, holidays like Easter and Christmas are celebrated as national holidays. Baptisms, circumcisions, and first communions are considered special as well. Traditional ancestral rituals have given rise to a number of other festivals and celebrations. And every special occasion in Madagascar is not complete without great feasts and plenty of singing and dancing.

One of the most celebrated events in Malagasy life is the Turning of the Bones festival (famadihana), in which the bodies of ancestors are exhumed from their burial sites, re-dressed, and then moved to the ancestral tomb, where they are buried a second time. In Malagasy culture, the worship of ancestors (*razana*) is based on the belief that they oversee the lives of the living, rewarding or punishing them accordingly. At least one zebu cow is slaughtered during the festival, as it is considered an offering to the ancestors. The horns are used to decorate the tombs of the dead, and the meat is eaten during the celebrations. The local homemade rum (toaka gasy) is seen as an offering and is consumed by participants in copious amounts. Drunkenness is not unusual. In fact, a glass of toaka gasy might even be served to the ancestor's remains after they are exhumed from the tomb, a custom that is meant to show honor to the dead. As with other celebrations, a feast is served including plenty of beef, rice, and accompaniments; it is followed by singing and dancing.

The Festival of Rice falls sometime in April or May every year and is intended as a celebration of the rice harvest. In the past, each family performed a ceremony in which prayers, various parts of the rice plant, and the toasted rice meal lango were given as offerings of thanks to the ancestral gods. For this reason, the rice harvest became a sign of wealth and prosperity. It was taboo (fady) for any rice to be consumed before the ceremony. Although the festival is

not as strictly followed today, it remains a period of great celebration where extended family and friends gather together to eat, sing, dance, and enjoy one another's company. Dishes with fatty cuts of meat and coconut milk are enjoyed. One such recipe might be chicken stewed in coconut milk with tomatoes and onions (*akoho sy voanio*).

***Akoho sy Voanio***

**Ingredients**

2 tbsp vegetable oil

1 whole chicken, cut up

2 onions, diced

2 cloves garlic, minced

2 tsp ginger, minced

1 can diced tomatoes

1 can unsweetened coconut milk

Salt and pepper to taste

In a large stockpot, heat oil over medium heat. Season chicken with salt and pepper, then sauté for about 10 minutes, turning occasionally. Remove the chicken from the pot and set aside. Add onions to the pan and sauté until golden brown, about 10 minutes. Add garlic and ginger, and continue to sauté another 3–4 minutes, stirring frequently. Add the tomatoes to the mixture, and cook for 10 more minutes, stirring from time to time. Return the chicken to the pot and add the coconut milk. Bring mixture to a gentle boil and immediately reduce heat to low, being careful not to curdle the coconut milk. Simmer for at least 30 minutes and adjust the seasonings.

## Diet and Health

Madagascar has a long history of traditional medical practices (*fanafody*) that are strongly linked with the worship of ancestors. Although modern, Western hospitals and clinics are beginning to appear, they are mostly located in cities and towns, making access difficult for those living in rural areas. In addition, many Malagasy people view Western medicine, as a relatively new form of health care, with suspicion. Consequently, traditional health care is still commonplace, particularly in remote locations. Regional variations occur in methodology and treatment, but most adhere to the belief that illness is a punishment for behavior not pleasing to God—the traditionally accepted God (*Zanahary*) or the God of Christianity (*Andriamanitra*)—or the ancestors.

Traditional healers (*ombiasy*) are employed for both physical and spiritual healing, relying heavily on herbal remedies. An ombiasy is believed to have the powers of divination—connecting with the ancestors and the spirit world—to help individuals suffering from spirit possession and diagnose a variety of other illnesses. Indigenous plants and leaves are commonly used, often steeped in water as a tea or bundled and placed under the patient's bed. These herbs are believed to remedy a number of maladies including headaches, common colds, nausea, toothache, and many others. The greens (bredes) so prevalent in cooking today, for example, were first used as medicine, slowly earning a place in everyday life. Spices, roots, and animal bones are part of the ombiasy medical repertoire as well. Markets are the best place to find them; stalls overflowing with various herbal concoctions are everywhere, overseen by ombiasy eager to find patients to purchase their wares.

Rice, too, is believed to have healing properties; the soft version (sosoa) is typically served to the sick. The Malagasy believe that children are well only if they eat enough rice. Toasted, ground rice flour (lango) is considered the food of the ancestors and thought to be restorative to the health.

Perhaps the greatest threat to Malagasy health is malnourishment and the lack of potable water. As one of the poorest nations in the world, sanitation standards and access to electrical power, transportation, and running water are well below those of the West. And with 70 percent of the population living on less than one dollar a day, access to food is a serious problem. Thirty-eight percent of the population is undernourished, mostly from insufficient caloric consumption and protein deficiencies. Forty-five percent of children under the age of three have

stunted growth, a result of their mothers' poor diet during pregnancy. The average life expectancy is only 55 years. Cities have the best living conditions and access to plenty of food by comparison to rural areas.

*Jennifer Hostetter*

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# Mauritania

## Overview

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania is a country in northwestern Africa. Its western border is the Atlantic Ocean; to the southwest is Senegal; Mali is on the east and southeast, Algeria to the northeast, and the Western Sahara to the northwest. Mauritania was named after the ancient Berber kingdom of Mauretania. It was part of French West Africa from 1860 until gaining its independence in 1960. It is sparsely populated, with about three-quarters of its land being made up of desert or semidesert. The majority of the population is of Berber, Arab, Tuareg, and Fulani descent and still lives a nomadic or seminomadic existence. However, many of these nomadic people have been driven into urban areas from long periods of drought. Almost all of the population is of the Islamic faith.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Lina lives in Mauritania's capital city, Nouakchott. Lina and her daughter, Hawa, go to the market in the Ksar. Lina must go to the market every day to buy food because little to no refrigeration is available. In the hot season, it is necessary to go to the market to buy food for each meal because food can spoil after only a few hours. Many of Mauritania's people still rely on subsistence farming to live. Lina and Hawa live in an urban area, so most of what they consume is purchased in the market. Lina and Hawa are lucky to live in Nouakchott because they have a greater variety of items available to them than if they lived in a smaller town or village.

The market is organized in sections. Different boutiques and vendors specialize in specific products. There are separate sections where butchered meat, vegetables, fruits, bread, and housewares are available. Small grocery stores are rare but may be found in larger cities like Nouakchott. These are typically for Mauritanians who are better off or are Western expatriates. The grocery stores are unique in that their prices are fixed. In the market, people are expected to bargain for the price of the item they are buying.

## Major Foodstuffs

Rice is a staple in the Mauritanian diet. It accompanies many dishes of fish, meat, and vegetables and is often mixed into stews. Mauritania's coastline is one of the world's richest fishing grounds, and there are many preparations of fish in the Mauritanian cuisine. Mauritanians in general prefer to eat dried fish, which is often served alongside rice. Lamb and camel meat are most often eaten. Dates are an integral part of Mauritanian cuisine because they provide both calories and minerals. They are typically eaten at the end of the meal or as a snack. Dates are available in abundance; Mauritanians consume all the dates that are grown there and do not export any.

The type of food Mauritanians eat largely depends on location and ethnic group. In the north, there is a more limited variety of foods, and the food itself is typically blander than in the south due to the influence of the nomadic Moors. The Moors relied mostly on food that traveled well and did not have to be cultivated, which limited the variety in their diet. In the north, Mauritanians eat mostly meat,




Women sit on the beach with their freshly cleaned fish in Nouakchott, Mauritania. (Attila Jandi | Dreamstime.com)

rice, and couscous. In the south, they have an abundance of fish, vegetables, and some fruits—mainly due to climate. The northern part of Mauritania is dry and arid, while in the south they have the Senegal River as a water resource and higher average rainfall. This environment is much more conducive to land cultivation, which accounts for the variety of fruits and vegetables in the diets of Mauritanians living in the south.

## Cooking

How one cooks in Mauritania is largely determined by where and how one lives. Nouahdibou has a higher standard of living due to higher economic development from fishing industries. Many of the better-off people in this city cook in Western-style kitchens with electric appliances and running water. In smaller, more rural areas, the kitchen may be located outside or in a separate area of the home. Oftentimes the kitchen is merely a covered structure. A small burner or burners, set on the ground and fueled by gas, is often the only means by which to cook. Nomads may use an open fire to cook their food, which usually involves a tripod that has a wok-like vessel hanging in the center over an open fire. Mauritanians use a lot of vegetable oil in their food preparation because it increases the calories in the meal. In addition, the high quantity of oil allows the food to be compressed so that it is easy to pick up and put in one's mouth.

## Typical Meals

The variety of dishes in Mauritania is quite limited. Typically, a family will eat the same foods for breakfast every day, and even lunch and dinner may vary little. For breakfast, people eat a porridge made of millet and served with milk and sugar. French bread

and butter is also a favorite breakfast food. It is usually served between 7 and 8 A.M.

The main meal of the day varies by culture. Black Africans prefer to make lunch the main meal, whereas Arab-Berbers have their main meal in the evening. In the south, the favorite lunch item is a Senegalese dish, *chub u gin* or *chubbagin,* which consists of rice and fish. It may be accompanied by vegetables such as eggplant, carrots, peppers, potatoes, and/or a green leaf called *bissap.* If fish is not available, goat or lamb may be substituted. *Yassa,* a simple dish of rice with onion sauce, is also popular. Lunch is usually served between 2 and 3 P.M.

Dinner is often couscous, which may be accompanied by goat or lamb. For special occasions, at dinnertime, people will have a plate of couscous with a goat's head on top. Dinner is usually served between 8 and 10 P.M. During Ramadan, dinner may be served as late as 11 P.M.

Camel meat is a Mauritanian specialty. The following is a traditional version of the national dish.

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***Chubbagin***

1 lb camel meat, cut into cubes (lamb may be substituted)

¾ c vegetable oil

2 tbsp tomato paste

1 onion, coarsely chopped

1 small eggplant, cut into chunks

2 carrots, cut into chunks

1 small cabbage, cut into wedges

1 large sweet potato, peeled and cut into chunks

1 smoked and dried fish

1 tbsp red pepper flakes, or to taste

1 garlic clove

1 small handful hibiscus leaves

2 lb rice

1 bouillon cube

Salt and black pepper to taste

Fry the meat in the oil to brown on all sides. Add the tomato paste and a little water. Stir to coat the meat. Add the onion, and season. Cook until the onion softens, then add the other vegetables, including the garlic. Continue to cook, adding more water if necessary. Finally, flake the dried fish and add to the pot. Add the red pepper and hibiscus leaves. Cover and cook for 30 minutes. Carefully remove the meat and vegetables and place in a bowl. Pour the rice into the remaining liquid, add the bouillon cube, and cook until rice is tender. Remove the rice to a serving tray, and place the meat and vegetables on top to serve.

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The ritual way of eating is important in Mauritania. There are no utensils—the meal is eaten with the right hand. The left hand is forbidden by Islam since it is seen as unclean. Food is usually served in a large bowl or plate that is placed on the floor, with everyone gathering around the dish. If there are a lot of people, there may be two or three dishes. Each person has an area of the dish that is considered his to eat. One must eat only the portion of food that is directly in front of one. If a desirable piece of food is lying outside this portion, one must ask if one may have it. Others will usually oblige and place it on one's portion of food. The meat is usually placed in the center of the dish, and the host will tear off the best pieces for visitors and guests.

The tea ceremony is very important in Mauritania. It is seen as a social event and a show of hospitality. It is believed to alleviate hunger, thirst, and fatigue. Tea is served at every meal. Green tea from China is typically consumed, or sometimes mint tea. The ritual of preparing and drinking tea can often take three hours. Three glasses of tea are usually drunk. There are three conditions in the ceremony of making tea: *ijmari*—placing the teapot on the charcoal embers; *jar*—slowly infusing tea leaves, serving, and drinking; and *jmaa*—assembling people. Each glass symbolizes a different aspect of life. The first glass is strong and bitter to represent death. For the second glass of tea, the pot is set back on the fire with mint and sugar in it. The flavor of the second glass is strong and sweet, symbolizing love. The last glass is a combination of the first two and is meant to symbolize life.

The actual act of serving the tea is also quite time-consuming and symbolic. The amount of foam in one's glass is indicative of how welcomed one is by the person who is preparing the tea. If there is a lot of foam—perhaps half the glass—one is welcomed, and the host greatly enjoys one's company. Very little or no foam means that the host is merely serving the tea to the guest as a hospitable, moral obligation. The foam is created by pouring the tea from one glass to another, often holding the glasses far apart and letting the tea cascade down into the glass. Foam in the tea is important because it takes time and care to produce it, showing that the host enjoys one's company.

## Eating Out

In Mauritania, eating mostly takes place in the home. That being said, there are restaurants of many ethnicities such as Moroccan, Lebanese, Chinese, and French located in the larger cities like Nouakchott. Foreign cuisines generally dominate the restaurant scene in the larger cities. Local cuisine like lamb, goat, and rice is available at restaurants throughout the country. Restaurants have improved in recent years due to better distribution of food. A typical meal may cost US$7 to $10. Eating on the street is also popular. One can buy nuts, fritters or donuts, cooked meats, and tea.

## Special Occasions

Festivals are celebrated all over Mauritania. Many of them are religious celebrations, such as the New Year, as well as more secular festivities like Independence Day. Often the feasts at these celebrations include a whole roasted goat or lamb. Sometimes, the head of the goat is roasted whole and served on top of couscous.

Animal sacrifice is a food custom that often takes place at ceremonial occasions. At the end of Ramadan, a married man is expected to offer a lamb. The meat of the lamb must be eaten within three days. It is also traditional to offer an animal on occasions like name-giving, initiation, marriage, and funeral ceremonies.

## Diet and Health

Religion influences Mauritanian dietary practices in many ways. Almost all Mauritanians are Sunni Muslims. Sunni is the largest denomination of Islam and means the words, actions, or example of the Prophet Muhammad. Mauritanians consume only halal food, which Islamic law dictates is the only food that is permissible to eat. Halal meat must be slaughtered in the way set out by Islamic law. The animal must be killed quickly, with the knife slitting the throat while a prayer is said and the name of Allah is spoken. The Quran explicitly forbids the consumption of the following foods: pork; blood; carnivorous birds of prey; animals slaughtered to anyone other than the name of Allah; carrion; an animal that has been strangled, beaten (to death), killed by a fall, gored (to death), or savaged by a beast of prey; fish that have died out of water; food over which Allah's name is not pronounced; and alcohol.

In Mauritania, the cultural ideal of beauty encourages young women to eat foods high in fat so that they gain weight. A person who is overweight by Western standards is instead considered beautiful in Mauritania. This practice is slowly diminishing as the influence of Western culture through television shows and movies takes effect.

*Annie Goldberg*

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# Morocco

## Overview

Morocco is in North Africa. It is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean on the west, the Mediterranean Sea on the north, and Algeria on the east and southeast. The southwestern border of the country is in dispute, because Morocco and Mauritania both claim the arid, sparsely populated Western Sahara territory. The country is dominated by mountains, primarily the Rif chain along the Mediterranean coast and the three much higher Atlas ranges (from northeast to southwest, the Middle Atlas, High Atlas, and Anti-Atlas), which roughly parallel the Atlantic coast some 100 to 150 miles inland. The population is largely concentrated around the Mediterranean coast in the northeast, in the plains running inland from the Atlantic north of Rabat, and in the central plateaus of the Atlas. The least populous part of the country is the southeastern slopes of the High Atlas and Anti-Atlas mountains, which lead down to the Sahara desert.

Before the coming of Islam in the seventh century, North Africans spoke languages of the Berber family. At present, the overwhelming majority of Berber speakers are concentrated in Morocco; scattered islands of Berber speech survive as far east as Egypt. Though three-quarters of Moroccans are of Berber ancestry, only perhaps 40 percent still speak the language, most of them in the highlands and the far south, with the rest of the country now speaking Arabic. Culturally, there is little difference between Arabs and Berbers. Many city dwellers also speak French.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Lahsen and Fatma Ben Hammoud; their son, Merwan; and Fatma's mother, Meryem, live in a four-room house in Fez, the country's fourth-largest city. Lahsen works as a tourist guide in Fez's huge and mazelike medieval *souq* (market). Their diet is typical of the lower middle class. They shop for meat, dairy products, and vegetables in the souq, but they also raise herbs, a few vegetables, and four chickens in their small backyard.

## Major Foodstuffs

The Moroccan diet is based on grains, primarily wheat and, to a smaller degree, barley, which provide about two-thirds of the daily calorie intake. Wheat is made into couscous, bread, and pastries, and both wheat and barley appear as porridges and soups. Morocco is no longer self-sufficient in grain and imports about one-third of the wheat it consumes.

The country raises 17 million sheep, 5 million goats, and nearly 3 million cattle. Beef and veal are eaten somewhat more often than in other Arab countries. Poultry, primarily chicken but also pigeon, is as important as red meat in the Moroccan diet. The advantage of pigeons is that, because they are free, once one has gone to the trouble of building a dovecote for the semiwild birds to live in, they don't need to be fed. Near the coasts, fish is a major food.

Milk is mostly consumed in the form of *rayeb* (a sweetened custardlike product made by curdling milk with wild artichoke) and *jebna* (cheese), made from sheep, cow, or goat milk curdled with sheep rennet.



Spices and herbs at Marrakesh bazaar. (Corel)

Cheese is usually eaten fresh, but it may be pressed to make a longer-keeping cheese called *ma'sura.* Yogurt is not traditional in Morocco.

The principal fats are olive oil, from Morocco's extensive olive groves, and butter, which is always clarified of its solids and whey into butterfat. This clarified butter (*smen*) can be flavored with spices and aged for months, even years, to achieve a highly prized rancid aroma, which in older examples suggests an aged cheese. The flavor of aged smen is essential to certain dishes such as the stews called *qedra.* In the south of the country, the nuts of the *argan* tree are pressed for their oil, which has a light, pleasant, hazelnut-like taste.

Pulses such as lentils, chickpeas, and fava beans are a significant source of protein. Chickpeas are added to many stews, and all the pulses are used in bean soups and *bisar,* a bean paste flavored with herbs and spices that is eaten with bread. Vegetables include tomatoes, peppers, zucchini, artichokes, cauliflower, fennel bulbs, and cardoons. Eggplant and leafy greens play a somewhat smaller role in Morocco than in Arab countries farther to the east. Cabbage, turnips, and pumpkins are also important. Morocco is the world's third-largest consumer of olives. In most countries south of the Mediterranean, olives are consumed only as snacks, but Moroccan cooks often throw them into cooked dishes.

A striking feature of Moroccan food is the very extensive use of herbs, above all cilantro, and especially of spices, often a dozen or more in a single dish. The famous spice mixture *ras el hanout,* for which there are countless recipes, may contain 30 spices along with other flavorings such as rose petals.

Because of its wide range of climates, Morocco produces fruits ranging from subtropical bananas

to temperate-climate fruits like apples and plums. The important fruits include grapes, plums, peaches, apricots, quinces, pomegranates, lemons, and oranges. Grapes are eaten fresh or dried, and raisins are a very common ingredient in stews. Lemons that are not consumed fresh are pickled in brine, which gives them a sweet, plush, somewhat pinelike aroma. Pickled lemons (*lim mraqqed;* literally, "lemons put to sleep") are added to salads and stews.

## Cooking

A Moroccan kitchen needs only a small range of pots and utensils: a brazier (*mijmar*) for frying, boiling, and grilling; the earthenware casseroles *tajine* and *qedra;* and a steamer called a *keskas* (in French, *couscoussier*), rounded out with a few knives, a mortar and pestle, and some sieves. Modern electrical appliances such as refrigerators and mixers are available in stores. Many people buy meat and produce in small quantities and cook it the same day. Any leftover food is covered and eaten at the next meal.

Couscous, the Moroccan staple food, is called *kesksu* in Arabic and *seksu* in many Berber dialects. In the center of the country it is often called *tt'am,* which is simply the Arabic word for "food." It is neither a whole grain nor a noodle but granules of flour, created by a special process that does not involve kneading. To make them, the cook sprinkles salted water into a bowl of flour and moves the fingers through it in circles so that granules form. From time to time, the flour is sieved to remove the granules and sort them into different sizes for drying. This is a time-consuming process, so factory-made couscous has been available for nearly a century. Many women of the older generations still make their own.

Whether packaged or homemade, the couscous is cooked by moistening it with cold water and then steaming it several times in the top of the couscoussier, alternating periods of steaming with more cold-water moistening and rubbing with butter or oil. The bottom of the couscoussier is filled with boiling water or, to conserve fuel, the stew that will be served with the couscous. Since the flour has never been kneaded, the gluten, the tough protein that creates the firm texture of noodles and bread, has not been activated, so the couscous granules are only loosely held together. This means that couscous must be steamed—if it were boiled, the granules would turn mushy. It also means that the granules can absorb far more water as they steam than noodles do in boiling, so couscous has a light and delicate texture. It can even be made from flours that totally lack gluten, such as barley flour, cornmeal, or, in a few places, acorn meal.

Rice is rarely served as a side dish. It more often appears as rice pudding or in the stuffings of roast birds and *bestilas* (large pies), for which it is steamed like couscous. A kind of pasta called *she'riya,* resembling short lengths of vermicelli, is likewise cooked by steaming, though it can also be boiled in soup.

## Typical Meals

Simple pastries are often served at breakfast. One is a sort of pancake called *beghrir,* which is fried on only one side. Variously shaped pastries collectively known as *rghayef* are made from leavened dough rolled thin and folded to create a few layers. They are cooked by frying in olive oil until brown and puffed and are then dipped in honey. Other foods that might appear at breakfast are cheese, olives, bread, and the bean paste bisar.

The beverage will be green tea, usually flavored with mint and sometimes with orange blossoms, and nearly always served very sweet. Mint tea is drunk not only at breakfast but also throughout the day; Moroccans rank ninth in the world for tea consumption. For serving to guests, tea is prepared in a ceremonious way, and at the end the tea is poured with a flourish from a height of a foot or more above the teacup.

Lunch is a relatively large meal, typically consisting of a soup, several salads of raw or cooked vegetables, and a *tajine* (chicken, lamb, or fish stewed with vegetables), followed by fresh or dried fruit. It comes with round, dense-textured loaves of bread an inch or so thick that are flavored with anise. Many Moroccans knead the bread dough and shape it into loaves at home and then send it to a local bakery for baking.

Couscous is commonly served at lunch, and it is the traditional meal on Fridays after men return from morning prayer at the mosque. Moroccan meals are eaten sitting on the floor, with the diners taking food from a common dish, using only the right hand. The etiquette of eating couscous is to gather the granules into a ball with the fingertips and pop it neatly into the mouth. The stewed meat or vegetables that accompany it are transferred to the mouth separately. The leftover juices of any dish may be soaked up with a piece of bread. Soups are eaten with a spoon.

Dinner is ordinarily a less important meal than lunch. The characteristic foods are hearty soups, but salads, tajines, and couscous may be served. However, when guests have been invited, dinner may be a very grand meal.

Morocco is the only major Arab country that was never part of the Ottoman Empire. As a result, its cuisine shows little Turkish influence—there are no stuffed vegetables or baklavas—and it has its own traditional haute cuisine, which arose in the royal courts. Though everyday meals may be rather simple, for special occasions Moroccan cooks have a repertoire of grand dishes, some of which go back to medieval times, such as *mruziya* (a tajine of lamb with prunes and raisins) and *tfaya* (lamb stewed with almonds).

The grandest dish of all is the bestila, a large pie a foot or more in diameter, typically filled with stewed pigeon, toasted almonds, curdled eggs, and spices. Its name comes from the Spanish word *pastel* (pie), and the basic concept was probably brought to Morocco by Moorish Muslims who left Spain in the 16th century, or perhaps earlier, because there had been considerable traffic between Morocco and Spain since the Moors conquered the latter in the seventh century.

The bestila now bears little resemblance to anything in Spain, because its crust is made from *warqa* ("leaf"), a paper-thin pastry sheet somewhat like phyllo or strudel dough but stiffer and crisper. It is made by tapping a large lump of dough against a heated metal dish (*tebsi*) and removing the thin sheet that sticks once it's cooked. Sheets of warqa are also used for making pastries other than bestila. Most often they are wrapped around a filling (usually almond paste) to make small packets called *briwat* ("envelopes"), which are cooked by frying. A strudel-sized roll of warqa with an almond-paste filling—but baked rather than fried—is called *mhannsha* ("snake-shaped").

In the north of the country, the bestila is usually flavored with lemon, and in the south it is usually sweetened. The north and south also have different tastes in couscous. Throughout the country couscous is most often served with a tajine of lamb, raisins, and chickpeas, but couscous with lamb, caramelized onions, and honey is traditional in Rabat, and in Essaouira on the Atlantic coast, couscous may come with fish and turnips. Throughout the country, people make a dish known as *couscous au sept légumes,* which is served with a tajine of mixed vegetables and, if possible, some lamb. Despite the name, the tajine needn't include exactly seven vegetables. A typical mixture might be carrots, onions, turnips, tomatoes, sweet peppers, zucchini, and pumpkin.

In addition to couscous granules of the usual size, larger and smaller varieties are also made. Extra-large couscous, called *mhammsa* in Arabic and *berkukes* in Berber, is popular in the south. Northerners make an extra-small couscous called *seffa* or *mesfuf,* which they serve with butter, sugar, and cinnamon.

Whole spit-roasted lamb (*meshwi,* often spelled the French way as *méchoui*) is particularly characteristic of southern Morocco and rural Berber regions. City dwellers often make a stripped-down version of meshwi using smaller cuts of lamb and sending them to a bakery, rather than roasting the whole animal on a spit.

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### *Soupe aux Carottes* (Carrot Soup)

*Serves 2*

Fez was the capital of Morocco for four centuries and had a long connection with wealthy and sophisticated Moorish Spain. As a result, it is renowned for elegant cuisine. This dish—something

between a cold soup and a sweet salad—shows the delicacy and refinement for which Fez is known. Fez is also a major citrus-growing area and, citrus fruits play an important role there.

4 carrots
Juice of 4 oranges
1 tsp orange blossom water
Sugar
Cinnamon

Peel and trim the carrots. Quarter them lengthwise and cut out the bitter, woody core. Having discarded the core, grate the carrots as finely as possible. Divide the grated carrots between two soup bowls.

In a mixing bowl, mix the orange juice and orange blossom water, and add sugar to taste. Pour it into the soup bowls. Pick up a pinch of cinnamon between the thumb and index finger and deposit a thin line across each bowl of soup, then repeat to make another line crossing it at right angles.

Serve cold.

## Eating Out

Moroccans usually eat at home. There are grand restaurants in large cities that cater largely to foreign visitors who otherwise would have no place to sample the unique dishes of the country. Otherwise, when away from home, people eat street foods such as fried fish (*hut mqalli*) and the local variety of shish kebab, known as *qotban* in Arabic and *brochettes* in French.

### ***Qotban*** **(Brochettes)**

*Serves 8–10 as a snack or appetizer*

Qotban (literally, "sticks") are typically made by marinating the meat with vinegar, onions, and pepper. This version from the Atlantic coast is more elaborately flavored, giving an idea of the variety of spices used in Morocco.

3 lb leg of lamb
2½ tsp cumin
2 tsp paprika
1½ tsp white pepper
1 tsp black pepper
1 tsp turmeric
1 tsp oregano
3 bay leaves, crumbled
½ onion, minced
3 cloves garlic, minced
¼ c olive oil
1 tbsp red wine vinegar
2 oz (½ stick) butter, melted
1 tbsp cumin

Cut the lamb into about 15 (¾-inch) cubes. In a mixing bowl, mix the cumin, paprika, white pepper, black pepper, turmeric, oregano, and bay leaves. Add the meat and rub with the spices. Toss with the onion, garlic, oil, and vinegar. Cover and refrigerate 24 hours.

Arrange the chunks of meat on skewers and grill until done to taste, about 7–8 minutes, basting with melted butter every 5 minutes. Dust with cumin and serve.



Qotban, a typical Moroccan dish. (iStockPhoto)

## Special Occasions

Nearly all Moroccans are Sunni Muslims and observe the usual Muslim religious occasions: the Ramadan fast and the Feast of the Sacrifice. Since the Muslim calendar is strictly based on the phases of the moon, the Muslim year is shorter than the solar year and the months of the calendar fall about 10 days earlier every year. The foods served at Muslim feasts (*eids*) tend to be the usual special-occasion foods of the particular time of year.

During the month of Ramadan, Muslims are required to abstain from food and drink during the daylight hours but are permitted to eat and drink from dusk until dawn. Eid al-Fitr (the Feast of the Fast Breaking) is a three-day celebration that follows the last day of fasting. The most traditional way of breaking the fast—whether during Ramadan or at Eid el-Fitr—is to eat dates, but the dish particularly associated with breaking the fast is a hearty soup called *harira.* It is basically a meaty broth slightly thickened with a flour-and-water slurry (*tedouira*), enriched with chickpeas or lentils, tomato paste, and any choice of vegetables and flavored with spices, always including some red pepper. Moroccans consume harira at any time of year, but it is particularly welcome after a day of fasting—and above all when Ramadan falls in summer, because of its thirst-quenching qualities.

The Feast of the Sacrifice, Eid el-Kebir ("the great feast"), takes place on the 10th day of the month of Dhu 'l-Hijja, the day that the pilgrims to Mecca sacrifice a sheep (or arrange with a butcher to sacrifice a sheep). Muslims around the world are expected to do the same if they can afford to and to distribute part of the meat to those who can't. As a result, the foods of Eid el-Kebir tend to involve meat. One dish particularly associated with the occasion is couscous with a tajine of sheep's head, carrots, and fava beans.

Couscous is served at both Eids. In fact, couscous is the universal dish at special occasions, such as weddings and the celebrations of births and circumcisions. During the period of mourning after a death, friends and relatives send couscous to the home of the bereaved, who distribute it to the poor.

## Diet and Health

Moroccans consume a Mediterranean diet featuring many fruits and vegetables. Fish is a major food in coastal regions, and garlic and olive oil figure in many dishes. The oil of the indigenous argan tree is high in unsaturated fats. However, it is laborious to produce and too expensive for most Moroccans.

On the whole, the Moroccan diet is rather high in carbohydrates, and in recent decades there has been a growing but not well-understood problem of obesity in urban areas, particularly among women, 18 percent of whom are now obese, as opposed to 5.7 percent of men. This is rate is more than triple what it was in 1980, when male and female obesity were roughly equal. The traditional dietary problem had been malnutrition, which still exists to some extent, particularly among children in rural areas.

A more serious problem in rural regions is availability of safe drinking water. In the countryside, only 58 percent of people have access to safe water, and many people suffer from gastrointestinal infections. In the cities, 100 percent of the water is considered safe.

*Charles Perry*

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# Mozambique

## Overview

The Republic of Mozambique is located on the southeastern coast of Africa and stretches for 1,535 miles along its eastern coast. The country is nearly twice the size of California, with about 309,475 square miles and a population estimated in 2009 to be about 21 million. It borders Tanzania, Zambia, and Malawi to the north; Zimbabwe to the west; South Africa and Swaziland to the south; and the Mozambique Channel of the Indian Ocean to the east. The terrain ranges from rain forests and swamps to mountains, grasslands, sand dunes, and beaches. However, the country is generally a low-lying plateau traversed by 25 rivers. The largest river, the Zambezi, an important resource, flows west to east and cuts the country into northern and southern regions. It supplies power through the Cahora Bassa Dam, one of Africa's largest hydroelectric projects. The capital, Maputo, formerly Lourenço Marques, is located on the coast in the southern part of the country. There are two main seasons: the wet season from November through March and the dry season from April through October.

The official language of Mozambique is Portuguese, a legacy of the country's colonizers, but various indigenous languages are also spoken, particularly in rural areas. After independence in 1975, there was an attempt to remove Portuguese as the official language, but no other language was spoken by a majority of the people. Mozambique's numerous African languages, all of which belong to the Bantu family, can be divided into three groups: Macua-Lomwe languages, spoken by more than 33 percent of the population, mostly in the north; Sena-Nyanja languages, in the center of the country; and Tsonga languages, in the south of Mozambique.

The population is divided among nine major ethnic groups. The largest group is the Macua, in the provinces of Nampula, Niassa, and Zambézia and the southern part of Cabo Delgado. In the northern part of Cabo Delgado and into Tanzania we find the Maconde peoples. The Tsonga are mostly in the provinces of Maputo, Gaza, and Inhambane. The Shona, Sena, and Ndau are mostly in Tete, Sofala, and Manica provinces. Roughly 3 percent of the population is European, Indian, Chinese, Pakistani, or mestizo (mixed race, mainly European and African). These people live mostly in the large coastal cities and are usually doctors, teachers, or shopkeepers or are employed in industry.

The earliest inhabitants, Bantu-speaking peoples from the Niger Delta in West Africa, moved slowly through the Congo basin about 3,000 years ago, in one of the greatest population migrations on the African continent. Over centuries they journeyed into eastern and southern Africa, reaching present-day Mozambique sometime around the first century A.D., where they made their living fishing, farming, and raising livestock. These groups also knew how to make iron. This enabled them to make tools and develop farming techniques that gradually led them to absorb the population of nomadic hunter-gatherers.

By the eighth century, sailors from Arabia arrived and began establishing trading posts along the coast. They intermarried with the indigenous Bantu speakers and created a hybrid culture and language called Swahili. These Arab traders and slave traders

also brought with them the spicy cooking styles of the East. This culture still prevails and exerts a strong influence throughout Mozambique. The name *Mozambique* is thought to have come from the Swahili *Musa al Big,* or *Musa Mbiki,* the name and title of an ancient Arab sheikh via the phrase *Ilha de Moçambique* (Island of Mozambique). The most important of the Arab trading posts was at Sofala, near present-day Beira. Other important coastal ports and settlements were Ilha de Moçambique, Quelimane, and Ilha de Ibo. These ports were the main link between the old kingdoms and the inland gold fields.

In 1498 the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama was the first European to set foot on the territory that is today Mozambique. After rounding the Cape of Good Hope he landed on an island off the coast and claimed it for the Portuguese. By 1510 the Portuguese controlled all of the trading posts, from the town of Sofala in the south to what is now the country of Somalia; and by 1515 they had expanded their control east to Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

Over the next century the Portuguese subdued the inhabitants, whom they forced to work on their farms and in their gold mines. Their rule was finally recognized by the Mwene Matapa group in 1629. The Portuguese called the area *Terra da Boa Gente* (Land of the Good People). Slavery existed in the area before the Portuguese came, but they introduced the practice of exporting slaves, and by 1790 approximately 9,000 people were being shipped out each year. Even after slavery was outlawed by the Portuguese in 1878, it continued for many years.

During the Portuguese rule, the *prazeiros* (Portuguese landowners) formed the wealthiest and most powerful class. Below them were the mestizos, those of mixed African and Portuguese descent; and at the bottom were Africans, who constituted the vast majority of the population. Today, the way people dress reflects the confluence of different cultures as well as an individual's economic standing. In the cities, men wear Western-style suits to work. Women wear Western-style dresses and dresses made from fabric with brightly colored African patterns. Women in rural areas, however, generally have kept their traditional dress of *capulanas* (long pieces of traditional fabric that are wrapped around the lower body). These capulanas are also used to hold their small children around their bodies. They also have retained the traditional head scarf or turban made from traditional fabric.

Today, the country is still divided along both ethnic and linguistic lines. But despite ethnic and linguistic differences, there is little conflict among the various groups. The greatest disparities are those that divide the north of the country from the south. The groups north of the Zambezi River follow a system of matrilineal descent. Many of them are seminomadic, moving every few years to more fertile soil. Because they are far from the capital and most urban areas, these groups show less influence from the Portuguese. South of the Zambezi River, in the Zambezi Valley, the tribes follow a patrilineal descent. To an extent, however, they have adopted Portuguese dress, language, and Christianity, especially the Catholic faith.

Mozambique is divided into 10 provinces: Maputo, Gaza, Inhambane, Sofala, Manica, Tete, Zambézia, Nampula, Niassa, and Cabo Delgado. Maputo, formerly called Lorenço Marques, is the national capital. Its main products are citrus, sugar, and limestone. Gaza's capital is Xai-Xai. It is located between the Limpopo and Changane rivers and has a rich wildlife. Gaza Province is known as the granary of Mozambique due to the fertility of the Limpopo Valley, where there is extensive cereal and rice cultivation. Its main products are cashews, cotton, rice, and maize. Inhambane was established as a permanent settlement by the Portuguese in 1534. It is one of the oldest settlements in southern Africa. The province is characterized by its extensive coconut palms and cashew trees. The main products are cashews, coconuts, and tangerines. Sofala is one of the richest Mozambican provinces, producing primarily shrimp and sugar. The provincial capital, Beira, is built on a plain below sea level. It is also the location of Gorongosa National Park and Marromeu Buffalo Reserve. The province of Manica is essentially agriculturally based and an important producer of a wide range of vegetables and fruits. Its capital, Chimoio, is the center for the trade of agricultural products from the surrounding fertile areas.

Its main products are gold, tobacco, citrus, and vegetables. Tete Province is known as the location of the colossal Cahora Bassa Dam, which is the fifth largest in the world. The city of Tete is in one of the warmest areas of Mozambique and lies on a plateau 1,640 feet (500 meters) above sea level. This province also has the largest number of baobab trees, which are spread throughout the area. Fishing is one of its main products. Zambézia is an agricultural mountain region of extensive coconut and tea plantations. Quelimane, its capital, is an important river port located on the Rio de Bom Sinais ("river of good signs"). The area is famous for its traditional cooking, which is quite spicy. Zambezian chicken, grilled with palm oil, is known all over Mozambique. Products are coconut, tea, and shrimp. Nampula's capital, also called Nampula, is an inland town surrounded by flat plains. Mozambique Island, located off the coast, where buildings are constructed of coral, was declared a World Heritage Site in 1992. Nampula is also known for the Makua tribe, where women paint their faces white with *muciro,* an extract from a root that is also used to paint houses. The area is also known for its cooking utensils made from black clay. Niassa province is the largest and most sparsely populated region of the 10 provinces. Its main products are cotton, maize, hardwoods, and precious stones. Cabo Delgado, the northernmost province of the country, is home to the famous Makonde people, who are known for their sculptures in hardwoods and ivory. The Makonde are also known as a fearless people and ardent followers of initiation rituals. Another cultural characteristic is the tattooing of the body and sharpening of the teeth, both for aesthetic purposes.

Music is a very important cultural tradition. Song serves several purposes, including religious expression, and the relating of current events. Most




Women in the Tete province of Mozambique fishing with nets. (Andrea Basile | Dreamstime.com)

musicians make their own instruments. Their drums have wooden bases covered with stretched animal skins. Wind instruments known as *lupembe* are used by the Makonde peoples and are made from animal horns, wood, and gourds. The gourds are dried and hollowed calabashes, which produce a sound similar to that of a trumpet. The *marimba,* a kind of xylophone that has been adopted in the West, originated in Mozambique, where it is popular in the south among the Chopi peoples. Chopi musicians also use the *mbira,* an instrument made from a hollow box with strips of metal attached to it and plucked with the fingers.

Dances are sometimes linked with religion, and the Chopi are known for their hunting dance, when they dress in animal skins, carry spears and swords, and act out battles. In the north, the Makua men dance around the village on tall stilts, wearing colorful masks and outfits. On Mozambique Island, women perform a dance that combines rope jumping with complex footwork. The *marrabenta,* a form of dance and a type of music, is very popular in the cities.

## Food Culture Snapshot

João and Maria Mutemba are a typical middle-class couple in Maputo. They live in a middle-class neighborhood and have two children, a boy age 12 and a girl age 10, who attend private schools. João and Maria's lifestyle and eating habits are typical of the middle class. They enjoy both Mozambican and Portuguese-influenced dishes. Their day begins with a breakfast of coffee; Portuguese rolls; papaya, mango, or bananas; and preserves. Sometimes breakfast will include eggs, sausages, fried manioc root, and/or leftover meats. Their bread is purchased at the bakery, and the fruit, preserves, and eggs come from the local grocery store.

For lunch their meal might consist of any of the following: grilled chicken or fish with fried potatoes and a salad, *lumino* (fried fish and manioc stew), *matapa* (a stew made from pumpkin leaves, peanuts, shrimp, and coconut milk), *quiabos fritos com camarão* (fried okra with shrimp), or *feijoada de mariscos* (seafood stew). The lunch usually ends with coffee and a dessert such as *doce de papaia* (papaya dessert, a fruit pudding). Snacks, usually eaten around 4 P.M., include *bolinhos de amendoim* (peanut balls), *chamuças* (spicy chicken or shrimp turnovers), *croquetes de mandioca* (manioc croquettes), *camarão grelhada* (grilled shrimp), and pastry with coffee.

The evening meal, usually served around 8 P.M., might consist of a soup made from pumpkin, corn, or manioc; *caril* (the Portuguese word for curry) with seafood, fish, or chicken; *camarão à laurentina* (shrimp in coconut milk); *frango à Moçambicana* (grilled chicken); or *churrasco Moçambicana* (grilled meats) with salads. Dessert follows, with *doce de batata doce* (sweet potato pudding), *bolo de ananás* (pineapple cake), or doce de papaia, served with coffee.

## Major Foodstuffs

Most of the crops originally cultivated in the region have been supplanted by European imports. The exception is millet, a grain that is sometimes made into beer. The diet of rural residents is based on the cassava root, which is called *mandioca* in Portuguese. It is an edible tuber root and a main source of nutritional starch. When pounded, it is a useful sauce thickener. Its importance is testified to by its name, which translates as "the all-sufficient." This malleable food source can be baked, dried in the sun, or mashed with water to form porridge. To substitute for rice and/or potato, cassava can easily be cooked by cutting it into pieces and frying, similar to French fries. In its most common form, it is ground into coarse flour along with corn and then mixed with cassava leaves and water. The resulting dough is served in calabashes. Cassava leaves have a high nutritional value, and their use in many Mozambican dishes makes them a favored food. Corn is the other staple food; both corn and cassava were introduced from the Americas by the Portuguese. Cashews, pineapple, and peanuts, other important foods, found their way to Mozambique in the same manner.

Fish and seafood are some of the delicacies that Mozambique has to offer. Fishing along the coast accounts for one-third of the country's exports. The rivers also provide fish, and several fisheries produce mackerel and anchovies. Maputo is known for its

excellent prawns, lobsters, and crayfish. Calamari (*lulas*) is also very popular and usually served grilled or fried. Crabs, cockles, clams, and various fish such as tuna, red snapper, rockfish, and swordfish (*peixe serra*) from the coastal waters are savored and prepared in a variety of ways, but the most common is grilled over coals. Fish is often just served with a simple sauce made by combining lemon juice, chili peppers, and salt and heating them for a few minutes. The oils used to cook these delicacies are peanut, olive, and sunflower.

Beans are a staple in Mozambique and are used in many traditional dishes. The most common are *nhemba* (a type of black-eyed bean), *feijão-manteiga* (butter bean), and *feijão soroco* (a green split pea). The Mozambican secret to perfect beans is not to stir them until they finish cooking.

Agriculture is by far the largest industry. Rice, also a major food product, is grown in the province of Gaza. The Limpopo River, which runs through the southern part of the province, creates a wide, fertile plain where rice is cultivated. Coconuts, tangerines, and sugarcane are also major crops. The spices that are most commonly used in Mozambican cooking are garlic, parsley, onions, mint, cinnamon, cloves, saffron, coriander, cumin, and red peppers.

## Cooking

Cooking techniques vary throughout the country. In the rural areas most food is cooked over an open fire. Chicken is grilled over coals, and any leftovers are made into another dish and eaten with rice. Vegetables and stews are cooked over the coals in clay or metal pots. In the central and northern regions goats are raised by many farmers and are part of their diet. The goat meat is cooked over coal fires and eaten with vegetables and a white doughlike mixture made from ground maize flour. This dough is used instead of utensils to scoop up the meat and vegetables.

In the larger cities, middle-class families have their meals prepared by cooks. Those meals are mainly Portuguese influenced, although the Goan (Indian) influence is very evident. Most meals are prepared on gas stoves fueled by propane tanks. Charcoal grills are also popular for grilling meats and seafood. The utensils that are essential in a Mozambican kitchen include a *pilão* (mortar and pestle) to pound peanuts and corn, a straw strainer to sift out the small stones and husks from flour, a small mortar to crush garlic and chili peppers, an *mbenga* (clay pot) to soak corn, and a good wooden spoon. Also found are a large pot for soups and stews; a large frying pan; a meat grinder for meats, peanuts, and greens; and a grater for garlic and other spices. Nowadays, steel and aluminum pans are used, but in the countryside good pans are made from clay.

*Piripiri,* the hot chili pepper, is a major contribution to the art of cooking. It is particularly prevalent in the cooking of the provinces of Maputo and Beira. All Mozambican cooks have their own way of preparing the piripiri sauce. The most common way is to begin by squeezing lemons, passing the juice through a sieve to remove the pulp, and simmering the juice in a pan with the piripiri peppers. The peppers are then removed and pounded to a paste with salt in a mortar and pestle. The paste is then returned to the pan with the lemon juice and simmered until thickened. The sauce can be served brushed over steak, fowl, fish, or shellfish that has been cooked on the grill. It is also used to season many dishes.

*Refogado,* a sauce that is the basis of most soups and stews, is made with onions, tomatoes, garlic, and green peppers sautéed in olive oil. Rice is usually served at each meal and sometimes combined in a dish with fruit such as *arroz de papaia* (rice with papaya) and *arroz integral com manteiga de amendoim e bananas* (brown rice with peanut butter and bananas) and served with grilled meats. Rice is also mixed with vegetables as in *arroz verde* (green rice), which calls for the rice to be cooked with a refogado made from onions, bell peppers, cilantro, garlic, salt, and pepper with chicken broth. *Mucapata* (rice with split peas) is an enticing combination of rice, green split peas, and coconut milk from the Zambesia region in central Mozambique. It is prepared in a clay pot and is usually served with *frango à cafreal* (African-style grilled chicken). Peanuts are a main ingredient in many Goan and Mozambican recipes. They are usually ground to a powder and used to thicken the sauce. *Matapa saborosa* (collard greens with peanut sauce) calls for the collard greens to be

cooked with shrimp, coconut milk, ground peanuts, and chili peppers. It is usually served with pork loin and white rice. Another very popular dish is *caril de amendoim e galinha* (chicken with peanut sauce): Chicken is served in a spicy curry sauce that calls for the piripiri pepper.

The Portuguese influence is very evident, mostly in the large cities, particularly in the use of wine in cooking, egg yolk desserts, and salads. Thousands of immigrants from the former Portuguese province of Goa, on the west coast of India, settled in Mozambique, adding a permanent Indian element to the culture. The Indian (Goan) influence is most evident in the southern part of the country. Caril (curry) is prepared using chicken, fish, or seafood. It is usually accompanied by mango chutney (*manga achar*), a hot chutney sometimes served with side dishes such as chopped peanuts, grated coconut, sliced cucumbers, and bananas. The chutney is also served with chamuças (samosas—triangular wedges of fried pastry filled with chicken, shrimp, meat, or vegetables). In the rural areas of the country and in restaurants and homes in the larger cities, we find African dishes such as African-style grilled chicken (frango à cafreal), cassava leaves cooked in a peanut sauce (matapa), chicken in lime-juice sauce (*galinha à Zambeziana*), and grilled meats, Mozambican style (churrasco Moçambicano). Along the coast the cuisine is more Portuguese influenced than in the interior, and in most restaurants excellent fish and seafood are available. In addition to grilled prawns, lobster, crayfish, and calamari (lulas), seafood dishes such as *macaza* (grilled shellfish kebabs), *bacalhau* (dried salted cod), and *chocos* (squid cooked in its own ink) are items on the menu. The food is seasoned with peppers, onions, and coconut.

Traditional drinks abound, and each region has its favorite. Some of the more common ones are made using cashew fruit, manioc, mango, and sugarcane. Normally, the fruits are gathered and washed and left to ripen completely. The fruits are then opened to loosen the seeds and rind, and everything is put into a large receptacle for a day or two. The mixture is then passed through a sieve, and the liquid is bottled and is ready for drinking. *Maheu,* a beverage commonly served at ceremonies or as a snack, is made with corn flour and water. After cooking it resembles a thick porridge. It is then refrigerated and sugar is added. Another popular drink served with food is *shema* (palm wine).

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### *Chamuças* (Chicken Turnovers)

Chamuças are one of Mozambique's most famous appetizers. They are of Indian origin and are common in much of southeastern Africa. But because of the Goan influence over centuries in Mozambique, this dish is now considered Mozambican. It can also be prepared with a shrimp filling.

#### Filling

2 lb bone-in chicken thighs
2 tbsp vegetable oil
2 large onions, minced
1 large tomato, chopped
1 tbsp curry powder
1 tbsp grated fresh ginger
1 tbsp red pepper flakes
1 tbsp garam masala
1 tsp salt

#### Pastry Dough

2 c all-purpose flour
¾ tsp salt
1½ tbsp oil or clarified butter
½–¾ c water
Vegetable oil for frying

**For the Filling:** Place the chicken thighs in a large pot, cover with water, and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer until the thighs are cooked through, about 30 minutes. Remove from the heat, and cool the thighs in the broth. When the chicken is cool, remove the skin and bones and shred the meat. Heat the oil in a large skillet. Add the shredded chicken and all the other filling ingredients to the skillet and simmer for 30 minutes, stirring frequently. Add a little of the broth if the mixture becomes too dry. Set aside.

**For the Dough:** Stir the flour and salt together. Make a well in the center of the mixture and pour in the oil and water. Stir briskly until combined, gradually adding more water if necessary. The dough should be slightly moist and stick together. On a lightly floured surface, knead the dough for about 10 minutes, until smooth and elastic. Cover with a damp cloth.

**Preparation:** Break off pieces of dough and shape them into balls the size of walnuts. Roll each ball into a circle about 1/16 of an inch thick and 4 inches across. Cut the circle in half and place a heaping tablespoon of filling on one side of the half circle. Fold over the half circle to form a triangle. Brush a bit of water along the edges and pinch to seal. Continue in the same manner until all the dough and filling have been used.

Heat 2 inches of oil in a large skillet. The oil is ready when a piece of dough sizzles when dropped in. Fry 3 or 4 chamuças at a time until golden and crisp on each side. Drain them on paper towels. Serve at room temperature with mango chutney.

**Variation:** You can also use wonton wrappers in place of the pastry dough. In this case, place a tablespoon of the filling in the center of each wonton, brush the edges with egg wash, fold in half diagonally, and press the edges together to form a triangle. Fry in hot oil until golden on all sides.

## Typical Meals

Mozambique with its 10 provinces has many regional flavors and ethnic food cultures. There are some differences in the type of food eaten in the interior and the major cities, but there are many meals that are typical and enjoyed throughout the country. Mozambican influence is evident in dishes such as peanut balls (*almondegas de amendoim*); collard greens with peanut sauce (matapa saborosa); rice with split peas (*mucapata*), which is prepared in a clay pot and served with grilled chicken or fish; African-style grilled chicken (frango à cafreal); fish and shrimp stew (*peixe à lumbo*), papaya pudding (doce de papaia); and sweet cassava (*doce de mandioca*). Goan influence is evident in dishes such as chicken curry (*caril de galinha*), chicken with peanut sauce (caril de amendoim e galinha), shrimp curry sauce (*molho de camarão com caril*), steamed rice bread (*sanna*), and chicken turnovers (chamuças).

Breakfast in rural areas is often different from what is eaten in urban areas (see Vignette). It might consist of *mealie,* corn ground into flour and prepared like porridge and mixed with goat milk. The cassava root is also eaten, either baked or mashed with water to form porridge. Other dishes include grilled meats, rice or potatoes, fruit, or leftovers from the previous evening meal. Occasionally omelets and scrambled eggs are served with a bit of meat and bread.

Lunch in rural areas might consist of stews, grilled meats, and manioc. All meat is cooked over an open fire. What is not eaten at lunch is often mixed with rice and served for another meal. Vegetables such as onions, potatoes, cabbage, and tomatoes, grown in home gardens, are cooked as side dishes or combined with leftover meats for stews. The evening meal might consist of leftovers from lunch, soup and bread, or grilled meats with cooked vegetables.

*Maguinha* and *upswa* are similar food staples that are widely consumed. Maguinha is made with cassava, and upswa is made with corn. Both are quite filling and are best eaten with a sauce, but when times are difficult and food is scarce, especially in the dry season, people will eat maguinha without a sauce.

In the rural areas, because of a frequent lack of electricity and gas for refrigeration, *meringues* are used to hold water. They are small containers made from clay and shaped like a balloon with a long neck and a lid. They are usually kept in the kitchen and will keep water fresh for at least three days.

## Eating Out

Most restaurants and hotels in larger towns and provincial capitals offer Continental, Portuguese, and local fare. In villages and rural areas one might find only *barracas* (small food stalls). These small stalls are also found in the large cities and usually serve local fare such as maguinha or upswa and sauce, fried fish, grilled chicken, and local beverages. In hotels and restaurants in the larger cities the fare is varied.



A barracas, or street vendor, in Mozambique. (Amitai | Dreamstime.com)

There will usually be one or two local dishes on the menu along with dishes like *caldo verde* (a green vegetable soup) and other soups, grilled meats, chicken, seafood, fish, fruit salads, French fries, and sandwiches. There are also ethnic restaurants: Italian, Portuguese, Brazilian, Greek, and Indian. Most cities have cafés, *pastelarias* (bakeries), or *salão e cha* (tea parlors) where one can purchase tea, coffee, pastry, snacks, or light meals.

## Special Occasions

Food is a part of many celebrations, and it is customary to serve a meal at parties, rituals, and other social gatherings. At private parties such as weddings and funerals, a variety of foods are found. Regional dishes as well as dishes with Portuguese, Chinese, and Indian influence are very popular at buffets. People celebrate festivals differently across the country, depending on the family's financial resources, regional foods, or religion. For instance, Tete Province, which is inland and separated from northeastern Mozambique by Malawi, has an estimated 1.8 million goats. Locals celebrate festivals by slaughtering a goat and preparing *caldeirada de cabrito* (goat stew made with potatoes, onions, tomatoes, carrots, peas, beer, curry powder, and lemon juice). In Zambézia Province, located southeast of Malawi, a celebration would not be complete without mucapata (rice with green split peas, coconut milk, and chili peppers, served with rice cooked in coconut milk).

In southern Mozambique, animals such as cows, goats, and pigs are slaughtered during Christmas or Family Day and New Year's Eve or Day. These two holidays bring families together more than any of the others, which are public and political events. Usually it is the religious holidays when special foods are eaten. For example, on Easter, meat is not eaten, and most who celebrate eat salt cod, other fish, and seafood. On Christmas Eve, because of Portuguese influence, bacalhau (salt cod) is the fish of choice for those who can afford it. Other dishes that are served for festivals are *caril de galinha à Moçambicana* (curried chicken, Mozambican style), *feijoada Moçambicana* (Mozambican bean stew), *lumino* (fried fish and manioc stew), matapa (collard or pumpkin greens in peanut sauce), frango à cafreal (African-style grilled chicken), and churrasco Moçambicano (Mozambican grilled meats).

Apart from national holidays—most of which are celebrated with parades, songs, and dance performances—Mozambique has few festivals. The public holidays and special events include New Year's Day (January 1), Mozambican Heroes' Day (February 3; commemorating the country's revolutionary heroes), Women's Day (April 7), International Workers' Day (May 1), Independence Day (June 25; commemorating Mozambique's independence from Portuguese rule in 1975), Victory Day (September 7; commemorating the signing in Lusaka of the treaty granting Mozambique its independence), Revolution Day (September 25; commemorating the initiation of Mozambique's independence struggle in Chai, Cabo Delgado Province), Day of Peace (October 4; commemorating the signing of the 1992 peace accords), and Christmas or Family Day (December 15). Each city or town also has its day commemorating its founding. Local businesses are closed on this day, and the city celebrates with parades and song and dance performances. Maputo Day is November 10.

### *Caril de Galinha à Moçambicana* (Curried Chicken, Mozambican Style)

Curried chicken, Mozambican style, is very popular throughout the country and is served at many parties and formal ceremonies. This dish is one of a number of examples of the influence Indian food has had on Mozambican cuisine.

**Chicken**

½ c olive oil
1 large onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, chopped
½ c chopped fresh parsley
1 whole chicken (3–4 lb), cut into 8 pieces, or 8 bone-in thighs

**Curry Sauce**

½ c olive oil
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 large onion, minced
2 medium tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and chopped
1 tbsp curry powder
1 tsp salt
1 tbsp flour
1 tsp red pepper flakes
2 c unsweetened coconut milk

**For the Chicken:** Heat the oil in a large skillet and sauté the onion, garlic, and parsley, stirring until the onion becomes transparent. Add the chicken pieces; cover with water, and cook over medium heat until the chicken is cooked through. Set aside (see note).

**For the Sauce:** In another large skillet, heat the olive oil over medium heat; add the garlic and onion. When the onion turns lightly golden, remove it from the skillet and puree in a food processor. Return the puree to the skillet, and add the tomatoes, curry powder, and salt. Stir well. Mix the flour with 2 tablespoons of water and add to the skillet along with the pepper flakes; mix well. Cook over low heat for 1 hour, adding ½ cup of coconut milk every 15 minutes. Add the chicken pieces, cover, and cook another 10 to 15 minutes, until the sauce thickens. Serve with white rice.

**Note:** After cooking the chicken you can remove the skin and bones and cut it into large pieces before adding it to the curry sauce.

## Diet and Health

In 1975, when Mozambique gained its independence, the government created a free, nationalized health care system. Its goal was to improve the population's health through preventive medicine. They employed nurses to give vaccinations and to educate the population about sanitation and other basic health care issues. They established clinics throughout the country, many of which unfortunately were destroyed during the civil war. In 1992, when the civil war ended, the government began rebuilding those clinics. The government also abandoned a law prohibiting private practice in an effort to increase the number of doctors, whose numbers had dwindled due to the exodus at the beginning of the civil war. Today, the main health threats are malaria, AIDS, and sleeping sickness, which is transmitted by the tsetse fly.

Malnutrition is also a concern and is the most common health problem, mainly because there is a lack of a variety of foods in many residents' diets, and they do not consume an adequate amount of protein, vitamins, and other essential minerals. There is a movement for the population to introduce new crops and change their diet to a much healthier one. As a result, vegetable gardens are being encouraged, and beans, tomatoes, onions, potatoes, and cabbage are being planted. Many people would have to borrow money to buy the seeds to plant these crops because most Mozambicans do not have a bank account. Bananas and cashews grow well in most parts of the country and are part of the local diet. Goats are kept by many, and therefore goat milk is available. For those living along the coast and near rivers, fish and other seafood are an important part of their diet. Corn, which is often ground into flour, is eaten by people in the rural areas for most of their meals. Rice is not grown in the northern region, which means that villagers have to purchase it. Many cannot afford to do so.

*Cherie Y. Hamilton*

**Further Reading**

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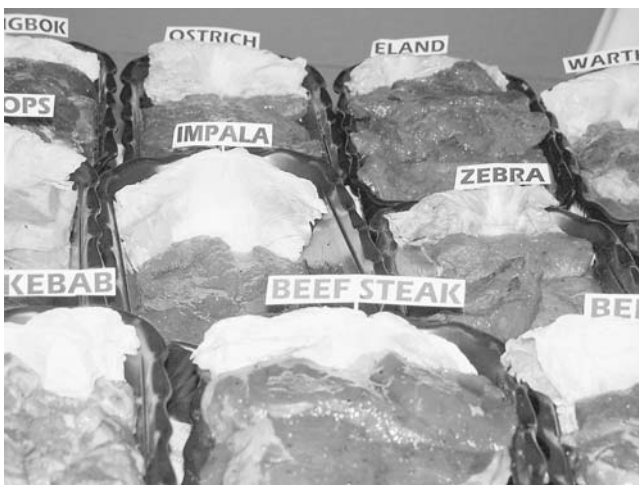
# Namibia

## Overview

Namibia is a country in southern Africa with a land area of 318,148 square miles. It is a little less than twice the size of the state of California. It has a population of just over two million, making it the second least densely populated country in the world, after Mongolia. Namibia shares borders with five countries: Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and South Africa. The country has over 900 miles of Atlantic Ocean coastline, much of it comprised of the western reaches of the Namib Desert, which encompasses over 31,000 square miles and is believed to be 55 million years old. The northern coastline of Namibia includes the notorious "Skeleton Coast," named for many shipwrecks and whale bones that washed to shore during the height of the whaling industry, due to dangerous ocean conditions created by cold water currents, surf, and thick fog.

Namibia gained its independence from South Africa in 1990, ending a long era of occupation that had begun with colonial Germany in 1884. While the Germans conceded claim to Namibia after World War I, their imprint of enforced segregation, relocation, and subjugation of indigenous tribes still echoes in contemporary Namibian society. German occupation was followed by South African control (initially as a British colony, then as a sovereign nation), which brought the system of apartheid to Namibia, further entrenching deep divisions between races by institutionalizing a system of disenfranchisement and discrimination. In 1966, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia formed a guerrilla military response to South African rule, demanding independence. The war was fought until 1988, when South Africa agreed to relinquish its administration of the country. Today, Namibia is a presidential representative democratic republic.

Whites and mixed-race Namibians (Coloured and Baster groups) together make up nearly 14 percent of the population, but the majority of Namibians are black Africans. The largest tribe is the Ovambo, which constitutes nearly half of the black African population of Namibia. The original inhabitants of Namibia are the Bushmen (San), who are hunter-gatherer nomads. English is the official language, though the multinational origins of Namibian society contribute to a country where German, Afrikaans, and Oshiwambo are widely spoken and often represent first languages for many citizens. Namibia is an interdenominational country but with Christians comprising 80 percent of the population.




Various meats at a barbeque in Namibia, including zebra, impala, warthog, and ostrich. (Unique2109 | Dreamstime.com)

## Food Culture Snapshot

Joyce Udjombala is married, with two children. She works as a librarian at a public branch in the Katatura Greenwell neighborhood of Windhoek, Namibia's capital city. Her husband, Thomas, is a middle manager at a power plant in the suburbs. Both Joyce and Thomas are ethnically Ovambo and grew up in northern Namibia but moved to Windhoek for postsecondary education. Joyce's oldest, a daughter named Maria, is an undergraduate at the University of Namibia, studying law. Her youngest, a daughter named Letha, is still in high school. Both daughters live at home with their parents.

Joyce grew up just outside Oshakati, the second-largest city in Namibia, located in the far north of the country. She grew up watching her mother and aunts prepare traditional dishes like *oshifima* (boiled millet) and *potije,* a vegetable and meat stew cooked in a three-legged metal pot. Now, living in Windhoek, Joyce prepares oshifima with cornmeal, more widely sold in the southern part of the country. She makes the thick cornmeal porridge with milk and often serves it with cooked meat. While Joyce and her family all eat their lunches at work or school, they gather most nights for a shared dinner. Provisions for the meal are purchased at the local supermarket on the way home from work and include a meat roast and gravy, canned or fresh vegetable sides, and bread. On special occasions, Joyce and her family will enjoy one of Windhoek's many restaurants, which specialize in everything from Cameroonian curry to *braai,* a grilled-meat tradition from South Africa that has spread through Namibia so widely that it is considered a national dish.

## Major Foodstuffs

In Namibia, a main meal for all ethnic groups is not complete without meat. While cattle are raised and consumed widely in Namibia (the number of cows far exceeds the number of humans in the country), wild game such as springbok, zebra, and oryx is also very popular. Two preparations are most common, the first being the traditional grilled meat called *braai,* an Afrikaans word from South Africa, where the dish originated. This dish is so thoroughly woven into Namibian society that they have made it their own. The second preparation, called *biltong,* involves air-drying small pieces of meat into strips of jerky. While braai makes a meal, biltong is seen in the cities as a snack, though in rural areas it is an important preparation to preserve meat for future consumption. Finally, German sausage varieties are widely available in Windhoek and other urban areas across the country.

With its long coastline, Namibia also boasts an array of seafood dishes. Fresh oysters are popular, along with fillets of hake and kingklip. Namibia exports horse mackerel and pilchard, a species of sardine. Recreational fishing is popular in Namibia, and licenses are available for enthusiasts. A seasonal Ovambo delicacy is the mopane caterpillar, or *omagungu,* which is fried with vegetables and often served with oshifima. The caterpillars can also be dried to eat as snack, much like biltong.

### *Grains and Starches*

Grains are grown and prepared widely throughout Namibia. In the north, millet, or *mahangu,* is the staple crop. Millet is more drought resistant than other grains and can thrive in the unforgiving climate in much of the north of Namibia. Once harvested, millet is pounded and winnowed to release the chaff. It is typically prepared as oshifima, by boiling it with milk and water, and then served alongside a meat stew.

In southern Namibia, white maize is the common crop, so cornmeal often replaces millet when making oshifima. While the wheat industry exists in Namibia, it is a much smaller crop compared to white maize and millet. Wheat pasta dishes are popular in much of urban Namibia, but the pasta is often imported from South Africa, which has much more robust wheat production.

***Oshifima***

*Serves 4–6*

1¼ c white cornmeal or millet

1 c milk

1 c water

Heat a cup of water to boiling in a medium-sized saucepan. Meanwhile, in a bowl, gradually add ¾ cup

of the cornmeal to the milk, stirring briskly to make a smooth paste. Add this mixture to the boiling water, stirring constantly. Cook for 4 or 5 minutes while adding the remaining cornmeal. When mixture begins to pull away from the sides of the pot and stick together, remove from heat. Transfer oshifima into a lightly greased bowl. With damp hands, shape it into a smooth ball, turning in the bowl to help smooth it. Serve immediately.

To eat in the traditional manner, tear off a piece of oshifima and make an indentation in it with your thumb. Use this hollow to scoop up stew or sauce from a communal bowl. Alternatively, the oshifima can also be shaped in the bowl as a vessel, and the meat stew can be poured in and over it and then served.

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Many groceries and markets in urban Namibia offer a range of fruits (bananas, grapes, and oranges) and vegetables (tomatoes, onions, pumpkins, and potatoes), most of them imported from neighboring countries with longer growing seasons and more suitable climates. Much of Namibia is arid and particularly challenging for providing crops the irrigation that they require. However, there are indigenous fruits that thrive in pockets of Namibia, namely, the northeastern Caprivi Strip of fertile floodplain bordering Zambia and Zimbabwe. The *marula* tree bears a plum-sized fruit of the same name with a light yellow-green rind, which is rich in vitamin C. The dark orange *eembe* berry is also prized and is known by the term "bird plum." Both these fruits can be used for making jellies, jams, fruit juices, and even cakes.

While yellow maize and varieties of beans are grown in parts of Namibia, the yield is for feeding livestock, not humans. Nearly half of Namibians depend on subsistence farming for their livelihood, so small-scale gardens and crop cultivation in rural areas are the norm. Groundnuts (peanuts) are cultivated in Namibia but mainly for export to South Africa.

When the Germans arrived in the late 1800s, they brought their culture of beer brewing, which today manifests in the Namibian Breweries' popular brand Windhoek Lager, which, along with an assortment of other lagers and drafts, is sold throughout the country. In addition to imported drink traditions, Namibia has a number of indigenous alcoholic beverages. *Walende* is a distillate made from palm fruit, while *mataku* is a wine made from watermelon. Millet is used to prepare a fermented drink known as *oshikundu,* sold widely in northern Namibia in both alcoholic and nonalcoholic varieties. The German influence on cuisine is not limited to beer and bratwurst. German pastries and cakes are widely available in bakeries and restaurants in urban areas such as Windhoek and Swakopmund.

## Cooking

The most common Namibian dishes are grilled over heat or fire, as opposed to baked. In the countryside, cooking is typically done over a fire, though efforts are underway to introduce solar stoves to take advantage of a plentiful natural resource. Cooking in some exclusive Windhoek neighborhoods largely takes place in kitchens that are outfitted with the full range of appliances one might expect in any industrialized nation: refrigerator, oven and stovetop, microwave, and dishwasher. Across town in more impoverished areas of the city, kitchens would more resemble their relatives in the countryside than their city counterparts. In the most arid climates of Namibia, which is much of the country, both meat and fruit are prepared for storage through a drying process that keeps the food preserved for months.



Outdoor cooking in a small village in Namibia. (iStockPhoto)

## Typical Meals

For rural Namibians farmers, who make up roughly 70 percent of the population, meals revolve around an agricultural lifestyle. A porridge breakfast of oshifima might start their day at dawn before the heat of late morning and midday sends people into the shade of trees or indoors for lunch, which would likely involve a meat dish—fish for coastal dwellers, game or cattle in much of the north and south. Dinner would be taken after a second shift either herding or tending to crops. While both men and women work in the fields, it is expected that women will prepare the meals.

In Namibian cities, many families eat breakfast at home so as to arrive at work between 8 and 10 A.M., depending on the job. Toast, coffee, tea, eggs, and boxed porridge are common dishes. Families with European heritage likely add cold meat slices and cheese to the breakfast menu. Alternatively, some urbanites enjoy *kapana,* or a skewer of beef or other red meat, sold in roadside stands in many neighborhoods of metropolitan Windhoek. These inexpensive sticks of grilled meat are not limited to breakfast, as the vendors fire up their coals in the morning and then sell throughout the day into the evening. While some urbanites return home for lunch, many grab a quick take-out sandwich or salad in the neighborhood where they work at around noon. Dinner is served at home between 6 and 8 P.M. and is typically prepared by the matriarch of the household.

## Eating Out

In rural Namibian villages there are no traditional restaurants, so eating out would involve an invitation by another household, most likely as part of a celebration of life (birth or marriage) or death (a funeral). In towns across Namibia, small eateries sell biltong, simple foodstuffs, and braai. In addition to small-scale restaurants, a range of street vendors offer everything from kapana to fresh fruit.

Windhoek, like any large capital city, has restaurants that run the gamut from fine dining to dives. Many of the most expensive ones line Independence Avenue and feature cuisines that have been introduced to Namibia, such as German, Cameroonian, Chinese, and U.S. Western barbecue. Independence Avenue is also home to malls that offer up dozens of coffee shops and fast-food eateries that sell pizza, sandwiches, and sweets. Joe's Beerhouse is a short drive from the city center and specializes in the array of meat dishes Namibia is famous for, from *sosatie,* the South African term for skewered meat in a spicy sauce, to classic braai. The restaurant Luigi and the Fish specializes in preparing the array of seafood found in Namibia.

## Special Occasions

Namibian Independence Day, March 21, is marked with celebrations across the country. Families will mark the day with a braai, and parties are known for "sunrising," as the festivities continue through the night until the break of dawn. As a predominantly Christian country, a number of holidays are observed widely in Namibia and typically involve meals and traditional dishes. Christmas and Easter often involve meals following church services, where a centerpiece red meat dish would be joined by vegetable and pastry side dishes, followed by dessert. Turkey or goose, while popular in a few households in Namibia, is not common. Rural celebrants would most likely prepare a slaughtered goat. Specialty baked goods such as *veldt bread,* made with cinnamon, allspice, and cloves, grace many a table. In German Namibian households, Christmas would be celebrated on December 24, whereas in non-German Namibian households, the celebration would take place on the 25th.

## Diet and Health

While urbanization has meant exposure to processed foods, supermarkets, and chain eateries for many Namibians, the majority of the country lives and eats in rural villages and towns where their diet has remained relatively unchanged for generations. Namibia has one of the widest gaps between rich and poor in the world, which affects diet and health indicators. While life expectancy in Namibia is an average of 51 years, if calculated along class and

race lines, a more divergent set of ages would be revealed.

*Anita Verna Crofts*

**Further Reading**

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# Nigeria

## Overview

Nigeria is located on the western coast of Africa in the central region. Its name is taken from the Niger River, which is not only an important food source but also an important form of transportation. The country is quite large, approximately twice the size of California, and has a mostly humid, tropical climate. The majority of the topography is plains and plateaus; however, there are mountains to the eastern side of the country and the Sahara desert is to the north. These landscape differences introduce variation in the types of foods that may be grown. The rivers also enabled trading of foodstuffs and the migration of people. The slave trade was established in Nigeria by the Portuguese around 1400, with other European traders and eventually the British taking control and establishing Nigeria as a territorial entity in 1914. As a result, the food of the southern United States has been influenced by the traditional foods of Nigeria through the slave trade, while traders coming into the region introduced Asian spices such as cinnamon and nutmeg.

Nigeria has the largest population in Africa (148 million people) and accounts for just less than half of the total West African population. There are approximately 200 different ethnic groups, and around 500 different languages are spoken; most residents are multilingual. The largest ethnic groups are the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Igbo in the southeast, and the Yoruba in the southwest. These ethnic groups also provide the lingua franca for each region, and their languages are designated as national languages. Government business is conducted and written in English. Despite this ethnic and linguistic diversity, the country is dominated by just two religions (90% of the total population). The northern region is largely Sunni Muslim although there are a number who belong to Sufi orders. Likewise, the Christians in the south may belong to a number of individual church sects, including Catholic, Methodist, Lutheran, Anglican, and Pentecostal.

Although one of the poorest countries in the world, the country is rich in natural resources, including oil and gas but also productive agricultural land able to produce a wide range of fruits and vegetables and support livestock. Nigeria has the second-largest African economy and accounts for 41 percent of the sub-Saharan gross domestic product. Over half of the country's population (54%) lives on less than one U.S. dollar a day. Life expectancy within the country is just 47 years. Families tend to be large, with an average fertility rate of 5.5 children per woman, and nearly 13 percent of teenage women have children. The infant mortality rate is high, at 19 percent (giving the country a ranking of 13 in the world). Literacy rates in Nigeria are better than for sub-Saharan Africa as a whole (69% compared to 59%), but boys are more likely to be enrolled in school (100%) than are girls (87%), and they attend school for a longer period (the average length of time in school for boys is nine years compared to seven years for girls). Economic data from 2007, however, suggest that inflation has fallen in recent years to around 5.5 percent (consumer prices) and that the current balance of payments is positive (exports exceeding imports). Most farming involves animal husbandry as well as crop production, and the majority of farmers operate small-scale farms



One of many street markets in Ibadan, Nigeria's second-largest city. Located about 100 miles from the Atlantic coast, Ibadan is an important commercial center that serves as the capital of Oyo state. (Corel)

of five acres or less that can be managed by hand. The Nigerian government argues that oil is now the primary foreign-exchange earner; however, there has been unrest in the region where oil is produced (the Niger Delta), which has reduced oil exports.

Despite the poverty, this is a country full of hope, creativity, and invention. In the recent past the country was ruled by the military; however, in 1999 the transition from military to democratic governance began, and in May 2007 the Umaru Musa Yar'Adua was sworn in as the third democratically elected president. This event is the first instance in Nigeria of a peaceful handover from one civilian government to another. Like the United States, the national governance structure is that of a federation, with a federal government presiding over 36 states.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Adé and Ṣadé Òyélówò live in an affluent area of Lagos. Adé is a headmaster, and Ṣadé is a teacher. They have three children, a relatively small family by Nigerian standards. Abení, a daughter, is 14 years old. Tunde, their son, is 11 years old. The youngest child, Grace, is 8 years old. All of the children attend their father's school. The family is Christian and is Yoruba. Their house reflects their more affluent standing and has a kitchen with a gas range and a refrigerator. There is a veranda on the house that overlooks their garden, which has mango and orange trees and a small vegetable patch where Ṣadé grows yams, carrots, greens, peppers, and onions. The two girls help her with this.

Ṣadé prefers to go to the local market to purchase most of what she needs. She likes the markets because

she can meet and talk with the market women and she feels that the food is better quality because it is fresh. For example, buying food in the market means she can also buy whole animals and then cut them up herself at home or live chickens that she can then kill when she is ready to use them. She can also get whole spices, such as nutmeg and pepper, that she then grinds in her mortar and pestle at home. Sometimes she will send the girls to the market after school to buy things for her. The market is not just a place to buy fresh food. She can also buy things like cooking oil for frying meat and plantains, sugar, and tea. She buys rice secretly from a woman who also has a stall at the market, because it is now illegal to import rice, so it must be smuggled into Nigeria.

Each day the family gets up at about 5 A.M. They have a small breakfast of thick toast or a porridge made of ground dry maize. The adults drink tea, while the children have hot chocolate. It is Abení's job to prepare this meal, but Ṣadé serves it to Adé on the terrace, where he will eat on his own until Tunde is 15 and will join him. The others eat together in the living area, where there is a table. Although school does not start until 8 A.M., Adé and Ṣadé leave earlier, as they must be at the school by 7 A.M. to prepare. The three children clean up the house and walk to school together later. The school day finishes at 2 P.M., when the three children walk home together unless they have a church or other function after school. The children have a snack on the way home that they purchase from one of the roadside vendors. This snack will often be *dodo* (fried plantains with chili), as this is a favorite, or *chinchin* (fried dough) if they want something sweeter. The snack is important because no lunch is served at the school. Ṣadé arrives home around 4 P.M. after stopping at the market. Ṣadé then starts preparing the evening meal, which consists of stew and either rice, if it is available, or a *gari* (ground cassava root) that is made into a thick porridge. The girls help with dinner preparations as it is part of their chores. Adé arrives home about 7 P.M. Once dinner is ready, at about 8 P.M., Ṣadé serves Adé his dinner on the terrace, bringing it to him on a tray. She and the three children then eat together at the dining table.

## Major Foodstuffs

While a traditional Nigerian meal would consist of a thick stew and a starch, individual wealth, regional location, religion, and tribal affiliation play a key role in determining the specific character of these items. Meat and fish feature in Nigerian cooking; however, apart from those whose livelihood is through farming or fishing, these foods are affordable only to the very wealthy. As a result, a large proportion of Nigerians are vegetarian out of necessity. For those who have access to meat, this would include goat, cow, chicken, turkey, goose, guinea fowl, and pigeon. The country also has a good source of freshwater fish, such as carp available from the Niger and Sokoto rivers, and seafood, including shrimp and crabs. Various varieties of palms are widely available, and as a result palm oil, made from ground palm kernels, is used extensively. There is an abundance of fresh fruit in Nigeria; papayas, pineapple, coconuts, plantains, and mangoes are plentiful. The Muslims in the north do not drink alcohol as those who are caught drinking face strong penalties under sharia law. Non-Muslims sometime drink a fermented palm drink produced locally or wine, beer, or spirits that are imported. Throughout the country men are more likely to drink than women.

While Western foods are available in supermarkets, these are also frequented only by the very wealthy. Ordinary Nigerians tend to purchase traditional foodstuffs from local markets and roadside stalls. Because of this provisioning behavior, combined with the diversity of the physical geography of the country, foods take on a regional character. For example, people from the north, who are also mostly Muslim, have diets based on beans and sorghum; those in the eastern part of the country eat pumpkin, dumplings, and yams (not the same as the American sweet potato); the southern people, who are mainly Christian, eat groundnut (peanut)-based stews (see following recipe) and rice as well as pork; and those in the southwestern and central areas (Yoruba people) tend to eat cooked gari (cassava root powder) with okra stews, groundnuts, mushrooms (which are also a harbinger of the ripening of new yams), yams, and rice dishes such as

*jollof rice*. Finally, those living on the coasts are more likely to have seafood stews instead of meat stews, while those near rivers will include freshwater fish stew in their diets. Foods made with milk and milk products are not common, except in the northern parts where the Fulani ethnic groups live. Women and girls from this region will hawk boiled cow milk (*mein-shanu*), which is then used in cooking. People also use milk in tea and on their breakfast porridge.

**Groundnut Stew**

*Serves 6*

1 stewing chicken or chicken parts (2–3 lb)
2–3 tsp oil for frying
1 tsp salt
A pinch of cayenne pepper
1 yellow onion, chopped finely
1–2 garlic cloves, chopped
4 c water
1½ c natural peanut butter (preferably with low sugar content)
Cooked rice for 6
Toppings: Chopped tomato, onions, pineapple, orange, papaya, banana, and grated coconut

In a large heavy-bottomed pan heat the oil and fry the onion and garlic until soft (5–10 minutes). Add the cayenne pepper. Once the onions and garlic start to caramelize, add the chicken and cover with water to form a broth. Simmer until tender. Once the chicken is cooked, remove the chicken from the broth and debone. Add the peanut butter to the cooking broth and stir until smooth. Return the deboned chicken to the broth and simmer for a half hour or more. If a thicker sauce is desired it can be thickened with cornstarch. Adjust seasoning to taste. Serve over cooked rice (as you would a curry) and sprinkle with fruit toppings.

***Jollof Rice***

*Serves 6*

½ tsp grated fresh ginger
½ tsp cinnamon
1 tsp thyme leaves
½ tsp salt
¼ tsp cayenne pepper
1¼ c chicken broth
16 oz chopped tomatoes (if using fresh tomatoes add 1 c water and 1 tsp tomato paste; otherwise, use the juice from the can)
2 tbsp peanut or cooking oil
2–3 lb chicken pieces
1 medium onion, chopped
1 clove garlic, chopped
1 bay leaf
1 c uncooked long-grain rice
Parsley, chopped

First, crush the ginger, cinnamon, thyme, salt, and cayenne pepper with a mortar and pestle. Combine the chicken broth, tomatoes, and either the juice from the can or, if using fresh tomatoes, the water and tomato paste. Add the crushed herbs and spices to this liquid. Set aside.

Next, in a large skillet heat the oil on high heat. Brown the chicken pieces on all sides (about 15 minutes). Once browned, remove the chicken from the skillet. Reduce heat to medium, and add the onion to the pan and cook in the same oil in which the chicken was browned. Soften the onion and add the garlic. Cook until tender but do not brown. Drain off the fat and return the chicken to the pan. Add the broth and tomato mixture to the chicken and the bay leaf. Do not stir. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 30 minutes, covered. Skim off any fat. Add the rice, making sure the rice is covered in the liquid. Cover and simmer for an additional 30 minutes, until rice is cooked. Remove the bay leaf. Sprinkle with parsley and serve.

A vegetarian version of this dish can be made by omitting the chicken and substituting vegetables such as green pepper and okra and by using vegetable broth instead of chicken broth.

Food in Nigeria is often well seasoned with salt, pepper (*atalodo*), and chilies. Refined sugar, however,

is not traditionally an important part of the Nigerian diet, as many snacks are savory rather than sweet and the norm is to drink water or fruit juice with meals. Examples of snack foods that may be made at home or purchased from street vendors include fried bean cakes, *kulikui* (deep-fried peanut butter), chinchin, and dodo. Where there is a dip, it is often made from chilies. Children buy and sell small, hard candies on the street. Globalization has meant the availability of sugary soft drinks, which are now increasingly consumed with meals instead of water or juice.

## Cooking

Most Nigerian meals are made up of one course consisting of a starch and a soup or thick stew. Frying food in oil as part of the preparation of the stew is very common. Food is cooked on a small portable stove or hearth. The better off may have a gas or electric stove. In modern houses, the kitchen would be part of the house and have similar features to Western kitchens, with a stove, refrigerator, cupboards for storing things, and so forth. In rural areas, however, the kitchen may be separate from the main living area and include an area for the cooking fire with a support for a cooking pot. In these kitchens, where there may be no oven, baking is accomplished by wrapping the food in leaves and cooking it in the hot coals. Indeed, banana leaves serve many functions as a cooking utensil. The leaves are also used as lids for the cooking pot to keep steam in, as well as baking pans. All Nigerian kitchens will also have a mortar and pestle, which may be made of wood or stone, for crushing spices and mashing yams.

In Nigeria cooking is women's work. It is the wife's responsibility to teach young girls how to cook. This teaching is done through demonstration, as cookbooks are rare. Women tend to cook from memory, and a good mastery of timing and volumes is considered a valuable skill that relies on the ability to understand how dishes should taste, how much to prepare, and how long it should take. This practice of cooking by memory and intuition also means that each cook imposes her own tastes on the food. Because food is frequently shared, women aim to achieve a reputation as a good cook among family and friends. Indeed, a number of epigrams are directly related to acknowledging the importance of women's cooking, such as "the way to a man's heart is through good food."

Polygamy is common and legal for all men in Nigeria, though those who are Christian are less likely to adopt this practice. In a polygamous family, wives take turns feeding the husband, but each wife is primarily responsible for feeding and caring for her own children. Particularly in rural areas, however, families live in extended units, and the wives along with aunts, female cousins, sisters, and so forth will often help each other when needed. Because men and women tend to keep their money separate, in order to support their children, women take on jobs to enable their provisioning such as tending the family garden, processing palm oil, or selling vegetables in the local market. Young boys and female children help their mothers with these tasks after school.

## Typical Meals

Breakfast, eaten at five or six in the morning, may be leftovers from the previous day, rice and mangos, dodo (fried plantains), stewed soybeans, or a porridge made from gari (ground cassava root). In wealthier urban households breakfast may be a cup of tea and toast with butter. Lunch may then be eaten around 11, and in many rural areas it is the main meal. In the evening a lighter meal may be taken. Throughout the day snacks are eaten, and for many children snacks are the only time when they are able to eat food without having to share it with their siblings.

While dining tables and cutlery are increasingly present in both rural and urban Nigerian households, this is a relatively recent phenomenon introduced by the wealthy. Traditionally Nigerians would eat with their right hand (use of the left hand is considered unhygienic) sitting around a mat placed in the central living area. This includes soups, which are eaten with a cupped hand. Because many Nigerians think that the eating experience is diminished



A group of men in Nigeria eating lunch. It is customary for the men to eat before the women and children. (FIFA | Getty Images)

by the use of utensils, traditional practices are still observed despite the availability of these items.

Nigerian households continue to be sharply divided along gender lines. This extends into eating practices, whereby the males would eat first and separately from the women and children. It is the wife's job to serve her husband his evening meal on a tray. In the poorer families, what is left on the plate is then eaten by the women and children. In wealthier families, where there is more food, women and children may eat at the same time as men, but they are still separate from the men. Very young children will share their mother's plate, but as they get older they will share a plate with other children of the same sex. When children reach adulthood, in wealthier households they are given their own plate. In households where men eat first, it is considered bad manners for the male householder to eat all the food and leave nothing for the women and children. These gendered eating practices occur throughout Nigeria.

## Eating Out

Because of poverty, most Nigerians tend to eat at home rather than eating out at a restaurant. Restaurants tend to be in the cities and are the domain of foreign visitors and the wealthy. There is the possibility of purchasing cooked food from market traders or small eateries (*bukas*) that serve local foods. Those eating this food are most likely to be men eating while at work during the day, rather than people eating out as a social or family event. Women who work prefer to bring food from home that they have prepared rather than purchase food out, as for

many women it is considered disgraceful to have to buy cooked food.

While eating out in the commercial sense is limited, it is not uncommon for Nigerians to eat out at a friend's or relative's house. Indeed, there is an expectation that enough food should be made to feed visitors, who may arrive unannounced. Within Nigerian custom, all visitors are to be fed, and the more generous the meal, the greater the affection that is being shown by the host. Guests are not expected to eat all the food they are given; instead, this generosity should be reciprocated by the giving of gifts. If a person is invited to dinner at a Nigerian home, it is appropriate to bring fruit, nuts, or chocolates for the host and a gift for the children.

While it is often common to see Americans and British people eating "on the go," Nigerians, partly because of the nature of the food but also because of custom, tend to sit and relax while eating. Indeed, it is viewed as bad manners to eat while doing something else, including when eating food purchased from street vendors.

## Special Occasions

As with most cultures, food is an important part of all Nigerian celebrations. While some celebrations are directly linked to the Muslim or Christian religions, others are linked to ethnic groups or particular regions, while still other celebrations are more national in their practice. The Christian holidays of Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter, as well as Muslim holidays of Eid al-Fitr, Tabaski, and Eid al Moulid, are all officially recognized. Eid al-Fitr celebrates the last day of Ramadan, which is the month-long observation of fasting (occurring in September). During daylight hours, those who are Muslim must not eat or drink. After dusk, families will buy food from street vendors to break the fast. For those who celebrate Christmas, this often involves traveling to be with relatives. Children will open presents in the afternoon. A typical Christmas feast will include *obe didin* (roasted goat), jollof rice, yams, liver, and other dishes.

Many of the regions have festivals to celebrate the various foodstuffs that are indigenous to that area. Examples include the Rgingu Fishing Festival, which takes place in Arugungo in Kebbi state. Arugungo is a village along the Sokoto River, and the festival marks a visit by a dignitary that occurred in 1934. While the original visit was in August, the festival is celebrated each year in February or March to mark the end of the growing season. Thousands of men enter the river with nets or in boats and for 45 minutes harvest perch and balloon fish. The largest fish that is caught is offered to the organizers of the event. What is caught is then grilled (barbequed) and eaten in a communal feast.

Perhaps more widespread are the New Yam Festivals, *Iri-ji,* celebrated in August, and the Second Yam Festivals, celebrated in November to January. These festivals are primarily celebrated by the Igbo communities. Each community will have its own day, much like European and North American communities that have harvest festivals or country fairs. The day symbolizes the conclusion of a work cycle and the beginning of a season. Only dishes made of newly harvested yam are served on this day. Prior to the festival, any old yams, which may have been stored whole or ground up, are disposed of. Before the celebration, new yams are offered to the god or yam spirit, Ifejioku, and ancestors first. Then the eldest and highest-ranking male member of the village will have the first taste of the new yam crop, as this position carries with it the privilege of being an intermediary between the gods and the community. Finally, the community and anyone who is visiting, not just those who grow and harvest the yams, will be invited to eat the new yam dishes, which are different from those that use old yams. The ritual of the new yam is meant to express thanks for the harvest to the gods. Yams are also considered a male crop signifying sustenance, strength, and endurance.

Similar to the New Yam Festival is the Benin Festival, which is held at the end of the rainy season after the harvests have been gathered. Unlike the other festivals, this festival is also intended to introduce marriageable (as defined in terms of wealth) girls to boys. While not all youth of marriageable age

may participate in the festival matching, all of the villagers will participate in the feast. In some places the festival is held only every four years.

At the family level, most Nigerians will celebrate marriage, naming, and death with food. Kola nuts are used in wedding ceremonies to bless the marriage, and guests are invited to taste the symbolic foods used in the ceremony as well as to join in a meal afterward. Eight days after a child is born there is often a naming ceremony, when the child is given its names by its parents. After the ceremony there is a celebratory meal. Likewise, those who attend a funeral will also be invited to share a meal with the family afterward. Meat dishes will often be served at these events, even by poor families. In fact, celebrations may be the only times when less-well-off households eat meat. The purchase of a whole steer is not uncommon for such occasions, but unlike many westerners, Nigerians will use the whole animal, including the organs, feet, and head. What is not edible will be used in other ways.

## Diet and Health

Given the relative productivity of the land and the possibility of growing a large variety of fruits and vegetables, the country offers the potential for providing access to a good, well-rounded diet. Indeed, recent estimates suggest that the average Nigerian's daily calorie supply is around 2,700. However, the extreme poverty of so many can be linked to health inequalities that are directly related to or are impacted on by diet. Of children under the age of five, about 39 percent are underweight, and over 39 percent are stunted (short for their age). Just over one-quarter of all children under five (27%) are estimated to be malnourished. Many in Nigeria also suffer from vitamin A deficiencies, which can result in blindness; these deficiencies result from inadequate access to greens, orange fruits and vegetables, and protein. As is the case with food supplies, access to clean drinking water is also divided by class. Just 51 percent of the population has access to safe drinking water, while the remainder are susceptible to waterborne diseases such as bacterial and protozoal diarrhea, hepatitis A and E, and typhoid fever. Nigeria is also in a malarial zone. These diseases can also contribute to vitamin A deficiency.

Finally, while malnutrition and water-related illness certainly contribute to the short life expectancy, AIDS also takes its toll. Today, the estimated life expectancy of Nigerian men and women is 47 years. Nearly three million adults in Nigeria are living with AIDS or HIV. Antiretrovirals, which are used to treat AIDS, are costly and require doctor support; also, the person must take the drugs with food and must take them several times a day. Access to food and water plays an intrinsic role in the life chances of Nigerians today, because without access the cycle of poverty is further exacerbated.

Intergenerational transfer of illnesses such as AIDS and illnesses related to vitamin and mineral deficiencies such as goiter, night blindness, and rickets are also linked to poverty. The estimated infant mortality rate was over 7 percent, or about 74 infant deaths for every 1,000 live births. Importantly, newborns in Nigerian societies are regarded with pride. They represent a community's and a family's future and often are the main reason for many marriages (a large proportion of Nigerian households are characterized by polygamy). Throughout Nigeria, the bond between mother and child is very strong. During the first few years of a child's life, the mother is never far away, and Nigerian women place great importance on breast-feeding and the bond that it creates between mother and child. Children are often not weaned off their mother's milk until they are toddlers. If a mother is infected with AIDS or HIV or is vitamin deficient herself, then her milk will not be sufficient to adequately feed her child.

Both Western and traditional forms of medicine are available in Nigeria. The health care system is sponsored by the government; however, because corruption is high and there is a shortage of trained health care professionals, ordinary Nigerians' access to health care is limited. Traditional medicine, also known as *juju,* is commonly practiced and involves the use of a variety of plants and herbs in the cures. Most families also have their own secret remedies for minor health problems. Juju can also involve adhering to food taboos; for example, when suffering from breathing difficulties one should avoid hot

food, kola nuts, and coconuts. Likewise, "slimy" food (e.g., okra soup) should be avoided when recovering from a wound because it is thought that the wound needs to dry out to heal and the texture of the foods will slow this process down. Some traditional remedies involve avoiding foods that, while not related to the characteristics of the malady, when eaten are thought to anger the gods. For example, smallpox is thought to worsen if chicken and grains are consumed because for some these foods are forbidden and the gods will not heal the patient if they are eaten. Finally, the character of the overall diet is also linked to understandings that combine taste with health benefits. Pepper, for instance, is not just used to improve the flavor of the dish but also because it is thought to act as a natural preservative and antibacterial agent and also to reduce the body temperature of the eater, which is important in a hot climate.

*Megan K. Blake*

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# Senegal

## Overview

The Republic of Senegal is located at the westernmost point of the African continent at the intersection of trade routes connecting Africa, Europe, the Americas, and the Arab world. It is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean on the west, Mauritania to the north, Mali to the east, and Guinea and Guinea-Bissau to the south. The country of Gambia lies almost entirely within Senegal's borders, separating the southern tropical region of Casamance from the dry Sahelian regions in the north and northeast of the country.

Due to high rates of urban migration since the 1970s, nearly half of Senegal's 11.9 million inhabitants live in major cities, including the capital Dakar, Touba Mbacké, Thies, Mbour, Kaolack, Ziguinchor, and St. Louis. The official language of Senegal is French, but national languages Wolof, Sérère, Diola, Pular, Malinké, and Soninké are commonly spoken.

Eating habits vary based on region and ethnicity, with the largest differences occurring between rural and urban areas and between northern Senegal and the Casamance region. Though many common dishes can be found throughout Senegal, each ethnic group has its own specialties and unique ways to prepare common dishes. Senegalese dishes generally consist of a cereal base accompanied by sauce. At lunch the base is almost always rice, especially in urban areas. In rural regions, millet continues to be frequently consumed, though, there too, consumption of imported rice is gaining popularity. In coastal regions, fresh fish is the main source of protein, but beef, chicken, dried fish, and beans are also commonly eaten, especially further inland. Pork, although obtainable, is rarely eaten, because the vast majority of Senegalese are Muslim and thus abstain from pork.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Aissatou and Malik Sarr live with their two young daughters in Pikine, a suburb of Dakar. Although they have their own apartment, they eat meals and spend most of the day at Malik's parents' house a few streets away. The Sarrs' eating habits are typical of lower-middle-class urban citizens. They mainly eat Senegalese dishes and a few from other regions of West Africa. Western influence can be seen, especially at breakfast and dinner, though they always have a distinctly Senegalese feel.

Around 9 A.M., Aissatou brings her daughters to their grandparents' house for breakfast. By that time, Malik has already left for work, grabbing a coffee from a street vendor on the way. When she arrives, water is already hot for *café touba,* a spiced coffee, and *quinquiliba,* a tealike infusion. The family eats a French baguette with butter or a chocolate-peanut butter spread before Aissatou walks to the market.

Lunch is the largest and most important meal of the day in Senegal. Aissatou decides what to prepare based on the ingredients available at the market. She carefully chooses the fish or beef, carrots, onions, eggplant, okra, cabbage, potatoes, and cassava (a root vegetable common in tropical climates) that she'll need for lunch and dinner. She chooses spices among tiny bags of



A local market in the region of Casamance, Senegal. (Torsius | Dreamstime.com)

salt, pepper, vinegar, mustard, and dried hot peppers hanging above the tables of meticulously stacked vegetables. Once back home, she begins cooking, since preparation takes over three hours. She boils the meat and vegetables for hours, adding bouillon cubes, garlic, parsley, tomato paste, and peppers to flavor the meal. Aissatou prepares enough for her husband's immediate and extended families. She shares the responsibility of cooking with an aunt, each woman cooking for four days at a time. The Sarrs eat lunch around three in the afternoon. If family members are not present at lunchtime, a portion of the meal is set aside for them. Dinner is a lighter meal served around 8 or 9 P.M. Rice is generally avoided in the evening in favor of millet, the traditional grain staple in Senegal; Moroccan-style couscous; or European dishes such as pasta, omelets, or French fries.

## Major Foodstuffs

Even though Senegal is mainly rural, environmental and infrastructural issues paired with politics that favor cheap international products have left the country dependent on imports for the majority of its food needs. Rice and wheat are most heavily imported, followed by products like powdered milk, bouillon cubes, and oil.

Rice is the main staple in Senegal, especially in urban areas. It has been cultivated in Casamance since the 11th or 12th century. However, most of Senegal is too arid for rice, better suited for growing coarse grains such as millet, sorghum, and *fonio* (an indigenous kind of millet). Today, despite significant political efforts to enhance the production of rice, cultivators are unable to keep up with the country's growing demand, linked to changing

eating habits among groups who once favored millet and to growing urban populations. Senegalese generally eat broken rice, a by-product of rice processing that is less valued on the international market but preferred in Senegal.

Certain processed foods are gaining importance in the Senegalese diet. Bouillon cubes and mustard are used to flavor sauces. Breakfast is dominated by industrialized foods: bread, butter, cheese, instant coffee, and powdered milk. Although drinking beverages during the meal is uncommon, Senegalese often buy sodas (Western brands and local varieties) to serve while entertaining guests.

Senegal has a wide variety of fish, ranging in quality from the highly valued marlin to the bony and inexpensive sardinella, called *yaboy*. In coastal areas, fresh fish is the main source of protein, affordable for all social classes. Dried fish is also commonly consumed, especially farther inland. Beef consumption is widespread, and Senegalese regularly eat mutton, in part because sheep sacrifice is essential for Muslim celebrations. Chicken is mainly eaten among the middle and upper classes or for special occasions, due to its price and the fact that one is generally obligated to purchase an entire chicken. *Niébé,* a bean native to Africa, also provides a significant source of protein, especially among lower social classes.

Vegetables are a part of nearly every Senegalese dish. However, they are often regarded as an accompaniment to the sauce that adds color and flavor, rather than a principal part of the meal. Alongside vegetables native to Africa, like okra, bitter eggplant, and cassava, one finds vegetables introduced by Europeans, including onions, potatoes, cabbage, tomatoes, eggplant, and carrots.

Senegal has a wide variety of tropical fruits, including mangoes, papayas, oranges, grapefruit, bananas, and coconuts. One can also find native fruits like *madd* (*Saba senegalensis*), which could be mistaken for an orange from the outside but inside has seeds surrounded by a bitter, slimy fruit. Madd is sugared, or salted and spiced, before it is eaten.

Many fruit juices are produced in Senegal. The most common, *bissap,* is made from dried hibiscus flowers that give the juice a deep purple color similar to that of wine. Another common juice is made from the fruit of the baobab tree, called *bouye* or monkey bread. When dried, this fruit is chalky with a pinkish-cream color. It makes a sweet, viscous juice of the same shade. *Ditkah* (*Detarium senegalensis*) is a firm, round fruit the size of a small plum that makes a bright green juice. It has a brown shell that is easily peeled to expose a green, fibrous fruit. Juice is also commonly made from ginger, which can be extremely tart or sweet. Like the tea and coffee served in Senegal, fruit juices are often flavored with large amounts of sugar. Members of the Catholic minority also commonly drink wine and other alcoholic beverages, whereas Muslims generally avoid alcohol.

Milk products are most commonly consumed in the form of *lait caillé,* literally, "spoiled milk." This milk is slightly less viscous than yogurt and is sweetened. Most Senegalese primarily consume powdered milk, but the Peulhs, a traditionally nomadic ethnic group of herdsmen, keep dairy cows. Those with family in Peulh villages can often easily access liquid milk.

## Cooking

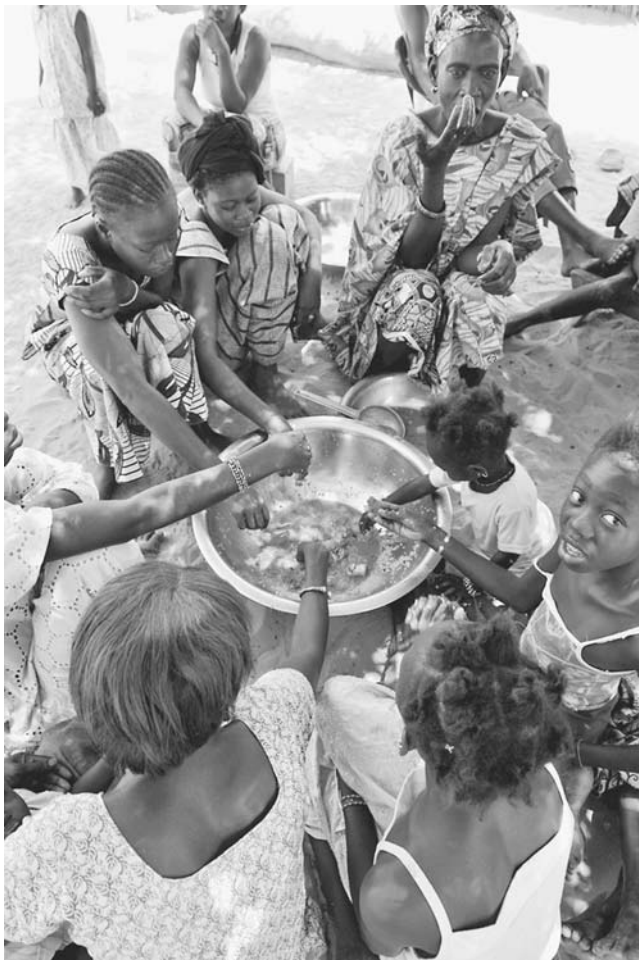
In nearly every Senegalese household, two to three hours per day are devoted to the preparation of lunch. Senegalese tend to have large families and many generations live together, meaning there is nearly always a female family member at home who prepares the family meal. It is also common to hire a maid to help with housework and cooking, even among middle- and lower-middle-class families.

Little is done to minimize cooking time, because the care that a woman puts into the elaborate preparation helps to maintain her family's reputation. Attempting to save time when washing ingredients, mixing spices, or leaving the sauce to boil would be interpreted as cutting corners, which Senegalese presume could not produce a good meal and would furthermore not be considered respectable.

Girls begin to learn how to cook between ages 9 and 12, starting with simple tasks like grinding spices in the mortar. It is considered imperative among all social classes that women know how to cook, even in families where maids prepare the meal

the majority of the time. The idea that a girl would marry without knowing how to cook all the basic Senegalese dishes is considered absurd and embarrassing. Girls take over cooking duties from their mothers in their teenage years, though only during vacation periods and on weekends if they go to school. Daughters-in-law who live with their husband's family are generally in charge of cooking. Though cooking is mainly a female task, as young men increasingly move out of the familial house before marriage, more Senegalese men are learning to prepare basic dishes.

Cooking often takes place in a courtyard outside the house. Meals are prepared in huge cooking pots on burners atop gas cylinders. Wood charcoal is sometimes used because it is less expensive, though more time-consuming, than gas. Small woodstoves or grills are also frequently used. Many middle- and upper-class families have kitchens built into their houses, and some have Western-style cooking ranges, including an oven. Stainless steel pots, large metal spoons, and knives are the most-used items. Onions and other vegetables are skillfully sliced with one hand while they are held with the other. Even in the wealthiest households, spices are ground up by hand in a wooden pestle and mortar. Preparation often includes multiple methods of cooking. Fish is quickly fried before boiling, and meats are often both boiled and grilled for the same dish. Rice and couscous are steamed and are sometimes then added to the boiling sauce.



Members of various families eat a dish served during the mid day meal in the village of Merine Dakhar in Senegal, 2008. (AFP | Getty Images)

## Typical Meals

In Senegal, people of different regions, religions, and socioeconomic classes share a surprising number of dishes. Meals are prepared in two forms: *ñari cin* and *been cin. Cin* refers to a marmite, a large cooking pot; *been* means "one," and *ñari,* "two." Ñari cin dishes consist of steamed white rice, cooked in one pot, accompanied by a sauce cooked in another. Been cin dishes do not include a separate sauce, because the rice is boiled in the sauce of the other ingredients. All Senegalese dishes blend a variety of bold flavors: garlic (often an entire head per meal), onions, black pepper, chili peppers, dried fish, and tamarind (the flesh of a sour pod native to Africa).

The national dish, *ceebu jën,* which originates from the colonial capital of St. Louis, is by far the most popular dish in Senegal. Eating and preparing this meal is perceived to symbolize a true Senegalese. Families often eat *ceebu jën* twice a week or more, switching off between the red and the white varieties (the former includes tomato paste). The preparation of other types of been cin dishes resembles that of *ceebu jën*, except that red meat is substituted for the fish in *ceebu yapp,* and *ceebu keccax* uses dried fish.

***Ceebu jën***

*Serves 6*

4 carrots
4 turnips
Large piece of cassava
1 small green cabbage
1 eggplant
5–6 okra
2 large onions, chopped
½ head garlic
Small bunch parsley
20 black peppercorns
1 bouillon cube
1 tamarind, pulp removed from pod, soaked in hot water and strained
1 small chili pepper or ¼ tsp cayenne pepper
2 or 3 lb whole fish (tilapia, or sea bass) or marlin steaks
1 lb dried, salted, or smoked fish such as cod or herring
½ c oil
6½ c white rice

1. Peel all the vegetables, then cut them into large pieces (halves or fourths). Clean fish, but leave whole (including the heads, which add flavor).
2. Grind the garlic, parsley, pepper, bouillon cube, tamarind pulp, and the chili or cayenne pepper (to taste) until it forms a paste, using a mortar and pestle or food processor. Cut 2–3 small slits in each fish and stuff them with the spice mixture.
3. Heat oil in a large pot. Fry the onions and the dried fish for a few minutes, then blanch the fish in the oil, frying on both sides for 1–2 minutes. Remove the fish and set aside.
4. Add the carrots, turnips, and cassava and enough water to cover them, and bring mixture to a boil. Add salt and pepper as needed. Reduce heat and let simmer for 30 minutes or more. Add the other vegetables and the fried fish. Simmer another 20 minutes until the vegetables are soft.
5. Remove the vegetables from the pot (you should be able to easily pinch off pieces with your fingers). Add the rice to the bouillon that's left (there should be twice as much liquid as rice). Bring water to a boil again. Cover, and let the rice cook for 15 to 20 minutes, lowering heat toward the end. Cook until the rice has completely absorbed the water.
6. Serve on a large platter with the vegetables and fish arranged in the middle, on top of the rice, which is spread out evenly.

After *ceebu jën* (called *ceeb* for short), the most common dishes are ñari cin. The sauces for these dishes vary greatly, and each originates from a specific ethnic group or region. The peanut butter–based *mafé* sauce is a Bambara dish. *Yassa,* based on onion, oil, and lemon juice, comes from Casamance. *Domoda* is a thick sauce made from peanut oil, tomato paste, onions, and flour. The *soupkànj* is an okra-based sauce that includes shrimp. When okra is ground up, it makes a thick, sticky paste to which red palm oil and vegetables are added. Besides these common Senegalese dishes, Senegalese often eat other West African specialties like *athiéké,* a dish from Côte d'Ivoire made from cassava.

***Yassa***

*Serves 6*

2 medium-sized chickens
2 c white vinegar
Salt
1 head garlic
1 bouillon cube
1 tsp Cayenne pepper or to taste
Pepper
8 tbsp lemon juice
6–10 large onions, chopped into rings or large slices
½ c peanut oil

2 bay leaves

2 tbsp Dijon mustard

1. Cut chicken into pieces. Remove the skin if you wish. Place chicken in a bowl with 1 cup vinegar and salt.

2. Grind the garlic, 1 bouillon cube, cayenne pepper, and 2 teaspoons of black pepper together with a mortar and pestle or food processor.

3. Remove the chicken from the vinegar. Cut slices (about 2–3 per piece) in the chicken, and stuff them with the spice mixture. Put the chicken back in the bowl with the vinegar and cover with the lemon juice. Add onions and another cup of vinegar to the mixture. Let marinate 10 to 20 minutes.

4. Heat grill or set oven to broil. Grill or bake the chicken until lightly browned but not done, making sure to cook all sides.

5. Heat oil in a large pot. Add onions, and cook for 10 to 15 minutes, until golden. Add the marinade the chicken was soaking in, bay leaves, mustard, and a cup of water to the pot. Cover and cook 20 minutes over medium heat. Add chicken and cook another 15 to 20 minutes.

6. Serve on a large platter over steamed rice, spreading the sauce evenly over the rice and arranging the chicken in the middle.

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Senegalese generally eat around a large common bowl, seated on the ground or a low stool. This arrangement makes the meal easily divisible and is thus conducive to sharing. Guests, both expected and unannounced, are commonplace and (generally) welcome in Senegalese households. Food is eaten with the right hand, using either the fingers and palm to roll the rice into a ball or a spoon. The mother, or another member of the family (usually female), reaches into the middle and tears off little pieces of the fish or meat and vegetables, tossing them toward each family member. This way, everyone gets a fair portion, and guests receive the best bits.

Senegalese meals do not usually include a series of dishes but focus on one main dish. Dessert is relatively uncommon, although fruits are occasionally shared, and in some families French desserts are eaten from time to time. Certain families eat at Western-style tables, using plates and utensils. While this is more common among middle- and upper-class families, this practice is not generalized even among the upper classes.

The dinner meal varies from family to family more than breakfast or lunch, especially depending on economic level. In middle- and upper-class families, dinner has distinct foreign influences. Some common evening dishes include omelets eaten with baguette, pasta, Moroccan couscous served with Senegalese-style sauces, and steak with French fries. Millet-based meals are more common in the evening. While in some rural areas millet is eaten multiple times each day, in cities it is almost exclusively consumed at dinner. Residents of Dakar claim that eating millet at lunchtime seems so bizarre that it would throw off their perception of time. Millet can be eaten in a couscous or in porridge.

Evening meals often consist of a porridge-like substance made from boiled rice or millet flour that is served in either sweet or savory form. Among the savory dishes is *mbaxal,* a rice porridge prepared with fish or meat and vegetables that necessitates very little oil (unlike the dishes common at lunch, which oftentimes use half a quart of oil). *Daxin* is a thick dish prepared with peanut butter or niébé beans, cooked with peppers and onions. Other porridges are sugared and served with lait caillé (soured milk/yogurt). *Sombi* is a sweet porridge made from rice, and *fondé, caakry,* and *laax* are also porridges made from millet flour. Though these dishes are sweet, they constitute the evening meal and not a dessert. People of all socioeconomic classes eat these dishes, especially on Sundays or the day after a celebration, when Senegalese say they prefer something light. However, among many poor families, the evening meal is consistently a cup of fondé or laax, due to its inexpensiveness.

## Eating Out

In villages, one's options for eating out are generally limited to a neighbor who sells snacks that she's prepared, while in urban areas the possibilities for dining outside the home are increasingly varied.

Vendors push moving stands through the streets, selling coffee and snacks. Others set up small tables in the road to sell peanuts, fruit and candies, or sandwiches and skewers of grilled meat. Plates of Senegalese dishes can be bought in restaurants, which sometimes consist of only a tent or a shack set up around a picnic table. There are many fast-food restaurants that sell hamburgers, hot dogs, pizza, and *chawarma* (a gyrolike pita sandwich of meat that has been cooked on a spit). But none of the franchised chains common throughout the world exist in Senegal. There are also a variety of sit-down restaurants that serve Senegalese dishes among European and sometimes Asian favorites.

Since the 1990s there has been increase in restaurants due in part to the introduction of the "continuous day," a bureaucratic change in the public school schedule that significantly decreased the length of the lunch break. This change also inspired transformations in employees' work schedules and thus led to an increase in consumption at university and company cafeterias, and at restaurants and sandwich shops near places of employment and schools.

The continuous day has made eating out a common activity for many urban residents, yet it continues to be viewed by many as a necessary evil. While people may enjoy restaurants, the underlying assumption is that eating at home would be preferable if it were possible. Some Senegalese favor home-cooked meals so much that they avoid taking a lunch break, preferring to eat leftovers from the family lunch when they return home at five or six in the evening.

The dislike of eating out is in part related to the strength of the value of community in Senegal. Social meals tend to be eaten with family inside of households, and eating out is often an individualized activity. There are also taboos against eating food prepared by strangers and fears that food outside the house is unhygienic. However, these beliefs are becoming increasingly uncommon, and exceptions are often made for certain types of restaurants or foods. Nonetheless, Senegalese mothers are often proud to announce that no one in their family eats in restaurants, even if certain members do sometimes eat out.

In general, restaurants are increasingly viewed as acceptable and even valued as a luxury. Certain families eat together in sit-down restaurants. This is especially common among those with relatives who live in Europe or the United States. Eating out with friends or siblings allows youth a sense of independence. Couples often go on dates to fast-food restaurants. Buying snacks from street vendors is widespread even among children, who receive a small allowance from their parents for this purpose. An afternoon snack could be prepackaged cookies, candy, Chinese-style egg rolls, *fatayas* (small fried pastries filled with spiced meat), or sandwiches filled with Nutella, tuna, or cream cheese.

## Special Occasions

Religious holidays, baptisms, weddings, and funerals are all commemorated with a large gathering of family and friends accompanied by a feast. These festivals are very common, due in part to their extended guest lists. Some Senegalese attend two or three festivals per week. Children sometimes go from festival to festival, supplementing their diets with food provided at these feasts, especially in poorer neighborhoods. Thanks to Senegal's warm climate, celebrations take place outdoors under large tents set up in the street or a courtyard. Family members mill about, moving between the main house, the tent, the street, and the houses of close family members who live nearby and have opened their homes for this event.

Food is prepared in huge marmites (metal or earthen cooking pots with covers) by hired workers. Before, families tended to rely on *griots* both to provide the entertainment and to prepare food at festivals. Griots are the musicians and historians of West Africa. Traditionally, they would memorize songs that told of a particular village's history, genealogy, and great deeds. Today, those who prepare feasts are sometimes of the griot caste.

Meat at festivals is sometimes served with sauce and eaten with pieces of baguette, but other times it is cooked into a ceebu yapp. Food is served on a large platter, like at family meals. Guests gather around a nearby platter to eat under the tent or inside the

house. Like at daily meals in Senegal, feasts generally focus around one main dish. Fruit juices and soda are served before and/or after eating, while guests mingle. Snacks, such as fataya, egg rolls, or meat on a skewer, are sometimes served while guests await the main dish.

The vast majority of Senegalese are Muslim. Islamic holidays like Tabaski (Eid al-Adha), Ramadan, Korité (Eid al-Fitr), and Tam Xarit (the Muslim New Year) are celebrated with a mixture of Islamic and Senegalese customs. Tabaski is the Muslim Feast of Sacrifice. It is essential that every family sacrifice at least one sheep on this day. The number of sheep sacrificed depends on the size of the family and their economic means. All parts of the sheep are consumed and are cooked in a variety of ways, including a tripe soup. The Muslim commitment to giving alms ensures that no one goes hungry on Tabaski; entire legs of mutton are given to neighbors or the poor.

During Ramadan, Muslims refrain from eating and drinking between dawn and dusk. Once the sun sets, the fast is broken with a small meal called *ndougu.* Senegalese drink hot tea or coffee and eat dates and foods commonly eaten at breakfast. A large meal is eaten later in the evening, which includes common Senegalese dishes. Senegalese often report that they spend more money on food during the month of Ramadan than at other times because they buy juices and more expensive ingredients than usual, indulging themselves slightly when they are allowed to eat.

The month of fasting is concluded with the festival of Korité. This day of feasting begins with the millet porridge laax. Sometimes Senegalese prepare variations of this dish with peanut butter and/or bouye. In early to midafternoon an elaborate lunch is prepared, which often includes chicken. Ingredients of particularly high quality and extra garnishes are used for both lunch and dinner on Korité.

Millet is considered the traditional grain of Senegal and is a critical part of many celebrations. In Senegal, the Muslim New Year is commemorated by eating millet couscous. Like on Korité, laax is served on the morning of baptisms, shared with those close to the family, who arrive early and spend the entire day at the celebration. In addition to laax, baptisms necessarily include two other symbolic foods: a sacrificial sheep and kola nuts. Sacrificing a sheep for a newborn is prescribed in the Quran. If parents cannot afford a sheep for their child's baptism, they borrow money or family members chip in to ensure that a sheep is purchased. If a sheep is not sacrificed, Senegalese believe that this will harm the growth and development of the child.

The kola nut is a small bitter red or white nut that contains stimulants and is the original flavoring of the soft drink cola. It is exchanged at many important events in Senegal. At baptisms, kola nuts are often distributed alongside candies made from rice and millet. Baptisms in Senegal take place eight days after a child is born and are also the day that a baby is named. Because guests cannot attend the naming ritual, the exchange of kola nuts is a symbolic way to connect the baby, the parents, and the guests at this celebration. Kola nuts are also distributed at weddings and funerals. At each event their exchange symbolizes social connections. At funerals the symbolic exchange of kola nuts and candies plays a central role.

Festivals in Senegal are generally elaborate and often expensive. Senegalese themselves often describe their celebrations as ostentatious but fail to see a way to change these rituals because they are part of a system of obligatory exchange. It would be considered disreputable to avoid or lessen the expenses associated with festivals. People often spend all their savings or borrow large sums to celebrate a baptism or wedding.

## Diet and Health

Malnutrition has historically been and continues to be a serious concern in Senegal. In turn, calorie-dense foods like oil and meat are highly valued, because they are believed to give strength and to symbolize wealth. Until recently, in many parts of Senegal, it was said that when eating a good *ceebu jën*, one should have oil running down one's arm. The energy-filled carbohydrate bases of meals vary little, whereas the quantity of vegetables, fish, and

meat lessens significantly in times of economic downturn.

Foods that are very sweet, salty, and oily are highly appreciated in Senegal, perhaps in part related to the constant threat of malnutrition. But diet-related noncommunicable diseases are increasingly widespread and are transforming ideas concerning health and nutrition. Diabetes and cardiac disease are extremely prevalent in Senegal and are a significant cause of death in the country. These degenerative diseases have been the subjects of many public awareness campaigns. Senegalese are thus increasingly familiar with problems related to obesity and consuming too much fat, cholesterol, and sugar.

However, awareness does not necessarily equate to transformations in eating habits. Senegalese often lament that their food is excessively oily, salty, or sweet but often feel that it is unalterable. This is, in part, due to the social role of eating in Senegalese society. Meals are a time of social exchange. Families eat together and welcome guests; meals link social networks. If one person or one family drastically changed their eating habits, this could isolate them and would seem individualistic and selfish.

The social difficulties of changing one's eating habits for health are obvious in the experiences of diabetics. Diabetics often explain that it is extremely difficult to avoid drinking sugary beverages because these play a critical role in welcoming a guest. To turn down food or drink one has been offered is considered discourteous. Familial celebrations pose a similar problem. To avoid appearing rude or ungrateful, diabetics often hide their illness and eat the foods offered, regardless of their nutritional content.

The price of ingredients and the cultural perception of ideal body size also play important roles in nutritional choices. It is cheaper to feed a large family a diet based on rice and oil than one based on vegetables. Many Senegalese simply don't have the economic means to consume the daily recommended amount of fruits and vegetables. In addition, heaviness is often associated with wealth, motherliness, and health. In turn, Senegalese women often prefer body sizes that are considered overweight by Western medical standards and make dietary choices based on these cultural perceptions rather than health considerations.

Despite the many cultural obstacles that inhibit proper nutrition, more and more Senegalese are attempting to make healthful changes in their diets. Many are trying to incorporate more fruits and vegetables into their diets and to avoid consuming excess rice, oil, salt, and sugar. These changes are mainly taking place in middle- and upper-class families, whose economic means allow them a certain nutritional flexibility that lower classes do not have.

*Chelsie Yount*

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# Sierra Leone

## Overview

The Republic of Sierra Leone is a coastal West African country bordered on the south by Liberia and on the east and west by Guinea. The capital, Freetown, was established in 1787 by the British as a settlement for repatriated Africans and the descendants of those formerly enslaved during the transatlantic slave trade with the United States and the Caribbean. With an estimated population of six million, Sierra Leone is divided into four provinces comprising 12 districts that lie in environmental areas that range from mangrove swamps and the sandy beaches of the Atlantic coast to the savanna and mountainous highlands further inland. Locally, the country is known as Salone and its inhabitants as Saloneans.

There are about 18 different ethnolinguistic groups represented in the country with the predominant groups being the Mende, Limba, Temne, and Krio. Other smaller but no less significant groups include the Fula or Peuhl, Kuranko, Sherbro, and Mandingo. English is the official language of the republic, but Mende, Timba, Limba, and Krio are widely spoken. Sierra Leone and neighboring Liberia are the two African countries whose population boasts a significant number of descendants of formerly enslaved Africans. This group, known as the Krio, also speaks the Krio language, which is a creolized form of English mixed with elements of various West African languages. Inherent in Krio culture are strong elements of Western European culture due to the Krio history of enslavement in the Americas. These manifest themselves in food, cooking, dress, and speech, making the Krio quite different from the other indigenous ethnic groups. Large groups of Lebanese and Indians and their descendants add even more diversity to Sierra Leone's ethnic mix, and no one group claims majority status. Sierra Leone is predominantly Muslim, with about two-thirds of the population practicing Islam. Approximately one-quarter of the country is Christian, with the remainder adhering to traditional religions.

Sierra Leone is a rural country, and the majority of people are subsistence farmers. In urban areas, many grow vegetable gardens. Even so, food security is an issue due to the 11-year civil war (1991–2002) that stymied agricultural production from 1996 to 2007. The staple food of Sierra Leone is rice, predominantly varieties imported from Asia though indigenous rice production does occur in Sierra Leone.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Manja and Edward Dauda are Mende and live in Kenema in southeastern Sierra Leone. They are a typical working-class Sierra Leonean couple with two small children. Edward runs a repair shop that also sells used auto parts. Manja's trip to the market yields purchases of rice, cassava, and plantains, all starches typical of the average Sierra Leonean diet. Fresh fruits like pineapple, pawpaw (papaya), citrus fruits, bananas, or soursop are purchased to eat or prepare as juices.

The family's day starts with breakfast, which may consist of fresh fruit like mango, pineapple, or pawpaw (papaya) with freshly squeezed lime juice or mashed butter pears (avocados) spread on bread or toast. A more elaborate way to start the day would be with a dish

like rice pap, a cooked porridge made from rice flour, flavored with sugar and lime juice, and eaten with milk. Rice pap without milk is sometimes served to children as a snack. For lunch, Manja might buy rice at the market to be eaten with a groundnut (peanut butter) stew with chicken or beef and a side of *akara,* fried bean fritters made from indigenous ground cowpeas, of which black-eyed peas are a variety.

An evening meal might consist of a main dish like *jollof rice,* a one-pot dish of rice prepared throughout West Africa. It is cooked with a tomato-based sauce and any combination of mixed vegetables, often peas with chicken, meat, or fish. It is usually flavored with onions and plenty of hot chilies. *Plasas* is a stew of pureed leafy greens, usually cassava or sweet potato leaves, cooked with meat, smoked fish, chilies, tomatoes, and sometimes even pig's feet for flavor. It is known as *palaver* or *palava sauce* in other West African countries.

Manja, like most others, generally does her shopping at open-air markets where everything from cooking pots and cloth to shrimp or spices is sold. Because electricity can be unreliable or is nonexistent around the country for the majority of people, refrigeration is not always a viable option for most families, so food tends to be purchased on the same day it is eaten.

## Major Foodstuffs

Many Sierra Leoneans raise chickens or have vegetable gardens and citrus or banana trees in their yards. They look to their local markets for meats, grains, and spices. The staple food is rice, and few consider a meal complete without it. There are permanent rice fields in the northwestern part of the country, where mangrove swamps dot the landscape. In other swampy areas of the country, rice production is also being developed, as imported rice accounts for nearly two-thirds of all rice consumed in Sierra Leone. Rice is even ground into flour for use in baked goods and other dishes.

Cash crops are produced by small farmers and include coffee, cassava (manioc), peanuts, cacao, millet, sweet potatoes, and palm kernels, which are used in the production of palm oil for cooking as well as beauty products that are important to the local and global marketplaces. Despite the presence of various waterways throughout the country and its location on the Atlantic coast, the commercial fishing industry is not developed, having been devastated by the civil war; the country is still struggling to rebuild it.

Besides rice, staples of the Sierra Leonean diet include cassava, palm oil, and groundnuts (peanuts). Cassava is often pounded into the ubiquitous West African dish *fufu,* a dish usually made from a starchy tuber that is boiled, then pounded in a mortar and pestle until it forms a sticky dough. Cassava root is also used as a base for spicy soups and stews. Cocoyam (taro) is a secondary staple and also an important cash crop, and it can also be used to make fufu. Sierra Leoneans also eat sweet potatoes (*Ipomoea batatas*) roasted and fried and have a preference for the leaves of the plant, which are cooked in thick sauces with palm oil. Yams (*Dioscorea* species) are also a significant food but much less important to the diet and culture than they tend to be in West African countries to the south, such as Ghana and Nigeria.



The fruits from which Africans produce their palm oil. (iStockPhoto)

Fresh fruits and vegetables are important to the Sierra Leonean diet, but vegetables in particular are very rarely eaten raw; they are most often part of a slow-cooked dish. Leafy greens such as leaves from the sweet potato and cassava are most common. Finely chopped, they are stewed with meat, chicken, or fish, flavored with chilies, and served with rice. Leafy greens are also valued for their mucilaginous qualities and added as thickeners to soups, much like okra. Okra, a vegetable indigenous to West Africa, is a much-beloved element in the Sierra Leonean diet and can be fried or stewed on its own or added to soups and stews for thickening and additional flavor. Corn, another important vegetable, is usually grilled and eaten as a snack. Fresh fruits like butter pears (avocados), bananas, papayas, pineapples, and citrus fruits are usually eaten raw, while fruits like soursop and passion fruit are most often used for refreshing juices. Plantains are a staple, eaten ripe or unripe. When ripe they are usually fried and served as a side; when unripe, they can be prepared similarly or boiled as part of a dish.

***Plasas***

This stew is the Sierra Leonean version of palaver sauce that tends to be found throughout West Africa. Meat and leafy greens are simmered in a tomato sauce. Any kind of greens can be used in the dish, although in Sierra Leone, cassava or sweet potato leaves might be preferred.

2 large bunches shredded collard greens

1 large onion, chopped*

1–2 Scotch bonnet chilies, chopped* (habaneros can be substituted)

⅔ c palm oil

1 lb beef stew meat

1 28-oz can crushed tomatoes

1-in. piece of ginger

2 c water

½ piece of smoked fish, cleaned and deboned

¼ c dried shrimp

¼ c natural unsweetened peanut butter

Salt to taste

*These two ingredients can be chopped together in a food processor.

Wash and shred collards by piling leaves atop one another and cutting thin strips; set aside. Chop onion and Scotch bonnet chilies. You may reduce the amount of chilies but use either habaneros or Scotch bonnets. Alternatively you may pulse the onions and chilies in a food processor; a very fine chop or puree will work well for this dish. Heat the palm oil in a large pot and fry the beef stew meat briefly. Add the tomatoes and the onion and chili mixture; grate the ginger, add to the pot, and cook for a few minutes more. Add 2 cups of water to the mixture and add salt. Reduce heat to medium low, and allow the mixture to simmer slowly for 20 minutes or until meat is fully cooked. When meat is done add shredded greens, smoked fish, and dried shrimp. Stir in the peanut butter and correct the seasonings. If liquid has reduced, add the rest of the water. Simmer 15 minutes more and serve.

The indigenous grain *fonio* (a kind of millet) is cultivated and eaten on a small scale. Corn and millet are commonly eaten. Corn is roasted or eaten fresh. It is also ground into meal for fritters or porridge. Rice is prepared in a similar manner.

Sierra Leoneans cook with coconut and peanut oil, but palm oil is the most important cooking oil. As in much of the rest of West Africa, the fruits of oil palms are harvested in Sierra Leone, and the intensely flavored, deep orange-red palm oil is extracted from those fruits. As much as the oil is valued for cooking, it is as highly valued for flavoring and coloring food. Palm butter is also extracted from the nuts and is a key ingredient in palm butter stew. The oil and butter are rich in beta-carotene, and it is one of the few vegetable oils high in saturated fat. It is, along with rice and cassava, one of the most important ingredients in Sierra Leonean kitchen.

Beans are important sources of protein. Indigenous cowpeas and pigeon peas are widely eaten, and white beans are also eaten on their own and used to thicken stews. Black-eyed peas form the base of highly seasoned bean fritters fried in palm

oil and eaten as *small chop,* another name for snacks and appetizers.

Goat, chicken, and beef are popular meats, but pork makes an appearance in a fair number of dishes. Pork is often used to flavor soups and stews; pig's feet are the cut of choice. Afterward, the meat is usually chopped and then added to the finished dish; in the Sierra Leonean kitchen, nothing is wasted. The consumption of pork in Sierra Leone, a predominantly Muslim country, is most likely connected to the history of Freetown as a colony for formerly repatriated Africans from the United States and the Caribbean, where pork—smoked, salted, and fresh—was the primary meat made available for enslaved Africans to eat.

Smoked and salted fish flavor many dishes and are added to dishes as the focus of a dish or as a flavoring cooked along with other types of meat. Fresh fish, shrimp, and giant snails are also popular fried or cooked in spicy stews. Sierra Leoneans, like Africans across the continent, tend to use all parts of an animal, from nose to tail, including organs, known as offal. Trotters (cow's or pig's feet) are popular, as is cow skin, which is usually boiled in a soup.

Tomatoes, onions, and chilies are the base for many dishes; garlic is almost never used. Ginger and other herbs also flavor various dishes, but people like chilies above all. Generally, complex blends of flavors result from a mélange of spice, meats, and dried or smoked fish or shrimp slow-cooked together.



A woman cooks rice over an open flame in Sierra Leone. (iStockPhoto)

## Cooking

Sierra Leonean cooking is labor-intensive, with most ingredients requiring a great deal of manual processing before cooking. Soaking, pounding, peeling, boiling, drying, and crushing of ingredients to be used in a dish are often the first steps to be taken before any actual cooking can be done. The most common cooking techniques are stewing, boiling, and frying. By and large, most things are made from scratch as Sierra Leonean cooks use convenience or processed foods infrequently, although some are widely available to the home cook: powdered plantain, yam, or cassava flours and canned meats.

## Typical Meals

The average Sierra Leonean might awaken and drink tea or coffee and perhaps eat fruit or a piece of bread or cake to get the day rolling, but breakfast is not an important meal. Traditionally, people have tended to eat two meals a day—at midday and in the evening. These larger meals are referred to as *chop.*

A main meal might consist of a highly spiced soup or stew accompanied by rice or perhaps another starchy dish; food in Sierra Leone shares this general characteristic with food throughout much of the rest of the region. Dishes like plasas, pepper soup, or groundnut stew might be served, always with rice, cassava, cocoyam, or another starchy dish. The main meal of the day is generally served at midday and often eaten from a communal bowl, while leftovers from the midday meal are eaten in the evening for dinner. Like most West Africans, Sierra Leoneans snack frequently throughout the day on fresh fruit, roasted corn, plantains, and coconut. Small chop, as snacks are called, can also consist of baked or fried meat pies; savory and sweet fritters; or *suya,* kebabs of spicy grilled meat.

In Sierra Leone factors such as one's socioeconomic status and location, that is, whether one lives in an urban or rural area, affect the preparation and

consumption of meals. In cities, there is a shift toward more middle-class, white-collar jobs, and people may eat three meals a day in order to meet the demands of office hours. In rural areas the hard physical labor of agricultural work in fields may necessitate a heavier midday meal after the bulk of the day's work has been done. Because of poverty and food scarcity issues in Sierra Leone, two lingering effects of the 11-year civil war, many people eat only one meal a day—dinner. Because it is a very diverse country, many of the dishes are the same, but particular ingredients or slightly different cooking styles may be favored by a particular group.

## Eating Out

There is little tradition of eating out in Sierra Leone, but cities and towns will have at least one cookery, which serves larger meals of the most traditional kind with rice, cassava, or plantain and grilled meat or fish. Restaurants generally serve only one or two dishes and plenty of different options for chop. One uniquely Sierra Leonean establishment is the *poyo house. Poyo* is fermented palm wine.

## Special Occasions

Food plays an important role in celebrations throughout Sierra Leone. Everything from the unexpected visit of a stranger to special occasions like weddings, births, and funerals may be acknowledged with parties or celebratory dinners. As a country that has a Muslim majority and a significant Christian population, religious holidays such as the Eid al-Fitr, Ramadan, Christmas, and Easter are all celebrated, with feasting (or fasting) playing an important role in these celebrations. Sierra Leoneans celebrate Independence Day (April 27, 1961) with feasts, music, and dancing. *Awujoh* is a thanksgiving feast intended to acknowledge ancestors. It is also intended as a way for people to display gratitude and celebrate good fortune with family and friends.

## Diet and Health

Sierra Leoneans have a varied diet that includes seafood, meat, many fresh fruits and vegetables, and very limited amounts of processed or sugary foods. Even with high amounts of rice and palm oil in their diets, most health problems do not stem from the typical diet itself. Rather, lack of food and subsequent malnutrition and inadequate sanitation are the primary causes of health problems in Sierra Leone. Civil war and governmental abuses have caused crushing poverty and a crumbling infrastructure. Basic food production and health care systems have been neglected, making it impossible to meet the needs of the growing population. While things are stabilizing slowly, hunger and malnutrition continue to be issues facing the people and government of Sierra Leone.

*Rachel Finn*

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# Somalia

## Overview

The Republic of Somalia is a country located in eastern Africa in an area known as the Horn of Africa. To Somalia's west and northwest is Ethiopia, to the southwest is Kenya, and to the north is Djibouti. The country's total land area is 246,090 square miles, about the same size as Texas.

Many of the people of Somalia live a nomadic or seminomadic lifestyle. They are organized by clans. The lifestyle of the nomad plays a major role in what foods they consume and how the food is cooked. Somalia has been a colony of England, France, and Italy. The influence of these countries can still be seen in their food and cooking. Religion plays a major role in the diet of Somalis, the vast majority of the population being of Islamic faith. They adhere to a halal diet, in which the consumption of pork and alcohol is forbidden and fasts are observed.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Ubah and her husband, Arale, live in Garas Balley, a small town northwest of Mogadishu. Some mornings, Ubah makes the journey to Mogadishu to go to the market. Mogadishu is about seven miles from her rural home, and it takes a little under two hours to walk there. Even so, she enjoys going to the market. Her two daughters, Amina and Nadifa, often make the journey with her. Not only is it a place where she can buy the food she needs to feed her family, but it is also an opportunity to socialize and enjoy the displays of handicrafts made from camel bone, wood, and fabric in the small shops located around the market.

The food at the market is fresh and local. A good variety of fruits and vegetables are available at a large market like the one in Mogadishu. She may also buy sorghum, rice, tea, sugar, dates, and pasta at the market. Ghee, which is butter that has been melted and its milky solids removed, is also purchased at the market. Ubah brings containers with her to the market so that she can buy milk. She will go from vendor to vendor, tasting the milk to find the one she likes best.

## Major Foodstuffs

Vegetarianism is relatively rare in Somalia, so meals are mostly meat based. Nomadic groups raise livestock to sell to the rest of the population, and they also depend on the animals as a source of food. Mutton is favored, with goat meat also being quite popular. Beef is also eaten but rarely. The popularity of each kind of meat is largely dependent on its availability. A small amount of chicken is consumed, but Somalis don't generally eat any other fowl. Fish is consumed along the coast but is not a part of the diet of Somalis living further inland due to the lack of cold storage and transport. Camel meat is considered a delicacy and is reserved for special guests. The milk of the camel is prized for its health benefits and is usually given to children to promote health and growth.

Carbohydrates are a large part of Somalis' diet. Rice is one of the staples and usually accompanies the main meal. Corn, beans, sorghum, and pasta are also consumed. Spices are used throughout Somali cooking. For sweets, cinnamon, nutmeg, cardamom, cloves, and ginger are used. For savory cooking,

black pepper, chilies, cumin, and parsley are commonly used. While most of these spices are not indigenous to Somalia, their common place in Somali cuisine illustrates the interaction Somalis have had with Asians and Middle Easterners. Somali farmers are able to produce a variety of fruits and vegetables including grapefruit, papaya, guava, pomegranate, mango, and citrus fruits. The selection of fruit available varies by region. Bananas are a very important fruit because they are one of Somalia's largest exports.

## Cooking

Women do the cooking in the Somali household because it is perceived as a feminine role. Often, the women living in a village will gather together to prepare food and socialize. With very limited technologies at their disposal, cooking is a time-consuming and labor-intensive task. Grinding the grains to make traditional breads like *anjeero* and *muufo* is done by hand, with the women of villages or clans collectively sharing in the labor. The grinding is done with a Somali version of the mortar (*kal* or *tib*) and pestle (*mooye*), which is made of wood. It is done each day to make the bread. A small piece of the previous day's bread dough is saved for the next day as a source of leavening. Bread is baked in a covered, wood-burning clay oven or on a hearth.

The majority of the population lives in rural areas where kitchens often have no running water or electricity. In some areas, there are no kitchens, and food is prepared outdoors. In big cities and villages, the stove most commonly used is made from clay and stone and uses charcoal for fuel. In some villages, the stove is made of tin and uses charcoal and wood



A Somalian woman holds her baby as she prepares breakfast over an open fire. (AFP | Getty Images)

for fuel. The most common method of cooking in Somalia is frying, which is often done in ghee. Cooking meats that have been dried and then fried in ghee is a traditional method used by nomads. Meat may also be grilled over an open fire, broiled, or stewed.

## Typical Meals

Somalis typically begin their day with *canjeero,* which is a pancakelike bread. They are usually eaten a few at a time with ghee and sugar. Canjeero is given to children—mixed with tea and sesame oil—to encourage growth. Liver and onions may also be eaten with the canjeero. *Boorash* or *mishaari*—a kind of porridge made of ground wheat and cornmeal—may be eaten for breakfast in the south. It is very similar to the polenta eaten in Italy. Somalis prefer to eat it with butter and sugar for flavor. Breakfast in the north might consist of shredded canjeero mixed with spices. Also popular is a spicy mixture of beef parts served with canjeero.

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***Canjeero***

This bread is a staple in the Somali diet. It can be eaten with every meal. Traditionally, it is made with corn or sorghum flour.

2 c sorghum or corn flour

2⅔ c lukewarm water

Whisk together the flour and water until a smooth batter forms. Let the batter rest.

Grease a nonstick or cast iron pan with ghee and heat over medium low. Pour the batter into the center of the pan and rotate the pan so that the batter evenly coats the bottom. Cook until the batter has set and is no longer sticky. Do not flip the bread to cook on the other side. Simply remove it from the pan and serve it as an accompaniment to a meal or plain with sugar and ghee.

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*Qado,* or lunch, is the largest meal of the day and can often be elaborate. It usually consists of a type of starch like rice or, in the south, *baasto,* or pasta, accompanied by a *maraq,* or stew of vegetables with meat served on the side. In the south, a mixture of rice and vegetables called *iskudhexkaris* is often eaten.

Dinner is often served as late as 9 P.M. and is a lighter meal than lunch. During Ramadan, dinner is eaten after the saying of the Tarawih prayers, which can be as late as 11 P.M. *Cambuulo* is a dish of slow-cooked adzuki beans mixed with butter and sugar. *Qamadi* is cooked in a similar way, with wheat replacing the beans. Muufo is another popular dish, similar to cornbread. It is baked in a clay oven and eaten by adding sugar and tea, then mashing it up. The evening meal may also be accompanied by a salad and is always served with canjeero. It is common to drink a glass of milk with cardamom before bed.

Throughout the day, many cups of sweetened tea or coffee are consumed by Somalis. They are drunk before or after a meal but never during it because many Muslims do not like to mix food and drink. Islam forbids the consumption of alcohol, so coffee, tea, water, and fruit drinks are the main beverages consumed.

*Sambuusa,* a popular Somali snack, are very similar to the Indian samosa. They are usually filled with ground meat and spiced with hot green pepper. *Bajiye* is also a popular snack. These deep-fried fritters are usually a mixture of maize, vegetables, meat, and spices and are usually eaten with hot sauce. Fresh fruits or homemade cakes may also serve as snacks throughout the day.

*Gashaato* or *qumbe* is a popular sweet consumed in Somalia. It is made of coconut, oil, sugar, and cardamom. In the south, *lows iyo sisin*—which is a bar made from peanuts, sesame seeds, and caramel—is a popular treat. *Jalaato,* which comes from the Italian word *gelato,* is a popsicle-like frozen fruit treat. Many varieties of cookies and cakes are also available, but these are usually reserved for holidays or special occasions. Table manners or rituals of eating are important to the Somali meal. First, before eating the meal, people wash their hands in a bowl of soapy water. Somalis often eat with their fingers or by using bread as a sort of utensil. Only the first three fingers are used. The left hand is never used for

eating because Muslim tradition considers it the unclean hand.

## Eating Out

The cities of Somalia have restaurants offering a wider variety of food. In the larger cities, such as Mogadishu, restaurants offering cuisines from other countries—such as Chinese, Italian, Middle Eastern, and American—can be found. Along the coast of Somalia, restaurants might offer freshly caught fish. Due to the influence of the Arabs over the seventh century, some restaurants offering traditional Arab food like kebabs might be found. By Western standards, Somali restaurants are quite inexpensive—a very nice meal costs about $10, and the cheapest meal costs only around $2 to $5.

Teahouses and coffeehouses are also popular places for people (mostly men) to gather and eat, drink, and socialize. Until recently, women seldom went to restaurants because women who were seen there were regarded as improper or as having a bad reputation. Many women still avoid restaurants in favor of socializing at friends' homes.

## Special Occasions

Nearly all festivals and celebrations have religious significance in Somalia. Family, friends, clan members, and villages gather together to celebrate births, weddings, public events, and holidays. In Somalia, as in all other Islamic nations, the Muslim lunar calendar dictates the dates of religious festivals.

During the holy month of Ramadan, Muslim Somalis observe a month of fasting. Through fasting, they show a true devotion to Allah and Muhammad. During this month, from dawn until sunset, Somalis refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, and indulging in anything that is in excess. In the morning, they have to rise before dawn to eat *suhoor,* the meal used during fasting to replace the traditional breakfast, lunch, and dinner. It typically tends to be heavy and is highly regarded by Islamic traditions to avoid the typical side effects of fasting, such as fatigue and ill temperament. After the meal is eaten, prayers must be said, and fasting continues through the day until *iftar,* which is the evening meal. On the last day of Ramadan, the fast is broken. This festival is called Eid al-Fitr and lasts for three days. Somalis don their best clothes, which are often bought for the occasion, to attend communal prayer in the early morning. Prayer is followed by feasting and visiting relatives and friends. Food is usually plentiful at this time, with many dishes of meat, vegetables, homemade bread, and rice being served. Food is also donated to the poor.

Wedding festivities are also great times of feasting. Depending on what the families are able to afford, the festivities can last for three days. The first two days and nights of the festivities are attended by those of the younger generations. On the last day, everyone comes together for eating, drinking, and dancing. Circumcision ceremonies are also events where festivities take place. Male and female Somali children are circumcised. Parents invite friends, relatives, and neighbors for a feast that takes place after the ceremony.

### *Bur Katuunboow*

*Bur katuunboow* are a type of fritter or donut. They are usually served during the month of Ramadan.

2 c all-purpose flour

½ c sugar

½ tsp active dry yeast

¼ tsp ground cardamom

Salt, to taste

1 c water

Vegetable oil to fry

Combine all dry ingredients. Add the water to the dry ingredients while stirring, being careful that lumps do not form. Cover directly with plastic so a skin does not form on the surface, and let rest overnight in the refrigerator. Heat the oil to 325°F. Using a small ice-cream scoop, form balls of dough and drop carefully into the oil. Let brown on one side, then turn gently. Remove the fritters from the oil and let them drain on a paper towel. Serve hot and fresh from the fryer.

## Diet and Health

Religion influences Somali dietary practices in a number of ways. Nearly all Somalis are Sunni Muslims. Sunni is the largest denomination of Islam and means the words, actions, or example of the Prophet Muhammad. Muslim Somalis consume only halal food, which Islamic law dictates is the only food that is permissible to eat. Halal meat must be slaughtered in the way set out by Islamic law. The animal must be killed quickly, with the knife slitting the throat while a prayer is said and the name of Allah is spoken. The Quran explicitly forbids the consumption of the following foods: pork; blood; carnivorous birds of prey; animals slaughtered to anyone other than the name of Allah; carrion; an animal that has been strangled, beaten (to death), killed by a fall, gored (to death), or savaged by a beast of prey; fish that have died out of water; food over which Allah's name is not pronounced; and alcohol.

*Annie Goldberg*

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# South Africa

## Overview

The Republic of South Africa occupies the southernmost part of the African continent and includes an area known as the "cradle of humankind," where three-million-year-old skeletons of the extinct hominid species *Australopithecus* have been found. Modern South Africa was not recognized as a unified territory until the early 20th century, after years of conflict chiefly between rival European colonists fighting to control the region's valuable resources, notably the Cape's strategic position as a layover for spice merchants traveling to and from the East, and the reserve of gold and diamonds discovered in the late 1800s, which led to the development of what is today a leading mining industry.

Following British defeat of the Boers, or Dutch settlers (also known as Voortrekkers), in the Second Boer War (1899–1902), the Union of South Africa began under British rule in 1910 and lasted until the country was granted independence in 1931. In 1948 the National Party took leadership of South Africa and legally instituted the system of racial segregation known as apartheid. South Africa was named a republic in 1961, and the National Party remained in power until 1994, when Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as the first president of the "new" South Africa after the country's first democratically held elections. Today, South Africa is a constitutional democracy, made up of a central government (parliament and the executive authorities of the president and his ministers), local governments representing each of South Africa's nine provinces, and traditional leaders (like King Goodwill Zwelithini, monarch of the Zulu people).

Its long history of political and social conflict has contributed to making cultural diversity one of the distinguishing features of the "rainbow nation" that is present-day South Africa. This is particularly evident in its many food cultures. Beyond European influences (mainly British and Dutch but also French from the Huguenots who arrived as Protestant refugees in the late 1600s, as well as some German and Portuguese influences), what is now considered traditional South African food includes richly spiced dishes based on those introduced by Malay slaves brought from Java and Indonesia to the Cape in the 17th century, and later by Indian laborers brought to work in sugarcane fields in the province now known as KwaZulu-Natal. Yet the most widespread food culture in South Africa belongs to the black majority who inhabited the country long before settlers from Europe and slaves from Asia arrived. Numbering almost 80 percent of a population of 49 million people, black South Africans are the main speakers of 9 of the country's 11 official languages, apart from English and Afrikaans. Though individual linguistic groupings have distinctive food cultures, black South African food traditionally consists of hearty portions of grains (maize, millet, barley, sorghum), vegetables (such as amaranth, known locally as *morogo*), beans (kidney, *jugo,* cowpeas), and meat when available.

The diversity of people and cultures represented by 11 official languages (which do not include the languages of the aboriginal Khoi and San people) gives some indication of the great variety of foods eaten in South Africa, although cultural groupings are not always accurate predictors of what individual



A student of the Rockefeller Foundation-funded African Center for Crop Improvement at the University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal, South Africa, inspects her maize project in July 2006. The Rockefeller Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation partnered to create the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa to increase the productivity of small farms and improve agricultural development in Africa. (Sharon Farmer | Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation)

South Africans eat. The combined effects of industrialization and internationalization, for example, have made more mass-produced convenience items (and fast food) available to a greater number of people, meaning that some traditional foodstuffs and preparation methods have been replaced. Also, while the boundaries between different traditional foods and those who eat them have never been static, social and political transformations in recent decades have made these lines even more permeable, particularly when it comes to eating in some of the many restaurants that now offer both traditional and/or modernized versions of foods from all cultural groups. Most important, South Africa remains a country not just of cultural diversity but also of great economic inequality, meaning that those with financial means have a wide variety of food choices (particularly in cosmopolitan areas, where sushi is as standard as pizza and "Mexican" food), while approximately half of South Africans live under the poverty line and must eat whatever is cheap and available.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Thabi and Lauren live in Cape Town with their two daughters, Naomi (age five) and Bianca (age three). They met at the university, where they both majored in English. Thabi went on to study communications and now works as a consultant for a new media firm. Lauren

stayed at the university to complete her doctorate and now teaches in the English Department. Although they both have full-time jobs, their schedules are flexible, and they both do a fair amount of work from home. The university has a day-care facility that is open all day, though Lauren prefers to collect the children in midafternoon when she can.

They do most of their shopping for meat and dry goods like pasta, rice, and cereal on a weekly basis, but it often happens that they run out of something, so on most days Lauren stops at the local mall on her way home. When she does, the girls normally get a small treat like an *ice lolly* (popsicle), a piece of *biltong* (jerky), or a biscuit (cookie). The family subscribes to an organic vegetable box that gets delivered to their house every week, so they seldom buy vegetables from the supermarket. Their daily shopping generally consists of fruit, milk, and fresh bread.

When she has time, Lauren makes herself a fruit and yogurt smoothie for breakfast, while the girls have cereal or porridge (either oats or their favorite, Maltabella, a malted sorghum porridge that now comes in convenient portion packs that only take one minute to cook in the microwave). Thabi is only interested in coffee first thing in the morning, so he buys a muffin at around 10 A.M. from the coffee shop close to his office. The day-care center provides the children with a midmorning snack, but their parents need to send packed lunches, so Lauren makes sandwiches and cuts up fruit for their lunchboxes while everyone else eats breakfast.

Lauren gets her lunch from the food court on campus (usually a salad and sushi, or soup on cold days), and if Thabi is not at a business lunch, he picks up a chicken pie or a sandwich, which he eats at his desk. They employ Thelma three days a week to clean their house and do their laundry, so they also need to make sure there is enough bread on those days for her to fix herself lunch. If they have leftovers from dinner, Lauren usually gives them to Thelma to take home with her because she knows that Thelma has a big family to feed and struggles to make ends meet. For their evening meal Lauren and Thabi take turns cooking. Their standard weekday dinner is some combination of meat or fish, vegetables, and either rice, pasta, or noodles. It is always fast and easy to prepare: They do a lot of stir-frying, and they use a range of sauces and condiments to turn otherwise-bland food into something more interesting. If the meal is very spicy, like when Thabi makes his favorite Thai green chicken curry, they simply cook a small portion of meat and vegetables separately for the children.

On Saturday mornings they enjoy going to the local organic market for breakfast and to buy interesting breads and meats for an afternoon *braai* (barbecue). They have a circle of friends who also have small children, and they regularly get together on Saturdays in one of their backyards where the adults can relax with a beer or a glass of wine while the children play. On Sundays they go to Lauren's parents' house for a traditional Sunday lunch with the whole family, including Thabi's parents when they are free. Lauren's mother always makes a roast of some sort, which she serves with rice, potatoes, gravy, at least two kinds of vegetables, and a salad, followed by one of her famous desserts, like trifle, lemon meringue pie, or a hot sticky pudding with custard. Lauren and Thabi are rarely hungry on Sunday evenings, so the children get something easy from the freezer, like fish fingers (fish sticks) or chicken nuggets.

## Major Foodstuffs

Despite vulnerability to drought and an arable landmass of less than 15 percent, South Africa is self-sufficient in most of its major foodstuffs and also exports many agricultural goods to neighboring countries and overseas. Subsistence farming dominates in small rural communities, while commercial agriculture was deregulated in 1994, meaning that state-run cooperatives could be privatized and that, coincident with the withdrawal of international trade sanctions, South African commercial farmers could compete in the global market.

Maize (corn) is the country's main crop and also the national staple, followed by wheat, sugarcane, and sunflowers, used for cooking oil. *Mielie meal,* or ground maize, forms the basis of a number of starch-rich meals, including breakfast porridge, *pap* (thicker and drier than porridge, normally eaten with

meat and/or vegetable stew), and *phutu* or *krummel pap* (cooked for longer and with less water until it reaches a crumblike consistency, also eaten with stew). Less finely ground than mielie meal, samp is made from boiling dried, chopped maize kernels and is often served with beans (*umngqusho,* or "samp and beans," is reputedly Nelson Mandela's favorite dish). Fresh maize cooked on an open fire is a popular roadside snack and also often an accompaniment to a braai, while fresh kernels mixed with flour and steamed in maize leaves produce *mielie bread.* Maize is also a main ingredient in *umqombothi,* a beer brewed with sorghum and yeast. Less traditional, but as popular, are the thousands of boxes of popcorn eaten in the country's cinemas on a daily basis. Beyond domestic consumption and mercantile exports, the maize industry is supported by government and private-sector subsidies that fund the distribution of food relief in South Africa and in surrounding countries.

Meat is consumed in great amounts in South Africa, whether simply braaied (barbecued) over coals (and no braai is complete without a ring or two of *boerewors,* "farmer's sausages," a combination of beef and pork flavored with coriander seed), oven-roasted, cooked into a number of stews or curries, or eaten as a snack in the form of biltong or *droëwors* (dried boerewors). Cattle, sheep, and poultry farming provide up to 85 percent of meat for domestic consumption with the remaining 15 percent being imported.

Fruits are also important, both as a major export item and for local consumption. Deciduous fruit like apples, pears, and grapes makes up 15 percent of agricultural earnings from export and are eaten locally either fresh, dried, baked into puddings, or preserved in the wide variety of jams (*konfyt*) and chutneys that South Africans eat regularly. Dried fruit also features in a number of savory dishes such as *bobotie* (curried meatloaf with raisins or sultanas and sometimes flaked almonds, topped with an egg custard before baking) and yellow rice with raisins. The country's most important fruit is the grape, first introduced by the Dutch settler Jan van Riebeeck in the 17th century and now indispensable to South Africa's position as one of the top 10 wine-producing countries in the world. With annual exports of over 300 million liters, the wine industry contributes significantly to the country's economy and to providing world-class wines for South African tables.



Lamb kabobs on a grill. The act of barbecuing, known as braai, is a popular social custom in South Africa. (Shutterstock)

Beyond these key national industries, South Africa has several major regional foodstuffs, many of which are transported and consumed around the country but remain characteristic of particular areas. With approximately 1,750 miles of coastline, seafood is sourced from the Cape's western coast (where the cold Atlantic yields predatory fish like tuna, yellowtail, and *snoek*) all the way along the east coast to the northern border with Mozambique, where the warmer Indian Ocean provides sole, calamari, and pilchards. Crayfish (spiny rock lobster) are a South African delicacy, as is *perlemoen,* a local abalone. Oysters are naturally abundant (the West Coast town of Langebaan is famous for having one of the largest oyster graveyards in the world) but have also been commercially farmed since the mid-20th century. Other popular seafood includes mussels, hake (a favorite for fish and chips), linefish such as kingklip and *geelbek* (also known as Cape salmon), and small fish like *harders* (sold dried and salted as *bokkoms,* a snack food) and whitebait, typically deep-fried whole and served with lemon and tartar sauce.

The inland aridity of the northern Cape makes it a prime area for sheep and ostrich farming, where local delicacies include sheep's testicles, *pofadders*

(puffadder is usually refers to a venomous snake, but these are sheep's intestines filled with offal, grilled over coals), *skilpadjies* ("tortoises," lamb or sheep's liver wrapped in caul), and *kaaings,* cracklings made from sheep fat. The area is also home to the Kalahari truffle (a species of *terfezia,* or desert truffle) and to much of South Africa's *rooibos* ("red bush") tea cultivation.

Bordering the landlocked Kingdom of Lesotho, the Free State has been known as South Africa's bread basket, thanks to extensive wheat cultivation. The area also produces potatoes, groundnuts, and asparagus, as well as hosting an annual cherry festival. Citrus, nut, and tropical fruit (mango, lychee, banana, avocado) farming are key to the province of Mpumalanga, while visitors to Limpopo can expect fried mopane worms, porridge made from the fruit of the baobab tree, and home-brewed *marula* beer.

## Cooking

One result of industrialization in South Africa is that much traditional food preparation has been simplified and/or displaced. Making pap or porridge used to involve hand-grinding the dried maize kernels, whereas now a majority of people rely on factory-processed mielie meal (the practice of hand-grinding continues in rural areas, where subsistence farmers also grow and dry the kernels themselves). Where available, presliced factory bread (or "government loaf," so named because of legally instituted price controls and tax exemption) has largely taken over as a main staple, and for those with refrigeration facilities, frozen, chopped vegetables provide a convenient alternative to hand-chopping, particularly for food at large gatherings like funerals and weddings.

In rural areas, and in many traditional households across all racial groups, cooking remains the women's domain. This reflects both African custom and the class-based divides introduced by Dutch settlers, who hired Malay slaves as cooks in their homes in the 17th century. Dating from the colonial era and later throughout apartheid, it is still common for middle- and upper-class South African households to employ domestic help to clean their homes, look after children, and, often, do the cooking. Known colloquially as *chars,* domestic workers are invariably women: Men have historically been employed to work in gardens, if not as migrant laborers in mines and other industries.

One notable exception to the norm of women cooking is the braai. Men are typically designated braai masters, and for many it is the only form of cooking they do. The task involves getting the coals ready, grilling meat, and declaring it ready—everything else is usually prepared by women. Cooking on a fire is an age-old practice in South Africa, beginning with the Khoi and San people (though now collectively referred to as the Khoisan, the two groups had distinctive ways of life: The Khoi were herders with domestic livestock, while the San were hunters), followed by the so-called Bantu tribes who migrated south from the Great Lakes region in central Africa to become "native" South Africans, and finally to the Voortrekkers, who introduced the three-legged cast iron pot known as a *potjie* ("little pot"). *Potjiekos* (*kos* is the Afrikaans word for food) continues today and refers to a stew (generally meat, vegetables, and potatoes) cooked slowly in a potjie set over coals. Potjies are also used to bake *potbrood,* or "pot bread," while *roosterkoek* ("grid cake") refers to bread buns cooked on the grid and *askoek* ("ash cake") to bread baked directly on the embers. Apart from steaks, chops, ribs, and boerewors, *sosaties* (kebabs, or marinated pieces of meat on a skewer, often interspersed with dried fruits and chunks of onion) are popular braai items, as is whole fish brushed with a jam-based glaze.

Frying is another common form of cooking in South Africa, from deep-fried foods like fish and chips to a number of savory snacks such as samosas, *slangetjies* ("small snakes," fried strands of a spiced pea-flour batter, sometimes mixed with nuts), *dhaltjies* (or chili bites, spicy puffs made from chickpea flour), and *vetkoek* ("fat cake," small pieces of fried bread dough, eaten either with sweet toppings like honey or savory fillings like curried mince). Deep-fried sweet foods include the Afrikaner *koeksisters* (twisted or plaited doughnuts dipped in ginger-and-lemon-flavored syrup) and the Malay

variant, *koesisters,* small round doughnuts made from a spiced dough, dipped in a simple syrup, and rolled in dried coconut. Pumpkin fritters with cinnamon sugar are also enjoyed on their own or, following the practice of pairing sweet with savory, as an accompaniment to a meal. *Smoor* ("smother," or braise) refers to foods braised in a pan with onions. *Smoorsnoek* traditionally calls for dried, salted snoek, flaked and fried with onions, cabbage, potato, chili, and garlic, though smoked fish is more often used nowadays. Rice, cabbage, and other vegetables like eggplant are commonly smoored.

## Typical Meals

A South African breakfast can be as simple as cereal, porridge, and/or *amasi* (curdled milk, prepared by natural fermentation in rural areas or available as a cultured dairy product from the supermarket). In traditional Afrikaner households, homemade baked goods are common, ranging from muffins and rusks (oven-dried biscuits typically dunked in coffee or tea; rusks provided useful sustenance for Voortrekkers and soldiers because they did not spoil) to breads. *Seed loaf,* referring to a whole-grain bread with a variety of seeds (sunflower, sesame, poppy, linseed), is widely eaten as toast with butter and preserves. A "full" South African breakfast, still eaten by some on a daily basis though more frequently reserved for weekend brunches in urban areas, mimics the traditional English breakfast with toast, eggs, bacon, fried tomatoes, mushrooms, sausage, and sometimes kippers, a piece of steak, or a lamb chop.

Apart from a Sunday roast, lunch is generally not the main meal of the day and often consists of a sandwich or other food item that can be eaten on the run, particularly for the large group of blue-collar workers. A typical lunch for many construction workers and other physical laborers is half a loaf of bread and some form of cooked or cold meat from a supermarket, if not something from one of the many corner cafés that sell hot foods like fish and chips, toasted sandwiches, savory pies, sausage rolls, and "Russians" (thick pork sausages). A favorite Cape fast food is the *gatsby,* a large hot dog bun filled with cooked or processed meat, French fries, and sauce, or a *salomi,* curry wrapped in a roti flat bread. The *bunny chow*—half or quarter of a hollowed-out loaf of bread filled with curry and topped with the *virgin,* or the bread from the middle (the virgin is eaten first with the curry, followed by the gravy-soaked sides of the hollow loaf)—originated in KwaZulu-Natal as a convenient way of selling food without cutlery to indentured laborers, but it can now be found in most major South African cities.

In traditional Malay and Indian households, the evening meal typically consists of some form of curry served with rice and/or breads, and *sambals* (accompaniments like chutney; *atjar,* a spicy relish; and *raita,* a yogurt-based condiment). Malay curries are milder than Indian curries and often have a sweet element to them, like in bobotie, a recipe for which was selected to represent South Africa in a United Nations international cookbook published in 1951. Other Malay specialties include *denningvleis* (lamb stew flavored with cloves, allspice, and tamarind) and *bredie,* a lightly spiced tomato-based stew, the most unique version of which uses *waterblommetjies* (the flowers of water hawthorn, an aquatic plant that grows wild in the Cape). Lamb, mutton, and chicken are popular meats for curries, though the Malay community uses only halal meat (and therefore never pork).

The braai is the most typical South African meal because it is the one that most, if not all, South Africans are familiar with—so much so that the annual public holiday on September 24, previously known as Shaka Day (in commemoration of the Zulu king's assassination by his half brothers in 1828) and later renamed Heritage Day, has been dubbed National Braai Day (or Braai4Heritage Day), with Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu as its patron. Both a noun ("let's have a braai") and a verb ("let's braai"), the occasion is most often a social one that can suit any demographic or income group. A braai can be a lavish affair with crayfish, fillet steak, and fine wine or a more casual gathering with virtually any form of meat (including chicken and venison), vegetables, boerewors, and plenty of beer. In addition to pap and grilled corn on the cob, a number of condiments are usually served with *braaivleis* (braaied meat),

like chutney, pickles, and *chakalaka,* a spicy tomato-and-onion relish.

## Eating Out

South Africa has a thriving restaurant industry that caters to most of its population and also to the tourist market, which has a wide choice of world-class restaurants to dine in. Le Quartier Français and La Colombe are notable as two restaurants (both in the Cape winelands) that have repeatedly been voted among *Restaurant* magazine's 50 "Best Restaurants in the World," though as their names suggest, the food they serve is inspired by French (or broadly international) trends. In the global market in which they participate, this class of restaurants offers extremely competitive value, but from a South African perspective only a minority can afford to spend more money on a single meal than many people earn in an entire month. Yet this relatively small market manages for the most part to sustain the high-end dining industry, and several South African chefs are recognized as celebrities in their local contexts. In 2009, Cape Town welcomed the country's first signature restaurants by foreign celebrities with the opening of Gordon Ramsay's maze and Nobuyuki Matsuhisa's Nobu.

Cosmopolitan areas do offer a wide variety of places to eat out that are affordable on a regular basis to the middle to upper classes. Wine and tapas bars, delis, and sushi restaurants have become popular in recent years, while less casual restaurants continue to be well populated for business lunches and dinners. Cities also abound in all kinds of middle-of-the-road eateries, from Italian to Chinese to burger restaurants, all of which are particularly successful in student neighborhoods (where street food also thrives, especially hot dogs made with boerewors). In suburban areas with a higher population of middle- to lower-income groups, franchised fast-food and family restaurants are very popular, including South African franchises like Spur Steak Ranches (burgers, steaks, and ribs), Nando's (Portuguese-style chicken), the Ocean Basket (seafood), a number of pizza chains, and global brands like McDonald's and KFC.

Eating out in rural areas generally falls into one of two categories that echo the historical divides set in place by apartheid. In traditional black communities, as well as in townships on the outskirts of most



A number of restaurants and store fronts along the coast of the Victoria and Albert Waterfront in South Africa. (Monkey Business Images | Dreamstime.com)

cities, restaurants often combine a butcher shop with braai facilities, so patrons first buy a piece of meat and then have it cooked for them on the fire, while pap, stews, and other accompaniments are available to order on the side. Mzoli's in the Cape township of Gugulethu has become a popular tourist destination for those looking for an "authentic" black experience, which here involves many people standing around their cars, playing loud music, and drinking copiously while enjoying Mzoli's meat and his famous secret sauce. In contrast, there are farm stalls along highways in sparsely populated agricultural areas. Originally small roadside stores selling fresh produce from (white-owned) neighboring farms, today farm stalls are sophisticated delis with an adjoining coffee shop or restaurant where travelers stop for refreshments and *padkos* ("road food") and also for hearty country meals.

## Special Occasions

In traditional black communities, special occasions like weddings and funerals typically involve feasting, beer drinking, and often the ritual slaughter of a cow or goat. Cattle have long been a symbol of wealth, and the practice of using cattle for *lobola* (the bride price, with the main aim of establishing a relationship between two families) remains common in rural areas. Some wedding customs also include food taboos, such as the bride not being allowed to eat until a certain time. Similarly, where male initiation rites are still observed, boys undergo a period of fasting and isolation before the final feast, which also includes the slaughter of an animal.

Food, and its restriction, is also important to Muslim celebrations, and several lavish dishes are reserved for special occasions. During the fasting period of Ramadan it is customary for children in Muslim communities to take plates of sweets like koesisters to their neighbors to break the fast at sundown. *Boeber,* a spicy drink of milk and sago (a starch extracted from palm), is often served before the main evening meal and is typically drunk on the 15th day of Ramadan to mark the middle of the fast. The celebration of Eid to mark the end of the fasting period of Ramadan usually features expensive dishes like crayfish curry and a host of elaborate puddings and sweets. *Breyani* (adapted from the Indian *biryani*) is a typical wedding dish that is assembled in various stages, beginning with marinating mutton or chicken for a few hours in a mixture of yogurt, tomato, and spices (cardamom, cinnamon, chilies, turmeric, cloves, saffron). The final dish consists of meat, rice, lentils, fried potatoes, and onions, layered in a pot and cooked slowly. Etiquette requires the lid of the pot not to be lifted until the time of serving, when halved hard-boiled eggs are often added as a final garnish. *Doopmaal,* the naming ceremony for Muslim babies, is always followed by tea and cakes, and sometimes savory snacks or a more substantial meal.

With a Christian majority, South Africa observes the major Western holidays like Christmas and Easter. These are celebrated with the same commercial flourish as in many parts of the world, with supermarkets stocking Christmas cakes, hams, and turkeys from October, and Easter eggs from soon after Christmas. Beyond these ritualized festivities, special occasions like birthdays and anniversaries are cele brated in nonspecific ways across the country but generally with due attention to food and drink, be it at a fancy restaurant, at a Spur Steak Ranch (where the staff will sing "Happy Birthday" on request), or simply having a braai with friends.

## Diet and Health

Echoing all other spheres of South African life, people with financial means can benefit from first-rate private health care, while the majority of South Africans currently have access only to the very rudimentary health care that the government provides free of charge. One result of this is an average life expectancy of 49 years, concentrated in the 80 percent majority who do not have access to adequate health services.

HIV is the biggest health challenge that South Africa faces, with a prevalence of close to 20 percent and over five million people living with the virus. It has also been the subject of the most notorious link between diet and health, when, in the period 2000–2005, then-president Thabo Mbeki denied the

causal relationship between HIV and AIDS and publicly recommended eating a diet rich in fruit and vegetables to fight the disease, rather than prioritizing access to antiretroviral drugs. It is estimated that 350,000 people died unnecessarily during that time.

As cattle are a symbol of wealth, excess body weight is also traditionally regarded as a sign of prosperity. This continues in many black communities and is exacerbated by high rates of HIV and AIDS, now commonly considered a "slim disease" because of its associated weight loss. But the principle that being fat is healthy is also complicated by escalating rates of diabetes and related health complications resulting from overweight and obesity. While increasingly Western lifestyles in urban areas, involving higher consumption of fast food and convenience foods, have contributed to this development, it is also the result of traditional ways of life across most racial groups, as eating substantial portions of meat and starch, often coupled with large amounts of beer, is not confined to black communities (white men count among the most obese in the country).

In cities the opposite trend is widespread, with a visible increase in the number of gyms, many of which work in partnership with medical insurance companies to offer reduced membership rates. Also on the rise are healthy fast-food options, from chains like Kauai (which also operate in the ubiquitous Virgin Active gyms) and Osumo, both of which specialize in smoothies, salads, sandwiches, and wraps and offer nutritional information with their menus. Leading supermarkets also have health sections that offer a number of "lite" and "low-carb" snack and meal-replacement products under leading diet brands like Weigh-Less, as well as a full array of gluten- and sugar-free foods.

*Signe Rousseau*

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# Sudan

## Overview

Sudan is a country in northeastern Africa with a land area of 2.3 million square miles, roughly the same size as the United States east of the Mississippi River. It has a population of 41 million. Sudan shares borders with nine countries and enjoys coastal access along the Red Sea. Two strands of the Nile, the White Nile and the Blue Nile, converge in the capital city of Khartoum and continue north to Egypt and eventually the Mediterranean Sea. Sudan's strategic location on the African continent has made it desirable to outside occupying forces, and both the United Kingdom and Egypt laid claim to parts of modern Sudan during the 19th and 20th centuries. The legacy of colonization is manifest in aspects of Sudanese culture today, from religion to food and language.

The contemporary history of Sudan is one of conflict. Two civil wars between Sudan's northern and southern states were fought for over 40 of the 50 years following independence from the United Kingdom in 1956. A peace accord was signed in 2005, but it was overshadowed by violence in the western Darfur region of Sudan, where it is estimated that hundreds of thousands have lost their lives since 2003. The combination of war and natural disasters has resulted in mass migration and displacement of the Sudanese subsistence-agriculture population. As such, Sudan has experienced rapid urbanization, with an estimated 40 percent of Sudanese living in cities today.

Given its land area and varied terrain, Sudan is home to a rich collection of indigenous tribes—over 100 of them—with an equal number of languages spoken. The official languages of Sudan are Arabic and English. Arabic is spoken widely in the north, while English is spoken in much of the south, a result of the British presence in the region during the 20th century. The majority of Sudanese are Sunni Muslims (70%), followed by indigenous and animistic faiths (25%) and a small minority of Christians (5%). Because of the strong Muslim influence in Sudan, alcoholic beverages are forbidden, as is the consumption of pork. The Sudanese economy has experienced tremendous growth because of its deposits of crude oil, which it began to export in 1999. While the standard of living has improved for some due to this new revenue stream, more than a third of Sudanese live on less than a dollar a day. In addition to disparities in household income, the population of Sudan is defined by the generation under the age of 14, who make up 40 percent of the population. In 2011, a southern Sudanese independence referendum is scheduled for a vote, which could potentially result in southern Sudan declaring itself a sovereign nation.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Selma Hassan Mustafa is married with three children. She works as a director at the federal Ministry of Finance in Khartoum. Her husband, Mustafa Adelrahman, is a professor of economics at the University of Khartoum. While Selma's mother was one of multiple wives to her father, she and Mustafa do not practice polygamy, which is still common in parts of Sudan. Selma's oldest son, Mohamed, is a physician and is married and working in Saudi Arabia. Her middle child,



People try to earn some money by selling peanuts and sugar outside of their shelters in East Darfur, Sudan. (David Snyder | Dreamstime.com)

a daughter named Amel, is an elementary school teacher. Amel is unmarried and still lives at home with her parents. Selma's youngest son, Hisham, is still in college in Khartoum, studying urban planning.

Selma grew up outside of the capital in Blue Nile State, located eight hours south of Khartoum by car. She learned to cook from her mother and grandmother, who prepared traditional dishes like breaded and fried river fish and *waika,* a dish made with dried okra flour, which she still prepares for her family in Khartoum. While her children are no longer living under one roof, Selma continues to cook dinners for her husband, Amel, and Hisham, who look forward to suppertime and the dishes she prepares.

As a practicing Muslim, Selma looks forward to the religious festival marking the end of the month of Ramadan when devout Muslims fast from sunrise to sundown each day. To celebrate, her eldest son and his wife return from overseas, and the family is reunited for a feast that includes roast mutton or goat and *bellah,* or dates, for dessert.

## Major Foodstuffs

Many standard Sudanese dishes have a grain as their main ingredient. In the west, millet is grown widely and is the base for *aseeda,* or boiled millet flour. This filling dish has the consistency of thickened polenta and is typically enjoyed with a *moullah,* or stew. Central Sudan produces sorghum, which is ground into flour called *fetareetah.* This flour is then used to form a batter that is fried into thin pancakes called *kisra* that are also served along with stews and cooked vegetables. In the north, wheat is produced and harvested for bread flour, used to make *gurassah,* flat unleavened bread fried in a pan. Cassava was introduced to southern Sudan in the 1830s by the British colonizers in an attempt to provide a crop that was more drought resistant and grew underground so that pests that fed on aboveground stalks would not damage the crop. This tuber is now a staple of southern Sudanese cooking.

In much of Sudan, meat makes the meal. The most common meats are lamb, mutton, and beef. Goat, camel, chicken, and fish are also consumed regionally. Meat can be prepared simply on skewers over a grill, or as a component of a stew or rice dish. Many meat varieties are ground and formed into kebabs, which are then served with bread and a spicy yogurt sauce called *shohta.*

Peanuts, or groundnuts, are a favorite ingredient and key export item for Sudan. Vendors serve roasted peanuts on streets across the country, and the nut is incorporated into fresh salads that accompany Sudanese barbecue, such as *salata dugwah.*

### ***Salata Dugwah*** **(Peanut-Paste Salad)**

*Serves 4 as a side dish*

**Ingredients**

4–6 medium tomatoes

½ c finely diced purple onion

1 tsp salt

⅛ tsp ground cloves

⅛ tsp ground curry leaves

½ tsp ground coriander

1 tsp minced garlic

⅓ c ground fresh peanuts (unsweetened peanut butter can be substituted)

Dash of sugar

Wash and dice the tomatoes and place them in a mixing bowl. Add the diced onions and incorporate thoroughly. Stir in the salt, cloves, curry leaves, co-

riander, and garlic. Finally, add the peanut paste and a dash of sugar and mix well.

Fava beans, or *fuul,* are known for the classic dish of the same name that is widely eaten throughout Sudan and much of northern Africa and the Middle East. An excellent source of protein, fuul is often served as a morning or midday meal.

Date palm trees are cultivated along the banks of the Nile from the northern state of Sudan down south of Khartoum to Sinnar state. Sudanese dates, or bellah, are prized for their size and flavor and are found in snacks such as *bellah madeedah,* a smoothie made from wheat paste, clarified butter, milk, yogurt, sugar, dates, and honey. While not native to Sudan, mangoes were introduced 6,000 years ago and many varietals flourish today. The Sudanese town of Shendi is particularly famous for its mangoes. Banana trees are plentiful in parts of southern Sudan, and they are consumed in many parts of the country. Dates, mangoes, and bananas are all rich sources of essential vitamins. Sudanese recipes often call for onions, tomatoes, cucumbers, and green peppers. These ingredients are either incorporated into hot entrées or highlighted in salads or side dishes. Another popular leaf vegetable is arugula, served fresh as a side salad.

Among the popular drinks, *karkaday* is a magenta-colored juice or tea made from dried hibiscus flowers. The dried petals are prepared as either a cold or a hot drink rich in vitamin C. The *tibeldi* trees in southern Sudan produce fruit that is dried to a chalky, wrinkled consistency and creates a thick juice when mixed with water. The dried tibeldi fruit is sold widely in markets across Sudan.

## Cooking

Most Sudanese dishes are cooked over heat as opposed to baked, regardless of whether one lives in the city or the countryside. Urban kitchens typically have a stovetop but might not include a proper oven. In cities, bakeries that produce cookies and popular breads are plentiful. In the rural areas, cooking is typically done over a fire. Finding fuel can mean seeking wood from a far distance, given the deforestation and desertification of much of Sudan. In southern Sudan, charcoal grills have replaced wood-fueled grills as the most popular cooking mechanism. In the most arid climates of Sudan, meat and fruit are preserved through a drying process that keeps the food edible for many months.

## Typical Meals

Urban Sudanese often take only a cup of milk tea and a simple cookie (referred to by the British term *biscuit*) at home in the early morning before starting their workday at 8 or 9 A.M. Some might stop for a potent espresso-sized cup of *jebena,* or spiced coffee, on the way to work. Alternatively, a tray of such coffee might be fetched for an office from one of the many jebena vendors after the workday is underway. The coffee tradition in Sudan is strong, as it is neighbors with Ethiopia, the birthplace of the bean. The meal referred to as breakfast is eaten at around 10 or 11 A.M. and might consist of a simple sandwich made of a round individual-size loaf of white bread stuffed with *tamaaya* (falafel) or fuul. Lunch therefore comes much later in the day, usually sometime between 2 and 5 P.M. The meal is more robust than breakfast and could involve takeout from a growing number of fast-food establishments that sell kebabs, French fries, and, in Khartoum, even pizza. Workmates sometimes share a spread of gurassah (the flatbread) dipped in *sharmut moullah,* a meat stew. Given the later dining times for lunch, dinner is typically taken well into the evening, between 8:30 and 11 P.M. Women are expected to do the cooking, and while some might employ hired help, many still handle the task on their own. Bread is a component of the meal that would likely be purchased, while others, like *sheearia,* a sweet noodle dish, would be made at home. Simple salads of sliced tomatoes, purple onions, and cucumber are common.

### *Fuul Sudani* (Sudanese Fava Bean Stew)

*Serves 4*

**Ingredients**

1 lb fava beans
Salt to taste

1 tbsp sesame oil
1 medium onion, diced
1 green pepper, diced
1 medium tomato, diced
1 tsp chili powder
1 tsp cumin
Juice of 1 small lemon
3 tbsp feta cheese

Soak the beans overnight (at least 3 hours), then boil them in water until they are tender. While the beans are cooking, heat a large skillet over medium-high heat, and add the sesame oil, then cook the green pepper and onion until they wilt, about 2–3 minutes. Then add the tomato and a dash of salt, cooking just until the tomato is warm but not cooked so much it loses its shape. Turn down the heat to simmer. Once the beans are soft, drain them, retaining 1½ to 2 cups of the cooking water, and place the beans in a mixing bowl. Then, with the back of a flat wooden spoon or curved spatula, mash the beans so that they break apart. Sprinkle with the remaining salt, chili powder, and cumin to taste. Add the beans and the reserved water to the skillet and combine thoroughly, incorporating the lemon juice and salt to taste. Turn the heat back up to medium high until it almost begins to bubble, and then take it off the heat and serve the fuul in bowls with the feta crumbled generously over the top.

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For rural Sudanese farmers or herders, the rhythm of their day creates an alternative meal structure. In addition, different regions of Sudan produce distinct crops, which are reflected in the meals. Millet may be their staple, or it could be wheat. Dairy is emphasized in the west, where cattle are plentiful. Fish play a more central role in the fertile communities that line the White and Blue Nile rivers. Dates are grown in the north and feature prominently in their cuisine.

## Eating Out

In rural villages, eating out involves being invited to another family's home for a meal, either as a gesture of friendship or because of a shared celebration. The Sudanese pride themselves on their hospitality, which is most often demonstrated by feeding guests. In towns and midsize cities, small eateries sell grilled meat, salads, and bread for eating in or takeout. In addition to restaurants, these locales have a collection of street vendors offering everything from roasted corn to *bakoumbah,* a sweet porridge made from boiled millet, yogurt, clarified butter, custard powder, sesame paste, and sugar.

Khartoum has a thriving restaurant scene, from fancy rooftop dining at the best hotels to corner restaurants in residential neighborhoods that serve a Sudanese favorite, *koftah,* or grilled meatballs. Lebanese, Egyptian, Chinese, Indian, Ethiopian, and Italian restaurants are popular with both locals and non-Sudanese residents of the city. The Kenyan restaurant chain Carnivore opened a branch on prime real estate facing the Nile and serves a wide range of meat that includes the traditional (beef and lamb) and the more adventurous (crocodile and camel). In addition to restaurants, Khartoum also has a vibrant street-food scene, where customers can enjoy kisra and moullah, or a grilled meat technique called *salat* that involves searing meat over hot river rocks and salt, to name just a few.

## Special Occasions

For practicing Muslims in Sudan, there are two major holidays that involve food: Ramadan Bairam and Kurban Bairam. Ramadan Bairam is also known as Eid al Ramadan. Ramadan refers to the Muslim month of fasting, determined annually by the lunar calendar and lasting roughly 30 days. All Muslims are required to not eat or drink anything from sunrise until sunset. Pregnant women, the sick, children under the age of 13, and those in transit are exempt. The nights of Ramadan involve *fatour,* or the social breaking of the daily fast with a shared meal. Ramadan culminates with the Eid al Ramadan, which marks the end of the month of Ramadan. The celebration extends for three or four days and involves eating and visiting with family and friends.

Kurban Bairam, also known more widely as Eid al Kabier, is another Muslim lunar holiday that marks the 10th month called Zu al Hajj, the designated month of the year in which Muslims from around the world make a pilgrimage to Mecca. Eid al Kabier marks the day when those in Mecca will have journeyed to the neighboring city of Medina, where each pilgrim will perform an animal sacrifice. In Sudan, Eid al Kabier lasts for four to five days and is a celebratory time for shared meals and family visits. Every Muslim family with the means to do so will slaughter a ram to mark the occasion.

## Diet and Health

While the introduction of fast food and large supermarkets in the urban areas has meant a shift in diet for some Sudanese, most Sudanese still live in small villages and towns, and their diet remains largely the same as that of their ancestors. As Sudan continues to urbanize, this trend will shift accordingly. The life expectancy in Sudan is an average of 51 years, not as a result of diet but instead because of a continuous cycle of food scarcity, war, diminished health facilities, and disease.

*Anita Verna Crofts*

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# Swahili City-States

## Overview

The Swahili (WaSwahili) are a Muslim people who live on the coast of East Africa. In some respects Swahilis differ significantly from other East Africans. They have always typically lived in city-state towns rather than in nomadic groups (like the Maasai or Samburu) or in dispersed farming settlements (like the Kamba or the Luyia). Among the Swahili, a prime differentiation is whether they are from a "stone town" or a "country town." The former exhibit more orthodox Islamic customs and claim more Persian and Arab ancestry.

Lamu is an ancient stone town, a Swahili city-state in the Indian Ocean off the north coast of Kenya. It is the main town of the traditional *Swahilini*—the original geographic crucible of Swahili culture. In December 2001, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization granted World Heritage status to Lamu's Old Town, citing the fact that the old town had retained its traditional functions for over 1,000 years.

The Swahili language (called KiSwahili in the language itself ) is the national and official language of Kenya and Tanzania and is probably the African language most widely studied outside of Africa. Swahili is spoken as a first language by the Swahili people on the Kenyan and Tanzanian coasts and the adjacent islands: Zanzibar, Pemba, Mombasa, Lamu, and more. This Swahili is a full and complex language (with 15 grammatical genders), but there is also a trade language based on simplified pidgin Swahili. The simplified version has led to a false reputation Swahili sometimes has as not being a real language. Swahili is spoken as a second (or third or fourth) language by tens of millions of people, mainly in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Congo (Democratic Republic of the Congo). There are also speakers in Mozambique, Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, Zambia, Malawi, and the Comoros, and even in southern Arabian countries such as Yemen and Oman.

When the Europeans arrived in the 1600s, they found an urban, Muslim people who lived in stone houses, conducted trade with India and China, and had an active written literature. They viewed the Swahili as so different from other Africans that they assumed the culture to be a foreign transplant, for example, Arabic. But Swahili culture, while Islamic, is not Arabic: It is a unique, syncretic, African-based culture.

Swahili towns stretch along the eastern coast of Africa from Somalia to Mozambique. The East African coast has been important to Indian Ocean trade for the past 1,000 years, and small boats or dhows have sailed on the seasonal monsoon winds, which have blown ships from Arabia, Persia, and India toward the Swahili coast and then later in the year blown them back again toward home. Swahili food shows influences from Africa, India, Arabia, and Europe—not surprising, for the Swahilis have been the contact group, trading the goods of inland Africa and the rest of the world for many centuries. The group of greatest modern influence is undoubtedly the people of the Indian subcontinent. Swahilis' default seasoning is curry, and Indian spices are common; important snacks are samosas, *bhajia* (a kind of deep-fried onion fritter), and other Indian snacks; the default bread is a chapati; the most festive rice dish is *biryani,* a mixed pilaf (showing pan-Islamic origins as well).



A grove of coconut palm trees. Mnazi, the coconut palm, occupies a special place in Swahili culture. (Jonathange | Dreamstime.com)

In the modern day, Swahili meals center around *wali* (rice), chapati flatbreads made with white flour (*unga*) and whole-grain flour (*atta*), or cornmeal porridge (*sima, bodo,* or *ugali*), eaten with a *kitoweo,* an accompaniment of fish, meat, or vegetables. *Mchuzi* is the word for a sauce-based kitoweo; it is variously translated into English as gravy, soup, sauce, or curry. *Supu* (from English) is also used for soup.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Sawiti bin Mohamed rises early, performs his *alfajiri* (morning) prayers, and arrives at the Lamu market just after dawn. He and other men (only men come to the market) congregate around the butcher, who is sectioning, cutting, and dispensing parts of the cow that was slaughtered just earlier. He orders a half pound of meat with bone. The butcher cuts what he thinks will be about a kilo and puts it on a sheet of newspaper on one side of a balance scale, then puts a kilo weight on the opposite pan. In the vegetable area of the market Sawiti buys three onions, chilis, garlic, two European potatoes, a carrot, bananas, and coriander leaf (cilantro). He will cook a *mchuzi wa ng'ombe* to accompany the rice he plans to serve.

If he were cooking an extraspecial dish for this evening's meal—grilled meat—he might buy boneless *sarara* (filet), then find someone with a papaya tree that has a fruit, buy one, and marinate the meat, cut up, in the shredded papaya and a combination of spices. This will tenderize the meat to the point it can be chewed, as the cattle that have been coming to the market these days have been Somali cattle that have walked many miles on their way to slaughter. This meat makes good mchuzis, though, especially pieces with bone.

He exchanges lengthy greetings and news for a long while with the other men. They are dressed alike: a

*kofia* (cylindrical hat), a *shati* (a collared shirt) or a *kanzu* (a full-length white shirt), and a *saruni* (a sarong), with rubber or leather *viatu* (sandals). He then leaves and stops at a *duka* (general store) to buy a small two-tablespoon tin of tomato paste and a packet of *bizari,* premade curry powder. Other days he will buy individual spices from bins and grind them himself on a grinding stone. He also buys two ripe coconuts and drops them off at his sister's house.

She cracks them in half, disposes of the water inside, then sits on an *mbuzi,* a seat of two crisscrossed boards with a sharp C-shaped saw blade—with the teeth on the outside of the C—stuck in the end of one board. She grinds the white part of the coconut with this blade, catching the result in a bowl underneath. She puts the ground coconut into a bag woven from fine palm fronds called a *kifumbu,* pours water into it, and squeezes out *tui* (coconut cream) into the bowl. She separates the first output from the second and third and will give them to Sawiti when he passes by again later.

Sawiti is a master professional *mpishi,* a cook. He is expert at Swahili, Indian, and European cuisines. Born in the area by the border with Somalia, he is a Bajuni Swahili and has lived up and down the Swahili coast. He has worked in restaurants and as the personal live-in chef for well-to-do Indians and Europeans. He can cook on a modern propane gas range using a baterie de cuisine and can make the same high-quality food when he needs to with only firewood and a battered *sufuria* pot if on safari (Swahili for "journey"), for example, on a sailing dhow trip to the northern islands of the Lamu Archipelago.

He is cooking with two friends and has no kitchen to speak of—not even a cutting board, only a knife, a kerosene cooker, one large spoon, and some sufuria pots. He peels the vegetables in a continuous single peel with the knife. One of the friends then holds the knife immobile, sharp side toward Sawiti, who grasps the meat and saws off pieces against the knife. Sawiti takes an empty tin can, puts peeled garlic and salt into it, and uses a stick to mash the garlic into paste. He mixes this with the meat and fries it with a piece of cooking fat from a small tin, adding the onion, bizari, and later the tomato paste. He adds water, the cut-up vegetables, and later the heavy tui and *dania* (coriander leaf). When the stew is done, he takes it off the heat and covers it. There is no refrigerator, but this dish will be good to eat even the next morning if it is kept covered and no one eats from it with his hand.

It is nearly noon, time for the *adhuhuri* prayer, and Sawiti heads toward one of the many mosques in Lamu town. On the main street, Usita wa mui, a block behind the seafront, he passes and greets groups of men on benches talking, drinking from small cups, and smoking; children carrying and eating from trays of deep-fried foods their mothers have made for sale; and men eating meals at outdoor tables while meat is charcoal-grilled nearby. A group of women enter a restaurant to eat snacks and drink fruit juice while passersby purchase sweets from a shop to take home. There are no wheeled vehicles in Lamu; the streets—mostly so narrow that if one spreads one's arms out, one will touch the adjacent buildings—are left to pedestrians, donkeys, and handcarts.

Sawiti returns for a midday nap. Later, that evening, he cooks rice using the lighter second and third tuis. He turns the hot rice onto a *sinia,* a platter. The three men set out a mat on the floor and wash their hands with soap and water. They sit around the platter on the floor. Sawiti uses a large spoon to make a depression in the rice in front of each diner and ladles in some mchuzi. On top of the mound he places some peeled banana and whole chilies for those who want a bite now and again. The men say "bismillahi" and eat with their right hands, occasionally placing some choice piece of meat in front of their friend if they think they have gotten too many good pieces. From time to time Swahili replenishes the mchuzi from the pot.

After the meal they go across to a *hoteli,* a café or restaurant, to have a cup of chai (milk tea), or they stroll down the main street to a *tambuu* (betel-leaf) seller and sit on benches on the street side chewing tambuu while others smoke cigarettes and drink *kahawa tungu* (strong cardamom-scented coffee) and pass the news of the day.

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***Samaki wa Kupaka***

A signature dish of the Swahili is *samaki wa kupaka* (also called *samaki paka*), fish coated with a paste of coconut cream and spices and usually cooked over charcoal. One could also bake or oven-broil it.

2–3 lb whole firm-fleshed fish like red snapper, scaled and cleaned, head on, tail and fins removed

Spice mix: ginger (a 2-in. piece), 1 head of garlic, and 2 hot chilies, all ground or mashed and chopped together (this is a common Swahili spice mixture—Swahili *sofrito,* so to speak—that one can make in quantity, storing the extra in a refrigerator)

About 2 c *tui mzito* (coconut cream; see note at end of recipe)

1 tbsp curry powder

½ c lemon juice or tamarind pulp or juice

1 tbsp turmeric

1 tsp chili powder, if desired

Slash one or two deep diagonal cuts in each side of the fish. Rub spice mix into the cuts and the inside cavity of the fish. Let sit for 30 minutes to an hour. Grill in a fish basket over a charcoal fire.

Meanwhile, combine tui mzito with curry powder, lemon juice or tamarind pulp or juice, turmeric, and chili powder, if using. Simmer together in a small saucepan until thick, about 10 minutes. When the fish is almost done, spoon coconut cream mixture onto the fish, letting it cook slowly into the flesh.

Serve with rice, chapati flatbreads, or sima (cornmeal porridge).

Tui mzito: If using canned coconut cream, do not shake the can; open and spoon off the creamy heavy part on top. If making your own, use only the first squeezings from each coconut. In either case you will need several cans or several coconuts.

## Major Foodstuffs

Tui, coconut cream, is an important element in Swahili food culture. Largely because of the nature of its fats, it can transform what might otherwise be humdrum foods into dishes of depth, complexity, and richness. Tui deepens spices, blends flavors, and corrects asymmetries. Grated coconut is put inside a kifumbu, a woven bag, and water is added. The bag is wrung out over a bowl, which catches the fluid. One can use cheesecloth, or a potato ricer also produces excellent tui. Typically one does three squeezings. Classic meal preparation uses the first, most fat-rich squeezing in the mchuzi, and the second and third squeezings to make *wali wa nazi* (coconut rice). Others cook the mchuzi with the second squeezing and only put the first in to finish the dish.

*Mnazi,* the coconut palm, occupies a special place in Swahili culture. Conversations about the coconut caused the great poet and cultural historian Ahmed Sheikh Nabhany to present to this writer *Umbuji wa Mnazi* (The grace of the coconut palm), his book of first-rank Swahili *mashairi* poems extolling the coconut palm. Swahilis say that if people own a certain number of coconut trees they can retire happy, because the trees will furnish them with everything they need to live. The palm fronds are the roofing material of thatched *makuti* roofs. The husks are excellent firewood; the sap can be tapped and in a day or so becomes palm wine, which in a few days becomes *siki,* palm wine vinegar. And from the ripe coconut one can get tui. Tui is the richest substance in traditional Swahili culture, and there are proverbs and sayings with tui as their central theme.

Indeed, the coconut is king. (*Maji ya*) *Dafu,* "milk/juice (lit., fluid) of an unripe coconut," is a popular drink in the plantation fields and in towns is sold from pushcarts in the street. The husk and shell are whittled away from the top of the nut with repeated upward strokes of a knife (or just lopped off with a *panga,* or machete) until a small hole in the inner husk reveals the milk. Sometimes a straw is provided, though usually the customer drinks straight from the coconut. If the customer also wants to eat the meat of the nut (and many do not), the seller opens the hole wider and cuts a *kijiko* (spoon) from a piece of husk, which either he or the buyer uses to scrape the meat free. With the curved part facing the center of the nut, the spoon is used as a wedge between the meat and the husk. The meat drops into the bottom of the nut and the spoon is turned over, curved side down, and used to convey the meat to the mouth. It is acceptable to sit at the curb on a street to consume a dafu.

Swahili cuisine is a coastal one, and finfish is an important foodstuff, as are shrimp, squid, octopus,

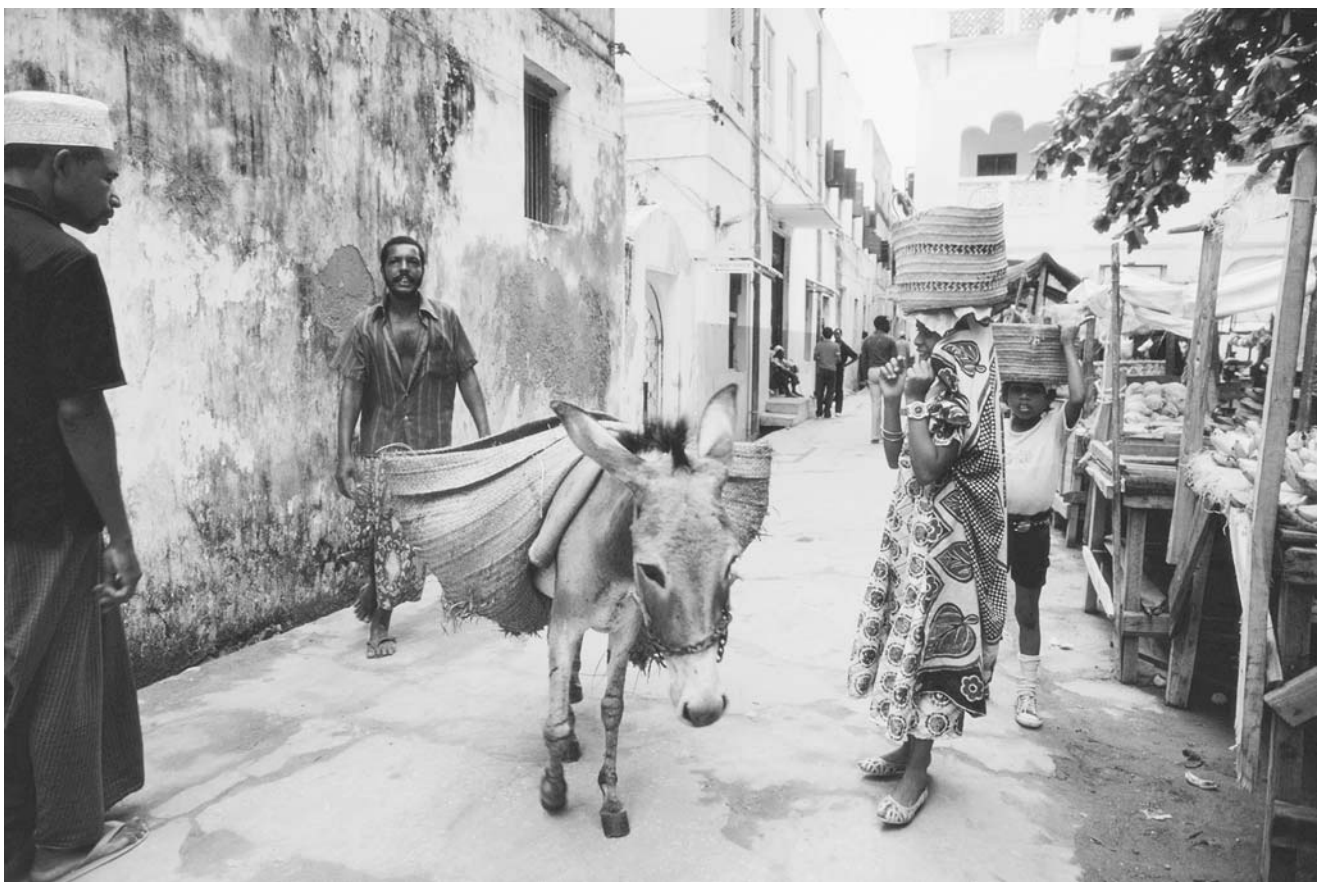
and cuttlefish. Swahilis do not typically eat crab or shellfish, nor lobster, though these are served to foreign guests (as opposed to, say, pork, which is never eaten, cooked, touched, or countenanced at all). The meat of cattle, chickens, and goats is widely used.

Fruits such as limes, pineapple, soursop, oranges, mangoes, tamarinds, and papayas are used widely, the papaya often for its meat-tenderizing properties. In Lamu for years the best *mishkaki*—meat on a skewer—was made by marinating the beef in a mixture of papaya and spices. The cattle were Somali animals that had been driven great distances, and yet the meat was tenderized by this mixture. Cabbage, onions, squash, and tomatoes are among the main vegetables.

Swahilis are Muslims, prohibited from drinking alcohol. Palms are tapped and the liquid is allowed to ferment, but it is proper to wait the few days until it turns to vinegar (*siki*) to use it, even in cooking. Other fermented foods include *maziwa lala* (yogurt) and *ng'onda* (salted, dried, slightly fermented fish). Popular drinks, apart from Western-style, fizzy bottled sodas, are tea, coffee, and a cinnamon beverage. Sweetened tamarind and lime juice are popular as well.

## Eating Out

Swahilis normally eat meals at home. Restaurants are typically for those who are traveling, on pilgrimage, or working far from where they live. Tourists sometimes puzzle over why Swahili restaurants do not attempt to serve food in the fashion it would be served in a home. The reason is apparently that the intent of a restaurant is not to try to recreate the privacy and intimacy of home.



A Tanzanian woman carries a basket on her head while shopping at a street market on Lamu Island. (Christopher Pillitz | Getty Images)

As recently as 1985 there were essentially no restaurants other than in a tourist resort set away from the town. This was a period when Zanzibar was just about to open up to tourism and other outsiders, yet there was as yet no real impetus for restaurants. There were many snack vendors in the waterfront gardens in the evening, since a stroll (*matembezi*) and a snack are a common form of entertainment.

Lamu is a different story, for tourists and many government workers and others from non-Swahili areas now live there. Thus, there are cafés and restaurants (*hoteli* in Swahili) catering to them and to Swahilis looking for matembezi. There are complex rules concerning eating in restaurants. In Swahili culture, it is only fit for small children to eat while walking on the street. There is even a saying warning against such behavior, *Kula kitu kitamu kinjianjia mtu atasibiwa na shetani* (One who eats delicious food while walking will be possessed by a devil). One cannot eat in the street, but men may eat outdoors if seated. Such outdoor seating is normally separated from the street, if only symbolically, by a fence.

Women do not sit at outside tables. If women eat at a restaurant—a fairly uncommon occurrence—it is often in an all-female group in an inner, enclosed room away from the other patrons. One sometimes sees exceptions in restaurants that cater to travelers. Indeed, travelers are an exception to many rules. A Swahili proverb says *Msafiri kafiri,* "A traveler is (lowered to the level of) an unbeliever"; that is, one must do all sorts of things in the course of traveling that one would not do normally: Eat unclean foods and break other taboos.

## Special Occasions

Food behavior comes under intense scrutiny during the month of Ramadan when all devout Muslims fast during daylight hours. They are forbidden to eat food, chew the stimulant *miraa,* smoke cigarettes, drink water, or even swallow their saliva. The signal that the fast is over each day is the evening call to prayer. Women break the fast at home. Many men, however, break the fast in the street. In preparation for breaking the fast, table upon table of food, sweets, and savories are set up right in the street in Lamu and Mombasa. Kahawa and *maji tamu* (fruit juice; literally, "sweet liquid") are also set ready. Men buy their food and drink and in Lamu sit opposite it and wait for the call to prayer that will signal the end of the day. In Mombasa men sit or stand in groups on the street and pool the food they will break the fast with. After breaking the fast, the men then go quickly off to the mosque to pray, and then home to eat a full meal. Ramadan cooking is often special and festive, with many special dishes made during that time only. Eid al-Fitr ends Ramadan, and it is a public holiday in Kenya. Gifts are exchanged, new clothes are given as presents, and festive foods are abundant.

## Diet and Health

Although many nutrition problems remain, Swahili have more access to protein than many other groups in the region given their routine eating of fish and other marine protein sources. This undoubtedly helps as well with ensuring enough iodine in the diet, a severe problem in some parts of East Africa.

*Robert A. Leonard*

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# Swaziland

## Overview

The Kingdom of Swaziland, one of Africa's last remaining monarchies, lies landlocked between South Africa and Mozambique. Swaziland is a small country, both in population and in geographic size. It is divided into four different regions: Highveld, Middleveld, Lowveld, and Lubombo. The landscape is mostly mountainous with hills in lower-lying areas. The climate is temperate with more tropical temperatures in lower-lying areas in the Lowveld. The majority of the population lives in the Middleveld where rainfall is less frequent than in the mountains. Its largest city and capital is Mbabane, located in the northwestern part of the country, in the Highveld. The food and diet of the Swazi traditionally were and still are affected greatly by seasonality.

Swaziland gained its independence from Great Britain in 1968 with its precolonial political system still relatively intact. The population of Swaziland is estimated around 1.2 million inhabitants. The population has, however, grown slowly due to the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, with 26 percent of its population being infected, the highest rate in the world. Its two official languages are SiSwati and English. Sixty-nine percent of the population is Christian, and the remainder practices traditional indigenous faiths. Religion has had an effect on food culture and eating. Swaziland's economy is made up mostly of subsistence farming and mining.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Ndoro and Sikose live outside of Manzini on Swazi Nation Land. They have four children, all of whom attend a nearby school. With rising food prices, Ndoro is finding it hard to afford basic foods, especially since losing his job in the mining sector in South Africa last year. To help pay the children's school fees, Ndoro has planted some vegetables on his small plot of land. The rain of the previous summer helped them grow, whereas the previous year had been very dry and large amounts of the maize crops were lost. What vegetables he does not use to feed his family, he sells. In his garden he grows green leafy vegetables and pumpkins. Ndoro owns no livestock and therefore must buy his milk and meat from the grocery store. Every day, Sikose buys bread, and twice a week they buy milk because they don't have refrigeration. Meat is bought only for special occasions or when it can be afforded. Once a month and depending on the family's financial situation, Sikose will buy canned items, such as tinned tuna. The family doesn't eat much fruit, but last year Ndoro planted a banana tree for the family's consumption and also for income.

## Major Foodstuffs

Traditionally, sorghum and maize were the main staples in the Swazi diet. Indigenous leafy greens and legumes accompanied the grains. While the base of the Swazi diet remains relatively the same, Western foods have been added due to availability and/or scarcity of indigenous plants and a shift from a hunting and gathering lifestyle to food purchasing. Western foods that have made their way into the Swazi diet as main staples are bread, rice, cabbage, tomatoes, and onions. Vegetables, such as carrots, spinach, beetroot, potatoes, peppers, chilies, okra,



An unidentified girl buys dried fish from a trader before a traditional Reed dance ceremony in Ludzidzini, Swaziland, 2009. About 80,000 virgins from all over the country attended this yearly event, which goes on for a week and which is the biggest in Swazi culture. (Getty Images)

pumpkins, and gourds, are also consumed. Fruit is limited due mainly to its price and availability. Some families may plant their own fruit trees, such as orange, guava, banana, and apple. Wild fruits indigenous to Swaziland have decreased in availability but can still be found. The most common are the monkey orange (*Strychnos cocculoides*), quinine berry (*Petalostigma pubescens*), and *marula* fruit (*Sclerocarya birrea*), a tart round fruit with a light yellow skin. The marula fruit (sometimes spelled merula) is fermented to make the traditional strong Swazi beer.

Meat, especially beef, is not eaten on a regular basis but generally reserved for special celebrations and ceremonies. Rural families keep their own livestock including cattle, goats, and chickens. Chicken is the most frequently consumed. Traditionally, game and birds would have been hunted; however, these species have now decreased in numbers and are hunted less frequently. Insects, such as caterpillars, termites, and locusts, were traditional delicacies. Newer generations are aware of their edibility but do not have a taste for them. Fish has become a regular part of the Swazi diet, whereas traditionally it was not consumed due to an old belief that it was linked to snakes. Over the past 30 years, with the increasing availability of canned fish, it has become a popular food because it does not need refrigeration, an important consideration in rural areas.

Cow milk is consumed regularly. Fresh milk is available; however, sour milk called *emasi* is preferred. Emasi was traditionally ripened in a gourd. A hole at the bottom was plugged with a root. When the milk was ripe, the whey was drained from the hole in the base.

## Cooking

Boiling, stewing, frying, and roasting are the most common cooking methods. Baking soda is used when boiling leafy greens to tenderize them, especially when the leaves are tough. The ash of aloe was traditionally used for the same effect. Legumes are boiled as well, with onions and tomatoes added as flavorings. Beans may be cooked with soup bones for added flavor. Meat is boiled, stewed, roasted, or fried. Fresh fish, caught in reservoirs near homes in rural areas, is generally fried, and tinned fish is cooked with fried onions and tomatoes.

The use of cooking fats, specifically oil, has aided in advancing cooking techniques among the Swazi people. This has allowed for more frying of foods, whereas before most items were stewed or boiled. Cooking equipment has also facilitated meal preparation. Prior to stoves and running water, firewood and water had to be brought to the kitchen, often from very long distances.

The traditional Swazi kitchen would have been inside a kitchen hut, called the *lidladla.* Cooking also took place outside over an open fire when the weather permitted. Inside the lidladla, a depression was created in the center of the hut floor, and a piece of iron was used to line the hearth. Iron rods were placed together to form a tripod to hold the pot over the flames. Today, food is prepared in a kitchen over either a coal stove or a portable camping-type stove. An open fire is also still used on occasion to prepare items like tea or porridge. To reduce the time spent preparing meals, as well as to save on fuel, the majority of meals are prepared once a day and then reheated as needed. Refrigeration is common in urban areas, but in rural areas not everyone has access to it. Cooking utensils were traditionally carved out of wood or gourds. Today, the use of aluminum, iron, and enamel pots and pans is common, as well as china or ceramic plates.

## Typical Meals

Traditionally two meals were eaten during the day, one in the morning and one in the evening. The morning meal was informal and eaten midmorning. Different age-groups and genders ate at different times. The evening meal was shared together at sunset and eaten in the *indlunkula,* the great hut.

Today, however, meals are eaten at unspecific times due to busy schedules. When possible, families eat together. Age and gender no longer specify mealtimes. Three meals are common today. Breakfast is usually eaten between eight and nine in the morning once the children have left for school. Lunch is eaten in the midafternoon around two once the children have returned from school, and supper is between six and seven. The main meal of the day is lunch, at which time food for the evening will be prepared. This helps save on food and water. Snacking between meals is not common. If something is consumed it is usually a soda or cordial. When the consumption of two meals was common, snacking was prevalent. *Jugo* beans (Bambara groundnut) would be boiled and carried to the fields as well as sugarcane, wild indigenous fruits, roasted groundnuts (peanuts), and *amahewu,* a fermented maize-meal beverage.

A typical breakfast consists of soft sour porridge with sugar, tea or coffee with creamer, and bread. Bread is spread with peanut butter or jam and sometimes margarine. Bread is replaced on occasion by scones or *vetkoek,* a traditional Afrikaner pastry that is deep-fried and filled with mincemeat or left plain and spread with honey or jam. Eggs are eaten when available but traditionally were restricted to women after the age of puberty, as it was believed that they would make them desire men.

Lunch is a stiff maize-meal porridge that is replaced at times by rice, mealie rice, or *phutus,* a maize meal cooked in such a way that it takes on the consistency of breadcrumbs. Phutus is served with fresh or sour milk (emasi) and sometimes relish. Relish in this sense refers to a side dish of leafy greens, meat, fish, eggs, or legumes. Maize is eaten daily. Dinner is leftovers from lunch. The maize-meal porridge is reheated and served with a different relish than what was served at lunch. A lighter supper without porridge would include a cup of tea with bread or scones. Tea is not part of the traditional Swazi diet. Its prevalence in today's diet is from British influence during the occupation.

The Sunday lunch is considered the culinary highlight of the week. Nontraditional foods, especially Western foods, are served to mark the special occasion. The Sunday lunch includes a fried, stewed, or roasted chicken served with rice and fresh and cooked salads, as well as pumpkin, mashed potatoes, or cabbage.

Meals are usually eaten with the right hand only, and utensils are used for softer or more liquid dishes that would be difficult to eat with the hands. The meal is an important way to express gratitude and hospitality as well as status. Meals are also used to perform rituals and mark certain celebrations. Children are taught from an early age to share their food with others. Food is often brought as a gift when visiting or given to guests upon their departure for the trip home. Food is always served to guests, and it is considered impolite to decline food when offered. It is also considered impolite not to serve food to a guest. Important guests are served meals similar to those served on Sunday. It is an important mark of status and shows respect for the distinguished guest. This meal includes rice, chicken, cooked and fresh salads, and a dessert that consists of jelly, canned fruit, and custard. Traditionally, men would be served in their own bowl, whereas the hostess and female guests would have to share the same dish.

The most prestigious foods in Swazi culture are beef and beer. Cattle are the main symbol of the accumulation of wealth. Green vegetables are regarded as women's food and suitable to serve to guests. Milk is regarded as a health food and used as a purifying medicine.

## Eating Out

Eating out is reserved for the wealthy and tourists. More than half the population of Swaziland lives on less than $2.00 U.S. a day. However, a restaurant culture does still exist. Most restaurants are located in the town or on the outskirts of the towns. Mbabane, the capital city, Manzini, Lobamba, and Big Bend are among the places offering the widest selection of restaurants. While it is possible to eat local or traditional Swazi fare at some of these establishments, most restaurants boast French or Portuguese-inspired dishes.

## Special Occasions

Food is also used to mark celebrations, for example, religious events, harvest, birthdays, and weddings. Foods associated with celebrations are often regarded highly. This is because these foods are often scarce, expensive, and time-consuming to prepare and are reserved for special occasions. Meat is an example of a food usually reserved for celebrations. An entire animal will be slaughtered and then consumed with all of the guests. For example, during *lobola,* the ceremony that marks the handing over of the bride's dowry, meat is consumed in large quantities along with strong beer. Cattle are associated with marriage and goats with birth. An exception to having to feed guests was traditionally during a funeral, when the family is considered to be too bereaved to have to cook and relatives and friends will bring food. Today, however, this is less widely practiced, and the family of the deceased will usually roast an entire animal and serve it with scones and bread.

The biggest and most important festivals are the *incwala* and the *umhlanga.* The incwala festival is a six-day celebration at the end of December or the beginning of January depending on the crops. It marks the beginning of the harvest. The consumption of the new crops is forbidden until the ceremony is performed. On the fourth day of the six-day festival the king, who has been in seclusion up until this point during the festival, must first taste the new crops before anyone else. On the final day a huge feast of cow meat and vegetables from the new harvest is eaten. The umhlanga, or the reed dance, is held in August and lasts five days. Unmarried girls gather to pay homage to the Queen Mother. These occasions are marked with the slaughter of a beast.

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**Impala (African Antelope)**

*Serves 12*

1 impala leg (venison may be substituted)

4 cloves garlic, sliced thinly

1 c green olives, halved

Cooking oil

3 large potatoes, diced

3 large carrots, diced

4 onions, diced

1 c beef broth

10 dried prunes, pitted

Salt and pepper to taste

**Directions**

1. Rinse the meat and pat dry.

2. Remove the lower shank bone and set leg aside. Place the lower shank bone into a pot, and add water to cover. Set to simmer until reduced by half.

3. With a sharp paring knife cut slits throughout the leg. Into the slits place the garlic and olives. Season the leg with salt and pepper.

4. Place the leg into a roasting pan lightly coated with oil and cook at 325°F for 25 minutes per pound.

5. When done, remove the leg from the pan and set aside to rest.

6. Meanwhile, sauté the vegetables in cooking oil until they are soft and translucent but not browned. Add the prunes and cook until soft. Strain and set the vegetables aside.

7. Add the broth to the juices remaining in the pan and reduce by half. To serve, place the leg on a dish with the vegetables and prunes surrounding it, and drizzle the gravy over the top.

## Diet and Health

Food restrictions in the Swazi diet are adhered to but not as commonly as before. Within the culture there is a strong awareness of the relationship between food, health, and body fat. Weight is a sign of prosperity. An underweight or thin person is a sign of poor diet. Milk is seen as an important beverage. It is drunk daily and seen as purifying during ritual occasions. While women are allowed to drink milk throughout most times in their lives, they are restricted from, or have limited contact with, the cows themselves. Depending on the woman's stage of life, contact between her and cattle is believed to affect the breeding and milk production of the cow.

Food restrictions were common. For example, adults who were still able to bear children were not to eat the meat of an aborted animal because it was believed that if they became pregnant they would have a miscarriage. Only the elderly were allowed to eat liver because, if younger people consumed it, it was thought that they would become forgetful. Men and older adults were not to eat soft porridge because it would cause them to become weak and lazy. Sugarcane and groundnuts were not to be consumed by pregnant women because of the belief that these would affect the baby once it was born. Sugarcane is said to cause a mucus-covered baby once it is born. Groundnuts are thought to cause the mother to give birth to a dirty baby. Some of the older generations still abide by these rules; however, the younger generations do not follow many food restrictions, as they cannot remember them.

Since the new millennium, food prices have been on the rise, making it difficult for the average Swazi family, especially when taking into account the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the society. Many of those infected with the disease require well-balanced diets to facilitate the effectiveness of their antiretroviral treatments. With the increase in food prices it is difficult for these families to obtain the proper foodstuffs.

*Kristina Lupp*

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Welcome to Swaziland Web site. http://www.welcometoswaziland.com.

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# Uganda

## Overview

Uganda is a country in equatorial East Africa measuring 241,000 square miles, a little smaller than the state of Oregon. Its population is about 32.3 million. Although Uganda is completely landlocked, a great proportion of the land lies adjacent to fresh water. There are many lakes such as Victoria, Kyoga, and Albert as well as the Nile River, and thus the land is extremely fertile in many places. This was one of the reasons the British designated the area a protectorate in the 19th century; their legacy is still apparent, in some food preferences if not in people of European descent, since white settlers were not permitted. Indians and others from throughout the British Empire were allowed to emigrate and have left a permanent culinary legacy. The population today on the whole remains relatively impoverished, and a large proportion of the wealth remains in the hands of a minority. Uganda is also a very young country, with a median age of 15 years (half the population is under 14 years old) and a life expectancy of 53 years. This is largely owing to widespread mortality associated with HIV.

The people of Uganda fall into dozens of separate ethnic groups, none of which constitutes a majority. The most powerful, centered around the largest city of Kampala, have historically been the Baganda. Their kingdom (officially recognized by the national government) is called Buganda, and an individual of this group is called a *muganda.* The Baganda comprise 17 percent of the total population. Other groups include the Banyakole with 9.5 percent, the Basoga with 8.4 percent, the Bakiga with 6.9 percent, and the Iteso with 6.4 percent, plus many others. As a legacy of colonial rule, English is an official language, though Bantu languages are widely spoken as well as Luo among the northern Nilotic peoples and Swahili as a kind of lingua franca in the north. Uganda has been an independent country since 1962 and has suffered great political vicissitudes, most notably under Idi Amin, who ruled for eight disastrous years in the 1970s. Its economy is growing rapidly today, however, despite the recent contraction of the economy globally. It is nonetheless still among the poorest nations on earth.

Roughly 80 percent of Ugandans work in agriculture, with coffee the largest and most important export. Tea, cotton, tobacco, and refined sugar are other important agricultural and industrial products. Many people still practice subsistence agriculture, though in larger cities and especially the cosmopolitan capital Kampala a large segment of the population works in public service and the service industries.

Most Ugandans are Christian, with 42 percent Catholics, 36 percent Protestants (mostly Anglican), 12 percent Muslims, and 10 percent other or none. Many indigenous practices have been melded with Christianity, though few still fully practice the traditional religions. There is also a tiny community of Jews, or Abayudaya (people of Judah), who live around Mbale.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Madiina Nakazzi is the mother of six children and works at Makerere University in Kampala. The eldest



A family of coffee farmers in Uganda begin to husk their coffee beans. (Brian Longmore | Dreamstime.com)

of her children, Annette Nanziri Clark, is married to an American and lives in Atlanta. The two oldest boys, Roger Serunyigo and Douglas, live and work in Kampala but no longer with their mother. The three youngest children, Susan Nansamba, Enock Kakeeto, and Rose Nankya, still live at home. Rose is in her second year studying economics at Makerere University. The children have different fathers, and extended families are quite common, though monogamy is a growing trend.

Madiina is well known for her excellent cooking, of which her children are especially proud. They enjoy eating together when they can, though the pressures of work often mean the entire family gets together only on special occasions, especially birthdays. The older boys, who work in offices, often resort to street food or fast-food joints such as Zanzi, which specializes in pork and serves beer. But everyone appreciates the opportunity to eat traditional meals cooked at home by Madiina.

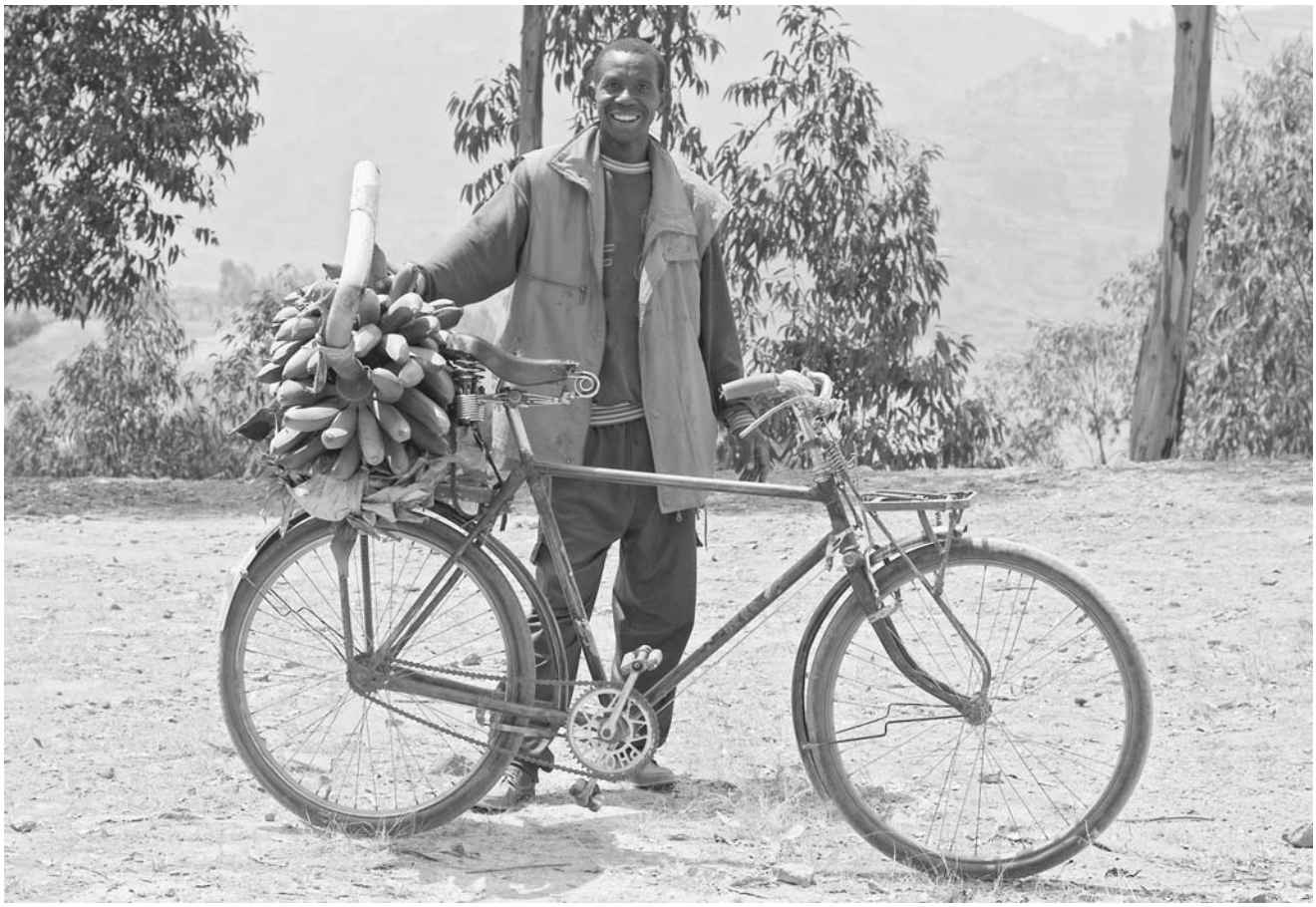
## Major Foodstuffs

A great variety of starch staples are available in Uganda, though these differ according to ethnic group and also factors such as soil fertility, which determines which staple will grow well in a given area. People are largely identified by which staple they prefer, though several may be commonly served and most people enjoy a wide range of starchy foods.

*Matooke* is the starch staple of the Baganda. It is made from a green banana (considered overripe if yellow) not dissimilar to a green plantain. In the Luganda language the word *mmere* means simply "food," but it also refers universally to matooke. There is a strict procedure governing its preparation. The bananas are peeled and soaked. They are then tied into packages made of banana leaves, placed in a pot, and steamed until soft. The bundle is then squeezed and massaged until mashed and smooth. Matooke is often served with a sauce that is steamed in the same pot. This sauce may consist of ground peanuts or smoked catfish (*mukene*) or silverfish (*nkejje*). A mushroom sauce (*butikko*) is also popular. It is said that the flavor of matooke is best when cooked over a charcoal fire rather than on gas or electric burners, which don't lend a subtle smoky aroma to the finished dish. *Katogo* is another dish similar to matooke, but the bananas are left whole and unmashed.

Many of the now-popular staples were introduced to Africa from the Americas. One is called *posho,* which is made from white corn or maize flour. It is the dominant staple of the Samya tribe from the Mbale District in eastern Uganda, and it is usually eaten with fish, either fried, roasted, or steamed, and with groundnut sauce. It is similar to the *ugali* eaten in Kenya and throughout East Africa. It is essentially a thick corn-flour mush eaten by pinching off a round ball in the hand, creating a depression on one side to serve as a scoop, and then dipping it into sauces and stews. The whole seasoned ball is then placed in the mouth and eaten. In West Africa a similar dish is known as *foufou*.

Another import from the Americas is cassava. Similar to posho, the root is cooked and mashed into



A young African man is transporting a load of bananas on his bicycle on a dirt road. The meal called *matooke,* made of green cooking bananas, is the most important food for the rural people in Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo. (iStockPhoto)

a thick porridge. This starch has largely displaced the native yam, a huge starchy white tuber not to be confused with the sweet potato, although the latter has also been brought from the Americas. Equally important is the potato, or Irish potato as it's called in Uganda, though it, too, originated in the Andes. It is eaten especially by the Bakiga people, though historically they depended more on local greens, gourds, and other vegetables.

The most important of native African grains historically are sorghum and millet. Sorghum looks like corn when growing, but instead of ears it has small round seeds at the top. Millet is a similar grain, familiar in the West as birdseed; it can be very tasty. These are eaten especially by the Banyankole ethnic group. *Kalo* is a thick mush made from millet flour that is eaten much like posho, except that it is dark and heavy. Nonetheless, it is very nutritious and can keep a person energized all day. In the north the staples among the Alur and Lugbara are wheat flour and *simsim* flour, which is made from ground sesame seeds. In the north especially, simsim is cooked with spinach.

Groundnuts, or simply *g-nut,* are perhaps the most important flavoring in Ugandan sauces. The native African bambara groundnut has been largely replaced by the New World peanut, but they are similar and the name *groundnut* remains for both species. It is used in soups or in a sauce called *binyebwa,* which is served with matooke.

Ugandans eat a wide variety of meats and especially love beef, chicken, and goat, though there are

many pork dishes as well. The following recipe is probably the most famous of Ugandan dishes; it can be made with any meat.

***Luwombo***

*Serves 4*

**Ingredients**

1 chicken (can also be made with beef or goat)

2 c roasted peanuts

2 yellow onions

1 tbsp grated ginger

4 tomatoes

Salt and pepper to taste

Banana leaves (available frozen)

Cut up a chicken (breast, thighs, and legs) into large bite-sized pieces without bones. Season with salt and pepper, and grill chicken until it begins to brown but is not cooked through. Next, crush the peanuts into a fine powder with a mortar and pestle. Chop the onion and sauté in oil until golden. Add the ginger. Dice the tomatoes and add to the onions. Cook until the liquid reduces, and then add the crushed peanuts and finish cooking the sauce. Add salt and pepper to taste. Place a few pieces of chicken, enough for a whole serving, with sauce in the center of a banana leaf. Draw in the edges, completely enclosing the ingredients, and tie at the top with a strand of banana leaf. Make four such packages. Place a few banana leaves at the bottom of a stockpot and arrange the bundles on top. Add a little water to the pot and steam for 1 hour or longer, checking to make sure the water hasn't evaporated. It is best cooked over a charcoal fire. When done, unwrap the bundles and serve one opened leaf package per plate. Serve with matooke—mashed steamed green banana. Plantains will work, but smaller green bananas from Southeast Asia are a better option. Men are advised to consider marrying only women who can properly prepare luwombo.

There are also a number of unique dishes, for example, cow's hooves, which are called *mulokoni* or *kigele,* often served with cassava. This is a popular meal late at night or at drinking parties. Probably the most unique food is green grasshoppers (katydids), which appear in the rainy season and are called *nsenene.* The name is probably onomatopoetic in origin based on the sound they make. They are caught in huge funnels, the legs and wings are removed, and they are fried in oil, salted, and served as a snack. In many rural places collecting nsenene dramatically enhances the household income.

Beans and peas are also a very important source of protein; the black-eyed pea and various relatives in the *Vigna* genus are native to Africa. Today, many varieties of beans and peas are grown and commonly included in stews and sauces. They can also be ground into a batter and fried. Fish are also very important to Ugandans who live near lakes and rivers, and smoked fish is eaten everywhere in cooked stews. Fresh fish, especially roast tilapia or other fish that is deep-fried or boiled with sauce, is a favorite at the beaches along Lake Victoria, such as at Entebbe.

A remarkably wide variety of greens provide essential vitamins in the Ugandan diet. There is *nakati,* a kind of spinach, either green or red, as well as *dodo* and dozens of other wild leafy greens. There is also a dish comparable to the Kenyan *sukuma wiki,* which is greens cooked down to a mushy and slightly gelatinous consistency that is highly appreciated. It is much like the consistency of well-cooked okra, another native African plant, which is also popular. The distant relatives of such dishes can still be found in the collard greens and gumbo of the U.S. south. There is also a small bitter eggplant called *ntula* as well as cucumbers, avocados (served in a salad reminiscent of guacamole), and many other native vegetables, which once formed the bulk of the diet. Among fruits Ugandans especially enjoy pineapple, which is grown extensively, as well as watermelons, pawpaws, mangoes, apples, jackfruit, and passion fruit. The juice of the latter is a popular accompaniment to meals.

The Banyankole also drink a lot of milk. Ironically, tea is the preferred local drink, a colonial legacy, despite the huge coffee production. Most

Ugandan coffee is exported and can even be bought in high-end coffee shops in the United States. Ugandans drink a lot of soda and also brew beer, most notably Nile Beer from Jinja, which is now owned by SABMiller. There is also a fiery liquor distilled from bananas called Uganda Waragi.

## Typical Meals

Ugandans eat three meals a day: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Many people eat a very small breakfast between 7:30 and 11 A.M. that consists of tea, with or without milk, and bread or fried cassava sticks or perhaps the Indian flatbread chapati—the legacy of a once-large Indian community who were exiled in the 1970s but have since been allowed to return. *Mandazi* is a kind of donut strip also eaten for breakfast. Some people, especially workers who may not have a long lunch break, eat a larger breakfast called *katogo,* which is matooke mixed with beef or beef chitterlings or offal. It is a heavy dish and thus can keep a person sated until dinnertime.

Lunch is a relatively late meal, eaten between 1 and 4 P.M., though in rural villages usually later in the afternoon since they will have spent much of the day tending gardens. City dwellers may go home for a lunch break, though increasingly they resort to fast-food and junk-food outlets that sell fried chicken, fries (called chips), and *chaps* (roasted ground meat in a kind of patty), or chapati and rice *pilawo* (another Indian dish, a kind of pilaf). Office employees without long breaks often resort to quick junk food.

Dinner is eaten very late, between 8 and 11 P.M., especially for those who work late and have no one at home who can cook. The cooking at home is almost always done by women, either the mother of the family or, if the family is affluent, a housemaid, and usually over a charcoal stove. Increasingly people do buy takeout from restaurants, which may sell rice, French fries or potatoes, chaps, beef, liver, kebabs, or sausages, which are all quickly cooked using gas stoves.

## Eating Out

Chinese, Indian, and even Korean restaurants are popular for parties and special occasions. Often Ugandan families will prepare food at home and then transport it to weddings, birthday parties, and even sporting venues. There are also many restaurants specializing in pork products, like Zanzi, Outlook, Nicodemus, Yakobo's, and Rise and Shine, to name a few. Kebab stands were introduced by Parsis—Zoroastrians from India who came under British colonial rule.

There is also a flourishing street-food scene. One can purchase sausages, a chapati rolled around eggs and sometimes tomatoes called a *rolex,* or *kikomando,* a chapati with beans. There is also a version of the Indian samosa, or *sambusa,* which is a delicate triangular pastry filled with beans and spices. Roasted bananas called *gonja* are another popular street food as well as roasted chicken and the like. Street vendors usually come in from poorer suburbs into the center of town with their equipment and ingredients. Ironically, it is often the more affluent families and professionals who resort to street food and junk food, while traditional dishes are more common among the poorer classes, mostly because they are cheaper. There are also a number of Ugandan snack foods, such as nsenene, as well as fried sweet dough strips called mandazi and roasted corn, roasted peanuts, and olives.

## Special Occasions

Among Christians special attention is given to holidays like Christmas and Easter, during which huge quantities of food are cooked for family gatherings, including matooke, beef, vegetables, chicken, beans, posho, and rice. Muslims celebrate their holidays with special foods such as a pilawo of fried rice and beef. They, of course, abstain from pork as do other Muslims. There are also secular celebrations such as the giving away of the bride, rites for the deceased, anniversaries, and birthdays. In the cities there are also office parties, which mostly include snack foods, fries and sausages, liver, and so forth.

## Diet and Health

While many Ugandan adults over the age of 45 take health into consideration and have given up

meat and fried foods, and instead resort to boiled food and low-sodium dishes, the young continue to eat both traditional foods and a wide array of Western junk foods high in fat, sodium, and refined sugar.

*Ken Albala and Roger Serunyigo*

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# Zimbabwe

## Overview

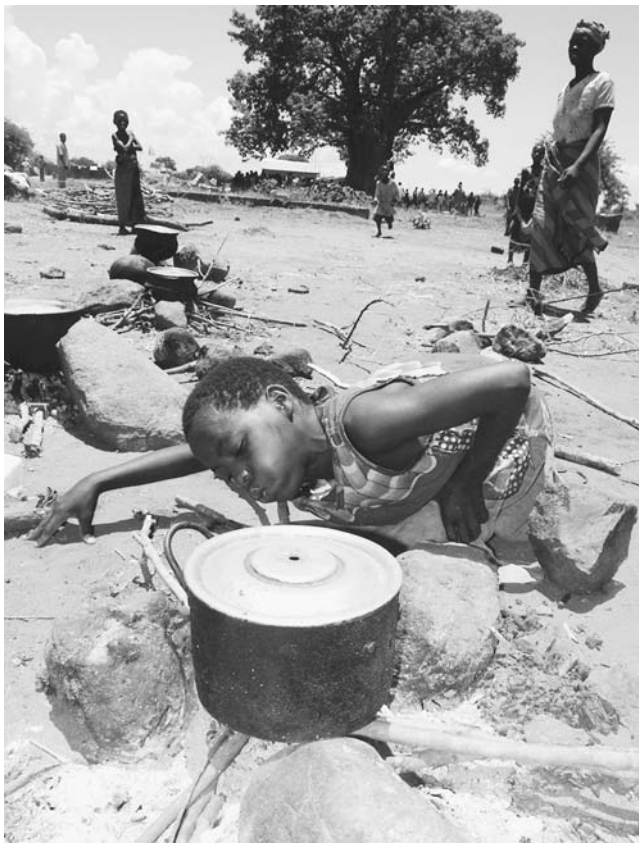
Despite having once been described as Africa's breadbasket, Zimbabwe, formerly known as Rhodesia, is now a country on the edge of starvation. While drought is part of the history of famine, the current situation is more the result of politics. Colonial exploitation by the British created an unequal farming system whereby the best and most productive lands were occupied by a minority of white farmers. These farmers, with the help of male, black farmworkers, were able to produce crops such as wheat, coffee, tea, and tobacco for export. The less productive land was largely subsistence farmed by women, which formed the backbone of Zimbabwean provisioning among the lower classes in both urban and rural areas, as rural women would trade their surplus in the cities. Recent land-reform efforts by President Mugabe, which reallocated plantations owned by white farmers to black Zimbabweans, did not redress the inequalities but instead had the effect of rendering much of this once-productive land unusable. This is largely because reallocation did not also come with training in large-scale agricultural practices. At the same time, efforts to "clean up" urban areas (operation Murambatsvina) resulted in the obliteration of the markets where women once sold their surpluses to poorer city dwellers and left millions, mainly women and children, homeless. Just less than 40 percent of the total population lives in the urban areas. Harare and Bulawayo are the largest cities.

Located in the southeastern part of Africa, Zimbabwe is a landlocked country whose borders are primarily formed by the Limpopo and Zambezi rivers. The climate is tropical, although this is moderated in much of the country by the altitude afforded to it by mountains that run the length of the country. From May to September the country's climate is cold and dry, which is usually offset by a rainy period between November and March. The most fertile areas are in the north of the country, leaving only about 8 percent of the whole area arable. In addition to the loss of productive agriculture in the country, the Zimbabwe Conservation Task Force estimates that 60 percent of Zimbabwe's wildlife has died since 2000. This is largely the result of poaching, as families are desperate for food after the collapse of farming caused by land reform.

Unlike many other African countries, Zimbabwe is relatively homogeneous in its ethnic and religious makeup. The largest ethnic group are Shona (77%), followed by the Ndebele, who comprise 18 percent of the population. Whites, mostly of British descent, are a very small minority at just under 1 percent of the total population. The vast majority of people (85%) consider themselves Christian, though like many who live in locations where Christianity was introduced by missionaries, Christianity is often practiced alongside or modified by more traditional forms of religion, which place particular emphasis on ancestor worship. Instead of religion or ethnicity, it is class that divides this country. The colonial expansion of the British South Africa Company introduced a class system that has profoundly influenced foodways. Those with greater incomes eat dishes that are more akin to what might be found in any British household. A considerably larger proportion of the remainder are lucky if they eat more than

one meal of *sadza,* a ground-corn dish that has a texture similar to mashed potatoes, per day. Food insecurity is particularly high for those living in the southern parts of the country.

The recent past has been particularly difficult for the vast majority of Zimbabweans. Even those with professional employment struggled to feed themselves and their families as inflation reached unimaginable proportions. In 2008, the only legal currency was the Zimbabwean dollar, and at one point inflation was so severe that prices changed by the hour. Not only could people not afford to buy anything, but there was also very little to purchase. There were reports of people standing in line for hours to buy cooking oil or a loaf of bread. As a result people smuggled basic goods such as vegetable oil, cornmeal, and soap from South Africa. The Zimbabwean dollar is still very weak but has stabilized since changes in currency laws now provide for wages in U.S. dollars and it is no longer illegal to sell and buy goods in other currencies.



A child begins preparation for a meal in Zimbabwe, 2008. (GRANT NEUENBURG | Reuters | Corbis)

## Food Culture Snapshot

Mapfumo is trained as a teacher. He used to live in Harare with his wife, Saki, and his three children. He now lives in Francistown, Botswana, just over the Zimbabwean border, working as a mechanic. Saki and his two youngest children, Fari (age 7) and Kati (age 12), still live in Harare. His other daughter, Rita (age 16), lives in the United Kingdom with her aunt, Saki's sister. Mapfumo makes the long journey back to the family home in Zimbabwe every weekend to be with his family. He moved to Botswana in 2005, when things in Zimbabwe started to become very bad, though not as bad as they would later become. He stopped teaching because the Zimbabwean government was not paying teachers regularly or enough to buy basic goods. One day he went to collect his pay packet hoping to be able to buy a hamburger for lunch. At that time the hamburger was $50,000 (Zim), or about $3 (U.S.). His total pay was only $25,000 (Zim) for a month's work teaching. He started going to Botswana to buy food and other goods, like soap, which he then brought back for Saki and the children. He and Saki also traded currency, but this became precarious when the government cracked down on market traders and the black market currency traders in 2005. He then decided to find work with some friends in Botswana, working as a garage assistant and tutoring privately. Until very recently he still brought back goods for his family from over the border, but now he can just bring money, as the shops are starting to sell goods again and it is legal to do business in currencies other than the Zimbabwean dollar.

Daily life for Saki is improving after the last hard years, though she has been forced to change the way she makes her livelihood. Now that it is possible to purchase goods in the stores again, and do so legally with the U.S. dollar, the Botswanan pula, and the South African rand, she is facing competition from legal businesses for the greens and vegetables she sells in the market. But at least she has a stall. Many lost their stalls when the government came through the suburbs in 2005 and removed what were identified as illegal buildings. This was not just stalls but also extensions

people had built onto their homes and garden sheds that were rented out to poorer families who could not afford their own home. Saki counts herself as lucky. She has a husband who is faithful and has not given her AIDS. He also gives her money. She is able to feed her family something more than bread each day. She can also send her two children to school. Her sister in the United Kingdom also sends her money regularly, though when it is transferred she spends the entire day waiting in line at the bank to get it out as no one trusts the banks. She misses Rita very much and knows she does not like living in the United Kingdom, but sending her to live with her aunt was the only way she could get formal schooling while the teachers were on strike for so long.

Saki starts the day at 5 A.M. She gets the children up and ready for school and gives them some sadza (ground corn mealies) left over from the previous evening. Sometimes there are leftover sweet potatoes. When she has milk, she boils some of this to pour over the sadza. It is best with a bit of sugar as well, but that is a luxury, as is the cup of tea that she likes in the morning. Mapfumo sometimes brings her red bush tea from Botswana, but she prefers the English-style black tea with milk and sugar that she used to have when she was younger. By six in the morning, she must be out of the house and waiting by the road for the farmer who brings her produce to sell in the market, so she is gone before the children start school. They leave together, and Kati drops Fari off at his school before heading on to her own. When the children finish school they will come to help Saki at the market. They tie bundles of amaranth leaves together to sell for the stew that goes with sadza. Sometimes they help grind peanuts into peanut butter. Kati stays with her mother now, although she used to sell roasted nuts at the bus station until a group of boys tried to take her away. A neighbor was also there and helped her get away from the boys. In the evening the family will have sadza with relish made from peanut butter and greens, which is better than a year ago, when all they would have was bread.

Saki is saving money to take a cooking class so she can work as a cook in a wealthy house. While she is a good Zimbabwean cook and her sadza has no lumps and is always the right consistency, wealthy people want cooks who can prepare English food. Saki doesn't understand why anyone would want to eat like that, as traditional food, when there is enough, is healthy, fills one up, and is not difficult to make once you get the sadza right. She even read that a chef at one of the hotels won a competition for all of Africa with his traditionally inspired dish. This is not what the wealthy want, but working for one of them would mean more money. Saki dreams that, one day, her husband and all her children will be with her again in Zimbabwe. Mapfumo will be able to work as a teacher, and her children will have good jobs.

## Major Foodstuffs

As in many other African countries, the traditional Zimbabwean meal consists of a starch and some form of stew or meat. The starch is usually sadza, which is made by mixing mealies (imported white corn) or mealie-meal with water to form a thick paste. Other grains such as millet are also used. The paste is cooked for a while, and then either more cornmeal is added to thicken it, or the water is squeezed out. What is left is a very thick, grayish porridge. When eaten, a chunk of sadza is taken and rolled into a ball. This ball is then dipped into the stew (referred to as relish). This relish might be some sort of leafy green, like spinach, amaranth, or collard greens, with squash and beans or nuts. Peanuts are very commonly made into a stew.

When Zimbabwe was more prosperous, meat (*nyama*) would be stewed with the vegetables and beans or grilled. Beef (*nyama ye mombe*) and goat (*nyama ye mbudzi*) were common, and to a lesser extent chicken (*nyama ye huku*), but also game animals such as springbok, kudu, impala (all types of venison), crocodile, and warthog. Freshwater fish, such as catfish, bass, and bream, are also available to those who can afford them or who live near a river or lake where they may be caught, something unavailable to most urban dwellers.

### ***Dovi* (Peanut Butter Stew)**

*Serves 6*

Oil or butter for frying

2 medium onions, chopped finely

Garlic, crushed

1 tsp salt
½ tsp pepper
½ tsp cayenne pepper
2 green peppers, chopped
Chicken pieces (optional)
3–4 tomatoes
2 c water
6 tbsp peanut butter
1 large bag spinach or some other green leafy vegetable or okra

In a large heavy-bottomed pot, brown the onions over medium heat in the oil or butter. When the onions are just brown, add the garlic, salt, pepper, and cayenne, and cook for a further 3–4 minutes, stirring. Add the chopped peppers and chicken, if using. Cook for about 5 minutes or until the chicken is browned. Add the tomatoes and the water, and simmer for 10 minutes. Add the peanut butter, and continue to simmer for 5 minutes. Add the spinach or other greens, and cook briefly until the leaves are limp and tender. Serve immediately.

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Because the seasons are distinctly divided, some foods are available only at certain times of the year, whereas others must be preserved. In rural areas in the summer mopane worms (flying termites) are caught and either eaten raw or fried (*modoro*) or made into a relish that includes baobab fruit (which looks like a coconut and has a sour pithy white interior), cassava, and nuts. Food is also preserved for the dry season in winter by drying it in the sun. *Biltong* (jerky made of seasoned meat that is hung to dry) and *kapanta* (dried fish) are two examples. Vegetables are also dried to be used in the winter dry season. *Nyemba* (a type of bean) leaves, pumpkin leaves, and tomatoes are all dried.

Cornmeal is sometimes made into a drink, called *whawha,* that is fermented and like beer. This and Chibuku beer, made from sorghum, are drunk by the poor, whereas those with more money may drink Lion or Castle brand beers. Lion beer is the stronger of the two. For those who do not drink alcohol, Rock Shandy (bitters, lemonade, and soda) or Malawi Shandy (ginger beer and bitters) are popular choices.

## Cooking

The traditional way to cook is using a series of three cooking pots. The sadza pot is made of clay or cast iron and is balanced on a tripod of three stones set in an open fire, although those in urban places have gas or paraffin cookers in their homes instead of an open hearth. The other two pots, also cast iron or clay, are for cooking the stew. All children, including boys, are taught to cook sadza from the age of 10. People are judged on their ability to cook sadza. A good sadza is not lumpy and is neither too hard nor too soft. Cornmeal, along with other grains and nuts (especially peanuts), is often ground at home with a large rock and grinding stone. Larger pieces of meat will be barbecued using a spit or roasted slowly over a low fire. Recently, "hot box" cooking has been introduced into the country as an inexpensive and environmentally friendly way to cook with limited use of cooking fuel. The method involves cooking the food for 10 minutes in a lidded cooking pot. This hot pot is then placed in an insulated container, which may be as simple as a cardboard box stuffed with pillows or hay. The food in the pot will continue to steam and will be ready to eat in three or four hours. This method is particularly effective for cooking tough cuts of meat.

## Typical Meals

While the norm for the majority of Zimbabweans is just one meal of sadza a day, the more traditional approach to mealtimes is to eat three meals a day. In the morning this may be sadza with jam, fruit, peanut butter, or sour milk and sugar, or a thinner porridge (*bota*) or bread (*pot brood*) with peanut butter. Tea or coffee are drunk with breakfast. Lunch and dinner are also likely to feature sadza dipped into a relish, which almost always includes some tomato. Sadza eaten at lunch is referred to as *sadza re masikati,* which means "sadza in the afternoon." Likewise, *sadza re manheru* means "sadza in the evening," or dinner. Many will also have a cup of tea at 10 A.M. and 4 P.M., a holdover from the British.

Before eating, a dish of water is provided for cleaning hands. The host or senior male member of the family will hold the bowl, and water is poured over the hands, which are then dried on a cloth. While utensils are available, typically people eat their food with their right hand. Serving of food varies and is culturally dictated. In some places food is served in a communal dish, usually wooden, on the floor, around which diners sit in a circle. Polite manners indicate that everyone eat at the same pace so that everyone has their share. More often, however, the order of eating is dictated by gender and age. Men eat first, starting with the husband, followed by older men, then younger men, then older women, then other women, and then children. The best parts of the meal are also given to the men; for a chicken this would mean the dark meat (thighs, wings, legs) is given to the men. Men will sit on benches if they are available, while women will sit on the floor.

The wealthiest are also the most likely to adopt the English diet. This typically consists of a meat and two vegetables. While ordinary Zimbabweans, including the middle classes, stick to one-course dishes of sadza and relish, the wealthy adopt multiple courses that include a starter, a main course, and a sweet course, but there may also be a soup and fish course prior to the main, much as the Edwardian colonizers would have done. Chicken roasted with bacon and served with apples, roasted potatoes, cheese, and grain mustard is an example of one dish that may be served as a main course. Victoria sponge cake may be served for dessert.

## Eating Out

The woman is responsible for providing food for her children and paying for their schooling. As women are less likely to be formally employed, eating out would be reserved for the few and is most often not a family activity. There are restaurants in Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe, for tourists and elites. In Harare, one can find all types of cuisines, ranging from Italian to Chinese and Indian, as well as fusion cuisines that adapt local ingredients to foreign cuisines. Beer is available and the most widely consumed beverage, although in the hotels wine and other spirits may be purchased. When dining in a restaurant, table service is the norm. Licensing hours for bars are from 10:30 A.M. to 3 P.M. and then from 4:30 P.M. to 11 P.M. Street food is available, but it is technically illegal. Nonetheless, children and women will walk along the road or through the bus station with baskets of bread, fruit, boiled or roasted corn, peanuts, beans, and hard-boiled eggs, which they sell.

If invited to eat in a Zimbabwean home, one should expect to have one's hands washed first and to be served a separate portion of food rather than to help oneself from the communal dish. It is polite to leave a small portion of the food that is served, as this indicates that the host has provided sufficiently for his guests. The most likely occasion when one would be invited to a Zimbabwean home for a meal would be for an event like a wedding, christening, or funeral. Moreover, some guests will receive special food such as dried chicken because it is particularly expensive. In this case, the chicken is slowly roasted over an open fire and served with sadza and peanut butter.

## Special Occasions

Zimbabwe is largely a Christian country and as such celebrates the major Christian holidays such as Christmas and Easter with food. Because of its location in the southern hemisphere, Christmas in Zimbabwe falls in summer and corresponds to the harvest. Fresh fruits and vegetables such as leafy greens and corn are eaten along with sadza. A roast is traditionally prepared using cow or goat, or perhaps game such as ostrich, kudu, or warthog. Additionally, the national day of Zimbabwe is celebrated in early April. In addition to sadza, the food that accompanies these celebrations may include squash soups or wild mushroom stews.

Weddings, christenings, and funerals are also marked with food. The size and scope of the wedding celebration largely depends on how much the family can afford to spend and may include a spit-roasted animal. A christening may be celebrated in a similar manner. Funerals, however, are not marked with special food. Instead, older family members and more distant relatives, such as a sister-in-law, will

bring food to those who are mourning. It is expected that chief mourners, that is, the immediate family, will not be able to cook at this time because they are in mourning.

## Diet and Health

The traditional rural diet is nutritionally sound in that it has few fats, uses natural rather than processed sugar, and incorporates many of the fruits that are able to grow in the country. Indeed, in the not-so-distant past, Zimbabwe was a net exporter of food. This diet has sometimes been impacted significantly by drought and crop failure, but the structural adjustment policies of the 1990s, and the more recent economic and agricultural mismanagement, have meant that this is a country plagued by an inadequate food supply. Lack of food contributes to a host of health problems that subsequently arise from starvation and malnutrition, such as blindness as a result of vitamin A deficiency and goiter due to lack of iodine in the diet. Children are stricken with kwashiorkor, a form of malnutrition linked to a lack of protein in the diet. Kwashiorkor usually affects children under five and exhibits symptoms such as a swollen belly or swollen ankles. Adults are more likely to exhibit pellagra, identified by dermatitis, diarrhea, and distemper, which is caused by niacin deficiency resulting from a diet solely of corn. Nearly two out of every five people are considered undernourished, and nearly one in every six children under age five is underweight, while one in five is stunted.

The life expectancy in Zimbabwe was identified as the lowest in the world in 2006. Men are expected to live to the age of 37 and women to the age of 34. This represents a drop in the life expectancy from 60 years in 1990. The infant mortality rate is also high, at 13.5 percent; about one in every eight children dies before reaching age five. Much of the decline in health is due to the prevalence of AIDS and HIV. Approximately one-fifth of those age 20–49 are currently infected with HIV. Additionally, the low life expectancy coupled with the economic disadvantages of women (employment is concentrated in the informal and illegal trading sector, and women are responsible for paying for their children's food) means that poverty is disproportionately borne by children. Just over a third of the country's total population is composed of children under the age of 14, a large proportion of whom are orphans. Estimates in 2007 were 1.3 million orphans as a result of AIDS. They must fend for themselves or rely on an ever-shrinking pool of elderly relatives.

Unlike its neighbors, until recently Zimbabwe has had relatively safe drinking water. However, in 2008, large areas of the country were struck by cholera, which infected over 10,000 people. Typhoid fever, malaria, and schistosomiasis (a parasite-derived disease) are also present throughout the country, with those in rural areas more susceptible, as only 37 percent of those in rural areas have access to sanitation, compared with 63 percent of those in urban areas. Generally, access to water is increasingly under stress as a result of more frequent droughts brought on by global warming.

In Zimbabwe, the health system has largely failed. By the end of 2008, only one of the four major hospitals within the country was still open, and the medical school had closed. As a result, many turn to traditional healers for medical help. Traditional medicine is holistic and is concerned with healing the root cause of an illness rather than just the symptoms. The illness may be the result of having angered the ancestors by failing to follow socioreligious obligations and taboos such as those against elder abuse and promiscuity. Diet and herbs are important for curing these unnatural diseases. For example, among the Ndebele, eating food that shares one's name is prohibited. For instance, if a man's last name is "cow," then he should avoid all beef.

*Megan K. Blake*

**Further Reading**

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# Middle East

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# Arabian Peninsula

## Overview

The Arabian Peninsula, encompassing Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), is approximately one-third the size of the United States. Much of it is a desolate, waterless desert with meager stretches of pasture, mainly scrubby saltbush plants, occasionally enriched with other short-lived plants following the scanty rainstorms that occur only in the winter and spring. Mountain ranges, which have a pleasanter climate, run parallel to the southwestern and southeastern coasts. The Rub' al-Khali (Empty Quarter), one-fourth of Saudi Arabia, is so arid that even most nomads avoid traversing it, as it contains little grazing for their flocks. In some places, the exact boundaries between countries have not been determined because the land is so inhospitable.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia covers approximately three-fourths of the peninsula and is about one-fourth the size of the United States. The Kingdom of Bahrain, an archipelago of 33 islands off Saudi Arabia's coast in the Arabian Gulf (as Arabs call the Persian Gulf), is the smallest of the countries in this region, about one-fourth the size of Rhode Island.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a monarchy; the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Kingdom of Kuwait are constitutional monarchies; the state of Qatar is an emirate; and the UAE is a federation of seven absolute monarchies. King 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Saud brought together Saudi Arabia's four provinces in the first third of the 20th century, uniting several independent tribes with a combination of fighting and democracy (although tribal affiliations remain strong in all countries of the peninsula). Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE were once British protectorates; that is, they made a treaty with Great Britain that Britain would help them against their enemies, in return for which they would not do business with any other foreign rulers without getting permission from Britain. Kuwait became independent in 1961. The other three areas became independent in 1971 when Britain pulled out of the Gulf. Six of the seven emirates (Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Sharjah, and Umm al-Quwain) then united to form the UAE; the seventh, Ras al-Khaimah, joined them in 1972. People who are unfamiliar with Qatar may have heard of its television station, Al Jazeera. Many Westerners first heard of Kuwait when Iraq invaded it in 1991, precipitating the first Gulf War. Kuwait has mostly recovered from the depredations of that invasion.

In an area this large, many different regional food habits exist; however, geography and climate, similar throughout most of the peninsula, played a major role in the original food habits in the area. Since the mid-20th century, the ready availability of imported foods of all kinds has greatly expanded food choices on the peninsula. Improved communication and mobility have contributed to homogenization of the diet. Most of the many foreign nationals working in the peninsula eat the traditional foods of their own countries.

Oil was discovered in Bahrain in 1932, in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in 1938, in Qatar in 1939, and in Abu Dhabi in 1959. Before World War II, life on the



A traditional fishing dhow at dock in Waqrah, Qatar. (iStockPhoto)

peninsula was relatively primitive compared to the West, with the majority of the population being Bedouin. The discovery of oil led to increased contact with the West and a huge upsurge in the standard of living. Governments have moved many Bedouin into settled communities. Nomads still exist, but they often travel in sport-utility vehicles, and a camel is as likely to be riding with folded legs in the back of a pickup truck as walking in a caravan. Before World War II, if boys had any education, they attended religious schools that focused on memorizing the Quran; schools for girls didn't open until the 1960s. Now, all children attend modern schools, and many attend colleges and universities at home or in other Middle Eastern countries, Europe, or the United States.

The peninsula was not entirely isolated from the outside world before the oil companies arrived. Ships sailing the spice routes from India to the Levant passed through both the Red Sea and the Gulf. Camels carried goods on the Incense Route from Yemen along the Red Sea coast. Experts disagree about whether early people living on the peninsula used the spices: Some assume they must have done so; others doubt they could have afforded them.

Beginning in the 620s A.D., after Muhammad founded Islam, Muslim armies fanned out through the peninsula, through North Africa into Spain and France, and along the north side of the Gulf and the Arabian Sea to the area that is now Afghanistan and Pakistan. They took Arabic foodways with them, and the foodways of the conquered countries filtered back to the peninsula. Once Muhammad instituted the pilgrimage (hajj) to Makkah (or Mecca, as it is usually spelled in the West), pilgrims came from far-flung countries of the Muslim empire. Some re-

mained, making Makkah a cosmopolitan city. When the Muslim empire shrank, the Ottoman Empire moved in and occupied the Red Sea coast through modern Yemen, and the Arabian Gulf coast through present-day Qatar, bringing new food influences. 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Saud drove the Ottomans out shortly after World War I. Arabs who go to other countries for schooling, vacations, or jobs often enjoy foreign foods and add them to their diet. Add items from the Columbian Exchange, like tomatoes and peppers, and the peninsula's food demonstrates global influences.

The Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco, now Saudi Aramco) discovered oil in Saudi Arabia in 1938. World War II delayed development, but after the war, Saudi Arabia grew to dominate world oil production. The oil industry brought many foreigners whose food cultures have affected food habits in the area, as local merchants sell foods these people want. In its early days, to cut the expense of providing food to its employees, Aramco worked with local farmers, teaching them modern agricultural methods and introducing them to fruits and vegetables not formerly available in the area. Much of the peninsula receives five or less inches of rain per year, but the Saudis and other Arabs have developed sophisticated irrigation techniques, including using fossil groundwater and desalinated seawater. They now grow much of the food the country uses, and they export items like cucumbers, dates, grapes, tomatoes, watermelons, and wheat.

Bahrain raises some produce, goats, cattle, and sheep and eats local seafood, but it must import most of its food. Kuwait and Qatar grow few crops but raise livestock and catch fish off their coasts. The UAE produces foodstuffs such as cabbages, citrus fruits, cucumbers, dates, eggplant, mangoes, squash, and tomatoes; chickens and eggs; milk and dairy products; and local fish. However, it must import about three-fourths of the food it needs.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Ali and Nura Abdulrahman live in Ali's family's compound in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia's capital. The compound's occupants include Ali's parents, his grandmother, his brothers and their wives and children, and his unmarried sisters. Ali and Nura eat breakfast at 6:30 A.M., as their workday starts early. Breakfast includes a grain porridge, fruit (often dates), and coffee. They both eat lunch at work: a light meal of meat (usually lamb or chicken), rice with pine nuts or raisins, and fruit. Most family members eat together in the evening. The meal consists of salad, rice, meat, vegetables, fruit, and occasionally a sweet dessert. The women of the household cooperate on the cooking; those who work outside the home usually come to the kitchen after work to help with final preparations and exchange news about their day and family developments.

Traditionally, meals were coordinated with some of the five daily prayers: breakfast after dawn prayers, lunch after midday prayers, and dinner after sunset prayers (sometimes much later). Mealtime schedules are now driven more by the needs of the modern business timetable, although Muslims still follow the traditional prayer schedule.

In some areas on the peninsula and in more traditional families, women are discouraged from shopping for food, with men or servants doing the shopping. People shop in both modern mega-supermarkets and local *suqs* (markets). Suqs often have a larger and fresher selection of fruits, vegetables, and fish, as well as live sheep and other animals. Suqs also sell whole, fresh spices, in contrast to the already-ground, bottled spices in stores.

Supermarkets offer the convenience of one-stop shopping, carrying both local and imported foods. Many products in the supermarkets are familiar to Westerners—but then there's fresh camel meat, packaged in the butcher section. Products from abroad cater to the tastes of foreigners. Supermarket owners must be careful in selecting items to import to be sure none of them contains any pork or alcohol. Imported meat must have been slaughtered according to Islamic requirements. Saudi consulates certify slaughterhouses in countries that wish to export meat to Saudi Arabia. Because large doses of nutmeg can be hallucinogenic or even cause death, Saudi Arabia classifies it as a drug, and stores there cannot import whole or ground nutmeg unless it is in a spice mix where nutmeg composes 20 percent or less of the mixture (presumably, this would allow for prepared mixtures

of the popular spice mix *baharat,* which includes nutmeg). Poppy seeds are also banned.

## Major Foodstuffs

Many people of the peninsula trace their ancestry to Bedouin who roamed the desert seeking pasture for their camels, goats, and sheep, and Arab food culture is rooted in that of the Bedouin. Their main foods were dates, bread, and the milk of their livestock, with occasional meat, usually for a celebration, to honor a special guest, or if they were lucky enough to catch some small wild animal (e.g., a hare or *gerboa*).

Ancient literature from the Gilgamesh Epic to the Bible to the Quran speaks reverently of dates and date palms. Scholars believe the date palm originated in the Arabian Peninsula. During the spread of the Muslim empire, armies and traders took along dates and, on purpose or by accident, planted date palms throughout the empire. Date trees are either male or female. Arabs hand-pollinate trees and tie paper bags around the flower clusters to protect growing dates from birds and insects. Birds nest in the trees, and many ground crops depend on their shade in hot oases.



A man harvesting dates in Bahrain. Dates play an important role in the economies and cultures of the Arabian Peninsula. (StockPhotoPro)

Resourceful Arabs use every part of the palm. Arabs eat dates fresh and dried, and sometimes ground into meal that is mixed with water to make bread. Date seeds can be fed to livestock or be ground and made into flour. Syrup (*dibis*) pressed from dates can sweeten pastries or be poured over puddings. Dates are a good source of energy and contain several essential nutrients. With milk, they make a complete meal. Dried dates keep well for long periods of time because their high sugar content discourages spoiling and they are easy to transport.

Young date palm leaves, cooked, can be eaten as a vegetable. Hearts of palm are a delicacy, but Arabs rarely eat them, because the heart is the tree's growing tip, and cutting it out kills the tree. Woven fronds from the leaves become baskets or mats; the center ribs of the leaves make strong sticks ( *jareed*) to build huts. The Arabs use palm wood for building. If anything is left, they use it for fuel. Arabs have many words to describe dates—not only names of different species, but also names for dates in different phases of growth.

Flatbreads are another staple food, and the Arabs have many varieties. Generically, bread is called *khubz,* but Arabs also refer to it as *'aysh,* meaning "life" (some also refer to rice as *'aysh*). Bedouin often cook bread by burying it under the embers of their fires. When it is done, they pull it out, brush the sand off, and eat it. Some Bedouin use a convex or flat piece of metal on top of the fire to cook bread. In villages, some women bring their bread to a communal oven. Some breads are cooked on stones on the oven floor; others are slapped onto the walls of the domed oven. If the oven isn't hot enough, the bread falls off into the fire. Some women stay by the oven and watch to be sure that their bread remains in what they consider the best place for it to cook. Some common breads in Arabia are *khubz 'arabi,* the simple pocket flatbread; *tamis,* a larger and crustier flatbread; *shurayak,* a soft, golden bread; *'aysh samuli,* a more loaflike bread; and *khubz ruqaq,* paper-thin bread that includes date syrup.

Before the increase in contact with the West, Bedouin derived most of their protein from goat or camel milk. If they had more than they could use, they made it into *samna* (clarified butter; the Indian name ghee is more familiar to Westerners) or yogurt. It is usually made from goat milk because the composition of camel milk's fat makes it difficult to make butter from it. To make samna, one heats butter until it boils, the curds float to the surface, and the remaining liquid is transparent. The curds can be skimmed off or strained out and eaten; the remaining samna will keep for several months without refrigeration. Arab cooks often use samna for frying or add it to breads and desserts for richness. Bedouin allowed the liquid to drain from yogurt, leaving a hard substance that kept for a long time. When they were ready to use it, they pounded it into powder with a mortar and pestle and mixed it with water. If necessary, they ate the hard dried yogurt. They would also add salt and olive oil to yogurt, which made it keep for a longer time.

Coffee (*qahwah*) holds a place of honor in the Arab lifestyle as a major element of the hospitality ritual. Arabs prefer their coffee strong and bitter. They usually flavor it with cardamom but sometimes with cloves, rose water, saffron, or other spices. These spices impart some sweetness and help mask coffee's natural bitterness. Although most of the Arab world's cardamom used to come from India, much now comes from Guatemala. For everyday purposes, cardamom is added in a ratio of 1/50th to 1/25th the amount of coffee, but for an honored guest, a host may add much more. Because harvesters must pick each pod individually, cardamom ranks with saffron as one of the most expensive spices; thus, adding a large amount to coffee shows how much the host values his guest. Arabs also drink large amounts of tea throughout the day. They prefer sweet mint tea, sometimes with coriander seed added, which they drink from small glass mugs.

One must be a Muslim to be a citizen in all these countries, and Muslim practices, based on the Quran and subsequent Muslim teachings, govern food habits. Muslim eating traditions charge believers to exercise moderation in eating. Muslims are prohibited from eating blood and unclean animals, including pigs, mice, bats, monkeys, birds of prey, carnivorous animals such as dogs and cats, and land animals with no ears, such as frogs and snakes. Some schools of thought forbid eating any seafood that doesn't have fins and scales, but others allow Muslims to eat shrimp. Muslims may eat only animals that have specifically been killed for food (i.e., no carrion or animals that have died naturally), and the person killing the animal must say, "Bismillah, Allahu akbar" ("In the name of God, God is great"), when slaughtering it. Meat killed in the name of a pagan god is also forbidden. The slaughterer slits the animal's throat and allows all the blood to drain from it. Meat killed according to Islamic law and foods that are acceptable to eat are designated *halal.* Forbidden and unclean items are called *haram.* Although coffee is a symbol of hospitality strongly associated with the Muslim world, some schools of thought say it is not permitted because it is an intoxicant.

Alcohol is also forbidden to Muslims. It is not available at all in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia (although one can purchase malt beverages, i.e., nonalcoholic beer). Liquor is available on a limited basis to foreigners in Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE, usually in the restaurants of large hotels. Foreigners living in these countries sometimes make alcoholic beverages. For the most part, governments ignore this activity as long as it is done circumspectly. The explosion of a still, public drunken behavior, especially drunk driving, or the discovery that a foreign national has given or sold liquor to a Muslim can result in jail and whipping or swift deportation. Visitors to these countries who are offered homemade alcoholic beverages should be cautious. Homemade liquor is often much stronger than commercial liquor, and it sometimes has impurities that make drinkers ill.

## Cooking

Cooking is women's work. People traditionally live in extended matriarchal family groups, and all women in a family cooperate in food preparation, with the social aspect being as important as the nourishing aspect. At feasts or holidays, visiting women help in the kitchen. Until the mid-20th century, most women in the peninsula couldn't read or write. Girls

started helping in the kitchen at a young age and learned to cook from their mothers. By the time they were old enough to marry, cooking was second nature—and besides, when they married, they moved into their husband's matriarchal family, where they joined other women who cooked together.

With growing industrialization, some families have left the traditional matriarchal mode and live in Western-style groupings of parents, children, and perhaps one or two other family members. Thus, some young women no longer have older women to help them with cooking. Toward the end of the 20th century, women began to publish cookbooks from various parts of the peninsula. Migration of families around the peninsula has encouraged the spread of regional recipes. Women who have spent time outside the peninsula have encountered the cooking of other countries and may try cooking foreign as well as Arab food. Television cooking shows, both from the region and from outside, have helped women learn recipes from all over. All these factors have increased the global influences on food in the peninsula.

Kitchens range from totally modern, Western-style kitchens in relatively new houses and apartment buildings to traditional kitchens or even a fire pit in a courtyard in older buildings. Pans and utensils may be Western style or may be traditional brass, copper, or wooden items. Bedouin still cook over a campfire, but that campfire may now be a camp stove.

## Typical Meals

Traditionally, food is served on large communal platters set on a cloth laid on the floor or ground, usually on top of oriental rugs. People eat only with their right hands, preferably with only the thumb and the first two fingers. The left hand is considered unclean, as it is used for hygienic (toilet) purposes. Some families still eat this way; some use Western tables, dishes, and flatware; and some alternate between the two styles.

Men and women of a family eat together, although women may hold back until men have eaten. When there are guests, women, including female guests, eat separately from the men. Famously, on a 1979 visit, Queen Elizabeth of Great Britain was declared an honorary man so that she could eat with King Khalid of Saudi Arabia.

Arabs are famous for their elaborate rules of hospitality. This code developed from the Bedouin life, lived on the edge of starvation. Hospitality in the desert could mean the difference between life and death for the potential guest. Therefore, when a stranger came to a man's tent, even if he was an enemy, the man had to treat him with courtesy and extend protection to him for three days. The Arabic traditional greeting exchange that translates to "Peace be with you"—"And with you, peace" may now seem like a courteous formality, but at times, it had the power of a treaty. In exchange for hospitality, the guest would share news of weather conditions (especially rainfall), pastures, and other Bedouin he had encountered.

Since, in earlier days, a guest had probably made a long ride across the dusty desert, a host offered his guest a cool drink such as fruit juice. In modern times, even some shopkeepers continue this ritual, offering those who come in a soft drink or fruit juice. Customs regarding coffee figure strongly in the rituals of hospitality. A man shouldn't offer coffee to a guest too early in a visit, lest the guest think he was expecting him to leave. When the host did offer coffee (or food), the guest would refuse several times before allowing the host to persuade him to receive his generosity and partake. An Arab in the desert, having ground coffee with a brass mortar and pestle, uses the pestle to ring the mortar like a bell. The sound carries a great distance and might reach a weary traveler and guide him to a safe haven.

Before a meal, the host says the simple prayer, "Bismillah" ("In the name of God"), and when the meal is over, the host says, "al-Hamdu lillah" ("Thanks be to God"). Often, a host waits to eat until his guest has finished, serving the guest and scooping up choice morsels and balls of rice for him. Although hosts are supposed to provide for their guests according to their means, legends tell of hosts who essentially bankrupted themselves by killing their only goat/sheep/camel in order not to fail in hospitality.

Arabs do not separate out savory foods for the main course and sweet foods for dessert. Spices and

fruit make many main-course dishes sweet (e.g., rice mixed with dates, cinnamon, and cloves), and some desserts contain items such as carrots. Although food in this part of the peninsula is often spicy, generally it is not hot. Flatbreads accompany all meals, since they serve as eating utensils.

Breakfast is usually a light meal—for example, bread with butter or samna; olives; eggs; fruit; and soft cheese or yogurt. In winter, it often includes a porridge such as *hunayua* (ground dates mixed with butter, semolina, and cardamom). *Balaleet,* a breakfast from Qatar, is a casserole of noodles or vermicelli cooked with sugar, cardamom, and saffron, topped with a flat omelet. Eaters use pieces of the omelet to scoop up the pasta. In the UAE, breakfast might be a pudding with saffron. Some people eat Western-style breakfasts.

The midday meal was once the main meal, but with the advent of Western-style work schedules, it is lighter, and the evening meal is becoming the main meal. Lunch is often a salad or vegetables; a mixture of meat or fish with rice; and fruit or pastries. Some people go to American fast-food restaurant chains for lunch. Dinner is similar to lunch but more elaborate. It begins with a salad (perhaps cucumbers and tomatoes), meze (a variety of foods served on small plates that are shared), or soup (lentil soup is popular). Arabs have imported the concept of meze from Lebanon, including hummus, baba ghanoush (a dip made of mashed eggplant, sesame paste, olive oil, lemon juice, and garlic), and tabbouleh. Soups tend to be thick rather than broth based.

The popularity of one-dish main courses in the peninsula stems from Bedouin cooking, where heat sources were limited, and also from the Arab tradition of hospitality. If extra guests show up, the cook can easily stretch the meal by adding more of some ingredient, or even just by adding water. So the main



Saudis gather around a traditional dinner. Saudi Arabia is home to a remarkably homogenous population; the peoples of Arabia are 90 percent Arab and 100 percent Muslim. (Corel)

course is often a stew, or meat served over rice. Other possibilities include lamb stuffed with rice, eggs, onions, and nuts; shish kebabs; or fried or grilled fish, especially in coastal areas. Popular seafood types include *hamur* (grouper), *shfri* (porgy), *kan'ad* (mackerel), *hamra* (red snapper), *zubaidi* (pomfret), crab, lobster, and shrimp.

***Machbous***

Machbous is the national dish of different countries on the peninsula.

2 tbsp samna (clarified butter) or butter

2 large onions, peeled and chopped

½ tsp turmeric

¼ tsp ground pepper

¼ tsp ground cardamom

¼ tsp chili powder

1 clove garlic, minced

2 lb lamb, on the bone

3 tomatoes, peeled and chopped

1 stick cinnamon

2 cardamom pods

2 tsp salt

1 bay leaf

1 clove

½ tsp dried lime (*loomi*), finely chopped, or 1 tbsp lime juice

2½ c water

2 c basmati rice

1. Fry chopped onions in samna until transparent. Stir in the first five spices, and cook for 2 more minutes.
2. Add the lamb; brown lightly.
3. Add tomatoes, remaining spices, and salt. Cover and simmer for 10 minutes.
4. Add water, cover, and simmer for 2 to 2½ hours until meat is tender.
5. Stir in rice. Cover and simmer 20 minutes.
6. Stir, remove from heat, and let stand covered for 5 minutes.
7. Remove the whole spices. Spoon rice onto each plate. Place pieces of meat on top of rice.

The most popular vegetables are those that thrive in warm weather, such as cucumbers, eggplant, olives, peppers, pumpkins, tomatoes, and zucchini and other squashes. Vegetable dishes are usually simple, emphasizing freshness. Often, larger vegetables (tomatoes, squash, peppers) are stuffed with a meat or rice filling. Lentils, chickpeas, fava beans, and black-eyed peas appear in many dishes. Fruits also tend to be tropical ones: bananas, citrus, dates, grapes, figs, mangoes, melons, and others. However, virtually all fruits and vegetables are available. If the Arabs can't grow it, they import it.

Desserts may be fresh fruit or a sweet pastry or custard. Some popular sweets are *halwa* (sweet sesame paste), *muhammar* (sweet rice served with dates or sugar), *Umm Ali* (a bread pudding), and *mehalabiya* (rice pudding with rose water).

Most dishes contain several spices. Traditional spice mixes, whose ingredients may vary somewhat, include *bahar* (cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, and sometimes ginger or pepper); baharat (black pepper, cardamom, cassia, cloves, coriander, cumin, nutmeg, and paprika); *za'atar* (the Arabic word for thyme but also a popular spice mix of thyme, sumac, sesame seeds, and perhaps another spice or two). The sumac is deep red and not the same as America's poison sumac, though edible staghorn sumac is also native to North America. Cooks use large quantities of garlic and onions.

Arabs usually drink coffee and tea with meals; other favorite drinks are fruit juices and juice mixtures; goat, sheep, or camel milk; buttermilk; *laban,* a mixture of water and yogurt; mineral water; and soft drinks. Some favored snack items are baba ghanoush, falafel, *shawarma* (meat, usually lamb or chicken, spiced and roasted on a spit), kebabs, hummus, fruit, and *sambousas* (pastries with a sweet or savory filling).

## Eating Out

Before the 1970s, almost no restaurants existed in the Arabian Peninsula except coffeehouses and those in the few hotels. Since then restaurants have proliferated, but natives of the countries rarely eat out. Restaurants range from formal eateries to fast-food outlets. High-end restaurants offer all types of cuisine, including Middle Eastern (more likely to be generic Levantine food than food specifically of the country), European, Indian and Pakistani, Indonesian, Chinese, Thai, Mexican, and many more.

Many American chains such as McDonald's, KFC, Pizza Hut, and so on have franchises in the Middle East. McDonald's even developed a special sandwich to appeal to Middle Eastern tastes: the McArabia, a sandwich of either grilled spiced chicken or spiced *kuftah* (ground meat) with lettuce, tomato, onions, and garlic mayonnaise, wrapped in flatbread. Shawarma shops offer a Middle Eastern fast food. The server cuts off thin slices of shawarma and folds them into flatbreads with vegetables such as cucumber, eggplant, onion, and tomato and dressings such as hummus or tahini. Traditional coffeehouses serve coffee, other drinks, and pastries and offer water pipes with flavored tobacco. Most restaurants in these countries have segregated eating areas: one for men only, one for families, and sometimes one for women only. Restaurants usually close during the day for Ramadan and on Muslim holidays.

## Special Occasions

Dating back to Bedouin life, the traditional dish for Arab festive occasions, celebrations, and special guests is a sheep or camel roasted on a spit and served on a bed of rice. Roasting a sheep yields a delicacy that hosts bestow on the guest of honor: the eyeball.

Three major observances in Islam have strong associations with food, of which Ramadan is the best known. Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim year, in which the Quran was revealed to Muhammad, is set aside for fasting. This fast is one of the five pillars of Islam, the five duties enjoined on Muslims. Unlike fasting periods in many other religions, Muslims fast only from sunrise to sunset, whose exact times a religious official determines each day. Until recently, a cannon shot announced the beginning and end of fasting. Now, people are more likely to hear the news over the radio or television.

At sunset, Muslims break their fast, often with a few dates and water, a tradition initiated by the prophet Muhammad. In Makkah, the water is preferably from the well of Zamzam, traditionally the well that God showed to Hagar when she and Isma'il (Ishmael) almost died of thirst in the desert. In Bahrain, they may drink fresh lime juice. In other places, a drink made by dissolving apricot leather in water is popular. After prayer, Muslims eat a large dinner (*iftar*). Often, this starts with soup, to ease the empty stomach back into eating; an alternative is *harissa,* a porridge of pounded meat and grain. The cook soaks wheat overnight to soften it and pounds it until it is mushy. She debones the meat (poultry or red meat) and cleans it of fat. Then she boils the meat and grain together until they form a homogenized paste. Finally, she sprinkles cooked onions, dried lime powder, black pepper, cardamom, and other spices on top.

Iftars usually include more and richer dishes and desserts than meals at other times of the year. One popular dessert is dried fruits, sometimes soaked in rose or orange blossom water. Shops, especially pastry shops, remain open late, because some people party until late at night. Others spend part or all of the night meditating, praying, and reading holy books. Mosques schedule extra gatherings for prayer during Ramadan. A few hours before sunrise, people rise for another meal, *suhur.* This meal may be dates and barley porridge, or leftovers from the evening meal. In some areas, a town crier with a drum walks the streets a few hours before sunrise to wake people up for suhur.

While many Westerners understand Ramadan as a time of fasting alternated with feasting, the most visible aspect, the daytime fast, prohibits not only eating and drinking but also gum chewing, smoking, and sexual activity, the goal being to cleanse the soul. Some extremists go so far as to spit out, rather than swallow, their own saliva during the fast. Muslims say that fasting puts them in touch with the plight

of the poor, who don't have enough food, and includes inviting people to one's home for iftar. These may be friends and relatives or strangers who pass by the house or whom the host meets in the street. Ramadan is also a time for discipline in other areas, including additional prayer and reflection. Muslims are exhorted to be more spiritual, to practice additional charity, to resolve outstanding arguments, and to reconcile with their enemies. While people are expected to work as usual during Ramadan, some people take time off, especially those who have prayed or partied through the night. Another Ramadan regulation concerns women who prepare food for the nightly feasting. Woman may taste food they are cooking during the daytime in Ramadan but may not swallow.

Certain people are exempted from fasting: girls younger than 12 and boys younger than 15; pregnant, nursing, and menstruating women; travelers; soldiers; the sick; and the elderly. Those who do not fast may make up for it by fasting at another time or by giving food or alms to the poor. While non-Muslims living in Arab countries are not required to fast, it is considered extremely impolite, and in some of the countries it is illegal, for a non-Muslim to eat, drink, chew gum, or smoke in public in the daytime during Ramadan.

Because Muslims use a lunar calendar, with a year of about 345 days, Ramadan comes slightly earlier each year when matched with the Gregorian calendar, in a roughly 33-year rotation. Thus, it can fall in winter (short days, long nights), summer (long days, short nights), or anywhere in between. Obviously, Ramadan is easier in winter. In summer, not only are the days long, but the temperature on the Arabian Peninsula can be well over 100 degrees Fahrenheit—even occasionally over 120 degrees—and going without food, and especially liquids, is an extreme hardship.

In most religions, a feast follows a ritual fast, and Islam is no exception. The three-day 'Id al-Fitr (or Eid al-Fitr, the Feast of Breaking the Fast) celebrates the end of Ramadan. Following a light breakfast, Muslims go to the mosque for prayers. Either immediately before the prayers or a few days earlier, they donate food or money, which are given to the needy so they can celebrate the 'Id. Dressed in their best clothes, they then visit friends and relatives. During the 'Id, people eat many sweet dishes, often flavored with rose water, giving the feast the nickname "the Sweet 'Id."

Religious leaders determine the start date of the 'Id al-Fitr based on sighting the new moon, and while it is narrowed down to one or two days, they must actually see the moon to determine that the 'Id will fall on the next day. This makes planning cooking for the 'Id difficult. Women must be prepared to start the feast on a particular day but also to hold the food over until the next day if the new moon doesn't appear. Since the feast often involves cooking a lamb or other large piece of meat that takes a long time to cook, women wait up to find out whether the new moon has been sighted and they should start cooking, or whether they must wait for the next night.

One of the rituals of the pilgrimage to Makkah, the hajj, is celebration of the three-day 'Id al-Adha (or Eid al-Adha, the Feast of the Sacrifice). This commemorates the willingness of Ibrahim (Abraham) to sacrifice his son Isma'il to God (the book of Genesis names Abraham's son Isaac as the one almost sacrificed, but the Muslim exegesis of this story says that the child, not named in the Quran's version of the story, was Isma'il). Muslims who are unable to make the pilgrimage also celebrate the feast in unity with those who are on the hajj. Each family sacrifices an animal, usually a sheep but possibly a goat, camel, or cow. The animal must be at least a year old and of good quality. The family gives part of the meat to the poor and keeps part for their own feast. Someone who, for whatever reason, doesn't wish to, or can't, sacrifice an animal can compensate by making a donation to charity. People on the hajj take their animal to a slaughterhouse in Miná. The meat from these animals is frozen and distributed to the poor in the Muslim world.

The hajj itself presents a major logistical challenge for Saudi Arabia: providing basic amenities, health care, and so on to over two million people, most of whom want to be in the same general area at the same time, to perform the prescribed hajj rituals. The government has an entire ministry devoted to it. Among other things, the ministry contracts with



A Saudi man carries his newly bought sheep prior to the Eid al-Adha, the four-day Muslim Festival of Sacrifice, December 29, 2006. The holiday, which marks the end of the the hajj pilgrimage, is celebrated by hundreds of millions of Muslims around the world by slaughtering goats, sheep, and cattle in commemoration of the prophet Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son to show obedience to God. (AFP | Getty Images)

food vendors to provide food for the pilgrims. The employees of these vendors work long, hard days during the hajj.

*Ma'mul,* cookies made of a farina and samna dough stuffed with a mixture of sweetened dates, cinnamon, and sometimes chopped walnuts, and formed in a traditional wooden mold, are a time-honored part of both 'Ids.

Weddings involve a long period of festivities, mostly for the bride. Technically, the marriage happens when the groom and the bride's father sign the marriage contract. However, there is then a 40-day period when the bride stays at home. A week before the wedding, she and her friends have a henna party, where they paint intricate henna designs on each other. Traditional foods for this party are sweets, harissa, breads, cheese, and olives. These are now ordinary foods but were once luxurious. Both the bride and the groom get new clothes to symbolize casting off their old life.

The actual wedding feast is quite different from Western weddings, because men and women have separate feasts, which start sometime after evening prayers and last into the early morning hours. Traditionally, these parties were held at home, but for those who can afford them, modern wedding parties take place in hotels or special wedding halls, although the groom's party may be in a tent, harking

back to the Bedouin past. The bride's feast includes all female members of both her and her husband's family, plus female friends. The groom's feast, likewise, includes all male members of both his and his wife's family, plus male friends. The groom's feast is usually rice with sheep or camel meat, side dishes, and desserts. A more elaborate dish for wedding feasts is *khouzi.* This starts with a chicken stuffed with rice mixed with spices, nuts, and raisins and shelled hard-boiled eggs. The chicken and more rice are then stuffed into a lamb, which is then baked or roasted on a spit. Khouzi is one of several dishes that Middle Eastern food writers describe as a "national dish" of the Arabian Peninsula.

The bride's feast is more elaborate. It also includes rice and meat, but this is supplemented with meze, salads, vegetable dishes, and more. Desserts feature elaborately decorated cakes, imported chocolates, and other sweets. These feasts have grown more and more elaborate, to the point that a movement to scale them back has begun; some couples would rather spend less on the festivities and have money available to buy a home and furnishings. Currently, charitable organizations give money to help people afford weddings (especially the bride's dowry, given by her husband, which finances much of the feast), and some of the governments of these countries have started giving subsidies to men who want to marry, provided they marry a native of the country.

Around midnight, the men at the groom's feast escort him to the bride's feast. The women there put on their veils before the men come in. Once the men bring in the groom, they leave, and the bride and groom cut the wedding cake together.

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**Stuffed Camel**

*Serves approximately 100 people*

Versions of this recipe have circulated among expatriates in the Middle East for years. Stuffed camel is also reputed to be the appropriate feast for a major Bedouin wedding.

1 medium camel

1 large sheep

20 medium chickens

1 gal samna

10 lb onions, chopped

5 lb almonds

5 lb pine nuts

2 lb pistachio nuts

2 lb raisins

2 c baharat spice mix

25 lb basmati rice, cooked

60 eggs, hard-boiled and shelled

Skin and clean the camel, sheep, and chickens. Brown the chopped onions in the samna. Mix in the nuts, raisins, and baharat, and add this mixture to the rice. Put an egg in each chicken, and add rice to fill it. Stuff the sheep with 5 chickens, and add rice and eggs to fill it. Put the sheep into the camel, and add rice and eggs to fill it. Roast the stuffed camel on a spit until done, and roast the remaining chickens. Put remaining rice on a large tray, and place the camel on top. Place the chickens and remaining hard-boiled eggs around it.

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The Arab coffee ritual for guests rivals the Japanese tea ceremony. They roast the coffee beans on a specially designed flat pan, then cool them. They grind the beans into powder with a wooden or brass mortar and pestle. The host boils a pot of water over the fire, then adds the ground coffee. He allows it to boil again, pulls it off the fire, then heats it to another boil. He then places cardamom or other spices in a gracefully shaped brass coffeepot (*dallah*) and pours in the coffee. Palm fronds in the pot's spout filter out the coffee grounds and spices. He pours the coffee into small, delicate ceramic cups without handles (*finjans*), which are often white with colored or gilt decorations. Even the small cups are filled only about a third full. The host tastes the coffee to show that it isn't poisoned and then serves it to his guests and others who are present. Guests should drink at least three cups. After that, if they don't want more, they wiggle the cup from side to side, indicating that they are finished.

## Diet and Health

The basic diet of the Arabian Peninsula is a healthy one, relatively like the modern Mediterranean food pyramid, featuring meat in moderation and an emphasis on fruit, vegetables, and grains. However, the area has developed an epidemic of obesity and related health problems. Causative factors include the social nature of eating, leading to long stays around the table; the relative abundance of food in the area since World War II; the extremely hot climate, which discourages outdoor exercise; and the prevalence of televisions and computers, encouraging a sedentary lifestyle.

Before the advent of the oil companies, for the most part, Arabs depended on traditional medicine, which made use of herbs, spices, and other natural ingredients. Some of these items were local plants; others are spices from India, China, and other remote parts of the world. Even petroleum, which was found in seeps in some areas, was used for medicinal purposes, both as a salve and taken by mouth. Even today, petroleum jelly is an ingredient in ointments and cosmetics.

Since the discovery of oil, the availability of modern medical care has increased greatly, with hospitals providing all the medical services found in the West, including organ transplants. In Saudi Arabia, the average life expectancy at birth in 1975 was 54 years, when good medical care was already available, and it has risen to the seventies. Other countries on the peninsula have similar numbers.

*Christine Crawford-Oppenheimer*

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# Berbers and Tuaregs

## Overview

The Berbers are the original indigenous people of North Africa and often refer to themselves as Imaghizen, which means "free" or "noble." Today, they live predominantly in Algeria, Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia. They have a long history stretching back to ancient times: They were mentioned by the Egyptians, flourished under Carthaginian rule when it was the most powerful seafaring state in the Mediterranean, and succumbed to Roman rule—in fact, there were many prominent Romans of Berber origin such as the poet Apuleius and St. Augustine of Hippo. The kingdoms of Numidia and Mauretania were Berber client states of Rome. In the seventh century the Berbers converted to Islam and made up a significant portion of those who eventually conquered and ruled Spain and northwestern Africa. The great medieval explorer Ibn Battuta was of Berber origin. In the early modern period North Africa fell under the sway of the Ottoman Empire, and in the 19th century Algeria was ruled by France.

In 1990, a department for the study of Berber culture and language was established at the University of Tizi Ouzou, and the following year another was opened at the University of Bejai; both schools are in the Kabyle. Liamine Zéroual, president of Algeria from 1994 to 1999 and a Berber from Batna, created the Haut Commissariat à l'Amazighité to help initiate policy and procedure for teaching Berber in schools and for its use in public spheres. In 1995, the Congrès Mondial Amazigh was established as an international Berber association based in Paris; in 1998 the Congrès adopted the Berber flag created by the Académie Berbère as the flag of the Berber people. In 2002, Tamazight, as it is called locally, was finally recognized as a national language in Algeria by constitutional amendment. Berber began being taught in schools the same year. Morocco, which has had similar issues with Berber language rights, also began formally teaching Berber in 2003.

The Tuaregs are also a Berber people. They live to the south in the Saharan desert, mostly as nomads and pastoralists, in Algeria, Niger, and Mali and to some extent in Burkina Faso. In the 11th century the Tuaregs founded Timbuktu, in present-day Mali, as a seasonal settlement. Timbuktu was an important city for the successive West African empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay. It flourished as a crossroads city between North and West Africa for trade and scholarship.

The largest concentrations of speakers of the Berber languages are found in Algeria and Morocco. Estimates vary, but they make up approximately 20 to 25 percent of the population in Algeria and 40 percent of the population in Morocco. Tunisia and Libya are predominantly Arab or Arabized, with small concentrated Berber populations on the island of Djerba in Tunisia and Jebel Nefousa in Libya. The largest population of Berbers outside of Africa lives in France; most are of Algerian or Moroccan heritage, and many are French born. Algerians from Setif and the Kabyle are often second-generation French citizens.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Ahmed and Lilia Boudra live in Setif City in the second-largest province in Algeria. Although Setif is on the edge of the Kabyle, many residents refer to themselves as Chaoui, after the Shawiya Berbers of the Aures Mountains; however, everyone is a Staifi (Setifienne). The local dialect, or *derja,* is a Berber-Arab synthesis, not easily understood in other regions of Algeria.

Ahmed is the manager at a couscous and pasta factory. Lilia is a medical student at the University of Setif, where her classes are taught in French. At home, they speak their local derja; Khaled, their six-year-old son, is learning Modern Standard Arabic in elementary school. The Boudras begin their day at 6 A.M. with a breakfast of homemade *ghraif* (thick semolina pancakes) served with espresso. Khaled has a croissant purchased from a pastry shop and a glass of *lben* (buttermilk). Lilia packs lunches for the entire family. She and Khaled will have *kesra* (semolina bread) and a thick chickpea soup; Ahmed will eat a sandwich of grilled meat and salad rolled into flatbread. Ahmed and Lilia meet in town for afternoon tea or coffee at a café.

Dinner is around 7 P.M. and is the largest meal of the day. Lilia prepares pasta with a dough of barley flour and water, which she kneads and rolls into thin sheets, then cuts into little squares for steaming in a couscoussier. The pasta is served with a sauce of buttered turnips, peas, and carrots, a specialty of the Kabyle region that she learned from her mother. They have oranges for dessert.

The main meal on Fridays, often couscous, is eaten with members of their extended family after *salaat-ul-jumu'ah,* a congregational prayer held immediately after noon at the mosque. The local way of preparing couscous is called *berboucha;* it is made with lamb, chicken, and root vegetables. Lilia sometimes hand-rolls the couscous and sometimes uses an instant variety from the factory where Ahmed works; both are prepared by steaming. North Africans never cook couscous using the absorption method found on directions for packaged couscous in the West. Watermelon is the traditional dessert after couscous.

Setif City hasn't been affected as much by globalization as Mediterranean coastal cities. The Boudras shop for food at *souks* (outdoor markets) and *hanouts* (small shops); they purchase prepared foods from small vendors. Bakeries and pastry shops sell North African and European specialties. Most cooking is done from scratch. Small restaurants serve a limited range of regional dishes.

## Major Foodstuffs

Political definitions of the Maghrib have shifted historically with changing seats of power and the birth of nations. It has been said that a culinary measure of the Maghrib, separating it from the Arab east, is found in an imaginary north–south line somewhere in Libya; rice is the staple food to the east, and couscous is the staple food to the west. Couscous is a Berber invention and the staff of life in the Maghrib countries of Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. Although there is theoretical unity through couscous, arguments about what constitutes a real couscous can range from lighthearted to fierce.

There is some evidence that the method for steaming couscous has a West African genesis. The prototypical couscous steamer was probably woven from grass; basket-type couscoussiers are still made in some rural areas of North Africa. In West Africa and Saharan North Africa, couscous is made with crushed millet or sorghum. The Maghribine (North African) Berber word for sorghum, *illan* or *ilni,* is



Chicken and couscous, or barboucha. (Typhoonski | Dreamstime.com)

related to the West African Songhay word for the same grain, *ille.* Couscous is also made with barley or cornmeal.

The most common and best-known couscous is actually a type of pasta made with durum or semolina flour. A mixture of coarse and fine semolina flour is lightly moistened with water while moving the flour in a circular motion with the right hand until tiny pasta "grains" are formed by aggregation. Adding more water and applying a heavier hand while rolling makes large pasta balls, called *berkoukes,* better known as Israeli couscous in North America or *Maghribiyya* ("make like the Maghrib") in the Middle East.

Couscous and derivative dishes were diffused widely during medieval Islamic times and the European age of exploration. One of the earliest written references to couscous is in an anonymous 13th-century Moorish cookbook. A 13th-century Syrian historian describes four recipes for couscous; one of them is called *Maghribian* (North African). The Moors of Spain and the Saracens of Sicily ate couscous.

During the Spanish Inquisition, couscous was banned as a symbol of Muslim behavior, but a derivative dish called *migas* (made of breadcrumbs) is still eaten in Spain. The Mexican dish *migas* or *migajas* differs from the North African and Spanish versions but is conceptually similar in that crumbs or tiny pieces of tortilla are used rather than bread as in Spanish versions. A Portuguese recipe for couscous from the 17th century calls for "flour of the earth," either maize or manioc, and looks very much like a modern Brazilian *cuzcuz,* a kind of steamed cake or pudding.

The North African and Arab influence in Sicily is still celebrated in what is called *cucina-arabic sicula* (Arab-Sicilian kitchen). The island hosts an annual event, Cous Cous Fest, that draws over 100,000 visitors. Sicilian *cuscusu* is usually prepared with fish. North African Jews introduced couscous to Israel. Today, semolina couscous is widely available as an instant food in Europe and North America.

The distinction between hard wheat (semolina or durum) and soft wheat (bread wheat) is important. Hard wheat has more gluten and less moisture than soft wheat, which makes it less prone to breakage during the drying process for pasta and gives it a longer shelf life than bread-wheat products. The capacity for extended storage and transportation would have been historically significant in eras of perennial famines and empire expansion. In some regions of North Africa, semolina flour and foods made from it, such as kesra (semolina bread), are strongly associated with Berber cultural identity.

In modern North Africa, pasta dishes tend to be concentrated in Tunisia and eastern Algeria. Berbers make rudimentary pastas with semolina flour, which are steamed or sometimes boiled. North African cookbooks often categorize pasta with either couscous or bread as related dishes or cooking techniques. Italian settlers introduced newer varieties of pasta during the colonial era. Pasta dishes that are categorized with couscous include *tlitli* and *dwiddat* (orzo). The method for making them is similar to the method for berkoukes, a rather tedious process of tearing off tiny pieces of dough and shaping each piece of pasta by hand.

*Trid,* or the diminutive *tridet* (derived from trid pastry sheets), are pasta squares. This shape of pasta is also called *m'kartfa* or *nawasar* (plural of *nasra,* square silver coins used during the Almohad dynastic period), and it is identical to Italian *quadratini. Tiftitine* are pasta strips made with semolina or bread flour. *Rechta* and *shariya,* vermicelli pastas, entered North Africa during the medieval Islamic period, and *fidwash* (fideos, a thin pasta still common in Spain) are Hispano-Moorish. *Maqaron* (macaroni) specifically refers to durum-wheat dried pastas.

Olives, olive oil, dates, figs, and semolina flour or a local grain are important regional staples. Chickpeas, lentils, or fava beans are added to many soups, stews, and *tagines* (stews simmered in a clay pot with a conical lid). Dairy products are primarily from cow, goat, or sheep milk. In sparse desert regions, camel milk is drunk as the primary source of protein. *Smen* is clarified or preserved butter. Clarified butter is used for cooking. Preserved smen tastes a bit like blue cheese and is used as a flavoring agent for couscous and tagines. Mint tea, herbal infusions, and lben are regional specialties.

## Cooking

The word *couscoussier* is a French word derived from North African *kiskas,* which refers only to the steamer insert. The pot itself is called a *gdrah,* and the stew cooked in it, over which the couscous grains or pasta steam, is called *marga* or tagine. This ingenious method of cooking allows two dishes to be cooked over a single source of heat, a very important feature in a region that has historically dealt with shortages of wood for cooking. Some couscoussiers have two stacking steamer inserts. Couscous grains or pasta are usually steamed two or three times. Meat, poultry, seafood, and vegetables are also steamed in a couscoussier. Steaming foods is a very common North African cooking technique, used even for pasta.

The Arabic word *tajin* is derived from the Greek *teganon,* meaning "frying pan." Regional use of the word *tagine* varies in North Africa; in Algeria *tagine* refers to various pots and pans. The most common use for the word *tagine* is for meat and vegetable casseroles cooked in clay cooking vessels with conical lids. The cooking vessel and the finished dish are both called a tagine. The conical lid stays relatively cool during cooking and creates a kind of water cycle: Evaporated water from the meat and vegetables collects in the conical lid, then flows back down into the dish. The deliciously succulent results distinguish tagines from other casseroles.

Breads called *khobz tagine* are cooked on griddles also called tagines. Bread isn't as universally iconic as couscous, but it is more frequently eaten. And in some regions it is as significant as couscous. Meats and poultry are braised, stewed, roasted, or grilled. There is a preference for well-cooked meat; tagines and stews, in particular, are cooked until the tender meat is falling off the bone. Vegetables are grilled, roasted, or stewed, or added to soups, stews, and tagines.

## Typical Meals

Berbers live throughout North Africa in vastly different economic, political, and geographic zones: in rugged mountainous regions, on islands, deep in the Sahara at desert oases, and in large cosmopolitan cities. Many have become assimilated into local or regional cultures.

There is no coherent Berber cuisine as such, since like the rest of North Africa, Berbers have been exposed to various influences. As for people everywhere, Berbers' meal choices are shaped by local availability of foods and personal finances more than anything else. Describing meals as "typically Berber" is impossible—at best, they are samples of what is eaten in different regions by Berber families. Berbers are predominantly Muslim and follow the same dietary laws and hygiene requirements as other Muslims. *Dadas* are female Berber cooks who work for wealthy families in North Africa. The tradition is especially strong in Morocco, where dadas have become important cultural icons as gatekeepers to traditional regional recipes.

Legend has it that the island of Djerba off the coast of Tunisia is the land of lotus eaters in Greek mythology. Today, the island's economy benefits from international tourism. The cooking style here is hot with *harissa* (chili paste) and fragrant with spices, like Tunisian cooking in general. Breakfast is *la bissara,* an egg poached in a spicy broth with fresh fava beans. Lunch is fish marinated in *chermoula,* a mixture of cilantro, onions, garlic, lemon juice, and olive oil, served with bread. Dinner is fish couscous with red peppers. The couscous is served in a large bowl, with the fish and peppers decoratively placed on top in a circular pattern and some of the fish broth poured on the top; the remainder of the broth is served in bowls. Harissa is stirred into the broth to taste. Dessert is *samsa* (fried pastry triangles) stuffed with dried fruit.

Kabylia is part of the Atlas Mountain range in northeastern Algeria. The region is known for olive trees, and many families make their own olive oil. Mint tea is rarely served in this region; proper coffee service is a matter of pride and considered an Ottoman influence. Herbal infusions made with fresh and dried herbs are very common. The Kabyle is a relatively poor region. The cooking is very simple, and expensive spices are rarely used; herbs and wild

greens are plentiful. *Avrum* (flatbread) is made daily from semolina flour and is ubiquitous. Avrum is served for breakfast with olive oil for dipping and for lunch with *h'miss* (grilled pepper salad). Couscous is made several times a week; it is served for breakfast or lunch with lben (buttermilk), for dinner with a soup or stew, and even for dessert sprinkled with sugar and raisins. Dinner is *tikerbabin,* large semolina dumplings in a light soup of tomatoes, zucchini, and turnips. Watermelon is ubiquitous during the summer. Fresh and dried figs are also served for dessert.

Shawiya Berbers live in the Aures Mountains and parts of Setif. The style of cooking is very much like that in the Kabyle, as the landscape and resources are similar. The same or similar dishes have different names. Breakfast is kesra (a semolina bread like avrum) and a glass of lben. The meat of choice for Shawiya pastoralists is lamb. Lunch is *chorba* (soup) made with lamb and root vegetables. Dinner is lamb steamed in a couscoussier; the lamb is rubbed with olive oil and garlic and seasoned with salt. Bread is also served, with a salad and braised cardoons.

Tuaregs are perhaps the most romanticized of Berbers, not just by Europeans, but by other Berber groups as well. The "Blue Men of the Desert" are regarded for a fine sense of aesthetics that seems to permeate their lives; their elaborate style of dress, artistic craftsmanship, and poetry tend to be a focus of documentation. However, they are not known for their cooking. *Taguella,* bread made from millet flour, is traditionally cooked in hot ashes covered with sand. Millet is also made into porridge or couscous and served with a basic sauce of tomatoes and onions, or goat and camel milk. Meat is scarce due to the loss of huge numbers of cattle to drought.

Mint tea is called *eshahid* by the Tuaregs of Niger; it is an integral part of social life, and the finer points of tea making and service are of utmost importance. The preferred base for mint tea is strong Chinese green tea; the British introduced gunpowder tea into North Africa in the 18th and 19th centuries via two routes, Morocco and Algeria.

Twice a year, Tuareg salt caravans travel from Timbuktu, Mali, to the salt mines of Taudenni, Mali, and from Iferourane, Niger, to Salah, Algeria. Caravans are an important economic activity for Tuaregs; others depend on livestock for their livelihoods. However, erratic enforcement of national borders frequently severs trade routes; droughts and land degradation have left many Tuareg pastoralists even more impoverished. The Tuaregs of Niger live in what the United Nations calls the "ground zero of climate change."

Libyan Berbers, like Tuaregs, cook bread in hot ashes covered with sand. The dough is spiced with sesame seeds, fennel seeds, and aniseed, shaped into a round loaf with a hole in the center, and then baked. The bread is eaten with a thick green or black tea. Tea drinking is a social occasion involving several courses. A tea course might include roasted and ground peanuts or almonds mixed into the tea.

The Siwa Oasis, located in the Egyptian desert near the Libyan border, is famous for date palm agriculture and olives. For thousands of years, the main economic activity in the oasis has been exporting these products to the Nile Valley and beyond. The salinity of the soil and mineral content in the water are thought to produce exceptional dates. Until the early 1900s, caravans originating in West Africa or the North African Sahara used the oasis as the last stop in their northern routes. The Siwa Oasis is being developed for tourism. A typical meal is comprised of bread, olives, dates, and goat cheese.

Tetouan is located south of the Strait of Gibraltar. Fatima R'Houni wrote the first book of Tetounese recipes in the 1960s. Tetounese Moroccan cooking shares many similarities with Tlemcen, in western Algeria. The cooking is noted for the kind of elaborate medieval-influenced dishes that North Africa is perhaps most famous for. Both are very Andalusian cities that also had significant Jewish populations. Ottoman influences, which are considered very refined, entered the city via Algerian refugees during the French colonial period. *Tagine t'afia* is a chicken casserole perfumed with ginger and saffron, garnished with sliced hard-boiled eggs and toasted almonds. *Seffa* couscous is made with semolina couscous or broken vermicelli, doused with butter, sweetened with sugar and raisins, and



Tuaregs prepare a meal by a campfire in the Sahara desert, Algeria. (StockPhotoPro)

sprinkled with fried almonds. *Mhancha,* a sweet pastry made with phyllo dough and ground almonds, is an Algero-Ottoman influence.

## Eating Out

Restaurants in Berber regions vary widely, and there is no Berber restaurant as such. Restaurants that market themselves as serving Berber specialties simply serve regional variations of general North African cuisine. On the island of Djerba, a Tunisian Berber chef with a culinary degree and international work experience serves a range of North African specialties at his restaurant. In the Aures and the Kabyle, a few regional dishes are served in mom-and-pop-type establishments. Moroccan dadas prepare elaborate regional specialties. Tea stops in the Sahara function as resting points and serve a limited number of refreshments.

## Special Occasions

The vast majority of Berbers are Muslim to one degree or another. They celebrate the same holidays as larger North African society. There are, however, specialties that various groups or regions are known for, but that does not mean that that group invented the dish or that the dish is exclusive to a group.

Couscous is a celebratory dish for all North Africans, regardless of religion or region. Couscous with

seven vegetables is a Berber dish; the number seven is considered to be lucky. Bedouin, who came to North Africa during the Hilalian invasion beginning in the 11th century, also make this dish. Various Bedouin groups are now considered Berber in North Africa.

Historically, North Africa had fluid borders between the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish worlds of the Mediterranean. The earliest evidence of Jewish presence in North Africa dates to late Roman times in Carthage and surrounding areas. Berber converts to Judaism have been documented even in relatively remote regions. The Shleuh of the Atlas Mountains in Morocco speak Judeo-Berber and claim to be descendants of Hebrew tribes who came to North Africa before the Christian era. The island of Djerba in Tunisia is predominantly Berber and still has a significant Jewish population, who trace their origins back 2,500 years. For Rosh Hashanah, they make a round challah baked with a piece of dough cut out in the shape of an open hand. *Adafina* (Arabic for "buried treasure") is a Jewish Sabbath stew of chickpeas, meat, potatoes, and whole eggs in the shell, made on Friday nights and left to cook slowly overnight. The dish is called *dafina* or *tafina* in Algeria and Tunisia, where it is still eaten.

North African Jews and Muslims have only nominal differences regarding religiously prescribed dietary rules. Both religions forbid pork. Wine is *haram* (forbidden) for Muslims but not for Jews. Shellfish and consumption of meat and milk together are *treif* (nonkosher) for Jews but *halal* (permitted) for Muslims. These differences are rarely encountered in North African cuisine: Pigs are scarce, wine is available in limited contexts, shellfish is only a minor component of coastal cooking, and yogurt marinades for meats are a nominal Ottoman influence.

## Diet and Health

Berbers follow the same Islamic dietary principles as other North Africans. Regional folk beliefs tend be just that, and not particularly Berber in nature or even shared by all persons in a region. As in many regions of North Africa, folk remedies are being lost to globalization and urbanization. Many older people in rural areas know how to identify edible and medicinal wild greens, a skill that is disappearing with younger generations due to lifestyle shifts and changes to various ecosystems.

- Chamomile is collected in the spring and is used as an infusion for gastrointestinal problems. The leaves and stems are crushed and used to filter fresh butter to help preserve it.
- Musky bugle (*Ajuga iva* [L.] Schreb) is collected in the spring and summer in Morocco and sold as a dried herb. It is taken as a prophylactic against general illness and specifically as a detoxifying and purgative agent.
- In the sandy steppes of Tunisia, the perennial rose garlic is taken fresh to cure colds and used as a condiment for foods.
- Bishop's weed grows all over North Africa in wheat and barley fields. It is an invasive plant that is currently being cultivated by pharmaceutical companies. Bishop's weed is used as an antiseptic.

Currently, various academics and conservation organizations are cataloguing or trying to preserve local knowledge of medicinal plants. Conservationist-operated small farms exist in Algeria to support local economies by cultivating and selling medicinal plants.

In the Kabyle and in Setif, olive oil is highly valued as a locally abundant source of nutrition during times of scarcity. Infusions of herbs steeped in water are drunk regularly for general health and taste, as well as to cure specific ailments. An infusion of basil is believed to control flatulence and reduce stress. An infusion of thyme is drunk to detoxify the digestive system or inhaled to relieve sinus congestion.

Argan trees are native to the Souss Valley of southwestern Morocco and the Tindouf region of Algeria. Argan oil is valued as a flavoring in foods and as a beauty oil for protecting and softening skin. Cosmetic products containing argan oil are marketed in Europe.

In the Sahara, dates—often abundant and free—are prized for their nutritional value and caloric density. Dates from Biskra in the Mozabite region

in particular are highly regarded for their flavor and texture.

*Susan Ji-Young Park*

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# Iran

## Overview

Although widely considered part of the Middle East, Iran is a country in Near Asia with a landmass that is roughly one-third the size of the United States. Largely mountainous and hilly in the north, the country gradually gives way to arid lowlands, a large desert in its center, and finally more lush, tropical climes at its southern border in the Persian Gulf. In the north, the area around the inland Caspian Sea is verdant and cooler.

Iran shares borders with Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan, Baluchistan, and the former Soviet bloc countries of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Turkmenistan. At its largest, early Iran, or the Persian Empire, encompassed all of those nations within its environs. As a result, the cooking styles throughout the nation have been duly influenced by those who lived in the larger empire. Later, Greek conquest of Iran brought foodstuffs including stuffed items such as grape leaves, while skewered marinated meats like *souvlaki* are thought to represent Persian influence on the Greeks.

Throughout this period and earlier, the Silk Road brought spices and goods from India and China into Iran. Through both trade and conquest, Iran influenced the cuisine of northern India. At its height in the Mughal dynasty, which lasted from the mid-1500s to the early 1700s, northern India demonstrated an artistry of food in the Persian style including prodigious use of lamb, elaborately layered rice dishes, and savory preparations that featured fruits, the use of saffron, and warm aromatic spices such as cinnamon. Today, Iranian food can best be described as most similar to northern Indian cuisine minus the use of spicy peppers.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Maryam Haghanifar, 27, is a typical 21st-century urbanite living in Tehran. She was raised in the northwestern city of Kermanshah, once a rural Kurdish stronghold but now a booming metropolis in its own right. Maryam's education brought her to Tehran, where she works as a sales analyst. Stylish clothes and jewelry are her passion, and like many young Iranian women who live in the city, she pushes the limits of Iran's Muslim sharia laws about *hejab,* or traditional dress for women.

Maryam and her husband, Farshad, 32, a musician, enjoy spending time in fashionable Western-style coffee shops or international-cuisine restaurants with friends, eating everything from sushi to pizza to Israeli falafel and fast food in the American style. At home the couple often eats take-out food for dinner, which is usually around seven or eight o'clock, because their hectic schedule doesn't allow for much cooking. Maryam, like so many Americans and Europeans, has adopted the habit of simply drinking coffee for breakfast while Farshad sticks to the more traditional tea and freshly baked bread with butter and jam. For both, lunch still follows traditional lines of being the larger meal of the workday and is usually a dish of rice with one of the many vegetable- and meat-based stews that are standard fare in Iranian cuisine.

When they do not purchase take-out food, the couple shops in Western-style supermarkets for their



An Iranian boy holds flatbread in a bakery in Tehran. (http://www.bigfoto.com)

staples. Tehran has a number of excellent bakeries, from the very traditional bread bakeries to patisseries in the French style, and like most people Maryam and Farshad get their breads and sweets in one of those two venues. The bazaar remains a traditional place to do all manner of shopping, particularly for spices and dried fruits.

For special occasions, such as weddings or feast days, Maryam enjoys specialties from both Kermanshah and Tehran. *Koreshte-khalal,* or a stew of lamb and sweet orange slices, is typical in Kermanshah and indicative of the Persian habit of using a variety of fruits in savory preparations, and *koreshte geymeh* is a beloved stew of lamb, split peas, and fried potatoes.

Maryam says she has noticed a change in the desire to cook and eat at home among Iran's younger generation. They prefer to eat out and are unaware of some of the nation's most traditional dishes. She notes that she is less interested in "old-style" dishes, and she mentions steak and pizza as high on her list of favorite foods.

## Major Foodstuffs

Iran produces a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, thanks largely to a system of underground irrigation that brings water from mountainous areas through the drier areas of the country. Since ancient times, Iran has been noted for an abundance of fruits like pomegranates, mulberries, persimmons, quinces, and melons of various types. Peaches and plums originate in Iran, and in the tropical south, oranges of many types are grown as well as a particularly succulent date that is prized throughout the Middle East. Up to 30 different varieties of grapes grow in Iran. In ancient times, these were used for prodigious wine production. As an Islamic republic, the consumption of alcohol is forbidden in Iran, so the grape harvest is eaten fresh, dried, and even pickled as an ingredient in various dishes. Even today, the classic Persian garden written about by both ancient historians and modern-era travelers still exists, and abundant and myriad fruit trees are a core part of its layout.

Iran grows a variety of vegetables including the slender Persian cucumber that is often served as a fruit, many different squashes, and eggplant, which is so ubiquitous in use that it is often called the potato of Persia. Pistachios are a major crop, and Iranian pistachios are widely exported to aficionados the world over. Almonds are grown and well used, as are English walnuts, which are Persian in origin. Saffron is also largely produced in Iran and considered to be the finest quality to be had on the market. Tea is also produced in Iran and is drunk in large amounts throughout the day. It is often spiced with cardamom.

Caviar is another major Iranian export and is largely considered to be the finest in the world. A traditional and beloved food in Iran, caviar fell under the strict eye of Muslim clerics soon after the 1979 revolution that changed the country from a monarchy to a theocracy. The clerics declared caviar *haram,* or forbidden, but both culture and economy made that an unpopular edict. Soon thereafter, a series of intricate studies as to the nature of caviar-bearing sturgeon, including a treatise on the scales of the fish, finally led them to declare this national food product permissible under sharia law.

Since wheat grows throughout much of the country, a wide variety of breads are made throughout Iran and often vary from region to region. Breads are cooked in a tandoor, a clay-lined oven, or in a brick oven. Flatbreads such as *lavash* or *taftun* will be familiar to those accustomed to eating wraps, tortillas, or flatbreads. More unique items, like *barbari,* a long, ovular flatbread that is slightly risen, and *sangak,* flatbread cooked over hot stones, are

unique to Iran and best eaten hot. It is still common to see Iranians congregate at bakeries to obtain a daily supply of fresh hot bread.

The most important food to Iranians by far is rice; a long-grain basmati type is grown natively in the Caspian region. Called *domsiah* (black tail) for its black-tipped kernels, the rice is highly aromatic. Local production is supplemented by purchase of basmati rice from India. Rice is so ubiquitous in Iranian cuisine that it is eaten daily, sometimes at more than one meal. This varies according to income, and it is not uncommon for the poor, particularly in rural areas, to eat bread more often than rice.

Lamb and sheep are the major livestock in Iran because of their native adaptation to mountainous terrain, and Iranian sheep tend to be lean, carrying most of their fat stores in their tails. They are used not only for meat but also for milk, from which yogurt, a daily condiment in Iran, and cheese, akin to feta, are produced. Chicken is fairly popular as the number of chicken dishes demonstrates. Beef is eaten in small quantities, although it serves as the most common substitute for lamb for Iranians living and cooking outside of Iran. Pork is forbidden by Islamic dietary laws. In the north and south, a variety of fish—from the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf, respectively—is also consumed and throughout the rest of the country as procured from freshwater rivers and streams.



A close-up of traditional lamb biryani. (Monkey Business Images | Dreamstime.com)

## Cooking

In Iran, cooking is as much a matter of artistry and etiquette as of culinary skill. Except in large cities like Tehran, where multinational takeout is rapidly becoming a norm, Iranians prefer home-cooked meals, and even "simple" everyday fare usually comprises four or five different dishes including rice or bread, stewed meat and vegetables, salad, yogurt, fresh greens, and pickled vegetables. Food is cooked abundantly, particularly for guests, so that the utmost hospitality is demonstrated.

The skill of a cook, particularly in more affluent families, is first gauged by his or her ability to master rice, the most precious part of any Iranian meal, followed by mastery of the preparation of complex items such as layered rice dishes or long-simmering stews. This extends to making one's own jams, pickles, and yogurts. It is not uncommon for an Iranian housewife to begin lunch or dinner preparation as soon as she has cleared the table for breakfast.

Rice is cooked one of two ways: The first is the more difficult *chelo,* in which rice is parboiled, then drained and mounded into a pot with oil or butter and a small amount of water, then covered and steamed. Chelo is fluffy with distinct grains, ideally featuring a crust of golden brown rice at the bottom, which is served separately. A second method, *kateh,* is made from boiling rice with oil or butter and salt until the water is absorbed, then allowing it to continue to cook over low heat. This is common for everyday meals. The kateh is overturned on a plate and sliced into like a cake. The crust is crunchy, but inside the rice is plump and fluffy, though not as separate as in chelo.

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***Chelo***

*Serves 4*

1 c aged basmati rice (Koh I Noor and Lalquila are two good brands)

2 tsp salt

¼ c olive oil or clarified butter (melted)

1. Place the rice in a deep bowl and add enough cold water to cover by 1 or 2 inches. Swirl the rice

around with your hand until the water becomes cloudy, then gently pour off the water, being careful to not inadvertently discard any rice. Repeat this process four or five times or until the water runs clear.

2. After pouring off the last rinse water, fill the bowl with enough cold water to cover the rice by 2 inches. Add 1 teaspoon of the salt to the bowl as well. Set aside for at least two hours but preferably overnight.

3. When you are ready to cook the rice: Bring a saucepan (preferably nonstick) of water to a boil, and add the remaining salt. Pour off the soaking water from the rice. You can also pour the rice into a fine mesh strainer. Add the soaked rice to the boiling water.

4. Boil for 10–12 minutes on medium high, and remove from heat. Drain the rice into a fine mesh strainer.

5. Add 1 tablespoon of the oil or butter and 1 tablespoon water to the bottom of the same pan in which you boiled the rice. Swirl it around to coat the bottom of the pan.

6. Using a large spoon, carefully spoon the rice into the center of the pot to form a pyramid.

7. Mix 2 tablespoons water with the remaining oil or butter, and pour this mixture evenly over the rice pyramid.

8. Place a clean dishcloth over the pot and then place the pot lid over that, pressing down to secure it firmly and make a seal. Fold up the edges of the cloth over the top of the lid so they do not hang down and touch the burner. Alternatively, you may layer two pieces of paper towel and place them over the pot and then secure the pot lid on top of that.

9. Place the pot over low heat for 20 minutes. Remove lid and fluff rice. Once you spoon out the rice onto a platter, there should be a golden crust of rice on the bottom of the pan. This is called *tahdig*. Invert the pot onto a plate so the tahdig comes out in one golden crust. Serve alongside the rice. Serve with koreshte (see following recipe).

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***Koreshte Geymeh***

½ tsp saffron, dissolved in ⅓ c boiling water

1 tbsp olive oil or clarified butter

1 medium onion, thinly sliced,

2 lb lamb, cut into 1-in. cubes

1 tsp turmeric

½ tsp cinnamon

1 tsp salt

Freshly ground black pepper to taste

1 tbsp tomato paste

2 *limou omani* (dried Persian limes) or ¼ c lemon juice

¼ c split peas

4 small Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and sliced into matchsticks

Canola oil, as needed, for frying potatoes

1. Dissolve the saffron in the boiling water and set aside for at least half an hour but preferably overnight. The longer it steeps, the darker the hue.

2. Heat the olive oil or butter in a Dutch oven or heavy-bottomed saucepan on medium-high heat and add the onion. Sauté the onion until translucent, about 3–4 minutes.

3. Add the lamb pieces to the onion mixture, and stir well. Fry until the lamb is browned on all sides, about 8 to 10 minutes.

4. Reduce the heat to medium low, and add the turmeric, cinnamon, salt, and pepper and cook, stirring, for 30 seconds. Add the tomato paste and mix well. Cook, stirring, for 3 to 4 minutes.

5. Add enough water to cover the lamb pieces by 2 inches and reduce heat to a simmer. Add the limou omani, if using, and simmer uncovered for 40 minutes. If using fresh lemon juice, add in the last 10 minutes of cooking.

6. While the lamb mixture is simmering, place the split peas in a small saucepan with enough water to cover. Simmer on medium-low heat for 20 minutes or until tender. Drain and set aside.

7. Heat a large frying pan with 2 inches of canola oil. Test the oil by adding one small potato stick. If it bubbles and fries, it is ready. Add the remaining potato sticks and fry until golden brown on all sides. Remove from the pan with a slotted spoon and place on a tray lined with paper towels or on a rack set over a sheet tray to drain.

8. Mix the split peas into the lamb mixture in the last 10 minutes of cooking.

9. Serve koreshte in a deep bowl or serving dish and arrange fried potato sticks on top of the stew. Serve with chelo and tahdig, garnished with a tablespoon of the koreshte.

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Most dishes start with some version of *piaz dogh,* or cooked onions. Stews follow the same method of preparation: Onions are fried, to which meat, most likely lamb, is added and browned. The mixture is then spiced, and a vegetable or fruit is then added to simmer for some time. This stew, or koreshte, is served with rice, and the form is commonly called *chelo koreshte* (steamed rice and stew). Iranian stews are named after the predominant vegetable since the meat tends most often to be lamb and is relatively little in relation to the vegetable or fruit. *Koreshte badamjun* (eggplant stew), for example, comprises meat and eggplant, but it is named after the eggplant. *Koreshte kadu* (squash stew) is named for the squash in the dish. *Ashe,* or soups, are incredibly popular and tend to be thick pottages that are mostly vegetarian in nature, thickened with yogurt or whey.

Layered rice dishes are very commonly cooked and are called *polloh.* They feature either a mixture of small pieces of meat and vegetables, in the nature of a *biryani* (a mixed rice pilaf), or nuts and dried fruits such as *zereshk* (barberries), a tart red berry that is used for culinary purposes mostly in Iran. As with koreshte these dishes are generally named according to the vegetable or fruit ingredient, including *albaloo* (cherry) *polloh, zereskh* (barberry) *polloh,* and so on. Pollohs are created using a method of steaming in which parboiled rice is layered alternately with cooked ingredients, then tightly covered and steamed over a low flame. Alternatively, sometimes pollohs are made by adding ingredients to steamed rice after both are cooked; "jeweled rice" is one example in which zereshk, dried fruits, and nuts are added after the rice is cooked.

Grilling, particularly of marinated meats, is a common cooking method and is most often used during picnics. It's not uncommon to see whole families picnicking on fine days with a portable hibachi-type grill, cooking kebabs. Baking of bread is most often left to the numerous bakeries throughout every city and village. Sweets, which include both traditional items made with nut and bean flours, rose water, and saffron and also Western-style cookies, cakes, and pastry, are most often purchased, though it is not uncommon for items like rice cookies and baklava, containing pistachios rather than walnuts, to be prepared at home, particularly around holidays.

Pickling vegetables is another skill that the Iranian cook must master. Collectively called *torshi,* or "sours," these pickled vegetables, ranging from pickled garlic or shallots to mixed vegetables and even herbs, are a condiment on the everyday table. Vinegar and a variety of spices are used, from angelica to nigella seeds and an allspice mixture called *advieh,* comprising ground rose petals, cinnamon, cardamom, pepper, turmeric, nutmeg, coriander, and cumin. This, too, can be made within the home by grinding whole spices or bought in the bazaar from a spice vendor.

Jams, compotes, and fruit syrups are other items cooked equally at home as well as purchased out, and they most often feature seasonal fruit, sugar, rose water, and spices, such as cinnamon or cardamom. Cold beverages called *sharbats* are made from various fruit purees, lightly spiced, or fruit syrups added to water. *Dugh,* a mixture of yogurt, mint, and flat or carbonated water, is also often made at home though bottled varieties are readily available.

Tea, the national beverage, is traditionally prepared using a samovar, a metal urn-shaped vessel with a heating chamber in the center that keeps the surrounding liquid hot. It steeps the tea leaves with

a consistent gentle steam. Because a samovar is not practical for everyday use, Iranians use a system of two tea kettles: Hot water is added to tea leaves, often with cardamom, in a small kettle and placed on top of a larger kettle to gently steam. The resulting tea is strong and dark and is added to small glasses, in which additional hot water is added to thin it out. The tea is typically served with a bowl of fresh fruit, a mixture of dried fruit and nuts called *ajil,* and, perhaps, small cookies or pastries.

## Typical Meals

An Iranian breakfast always features hot tea, though coffee is not uncommon. Breads such as lavash, taftun, or *barbari* are heated or preferably purchased fresh and warm and eaten with cheese or butter and jams. Eggs—cooked, fried, or in simple omelets—can be had as well.

As in most of the Middle East and part of Europe, lunch is the biggest meal of the Iranians' day, usually featuring chelo koreshte of some kind. The lunch hour, even for business, tends to be long to allow for some rest after the consumption of the heavy meal. Lunch (and dinner) is most often preceded and followed by the drinking of tea, which is consumed by placing a sugar cube in the mouth and taking small sips of the hot tea. Dinner features much of the same foods as lunch and is eaten fairly late in the evening, sometimes as late as eight o'clock.

Both lunch and dinner were traditionally served on a *sofreh,* or tablecloth, laid directly on the floor, around which diners would sit. A multiplicity of dishes are offered in addition to the main course, including *sabzi khordan,* or a plate of fresh herbs including mint, tarragon, parsley, basil, and scallion that are taken up with the fingers and eaten between bites of food. Radishes are also often included on the plate. Varieties of pickles, plain yogurt, and yogurt mixed with herbs or vegetables also dot the sofreh.

In modern times, most families eat at a dining table, though it is not uncommon for Iranians of all classes and level of urbanity to return to the sofreh during large gatherings or for special occasions. On a daily basis, dinner is increasingly more akin to the traditional lunch in its variety and length, as it is, like in the West, often the only time family members get to enjoy a relaxed meal together.

Snacks of dried fruit, nuts, fresh fruit, and small sweets are often eaten throughout the day, usually with tea. Savory snacks served in profusion are called *mezzeh,* similar to the Turkish, Arabic, and Greek styles. Desserts, while not typical daily fare, would be eaten with the postmeal tea and usually include small cookies, date-based confections, or even ice cream, commonly topped with compote or jam. *Paludeh,* or Iranian ice cream, has a unique taste as it is made with rose water and cardamom.

## Eating Out

Until the 20th century, the most common manner of eating outside the home was in teahouses, at street-food stalls, and in *chelo kebabis,* or restaurants that exclusively served kebabs and rice with its accompaniments. The chelo kebabi remains popular today, as the method of preparation using the tandoor is often not present in the modern home, especially in major cities like Tehran, where most people live in some manner of apartment. While street stands or stalls are not common, smaller indoor eateries, usually without seating, prepare other items not normally prepared at home, usually because of the cooking method: the use of a direct flame, as with grilled lamb liver, or deep-frying, as for falafel.

Teahouses have always been popular in Iran and were at one time a male-only gathering place. Today, teahouses range from the most simple takeout to high-end establishments featuring decor in the classical style, including Persian rugs and throw pillows on which to sit. A variety of mixed fruit, nuts, and pastries accompany the tea.

Today, a large number of multinational cuisines are available in the larger Iranian cities, from fast-food joints in the American style to Indian, sushi, Chinese, other Middle Eastern cuisines, pizza, Italian, and much more. In urban areas, takeout is increasingly used to "solve" mealtimes, particularly

dinner or for a quick midday meal during the workweek, although most Iranians prefer something more traditional like chelo koreshte for lunch, reserving takeout for the smaller dinner or as a treat. Increasingly, "foreign" eateries are taking on the tenor of traditional chelo kebabis or teahouses as places most valued for socialization. Sweets such as pastries and ice cream are common foods that are purchased and eaten out, particularly around festive occasions.

Perhaps the most prized form of eating out for Iranians is eating al fresco in the form of a picnic. Picnics usually feature grilled kebabs, which are traditionally cooked by men whereas women cook nongrilled foods. This is true both in the restaurant setting and within families, not dissimilar to the tradition of the backyard cookout in the United States. Breads, salads, fruits, pickles, and sharbats are typical. Picnics are common not only during good weather but also as an integral part of celebrations, particularly the 13th Day Festival of the Persian New Year.

## Special Occasions

Foods for special occasions in Iran must follow the rule of extreme hospitality that is ingrained in the culture. A special occasion might range from the visit of a single guest to a wedding or celebration of a religious or national holiday. Regardless, the custom of *tarof* is key to meal preparation, serving, and consumption at those times.

The system of tarof is based on extreme selflessness and politeness on the part of both the preparer and the receiver of the food. A guest will enter an Iranian home and immediately be offered tea, fresh fruit, cookies, and bowls of dried nuts and fruit. The guest is expected to politely refuse the offer of refreshment, lest the host be put to any trouble. The entreaty to partake and refusal must pass back and forth at least three times until the host simply goes ahead and serves the items, to the guest's extreme thanks. When sitting down to eat the main meal, the host serves guests first, and guests, in turn, thank the host profusely for his or her generosity. As part of entreating guests in the home, meals must be as expensive and generous as the host can afford. Guests should not be made to feel that they must curtail their eating, even if they want seconds or thirds, although it would be rude to eat that much.

The dishes prepared for special occasions must be elaborate enough to demonstrate the skill of the cook; layered rice dishes are popular. Also served are complex dishes that showcase the cook's ability to meld a variety of delicate spices and flavors, particularly, in many cases, showcasing the Iranian love for the sweet and sour.

Food is an important part of holidays in Iran. Not only are very specific dishes cooked but, in some cases, such as weddings and Noruz, the Persian New Year, ceremonial tables that use foodstuffs to highlight larger philosophical themes are the norm. At Noruz, an ancient Persian holiday that constitutes an ecumenical New Year on the first day of spring, a table is set with a *sofreh haft-sin,* or the "tablecloth of seven Ss." The Ss comprise items that begin with the letter S in Farsi and may include apples (*sib*), sumac powder (*sumogh*), garlic (*sir*), jujube fruit (*senjed*), vinegar (*serkeh*), and sweets (*shirini*), as well as coins (*sekkeh*), hyacinth (*sonbol*), or other items starting with an *s*. Each represents the possibilities for the year to come, including sweetness, abundance, wealth, spice, and even, at times, bitterness.



A table decorated with sofreh haft-sin or "tablecloth of seven Ss" in celebration of Noruz, an ancient Persian holiday that constitutes an ecumenical New Year on the first day of spring. (StockPhotoPro)

The Noruz dinner always features *ash reshteh,* a thick vegetarian noodle soup, as noodles represent long life, and whitefish served with herbed rice (*sabzi polloh va mahi*), as herbs represent the green and rebirth of spring. Noodle rice (*reshteh polloh*) and an herb omelet (*kookooyeh sabzi*) are served for the same reasons. Sweets abound at Noruz and are an integral part of the feast. Traditional cookies made from rice, chickpea, and almond flour abound, as do baklava and other treats, such as *gusht-e-fil,* or elephant ear cookies, and *zulubia,* a fritter of yeast dough dipped in sugar syrup perfumed with rosewater essence. It is very similar to the Indian *jalebi.* Thirteen days after Noruz is the celebration of *seizdah bidar,* or "the giving of 13," when families leave their homes for an elaborate picnic in a beautiful spot. Those who do not picnic try at least to eat their main meal outside the home.

Weddings are also an occasion for plentiful sweets similar to those served at Noruz. These include *noghle* (sugar-coated almonds) and *sohan assali* (honey almonds), which are placed on platters on a special sofreh that also features a plate of herbs, cheese, and bread to serve to the guests immediately after the ceremony to bring the couple good luck. Other items on the sofreh include a bowl of eggs to symbolize fertility, a bowl of honey for a sweet future, and other nonfood items—such as a needle and thread to "sew up the mother-in-law's mouth"—to represent a healthy and happy marriage. The wedding feast comprises the most intricate dishes that are within the families' means to provide. *Shirin polloh,* or "sweetened rice," is always served and is a layered rice dish featuring orange peel, carrots, pistachios, almonds, and zereshk. A whole roasted lamb is served as at most major feasts.

Ramadan, or Ramazan, as it is called here, is celebrated in Iran. In this Muslim fasting month, the daily fast is broken with a date and a traditional dinner. During this month housewives would have a large predawn breakfast prepared for their family, most often featuring foods more traditionally eaten at lunch or dinner, to fortify them for the day ahead. On the last day of the fast, the feast-day Iftar, a variety of both complex and humble dishes are placed on the table.

## Diet and Health

The Iranian diet is particularly well balanced given that meat is eaten in relatively small proportion to vegetables and fruits, even when combined in the same dish. Sweets are eaten moderately, except during celebrations, and a variety of grains, in addition to rice and bread, including barley and whole-wheat germ, are consumed as well, providing additional sources of fiber.

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, Iran's average proportions of dietary energy from protein (11%), fat (22%), and carbohydrates (67%) are desirable from a nutritional point of view. Food is considered a major part of health and well-being in Iran, not simply based on diet but based on its believed effect on personality and psychological well-being. A system of "hot" and "cold," called *garm* and *sard,* is similar to Ayurvedic and yin-yang principles of eating.

With a clear basis in seasonal availability the premise of garm and sard is an ancient one, believed to have originated thousands of years ago with Zoroaster, the founder of the Persian monotheistic religion of Zoroastrianism. The basis of the religion is the epic battle between good and evil, a battle that is thought to be waged within the human body and spirit as well. Foods must be used to balance the humors for best health, so, for example, if someone is "hot-natured," he or she must eat cold foods, and vice versa.

*Garmi,* or hotlike food, thickens weak blood and speeds up the metabolism, while *sardi,* or coldlike food, thins the blood and slows down the metabolism. It is important to note that those classifications have nothing to do with temperature or spiciness but rather a system that was developed millennia ago. Beef, for example, is "cold," while lamb is "hot." Duck is "hot," but turkey is "cold." Corn is "hot," but pumpkins are "cold," and so on. The classification applies to all manner of food, from meat to fish,

fowl, grains, beans, vegetables, dairy, spices, herbs, and even beverages.

*Ramin Ganeshram*

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# Iraq

## Overview

Iraq is a little more than twice the size of Idaho, with a population around 27 million, sharing borders with Iran, Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. Its sole access to the Arabian Gulf is through the southern city of Basra. Topographically and ethnically, Iraq is diverse. The mountainous north is inhabited by Kurds, who make up 15–20 percent of the population. A bit farther south dwell the majority of the Turkomans and Assyrians, approximately 5 percent of the population. The central and southern zones make up a fertile alluvial plain inhabited mostly by Arabs, who constitute 75 percent of the population. There is also a small ethnic minority of Armenians, largely concentrated in Baghdad and Basra. The western and southwestern region is a desert sparsely populated by nomadic Bedouin. Iraqis are predominantly Muslims, about 97 percent, and the rest are Christians and other minorities such as Sabians and Yazidis.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Ahmed is a 12-year-old boy who lives in Baghdad with his family of seven. Today is his turn to accompany his mother to the neighborhood marketplace, something to which he looks forward. He enjoys the sight and aromas of fresh vegetables and fruits, and he feels flattered that his mother needs him to carry home the grocery bags with her. These days she does grocery shopping more often than she used to because refrigeration is not dependable due to frequent power outages. She looks tired but never complains, and Ahmed is happy to help.

The first stop they make is at the butcher's. His mother purchases lamb chunks on the bone, which usually go into the stew pot. She also asks for chunks of beef to be ground for her, at which Ahmed gets excited. Ground meat is used to make delicious elaborate stuffed foods such as *dolma,* an assortment of vegetables stuffed with meat and rice, and *kubba,* disks of rice, potato, or bulgur stuffed with meat. Since they are expecting guests for dinner, they also stop at a fish place, where river fish varieties, such as *shabbout* and *bunni* of the carp family, are displayed. She also buys small inexpensive fishes called *zoori* at Ahmed's request. He loves them fried. The bigger fishes will either be cut into pieces and then fried or be baked whole in the clay oven (*tannour*) that Ahmed's father built outside the house in a corner of their small garden. Ahmed has already started fantasizing about the golden yellow rice with raisins and almonds that his mother usually cooks with fish.

Their next stop is the vegetable and fruit stalls, a place so much alive with the hustle and bustle of shoppers, the earthy aromas, and venders' loud chants and catchy phrases to attract customers. Ahmed's mother buys okra and fresh fava beans. "These are for the stews," she tells him. She further purchases eggplant, gourds (similar to zucchini), cucumbers, potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, green onions, white radishes with the leaves on, and small bundles of parsley, mint, basil, *kurrath* (similar to Korean leeks), and *rishshad* (garden cress). Most of the vegetables will be used for dolma, and Ahmed is hoping his mother will make his favorite, *poteta chap,* fried kubba made with potato. The herbs will be washed and served whole on a large platter with the main dishes. Were it wintertime, his mother

would have bought spinach, Swiss chard, lettuce, and fresh green beans.

For fruit, they buy grapes, sweet pomegranates, a small cluster of fresh dates, and the locally grown small white apples. A large watermelon would have necessitated hiring a taxi to go home, but they already have one at home. In winter, fresh fruits of choice would have been oranges and mandarins, and perhaps imported apples and bananas if available and affordable.

Next, they make a short stop at the grocer's to buy tomato paste and dried white beans. For the fish dish, Ahmed's mother needs to buy some *noomi Basra* (dried lime). She further purchases a small bottle of pickled mango (*amba*), eaten as a relish with the meal. But Ahmed loves to have it stuffed in bread with slices of boiled eggs and tomatoes. The last stop is at the confectioner's, where they purchase a box of the syrupy pastries *baklawa* and *zlabya* (fried fritters), much to Ahmed's excitement.

## Major Foodstuffs

To a large extent, Iraqi cooking is defined more by topography than by ethnicity, diverse as it is. The country is primarily agricultural. In the northern zone, it is cold in winter, and heavy snow sometimes falls on the mountains. Growing crops depends on rain, which falls in winter and spring. The central and southern parts are dry. There, the winter is mild and the summer is hot and completely rainless. The two major rivers, Tigris and Euphrates, are the main source for irrigating crops.

Grains, primarily wheat and barley, are the most important crops. They are planted in the fall and harvested in spring. Barley is more tolerant of salinity than wheat. Therefore, it is grown more in the middle and south than in the north, which is the land of wheat. In Iraq several varieties of rice are grown, the best of which by far is the aromatic *timman anbar.* It grows in paddies in the southern marshlands. In the course of the 20th century Iraq increasingly became more dependent on imported necessities to meet domestic demands, such as rice, wheat, vegetable oil, and sugar, among many other things, but they were all subsidized and hence affordable. That is why the economic sanctions after 1990 were devastating in their effects on the daily lives of ordinary people.

Meat comes from sheep, goats, and cattle. Iraqi sheep are distinguished by their fat tails (*liyya*), which have been a valuable source of fat, only recently shunned for health considerations. Mutton and lamb are preferred to other meat, particularly for dishes that require meat on the bone, such as *marag* (stew) and *thareed* (a stew with bread soaked in it). It is not cheap; therefore, quantities used depend on one's means. But since meat is a social gauge of some sort, when cooking for guests, more meat is thrown into the pot than usual. Goat meat is mostly eaten in the mountainous region, where goats abound. Beef is used for ground meat dishes, for kebab, both grilled and fried, and the endless stuffed dishes of kubba and dolma. Pork is hard to find since the majority of people are Muslims. Domestic poultry is not enough to meet the demand. Its meat is tough, and people always boil the chicken before doing anything else with it. Before the economic sanctions, substantial amounts of frozen chicken and eggs used to be imported.

Fish used to be plentiful in the Tigris and Euphrates and their tributaries. Fish dishes are more popular in the central and southern regions than in the north. Basra is the source for shrimp and *zubaidi* (pomfret), which, unlike river fish, has few bones. Southern marsh dwellers in Ahwar still salt and dry fish like their ancient ancestors used to do.



Traditional mutton briyani. (Paul Cowan | Dreamstime.com)

The richest yogurt, made from sheep and goat milk, is available in the northern region in springtime when the pastures are lush. Yogurt from the Kurdish city Arbeel is legendary. The best *geymer* (clotted cream) is made from buffalo milk. Fresh soft white cheese made from cow milk is called Arab cheese. Kurdish cheese made from sheep and goat milk is harder and saltier because it is aged.

The major fruit is the date. It grows in the central and southern regions. The north is too cold for it. Dates are eaten as fruit, both fresh and dried, and syrup, called *dibis,* is also extracted from them. In the northern region honey is more common. Fruits and vegetables are mostly locally grown and are all seasonal.

Basra has a long trade history with India, from where the best spices were imported. The basic *baharat* is a brownish spice mix of many ingredients including cardamom, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, and allspice. The yellow spice mix called *bahar asfar* is similar to curry powder. Iraqi cooks, mostly in central and southern Iraq, are fond of using the delicately tangy dried lime called noomi Basra (lemon of Basra), imported from Oman.

## Cooking

Cooking with water was an advanced stage in the history of humans' attempts to make their food more palatable. This stage was already perfected in ancient Iraq millennia ago. One of three excavated cuneiform clay tablets written in 1700 B.C. in Babylon, south of present-day Baghdad, deals with 24 recipes for stew cooked with meat and vegetables, enhanced and seasoned with rendered fat from sheep's tail, leeks, onion, garlic, and spices and herbs like cassia, cumin, coriander, mint, and dill. Stew has remained a mainstay. Extant medieval Iraqi recipes and modern-day cooking attest to this. However, the introduction of tomatoes from the Americas around the 16th century revolutionized the way stew is cooked. They gradually replaced most of the thickening, souring, and coloring agents used in making the stews, such as nuts, sour fruit and vegetable juices, saffron, and pomegranate juice. Remnants of the medieval way of cooking tomatoless stew can still be seen in the *summaqiyya* (soured and colored with sumac berries) of the northern city of Mosul and the *fasanjoun* (soured with pomegranate and thickened with walnut) of Najaf and Karbala, south of Baghdad. The preferred meat is lamb chunks on the bone, sometimes replaced with small, spicy meatballs called *ras il-'asfour* (sparrows' heads). Relatively recently, the saturated animal fat of rendered sheep's tail has been replaced with vegetable oil. Generally, the stews of the southern city of Basra are made spicier than the rest. The city is also known for its fish and shrimp stews and curries.

Related to stew is the traditional dish thareed, also called *tishreeb,* in which bread is soaked, because that was how stew was always served before rice became an affordable option through importation of American and Far Eastern varieties. Thareed prepared with chunks of lamb or chicken, *pacha* (a broth of sheep trotters, tripe, and head), and the meatless *tashreeb bagilla,* made with dried fava beans, are quite popular.

White plain rice is commonly served with stew, but it is also prepared in a variety of ways, depending on the occasion and affordability. It is garnished with almonds, raisins, and vermicelli noodles; made red with tomato juice; or colored yellow, most commonly with turmeric rather than the expensive saffron, and served with a whole browned chicken sitting in the middle. Rice is also offered as an independent dish, usually served with plain yogurt, as in *timman bagilla* (green rice with dill and fresh fava beans), *maqlouba* (upside-down eggplant dish), *timman tacheena* (with diced vegetables and meat), *mtabbag simach* (fried fish layered with rice), and *biryani,* which is a spicy mix of meat, vegetables, and rice reserved for festive occasions. Kurdish cooks in northern Iraq give biryani an elaborate touch by encasing the rice mix in thin sheets of dough and baking it in the oven. They call it *parda palaw.* Bulgur sometimes replaces rice, but this is more common in the northern region.

It is not customary to serve soup before the meal because it is a meal itself, eaten with some bread and salad vegetables. Unlike stew, soup does not have to contain meat. More commonly, it is prepared with

grains and legumes. The most popular soups are *shorbat 'adas* (lentil) and *mash* (mung beans). For a treat, sometimes small meatballs of ras il-'asfour are added.

Bread consumed with the meals can be the flat variety baked in the commercial or household domed clay oven, the tannour. *Sammoun* bread is commercially baked in brick ovens. It is diamond-shaped, similar in texture and taste to the Italian ciabatta. In the north, *rqaq* is the bread to have with meals. It is made by flattening simple dough into a large thin sheet using a dowel, and baking it on a heated, large, domed metal plate called *saj.* In the southern marshlands where rice grows, *khubuz timman* is made by pouring a batter of ground rice onto a heated plate, resulting in thin sheets of rice bread.

*Nawashif* (literally, "dry") dishes are usually reserved for smaller meals, especially supper, or more conveniently offered, among many other things, at dinner parties. Most of them are fried, such as varieties of kubba, meat patties of *kufta* and kebab, and stuffed pastries like *boureg* and *sanbousa.*

The Iraqi cuisine is distinguished by the variety of stuffed dishes it offers. Kubba tops the list. The northern city of Mosul is especially renowned for its thin and huge flat disks of *kubbat Mosul,* usually boiled in wide pots. It is time-consuming and requires special skill; therefore, most cooks prefer to serve it as boiled small disks and balls. In northern Iraq, where it is more common to use yogurt in cooking, this sort of kubba is sometimes added to a delicate yogurt soup. *Kubbat hamudh shalgham* is rich soup made with chunks of lamb, cubed turnips, and chopped Swiss chard (which may be replaced with squash and mint in the summer) and thickened with crushed or ground rice. Then small balls of rice kubba are added to the pot. Iraqi Jews make it red by replacing the turnips with beets, and instead of rice flour, farina is sometimes used. They also add these kubba balls to okra stew.

Vegetables are stuffed in dishes like dolma and *sheikh mahshi.* For dolma, vegetables like cored eggplant and gourds, onion layers, and leaf vegetables like grape leaves and Swiss chard are stuffed with a mix of rice and ground meat and simmered in liquid until it all evaporates. For Lent, Iraqi Christians cook dolma without meat and use olive oil. For sheikh mahshi no rice is used, only meat, hence the name "master of all stuffed dishes." It is simmered in tomato sauce until it thickens nicely.

Most of the traditional desserts are simmered on top of the stove, since ovens in households did not become common until perhaps the middle of the 20th century. Light and thickened puddings are made with cornstarch, vermicelli noodles, dates, carrots, and other ingredients. Fried syrupy pastries like *luqmat il-qadhi* ("judge's morsel," deep-fried dough balls soaked in syrup) are also popular. Desserts are flavored with cardamom, rose water, or orange blossom water.

## Typical Meals

All meals are served with warm bread, preferably purchased just before the food is served. To wash down the meal, several rounds of sweet hot tea are served in *istikan,* the small transparent glasses. A typical summer breakfast would be sandwiches stuffed with cheese along with watermelon or slices of peeled cucumber. In winter, it might be *bastirma* (Iraqi cured sausage) with eggs, or slabs of geymer (clotted cream) with date syrup or honey. Brunch on weekends can sometimes be elaborate, such as tashreeb bagilla. Dried fava beans are simmered to tenderness, and then broken pieces of flatbread are simmered for a while in the broth and then ladled onto a large platter. The fava beans are scattered all over it, and a generous amount of crushed dried *butnij* (river mint) is sprinkled over it. Then it is drizzled liberally with sizzling hot oil or clarified butter. Another typical brunch could be *kahi,* purchased from specialized bakeries. It is made of simple dough flattened into a large, thin disk, brushed liberally with oil, and then folded and baked. Kahi is eaten drenched in light syrup with a generous slab of geymer on top.

Lunch is the main meal for most families. Stew and rice (*timman w'marag*) are served almost daily, and the possibilities for variety within this category are endless. Okra stew is the most-liked summer stew, and for winter, white dried beans ( *fasoulya yabsa*) and spinach (*spenagh*). Stew is customarily

served in a big bowl. It is spooned out and mixed with some rice and eaten with condiments, such as pickles, amba (pickled mango), and plenty of herbs. A refreshing drink served with the meal in summertime is *shineena.* It is plain yogurt diluted with water, seasoned with a pinch of salt, whipped until frothy, and served chilled with ice cubes. On cold winter days, it is common to serve rich and hearty soups that stick to the ribs for lunch.

In the afternoon, the family gets together for a round of freshly brewed tea served with simple dunking cookies purchased from specialized bakeries, such as *ka'ak* and *bakhsam,* or *churek,* which is lightly sweetened yeast pastry. The afternoon is also fruit time.

Supper, usually served around seven or eight o'clock, is the time for nawashif (dry dishes), such as *kubbat halab* (rice dough stuffed and fried) or *'uroug,* which is fried patties of ground meat mixed with chopped onion and parsley. The family is often treated to simple puddings or the richer and thicker *halawa* (a fudgelike sweet made from nuts or sesame seeds).

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***Margat Bamya* (Okra Stew)**

*Serves 4*

To get rid of most of the slime inside okra, cut off both ends and wash it briefly. Fill three-quarters of a medium pot with water and bring it to a quick boil. Add okra and let it boil briefly (no more than 5 minutes). Then strain it and use or freeze for future use.

4–6 chunks of lamb on the bone (2–2½ lb)

2 tbsp oil

5–6 cloves garlic, whole

3 heaping tbsp tomato paste (one 6-oz can), diluted in 4 c hot water

1½ tsp salt

1 tbsp pomegranate syrup, or ½ tsp sugar and 2 tbsp lemon juice

1 lb fresh or frozen okra

2–3 small dried hot peppers (optional)

In a medium-heavy pot, sauté meat pieces in oil until browned, about 10 minutes. Add enough hot water to cover the meat. Bring to a quick boil, skimming as needed, and then let simmer gently, covered, on low heat until meat is tender and moisture evaporates, about 45 minutes. If meat is cooked and there is still some liquid in the pot, strain it and use it as part of the liquid required in the recipe. To the meat pot, add garlic cloves and stir for 30 seconds. Stir in the rest of the ingredients, and bring pot to a quick boil, skimming as needed, then reduce heat to medium low, and simmer gently, covered, until sauce is rich and somewhat thickened (35 to 40 minutes).

Serve the stew with a side dish of plain white rice or bulgur along with slices of onion and green pepper. Another popular way of serving okra stew is having it as *tashreeb:* Put bite-size pieces of flatbread in a deep dish and drench it with the stew sauce. Arrange meat pieces and garlic on top.

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## Eating Out

The first European-style restaurant opened in modern-day Baghdad in the 1920s. It boasted a menu, the first one in Baghdad, which offered Italian, Greek, and Lebanese dishes. However, Iraqis, even those who could afford it, were very slow to develop the habit of dining out for leisure, not doing so until the late 1960s.

For the majority of the population, the best option for dining out would be carry-out foods from stalls and small shops. A treat on an outing on a cool summer evening might be warm sandwiches of grilled meat, such as *mi'lag* (liver), *tikka* (cubed lamb), and kebab (skewered ground meat). Other options are *guss* (*shawirma,* similar to gyro) or grilled hamburger slathered with yellow mustard and *sos* (steak sauce similar to A1). At small specialized bakeries, succulent *lahm b'ajeen* might be another tempting option. It is flatbread topped with a thin layer of a spicy mix of fatty ground meat with chopped onion, tomatoes, and parsley. Cold sandwiches of sliced pot roast or boiled beef tongue are popular movie theater snacks.



An Iraqi family has a picnic at the Shrine of the Ezekiel. (StockPhotoPro)

A much more expensive summertime treat would be the famous Baghdadi *masgouf* fish barbecued and served in the open-air cafés scattered along the bank of the river Tigris. Customers are allowed to choose the fish themselves from small fish tanks. The fish is split open, washed, and sprinkled with coarse salt. Then it is impaled with other fishes on sticks arranged in a circle around a flaming wood fire. After an hour or so the fishes are placed flat on the smoldering fire so that their skins may crisp. Since river fish is riddled with numerous small, prickly bones, people usually eat it with their fingers.

The major bulk of the business of the small restaurants and food stalls that abound in the bustling city centers comes from the regular customers who work far from home for the day, or travelers. They usually serve the familiar staples of rice and stew or warm sandwiches of grilled kebab and guss. A hearty breakfast or a whimsical late-night meal might be the traditional dish pacha—a broth made with sheep's head, stomach, and feet. On cold winter days, passersby might find the aroma emitted from the steaming cauldron of *kubbat burghul* (stuffed disks made with bulgur wheat) at a street-corner stall too tempting to pass. The steaming pots of *lablabi* (boiled chickpeas) and *mayi' il-shalgham* (tender boiled turnips) might be equally hard to resist.

## Special Occasions

During Ramadan, which begins and ends with the first appearance of the crescent moon, Muslims abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset. They usually break their fast first with a few dates and yogurt or water, in emulation of a tradition set by the Prophet many centuries ago. *Iftar,* which is the daily Ramadan meal, usually begins with soup,

mostly lentil, followed by rice and stew, and platters of dolma, perhaps some kubba, or other nawashif dishes. A favorite drink with the meal is *sherbet qamar il-deen,* a refreshing, thirst-quenching beverage made from sheets of dried apricot. A few hours later, it is customary to enjoy some of Ramadan's favorite desserts, baklawa and zlabya. Before sunrise, a simple light meal called *suhour* is consumed.

The appearance of the new crescent moon announces the end of Ramadan and the beginning of one of the two major Muslim holidays, the Small Feast. It is a three-day celebration during which Muslims exchange visits and share meals. A variety of rice dishes with lamb or chicken and stews are prepared for guests, as well as dolma and kubba. Cookies called *kleicha* are offered to guests with sweet tea. The second major religious holiday is the Big Feast, which lasts for four days. It celebrates the end of the ceremonies of hajj (pilgrimage) to holy Mecca. Sheep are usually slaughtered to honor the occasion. Most of the meat is distributed to the needy, and with the rest some traditional dishes are prepared, such as pacha.

The dishes Iraqi Christians prepare for Christmas and Easter are not much different from the ones already mentioned. For Lent, a succulent meatless version of dolma is made with olive oil. Before the mid-20th century there was a thriving community of Jews in Iraq, who prepared special dishes for their own religious days and feasts. For the Sabbath, *tibyeet,* also called *tannouri,* was cooked. It is a rich chicken dish with rice simmered overnight in the clay oven (tannour). Both Christians and Jews share the Muslims' fondness for the festive kleicha cookies. The Christians bake them for Christmas and Easter, and the Jews for the joyous festival of Purim, which occurs in springtime. They call them *ba'ba' bil-tamur* (date-filled disks).

In Iraq, March 21 is a national holiday celebrating spring. The feast is called Norouz, and it is an essentially Kurdish festival, deeply rooted in the ancient Mesopotamian New Year spring celebrations. Typically, families would spend the day out in picnic areas enjoying huge pots of dolma.

The Muslim New Year, which occurs at the beginning of the lunar month of Muharram, is not celebrated by Iraqi Muslims the way Christians do the first day of January. Specifically, for Shiite Muslims, it begins a period of religious ceremonies that mourn the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson al-Hussein, who was killed in battle on *'ashoura,* the 10th day of this month. For this occasion, wheat porridge called *hareesa* is cooked in huge cauldrons on wood fires set in the street. Pearled wheat is simmered with fatty lamb all night long, and neighbors take turns stirring and mashing it almost constantly until it looks like smooth, thin paste. Early in the morning it is distributed to the neighbors and offered to passersby, drizzled with sizzling hot clarified butter and liberally sprinkled with sugar and cinnamon.



Date-filled cookies called Kleichat Tamur. Christians bake them for Christmas and Easter, and Jews bake them for the joyous festival of Purim, which occurs in springtime. (iStockPhoto)

Offering meals for the spirits of the deceased is customary. The family of the deceased Muslim offers evening banquets the first three days after the burial rites are concluded. The beverage offered on such occasions is sugarless Arabic coffee served in small cups. On happy occasions like weddings, guests are greeted with a sweet drink called *sherbet.* It is made by diluting syrupy condensed fruit juice (similar to cordial) with chilled water. As for the wedding feast itself, the centerpiece will typically be *qouzi,* a whole lamb stuffed with rice and roasted and served with different kinds of stew. Other elaborate dishes are also offered, mostly of the nawashif (dry) type, such

as varieties of kubba, stuffed pastries (boureg and sanbousa), grilled meats, and so on.

When social gatherings were still strictly gender segregated, perhaps in the 1980s and earlier, women used to hold afternoon parties called *qaboul.* They would discard their *abayas* (black cloaks covering the body from head to feet) and have a good time, singing, belly dancing, cracking toasted watermelon and pumpkin seeds, and enjoying the dunking cookies ka'ak and bakhsam, along with kleicha and *khubz 'uroug* (traditional flat tannour bread with meat and vegetables).

Men sometimes get together to share alcoholic beverages, such as the indigenous *'arag* (distilled date wine) and beer. They are usually consumed with the familiar little *mezza* dishes of *tabboula* and hummus, or simmered dried fava beans (*bagilla*) and chickpeas (lablabi), along with some nawashif dishes like grilled meat. In springtime, a favorite mezza dish in northern Iraq outside the city of Mosul would be grilled sparrows (*'asafeer*). They were particularly popular in medieval drinking sessions, as they were believed to be an aphrodisiac.

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***Kleichat Tamur* (Date-Filled Cookies)**

*Makes about 25 pieces*

3 c all-purpose flour

1 tbsp sugar

½ tsp each of baking powder, cardamom, and ground aniseed

¼ tsp each of cinnamon, crushed nigella seeds, and salt

¾ c oil or melted butter

⅔ c water, room temperature

1 egg, slightly beaten, for glaze

Preheat oven to 400°F. In a big bowl, combine dry ingredients. Add the oil or butter, and rub mix between the fingers until it resembles breadcrumbs. Add water, and knead for about 5 minutes to form a pliable dough of medium consistency.

Take a piece of dough, the size of a walnut, and flatten it with fingers into a disk. Put a heaping teaspoon of date filling (recipe follows) in the middle, and gather the edges and seal well to prevent the date from showing. Put the stuffed piece into a wooden mold (available in Middle Eastern stores), press it in well, and tap it out. Repeat with the rest of dough. Arrange the cookies on a baking sheet, brush them with beaten egg, and bake them in a preheated oven until golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes.

**Date Filling**

2 c pitted dates

About ¼ c water

2 tbsp butter

½ tsp each cinnamon, cardamom, and coriander seed, all ground

¼ c toasted sesame seeds

1 tsp rose water or orange blossom water

Put dates, water, and butter in a heavy skillet. Cook over low heat, mashing with the back of a spoon, until the dates soften. Add the rest of the ingredients, and mix well. Allow to cool and use as directed.

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## Diet and Health

It is difficult to generalize about the diet and health of the Iraqi people today as the country has been going through trying times for at least 20 years. Years of economic embargo and military attacks have left most of the population, especially children, malnourished. These adverse circumstances are also believed to be the cause for an increase in diseases, especially cancer, and environmental pollution.

Under normal circumstances, however, the Iraqi diet is reasonably healthy and balanced, with more emphasis on vegetables than meat, which is indeed mostly dictated by economic constraints rather than health concerns. The majority of cooks have embraced vegetable oil and abandoned saturated animal fats, such as *dihin hurr* (clarified butter) and

liyya (sheep's tail fat). Still, most of the traditional foods, collectively called nawashif, are fried, a vice Iraqis share with other Middle Eastern cooks.

Dessert is not served after a meal on a daily basis. People are more accustomed to having dates and melon, for instance, than rich pastries. The favorite beverage to drink after meals is black tea, which indeed has been acknowledged to possess healthy properties. But people usually prefer to have it very sweet. While this might offset the tea's benefits, it does, nonetheless, satisfy the sweet tooth of many.

During medieval times, the predominant dietary theory in the region was influenced by the classical doctrine of the four elements, that is, that the world, including food and the human body, is basically composed of fire, air, water, and earth, each of which possesses innate qualities. For instance, fire is hot and dry, while water is cold and moist. To maintain good health, the elements need to be kept in harmonious balance. Although this theory is now obsolete, remnants of its practices can still be recognized in the way Iraqis look at food. For instance, gourds are considered an ideal summer vegetable because they are cold. People with short tempers should not consume eggplant in excess because it is hot. Iraqis eat a lot of dates, and to balance their hot properties, they are usually served with cucumber or yogurt, both of which are cold.

*Nawal Nasrallah*

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# Israel

## Overview

The State of Israel, founded in 1948, is a Middle Eastern country located on the Mediterranean Sea. Lebanon and Syria form its northern border; Jordan is to the east and Egypt to the south. Israel is a democracy with slightly over seven million citizens. The vast majority are Jewish while approximately 20 percent are Arabs. Two languages are primarily spoken in Israel, Hebrew and Arabic, but a large portion of the population is fluent in English and/or Russian. Throughout the history of modern Israel, waves of Jewish immigrants have arrived from all over the world. From the 1990s on, close to a million Jews from the former Soviet Union have arrived in Israel. In smaller numbers, Jews from Ethiopia, Argentina, and France have also moved to Israel. Thus, Israel has become culturally and gastronomically a heterogeneous society as each group of immigrants have brought with them unique culinary traditions.

Israel is identified as the Jewish State, and therefore all its public institutions are required to follow the traditional Jewish dietary laws of *kashrus*. Kashrus, or "keeping kosher," involves compulsory rules for the slaughter of animals and food restrictions including avoiding pork products and shellfish and refraining from mixing dairy and meat products. Fifty-three percent of Israeli Jews identify themselves as keeping the ritual dietary laws. On certain holidays such as Passover, Jews abstain from eating leavened bread. Although the majority of Israelis are secular Jews, many still abide by some or all of the rules of kashrus. For example, it is not unusual for a family to keep a kosher kitchen but eat nonkosher meals outside the home. Nonkosher food is available throughout Israel in certain food chains, open-air markets, small delicatessens, and restaurants. However, all kosher restaurants are required to be closed on the Sabbath.

In general, the Israeli diet is rich in fresh fruits and vegetables, along with a variety of grains, bread, poultry, and milk products. These foods are readily available at reasonable prices. Certain items are under price control by the Ministry of Commerce and Trade in order to assure that everyone in Israel can afford to purchase white bread, flour, sugar, margarine, oil, eggs, and milk. Israelis have a wide variety of dietary practices based on income, ethnicity, education, and level of religious observance. Therefore, it is difficult to talk about the typical Israeli diet.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Naomi and Dan Cohen can be found on late Thursday afternoon at the local supermarket doing their weekly shopping in a Tel Aviv suburb. Naomi is buying the favorite foods of her family (husband, two children, and a dog). Their typical cart is filled with two or three kinds of bread or rolls and a box of sweetened breakfast cereal along with milk and milk products such as flavored yogurt, yellow cheese, and a large variety of white cheeses. Vegetables and fruits take up considerable space in the cart. Most are fresh, although frozen and canned are available. It should be noted that consumption of fruits and vegetables is on the decline in Israel, as these are being replaced by convenience foods and snacks. At the meat counter, Dan chooses

fresh chicken and turkey breast. A carton of eggs and packages of frozen fish fillets and chicken cutlets are also added to the cart. Other foods like pizza and hot dogs along with rice, noodles, and potatoes are part of the weekly shopping. Middle Eastern foods such as hummus spread and tahini sauce are eaten by the family regularly. If the family is planning a weekend picnic at a local park, the Cohens will buy prepared eggplant and cabbage salads along with kebabs, steaks, and pita bread. Snack foods are quite popular. The adults prefer roasted sunflower seeds, nuts, energy bars, and dried fruit, while the children choose potato chips, cookies, candies, and locally produced peanut doodles (*bamba*). Every week a case of mineral water and a case of soft drinks are also purchased. Next to the supermarket is a small store specializing in organic foods. Some of the Cohens' friends prefer this store or frequent local farmer's markets. However, the prices for organic foods tend to be high and choice is limited.

The Hatib family, Ibrahim and Suhad, live in an Arab town near the city of Hadera, a medium-sized city in central Israel. Although some of their shopping is done in a large supermarket, they tend to purchase much of their food from smaller shops in their town. Meat (chicken, turkey, and beef) is purchased from the family butcher, who is considered a trustworthy merchant. Spices and legumes are also bought in stores that cater to this sector of the population. Bread is bought fresh daily at a local bakery. Often, one of their children will go to a nearby restaurant to purchase hummus. Suhad is often busy preparing dishes at home and devotes significantly more of her time to cooking than her Jewish counterparts do. She often pickles olives, eggplants, cucumbers, and turnips for her family and purchases most of the family foods as basic ingredients rather than in prepared forms.

## Major Foodstuffs

Israel is a modern developed country and produces almost 70 percent of its food requirements. Due to the global nature of the world food market, food is exported to Europe and America, and products from around the globe can be found in most Israeli supermarkets. Fruits and vegetables are locally grown and are available in season. In the winter, common fruits are citrus, kiwi, apples, persimmons, quince, and bananas, and, in the summer, strawberries, peaches, apricots, mangoes, cherries, cantaloupe, watermelon, plums, figs, dates, and grapes are available. Vegetables are grown in greenhouses and are often available year-round. The tomato is probably the most popular vegetable, with cucumbers and peppers coming in close behind. Carrots, fennel, turnips, parsnips, eggplant, cabbage, zucchini, beets, yellow squash, onions, spinach, potatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, mushrooms, lettuce, radishes, artichokes, okra, and string beans are all found in the produce section. A new trend is purchasing fresh herbs, which are sold prewashed and packaged.

Although Israel is a small country, there is a large diversity of climates, soils, and weather. Consequently, agronomists have worked hard to develop methods to produce high yields of crops in desert soil and have used innovative technologies to grow grapes in saline water and melons and citrus in sandy soil. Israel is a leader in agricultural development, and on its markets' shelves new products can be found, such as peppers in virtually every color, red curled parsley, and pagoda cauliflower.

The dairy industry in Israel is well known for its production of a rich variety of yogurt and cheeses. Unlike in Europe, most of the cheeses are white cheeses similar to a curdless cottage cheese that can be spread on bread or crackers or put in salad. These cheeses range in fat content from 0 to 30 percent, with the most popular being 5 percent fat. Some of the cheeses are made with spices and vegetables for additional flavor. Yogurt is sold plain or with added fruits, candies, or granola, and new varieties and flavors are continually appearing on market shelves. Israelis also enjoy milk-based flavored puddings and creams.

Meat or poultry dishes are eaten daily, with chicken and turkey being the most popular. Surveys show that Israel consumes the highest amount of turkey per capita in the world. Unlike the typical 10-pound American turkey, Israeli turkeys are significantly larger and not sold whole. Turkey legs, breasts, necks, and wings are sold separately and used in foods ranging from cold cuts to *shawarma*

(shaved turkey cooked on a skewer). Beef, lamb, and pork are all eaten but in smaller quantities. Commonly, beef is imported frozen from South America, while poultry, pork, and lamb are raised locally. Fish is also part of the Israeli diet and sold fresh, pickled, or frozen as fillets. Some fish are imported, and others are raised locally in both fresh- and saltwater ponds. Eggs are an important part of the Israeli diet. On average, Israelis consume one egg per day. Sources of fat include soy, canola, and olive oil along with margarine and butter. Common grains eaten in Israel are rice, corn, and wheat (bulgur, semolina, and pasta). Legumes are part of many traditional foods, but their popularity is decreasing. Chickpeas (hummus) and lentils (*majadara*—rice with lentils and onions) remain popular in both Jewish and Arab homes. Beans are consumed more in winter months and are eaten as part of the overnight cooked Sabbath stew (*cholent*). Israel has a well-developed soy-food industry, and imitation meat and milk products are very popular.

The most distinctive feature of the Israeli diet is diversity. It is impossible to characterize Israeli cuisine as a genuine entity as one might describe French food or Italian food. Within the Israeli diet, there are North African dishes, Asian dishes, South American foods, and Eastern European delicacies. There is also a strong Middle Eastern and American influence on locally eaten foods. The majority of Israelis are first- or second-generation immigrants, many of whom arrived as refuges; therefore, little attention has been given to the development of a hedonistic ethos of dining. Cooking and eating have served a functional role until more recently, when Israel has become more exposed to global culinary trends and fast foods. The younger generation of Israelis is well traveled and attempts to produce at home the exotic dishes consumed abroad. In addition, Israeli television broadcasts a multitude of cooking shows from around the world, and Internet access is widespread.

Israel has a hot climate, and it is important to consume sufficient amounts of liquids. Many Israelis drink large amounts of tap water, while others opt to purchase mineral water. This is available in small bottles or home coolers. Expensive filter systems are sold for personal and office use that dispense both hot and cold water. Common beverages include soft drinks, coffee, and tea. Coffee preferences range from a quick cup of instant to gourmet varieties of cappuccino and espresso. Beer, wine, *arak* (a clear spirit flavored with anise), vodka, mixed drinks, and cocktails are all consumed in Israel.



Pizza being made at a Jewish restaurant in Israel. (iStockPhoto)

## Cooking

Preparation of traditional foods is time-consuming and labor-intensive. As in most cultures, it was customary for women to prepare food for their families. Israel was founded on an egalitarian ethos and socialism. The early pioneers living on kibbutzim, socialist collective communities, strived for equality between men and women. Both genders were

equally responsible for food preparation in collective dining halls. However, in more religious homes and in the Arab community, women retained the role of domestic cooks. Today, a large portion of the workforce is female, and less time is available for food preparation in the home. Consequently, microwaving is popular, and slow cooking is most often done, if at all, on the weekend, for the Sabbath meal and for religious holidays. Baking is rare, and ready-to-eat cakes and cookies are sold in bakeries and supermarkets. In some homes, a revival of home-baked bread can be found, often with the aid of bread machines.

Modern Israeli homes are outfitted with the latest cooking equipment, from microwave ovens to food processors and espresso machines. Expensive cookware from around the world is available in local stores. A wide variety of cooking methods are used in homes, including boiling, roasting, broiling, sautéing, stir-frying, and deep-frying. Israelis enjoy outdoor grilling, and on national holidays and weekends it is common to see families enjoying a cookout. As in the case of barbequing, men are most often the chefs on these occasions.

In the Arab community, home cooking is much more common. Regardless of their level of education and employment status, most women cook on a daily basis. Modern cooking devices are employed to save time and labor, but traditional foods are still eaten regularly. Local bakeries produce pita bread, which is bought fresh. Grilling and broiling are not commonly performed for cultural reasons. It is thought that serving a guest broiled meat is an insult, as it takes little effort to prepare and thus suggests that the guest was not worthy of being served foods that were specially prepared.

## Typical Meals

Israel is ethnically and socially heterogeneous, yet there are some typical eating patterns and meals that have arisen over time. During the week most Israelis eat breakfast on the run. Readily available foods such as yogurt, breakfast cereals with milk, toast and white cheese, a slice of cake with coffee, or fruit often make up the first meal of the day. Many have a 10 A.M. snack, in particular school-age children. This snack most frequently consists of a sandwich, fruits, yogurt, cookies, or pretzels. It also may be a fresh roll and chocolate milk sold in small plastic bags. In the Arab community, the traditional breakfast is no longer common, and many families eat breakfast cereals, flavored yogurts, or white bread with chocolate spread.

Lunch is the major meal of the day and usually contains a serving of protein-rich food. Most popular are chicken or fried breaded chicken cutlets (schnitzel), meatballs (chicken, turkey, or beef), fish (breaded and fried, baked, formed into fish cakes, or grilled), or soy meat (hot dogs, hamburgers, tofu). This is accompanied by two side dishes, one a carbohydrate and the other a cooked vegetable or salad. The carbohydrate is rice, potatoes, or pasta alongside a wide variety of seasonal vegetables. A dessert of fresh fruit or cake is also common. Schools in Israel do not have cafeterias, and most children return home for a midday hot meal. Others are served a hot meal by catering companies at afterschool programs. Adults also eat the main meal of the day during work hours, either in a company cafeteria or in small restaurants.

In Arab families, a hot meal is served at home upon return from work or school. Fewer women work outside the home in this community, and even if they are employed, they are still expected to prepare a home-cooked meal every day. Legume and rice dishes are more common, and traditional Middle Eastern foods are often served. However, more and more families are imitating the Jewish food practices and incorporating dishes such as fried breaded chicken cutlets (schnitzel), pizza, pasta dishes, casseroles, and vegetable soups into their meals. Commercial soup powder and ketchup are now used in most homes.

During the workweek, dinner is a lighter meal consisting of salads, sandwiches, eggs, hummus, pizza, grilled cheese, and milk products. This fits in well with the hot climate. On Friday night, the Jewish Sabbath, a special dinner is prepared (see the following).

Traditionally, Jewish families ate all meals together. This was an important aspect of daily life and helped to build strong connections among

family members. In modern-day Israel, where much of the workforce is female and working hours are longer than in the past, there is less time for the luxury of family meals. Today, it is common to see latchkey children who return from school and are responsible for heating their own lunch. Although families do make an effort to eat dinner together, work schedules and afterschool activities often interfere. In Arab families the men traditionally ate separately from the women and children. Even today, in some homes, women eat with their children and serve their spouses a meal when they return from work.

## Eating Out

Israelis eat out for many reasons. A growing portion of the workforce chooses to eat lunch either at work cafeterias, which are often subsidized, or at small restaurants that serve inexpensive, homestyle meals. Eating out has also become a form of leisure activity, and many families dine out on a weekly basis. Special occasions are often celebrated in restaurants. Every variety of cuisine in all price ranges can be found: Chinese, Eastern European, Italian, Indian, American, Mexican, Argentinean, Romanian, Russian, Ethiopian, Thai, French, Japanese, Spanish, Brazilian, Turkish, Middle Eastern, and more. These restaurants are designed to capture the atmosphere of similar ethnic restaurants in other countries. Many of the dishes served have been modified to meet the local tastes, while others claim to provide authentic versions.

Fast food is also available on most street corners, and falafel stands compete with the large American chains. Pizza, hamburgers, tortillas, ice cream, fried chicken, frozen yogurt, pasta, crepes, and noodle dishes are all easy to find in most Israeli cities. In the last 15 years, there have been dramatic changes in the culinary scene. This has been fueled by an ever-increasing number of tourists and a growing number of middle-class Israelis who have been exposed to foods and restaurant culture around the world. A small number of gourmet restaurants with internationally trained chefs serve food that can compete with some of the best restaurants in the world.

Cafés are an institution in Israel. Israelis spend much of their time sitting in outdoor cafés, leisurely drinking coffee and eating light meals. The clientele includes professionals with their wireless computers, students, pensioners, businessmen, and, of course, the traditional coffee klatch. In the evenings one may find young couples on a date or groups of friends spending the evening together. On the weekend it is not uncommon to find families dining with their children. The café tends to be less expensive and more relaxed than other eateries. Cafés in Israel fulfill a similar function to the European pub.

Israeli breakfasts, served in hotels and many cafés, have a reputation for being unique. The most modest of these breakfasts consists of two eggs prepared to order, an Israeli salad, two or three varieties of cheese, tuna salad, freshly baked hot bread with butter, jam and honey, fruit juice, and coffee. This is often expanded to include a large buffet with several types of bread and rolls, numerous types of vegetable salads, fruits, smoked and pickled fish, breakfast cereals, and yogurts, alongside cakes and puddings. On Friday mornings (the Israeli weekend is Friday to Saturday) the cafés are filled with people enjoying a late Israeli breakfast. The meal is substantial enough to tide one over until the traditional Sabbath meal.

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**Israeli Salad**

**Ingredients**

3 large tomatoes

3 cucumbers, unpeeled

3 scallions or 1 small red onion

1 green or red pepper

Parsley and *nana* (mint leaves), to your liking

Olive oil

Freshly squeezed lemon juice

Salt and pepper

Chop the vegetables. Before serving, add the herbs, olive oil, lemon juice, and spices to your liking. Serve with an omelet, fresh bread, olives, and cheese.

### *Shakshuka* (Eggs with Tomatoes)

There are many variations on this recipe, but this is the basic dish.

**Ingredients**

1 large onion (not a red onion)

Olive oil

3–4 large ripe tomatoes or 5–6 plum tomatoes

1 red, green, or hot pepper, or a bit of each

A spoonful of fresh herbs to your liking (optional)

Salt, pepper, hot paprika (chili pepper is optional but go easy on it), and turmeric (optional)

2 eggs

Chop the onion, and fry it in olive oil until it turns translucent. Chop the tomatoes (you may want to peel them first), and add to the pan. Add herbs and spices. Cover, reduce the heat, and let cook until tomatoes are cooked but not as cooked as you would cook them when preparing a tomato sauce (15–20 minutes). Make two holes in the mix, crack eggs, and pour an egg into each hole. Cover and let cook until the eggs are firm (around 5 minutes).

Serve with fresh bread, pickles, and an Israeli salad.

## Special Occasions

In the Jewish tradition, most holidays and celebrations are centered on food. Life-cycle events, births, bar or bat mitzvahs, and weddings are all accompanied by lavish amounts of food. Even in mourning, it is traditional to serve refreshments. There are no set menus for these events, and the food served reflects both the socioeconomic status and ethnic background of the family.

In most homes, a special Sabbath meal is prepared each week, and often the extended family and close friends gather to eat together. There are many ethnic and class-related variations on what is served; however, it is always different from what is served during the week. In many households this is the one day that is devoted to home-cooked meals. In religious or traditional families the meal will begin with the ritual blessings over the Sabbath bread (challah) and sweet red wine. This is followed by a serving of fish, either gefilte fish (ground carp in jelly) or *hriime* (a North African dish of fish in a spicy red sauce). Chicken or vegetable soup is served with soup almonds (*shkedei marak,* a kind of crouton made of flour and palm oil, sometimes called *mandlach* in the United States). The rest of the meal is usually a meat dish (often chicken) with side dishes and salads. Summer desserts are often fresh fruits, but compote (stewed fruits) and cake may also be served. Variations of the traditional Friday night dinner are common. Some families use this opportunity to prepare new recipes and entertain friends. In families where children return home for the weekend (soldiers, students, etc.), many mothers make an effort to prepare their favorite dishes.

There are long lists of Jewish holidays, each of which has its own traditional foods. For the most part, these foods are part of large festive meals with many servings. On the Jewish New Year it is traditional to eat apples, honey, and honey cake to symbolize the wish for a sweet and good year to come. Hanukkah is known for its fried potato pancakes and doughnuts, and on Passover unleavened bread (matzo) is served. New traditions have also emerged, and the Israeli state likes to mark its annual Independence Day with outdoor barbeques with kebab, skewered meats, hamburgers, and steak.



Latkes are one of the traditional foods of Hanukkah, the Jewish eight-day festival also known as the Festival of Lights. (iStockPhoto.com)

## Diet and Health

Overall, Israelis enjoy good health, and over 50 percent defined their health state as "very good" in a national survey. The life expectancy for women and men is 82 and 78.5 years, respectively. This is among the highest in the world. These statistics are commonly attributed to the national health care program, in which every citizen is insured and has access to primary care doctors, inexpensive medications, and hospitals. However, many health care professionals feel that Israelis, on the whole, do not practice healthy lifestyles and that the next generation of Israelis will suffer from considerably more chronic diseases than their parents. The once-healthy Israeli diet is rapidly deteriorating and is mimicking other developed countries that consume high quantities of processed foods, simple sugars, and saturated fats. Women in the workforce have less time to prepare home-cooked meals, and the availability of prepared products and fast food plays a large part in these dietary changes. Obesity is on the rise, and a disproportionate number of older Arab women are overweight. Along with dietary changes, Israelis are less active than ever before. Most families have cars, and the use of computers and television viewing are common nationwide. Fewer and fewer individuals work in jobs that require manual labor, and despite two to three years of army service for most young adults, the lifestyle is quite sedentary. There is a trend to increase physical activity for all ages, and health clubs are popular. However, only a small percentage (~20%) of the population actually exercises regularly.

Overnutrition does not guarantee adequate nutrients. Iron-deficiency anemia is not uncommon in small children, teens, and female adults. Surprisingly, in sunny Israel, vitamin D deficiency has also been documented. This is most evident in sectors of the population that dress modestly, including religious populations, both Muslim and Jewish, and Ethiopian women with dark skin and modest dress. Despite the availability of a wide variety of dairy products, calcium intake in every sector of the population has been shown to be significantly lower than recommended daily intakes.

There is great interest in the connection between diet and health, and most newspapers and magazines have columns reporting the most recent findings in nutritional research. Alternative eating practices such as vegetarianism, vegan diets, and fruitarianism are popular. Diet books written by local authors, but also translations of fads from around the world (Atkins, Blood Type, South Beach, and Weight Watchers), can be found in bookstores or purchased on the Internet. In addition, yoga lessons, Pilates, and Feldenkrais lessons are offered in studios and community centers. However, there is a large gap between the population's knowledge and their practices. There are definite attempts to improve nutritional consumption at both individual and national levels. Organic foods are available, and a wide selection of new products has been marketed by the food industry: eggs with omega-3 fatty acids; low-fat cheeses and mayonnaise; reduced-calorie cookies, crackers, and cereals; soy hotdogs, hamburgers, and tofu; whole-grain breads; and dietetic ice cream. This reflects the population's awareness of the connection between diet and health, but purchase of these products is not sufficiently widespread. If supermarket shelf space reflects the consumption patterns of a community, soft drinks, candies, cookies, cakes, and salty snacks still fill a large proportion of market shelves. There are attempts by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education to improve knowledge and attitudes regarding a healthy diet, but major changes still need to be made to improve the overall diet quality of the Israeli population.

*Aliza Stark and Liora Gvion*

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# Jordan

## Overview

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a young country that occupies a region with a tremendous amount of ancient history. Situated in the Middle East and bordered by Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, Jordan was the location of several Bronze Age settlements, numerous Old Testament events, a number of Roman cities, and the remarkable "lost city" of Petra, once part of the huge Nabataean spice-trading network.

Most of the country was abandoned after the fall of the Roman Empire, left to small bands of wandering Bedouin herders. There was some habitation in the slightly more arable north, and a Crusader castle shows that more than just Ottoman Turks fought over the area. However, there was no urban center or area of greater population around which to build a state. Much of the interior, including Jordan's capital, Amman, was not inhabited from the time of the ancient Romans until the late 1870s, when Circassians—a Muslim group from the Caucasus Mountains—settled here after fleeing persecution in Russia. The Circassians introduced both wheeled carts and settled agriculture on previously uncultivated pastureland. They also engaged in commerce. Their success began to draw others to Jordan. This was the seed that would lead to the growth of the new country. Today, there are approximately 40,000 Circassians in the Amman area, but they are now a minority in a country whose population has grown explosively to more than six million.

The emergence of Jordan as a political entity began after World War I and the Arab Revolt against Turkish occupation. After the war, the Hashemite princes, believed by Muslims to be descendants of the prophet Muhammad, were given positions of authority in the newly liberated region, though under the protection of the British. King Faisal, who hoped to unite all Arab states into one, was declared king of Syria by the Syrians and was given authority over Iraq by the British. Abdullah, brother of King Faisal, was declared ruler of the region of Transjordan (so called because it was beyond the Jordan River). Abdullah made Amman his capital. By 1928, Transjordan had gained its independence, and after the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, having seized the West Bank, Abdullah declared himself king and renamed the country the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Palestinians were outraged that Jordan kept control of the Palestinian land it had captured during the war, and in 1951, one angry Palestinian assassinated Abdullah. The throne, and the responsibility for establishing Jordan and its place in the world, passed to Abdullah's popular 17-year-old grandson, Hussein. King Hussein, supported by Britain and the United States, ruled Jordan until his death in 1999. He helped to stabilize the region and build a country that was the safest and most peaceful in the volatile Middle East.

At 34,277 square miles, Jordan is slightly smaller than Indiana. Its population is 98 percent Arab, with almost half of that number made up of recent Palestinian and Iraqi refugees. The population is approximately 92 percent Sunni Muslim, 6 percent Christian, and 2 percent "other." About 75 percent of the population is urban. Bedouin who retain their traditionally nomadic lifestyle make up close to 10 percent of the population. However, many Bedouin

have been made to live in cities, and urban residents who trace their roots to the Bedouin make up more than one-third of Jordanians. The rest of the population lives in rural areas, where small villages perch on the edges of fields and orchards.

Most of Jordan is rocky desert, with a rainy season only in the west. Water is a rare and precious commodity. There is only a 16-mile shoreline, at Aqaba, where the country's hem brushes the Red Sea. Only 3.32 percent of the land is arable, and just under 3 percent of the population works in agriculture. The primary agricultural products are citrus, tomatoes, cucumbers, olives, sheep, poultry, stone fruits, strawberries, and dairy.

While there are Roman ruins at the center of the city, Amman is a clean, bright, modern city, in sharp contrast to the ancient capitals of surrounding countries. The dominant influences on both the culture and cuisine of Jordan are Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and the traditional Bedouin who have so long wandered across this region. While those familiar with Middle Eastern food will recognize many of the dishes on offer in Jordan, there are still specialties that are particularly identified with the country.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Maryam and Asef Bani Sakhr live in one of the older parts of Amman. The parents of both live in the same neighborhood, but their grandparents had not been city dwellers. On a typical day, Maryam was in the kitchen, watching her daughter, Nour, working with the yogurt. Nour was putting it to drain, to make *labneh,* the yogurt cheese that was a favorite breakfast item. Nour was now old enough to make it without Maryam's guidance, but Maryam still loved working alongside her daughter. Maryam poured bulgur into a



Grove of date palms in the Jordan River Valley. (Photo courtesy of Zev Radovan, Land of the Bible Picture Archive)

bowl and added water, to allow it to soak, and checked the chickens roasting in the oven. Her boys, Salah and Sameer, should be home with the groceries soon, and preparations for lunch would begin in earnest.

Maryam knew that an increasing number of Jordanian women actually left the home to do their own shopping, at least in the city. Women were even beginning to have jobs outside the home, but that was still not terribly common, especially among married women. For most families, the women did not go out unaccompanied. Maryam imagined that the world into which Nour was growing would be different. Nour even went to school. Most of the girls in the neighborhood did these days. However, the family remained traditional about Maryam going out alone, and that included for shopping.

In wealthy families, the women just sent the servants to the supermarket, Safeway. The prices were high there, but many foreign items were available. For most families, however, the husband and sons shopped locally or in the *souk,* or market, downtown. Almost everything Maryam needed could be purchased nearby. Every neighborhood had almost as many shops as residences. There was a bread baker pulling fresh bread out of his brick oven, a butcher with lamb and mutton hanging in the window, a chicken seller with cages of live chickens piled high, herb and spice shops, fruit vendors, nut and sesame seed sellers, tahini shops, milk and yogurt vendors, and more, plus there were little markets on almost every corner.

Maryam knew the boys might stop and talk to their friends, perhaps buying falafel at one of the many street vendors, especially as there were so many shops to visit. However, they could be relied on to remember everything. Asef had brought home lemons, zucchini, eggplant, okra, and fresh chickpeas last night from the souk, as well as chickens from the shop down the street. She had roasted the eggplant already, and the chickpeas had been cooked and pounded with tahini for the hummus they would enjoy this evening. She had coffee and cardamom, tea, and most of the spices she needed—cumin, coriander, garlic—plus rice, sesame seeds, yogurt, eggs, sugar, flour, clarified butter, and olive oil. However, the parsley, tomatoes, cucumber, sumac, parsley, mint, apricots, and maybe a watermelon would arrive with Salah and Sameer. Then they would not need to shop again for another week, except possibly for bread and some fresh produce.

## Major Foodstuffs

Jordanian food is essentially an Arab cuisine, and it has much in common with other Middle Eastern countries, as well as Arab-dominated North Africa. Dishes such as baba ghannouj, falafel, hummus, and *bourek* (cheese-filled pastries) appear here as well as in most surrounding countries. Olives and olive oil are consumed at every meal. Eggplant, bulgur (also often called *burghul*), tomatoes, yogurt, mint tea, garlic, and unleavened bread are staples throughout the region. However, the influence of the nomadic Bedouin has contributed to the cuisine of Jordan, and among the country's Arab neighbors, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine have had the strongest influence. Because of the Ottoman Empire, foods one often associates with Turkey and Greece have also spread throughout the region, including baklava and gyros-style meats (called *shawarma* in Jordan, where it is made as often with chicken as with lamb).

Because Jordan is a Muslim country, there is no pork. Most main-course dishes include chicken or lamb. Fish is available as well, though it is more common in the south, nearer the port of Aqaba, and goat is eaten on occasion, though most goats are kept for milk. Eggs, milk, yogurt, cheese, fava beans, and chickpeas are other important protein sources.

The bread one sees most often in Jordan, as throughout the Arab world, is the round, unleavened, pitalike loaves called *khoubiz* (also spelled *khobz*). One is served khoubiz in homes and in restaurants; it is found at neighborhood street-food vendors and fine hotels; and bakers everywhere can be seen piling it high in displays or on carts or trays. It is a little thicker than pita but is similar, including having the pocketlike quality that makes it ideal for making sandwiches with falafel or shawarma (or *shwarma*). The second kind of bread, seen somewhat less often, is Bedouin sheet bread, called *shrak* (also spelled *shirak*), which is about 13 inches in diameter and ¼-inch thick, and as soft and flexible as a child's blanket.

Tahini, a paste made from sesame seeds, appears at almost every meal, including breakfast, alone or incorporated into one of the many dishes for which it is a key ingredient, including the nearly ubiquitous pureed chickpea dip, hummus, and the smoky eggplant dip, baba ghannouj. Yogurt is another staple. It can be bought at the local market, but in more traditional homes, it is homemade, with mothers handing down recipes to their daughters. Yogurt is used plain and in sauces, or it is drained to create the creamy yogurt cheese called labneh.

Rice can be a bed for roasted meats, a pilaf, or part of the stuffing for cabbage rolls. Bulgur, or cracked wheat, is featured in many recipes, including the popular bulgur-and-parsley salad called tabbouleh. It is also a key ingredient in *kibbeh,* a tremendously popular dish that combines the bulgur with finely ground lamb, which, depending on the version of kibbeh being prepared, may be served raw (like steak tartare), baked, fried, stuffed, or in soup.

Coriander, cumin, cinnamon, and black pepper are common spices, but the most distinctive regional spice is sumac (also spelled *sumaq*). This is not the poison sumac of North America, though it is a distant relative. The spice is ground from the berry of a shrubby tree that grows wild in the Middle East. It has a deep rusty-red color and a tart, astringent taste that adds a pleasant sourness to dishes. In addition to being added to recipes or used to add a splash of color to an appetizer, sumac is a key ingredient in the spice mix *za'atar.* Za'atar is a flavorful blend of sumac, toasted sesame seeds, salt, thyme, oregano, and marjoram. Amounts of each ingredient may vary, and blends may appear red or green, depending on the proportion of sumac to herbs. Also, basil and/or savory may be included in the blend, as this can be very personalized. While it can be purchased commercially, za'atar is often blended at home. Two of the most popular applications are sprinkling za'atar on bread that has been spread with olive oil and sprinkling it on labneh. Even breakfast buffets in hotels will include a large bowl of za'atar for diners. The word *za'atar* can also refer simply to the herb thyme, but it far more often refers to the spice blend—and thyme is always a featured ingredient in any za'atar.

Flatleaf parsley is used so heavily that it actually constitutes a vegetable or salad green rather than a mere herb. It does sometimes appear as a garnish, but it is a major ingredient in such salads as *fatush* (a bread salad) and often dominates the bulgur in tabbouleh. Mint appears almost as commonly, in salads and other recipes, and is also almost always used in tea.

*Fuul* is the garlicky, lemon-scented, stewed fava bean dish that is Egypt's national breakfast, but it is most often found as an appetizer on lunch or dinner menus in Jordan. Lentils appear in soups, and chickpeas most commonly appear in hummus or in falafel, the fried veggie balls that are among the Middle East's most common snack foods.

Lebanese influence is most responsible for Jordan's splendid pastries. Delicate, layered, honey-drenched sweets and rich cookies laden with pistachios, walnuts, and/or sesame seeds line the shelves of pastry shops. Pastry is usually both baked and exhibited on a large, round baking tray called a *sanieh.*

## Cooking

Modern homes are beginning to get modern conveniences, such as food processors, but few in Jordan are wealthy enough to have such appliances, and many simply do not believe they are as effective as traditional tools. The cornerstone of most traditional kitchens is a range of mortars and pestles: a large, heavy one, usually made of stone, for making kibbeh; and smaller ones of stone or brass for making hummus, baba ghannouj, and other purees and pastes. Generally, anything that will be put in the oven is cooked on a sanieh. Heavy pots and pans are used for thick soups and dishes containing yogurt.

Bedouin sheet bread is cooked on a *sorj,* which is a large metal dome that looks something like a shield or an inverted wok. It is put over a fire and the dough is stretched out over its surface. The bread cooks in only a few minutes. Skewers (for shish kebab, among other dishes) and grills are common everywhere, as are spits for roasting ranks of chickens or whole lambs.

In urban homes, cooking gas is used for cooking, but it is not piped in; individual tanks are delivered to homes. Gas company trucks cruise the neighborhoods each day, playing cheerful tunes to announce their presence, much as an ice cream truck would do. Water must be delivered as well. Jordan is among the most water-scarce nations on earth, so water is strictly rationed and must be conserved, because one must make the water last until the next delivery. Amman's recent rapid growth has further strained resources, and the government is looking for ways to ensure a regular water supply for all, regardless of economic status.

## Typical Meals

Breakfast for most Jordanians comes after the dawn prayers that start the day throughout the Muslim world. Lunch is usually eaten around 2 P.M. and is frequently the biggest meal of the day. Dinner is generally eaten late, around 9 P.M. However, this schedule alters during the month of Ramadan, when Muslims are required to fast from sunrise to sunset; lunch is skipped, and dinner becomes the big meal of the day.

All meals include rounds of unleavened Arabic bread. Breakfast usually includes eggs (as omelets, hard-cooked, or baked with yogurt and garlic) and labneh, a soft, tangy yogurt cheese that is spread on the bread and often sprinkled with za'atar. The main meal will almost inevitably include hummus, soup, bread, yogurt, olives, salad, vegetables (cauliflower, eggplant, potatoes, okra, tomatoes, or cucumbers, or some mixture of these, often stuffed or with a sauce), a main course with rice and lamb or chicken, and fruit (apricots, apples, bananas, melons, and oranges are most common). However, depending on the occasion and whether there is company, lunch can expand to a lavish affair that spans hours. The hummus may be joined by a whole range of other *mezze,* or appetizers, including kibbeh, tabbouleh, bourek, spiced olives, beef sausage, fuul (cooked fava beans), stuffed grape leaves, baba ghannouj, and more. The mezze offerings are often so elaborate that this course seems like a feast on its own.

Generally, for meals, a covering is placed on the floor, and a large tray with the main course is placed in the center, surrounded by platters of bread and bowls of yogurt, salad, and whatever other dishes are being served. Often, the bread is the primary utensil for eating the food, torn in pieces, folded, and used as a scoop. Often, even at home, the genders do not mingle at meals. Men and older boys sit in a circle around one array of food, women and older girls sit in another circle, and, if the family is large, the youngest children, boys and girls, might be in yet another circle. This will usually occur even when there are guests. While seasonal fruit is the most common dessert, the presence of guests will usually find the meal ending with decadent pastries, either homemade or from one of the local pastry shops.

Nothing is wasted. Recipes abound for brain omelets, lamb-tongue salads, and stuffed tripe. Even day-old bread finds a second life in the flavorful, refreshing salad known as fatush. Fatush, a bread and vegetable salad, is identified most commonly as Jordanian/Palestinian or Lebanese/Jordanian. These countries are so close, and their populations are so intermingled, that many dishes don't change names or recipes as they cross borders. Because of differences in the types of unleavened bread available, especially for Jordanians living overseas, some recipes simply call for "local bread." Others will specify Arabic bread or pita. Any good unleavened flatbread will work.

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### *Fatush* (Flatbread Salad)

*Serves 6*

1 pita

1 heart of romaine lettuce, shredded

2–3 tomatoes, roughly chopped

1 cucumber, peeled and cut into ¼-in. chunks

3–4 scallions, white and light green parts, thinly sliced

1 sweet pepper, red or green, chopped

¼ c chopped parsley

¼ c chopped mint leaves

1 clove garlic
1 tsp salt
1 tbsp sumac
½ c lemon juice
½ c extra virgin olive oil
Freshly ground black pepper

Preheat oven to 400°F.

Cut the pita into approximately ¾-inch squares. Place on a baking sheet and toast in the oven until golden brown, about 8–10 minutes.

Put the lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber, scallions, sweet pepper, parsley, and mint in a bowl, and toss to combine.

Crush the garlic clove in a bowl with the salt and mix into a paste. Add the sumac and lemon juice, then whisk in the olive oil. Just before serving, add the toasted bread to the vegetables, pour the dressing over everything, and toss to combine. Chopped radishes or purslane are also common additions to this salad. Grind black pepper over to taste.



Za'atar and other typical breakfast items from Jordan. (iStockPhoto)

## Eating Out

Wonderful, savory street food is found on almost every block of Jordan's cities. Most common among the offerings of the small food shops are falafel (balls of mashed chickpeas mixed with herbs and spices and deep-fried) and shawarma (slowly rotating pillars of spiced lamb or chicken, where the outside is shaved off as it roasts). Both of these are usually stuffed into pockets of khoubiz, that round, unleavened flatbread of the Arab countries. Shops selling roasted chickens are also close to ubiquitous.

Restaurants are increasing in number in rapidly modernizing Amman. However, even here, Islamic law generally keeps the sexes apart. Coffee shops and bars usually have all-male clienteles, though some foreign-run establishments (usually with obvious names like Irish Pub) welcome women. Still, women from traditional families would be unlikely to ever go to a bar. While an increasing number of restaurants in big cities, such as Amman, allow gender mingling, especially if the diners are foreigners, many eateries are for men only. Often, these restaurants will have a family room set aside for women and children.

There are a few American-style restaurants, mostly popular with homesick tourists, some excellent Mediterranean places, and a few good Asian restaurants, and most of the nicer hotels have restaurants that offer a range of "Continental" cuisine. Pizza, wraps, and smoothies are available for upscale Jordanians who are more familiar with Western culture, either through association or travel. However, even when dining out, most Jordanians are looking for traditional foods, though perhaps on a grander scale than is possible at home. The mezze spread can be fairly astonishing, and the national dish of Jordan, *mansaf* (lamb cooked in a dried yogurt sauce

served on a big platter over flatbread and rice, and garnished with almonds and pine nuts), is eaten for all special occasions. It is the specialty of many restaurants offering traditional fare. One can even dine in a traditional "hair house," as the Bedouin call their camel-hair tents, in the courtyards of some popular restaurants. For a special occasion, this recalling of one's roots is a popular option. One does not sit on the ground in restaurants, as one does in homes, but low chairs surround low tables. As at home, myriad small dishes and platters are passed, and everyone dines from the huge trays in the center of the table.

Dining out, other than street food, even at relatively modest places, is generally the domain of the middle class or wealthy. Most Jordanians do not go to restaurants, or go rarely. However, as the middle and upper classes grow, this is changing. Some hip, high-end places not only allow women but also don't even require head coverings. At these places, the food may be European or fusion but is just as likely to be the same food found at more traditional spots. However, while some younger, better-educated Jordanian professionals are pursuing greater freedoms, Jordan is still a country where most women stay home until they're married and still often accept arranged marriages. So it seems likely that the restaurant scene will not change dramatically in the foreseeable future.

## Special Occasions

Jordanians follow the Islamic calendar. Religious holidays include Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr (the end of Ramadan), Eid al-Adha (the Feast of the Sacrifice), Ras as-Sana (the Islamic New Year), the birthday of Muhammad, and Leilat al-Meiraj (the Ascension of Muhammad). National holidays include Arbor Day (January 15), Arab League Day (March 22), and Independence Day (May 25). Celebrations also surround engagements, weddings, and births.

Mansaf, the national dish of Jordan, is served for all important holidays and special occasions, as well as to honor the visit of a relative or guests. Of course, the usual mezze are served first, though more abundantly for a celebration, and strong, cardamom-scented coffee—the wine of the Arab world—will flow more generously. In some homes, real wine, or possibly *arak,* the strong anise-flavored spirit of the region—will be served, despite the fact that Islam forbids the drinking of alcohol.

Mansaf is a lavish feast dish that appears at special occasions everywhere, from Bedouin tents to high-end restaurants in Amman. This feast is taken seriously, with hours going into its preparation—and heated discussions often erupting over differences of opinion as to precisely how it should be made.

### *Mansaf*

Many of the traditional ingredients in mansaf are not widely available outside of the Middle East. One key ingredient is *jameed,* a defatted sheep- or goat-milk yogurt that is formed into a ball, salted, and dried in the sun until rock hard. Then, when needed, it is soaked in water and heated, to reconstitute it. Mansaf is cooked in this reconstituted yogurt, which gives mansaf its distinctive, slightly gamy taste. Plain cow-milk yogurt cannot simply be substituted, as it curdles with long cooking. However, goat-milk yogurt is available at many ethnic grocery stores, and it will work in the recipe without curdling, or one can stabilize the cow-milk yogurt—directions follow the recipe. Also, liquid jameed can be found at some Middle Eastern stores.

Other essential ingredients, besides the jameed, include a spice mixture known as *bahārāt* and the cooking fat called *samneh.* Bahārāt always includes black pepper, cinnamon, and allspice but may also include cardamom, nutmeg, coriander, or cumin. In the United States, it can be found premixed in many Middle Eastern markets, but in this recipe, the individual spices are used. Samneh is clarified goat- or sheep-milk butter, but any clarified butter, including Indian ghee, can be used.

Normally, an entire sheep is cooked, and the boiled head is prominently displayed in the middle of the mound of food. The recipe has been revised for a more reasonable, and headless, amount of lamb. For the presentation, Bedouin sheet bread is mounded on a large tray, rice is piled on top, the

lamb is piled on the rice, the yogurt sauce is poured over everything, and then the dish is sprinkled with pine nuts. Almonds may also be sprinkled on the dish.

Mansaf is traditionally eaten in the Bedouin style, from a large, communal platter, with people sitting or standing around the mansaf, with the left hand behind the back, using the right hand instead of utensils. A piece of lamb is pulled off the bone (it is cooked until it is falling apart, so this is easy), and then a bit of rice, bread, and some of the yogurt sauce are gathered around it. This is rolled into a ball and popped into the mouth, without having the fingers touch the mouth. This is traditional good manners but also a good health tip when everyone is eating from the same platter. In restaurants serving mansaf, chairs are more usual, rather than sitting on the ground, and forks are available, as well as individual plates, for diners (usually foreign guests) not accustomed to Bedouin dining.

***Mansaf***

*Serves 6*

3 lb lamb shoulder on the bone, cut into 6 similarly sized pieces

Water

1 tsp salt

¼ c clarified butter

¼ c pine nuts

1 large onion, coarsely chopped

1½ tsp ground turmeric

½ tsp freshly ground black pepper

½ tsp ground allspice

½ tsp ground cinnamon

1 batch stabilized yogurt (see following)

3 c cooked, buttered rice

2 sheets Bedouin bread or 3 pitas, split

Additional salt and pepper, as needed

Place the lamb in a large pot and cover with cold water. Bring slowly to a boil, skimming as needed. When no more scum is forming and the water is boiling, add 1 teaspoon salt, or to taste. Cover, reduce heat, and let simmer for 30 minutes.

In a frying pan, heat the clarified butter. Add the pine nuts and fry, stirring frequently, until golden brown. Remove the nuts with a slotted spoon, leaving the butter in the pan. Set nuts aside. In the remaining butter, fry the onion until it is transparent. Stir in the turmeric, pepper, allspice, and cinnamon, and cook for an additional 2 minutes.

Add the onion and spice mixture to the lamb in the pot, and let the lamb continue to simmer, covered, for another hour. Then remove the lid and let the liquid reduce until it half-covers the lamb.

When the liquid has reduced sufficiently, add the stabilized yogurt (or goat yogurt, if you've found it), shaking the pan to blend the yogurt evenly into the liquid. Let the lamb simmer gently on low heat until the lamb is tender and the sauce thickens, about another 30 minutes. If the sauce does need to be stirred, do so gently and in one direction, to avoid breaking up the lamb. Add salt and pepper to taste.

To serve, line a large platter with the bread, mound the rice on top of the bread, and put the lamb on top of the rice. Pour the sauce over the lamb and rice, and sprinkle the fried pine nuts over the whole dish.

**To stabilize cow-milk yogurt:** Put 2 cups plain, full-fat yogurt in a heavy saucepan. Beat with a fork until smooth. Beat an egg white until frothy, then beat it, along with 2 teaspoons cornstarch and ½ teaspoon salt, into the yogurt. Put the saucepan over high heat. Stir with a wooden spoon as it heats, stirring in only one direction. Stir constantly until it starts to bubble. Reduce the heat to medium, and let it boil for about 3–5 minutes, or until thick. It is then ready to use in the mansaf.

## Diet and Health

Before Jordan was a country, many people in the region were poorly nourished, unless they had herds or farms, but this was due to poverty and the scarcity of food, rather than flaws in the food traditions.

As the country grew and food was more widely distributed, whether through aid, as at the beginning, or later, as the economy improved, the traditional diet was essentially wholesome, with a good balance of meat, dairy, vegetables, legumes, nuts, and fruit. Also, like other Mediterranean countries, Jordan relies heavily on olive oil in its cuisine. With increased urbanization, sugar consumption increased, which had its biggest impact on dental health. A bigger concern for most health organizations was the long-standing cultural encouragement of smoking. Even today, approximately 62 percent of males smoke, though fewer than 10 percent of females smoke.

As with many countries, nutrition has declined with increased education, urbanization, and modernization, especially among the young. While fast food and soft drinks are not often consumed by adults or those in rural areas, they have been adopted by students in cities. In the past, the consumption of sweets was at least partially offset by a high consumption of dairy products, but with soft drinks increasingly replacing milk, health is suffering. Students who focus on fast food, modern snacks, and soft drinks are rarely getting enough vegetables and meat. Health organizations are making an effort to get nutrition programs into schools to help stop the deterioration of health.

*Cynthia Clampitt*

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# Lebanon

## Overview

Lebanon is bordered by Israel on the south, Syria on the north and east, and the Mediterranean Sea on the west. It consists of a relatively narrow coastal plain, the Lebanon mountain chain just inland, and the Bekaa Valley between the Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon mountains, which form the Syrian border. It has a Mediterranean climate of mild summers, with rain concentrated in the winter months. Because of its mountains, Lebanon receives sufficient rainfall that three-quarters of its cropland needs no irrigation. The largest river is the Litani, which flows through the Bekaa Valley and enters the Mediterranean between the southern cities of Tyre and Sidon. A quarter of the country's land is agricultural, and the only foodstuffs Lebanon imports in any quantity are meat and dairy products from Syria. Despite its agricultural productivity, the population of 3.8 million is 87 percent urban.

The mountains have also influenced the country's religious makeup. After Sunnite Islam became the majority religion of the Middle East in the 11th century, Christians and other religious dissidents retreated to mountainous areas. The Lebanon Mountains are home to the largest Christian population in the Arab world (mostly Maronite Catholics but also Orthodox and other eastern Christian denominations) and to many Druze, members of an offshoot of Shiite Islam. The base population of the Bekaa is Shiites, locally called *mitwalli,* while Beirut is dominated by Sunnites. This uncomfortable diversity of faiths has contributed to a number of conflicts in Lebanon's history, notably the disastrous civil war of 1975–1990.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Maroun and Afifa Nader and their daughter, Brigitte, live in a new apartment house in Kesrouan, a busy and prosperous area east of Beirut that has exploded into suburbs since the 1970s. Maroun works at a design firm; Afifa supplements the family income with a small Internet business trading in traditional craft jewelry. They are representative of the professional class. As Maronites, the most Europeanized segment of the population, they have a cosmopolitan lifestyle, but they often visit Maroun's relatives in the mountains and bring home village specialties such as the paper-thin bread *marqouq* and various gathered foods, including hawthorn (*za'rur*) and wood sorrel (*khubbaizi*). Afifa does not visit her family's ancestral village, which they left because of bitter fighting during the civil war.

The war devastated Beirut's market quarter. As a result, Beirut is the only sizable Arab city without a traditional *souk,* or marketplace, and Beirutis now shop in American-style supermarkets. The Naders live conveniently close to one of the largest, which uses as its symbol a giant shopping cart 40 feet high. It stocks the usual Mediterranean produce—tomatoes, eggplant, zucchini, potatoes, spinach, chard, olives, citrus fruits, grapes, apples—and a few items more typical of the Arab world: grape leaves for stuffing, fresh chickpeas in season, and a grain delicacy known as *friki,* which is unripe wheat grains scorched to give them a smoky flavor.

This market also has a fish department, a butcher shop (mostly lamb and chicken, with some beef and goat meat), a dairy section, and a wide selection of imported goods such as wines and cheeses. It also stocks Lebanese wines from the Bekaa. It sells frozen foods

and an extensive selection of ready-to-eat dishes. When she's in a hurry, Afifa can pick up a carton of chard and lentil soup and another of lamb and okra stew, leaving nothing to make for her family's dinner but rice and salad.

Outside Beirut, people still shop in traditional souks, where the choices are more limited but prices are commensurately lower. Rural people eat less meat, getting a higher proportion of their protein from dairy products and pulses, consumed as bean soups and porridges.

## Major Foodstuffs

The favorite meats are lamb and chicken. Beef is available to a limited degree, and so are pork products in Christian districts. Wheat and rice are the chief grains. Pita bread (called simply *khubz,* "bread") is eaten at most meals, even when rice is served. Wheat is also consumed as *burghul* (bulgur): Wheat grains are boiled until the starch gelatinizes and are then dried and crushed, making a product that can be made ready to eat simply by boiling or even soaking in water. Bulgur soaked in yogurt and then sun-dried makes *kishk,* a sort of instant soup mix with a tart, slightly musty flavor. Wheat is also used in sweet and savory pastries.

The leading cooking fats are olive oil, vegetable oil, and butter. Lamb fat, from fat-tailed sheep (which have been bred to deposit their body fat in their tails), plays a minor role; bits of tail fat are often threaded between the chunks of meat in shish kebab, and a little tail fat is traditionally added to the butter in baklava to give a subtle gamy tang.



Grape leaves stuffed with rice, a common Lebanese dish. (Shutterstock)

Milk is rarely consumed fresh (except as ice cream). Mostly it's soured into yogurt (*laban*) or processed further by straining the yogurt to make the even more noticeably tart *labni,* which has the consistency of a soft cheese. Both keep quite well in the warm climate. Fresh milk is also curdled to make cheese, mostly consumed fresh as *jibneh baida* (white cheese) or preserved in brine, but a cheese called *musanara* is made from a boiled curd, like mozzarella or string cheese. Some cheeses are flavored with spices such as *mahleb* (ground cherry pits).

Butter is nearly always clarified of its solids and whey to make pure butterfat (*samni*), mostly used in making sweets. A product called *qaymaq* is made by simmering whole milk so that a skin of rich cream forms on the surface, being removed as it forms to make a very rich product comparable to English clotted cream—it can be eaten by itself or used as a filling for pastries. Other dairy products include *shanklish,* which is dried balls of yogurt cultured to produce an aged-cheese flavor, and *ayran,* a tart drink made by diluting yogurt with water.

While the civil war was destroying the old souk and paving the way for supermarkets and convenience foods, it had the ironic side effect of reviving some traditional homemade foods, because people often had to rely on themselves during the war. Today, Lebanese food lovers patronize shops that specialize in once-endangered foods such as *qawirma* (fried lamb preserved in jars under a layer of lamb fat) and homemade pickles, preserves, and cheeses.

The eastern Mediterranean is not particularly rich in fish, but Lebanon does have a fishing industry and a repertoire of fish dishes. Fish is most often fried in olive oil and eaten with rice and a squeeze of lemon, accompanied by rice and a salad, or as *sayyadiyyi,* the dish of fish, fried onions, and rice prepared throughout the Arab Mediterranean, but there are also fish kebabs, stews, and casseroles, even fish *kibbi* (fish pounded to a paste with bulgur wheat).

***Samak bi-Tahini* (Fish in Tahini Sauce)**

*Serves 4*

This is a rich special-occasion dish using the sesame paste tahini, which also flavors dips such as *hummus bi-tahini* and baba ghannouj, the smoky eggplant dip. Traditionally it's made with a whole fish, but these days some cooks use fish fillets instead to avoid having to pick through a lot of fish bones. It's served at room temperature.

Note: For frying, Lebanese cooks don't cut onions crosswise into rings. They make cuts from the top of the onion nearly to the bottom to produce narrow wedges about ¼ inch at the widest. These separate into lengths known as "wings" (*ajniha*).

1 fish (about 2–2½ lb)
Salt
4 tbsp olive oil
2 onions
1 clove garlic, crushed
1½ c tahini
¾ c lemon juice
Water
½ tsp cumin

Clean the fish and rub inside and out with about 1 tablespoon salt. Refrigerate for at least 2 hours to firm up the flesh.

Rinse the fish and pat dry with paper towels. Spread 2 tablespoons olive oil in a baking dish, place the fish in it, and bake at 350°F until the flesh flakes when poked with a fork, about 20 minutes. Remove the baking dish from the oven.

Meanwhile, cut the onion lengthwise into "wings" and fry in 2 tablespoons oil until just starting to turn golden. Remove and set on paper towels to absorb oil.

Place the garlic and the tahini in a bowl, and add the lemon juice and ¼ cup water. Stir, adding more water as needed, until it has the consistency of thick cream. Stir in the cumin, ½ teaspoon salt, and the fried onions. Pour this sauce over the fish and return to the oven until the sauce is thickened and bubbling, 20–25 minutes.

Remove from the oven and allow to cool to room temperature.

## Cooking

City people use gas or electric ranges, though villagers may still cook on a wood-fired range made of brick or stone. The cooking utensils of a Lebanese kitchen are much the same as in Europe, with one notable exception: the *siniyya.* This is a round baking pan about 16 inches in diameter with sides about an inch high. It's used for baking baklava-type pastries, a sort of flat meatloaf called *kibbi bi-siniyya,* and certain stews, such as *masbahet al-darwish* ("the beggar's rosary"), made with summer vegetables and tomatoes.

The siniyya owes its existence to the fact that traditional kitchens did not have ovens, so dishes to be baked were sent to the village bakery to cook after the day's bread baking was over. Its flat shape made it possible to fit a number of these pans into a brick oven at the same time. In villages it's common to see children balancing siniyyas on their heads on the way to the local bakery; it was not uncommon even 30 or 40 years ago in Beirut. These days city people more often use the siniyya in the oven of a home range. By its nature, cooking in a siniyya exposes a large amount of the food's surface to heated air, so stews baked in one develop a special flavor because of evaporation and browning.

Traditional kitchens have a large marble mortar (*jorn*) and a pestle (*mdaqqa*) about the size of a baseball bat, which are used for making kibbi, a versatile paste of meat, bulgur, and onions. In the Bekaa Valley, the mortar is replaced by a flat grinding stone (*rahaya*). Making kibbi with either utensil is a laborious process requiring an hour or more. Many people own a food processor, which reduces the process to a matter of minutes.

One notable feature of Lebanese food is the heavy use of lemon juice and olive oil. Fish and even eggs are fried in olive oil; the most usual salad dressing

is lemon juice and olive oil (often with the addition of mint). Since medieval times, olive oil has been a particular feature of Christian fast-day dishes, such as vegetables slowly stewed in oil. Grape leaves (*waraq 'inab mahshi*) may be stuffed with meat, but the vegetarian version, stuffed with rice and tomatoes, is served cold with olive oil.

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***Mjaddara* (Pockmarked Rice and Lentils)**

*Serve 4–6 as a main dish with salad or 10–15 as a dip*
This filling vegetarian dish is often eaten by Christians on fast days, but it belongs to the general repertoire of Arab cooking. In fact, it is recorded in several 13th-century cookbooks. The name means "pockmarked," because of the grains of rice among the lentils. The addition of onions well browned in flavorful olive oil makes the dull-sounding combination of rice and lentils very attractive.

1 c lentils
7¼ c water plus more for washing the lentils
2 onions
¾ c olive oil
½ c rice
½ tsp allspice
½ tsp cinnamon
Salt

Wash the lentils by putting them in a bowl and covering them with water. Remove any floating debris and any stones or other extraneous matter. Drain.

Put 6 cups of water in a 2-quart saucepan, bring to a boil, add the lentils, and cook until soft, about 35 minutes.

Meanwhile, peel the onions and slice into "wings." Put the olive oil into a pan and fry the onions over medium heat, stirring often, until distinctly brown (but do not let them burn). Drain onions on paper towels.

When the lentils are done, drain them and set aside. Put 1¼ cup water in the saucepan, bring to a boil, throw in the rice, allspice, and cinnamon, reduce the heat, and cook over low heat, covered, for 10 minutes. Stir in the lentils and add salt to taste. Stir in the fried onions and oil, and cook uncovered over medium-low heat for another 10 minutes.

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## Typical Meals

A usual breakfast for city people would be flatbread (plain or perhaps topped with *zaatar,* a mixture of wild thyme, sesame seeds, and tart ground sumac berries) and white cheese along with a handful of olives. Croissants, an imported soft cheese, and the rather syrupy local fruit preserves (*mrabba*) are typical. Turkish coffee is usually served with breakfast. Farmers often start the day with a hearty soup of kishk and qawirma fried with a good deal of garlic.

Lunch for city people is often a hasty kebab or falafel sandwich, but on more leisurely occasions a lamb and vegetable stew or kibbi baked in the siniyya might be served, or just a spread of the appetizer dishes known as *mezzeh,* such as hummus, falafel, tabbouleh, stuffed grape leaves, lebni (a kind of yogurt cheese), and pickled turnip spears. Mezzeh also appear at picnics and feature at afternoon parties.

A typical dinner might be lentil soup, followed by lamb stewed with a vegetable, accompanied by plain pilaf (*rizz mfalfal*) or pilaf garnished with toasted vermicelli (*rizz bi-sha'riyyi*). Tomato and cucumber salad is likely to appear on the side. Rural people eat the same sort of dinner so far as their budgets allow. Urbanites sometimes cook international recipes (mostly French, Italian, Iranian, and Indian) from their favorite cooking magazines. The traditional beverages are water, ayran, or (among Christians) *'araq,* an anise-flavored liqueur, but some people prefer wine. Coffee and fresh fruit end the meal. The famous Middle Eastern pastries are not usually served with a meal but consumed as snacks during the day.

Two features of Lebanese food survive from medieval cookery, though in an altered form. In the Middle Ages, most Arab stews contained a sour

fruit juice, such as lemon, pomegranate, or even rhubarb juice, and all were flavored with complex spice mixtures. Both practices are still known, but all fruit juices except lemon have been replaced by tomato juice, and allspice, or a mixture of allspice and cinnamon, usually substitutes for the old spice mixtures. Other spices such as cumin, coriander, and saffron, when used, usually appear alone rather than mixed with other spices. On the table, salt and allspice appear instead of salt and pepper.

Kibbi is one of the most versatile Lebanese foods. The meat, bulgur, and onion paste can be rolled into meatballs and grilled on a skewer, baked in a siniyya with a filling of fried onions and lamb fat, made into tangerine-sized, torpedo-shaped meatballs with the same filling and then deep-fried, or made into meat-stuffed flying-saucer disks and grilled or fried. It can even be served raw, and often is at important dinners, because raw kibbi can be made only from the best-quality lamb.

Lebanon is a small country, but it does have regional specialties. The Sunnite grandees of Beirut were known for their fine food (a nearby village, Dfoun, traditionally provided their cooks), and the best hummus, falafel, and tabbouleh are still considered to come from Beirut. A specialty of the mountains is *fattoush,* a salad of tomatoes, cucumbers, purslane, and crisp croutons made by toasting pita bread. The mountain village of Ehden has a specialty of raw kibbi made with goat meat. Fish kibbi is a dish of the northern coastal region, and the northern city of Trablus is known for making elegant, miniaturized versions of baklava and other pastries.



Fattoush, a traditional Lebanese salad made with tomatoes, cucumbers, purslane, and crisp croutons made by toasting pita bread. (Edward Karaa | Dreamstime.com)

## Eating Out

The end of the civil war led to an explosion of restaurants in Lebanon, and today it has restaurants serving a wide variety of Asian and European cuisines. Still, most public eateries serve traditional roast meat dishes such as shish kebab (*lahm mishwi*) and *shawerma* (thin-sliced meat arranged on a vertical spit; browned portions are sliced off for serving as they are done). The meat may come with rizz bi-sha'riyyi, turnip pickles, and a tomato-cucumber salad, or it may be sold in pita bread with garlicky tahini sauce. These places also offer dips such as hummus bi-tahini and baba ghannouj and various salads. One new development after the civil war was a sort of restaurant/dance club called *taksh-wa-faksh,* where people eat the usual mezzeh snacks and then dance to disco music, on the tabletops if there's no dance floor.

Lebanon has a famous restaurant village, Zahle, located in a shady gorge at the western edge of the Bekaa Valley. Open-air restaurants extend out along a little creek for about a quarter of a mile up the gorge. They specialize in mezzeh and above all in roast chicken, which is served with a strong garlic sauce.

As everywhere in the Arab world, coffeehouses are a male preserve. They serve much the same function that bars do in Europe or America: as a place for male socializing. They serve Turkish coffee and a variety of pastries. More westernized men of the more affluent classes, however, are likely to patronize modern (and sexually integrated) espresso shops instead.

## Special Occasions

The chief religious celebrations of the Muslim majority are Eid al-Adha (the Feast of the Sacrifice),

which falls on the last day of the pilgrimage to Mecca, and Eid al-Fitr (the Feast of the Fast Breaking) at the end of the month of Ramadan. Eid al-Adha is the day when Muslims around the world, as well as those on the pilgrimage, sacrifice sheep (or other animals) in remembrance of Abraham's faithful willingness to sacrifice his son at the command of God, who allowed him to sacrifice a sheep in his place. It is a festive time of year when people dine and make sociable visits to family and friends.

Some Muslims do slaughter their own sheep for the occasion, but most arrange with a butcher shop for meat. Those who can afford to buy meat are expected to distribute some of it to families who can't. Naturally, Eid al-Adha spotlights meat dishes. Because the Islamic calendar is based entirely on the phases of the moon, Eid al-Adha can fall at any time of year, so on the whole the dishes served are the usual dishes of the season, rather than dishes unique to the Eid.

One of the principal religious obligations of Islam is abstaining from food and drink during the daylight hours of the month of Ramadan. From sunset to sunrise, in contrast, the faithful are permitted to eat and drink whatever they wish. They tend to avoid salty foods, which would make them thirstier during the following day. At the end of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr is a day of feasting and socializing. In distinction from Eid al-Adha, it emphasizes pastries and other sweets, rather than meat dishes.

The Shiites observe Ashura, the 10th day of the month of Muharram, with bitter mourning for the seventh-century martyrdom of the imam Husain ibn Ali. *Ashura* is also the name of a dish associated with this day; it consists of boiled whole wheat enriched with raisins and nuts. Grains and other seeds symbolize rebirth and/or the afterlife, and a similar dish is prepared by Christians at Easter and the feast of St. Barbara. Christians abstain from meat on Fridays, during Lent, and on other days of abstinence. They have a repertoire of meatless dishes such as fish or lentil kibbi.

Happy occasions such as weddings and births are celebrated with sweet foods—puddings and pastries. By the same token, sweet foods are considered inappropriate at sad occasions. After a funeral, guests are always poured bitter coffee.

## Diet and Health

The Lebanese diet is rich in fresh fruits and vegetables, so vitamin deficiency is not a serious problem. In particular, it uses lemon juice more abundantly than most cuisines. It also provides other healthful ingredients such as fish, nuts (which figure in the fillings of both pastries and stuffed vegetables), yogurt, and garlic.

Because of the availability of fish and olive oil, the Lebanese diet is lower in saturated fats and higher in omega-3 oils than that of some of its neighbors. However, although the Lebanese diet is the classic Mediterranean diet in many ways, sedentary city people tend to consume large amounts of sugar, butter, and refined wheat. Men who socialize in coffeehouses are at particular risk, because nothing but pastries is regularly served there, posing the danger of diabetes and cardiovascular problems. Many Lebanese are aware of these problems and explore health-food options.

Traditional medicinal concepts were derived from ancient Greek and Persian medicine and analyzed most complaints as due to an imbalance of the bodily humors. Medical treatments aimed to correct this supposed imbalance. All foods were held to have medicinal qualities, so medieval doctors often prescribed particular dishes—they even gave recipes, which cookbook writers eagerly plagiarized. These theories no longer exert much influence on diet, if any. Lebanon was the first Arab country to have modern medical schools, and it uses up-to-date pharmaceuticals and techniques. Folk remedies survive, however. Tea and yogurt are often recommended to those suffering from diarrhea, and mothers brew bitter medicinal teas for sick children.

*Charles Perry*

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# Palestinian Territories

## Overview

Palestine occupies the area between the eastern shore of the Mediterranean and the Jordan River and includes the Palestinian territories of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem—though East Jerusalem is under full Israeli jurisdiction. The West Bank is inhabited by some 2.46 million Palestinians, the Gaza Strip by approximately 1.55 million. Palestine occupies, in total, only 4,163 square miles (6,700 square kilometers) of territory. Palestine has several distinctive languages, ethnicities, cultures, and cuisines.

Palestinians follow many religious traditions, but the main demographic, 98 percent, is Sunni Muslim. A significant minority is Christian—2.6 percent—with even smaller groups such as Druze and Samaritans. Cultural displacement means that many of the original Bedouin population of Palestine have transmigrated to Israel, Egypt, and Jordan. The current number of Bedouin accounts for 0.5 percent of the population, an Armenian community makes up 0.1 percent, and a Jerusalem-based Indo-Aryan Dom community (Gypsies) less than 0.1 percent. Palestinians represent a highly homogenized community who share one cultural and ethnic identity: South Levantine Arabic.

The output of the Palestinian economy is almost exclusively agricultural; there is some minor expansion in small-scale industry, but unemployment is widespread. Fifty-seven percent of the population lives below the poverty line.

The upsurge in the consumption of processed food as a result of westernization and altered work patterns has meant a move beyond the home and the basis of fresh fruits and vegetables that underlay the Palestinian diet. As yet, none of the organizations working in this area has conducted comprehensive surveys of the impact of the geographic, socioeconomic, or political situation on the Palestinian diet. According to a 2007 "Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment" study by the World Food Program, 34 percent of Palestinians could not afford a balanced meal. In 2009 the United Nations World Food Program began a food voucher system to help 30,000 people in urban areas of the West Bank. This was a response to the nearly 70 percent increase in the price of basic food commodities such as oil and milk. A similar smaller-scale project is planned for the Gaza Strip. Such voucher schemes are the result of a 2008 study by the World Food Program, which found that residents of Gaza and the West Bank were particularly vulnerable, due to their dependence on imports, to the repercussions of global food prices on domestic markets.

Palestinian food culture can be aligned to eastern Mediterranean Levantine food culture, a culture that also exists in Syrian, Jordanian, and Lebanese cuisine. Historically, Palestinian food originates in the many diverse civilizations that colonized or resided in Palestine, with particular lines of inheritance drawn from the Arab Umayyad conquest and its establishment of a caliphate. This can be traced back to the food cultures of Mecca and then Damascus. Further influence comes from Abbasid Caliphate, with its Turkish, Syrian, and Iranian food strands, and Turkish food culture via the Ottoman Empire.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Yasir and Reem Abbas live in an affluent area of the West Bank city Nablus. Yasir, originally from Ramallah, is a civil servant; his wife, Reem, indigenous to Nablus, is a teacher. Their food choices typify middle-class urbanites whose diet is very Western as well as Palestinian. Yasir and Reem start their day at 6:30 with breakfast. This is a light meal of omelets, called *iljeh,* and Jenin fig jam, with both eggs and jam bought from the local minimarket. The *khoubz* bread they eat is bought by Yasir from a modernized bakery. The Abbases will meet again for lunch, the largest meal of the day, eating rice with a *yakhneh* stew of a small amount of lamb with squash and *mahasi* (stuffed vegetables). For the mahasi they will have bought eggplant. They bought the lamb and squash in a supermarket, although the spices that Reem used for the dish were from a reliable *'atar* in the local *souk* (spice market). If guests drop by, they may drink coffee, bought ready-ground in the souk. After work, at 8 P.M., Reem prepares a dinner of *shakshuka,* prepared using eggs and tomatoes bought from the minimart. Later, after dinner, comes *'hilew,* which is a light snack of *kanafeh* (a confection made of a shredded wheat–like pastry, cheese, and syrup) with mint tea, the mint coming from the souk. The pastry will have been bought from a local specialized Nablusi pastry shop in the Old City. Nowadays, there is more processed and fast food available to the Abbas family than in the past. They eat out more now than before, with wider choices, but often as part of their wider family unit. Westernization is more clearly evident in cities: Hamburgers replace *kiftah* (the traditional ground lamb dish), pizza replaces *sfeeha* (a flatbread topped with peppers, tomatoes, and lamb).

## Major Foodstuffs

From the humid coastal strip of Gaza, to the landlocked hilly lands of Bethlehem and snow-capped Beit Jala, to the West Bank, with its high rainfall and mountainous highlands, to the desert landscapes of Jericho: All of these landscapes shape Palestinian food culture. Predominantly, though, more than 90 percent of Palestinian dishes are made of vegetables, but vegetarianism, as a discrete cultural choice, is rare. Meat consumption spikes at seasonal, religious, and cultural events. The differences between the interior and the coast alter food culture: The proximity of the north to Lebanon means that many dishes are yogurt based (using the dried yogurts of *jameed* and *kishk*); tomato-based sauces appear in the south and center of the country. Gaza's coastal reaches mean that fish and vegetables predominate, but the Egyptian culinary influences mean that dried hot red peppers and fresh green peppers are featured. Lamb is the main protein in the interior: Their complex meat dishes distinguish Nazarenes. Rural and urban differences can be seen.

Urban food is open to global food influences: The northern West Bank city of Nablus is home to wealthier, more cosmopolitan Palestinians, and so the food culture of Nablus tends to be aligned to that of cities such as Lebanon's Damascus. The settlement of Europeans from the mid-19th century through to the further demographic changes of the last 50 years has affected urban food culture. Furthermore, the closed borders of the Palestinian Occupied Territories can result in food shortages and



Shakshuka, a traditional dish made with eggs and tomatos and often served for dinner. (iStockPhoto)

imbalances: Staples such as flour and pulses have been estimated by the United Nations to meet only about half of the population's immediate needs. Food insecurity has a dramatic impact on Palestinian access to food, affecting the majority of people. For example, nearly 40 percent of Palestine's inhabitants live in Gaza, on only 6 percent of the total land area, making access to adequate food precarious.

Agriculture is a central sector of the Palestinian economy, a buffer in times of economic difficulty. However, agriculture also needs access to land, water, and markets, none of which are givens. Agricultural production in Gaza and the West Bank has declined steadily. Only 6 percent of the land cultivated by Palestinians in the West Bank is under irrigation. Rain-fed cultivation accounts for around 95 percent of cultivated land but is dependent on climatic conditions and is found in its highest concentration in the northern West Bank Jenin area.

Vegetables, including onions, cucumbers, tomatoes, cauliflower, squash, and okra, provide minerals, vitamins, and trace elements. In excess of 30 different vegetable crops are grown in Palestine, the number accounted for by plant diversity and varied planting times. A number of green leafy plants, bought in the market or often acquired gratis—even picked by the roadside—are popular but preponderate in the area of Jericho: Strong-tasting *jarjeer* (arugula) appears in abundance in winter, while in spring the grasslike *hindbeh* (wild chicory), *hwerneh* (mustard greens), and *khubbeizeh* (wild mallow) appear. Jarjeer and hwerneh are eaten raw in salads, while hindbeh and khubbeizeh are fried. Tomatoes flourish in the cooler, more northern climes in Palestine. Areas to the north of the West Bank, with their fertile soils and high rainfall, like Jenin, Tulkarm, and even Ramallah, lying in the middle of the West Bank, enjoy varied crops. In contrast, in the Gaza Strip, the capacity of agricultural production has been outstripped by consumer demand, and the last of the sand dunes has been leveled for intensive horticulture. The fertile West Bank lands of Jenin, far north of Nablus, are home to palm and fig trees, and also produce watermelon, a useful source of thirst-quenching water in a dry climate. The culinary tradition of mahasi, the stuffing of vegetables such as pumpkin and eggplant, continues. Vegetables are cored and stuffed with rice and meat. Cabbage leaves and chard may be stuffed, or vine leaves to make *waraq al-'ainib.* Vegetable soups are also popular, based on such combinations as potatoes, Swiss chard, dried beans, and cauliflower. Zucchini can be used all year round, as these can be preserved dried.

Only small numbers of *fallahat,* women farmers, continue to sell domestically produced, rainwater-irrigated vegetables, purportedly low on pesticides, known as *baladi* vegetables, grown by *fellahin* (peasant farmers) on small plots in villages beyond the city. Vegetables include prized Rihâwi eggplant, fresh bush tomatoes, garlic, and onions. Despite displacement and urbanization, the persistence of vestigial fellahin culture means there is still an emphasis on the private cultivation of vegetables, even in urban areas. Seasonal vegetables and the fellahin who supply them still alter the food available: The spring brings apricots, the summer cucumbers, the autumn apples and olives, the winter bitter oranges and lemons. Many fellahin offering baladi-grown food must enter cities by circuitous back routes in order to avoid checkpoints, as the Israelis prefer to supply Israeli-grown vegetables to the Palestinian Occupied Territories. Za'atar is also one of the Palestinian foodstuffs that have become politicized. In 1977, ecologists ruled that overharvesting had left wild za'atar endangered: The Israelis declared it a protected species and banned its collection from the wild. Offenders would be heavily fined. The Israeli authorities have placed a similar ban on gathering za'atar in the West Bank. Palestinians, objecting to this, claimed an ancestral knowledge of how to preserve the yield of wild za'atar. Since 2006, Israel Defense Force checkpoints confiscate za'atar plants.

Dietary products derived from animal milk are a key source of protein. *Laban,* meaning "milk" or "white," is a fermented-milk yogurtlike product, often processed to allow year-round storage. Historically, the Bedouin have supplied the Palestinian market with goat and sheep meat and dairy products. After the rain of winter, fresh green pasture opens up in spring, and with it comes the production of white goat- or ewe-milk cheese, like *jibneh baida,* and cow

milk–based, increasingly popular *ackawi.* Unfortunately, Bedouin food culture has suffered from the impact of droughts and lack of mobility: Restricted access to traditional grazing land in the West Bank has compelled the Bedouin to buy fodder for their livestock. This, then, has escalated in cost, forcing some Bedouin to give up their traditional livelihood or sell portions of their livestock. Cheeses derived from ewe and she-goat milk are made using gum Arabic or mastic (gum acacia, a pistachio-tree resin) and can be flavored with the aromatic spice *mahlep,* made from ground cherry kernels. The cheese is preserved in salted water. The production of *laban jameed* is staged: Once the milk has been churned to extract the butter, the buttermilk is left to drip through a cheesecloth for several days; the resulting sour paste is kneaded and mixed with such spices as turmeric, cumin, mahlep, nutmeg, and cinnamon (the Bedouin in the area of Bethlehem use fenugreek instead of cumin), then shaped into small balls. After being dried, the cheese is stored in cloth bags. The individual balls are rehydrated for cooking. Laban jameed is a staple in many Palestinian dishes, used in *mahashi* (stuffed cabbage), *fatteh* (stock and dates on leftover flatbread), *mansaf* (stewed lamb) for sauces, and in many stews. *Labaneh,* another yogurt derivative, is a ubiquitous side dish on the Palestinian table and, as *labaneh wa za'atar,* is served with olive oil and *za'atar* (a herb compound of dried thyme, hyssop, sumac, sesame, and sometimes oregano).

Butter is also derived from ewe milk, and clarified butter, *samneh baladieh,* is strained after being boiled with *burghul* (bulgur) wheat, the musky spice turmeric (giving samneh its distinctive taste and iridescent yellow color), and nutmeg. Where samneh would have been used for the deep, rich flavors it affords, because of heightened awareness of the dangers of saturated fats, its use is limited. Urbanized young people may prefer instead to use olive oil or vegetable oil in cooking.

Staple foods such as rice, bread, and wheat are grouped together under the term *aish,* from the Arabic verb "to live," and *arruz* (rice) is derived from *araza,* "to be miserly or tight-fisted"—the starch in rice, when cooked, huddles together in balls, like the fists of the miser. Rice is not cultivated in Palestine, a fact that bears testimony to Palestine's position as a point of intersection for trade routes. Rice appears during ceremonial eating and in dishes such as the Gaza-based dish *sumaggiye* (a stew of beef, chickpeas, and chard flavored with sumac and tahini paste) and the upside-down meat and rice dish *makloubet* or the stuffing for mahasi.

Wheat-derived products are the oldest aish foods in Palestine, served cracked in the form of burghul wheat, derived from durum wheat, in dishes like tabbouleh and *kubeh* (ground lamb dish). *Freekeh,* roasted young green wheat, can supplant rice in makloubet and mahasi, while semolina, the kernel of the durum wheat, is used to make the sweet Palestinian *harisseh.* Many wheat-based products are steamed, like *maftool,* popular in Gaza, where it is served like a couscous with a sauce flavored with dried sour plums, but maftool may also be shaped into tiny peppercorn-sized balls and steamed over a savory stew or broth. Pulses incorporated into soups are often used as a staple food among poorer eating communities. *Adas majroosh* is a popular seasonal winter soup, using crushed lentils (*majroosh*), chopped fried onion, and cumin. Freekeh is a second cereal type: Harvested yellow wheat, with soft inner seeds, is placed into piles and set on fire. This process leaves only the seeds, which are then thrashed or rubbed (from which the word *freekeh* is derived).

The next key staple, bread, may be homemade but is most often store-bought from modern bakeries. Commonly consumed, *kmaj* is a double-layered flatbread with a pocket of air inside, and this double-layering technique becomes multiple layering when *mtabbak* (meaning "folded") is made. Bread such as *mabsoos* is kneaded with olive oil and za'atar. Taking its name from the *tabun* oven, *tabun* bread is a combination of whole-meal and white flours. *Tanoor,* a thinner version of tabun made solely of white flour, is baked on the outside of the tabun. The hot, dry back of a type of local wok is used for pitalike *saj* bread. At most street corners in Jerusalem, circular breads called *ka'ek* are sold, sprinkled with sesame seeds.

Key herbs and spices recur. Za'atar is the generic name for a number of herbs and for Palestine's distinctive spice compound. Za'atar and other spices

used include cumin, allspice, cardamom, and cinnamon. Fresh spices are readily available from a spice vendor, or 'atar; herbs such as mint, dill, thyme, coriander, parsley, and rosemary can be grown in the garden, although thyme and rosemary grow wild. Ideally, the herbs and spices used in Palestinian food should meet the required level of sourness, or *hmudah.* Spices and spice compounds such as dark red bitter sumac, unsweetened tamarind, or pomegranate molasses give this taste, as in the Gazan dish *rummaniyya* (made with eggplant, tahini, peppers, and lentils). Immature fruit can contribute to hmudah, such as the green fruit of the almond tree, *el-khader,* sold in the markets in early April. Several spice-based pastes and oils like za'atar, samneh (spiced, clarified butter), or *baharat* (a Levantine mix of allspice berries, cinnamon, black peppercorns, and nutmeg) inform the deeper tones of Palestinian food.

The culture of the olive tree is central to Palestinian food, although land confiscation has impacted olive cultivation. Home-pickled olives go with every meal. Olive oil is a base for stews and frying; integral to the construction of appetizers and salads, it also moistens *hummos* (hummus) and adds sharpness to *m'tabbal,* a pungent eggplant dip. Early morning workers in Palestine might douse their tabun bread in olive oil and a little sumac to ease the "dizziness" of an early morning start, while a small cup of olive oil can aid digestion. The highest density of olive orchards under irrigation is in the Tulkarm district in the northern West Bank region, which produces greenish oil, as opposed to the lighter, yellowish olive oil of Ramallah. Olive harvesting in October and November remains a key social, communal, and familial event in Palestine. Sesame oil, *sirej,* used in frying, is an element in the ubiquitous *tahineh* (sesame paste), and a tablespoon is added to dishes such as mahasi. Sirej, when combined with pistachios and sugar, makes the sweet *halaweh.*

Lamb, mutton, chicken, and beef dominate meat consumption in Palestine, although such meats are pricey and hard to come by in certain restricted areas, such as the Gaza Strip—lamb smuggling occurs in the occupied territories, but cattle smuggling less so. Lamb, its slaughter, and its presentation intersect with the fabrics of ritual, celebration, and daily life, fitting as it does with the concept of sacrifice in the twin traditions of Christianity and Islam, and the key theistic celebrations of Easter and Eid al-Adha.



Harvesting olives in Palestine. The olive tree is not only a source of livelihood and a symbol of the people's connection to the land, but it has also been employed as a symbol of cooperation between peoples. (iStockPhoto)

Fish is a main element in the staple diet of specific regions of Palestine, namely, in coastal regions such as Gaza. Freshwater fish include carp, grey and golden mullet, tilapia, salmon, and freshwater prawns. Fish farming is a developing industry, as pollution, particularly in the Red Sea and the Jordan River, is increasingly problematic, as are falling water levels in the Sea of Galilee. Sardines and sole, *arous* (similar to sea bream), tuna, sea bass, turbot, slipper lobster, and a wide array of shellfish including squid, shrimp, and crab are representative of saltwater fish. Gaza was the traditional supplier of saltwater fish, but this is now under serious threat. According to

the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, from 2000, the number of nautical miles from the coast in which fishing was permitted was limited to six. By 2008 fishing accounted for merely 1.5 percent of Gaza's economy (agriculture accounts for a further 8.5%). Most recently, a three-kilometer (about 2-mile) restriction has been enforced, limiting fishing to the overfished spawning grounds of shallow coastal waters. Gaza's fishing authority is trying to establish fish farms. Lack of fuel has also had a detrimental effect on the fishing industry. Popular fish dishes are the fish broth of *sayyadiy* and *zibdiyit gambari,* shrimp stewed with fresh dill, peppers, olive oil, tomatoes, chili, and garlic. Grilled fish, rubbed with or marinated in lemon juice, coriander, cumin, and chili, is popular.

Water is often used with meals; Arabic or Turkish coffee is popular at informally established times: in the morning, during the private time of siesta after afternoon prayer at around 3:30 P.M., or when visitors call. Coffee may be spiced with cardamom and sweetened or unsweetened. Mint tea is most often consumed in the evening, made with fresh green mint (*na'ana*) leaves infused in hot water; fresh sage (*maramiyyeh*) may also be infused. Coca-Cola is encroaching on mint tea consumption: Soft drinks can be found in most Palestinian homes. Hebron, Nablus, and Gaza have distribution centers for Coca-Cola (though Gaza's was shut down in 2007), and Ramallah has a Coca-Cola bottling plant.

While alcohol is not widely consumed, less conservative Muslims and Palestinian Christians drink light beer (the West Bank town of Taybeh has the only beer brewery, producing Tayibeh but also alcohol-free beer for conservative Muslims). Scotch whisky or the clear aniseed digestive *arak* may be consumed. Arak is diluted and made milky with water and is consumed with meze (small dish appetizers) and at high points in the cultural calendar. Christian monasteries may produce wine.

In winter, *sahlab,* warm milk thickened with *salep* starch, which is derived from the orchid bulb, and sweetened with orange blossom or rose water, appears. *Sharabat* is a category of soft drink made by adding ice and cold water to fruit syrups, such as the lemony orange citrus syrup *khushhash* and *toot* made from mulberries. At key celebratory points such as Ramadan—or in periods of hot weather—people make drinks from the following: tamarind (*tamar hindi,* meaning "Indian dates," an Arabic appellation for tamarind), a licorice drink called *sous,* carob, and *mishmash* (apricot) juice. The pulp from carob is also used as a sweet substitute among children of poorer communities.

## Cooking

Women are chiefly responsible for home food preparation, with a higher concentration of women rurally. However, social forces have impacted on this as women have joined the public workforce, and more food is processed. Traditionally, the centerpiece of cooking in the Palestinian household was the tabun, a cone-shaped oven of yellow clay and straw, fueled by wood or, more traditionally, by dried sheep or camel dung, situated in the open backyard of the home. The tabun featured in both public and private spaces in rural Palestinian villages, with families taking turns to use the tabun for bread making, as communal property. The use of the tabun has decreased substantially, almost disappearing, with a few exceptions in rural communities. Ironically, there has been some resurgence in its use, as supplies of more modern cooking fuels have become subject to restrictions. Predominantly, though, as shown by a survey by the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics in 2006, 96.1 percent of households use petroleum gas as the main fuel for cooking, while 9.4 percent depend on electricity as a secondary fuel and 8.5 percent on wood as a secondary fuel. Many Palestinians buy ready-made bread at local markets. Modern bakeries fueled by gas have replaced the tabun, and these can now be found on every corner. In this context, tabun use can be accounted for more by restaurants and bakeries aiming to attract customers who are nostalgic for old-fashioned tabun bread. However, many of the new so-called tabun are often operated by gas and bear no resemblance to the old-fashioned tabun. Fuel for cooking has been a compromised commodity: The illegal piping of cooking gas has been attempted, particularly beneath the

southern Gaza Strip and Egypt. It was estimated that in the border town of Rafah, as many as 400 illegal pipes were laid. Fuel disputes led to some unexpected developments: Cooking oil has been used to fuel cars, which led to unexpected profits for restaurant owners. Much of this came about because Israel, once the sole supplier of cooking gas and fuel to Gaza, imposed sanctions following a spate of violence that disrupted a six-month ceasefire in November 2008.

Cooking utensils in modern Palestine are very similar to Western utensils, replacing the earthenware dishes such as the *zibdieh* or tagine-like *fukhar.* Various traditional implements were used in the past for grinding, but the most commonly used device is a mortar and pestle—although electric blenders and grinders are popular. Most Palestinians buy their spices from the souk or shops. A core set of spices like turmeric and nutmeg arrive in Palestinian dishes through other elements of the dish like samneh or laban jameed. Others are newcomers: Traditionally, coriander seed, with its delicately fruity undertones, has been used, only to be upstaged in recent years by an increased use of fresh green leafy cilantro. Coriander seed is used for such dishes as *mulukhia* (bitter leafy green), *bamiah* (okra), and *yakhni fasuliah* (beans).

Pickling, a means of extending the shelf life of seasonal foodstuffs, is common, with chilies, olives, turnips, and cucumbers being pickled in a multitude of different styles. Green olives not sent for oil production are lightly cut by the farmer, and then water with salt, sugar, or vinegar is poured over them and they are stored. Common also are techniques for drying and preserving; for instance, the many jams popular in regions such as Gaza are all ways of extending the shelf life of fruits: These can be fig, orange (*khushkhash*), or sour plum (*arasiya*). With only a short two-week season in July, the cherry-sized plums are sold in local markets and jammed or dried, in their dried form enriching the flavor of dishes like beef and pumpkin stew, *ari' bi tahina.* Jam making is, again, prevalent in West Bank cities such as Hebron, where grapes are a primary crop in spring and summer. Grapes are dried to make raisins, a molasses *dibs,* and jams.

## Typical Meals

There is a central daily ritual of eating that Palestinians will adhere to, given the economic means to do so. There are four meals a day: breakfast (*iftur*), lunch (*gheda*), a predinner snack ('hilew), and dinner (*'asha*). The largest meal of the day is lunch, which may be anytime between 12 and 2, and, as eating is so integral to family life, meals may well take one or two hours.

Meals are sites of family connection and cultural identity for Palestinians. Traditionally, the family group, seated on the floor, would eat around the *tabliyeh,* a round table. In a more contemporary setting, food will always be placed on a surface above ground level. Nuts and olives, sometimes mixed with fresh rue, and cheese will already be on the table. The traditional notion of Palestinians eating with their right hands, seated in a circle around a dish (as is still practiced at weddings), is outmoded; many modern Palestinians will sit at a table to eat, using a knife and fork, with the fork in the right hand. The etiquette of right-handed eating is firmly and immovably established across Arab Christian and Arab Muslim food cultures. Traditionally, though, if guests and family are to eat using their hands, the right hand is used to scoop up food (always solely from the section of the communal plate directly in front of the diner), which is then shaped with the right hand into a golf ball–sized piece.

Bread is also ubiquitous: The bread is torn, shaped into a scoop with the fingers, and used instead of utensils to scoop up dips, salads, meats, and sauces. Bread dough also reappears in *manaqeesh* (flatbread covered with cheese or herbs); *sfiha,* with its crust of minced lamb; or *fatayer* (stuffed dough pastries). Pizzalike bases spread with pastes are popular, for instance, *manaqeesh jibneh,* when goat cheese is combined with oil and garlic; or *manaqeesh bi za'atar,* flatbread covered with the spice mixture za'atar; or *manaqeesh beid,* when eggs replace the za'atar.

Various salads and vegetables will be served: *salatat bandura* (tomato salad), *fattoush* (bread salad), *dagga* (tomato and chili pepper salad), and tabbouleh. Mahasi would also be served. A key element in typical meals is beans, such as broad beans, fava

(*ful*) beans, and chickpeas in falafel. The chickpea-paste hummos, of which the most popular is *hummos bi tahineh,* comes in many varieties for both lunch and dinner. Chickpeas can also be combined with ful to make the brownish *mukhluta.* Other dips such as the eggplant baba ghanoush are popular, as is the spicier version of this, m'tabbal. Depending on where one is in Palestine, it is customary to serve a sweet such as baklava, made by layering honeyed walnuts and pistachios with sheets of unleavened dough, or a West Bank favorite from Nablus, kanafeh, with honeyed Nablusi cheese beneath the finely shredded noodlelike pastry, dyed orange and sprinkled with crushed pistachios. A sweet milk pudding such as *heytalliyeh* or *muhalabiyeh* might be served after meals.

Breakfast (iftur) may be eaten on the move from street vendors selling manaqeesh bi za'atar and jibneh baida; in its more sedentary form, breakfast is a quick, light meal of eggs (boiled, fried. or in iljeh), hummos, *foul mudammas* (stewed fava beans), cucumbers, tomatoes, olives, labaneh, and khoubz bread and quince, carob molasses, or *safarjil* (sweet lime) jam. In Jerusalem, breakfast may be the local specialty of a boiled egg and sachet of za'atar with the ring-shaped, sesame-seed bread *ka'ek bi simsim.* Hot tea infused with mint leaves accompanies breakfast. At its most basic, breakfast can be hot tabun bread, drenched in olive oil.

Lunch (gheda) lies later in the afternoon. Characteristically, lunch would be rice with a *yakhneh* stew, based on a single vegetable and sometimes lamb; mahasi or waraq al-'ainib, rice wrapped in vegetable leaves, is also popular—but the labor-intensive nature of waraq means its appearance can be limited to festivity. Kubeh, such as the pounded lamb and burghul wheat *kubeh bi-saniyeh,* are served warm. Lunch comes with an array of small dishes of pickles, salads, olives, and dips. Increased affluence and times of economic boom have meant that urban Palestinians are attracted to Western eating styles. However, Palestine's vigorous and indigenous street fast-food culture thrives, with inexpensive *shawarma* in khoubz bread and fatayer. For shawarma, lamb is grilled on a vertical spit, shaved, and then rolled up, with pickled turnip, onions, cucumber, tomato, and tahineh, in a long roll of khoubz bread. However, most offices will shut down over lunch, to allow workers to have lunch at home with their families. It is often the case that all courses are served together.

A brief eating interlude called 'hilew acts as a satellite snack to dinner, coming before or after. 'Hilew consists of pastry shop–bought baklava or homemade muhalabiyeh. Dinner, 'asha, can be eaten after 8 P.M. and includes small, light dishes, such as little omelets or shakshuka, eggs cooked in tomatoes, peppers, and spices; soups; and unleavened dough cakes, sweetened with syrup and stuffed with nuts, called *fteereh.*

The following are examples of typical meals in middle-class families in three regions of Palestine: the Triangle (incorporating Galilee), Gaza, and the West Bank.

### *The Triangle*

Cities such as Nazareth, Haifa, and Akka are counted as part of northern Israel. The Triangle, as this is referred to, is a contested area of land. The food culture of Galilee, or the Triangle, places an emphasis on kubeh, the combination of burghul wheat and meat, revealing its close affinity to Lebanese cuisine. The practice of serving burghul wheat raw reveals a direct affinity. A main dish would be *kubeh bi-siniyee,* which uses burghul wheat as a crust encasing minced lamb or beef, baked in the oven. Kubeh is associated with mood, particularly happiness, and its inclusion in a meal can signify the end to a time of mourning. Manaqeesh appears as a popular breakfast food, as does *lahm bi ajeen,* spiced ground lamb on a thin dough base, accompanied by tea or a yogurt drink, labaneh, and olives. Meze also predominate, accompanied by skewered meat. Roast lamb would be the focal dish for special occasions. Ackawi cheese, originating in the city of Acre, now part of Israel, on the coast of Galilee, is popular.

## Gaza

Eighty percent of Gaza's occupants are refugees, bringing food traditions from throughout Palestine. Nonetheless, there is a distinct Gazan food culture: reliance on fish, on cheap foods such chickpeas, or on free seasonal wild foods such as mustard greens

(hwerneh). Variations in the ingredients used in Palestinian staples also appear: Okra or fresh chopped basil may be added, and a side dish of green chilies is ubiquitous in Gaza. The distinctive tastes brought to Gazan food through chilies, dill, and cumin, as well as the sour fruit taste of tamarind, pomegranates, and plums, distinguish it in dishes such as the summer and autumn vegetarian dish rummaniyya, named after the pomegranate. Late autumn sees the harvest of root vegetables and squash, and the bright red dish *mahashi jazar ahmar,* plump, short, stuffed carrots in a tamarind stock.

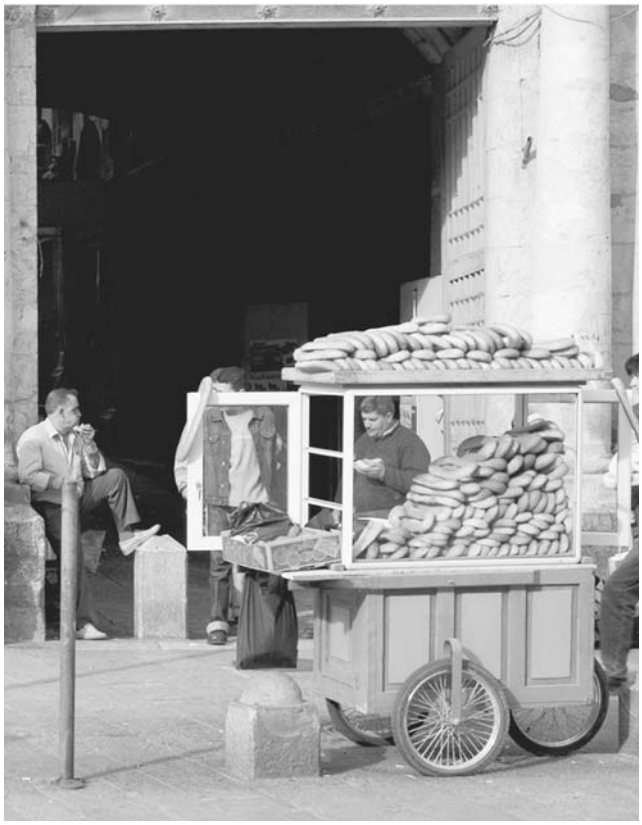
Ironically, the artificially isolated nature of life in the monitored and check-pointed Gaza Strip means that it maintains a very distinctive food culture: This, the sea, and culinary connections to Egypt influence Gazan eating. For instance, dagga, a salad with distinctively hot peppers, dill, crushed tomatoes, olive oil, lemon juice, and raw garlic, is distinctively Gazan, as is the seasonal chard and lentil stew *fukharit adas.* Economic deprivation has determined the preponderance meatless dishes such as *bisara* (made of dried beans) or *saliq was adas* (chard and lentils). The price of fish is making it unaffordable for most inhabitants of Gaza, but calamari (*habbar*) remains plentiful. An emphasis on chilies and garlic in fish cookery exposes the Egyptian connection, as does the use of *shatta,* a hot pepper paste. A dish often associated with Gaza is the meat-based sumaggiye. The dish derives its name from its main ingredient, sumac seeds or powder. Sumac, soaked in water, is mixed with tahini. This is then combined with chard (another sign of Egyptian influence and a chief ingredient in much Gazan food), pieces of beef, chickpeas, garlic, dill, and chili. It is eaten with khoubz or kmaj bread. Popular during the Muslim Eid al-Fitr holiday, each family will distribute its own sumaggiye to friends and neighbors, who will, then, fill the bowl with their own bespoke version of sumaggiye—or some cinnamon, nutmeg, and date cakes, ka'ek bi ajwah.

## The West Bank

With a population in excess of 33,000, including the refugee camp, Jericho has a moderate climate and a high degree of agricultural production, its most noted products being citrus, bananas, and dates. A heavier diet is consumed on the West Bank, with more meat protein and rice. In the northern cities of Tulkarm and Jenin the layered chicken, onion, sumac, and tabun dish *musakhan* originated. *Ma'lube* typifies the region and is an upside-down braised lamb, tomato, eggplant, and rice casserole. When turned, the casserole has a scarlet red top from the tomatoes (which are placed in a solid layer at the base of the casserole). As it is customary never to eat food dry—*nashef*—ma'lube is dressed with lemon juice or yogurt. In the West Bank region, grapes are the second-largest fruit crop, with Hebron being the greatest producer and, hence, supplier of grape leaves for waraq al-'ainib. Beit Jala, in close proximity to Bethlehem, and the village of Jifna are renowned regionally for their apricot harvest and jam, while Tulkarm is famous for olives. Seasonally, Artas, south of Bethlehem, is famous for its lettuce crop, and the seasonal dish to accompany this is lettuce leaves stuffed with tabbouleh.

## Eating Out

Although much eating is domestic, eating out has become more popular. Restaurants still widely focus on Palestinian food, and, instead of single people or couples, whole families will eat out. Pickles and meze will often function as the starter courses, followed by kebabs and grilled meat and fish as a main. There is a vibrant food subculture that often involves the use of the grill, as opposed to the stove-based stews of home cooking: Kebabs, falafel, and shawarma are available. Western cuisine is popular, and most hotels, restaurants, and cooking schools explore a weak array of Palestinian food while offering French, Italian, and European dishes. Jacir Palace Intercontinental in Bethlehem has tortellini and gorgonzola or chicken breast dijonnaise. Foccacia bars and pizzerias are very popular. Hamburgers are widely popular, and Jerusalem has seen a huge expansion of restaurants serving French fries and European sandwiches. Ramallah sandwich shops such as the Ziryab Café have westernized fillings inside processed white bread rolls. Meze remain popular, with their staples of hummos and grilled or fried eggplant. Coffee shops still remain the province of



Two traditional food stalls selling beigele breads and Palestinian pastries in Old Town Jerusalem. (StockPhotoPro)

men but non-gender-specific coffee shops have proliferated in the newer areas of urban centers. These do tend to have a generational attraction, favored as they are by a younger clientele. Located in the souks of urban centers are cake and sweet shops, *mahal 'hilewayet,* selling baklava, cookies, and kanafeh; some focus on one particular sweet.

## Special Occasions

Celebratory traditions vary regionally and in terms of religious observance in Palestine. Traditionally, lamb would be at the core of the celebration, with its many metaphorical resonances, but it can turn up in celebrations for many things, from recovery from an illness through to the acquisition of a new car. The appearance of lamb as a trope for sacrifice is most clearly seen in the feasts of Adha and Easter. A centerpiece at many celebrations, and particularly weddings, is *mansaf,* a leg of lamb or sections of lamb, served on tabun bread with yellow rice. Although the use of Western tableware is widespread, mansaf is traditionally served on a *sidr,* a large communal dish. *Mansaf* means "to finish off food," and its inclusion on the table signifies respect for a guest. Another key thread in Palestinian food culture emerges, too: This food culture's fidelity to traditional food practices can be a determined act of cultural expression within the more hegemonic culture of Israel.

During Lent, Christian communities will eat specific dishes, although the more Orthodox a Palestinian Christian is, the more likely it is that they will eat a nondairy and vegetarian diet. Ramadan comes with a clearly discernable food culture. Fasting is central to religious obeisance, a central tenet of the five pillars of wisdom of Islam, and the ceremony of breaking the fast at sunset is deliberate and controlled. Daily iftars, the breaking of the fast, are marked with a drink of water or a mixture of strained tamarind and rose water, fatteh, a combination of clear stock and bread, and dates. After fasting, traditional drinks are based on bitter almonds, dried apricots, carob, and licorice; these may be prepared at home but are also sold in the market, sometimes offered free to children by costumed vendors playing cymbals and calling out. Various soups are also used to rehydrate. Larger quantities of meat may be consumed during Ramadan. Rice, vegetables, salads, falafel, and hummos are also consumed. Of key importance is the preparation of additional food for distribution to the poor and one's neighbors: Like for like, the same amount of food eaten by a house must go to the needy. Christians are included in Ramadan as well: It is a cultural signpost, a holiday also. Christian and Muslim alike anticipate the delicate sweet pastry making that occurs, such as the fragile pastry *barazek na'mine,* flavored with sesame seed. Only in Ramadan are *katayif* sold; they appear on the first day of Ramadan. These resemble pancakes, but only the batter base is cooked, and the top is filled either with sweetened, unsalted goat cheese or sugar, crushed walnuts, and cinnamon.



Small pancakes stuffed with cheese, folded over to make sealed packets and fried. These qatayef pancakes are only made during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan as a special treat. (Paul Cowan | Dreamstime.com)

Eid al-Adha, the Feast of Sacrifice, which comes at the end of March, commemorates Abraham's obedience in his willingness to sacrifice Ishmael (rather than his brother Isaac, as in the Hebrew Bible), with the substitution of a lamb for Ishmael, and is marked with religious observance based on the sacrifice of an animal. But the consumption of lamb at times of religious celebration is not limited to the Muslim community: To celebrate Easter, stuffed lamb and lamb ribs are eaten by the Christian Orthodox community. Both Easter and Eid al-Adha are marked by the consumption of round semolina date- or walnut-filled ka'ek, with wreath-shaped ka'ek bi ajwah (date cake) intended to resemble Christ's crown of thorns. Food as metaphor further exists in the traditional stuffed kubeh that is popular at Easter, symbolizing as it does the spear that pierced Christ's side. Palm Sunday, the Annunciation, and the Transfiguration are points in the Christian calendar when fish may be consumed in Orthodox families.

Religious veneration is offered through food on various days in the Palestinian Christian year: For the feast of the Virgin Mary on August 28, semolina is combined with fenugreek seeds to make *hilbeh.* December sees the Saint's Day, the Feast of St. Barbara, and the making of *burbara,* a pudding based on wheat because, reputedly, after her imprisonment, St. Barbara would eat only wheat or gave wheat to the poor. Wheat is soaked overnight to soften it, after which it is boiled. Aniseed, sugar, and raisins are combined with it. This is then decorated with pomegranate seeds, almonds, and nuts. The dish is then left out all night in the hope that St. Barbara would visit the house and try a mouthful with three fingers. Children would, then, look for this indentation on the burbara on the morning of St. Barbara's Day. September's Feast of the Cross comes with anise cookies and an eggplant and pomegranate dish, while Epiphany is marked with macaroons and sweet *zalabieh,* deep-fried balls of batter, which are then dropped into orange blossom syrup.

Secular celebrations are also marked through the presence of other sweet stuffs: *Knafeh* (a sweet made with cheese and shredded phyllo pastry) is traditionally associated with the New Year. Dishes with white sauces and gravies can signal the New Year. Birth and death are ritualized in food. A pudding made from spiced ground rice and sugar, sprinkled with almonds, and called *mughli* is made when a baby is born, to thank the guests for coming and to stimulate the flow of milk from the nursing mother. Even the baby cutting its first tooth can be celebrated with bowls of *snounieh,* sweetened wheat. After circumcision baklava will be eaten. Mourning can be marked through a number of food devices: Unsweetened Arab coffee accompanied by dates may be served in Muslim households, while Christians use a *rahmeh,* a special bun, to accompany such coffee, functioning as a memory of the loved one and as a metaphorical blessing on the deceased's soul.

## Diet and Health

Various herbs and spices in Palestinian food are associated with health and well-being. Maramiyyeh (sage), *babunej* (chamomile), and za'atar (thyme) are all herbs that have medical applications to alleviate discomfort associated with stomach pains, colds, and so on. A number of medical practices are centered around the use of fenugreek, *hilbeh*. Hilbeh paste functions as a poultice for boils. An infusion of hilbeh leaves is sipped to ease digestive complaints such as inflammations and cramps. Stomach complaints are also addressed through the misnomer "white coffee," or *qahwa beyda,* an infusion of sweetened orange blossom water or rose water in hot water. This lacks any coffee—hence the whiteness alluded to in its name. Plants such as hilbeh have found their way into pharmaceutically produced capsules that are retailed to address glucose imbalance in older diabetic patients. Hilbeh seeds, when infused, are thought to ease menstrual pain and increase lactation in breast-feeding mothers. Cumin is noted as preventing flatulence, while za'atar, in its incarnations as both thyme and the dried mixture, is used in an infusion as a sore throat medicine, while combined with olive oil and rubbed on joints it is used to alleviate rheumatism. This same combination kept in a house augurs good fortune. An interesting submythology adheres to za'atar: The dried powdered leaves, when consumed, will guarantee safety from serpents for 40 days.

*Fiona Ross*

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# Syria

## Overview

Syria is bordered by Turkey on the north, Iraq on the east, Jordan on the south, and Israel, Lebanon, and the Mediterranean Sea on the west. The primary agricultural region is a strip about 100 miles wide: a coastal plain around Latakia, the Jebel Ansarieh Mountains just inland, and, east of the Jebel Ansarieh and the mountains that form the Lebanese border, a corridor of farmland irrigated from wells and rivers that mostly originate in Lebanon. The northern city of Aleppo gets its water from the Turkish highlands, as does a secondary agricultural area extending east from Aleppo to the Iraqi border. The country has been investing in projects to expand agriculture in the east, particularly in the Euphrates Valley. The rest of the country consists of sparse grassland and the rocky Syrian Desert, which extends eastward into Iraq and south through Jordan to the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula. Outside of scattered oases, the arid region is inhabited by a small population of sheep- and goat-herding nomads.

Syria's 18 million people are about equally divided between urban and rural. The population is 76 percent Sunnite Muslim, 10 percent Christians (largely the Nestorians of the northeast, along with Greek Orthodox, Armenians, and other eastern churches), and 14 percent Shiites, including two Shiite offshoots, the Druze in the south and the Alawites of the Jebel Ansarieh.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Ma'an and Maysim Hamwi and their children, Yusuf and Lamya, live in Damascus, in an apartment block built in the 1970s on former farmland within walking distance of the ancient walled city. Ma'an is a clerk in a government agency. They are typical of the urban middle class. The Hamwis buy their food from various shops in the neighborhood: a butcher, a bread bakery, a pastry shop, a dairy goods shop, one specializing in dry foods (grain, flour, beans, nuts, and dried fruit), and one selling syrups, preserves, and canned goods. They buy their fruits and vegetables in a produce market, Damascus's traditional wandering street vendors with their colorful cries (e.g., "Bride of the frying pan," indicating eggplant) having become somewhat rare.

Maysim herself is of part Turkish ancestry, and Ma'an's late mother grew up next to a Turkish family, so the Hamwis' cookery is a little more Turkish than most. One of Ma'an's mother's specialties was *oturtma,* a Turkish dish belonging to the vast Near Eastern repertoire of lamb, tomato, and eggplant stews. The name means "settled," which is close to the sense of the name of a Damascus specialty called *mnazzli,* "lowered, cooked down."

## Major Foodstuffs

The Syrian diet is based on much the same vegetables as in any Mediterranean country, particularly tomatoes, onions, eggplant, zucchini, turnips, and potatoes, but including less common ones such as cardoon (*kangar*) and kohlrabi (*karamb*) and some specifically Middle Eastern vegetables, such as grape leaves for stuffing and mallow (*molukhiyyi*), a coarse green that cooks up with a slightly sticky texture. Other greens include lettuce, cabbage, spinach, and Swiss chard. Some produce vendors sell

gathered foods such as *'akkub,* a sort of rugged wild thistle cooked much like artichokes.

The main meats are lamb and chicken, and to a lesser degree goat, but more of Syrians' protein comes from dairy products and pulses, particularly chickpeas and lentils, than from meat. People living in the villages rely even more on dairy products and pulses. Fish is rarely eaten in Syria except on the Mediterranean coast and is not a major food even there.

Wheat and rice are the chief grains. Pita bread (called simply *khubz,* "bread") is eaten at most meals, even when rice is served. Wheat is also consumed as *burghul* (bulgur): Wheat grains are boiled until the starch gelatinizes and then dried and crushed, making a product that can be made ready to eat simply by boiling or even soaking in water. Bulgur soaked in yogurt and then sun-dried makes *kishk,* a sort of instant soup mix with a tart, slightly musty flavor. Wheat is also used in sweet and savory pastries.

The leading cooking fats are olive oil, butter, and lamb fat. The olive does not flourish away from the coast, so in the inland cities it is partly replaced by other fats. Lamb fat comes from sheep varieties bred to deposit their body fat in their tails (*liyyeh*), which look as a result somewhat like beaver tails. This fat has a low melting point, giving it a pleasant mouth feel, so bits of tail fat are often threaded between the chunks of meat in shish kebab or used as a stuffing for meatballs to produce a spurt of hot lamb fat in the mouth. A bit of tail fat is traditionally added to the butter in baklava to give a subtle gamy tang.

Milk, principally from sheep and goats, is rarely consumed fresh except in ice cream. Mostly it's



Groats seller at the Hamidiyyah souq (marketplace) in Damascus, Syria. Groats are hulled cereal grains used in many staple dishes. (Shutterstock)

soured into yogurt (*laban*). Yogurt can be strained to make *labni,* an even more noticeably sour product with the consistency of a soft cheese. Both yogurt and labni keep better than milk in the absence of refrigeration. Fresh milk is curdled to make cheese, mostly consumed as *jibni baida* (white cheese), which is stored in brine like feta. The curd can also be boiled to make a sort of mozzarella called *musanara,* and this can also be twisted into *mudaffara,* which resembles Armenian string cheese. A sort of cheese called *qarish* is made by boiling yogurt until it curdles and then straining out the solids.

Butter is nearly always clarified of its solids and whey to produce pure butterfat (*samni*), mostly used in making sweets. A product called *qaymaq* is made by simmering whole milk so that a skin of rich cream rises to the surface, being skimmed off as it forms to make a very rich product comparable to English clotted cream. It can be eaten by itself or used as a filling for pastries. Other dairy products include *shanklish,* which is dried balls of yogurt or qarish cultured with mold to produce something a little like blue cheese, and *ayran,* a tart drink made by diluting yogurt with water.

## Cooking

City people use gas or electric ranges, though villagers may still cook on a wood-fired range made of clay or stone. In the western part of the country, bread is baked in European-type brick ovens, but the *tannur,* the ancient Mesopotamian clay oven, survives in the east. This is essentially a clay jar two or three feet high with an opening at the bottom for feeding a fire. Flatbreads are cooked by slapping them onto the inside of the neck of the jar, where they cook very quickly in the high heat.

The usual cooking utensils of a home kitchen are much the same as in Europe, with the notable exception of the *siniyya.* This is a round baking pan about 16 inches in diameter with sides about an inch high. It's used for baking baklava-type pastries and a variety of homey stews. The siniyya owes its existence to the fact that traditional kitchens did not have ovens, so dishes to be baked were sent to the village bakery, where enough heat would remain in the oven's bricks after the day's bread baking to cook them. The siniyya's flat shape made it possible to fit a number of these pans into one of these ovens at a single time. Occasionally, one will still see children even in big cities balancing siniyyas on their heads on the way to a local bakery. These days, city people more often use the siniyya in the oven of a home range. By its nature, cooking in a siniyya exposes a large amount of the food's surface to heated air, so stews baked in one develop a special traditional flavor because of evaporation and a slight browning of the vegetables, including tomatoes.

Traditional kitchens may have a large stone or marble mortar ( *jorn*) and a pestle (*mdaqqa*) about the size of a baseball bat, which are used for making *kibbi,* a versatile paste of meat, bulgur, and onions. Making kibbi in the jorn is a laborious process taking an hour or two. The Hamwis own a food processor, which reduces the process to a matter of minutes.

## Typical Meals

A usual breakfast for city people would be flatbread (plain or perhaps topped with *zaatar,* a mixture of wild thyme, sesame seeds, and tart ground sumac berries) and cheese—white cheese or qarish—along with a handful of olives. Some city people have a Continental breakfast of croissants, an imported soft cheese, and the rather syrupy local fruit preserves (*mrabba*). Turkish coffee is usually served with breakfast. Farmers might start the day with a hearty soup made from kishk or lentils.

When possible, people prefer to eat lunch at home. Those who can't because their workplace is at the other end of town may go out to a shish kebab restaurant. On weekends, people will have a simple lunch—say, roast chicken or stuffed eggplant accompanied by pilaf and salad. Lunch is accompanied by water or ayran, or sometimes a soft drink.

A typical dinner would be lentil soup followed by lamb stewed with a vegetable, accompanied by plain pilaf (*rizz mfalfal*) or pilaf garnished with toasted vermicelli (*rizz bi-sha'riyyi*). Tomato and cucumber salad is likely to appear on the side. Rural people eat the same sort of dinner so far as their

budget allows. Coffee and fresh fruit end the meal. The famous Middle Eastern pastries are not usually served with a meal but consumed as snacks during the day.

Two features of Syrian food survive from medieval cookery, though in an altered form. In the Middle Ages, most Arab stews contained a sour fruit juice such as lemon, pomegranate, or even rhubarb juice, and all were flavored with complex spice mixtures. Both practices are still known, but in many cases the fruit juice has been replaced by tomato juice and the spice mixtures reduced to cinnamon and allspice, or even allspice alone. On the table, salt and allspice appear instead of salt and pepper.

Kibbi is one of the most versatile Syrian foods. The meat, bulgur, and onion paste can be rolled into meatballs and grilled on a skewer, baked in a siniyya with a filling of fried onions and lamb fat, made into tangerine-sized, torpedo-shaped meatballs with the same filling and then deep-fried, or made into meat-stuffed flying-saucer disks and grilled, fried, or even poached.

In the 16th century, most Arab countries entered a period of economic stagnation, partly because the region's middleman trade declined after the European voyages of exploration to the Far East. Aleppo, however, continued to have a vigorous economy. One sign of this is that some of its caravanserais (*khans*), which served as hotels and warehouses for traveling merchants in the Middle Ages, are still in service as warehouses, while in other countries caravanserais have mostly been converted to other uses such as museums.



Bedouin in the Syrian desert baking bread in the sand. (Styve | Dreamstime.com)

As a result, Aleppo has long been the most prosperous city in Syria, and it has developed an opulent and distinctive cuisine. It often uses pomegranate juice or tamarind in place of lemon juice, making for particularly aromatic stews. The medieval tradition of cooking meat with fruits such as quinces is still quite lively. Unlike the rest of Syria, which is not particularly fond of red pepper, Aleppo uses large quantities of a medium-hot dried pepper known throughout the area as Aleppo pepper. To Syrians from other parts of the country, the Aleppines seem to substitute this crushed pepper wherever possible for fresh herbs such as parsley or mint. The city has long had a substantial Armenian population, and until the mid-20th century it was home to an ancient Jewish colony; both groups had their own culinary specialties.

The proverbial expression is *Halab, ahl il-mahashi wal-kibab* (Aleppo, the people of stuffed vegetables and varieties of kibbi). Aleppo cooks stuff cabbage leaves the way grape leaves are stuffed elsewhere in Syria (and with red pepper in the filling). They even stuff laboriously hollowed-out carrots. As for kibbi, Aleppo kebab shops regularly offer *kibbit banjan,* which is kibbi meatballs alternating on the skewer with slices of eggplant. The most famous version is *kibbi halabiyyi:* stuffed disks of kibbi poached in a lemony sauce. Among sweets, a local specialty is *halawat jibn,* a stretchy sweet dough kneaded with butter and cheese, which can be eaten as is or rolled around a filling of qaymaq or ground nuts.

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### *Mhammara*

*Serves 6–8 as an appetizer*

This is Aleppo's best-known dish. It shows the city's characteristic use of medium-hot crushed pepper (*filfil halabi*) and pomegranate molasses (*dibs rumman* or *rob-e anar*), a concentrate of tart pomegranate juice. Both ingredients are available at Middle Eastern markets, as are pine nuts. Do not use the sweetened pomegranate syrup called grenadine, which is only for making cocktails.

3 tbsp breadcrumbs

3 tbsp hot water

1½ tbsp pomegranate molasses, or substitute ¼ c unsweetened pomegranate juice and omit the water

1 tbsp olive oil

3 tbsp Aleppo pepper, or substitute 1 tbsp crushed red pepper and 2 tbsp sweet paprika

½ tsp cumin

1 c crushed walnuts

Salt

¼ c pine nuts

2 oz (¼ c) vegetable oil

3 loaves pita bread, each layer separated, cut into 8 wedge shapes and toasted until stiff, or substitute crackers

Mix the breadcrumbs with the hot water, and stir in the pomegranate molasses, olive oil, Aleppo pepper, and cumin. Add the walnuts, and process into a slightly coarse puree in a blender or food processor. It should have about the thickness of mashed potatoes; add a bit of water or breadcrumbs as needed. Season with salt to taste.

Put the pine nuts and oil in a frying pan and toast over medium heat, shaking often to prevent scorching, until the nuts are golden and fragrant. Drain and sprinkle lightly with salt.

Mound the mhammara on a serving dish and sprinkle with the pine nuts. To eat, scoop up with the pita bread croutons.

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The other great city of Syria is Damascus. Before World War I, it was a center of administration under the Ottoman Empire. As a result, its food has a distinct Turkish tinge, even though Damascus is farther from Turkey than Aleppo is. It is known for making the best baklava-type pastries in the Arab world.

The Turkish dishes known in Damascus include *jazzmazz* (fried meatballs; in Turkish, *cızbız*), *tirli* (mixed vegetables fried and then stewed with garlic and tomato juice; Turkish *türlü*), and *bashmishkat.* This last dish, though it has a Turkish name (*başmış kat,* "pressed layer"), is not known in Turkey itself, so it may be a creation of the Damascus Turks. It requires a particular thin layer of muscle from the lamb's shoulder blade, which is flattened, stuffed with a filling of rice and fried meat, sewn up like a baseball, and cooked in a lamb and tomato stew.

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***Mnazzlit Ahmar wa-Aswad***

In Lebanon and elsewhere in Syria, *mnazzli* is a stew of lamb, eggplant, and tomatoes. Damascus makes several varieties, including a meatless one of kohlrabi, so it distinguishes its tomato and eggplant version by calling it "mnazzli of red and black." Some people toast the eggplant in a pan rather than frying it in fat, so that it develops a flavor that faintly recalls roasted corn. Despite the foreign ingredients of tomato and allspice, this stew has a rather medieval flavor.

If mnazzli is made with olive oil instead of butter, it is called *mqalli.*

2 oz (½ stick) butter

1¼ to 1½ lb eggplant

1 lb ground lamb

1 tsp salt

½ tsp allspice

⅛ tsp cinnamon

12 cloves garlic, peeled and coarsely chopped

4 lb tomatoes

1½ c chopped cilantro

Water or tomato juice

Melt the butter and skim the solids off the surface. Separate the clear butterfat from the liquid underneath and transfer it to a saucepan.

Slice the eggplant ⅛ to ¼ inch thick. In a frying pan, fry the slices without butter until softened and brown in patches and beginning to become translucent, a minute or so on a side. Set aside.

Mix the meat, salt, allspice, and cinnamon and roll into meatballs ¾ to 1 inch in diameter. Place the

meatballs in the pan with the clarified butter and fry over medium-high heat until they are stiff and turning brown. Add the garlic and continue frying, stirring often, until the garlic is softened and off-white.

Slice the tomatoes and add to the pan of meatballs, then add the eggplant and cilantro. Bring the contents to a boil, reduce the heat to medium, and cover the saucepan for 10 minutes. Remove the lid; the tomatoes should have given up their liquid. If the liquid level is not enough to cover everything, add a little water or tomato juice. Reduce the temperature, cover the pan, and simmer for 1 hour.

Add salt to taste. Serve with rice pilaf.

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The cooking around Latakia on the Mediterranean coast resembles Lebanese food, with its free use of olive oil and lemon juice. The northeastern area of the country, like neighboring northern Iraq, makes lots of hearty soups and stews and often cooks disks of kibbi by poaching them in a vegetable stew.

Nomad food revolves around yogurt and flatbread, but for special occasions the Bedouin roast a whole lamb (*quzi*) stuffed with rice. They are famous for making an elaborate ceremony of roasting, grinding, and boiling coffee to honor a guest. They like to flavor their coffee with cardamom, and the closer a city is to the desert, the more likely settled people are to do the same. Coffee is an essential part of hospitality in all parts of society, and throughout Syria visitors are typically welcomed with Turkish coffee and a sweet. When finished with their coffee, guests politely say, "Qahwi daimi," that is, "May there always be coffee (in your house)."

## Eating Out

In big cities such as Damascus and Aleppo, it is possible to find restaurants serving French or Italian food, and even hamburgers. However, most public eateries serve traditional roast meat dishes such as shish kebab (*lahm mishwi*) and *shawerma* (thin-sliced meat arranged on a vertical spit; browned portions are sliced off for serving as they are done). The meat may come with rizz bi-sha'riyyi, turnip pickles, and a tomato-cucumber salad, or it may be sold in pita bread with garlicky tahini sauce. These places also offer dips such as *hummus bi-tahini* and baba ghanoush and various salads, including tabbouleh.

Except in the most westernized segment of society, women rarely go to restaurants unaccompanied. Many restaurants have two sections—the regular section, serving men, and a separate room (*'ailat*), often on the second floor, serving families. Coffeehouses are even more of a male preserve. They serve much the same function that bars do in Europe or America, or teahouses in Iran and Central Asia: as a place for male socializing. They serve Turkish coffee and a variety of pastries.

## Special Occasions

The chief religious celebrations of the Muslim majority are Eid al-Adha (the Feast of the Sacrifice), which falls on the last day of the Meccan pilgrimage, and Eid al-Fitr (the Feast of the Fast Breaking) at the end of the month of Ramadan. Eid al-Adha is the day when Muslims around the world, as well as those on the pilgrimage, sacrifice sheep (or other animals) in remembrance of Abraham's faithful willingness to sacrifice his son at the command of God, who allowed him to sacrifice a sheep in his son's place. It is a festive time of year, when stores are filled with decorations to welcome home the pilgrims who will soon return from Mecca. On Eid al-Adha, people dine and make sociable visits to family and friends.

Some people do slaughter their own sheep for the occasion, but most arrange with a butcher shop for some quantity of meat. Those who can afford to buy meat are expected to distribute some of it to families who can't. Naturally, Eid al-Adha spotlights meat dishes. Because the Islamic calendar is based entirely on the phases of the moon, Eid al-Adha can fall at any time of year, so on the whole the dishes served are those of the season rather than dishes unique to the Eid.

One of the principal religious obligations of Islam is abstaining from food and drink during the daylight hours of the month of Ramadan. From sunset

to sunrise, in contrast, the faithful are permitted to eat and drink whatever they wish. They tend to avoid salty foods, which would make them thirstier during the following day. At the end of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr is a day of feasting and socializing. In distinction from Eid al-Adha, it emphasizes pastries and other sweets rather than meat dishes.

The Shiites observe Ashura, the 10th day of the month of Muharram, with bitter mourning for the seventh-century martyrdom of the imam Husain ibn Ali. *Ashura* is also the name of a dish associated with this day; it consists of boiled whole wheat enriched with raisins and nuts. Grains and other seeds symbolize rebirth and/or the afterlife, and a similar dish is served among Christians at Easter.

Happy occasions such as weddings and births are celebrated with sweet foods—puddings and pastries. By the same token, sweet foods are considered inappropriate at sad occasions. After a funeral, guests are always poured bitter coffee.

## Diet and Health

The Syrian diet is rich in fresh vegetables and notably in nuts, which figure in the fillings of both pastries and stuffed vegetables, so vitamin deficiency is not a serious problem. It is also rich in other healthful ingredients such as yogurt and garlic. However, it is low in fish and relatively high in saturated fats such as butter and lamb fat. This poses the danger of cardiovascular problems for sedentary city dwellers. At all levels of society, grain foods are a very important part of diet. Many urban men consume more simple than complex carbohydrates, because of the social institution of the coffeehouse and its tempting variety of baklavas.

Traditional medicinal concepts were derived from ancient Greek and Persian medicine; most complaints were analyzed as due to an imbalance of the bodily humors. Medical treatments aimed to correct this supposed imbalance. All foods were held to have medicinal qualities, so medieval doctors often prescribed particular dishes—they even gave recipes, which cookbook writers eagerly plagiarized. These theories no longer exert much influence on diet, and Syrian doctors now use modern medicines and techniques. Folk remedies survive, however. Tea and yogurt are often recommended to those suffering from diarrhea, and mothers brew bitter medicinal teas for sick children.

*Charles Perry*

**Further Reading**

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# Turkey

## Overview

Turkey connects the southeastern tip of Europe with Asia and the Middle East; it has a population of 75 million that is predominantly Muslim. To the north of the country lies the Black Sea and to the south is the Mediterranean. The Aegean Sea lying to the west between Greece and Turkey connects to the Black Sea via the straits of the Dardanelles and Bosporus and the inland Sea of Marmara. The straits define the geological boundary between Europe and Asia: The European part of Turkey is called Thrace, and the Asian part is called Anatolia (Asia Minor). The present-day capital is Ankara, but the largest city is Istanbul, previously capital of the Byzantine and Ottoman empires. The country has nine neighbors: Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Iran to the east; Iraq and Syria to the southeast; the island of Cyprus to the south; and Greece and Bulgaria to the west and northwest.

The literature on Turkish food culture generally begins with a reference to its Central Asian Turkic origins and continues with the legacy of the Seljuk and Ottoman empires. However, Turkey's cuisine is also heir to ancient Anatolian culture, whose roots lie in the Neolithic period, when farming began in this region, and which was subsequently shaped by a series of civilizations, including the Hittites, Urartians, Phrygians, Lydians, Greeks, Romans, and Byzantines. Persian and Arab influences have also been significant. The Turks came to Anatolia in the 11th century and continued to move westward, settling in the Balkans and pushing their way deep into Europe, reaching the gates of Vienna in the 16th century. The Ottoman Empire also extended southward to the Middle East and Africa. Consequently, today's Turkish food culture has a very varied and complex historical legacy, fostered by bountiful geography. Central Asian, Iranian, Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, and Balkan traditions echo in rituals, celebrations, cooking techniques, and eating habits, while recent archaeological studies reveal that some crops, harvesting and food-preparation methods, cooking techniques, and dishes have remained unaltered since Neolithic times. Stone mortars found in Çatalhöyük, a Neolithic settlement dating back to 7500 B.C., are almost identical with the ones still in use in the vicinity.

Turkey also hosts many ethnic cuisines including Circassian, Georgian, Armenian, Jewish, and Greek, but regionality rather than ethnicity dominates the kitchen. In the eastern city of Malatya, for example, people of Turkish, Armenian, Kurdish, and Arabic origin share the same foodways, such as the local specialty of stuffed cherry leaves, and their culinary culture is very different from that of a Kurd of southeastern Anatolia or an Armenian of Istanbul. Even within the Sephardic Jewish cuisine there is great regional diversity. There are also examples of localized communities with cuisines very different from those around them, as in the case of Tatar Turks in the central Turkish city of Eskişehir. Likewise, Circassian communities tend to keep their distinct cuisine intact wherever they live.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Zeynep and her husband, Mehmet Yılmaz, live in Ankara, the capital of Turkey. They have two children, one



Famous Turkish appetiser imam bayaldi, baked stuffed eggplant, with turkish pide, or flatbread. The name literally means "the priest fainted", apparently due to the dish being so delicious. (iStockPhoto)

working in Istanbul, the other a university student still living at home. They met years ago in eastern Turkey, where Mehmet was working as an engineer and Zeynep as a teacher. Mehmet, originally from the southeastern agricultural city of Gaziantep, still receives an annual supply of homemade tomato paste, cracked wheat, dried vegetables, and so on from his family. Zeynep is from the small town of Ayvalık on the North Aegean coast and is still not reconciled to her husband's taste for meat and hot spices, as she comes from the land of olive oil and fresh greens. Her parents were migrants from Crete. The family usually spends their summer vacation in Ayvalık, where they get their year's supply of cured black and green olives and tins of olive oil from local producers.

Early each morning the family begins the day by putting the kettle on for the tea. The janitor of the block of flats where they live leaves a fresh loaf of bread at the door, along with the daily newspaper. Breakfast is almost always the same: white cheese, yellow cheese, black olives, jam, honey, butter, and some sliced tomatoes accompanied by bread and glasses of tea. Zeynep also likes to have a dip of olive oil on the table. Mehmet usually buys cheese from a charcuterie, as he likes to sample it before making a selection. Zeynep laments that the taste of greenhouse tomatoes is not as good as traditional field-grown varieties. Recently she joined a nonprofit seed-exchange Internet group and started to grow heirloom tomatoes on their balcony. If it is a Sunday, Mehmet walks across the road to a nearby *bakkal,* a small grocery store, to buy extra newspapers and *sucuk,* spicy cured sausage. He also buys a couple of crusty *simit,* sesame-covered bread rings, from a street seller to accompany an extra Sunday treat of fried eggs with sucuk.

Zeynep, who is now retired, does the shopping. She buys fresh vegetables and fruits from the neighborhood market held twice weekly but makes an extra journey to the district where they used to live, to the butcher she has been accustomed to since they were first married, to buy meat and sometimes ready-made meatballs. However, many of their friends who have moved to new homes in the suburbs now buy packaged meat from supermarkets. When there is an urgent need or if a better selection is desired, she also shops from the *manav,* the pricier greengrocer. About twice weekly she buys freshly rolled *yufka,* thin pastry sheets similar to phyllo dough, to prepare *börek,* layered pastries. Since Mehmet comes from Gaziantep, the baklava capital of Turkey, he frequently brings a box of baklava from his favorite sweet shop. He also likes to buy a selection of meze (appetizers) from a good charcuterie if friends are invited for a meal accompanied by *rakı* (anise-flavored spirits) or wine. Until recently they used to buy thick yogurt from the street yogurt seller. Nowadays, Zeynep and Mehmet cannot resist regularly driving out of town to one of the large supermarkets to stock up on staples.

On the rare occasions when they go out to eat, the family usually opts for fish restaurants, since Zeynep has at last won her battle against Mehmet's preference

for kebab restaurants, on the grounds of healthier eating. This once-sleepy town in Central Anatolia now has numerous fish restaurants, and many people argue that the best fish is to be had there because freshly caught fish from the Black Sea is transported to Ankara within hours.

## Major Foodstuffs

Turkey is an important agricultural producer with a strong food industry. Climatic conditions vary widely from region to region. Except for high mountainous terrain the land is generally suitable for a wide range of agriculture and animal husbandry. There are some tropical microclimatic spots in unexpected corners of the country, such as the town of Rize on the northeastern Black Sea coast, where tea is a major crop, followed by kiwis and tangerines. The central and southeastern regions are the granaries of Turkey, while maize is the principal cereal grown in Thrace and the Black Sea coastal region. Rice is grown in the inland Black Sea region and northern central Turkey, and the Aegean is a major center of grape and fig cultivation. Turkey is the foremost world producer of hazelnuts, raisins, dried figs, dried apricots, cherries, and quinces. Turkey's Mediterranean region, especially the environs of Antalya, is the center of greenhouse production in Turkey, with year-round cultivation of fresh tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, and other salad greens. A large range of other crops are grown in this region, including bananas and citrus fruits. Turkey's wide climatic diversity means that a very extensive range of different vegetables and fruits are grown in different parts of the country.

Wheat is the most important cereal, grown predominantly in central and southeastern Anatolia. Other cereals such as millet, barley, oats, and rye have mostly given way to wheat, while barley is on the rise again for beer production. Wheat is widely consumed as bulgur, parboiled and dried cracked wheat. Bulgur comes in many varieties and grades, fine for meatballs, coarse for pilafs, and so on. The earliest evidence of wheat agriculture is recorded in Anatolia and Upper Mesopotamia, in contemporary southeastern Turkey, and both wild species and the early cultivated wheat species einkorn (*Triticum monococcum*) and emmer (*Triticum dicoccum*) are still found in the region. Einkorn and in some regions emmer are known as *siyez,* apparently from the Hittite word *zez* for wheat. A regional wheat product is parched unripe wheat grains known as *firik.* Maize is grown mostly in the Black Sea region and Thrace. In the former region dried corn and cornmeal are major staples. Rice is popular throughout the country, as an ideal Turkish meal cannot be considered complete without rice pilaf. Bread of all sorts is also an indispensable staple food. Yufka, leaves of paper-thin pastry, is freshly produced in almost every neighborhood in cities to be baked into savory börek, a layered pastry dish with meat, cheese, or spinach fillings. *Yufka ekmeği* is unleavened flatbread dried for winter consumption.

Legumes constitute another major part of local diets. Lentils and chickpeas are among the most ancient Anatolian crops. Both appear in many dishes like soups, pilafs, casseroles, and stews. Roasted chickpeas are a popular snack called *leblebi.* Dried beans, such as black-eyed peas and fava beans, have always been an indispensable part of Turkish cuisine, although the *Phaseolus* species introduced following the Columbian Exchange is the main type grown today.

Vegetables of all sorts constitute an important part of the daily diet in Turkey. King of vegetables in Turkish cuisine is the eggplant, a native of India that arrived in Anatolia in the medieval period. It is cooked in many forms, usually fried and then braised with other ingredients, or char-grilled in the skin. It is also pickled and made into a sweet preserve. Famous eggplant dishes include *musakka* (sautéed eggplant, green peppers, onions, and ground meat, though not layered like its Greek cousin), *imam bayıldı* ("imam fainted"—braised eggplant stuffed with onions and tomatoes), *karnıyarık* ("split belly"—similar to imam bayıldı though with ground meat), and *hünkar beğendi* ("sultan's delight"—eggplant puree with cheese). Among other popular vegetables are zucchini, peppers, green beans, peas, and okra. A regional favorite of Istanbul and the Aegean region is artichokes, whose hearts are used

to make several elaborate dishes. The use of garlic and onions is abundant. Root vegetables like celery, carrots, Jerusalem artichokes, beets, and potatoes dominate during the winter, along with leeks, cabbage, and cauliflower. Tomato is used abundantly in many dishes; when reduced to a sauce it lends a tang to all braised dishes. The concentrated tomato paste *salça* is a basic condiment that goes into most hot dishes.

Green leafy vegetables like spinach, chard, purslane, and wild purslane are very popular, the latter two also consumed raw as a salad. Anatolian foraging culture is deep-rooted, and local wild greens are consumed in all regions. Though there is a common perception that wild greens are a feature of Aegean cuisine, all regions have a wide variety and profound knowledge of using wild greens and herbs, as both food and folk medicine. Wild greens that can also be found in local markets include nettle, sorrel, mallow, borage, knotweed, *rumex* (a type of sorrel), mustard greens, wild chicory, wild fennel, wild asparagus, wild rhubarb, cardoons, poppy leaves, pennyroyal, arum, smilax, and wild lily shoots. Many vegetables and greens are dried for winter consumption.

Dairy products are also a major part of Turkish cuisine, as animal husbandry plays a prominent role in food production. Yogurt is a staple product for both rural and urban families throughout the country, consumed plain, as an accompaniment to dishes, or as a cooking ingredient in a wide range of dishes, from soups (*yayla çorbası*) to desserts (*yoğurt tatlısı*). Milk is drunk cold or hot, especially for breakfast. It is also used in soups, some savory dishes, and a large number of *sütlü tatlılar,* milk puddings. *Peynir,* cheese, ranges from fresh curd cheese to matured varieties. The most popular cheese is *beyaz peynir,* white cheese in brine. Other major cheeses include *kaşar,* hard yellow cheese; *lor* and *çökelek,* both types of curd; and *tulum* (cheese cured in goat- or sheepskin). *Kaymak,* clotted cream, is either served with honey at breakfast or added as a topping to desserts.

Butter is one of the principal cooking fats and in the past was clarified to prevent it from going rancid. This custom has now largely died out with the introduction of refrigerators. Other widely used cooking fats include sunflower oil and corn oil, and more recently hazelnut and peanut oils have become available. The once-popular sesame oil has totally vanished from the food scene, but sesame paste, *tahin,* is as popular as ever. Likewise, poppy oil consumption declined after the restrictions imposed on poppy cultivation (it is the source of illegal opium), but the much-loved poppy seed paste is used abundantly in the poppy-growing city of Afyon. Turkey is the second-largest producer of the opium poppy, which is cultivated under strict control.

Olive oil is the major type used in the Aegean region, and it is becoming increasingly popular in other parts of the country. Turkey is the fourth or fifth (depending on the year) olive oil–producing country in the world, and the second in cured olives after Spain. Olive oil is the essential ingredient in a large category of dishes known as *zeytinyağlı* (literally, "with olive oil"), the generic name for a vegetable or legume dish cooked with olive oil and eaten cold or at room temperature. These dishes were favored particularly by the Christian communities of the Ottoman Empire during the long Lenten fasts. Their cooling effect makes these dishes very popular during hot summer months.

All sugar in Turkey is made from sugar beets. Sugar beet production was introduced in the early years of Turkish Republic, and the establishment of sugar factories was like a manifesto of economic independence.

Meat is important in Turkish cuisine; some think meat dishes predominate. This is partially true, but in reality, for the majority of the population, meat is hard to afford. Still, it is not easy to be a vegetarian in Turkey as it is customary to put at least a handful of cubed or minced meat into most hot vegetable or pulse dishes. Meat is also consumed in the form of *kebap* (meaning roasted meats), which can be grilled or oven baked, or slow cooked in a pot. Another very popular category is *köfte,* meatballs of all varieties, and almost every town claims a specialty of its own. The meat of preference is lamb or mutton, although beef is now very common. Goat and kid remain a regional and seasonal specialty. Pork is forbidden for Muslims and Jews, so pork



Market, Kas, Mediterranean coast. (Corel)

products are very rare, with only very few farms catering to Christians and those who do not observe the religious ban. Poultry, mainly chicken, is also widely consumed and very popular. Game is restricted to regional cuisines and is not a part of the urban culinary scene. Meat is also preserved in various ways, dried, cured, or dry fried. Preserved meats like *pastırma* (cured dried beef coated with a spicy paste), sucuk (spicy cured sausage), and *kavurma* (potted meat) are consumed on their own or as a lavish ingredient upgrading various dishes from baked beans to fried eggs, or as a topping for *pide,* thin, pizzalike flatbreads.

Offal is still much appreciated, though getting rarer. There are specialized eateries for offal dishes. *Kelle* (lamb's head), *paça* (trotters), *ciğer* (liver), *işkembe* (tripe), *beyin* (brain), *böbrek* (kidneys), and *koç yumurtası* (lamb's testicles) are admired by enthusiasts. Lamb's intestines are grilled as a popular street food called *kokoreç* and are stuffed to make the regional specialty *bumbar.*

Eggs are used in many dishes. Whether scrambled with tomatoes, green peppers, and sometimes onion to make the dish known as *menemen* or *şakaşuka*; fried with spinach, minced meat, or cured meats; or poached and served with garlic and yogurt sauce (*çılbır*), eggs constitute a quick meal. It is very common to consume wild greens scrambled with eggs in rural areas.

Sea fish and other seafood are mostly confined to coastal areas, although freshwater fish features in regional cuisines. The Black Sea region is renowned for *hamsi,* fresh anchovies. Istanbulites claim that fish caught in the Bosporus Strait are the finest of all. Sea bass, red mullet, bream, sole, turbot, bonito, mackerel, swordfish, and sardines are the most popular

types. Mussels, squid, octopus, and shrimp are among the most widely consumed types of seafood.

Herbs and spices are very important in Turkish cuisine; however, they are used sparingly, to enhance the flavor of the dish, never to mask or to dominate. Parsley, dill, and mint are the major herbs used fresh, and dried mint and thyme are at hand in every kitchen. Dried purple basil (*reyhan*), dried tarragon, basil, and bay leaf are mainly used in regional cuisines. Chili flakes, paprika, black pepper, sumac, allspice, cumin, cinnamon, and cloves are the most common spices. Nigella seeds (the seeds of the plant known in the West as love-in-a-mist) and sesame seeds are sprinkled on buns and breads. Rarer flavorings are *mahlep* (the kernel of the *mahaleb* cherry) and *damla sakızı* (the resin of the mastic tree), which are added to breads, savory buns, and sweet cookies. The latter is also added to ice creams along with *salep* (the powdered root of flowers in the *Orchis* genus). Pomegranate concentrate is used as a souring agent. Pickles usually appear as a condiment on the table. Cabbage, green chilies, green tomatoes, cucumbers, carrots, unripe melons, and eggplants stuffed with chopped vegetables are most commonly pickled.

Fruit is abundant in Turkey, and white mulberries, black mulberries, strawberries, cherries, loquats, apricots, peaches, cherries, sour cherries, plums, damsons (a kind of plum), pears, apples, melons, watermelons, grapes, figs, quinces, pomegranates, persimmons, medlars, jujubes, bananas, oranges, grapefruits, and tangerines are consumed fresh seasonally. Many fruits are dried and consumed as snacks or stewed into compotes; mulberries, figs, grapes (as well as raisins), apricots, and prunes are among the most popular. The pulp of fruits such as apricots, plums, mulberries, and grapes is dried in sheets known as *pestil* (fruit leather). The juice of many fruits, above all grapes, is made into *pekmez,* molasses, which is still a very popular sweetener. Strings of nuts dipped several times in grape must boiled with starch make a sweet delicacy called *cevizli sucuk,* literally, "walnut sausage." Walnuts, pistachios, almonds, and pine nuts are much liked in both sweet and savory dishes. Hazelnuts and peanuts are used more in regional cooking or consumed as snacks along with sunflower and melon or pumpkin seeds.

Water is served with meals. Turkey is very rich in spring and mineral waters, and many people pride themselves on being able to differentiate between water from different springs. After water, ayran (diluted salted yogurt) is the most popular beverage. Packaged fruit juices of all kinds have become popular in recent years, replacing the traditional *sherbets* made of various fruits, flowers, or spices. Fermented turnip juice, *şalgam suyu,* is a popular accompaniment to kebap. Despite having a history of only one and a half centuries, tea has become a national drink, brewed strong and served in tulip-shaped glasses. Herbal teas of all sorts are consumed widely, with linden flower, sage, and thyme being the most popular. Turkish coffee is served in-between meals or after lunch. It is made with finely ground coffee boiled and served unfiltered in a small cup in which the solids settle. In winter a sweet hot milk drink called *salep,* made from ground orchid root and sprinkled with cinnamon or ginger, and a thick drink known as *boza,* made from fermented grain, are popular.

The national alcoholic drink is rakı, anise-flavored grape spirit. Beer is very popular, and the selection of local wines keeps increasing every year. Wine producers have been giving emphasis to reviving native grape varieties recently. Anatolia is home to one of the oldest wine cultures in the world, a complete set of legislation being dedicated to vineyards and wine making back in the Hittite period (ca. 1650–1100 B.C.).

## Cooking

Turkish cuisine involves many preparation and cooking techniques that range from simple to very labor-intensive. Most cooking is done over a burner. Many Turkish dishes start by sautéing onion in butter or olive oil. For hot dishes salça (tomato paste) and minced or cubed meat are also fried briefly. Other ingredients and water are added, and cooking is completed by simply braising and reducing the cooking juices. This method mingles and

concentrates flavors, and the tasty cooking juice is mopped up with bread. Cold olive oil–based dishes are also cooked using the same technique but omitting the tomato paste and meat and reducing the cooking liquid almost completely. *Kavurma,* pan-frying meat and vegetables in their own juices with a little fat or oil, is another common method. Others include boiling, deep-frying or shallow frying, oven baking, embedding in hot embers, and grilling.

The traditional oven, the *tandır,* is a large earthenware pot sunk into the ground. Most towns still keep the tradition of stone-lined wood-burning communal ovens, called *taş fırın*. In the past it was common to take dishes that required baking to the local bakery, but nowadays most urban households possess a gas-fired or electric oven. One important utensil related to the oven is the earthen pot called *güveç.* A vegetable stew baked in the pot is called by the same name, *güveç.* Rural households have a trio of special equipment for preparing and cooking flatbreads and pastry: *hamur tahtası,* a low circular wooden table; *oklava,* a long, slim rolling pin; and *sac,* a domed tin griddle.

Some dishes involve skills that require experience and patience. *Sarma,* wrapped vine, chard, cabbage, or wild green leaves filled with meat or rice; *dolma,* vegetables such as bell peppers, red peppers, eggplants, squash, and tomatoes with a similar filling; and *mantı,* tiny pasta dumplings with a minced meat and onion filling, are among the most demanding examples.

Sauces are not common as the reduced cooking liquid serves as a sauce of its own. Some dishes, particularly soups, are perked up with a drizzle of butter sizzled with crushed dried mint and paprika. Cold garlic yogurt is a popular accompaniment for many hot vegetable dishes like meat-stuffed dolma or wrapped sarma. Garlic yogurt sauce is poured on mantı or on poached eggs, in the case of *çılbır,* and then drizzled with hot sizzling paprika butter.

Preparing foodstuffs for winter is a very important activity even in urban households. Most households prepare their own jams, preserves, pickles, and grape leaves in brine during the summer months. Many urban families still have connections with their native villages and return to the countryside to help with the harvest and winter preparations. Communal labor sharing is a common practice. Tomato paste and red pepper paste are among the essential end-of-summer preparations. Vegetables of all kinds are dried for winter. Hollowed-out eggplant, squash, bell peppers, and red peppers are dried to be used in stuffed dishes. Vegetables like okra, green beans, and wild greens are also dried. Another widespread dried preparation is *tarhana,* a fermented mixture of grains or flour and yogurt, and in some cases tomatoes and peppers, used as a ready soup mix, either crumbled or in the form of flattened patties to be reconstituted to a grainy soup.



Kadayif, or Kanafeh, is a very fine vermicelli-like pastry used to make sweet pastries and desserts. Kanafeh is also found in the Balkans and is a feature of Lebanese, Turkish, Greek, and Levantine cuisine. (iStockPhoto)

## Typical Meals

First thing in the morning tea is brewed. Breakfast is always accompanied by tea served in tulip-shaped glasses. Breakfast consists of fresh bread, black and green olives, beyaz peynir (white cheese in brine), *kaşar peyniri* (yellow cheese), *reçel* (homemade fruit preserves), honey, and butter. Usually fresh tomato and cucumber slices and fresh green peppers accompany the cheese. For a more elaborate table, kaymak (clotted cream) is served along with honey and jams. The most popular fruit preserves are *vişne* (sour cherries), *kayısı* (apricot), *çilek* (strawberry), *incir* (fig), and *gül* (rose). Sunday breakfast would also include fried eggs with sucuk (cured spicy garlic sausage) or pastırma (cured pressed beef). Breakfast in rural areas could be just a bowl of soup or flat unleavened bread rolled up with some wild greens, spring onions, or salty cheese.

For the midmorning break some people take tea with simit (bread rings sprinkled with sesame seed). This is called *kuşluk,* literally meaning "a bite fit for a bird." Others take Turkish coffee, traditionally served with a single piece of Turkish delight (*lokum*)— fruit-flavored jellies, though they come in many different flavors, sometimes studded with nuts.

Lunch is around noon and usually taken at a local eatery catering to working people. Students have a set lunch provided by their school canteens. Lunch usually consists of soup; pilaf made with either rice or bulgur; and a stew of beans, chickpeas, or lentils, or a meat and vegetable stew. A dried fruit compote or yogurt may accompany the main dish, sometimes replaced by a salad or *cacık,* a cold dish of yogurt mixed with diced cucumbers. Dessert may follow the meal or be eaten separately as an afternoon treat in a pudding shop or patisserie. Lunch for peasants working in the fields is often a wrap of flatbread with salty cheese, spring onions, and wild greens, usually accompanied by a jug of ayran, a diluted yogurt drink.

A midafternoon snack is known as *ikindi,* after the time of the afternoon prayer. Schoolchildren are sometimes served *ikindi kahvaltısı,* an afternoon "breakfast" that can be a mini-replica of breakfast, or *poğaça*, a savory bun, or börek. Housewives take this opportunity to arrange gatherings called *gün,* meaning "day," at which they take turns inviting friends. Dinner normally consists of soup, a meat and vegetable dish, rice or bulgur pilaf, a cold vegetable dish made with olive oil, and a salad, followed by dessert. Tea is again drunk after the dinner, and later at night fruit can be shared while watching TV.

## Eating Out

Turkey has a deep-rooted tradition of public kitchens called *imaret,* established as institutions of charity. During the Ottoman times, imarets became an inseparable part of the urban landscape in most cities, offering free food for the needy. The institution is still functioning to a certain extent. Many eateries are formed around bazaars, another typical feature of Ottoman cities. Today, in many shopping and business areas, there are little eateries called *esnaf lokantası,* mainly catering to shop owners and shoppers, and often serving only lunch. The food on offer is mostly a choice of soups and a wide range of hot *tencere yemeği* (ready-braised hot dishes) laid out warm for the customers to choose from. The range includes legume/vegetable and meat stews, eggplant dishes, stuffed vegetables with minced meat, chicken stew or a slow-cooked meat dish, and rice pilaf. For dessert, *hoşaf,* dried fruit compote, is almost always present and can also be sipped alongside the meal as a palate cleanser. Depending on the season, pumpkin or quince desserts topped with walnuts or clotted cream and a milk dessert like rice pudding (*sütlaç*) are available.

For those who do not have the time to sit down for a full meal, another ubiquitous feature of modern Turkish cities is the *büfe,* sandwich bar, which offers toasted sandwiches with cheese or sucuk, spicy cured meat sausage, and *döner,* meat slices piled on a large vertical spit, roasted, and shaved into slivers. These places offer a variety of freshly squeezed fruit juices or *limonata* (lemonade).

In addition, a variety of specialized eateries offer one kind of food only. A *köfteci* is a place to have

meatballs, often served accompanied by assorted pickles and *piyaz,* a bean and onion salad. The *pideci* serves pide, which is thin, oblong flatbread topped with cheese, meat, spinach, or eggs, or a mixture of these. The *işkembeci* sells *işkembe çorbası,* tripe soup, and is usually open overnight, as tripe soup is considered to be an ideal hangover remedy. The *çorbacı* is a soup (*çorba*) restaurant, which again remains open until late at night. The *börekçi* has a variety of börek (layered pastries), often served chopped up on small plates to be eaten quickly on the spot. The *muhallebici* specializes in milk puddings. Curiously, many milk-pudding shops also sell chicken soup and rice pilaf with chicken as a by-product of the signature pudding of the place, *tavuk göğsü kazandibi,* a milk pudding made of pounded chicken breast and caramelized on the bottom. Pastries of many varieties soaked in syrup are also sold in specialist shops, the favorite being baklava, a multilayered pastry filled with pistachios, walnuts, or cream. Others include *tel kadayıf* (pastry threads stuffed with nuts), *ekmek kadayıf* (rusks topped with clotted cream), *künefe* (pastry threads stuffed with cheese and served hot), *tulumba tatlısı* (fritters made of batter squeezed from a syringe), *lokma* (ball-shaped fritters), *revani* (cake made with semolina), and *şekerpare* (domed cookies).

A *kebapçı* can range from a modest eatery to an upmarket restaurant specializing in a wide range of grilled meat dishes. A kebapçı may also offer *lahmacun,* thin, round flatbread with minced meat topping; *çiğ köfte,* spicy raw meatballs; or *içli köfte,* fried or boiled fist-sized balls of bulgur filled with minced meat and chopped walnuts. Traditional eateries almost never serve alcoholic drinks, with a few exceptions in major cities.

Though prohibited by Islam, alcoholic drinks are widely enjoyed, especially in large cities and coastal regions. Drinking is considered a social occasion enjoyed at a table for long hours, the most typical location being a *meyhane.* The meyhane typically offers a selection of small platters of meze to be shared. The range of the meze on offer varies greatly from region to region; wild greens and seafood feature in the Aegean region, and hot and spicy spreads and dips in the southeast, with the greatest diversity found in Istanbul. The national drink is rakı. The essential basic mezes are white cheese and melon. Others include *ezme,* crushed tomato spread; *haydari,* yogurt and herb dip; *fava,* broad bean paste; *humus,* chickpea paste with tahini; *tarama,* salted carp roe; *lakerda,* salted bonito; *çiroz,* dried mackerel; *midye dolması,* mussels stuffed with rice; *Arnavut ciğer,* Albanian-style fried liver; fried eggplant; char-grilled eggplant salad; roasted red peppers; grape leaves stuffed with rice; octopus salad; and so on. Although a typical meze table spread is generally conceived as an array of cold dishes, there are also hot appetizers, which generally include fried börek, *kalamar tava* (fried calamari), and *midye tava* (fried mussels). It is possible to continue drinking through a main course, which can be either fish or an assortment of grilled meats. A meyhane dinner often concludes with a plate of fruit and Turkish coffee.

When eating out for recreation, Turkish families always prefer places serving dishes that cannot be prepared at home, such as specialties requiring a wood-fired oven or a special cooking technique. However, a modern Western restaurant culture has also developed in major cities. White Russian immigrants escaping the revolution had a major impact on Turkish restaurant culture as they established European-style dining venues, mainly in Istanbul and in the new capital, Ankara. International eating venues ranging from fast-food chains to coffee joints are common in many towns and cities. The Turkish response to this has been the recent phenomenon called *simit sarayı,* sesame-ring palaces, offering varied ways to consume the ubiquitous simit, the sesame ring bun. High-end restaurants that used to serve French cuisine seem to have switched to Italian or even to sushi. There is a recent trend of discovering lost local values, like reviving Ottoman court cuisine and the quest for regional foodways. Some young Turkish chefs are keen on experimenting to create a connection between the historical and the contemporary. Places to pass the time between meals are mainly the *kahve,* the coffeehouse, where men traditionally congregate, or the more family-friendly *çay bahçesi,* or tea garden.

## Special Occasions

Turkey has a strong tradition of celebrations, whether religious, seasonal, or related to life transitions. Certain foods mark each such occasion. Life transitions are often marked by eating special foods. The engagement, *nişan,* can be celebrated like a small-scale wedding. Sugary cookies like *kurabiye* or *çörek* can be sent to the house of the bride to symbolize a commitment on the part of the groom. A box of chocolate has in many places taken the place of traditional sweets. Before the wedding there is a series of events, especially in rural areas. The houses of the groom and the bride hold different all-male and all-female gatherings. The bathing ritual at the *hamam* (Turkish bath) gets transformed into a party with lots of food and drinks served. The *kına gecesi* (henna night), held the night before the wedding, is an all-female event, involving the dyeing of the hands and feet with henna. Sherbets and sweets are essential at these events. The wedding ceremony is called *düğün* and is a big feast for all. Weddings usually take place in the summer and often after the harvest in rural areas.

At most celebrations and traditional weddings, four main dishes are important: soup, meat, rice, and dessert. Soup is preferably *düğün çorbası* (wedding soup—a meat-and-vegetable-based soup thickened with egg yolk and lemon), the meat can be kavurma or spit-roasted or oven-baked lamb. Rice pilaf can be prepared with chicken or meat stock. *Helva* (sesame paste, but there are also other varieties) or baklava is favored as a sweet. The meat and grain dish used to be *keşkek,* a long slow-cooked wheatberry and meat stew, cooked to a porridge-like consistency. This tradition still prevails in some rural areas.

Births are celebrated by *lohusa şerbeti,* the puerperal sherbet, a very sweet pinkish-red-colored warm drink. Strongly flavored with cinnamon and cloves, almonds or pine nuts are floated on top. The first tooth of the baby is celebrated by *diş buğdayı,* literally translated as "tooth wheat," which is boiled wheat berries tossed with sugar, sprinkled with cinnamon, and sometimes topped with a handful of crushed walnuts.

The *sünnet düğünü,* circumcision feast, is another important occasion. The father takes particular pride in this feast and uses the chance to show off his wealth. As well as abundant food there is entertainment for the children, such as the traditional shadow theater Karagöz. Vendors of sweets that are children's favorites like *pamuk helva* (cotton candy), *elma şekeri* (sugar-glazed apples), *kağıt helva* (wafer disks), *horoz şekeri* (rooster-shaped lollypops), and *macun* (assorted flavored sugar paste twirled on a stick) cheer up the crowd.

Death is commonly associated with helva, a generic name for many sweets but in this case made of semolina or wheat flour. Semolina or flour and some pine nuts are slowly pan-roasted in butter; syrup is added and stirred till the mixture reaches the desired consistency. It is important to take turns and recall all the deceased loved ones while stirring the helva. No cooking is done in the bereaved house; instead, abundant food is brought in by neighbors and relatives for the family and all those paying their condolences. Prayers are held on the evening of the 40th day following the death, and *mevlut şekeri* (a paper cone filled an assortment of *akide şekeri,* pulled sugar, topped with a plump lokum, Turkish delight) is distributed to the guests. *Lokma* (fried fritters soaked in syrup) is another sweet often distributed in memory of the deceased person.

Seasonal transitions are also celebrated. Nevruz on March 24 and Hıdrellez on May 6 are two rituals celebrated to welcome the spring. White dishes or milk-based dishes wish for a bright future at Nevruz and greens for a fresh beginning at Hıdrellez, which used to be the day when the first lamb of the season was spit-roasted. Both celebrations take place in the open air like a picnic, preferably near the seashore. Spring onions and boiled eggs are essentials of the picnic meal.

Religious festivals follow the Islamic lunar calendar. Ramadan, the month when most Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset, is a time of the year when eating becomes a focus of life. Certain foods mark Ramadan. Bakeries start making a special type of pide, leavened bread in flattened circles, which people line up to buy before sunset. Dinner following the fast is known as *iftar.* The fast is generally broken

with dates or olives, and dinner continues with a soup and *iftariyelik,* a breakfast-like assortment of small bites including pastırma, followed by a main meat dish and rice pilaf, and then börek. The custom of having fried eggs before the meat dish has almost vanished. The foremost dessert of Ramadan is *güllaç,* a sweet prepared with paper-thin starch wafers, milk, and rose water. Ramadan is followed by a holiday that in Turkey is called *Şeker Bayramı,* meaning "the feast of candy." Gifts of candies are given to children, and sweets are served to guests. The other Islamic holiday is Kurban Bayramı, the feast of sacrifice, three lunar months after Ramadan. Distributing the meat of the sacrificed lamb to needy families is an important part of this feast. The month of Muharrem, which is the first month of Islamic calendar, is the time for *aşure,* a pudding of wheat berries, beans, chickpeas, dried fruit, and nuts.



Turkish coffee in a *zarf.* Taken from the Arabic word meaning container, the *zarf* gained popularity in Turkey as the serving of coffee became complex and ritualistic. (Shutterstock)

## Diet and Health

The relation between food and health was central to Ottoman medicine both as a preventive measure and as a method of treatment. Ottoman medicine was based on Islamic medicine, which also followed the theories of the Greeks Hippocrates and Galen. Based on Galenic theory, as well as further knowledge developed by the Islamic physician İbn'i Sina (Avicenna) and the Andalusian botanist and pharmacist İbn-i Baytar, Ottoman medicine simply posited a direct causal connection between food and health. According to the system of thought, the human body has four humors or a combination of them, namely, blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile, relating to the four elements of air, water, fire, and earth. Each represented qualities like hot, cold, moist, and dry. All foodstuffs carry these qualities, and one has to take care as to which combination of foods is to be consumed for one's health. This approach also gives much importance to seasonality, specifying what kinds of food have to be consumed to restore one's health.

This thought system is nowadays not known, but its influences still prevail. Turkish cuisine attaches much importance to seasonality and a balanced meal. Many dishes are automatically associated with seasons. A typical meal has a balanced distribution of proteins and carbohydrates and is accompanied by vegetables or wild greens. Two major healthy food items in Turkish cuisine are bulgur and yogurt. Bulgur is parboiled, dried, and cracked wheat berries, and this process enables the nutrients in the grain to be more easily absorbed. Dried fruit and nut snacks contribute to a healthy diet, along with the popular combination of *tahin-pekmez,* sesame paste and grape molasses.

*Aylin Öney Tan*

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# Yemen and Oman

## Overview

The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Yemen are on the southeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. Oman, about the size of Kansas, is a hereditary sultanate with an elected advisory council, and Yemen, midway in size between California and Texas, is a presidential republic.

From 1507 through 1742, Oman was occupied by the Portuguese. After Omanis drove out the Portuguese, they built up the country until in the 1800s, it was the most powerful country in the Arabian Peninsula. However, things deteriorated. The ruler from 1932 to 1970, Sultan Said bin Taimur, was suspicious of the outside world to the point of paranoia, and he did his best to isolate the country from outside, especially Western, influences. He restricted travel within the country, and Omanis who managed to leave were seldom allowed to return. Worried that his people might rebel against him, he even abolished schools. Although he had sent his son, Qaboos bin Said, to school and university in Britain, once Qaboos returned, Said kept him under house arrest, fearing that he might try to take over. In 1964, oil was discovered in Oman. In 1970, unhappy Omanis rose up against Said bin Taimur and, with British help, established Qaboos bin Said as Sultan. Qaboos built schools, hospitals, and other infrastructure to bring the country up to modern Western standards and also developed a tourism industry. Oman has little arable land but produces fruits and vegetables such as bananas, dates, melons, and tomatoes and raises camels, cattle, and goats. Unlike the rest of the peninsula, it receives rainfall in the summer from the monsoons.

Yemen has the most history of unrest on the Arabian Peninsula. It was part of the Ottoman Empire from the 1500s until the British gained control of part of the country in the 1800s. North Yemen and South Yemen were established in 1904. These two countries went through various changes of name and uprisings, including driving the British out of South Yemen in 1967. In 1984, oil was discovered in Yemen, and reunification talks began. Unification occurred in 1990. Yemen has not yet built itself up to the point reached by other countries on the peninsula. Yemen is the only country on the Arabian Peninsula that opposed the 1991 Gulf War against Iraq, leading to poor relations with the United States and other countries. In 2000, terrorists attacked the USS *Cole,* docked off the Yemeni town of Aden. The relationship between Yemen and the United States continues to be tense.

The kidnappings of several tourists over the years have hampered Yemen's efforts to develop a tourist industry. Yemen has good agricultural land and raises a large amount of the products its inhabitants use, including apricots, bananas, dates, eggplant, figs, grapes, mangoes, melons, okra, onions, and tomatoes, plus barley, millet, sorghum, wheat, chickens and eggs, cattle, goats, and sheep. Yemen also produces and exports honey, a major ingredient in many Arab desserts. Anticipating modern trends, Yemenis value local food highly.

Yemen's most famous agricultural product is coffee, considered by many the finest in the world. Although coffee originated in Ethiopia, scholars believe that it was first cultivated in Yemen and that the beans were first roasted there. The word *mocha*

comes from *al-Makhâ,* the Yemeni port from which coffee was exported. Until the 18th century, Yemen dominated the world coffee trade; then, Dutch coffee enthusiasts obtained coffee beans to grow in Indonesia (hence the slang term *java*), and other countries developed coffee crops. Yemen no longer ranks even among the top 10 world coffee producers.

Oman and Yemen were famous in ancient times for their frankincense trees, and they supplied incense and myrrh to the Roman Empire at its height. Although their foods have some similarities with those of the other countries on the peninsula, geography has created some differences as well. They are more accessible from the sea coast than from land. Many of their food influences have come from India, Iran, and western Africa, leading to Omani and Yemeni foods being hotter and spicier than those of the other parts of the peninsula, and to the use of Indian breads.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Khadija lives in a small village in Yemen. Every morning, she and her two daughters bake rounds of flatbread for the family's meals that day. They grind the sorghum that they prefer for bread and mix it with water, yeast, and salt. The oven is a *tannur,* a traditional clay oven shaped like a truncated cone. It takes practice to slap the bread quickly onto the inner sides of the tannur and remove one's hand before it gets uncomfortably warm. A grate rests on the open top to hold pots where Khadija boils rice, vegetables, and meat. A small hole in the oven's side allows her to insert fuel (charcoal or wood). A charcoal brazier, for warming the coffeepot, sits in a corner. The kitchen windows are closed, to keep dust out, making the kitchen almost unbearably warm in the summer. The windows are high in the wall, so men passing the house cannot look in at the women.



Coffee farmer picking ripe cherry beans for harvesting on the island of St. Helena, Yemen. (Darrinhenry | Dreamstime.com)

Both Oman and Yemen have modern supermarkets in the major cities, but residents also shop for food in traditional *suqs* (markets). Rural areas have smaller food shops and also *suqs* with merchants specializing in different kinds of foods and spices. In Yemen, men usually do the shopping.

## Major Foodstuffs

Meals in these two countries are usually simple, but marinades and spices are used to add flavor. Most meals include meat, mostly chicken, fish, or mutton, as well as rice, vegetables, soups, and salads. Curried vegetables reflect the Indian influence. Oman grows limes that are dried (*loomi*) and used throughout the Middle East. Grated into powder or pierced and added to a stew, they give a tangy, musky taste. Food in Yemen is hotter than that in the rest of the peninsula, with liberal use of chilies and hot peppers. A typical Yemeni condiment is *zhug,* a spicy bread dip and relish often added to salads and main dishes. Yemeni cooking is particularly differentiated from the remainder of the peninsula by the use of the spice fenugreek. Another popular condiment is *hilbeh* or *hulba* (regional variations of the same name, with regional variations in the ingredients). It includes fenugreek, hot chilies, coriander, garlic, onions, tomatoes, cayenne pepper, salt, and black pepper. Sorghum and millet are the two most popular grains for bread.

***Zhug***

This spicy mixture is popular in Yemen as a dip or a flavoring for stews. Yemenis believe it aids health and long life.

3 cardamom pods
1 tsp black peppercorns
1 tsp caraway seeds
4 hot chilies
1 c parsley
1 c fresh cilantro
6 cloves garlic
1 tsp ground cumin
½ tsp salt
½ tsp pepper
2 tbsp olive oil

With a blender or food processor, grind the first three ingredients. Add the remaining ingredients and blend into a coarse puree. Store the zhug in the refrigerator.

Between meals, especially in the afternoon, many Yemeni men (and some women) chew the leaves of a plant called *qat,* not swallowing, but keeping a ball of it in their cheek. Qat contains an amphetamine-like chemical, which is a mild stimulant and appetite suppressant. It may cause insomnia, is addictive, and, worse, may be carcinogenic and cause other health problems. In Saudi Arabia, the United States, and other countries, growing and using qat is illegal. Use of qat has increased greatly in Yemen since 1970. Because it is popular and easy to grow, it is one of Yemen's major agricultural products. Some Yemenis are concerned about the effects of qat, both in terms of lost human productivity and because growing the plant uses water resources and acreage that could better be used for growing other crops the country needs. Farmers have increased qat production using land where coffee formerly grew, so coffee production has dropped.

## Cooking

Because oil was found later in this area, it is not as developed as the other parts of the peninsula and so has fewer new houses and apartment buildings. Although many kitchens in the big cities have modern appliances, the kitchen of an older house has one or more tannurs, used as both oven and cooktop. In some areas, kitchens are roofed, semi-enclosed areas in the courtyards of houses, allowing the cooks better ventilation. An older house may have a traditional food-cooling system, based on evaporative cooling. A niche in the wall, with doors into the kitchen and holes in the outside walls, contains a stone or clay jar of water. Wind blowing through

the holes evaporates water, cooling the air and any food that is in the niche. Traditionally, Yemenis used cooking pots made of iron and also shallow pots carved of soapstone. Now they are just as likely to use modern pots and pans.

## Typical Meals

Most Omanis and Yemenis still eat in the traditional Arab style, with food served on communal platters placed on a cloth on the floor or ground. People serve themselves using pieces of flatbread as scoops or taking small pieces of meat or balls of rice with their fingers. As elsewhere in the Muslim world, they use only their right hands. In Yemen, even soup is presented in a single bowl; diners drink it from a common ladle. Omanis serve soup in glasses. Men eat first, and then women and children eat. They often eat the main part of the meal in relative silence, then move to another room for dessert, coffee, and conversation. All meals include dates, flatbreads, *laban* (a yogurt drink), and usually rice.

Breakfast includes stewed or fried beans, fried eggs with onion and tomatoes, or bread dipped in laban. Yemenis drink coffee with ginger or other spices in the early morning, then switch to *qishr,* a tea made from ground coffee husks, ground ginger, and sometimes cinnamon, cardamom, and/or sugar.

The main meal is usually the midday meal. It begins with a salad or raw vegetables, such as onions, radishes, or eggplant. On special occasions, Yemenis begin their meal with *bint al-sahn,* a dish made of a stack of very thin flatbreads with *samna* (clarified butter) between the layers, baked and served with honey and more samna. The main course includes vegetables, possibly spiced or curried, and rice with meat, fish, or chicken. Kebabs are popular. Another popular Yemeni dish is a stew called *saltah.* The cook simmers lamb, lentils, onions, potatoes, salt, cilantro leaves, and water together. When the stew is cooked, she adds hulba. Soups usually contain vegetables, meat, and lentils. With their long coastlines, both countries have an abundance of fish and shrimp. Omanis enjoy shark.

***Bint al-Sahn***

*Serves 8–16*

1 packet active dry yeast (0.25 oz), dissolved in ½ c warm water with 1 tsp sugar

4 c flour

1 tsp salt

5 eggs, beaten

¾ c samna (clarified butter), divided

**For Serving**

Melted samna or butter

Warm honey

1. Dissolve yeast in the warm water with the sugar.
2. Sift the flour and salt into a large mixing bowl.
3. Make a well in the center of the flour mixture. Pour eggs and the yeast mixture into the flour mixture.
4. Blend well, and turn out onto a board.
5. Slowly knead in ¼ cup of the samna. Continue kneading until dough is smooth and elastic.
6. Divide the dough into 12 balls.
7. Place a dough ball on a lightly floured board and form into a very thin round shape, about 8 inches across, using the heel of your hand or a rolling pin. If you haven't shaped such things by hand before, a rolling pin will work much better. Don't obsess about making perfect rounds.
8. Brush a baking sheet with samna.
9. Place the completed round on the baking tray, and brush well with melted samna.
10. Make 5 more rounds. After completing each round, place on top of the previous round, press the edges with fingertips, and brush well with samna.
11. Make a second stack of 6 more rounds. Brush the last round with the samna.
12. Let rest in a warm place for 45 minutes.
13. Preheat oven to 350°F.
14. Bake for 25–30 minutes until light brown. Don't overbake.
15. Serve with samna or butter and warm honey.

At the end of a meal, Yemenis take whatever food is left over, put it into a pot with sauce, and mix and heat it to create a stew, which they then eat with bread. Many Yemeni desserts include local honey. Popular desserts in Oman include *halwa* and *lokhemat,* fried pastry balls drizzled with lime and cardamom syrup. Coffee spiced with cardamom ends the meal in Oman. As in other Arab countries, Omanis and Yemenis drink large amounts of sweet tea, often spiced with mint, ginger, lemon, or cinnamon.

The evening meal is a lighter meal, similar to breakfast, or smaller amounts of the foods eaten at midday. For snacks, people in this area eat things like flatbread with hummus, falafel, kebabs, *shawarma* (similar to gyros), boiled potatoes, boiled eggs, fried fish, fruit, juice, or pastries.

Breads in Oman and Yemen include not only Arab breads such as *khubz* and *mardouf* (made with dates) but also Indian breads such as chapatis, *parathas,* and *pooris* (flatbreads made in a tandoor oven, or fried and puffed). One of Yemen's specialties is *kutma.* It includes equal parts of wheat and sorghum flour and is made into a roll that is thicker than most flatbreads. *Lahuh,* a thin sourdough bread, is made with sorghum. Yemenis also eat samosas (Indian filled pastries, both savory and sweet), although they have developed some with Arab-style fillings such as cheese and mint.



A man sells fenugreek at a street market in front of Nakhl Fort in Oman. (Styve | Dreamstime.com)

## Eating Out

Restaurants offer a variety of foreign cuisines, including European, Indian, and Oriental. American fast-food chains like Burger King, KFC, and McDonald's have franchises in the larger cities. As in the other peninsula countries, restaurants have segregated areas: an area for families, an area for men only, and sometimes an area for women only.

While Yemen is a dry country, non-Muslims may bring two bottles of alcoholic beverages into the country. They must consume these on private property. In Oman, alcohol is sold (to visitors only) in large hotels and is expensive. As with the other Arabian Peninsula countries, the natives of the country are Muslims and not allowed to drink. Visitors to the country should not offer liquor to Muslims.

## Special Occasions

In Oman, a variation on the tradition of breaking the Ramadan fast with dates, obviously modern, is to freeze dates and break the fast with cold dates. Omanis also make *suh,* which is dates mixed with samna, sesame seeds and aniseed, cardamom, cumin, and/or fennel, a candy that they give as gifts during Ramadan. Other traditional Omani Ramadan foods are *sakhana,* a porridge made of dates, milk, molasses, and wheat, and *fattah,* a mixture of meats, vegetables, and bread. Omanis enjoy drinking laban, a yogurt-based drink, to break the fast, or perhaps lemonade with mint and rose water, watermelon juice with rose syrup, or tamarind juice with rose water. In Yemen, qishr is traditional for breaking the fast.

A popular dish for the Eid al-Fitr is *shuwa,* a labor-intensive dish that several families make together. A whole cow or goat is marinated in spices—cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, cumin, garlic, *loomi* (dried limes), red pepper, and turmeric—and date paste. This is wrapped in mats made of banana or palm leaves, buried in an underground pit oven lined with hot charcoal, and sealed so the smoke cannot escape. After 24 to 48 hours it is removed and served with rice.

In Oman, modern weddings for the more affluent include a party for the women at a hotel or wedding hall. As in other parts of the peninsula, the wedding party starts in the late evening and goes on until early morning. Buffets include items like flatbread, cheese, hummus, baba ghanoush, stuffed grape leaves, and other meze (little appetizer plates). When the groom comes to claim his bride at the end of the party, they cut the cake. Old-style weddings are simpler. Each family holds a party at its own house, with traditional foods including whole roasted sheep on platters of rice.

In Yemen, at the conclusion of the marriage contract, the father of the bridegroom throws raisins on the carpet. Male guests try to pick up as many raisins, representing future happiness in the marriage, as possible. The actual Yemeni wedding feast, with men and women in separate groups, features sheep and perhaps a calf. After the meal, the men chew qat or smoke water pipes.

## Diet and Health

Modern medicine has come to Oman and Yemen relatively recently. Traditional medicine included herbs, spices, and honey. Yemeni honey has a reputation for curing all ills, from sore throats to ulcers to insomnia. Both countries now have modern hospitals. Obesity is less of a problem in these two countries than in the rest of the peninsula, partly because Western influences have not been around so long and partly because of the use of qat, an appetite suppressant, in Yemen.

*Christine Crawford-Oppenheimer*

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# About the Editor and Contributors

**Ken Albala,** Editor, is professor of history at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California. He also teaches in the gastronomy program at Boston University. Albala is the author of many books, including *Eating Right in the Renaissance* (University of California Press, 2002), *Food in Early Modern Europe* (Greenwood Press, 2003), *Cooking in Europe 1250–1650* (Greenwood Press, 2005), *The Banquet: Dining in the Great Courts of Late Renaissance Europe* (University of Illinois Press, 2007), *Beans: A History* (Berg Publishers, 2007; winner of the 2008 International Association of Culinary Professionals Jane Grigson Award), and *Pancake* (Reaktion Press, 2008). He has co-edited two works, *The Business of Food* and *Human Cuisine.* He is also editor of three food series with 29 volumes in print, including the Food Cultures Around the World series for Greenwood Press. Albala is also co-editor of the journal *Food Culture and Society*. He is currently researching a history of theological controversies surrounding fasting in the Reformation Era and is editing two collected volumes of essays, one on the Renaissance and the other entitled *The Lord's Supper.* He has also coauthored a cookbook for Penguin/Perigee entitled *The Lost Art of Real Cooking,* which was released in July 2010.

**Julia Abramson** has visited France on a regular basis for more than 25 years to study, research, travel, and eat. She has published essays on aspects of food culture from vegetable carving to gastronomic writing and is the author of the book *Food Culture in France.* Abramson teaches French literature and culture and food studies at the University of Oklahoma, Norman.

**M. Shahrim Al-Karim** is a senior lecturer of food service and hospitality management at the Universiti Putra Malaysia. His research interests include food and culture, culinary tourism, food habits, and consumer behavior. He received a BS in hotel and restaurant management from New York University; an MBA from Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia; and a PhD in hospitality and tourism from Oklahoma State University, United States.

**E. N. Anderson** is professor emeritus of the Department of Anthropology, University of California, Riverside.

**Laura P. Appell-Warren** holds a doctorate in psychological anthropology from Harvard University. Her primary focus of research has been the study of

personhood; however, she has also studied the effects of social change on children's play. She has done research among the Bulusu' of East Kalimantan, Indonesia, and among the Rungus Momogon, a Dusunic-speaking peoples, of Sabah, Malyasia. In addition, she has traveled widely throughout Arctic Canada. She is the editor of *The Iban Diaries of Monica Freeman 1949–1951: Including Ethnographic Drawings, Sketches, Paintings, Photographs and Letters* and is author of the forthcoming volume entitled *Personhood: An Examination of the History and Use of an Anthropological Concept.* In addition to her current research on cradleboard use among Native North Americans, she is a teacher of anthropology at St. Mark's School in Southborough, Massachusetts.

**Heather Arndt-Anderson** is a Portland, Oregon, native who draws culinary inspiration from many world cuisines but prefers cooking from her own backyard. She is a part-time natural resources consultant and a full-time radical homemaker; in her (rare) spare time she writes the food blog *Voodoo & Sauce.*

**Michael Ashkenazi** is a scholar, writer, and consultant who has been researching and writing about Japanese food since 1990. In addition to books and articles on Japanese society, including its food culture, he has written numerous scholarly and professional articles and papers on various subjects including theoretical and methodological issues in anthropology, organized violence, space exploration, migration, religion and ritual, resettling ex-combatants, and small arms. He has taught at higher-education institutions in Japan, Canada, Israel, and the United Kingdom, directing graduate and undergraduate students. He is currently senior researcher and project leader at the Bonn International Center for Conversion in Germany, with responsibility for the areas of small arms and reintegration of ex-combatants. He has conducted field research in East and Southeast Asia, East and West Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.

**Babette Audant** went to Prague after college, where she quickly gave up teaching English in order to cook at a classical French restaurant. After graduating from the Culinary Institute of America, she worked as a chef in New York City for eight years, working at Rainbow Room, Beacon Bar & Grill, and other top-rated restaurants. She is a lecturer at City University of New York Kingsborough's Department of Tourism and Hospitality, and a doctoral candidate in geography at the City University of New York Graduate Center. Her research focuses on public markets and food policy in New York City.

**Gabriela Villagran Backman,** MA (English and Hispanic literature), was born in Sweden and raised in Mexico and the United States; she currently lives in Stockholm, Sweden. She is an independent researcher, interested in food studies, cultural heritage, writing cookbooks, red wine, and the Internet.

**Carolyn Bánfalvi** is a writer based in Budapest. She is the author of *Food Wine Budapest* (Little Bookroom) and *The Food and Wine Lover's Guide to Hungary: With Budapest Restaurants and Trips to the Wine Country* (Park Kiado). She contributes to numerous international food and travel publications and leads food and wine tours through Taste Hungary, her culinary tour company.

**Peter Barrett** is a painter who writes a food blog and is also the Food & Drink writer for *Chronogram Magazine* in New York's Hudson Valley.

**Cynthia D. Bertelsen** is an independent culinary scholar, nutritionist, freelance food writer, and food columnist. She lived in Haiti for three years and worked on a food-consumption study for a farming-systems project in Jacmel, Haiti. She writes a food history blog, *Gherkins & Tomatoes,* found at http://gherkinstomatoes.com.

**Megan K. Blake** is a senior lecturer in geography at the University of Sheffield. She has published research that examines the intersections between place and social practices. While her previous work focused on entrepreneurship and innovation, her recent work has examined food practices and family life.

**Janet Boileau** is a culinary historian who holds a master of arts degree in gastronomy from Le Cordon Bleu Paris and a doctorate in history from the University of Adelaide.

**Andrea Broomfield** is associate professor of English at Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kansas, and author of *Food and Cooking in Victorian England: A History.*

**Cynthia Clampitt** is a culinary historian, world traveler, and award-winning author. In 2010, she was elected to the Society of Women Geographers.

**Neil L. Coletta** is assistant director of food, wine, and the arts and lecturer in the MLA in gastronomy program at Boston University. His current research includes food and aesthetics and experimental pedagogy in the field of food studies.

**Paul Crask** is a travel writer and the author of two travel guides: *Dominica* (2008) and *Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique* (2009).

**Christine Crawford-Oppenheimer** is the information services librarian and archivist at the Culinary Institute of America. She grew up in Ras Tanura, Saudi Arabia.

**Anita Verna Crofts** is on the faculty at the University of Washington's Department of Communication, where she serves as an associate director of the master of communication in digital media program. In addition, she holds an appointment at the University of Washington's Department of Global Health, where she collaborates with partner institutions in Sudan, Namibia, and India on trainings that address leadership, management, and policy development, with her contributions targeted at the concept of storytelling as a leadership and evidence tool. Anita is an intrepid chowhound and publishes on gastroethnographic topics related to the intersection of food and identity. She hosts the blog *Sneeze!* at her Web site www.pepperforthebeast.com.

**Liza Debevec** is a research fellow at the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovene Academy of sciences and arts in Ljubljana, Slovenia. She has a PhD in social anthropology from the University of St. Andrews, United Kingdom. Her research

interests are West Africa and Burkina Faso, food studies, Islam, gender, identity, and practice of everyday life.

**Jonathan Deutsch** is associate professor of culinary arts at Kingsborough Community College, City University of New York, and Public Health, City University of New York Graduate Center. He is the author or editor of five books including, with Sarah Billingsley, *Culinary Improvisation* (Pearson, 2010) and, with Annie Hauck-Lawson, *Gastropolis: Food and New York City* (Columbia University Press, 2009).

**Deborah Duchon** is a nutritional anthropologist in Atlanta, Georgia.

**Nathalie Dupree** is the author of 10 cookbooks, many of which are about the American South, for which she has won two James Beard Awards. She has hosted over 300 television shows on the Public Broadcasting Service, The Food Network, and TLC. She lives with her husband, Jack Bass, who has authored 9 books about the American South and helped with her contribution to *Food Cultures of the World.*

**Pamela Elder** has worked in food public relations and online culinary education and is a freelance writer in the San Francisco Bay area.

**Rachel Finn** is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in various print and online publications. She is the founder and director of Roots Cuisine, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the foodways of the African diaspora around the globe.

**Richard Foss** has been a food writer and culinary historian since 1986, when he started as a restaurant critic for the *Los Angeles Reader*. His book on the history of rum is slated for publication in 2011, to be followed by a book on the history of beachside dining in Los Angeles. He is also a science fiction and fantasy author, an instructor in culinary history and Elizabethan theater at the University of California, Los Angeles, Extension, and is on the board of the Culinary Historians of Southern California.

**Nancy G. Freeman** is a food writer and art historian living in Berkeley, California, with a passion for food history. She has written about cuisines ranging from Ethiopia to the Philippines to the American South.

**Ramin Ganeshram** is a veteran journalist and professional chef trained at the Institute of Culinary Education in New York City, where she has also worked as a recreational chef instructor. Ganeshram also holds a master's degree in journalism from Columbia University. For eight years she worked as a feature writer/stringer for the *New York Times* regional sections, and she spent another eight years as a food columnist and feature writer for *Newsday*. She is the author of *Sweet Hands: Island Cooking from Trinidad and Tobago* (Hippocrene NY, 2006; 2nd expanded edition, 2010) and *Stir It Up* (Scholastic, 2011). In addition to contributing to a variety of food publications including *Saveur, Gourmet, Bon Appetit,* and epicurious.com, Ganeshram has written articles on food, culture, and travel for *Islands* (as contributing editor), *National Geographic Traveler,*

*Forbes Traveler, Forbes Four Seasons,* and many others. Currently, Ganeshram teaches food writing for New York University's School of Continuing Professional Studies.

**Hanna Garth** is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles. She is currently working on a dissertation on household food practices in Santiago de Cuba. Previously, she has conducted research on food culture, health, and nutrition in Cuba, Chile, and the Philippines.

**Mary Gee** is a medical sociology doctoral student at the University of California, San Francisco. Her current research interests include herbalism and Asian and Asian American foodways, especially with regards to multigenerational differences. Since 1995, she has actively worked with local and national eating disorders research and policy and advocacy organizations as well as for a program evaluation research consulting firm.

**Che Ann Abdul Ghani** holds a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in linguistics. She has a keen interest in studying language and language use in gastronomy. She is currently attached to the English Department at Universiti Putra Malaysia. Her research interests range from the use of language in context (pragmatics) to language use in multidisciplinary areas, namely, disciplines related to the social sciences. She also carries out work in translation and editing.

**Maja Godina-Golija** is research adviser at the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, Scientific Research Centre of Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

**Annie Goldberg** is a graduate student studying gastronomy at Boston University.

**Darra Goldstein** is Frances Christopher Oakley Third Century Professor of Russian at Williams College and the founding editor-in-chief of *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture.*

**Keiko Goto,** PhD, is associate professor at the Department of Nutrition and Food Sciences, California State University, Chico. Dr. Goto has more than 15 years of work experience in the field of nutrition and has worked as a practitioner and researcher in various developing countries. Dr. Goto's current research areas include food and culture, child and adolescent nutrition, sustainable food systems, and international nutrition.

**Carla Guerrón Montero** is a cultural and applied anthropologist trained in Latin America and the United States. She is currently associate professor of anthropology in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Delaware. Dr. Guerrón Montero's areas of expertise include gender, ethnicity, and identity; processes of globalization/nationalism, and particularly tourism; and social justice and human rights.

**Mary Gunderson** calls her practice paleocuisineology, where food and cooking bring cultures alive. Through many media, including the sites HistoryCooks.com

and MaryGunderson.com, she writes and speaks about South and North American food history and contemporary creative living and wellness. She wrote and published the award-winning book *The Food Journal of Lewis and Clark: Recipes for an Expedition* (History Cooks, 2003) and has authored six food-history books for kids.

**Liora Gvion** is a senior lecturer at the Kibbutzim College of Education and also teaches at the Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Environment at the Institute of Biochemistry, Food Science and Nutrition Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

**Cherie Y. Hamilton** is a cookbook author and specialist on the food cultures and cuisines of the Portuguese-speaking countries in Europe, South America, Africa, and Asia.

**Jessica B. Harris** teaches English at Queens College/City University of New York and is director of the Institute for the Study of Culinary Cultures at Dillard University.

**Melanie Haupt** is a doctoral candidate in English at the University of Texas at Austin. Her dissertation, "Starting from Scratch: Reading Women's Cooking Communities," explores women's use of cookbooks and recipes in the formation and reification of real and virtual communities.

**Ursula Heinzelmann** is an independent scholar and culinary historian, twice awarded the prestigious Sophie Coe Prize. A trained chef, sommelier, and ex-restaurateur, she now works as a freelance wine and food writer and journalist based in Berlin, Germany.

**Jennifer Hostetter** is an independent food consultant specializing in writing, research, and editing. She has degrees in history and culinary arts and holds a master's degree in food culture and communications from the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Italy. She also served as editorial assistant for this encyclopedia.

**Kelila Jaffe** is a doctoral candidate in the Food Studies Program at New York University. Originally from Sonoma, California, and the daughter of a professional chef, she has pursued anthropological and archaeological foodways research since her entry into academia. She received a BA with distinction in anthropology from the University of Pennsylvania, before attending the University of Auckland, where she earned an MA with honors in anthropology, concentrating in archaeology. Her research interests include past foodways, domestication, and zooarchaeology, and she has conducted fieldwork in Fiji, New Zealand, and Hawaii.

**Zilkia Janer** is associate professor of global studies at Hofstra University in New York. She is the author of *Puerto Rican Nation-Building Literature: Impossible Romance* (2005) and *Latino Food Culture* (2008).

**Brelyn Johnson** is a graduate of the master's program in food studies at New York University.

**Kate Johnston** is currently based in Italy, where she is an independent cultural food researcher and writer and a daily ethnographer of people's food habits. She

has a degree in anthropology from Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia, and a recent master's degree in food culture and communication from the University of Gastronomic Sciences, Italy. She was also editorial assistant for this encyclopedia.

**Desiree Koh** was born and raised in Singapore. A writer focusing on travel, hospitality, sports, fitness, business, and, of course, food, Koh's explorations across the globe always begin at the market, as she believes that the sight, scent, and savoring of native produce and cuisine are the key to the city's heart. The first and only female in Major League Eating's Asia debut, Koh retired from competition to better focus on each nibble and sip of fine, hopefully slow food.

**Bruce Kraig** is emeritus professor of history at Roosevelt University in Chicago and adjunct faculty at the Culinary School of Kendall College, Chicago. He has published and edited widely in the field of American and world food history. Kraig is also the founding president of the Culinary Historians of Chicago and the Greater Midwest Foodways Alliance.

**R. J. Krajewski** is the research services librarian at Simmons College, where among other things he facilitates discovery of food-culture research, especially through the lens of race, class, and gender. His own engagement with food is seasonally and locally rooted, starting in his own small, urban homestead, much like his Polish and German ancestors.

**Erin Laverty** is a freelance food writer and researcher based in Brooklyn, New York. She holds a master's degree in food studies from New York University.

**Robert A. Leonard** has a PhD in theoretical linguistics from Columbia. He studies the way people create and communicate meaning, including through food. He was born in Brooklyn and trained as a cook and *panaderia-reposteria* manager in the Caribbean; his doctoral studies led him to eight years of fieldwork in language, culture, and food in Africa and Southeast Asia. In the arts, as an undergraduate he cofounded and led the rock group Sha Na Na and with them opened for their friend Jimi Hendrix at the Woodstock Festival. Leonard is probably one of a very few people who have worked with both the Grateful Dead and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which in recent years recruited him to teach the emerging science of forensic linguistics at Quantico.

**Jane Levi** is an independent consultant and writer based in London, England. She is currently working on her PhD at the London Consortium, examining food in utopias, funded by her work on post-trade financial policy in the City of London.

**Yrsa Lindqvist** is a European ethnologist working as the leading archivist at the Folk Culture Archive in Helsinki. Her research about food and eating habits in the late 1990s, combined with earlier collections at the archive, resulted in 2009 in the publication *Mat, Måltid, Minne. Hundraår av finlandssvensk matkulur.* The book analyzes the changes in housekeeping and attitudes toward food. She has also contributed to other publications focusing on identity questions and has worked as a junior researcher at the Academy of Finland.

**William G. Lockwood** is professor emeritus of cultural anthropology at the University of Michigan. His central interest is ethnicity and interethnic relations. He has conducted long-term field research in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Croatian community in Austria and also among Roma and with a variety of ethnic groups in America, including Arabs, Finns, and Bosnians. He has long held a special interest in how food functions in ethnic group maintenance and in reflecting intra- and intergroup relations.

**Yvonne R. Lockwood** is curator emeritus of folklife at the Michigan State University Museum. Her formal training is in folklore, history, and Slavic languages and literatures. Research in Bosnia, Austria, and the United States, especially the Great Lakes region, has resulted in numerous publications, exhibitions, festival presentations, and workshops focused on her primary interests of foodways and ethnic traditions.

**Janet Long-Solís,** an anthropologist and archaeologist, is a research associate at the Institute of Historical Research at the National University of Mexico. She has published several books and articles on the chili pepper, the history of Mexican food, and the exchange of food products between Europe and the Americas in the 16th century.

**Kristina Lupp** has a background in professional cooking and has worked in Toronto and Florence. She is currently pursuing a master of arts in gastronomy at the University of Adelaide.

**Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire** is a lecturer in culinary arts in the Dublin Institute of Technology. Máirtín is well known as a chef, culinary historian, food writer, broadcaster, and ballad singer. He lives in Dublin with his wife and two daughters. He was the first Irish chef to be awarded a PhD, for his oral history of Dublin restaurants.

**Glenn R. Mack** is a food historian with extensive culinary training in Uzbekistan, Russia, Italy, and the United States. He cofounded the Culinary Academy of Austin and the Historic Foodways Group of Austin and currently serves as president of Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts Atlanta.

**Andrea MacRae** is a lecturer in the Le Cordon Bleu Graduate Program in Gastronomy at the University of Adelaide, Australia.

**Giorgos Maltezakis** earned his PhD in anthropology with research in cooperation with the Institute Studiorium Humanitatis of the Ljubljana Graduate School of the Humanities. His dissertation was on consumerism, the global market, and food, which was an ethnographic approach to the perception of food in Greece and Slovenia.

**Bertie Mandelblatt** is assistant professor at the University of Toronto, cross-appointed to the departments of Historical Studies and Geography. Her research concerns the early-modern French Atlantic, with a focus on commodity exchanges at the local and global scales: Her two current projects are the history

of food provisioning in the Franco-Caribbean and the transatlantic circulation of French rum and molasses, both in the 17th and 18th centuries.

**Marty Martindale** is a freelance writer living in Largo, Florida.

**Laura Mason** is a writer and food historian with a special interest in local, regional, and traditional foods in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. Her career has explored many dimensions of food and food production, including cooking for a living, unraveling the history of sugar confectionery, and trying to work out how many traditional and typically British foods relate to culture and landscape. Her publications include *Taste of Britain* (with Catherine Brown; HarperCollins, 2006), *The Food Culture of Great Britain* (Greenwood, 2004), and *The National Trust Farmhouse Cookbook* (National Trust, 2009).

**Anton Masterovoy** is a PhD candidate at the Graduate Center, City University of New York. He is working on his dissertation, titled "Eating Soviet: Food and Culture in USSR, 1917–1991."

**Anne Engammare McBride,** a Swiss native, food writer, and editor, is the director of the Experimental Cuisine Collective and a food studies PhD candidate at New York University. Her most recent book is *Culinary Careers: How to Get Your Dream Job in Food,* coauthored with Rick Smilow.

**Michael R. McDonald** is associate professor of anthropology at Florida Gulf Coast University. He is the author of *Food Culture in Central America*.

**Naomi M. McPherson** is associate professor of cultural anthropology and graduate program coordinator at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan Campus. Since 1981, she has accumulated over three years of field research with the Bariai of West New Britain, Papua New Guinea.

**Katrina Meynink** is an Australia-based freelance food writer and researcher. She has a master's degree in gastronomy through Le Cordon Bleu and the University of Adelaide under a scholarship from the James Beard Foundation. She is currently completing her first cookbook.

**Barbara J. Michael** is a sociocultural anthropologist whose research focuses on social organization, economics, decision making, and gender. Her geographic focus is on the Middle East and East Africa, where she has done research with the pastoral nomadic Hawazma Baggara and on traditional medicine in Yemen and is working on a video about men's cafes as a social institution. She teaches anthropology at the University of North Carolina Wilmington and has also worked as a consultant for several United Nations agencies.

**Diana Mincyte** is a fellow at the Rachel Carson Center at the Ludwig Maximilian University-Munich and visiting assistant professor in the Department of Advertising at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Mincyte examines topics at the interface of food, the environment, risk society, and global inequalities. Her book investigates raw-milk politics in the European Union to consider the production risk society and its institutions in post-Socialist states.

**Rebecca Moore** is a doctoral student studying the history of biotechnology at the University of Toronto in Ontario, Canada.

**Nawal Nasrallah,** a native of Iraq, was a professor of English and comparative literature at the universities of Baghdad and Mosul until 1990. As an independent scholar, she wrote the award-winning *Delights from the Garden of Eden: A Cookbook and a History of the Iraqi Cuisine* and *Annals of the Caliphs' Kitchens* (an English translation of Ibn Sayyar al-Warraq's 10th-century Baghdadi cookbook).

**Henry Notaker** graduated from the University of Oslo with a degree in literature and worked for many years as a foreign correspondent and host of arts and letters shows on Norwegian national television. He has written several books about food history, and with *Food Culture in Scandinavia* he won the Gourmand World Cookbook Award for best culinary history in 2009. His last book is a bibliography of early-modern culinary literature, *Printed Cookbooks in Europe 1470–1700.* He is a member of the editorial board of the journal *Food and History.*

**Kelly O'Leary** is a graduate student at Boston University in gastronomy and food studies and executive chef at the Bayridge University Residence and Cultural Center.

**Fabio Parasecoli** is associate professor and coordinator of food studies at the New School in New York City. He is author of *Food Culture in Italy* (2004) and *Bite Me: Food and Popular Culture* (2008).

**Susan Ji-Young Park** is the program director and head of curriculum development at École de Cuisine Pasadena (www.ecolecuisine.com); project leader for Green Algeria, a national environmental initiative; and a writer for LAWEEKLY'S Squid Ink. She has written curriculum for cooking classes at Los Angeles Unified School District, Sur La Table, Whole Foods Market, Central Market, and Le Cordon Bleu North America. She and her husband, Chef Farid Zadi, have co-written recipes for *Gourmet Magazine* and the *Los Angeles Times*. The couple are currently writing several cookbooks on North African, French, and Korean cuisines.

**Rosemary Parkinson** is author of *Culinaria: The Caribbean, Nyam Jamaica,* and *Barbados Bu'n-Bu'n,* and she contributes culinary travel stories to Caribbean magazines.

**Charles Perry** majored in Middle East languages at Princeton University, the University of California, Berkeley, and the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies, Shimlan, Lebanon. From 1968 to 1976 he was a copy editor and staff writer at *Rolling Stone* magazine in San Francisco, before leaving to work as a freelance writer specializing in food. From 1990 to 2008, he was a staff writer in the food section of the *Los Angeles Times*. He has published widely on the history of Middle Eastern food and was a major contributor to the *Oxford Companion to Food* (1999).

**Irina Petrosian** is a native of Armenia and a professional journalist who has written for Russian, Armenian, and U.S.-based newspapers. She is the coauthor of

*Armenian Food: Fact, Fiction, and Folklore* and holds degrees in journalism from Moscow State University and Indiana University.

**Suzanne Piscopo** is a nutrition, family, and consumer studies lecturer at the University of Malta in Malta. She is mainly involved in the training of home economics and primary-level teachers, as well as in nutrition and consumer-education projects in different settings. Suzanne is a registered public health nutritionist, and her research interests focus on socioecological determinants of food intake, nutrition interventions, and health promotion. She has also written a series of short stories for children about food. Suzanne enjoys teaching and learning about the history and culture of food and is known to creatively experiment with the ingredients at hand when cooking the evening meal together with her husband, Michael.

**Theresa Preston-Werner** is an advanced graduate student in anthropology at Northwestern University.

**Meg Ragland** is a culinary history researcher and librarian. She lives in Boston, Massachusetts.

**Carol Selva Rajah** is an award-winning chef and food writer currently based in Sydney, Australia. She has written 10 cookbooks on Malaysian and Southeast Asian cuisine. Her book *The Food of India* won the gold award for the Best Hardcover Recipe Book at the prestigious Jacob's Creek World Food Media Awards.

**Birgit Ricquier** is pursuing a PhD in linguistics at the Université Libre de Bruxelles and the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium, with a fellowship from the Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique (FNRS). The topic of her PhD project is "A Comparative Linguistic Approach to the History of Culinary Practice in Bantu-Speaking Africa." She has spent several months in central Africa, including one month in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a member of the Boyekoli Ebale Congo 2010 Expedition and two months of research focused on food cultures in Congo.

**Amy Riolo** is an award-winning author, lecturer, cooking instructor, and consultant. She is the author of *Arabian Delights: Recipes and Princely Entertaining Ideas from the Arabian Peninsula, Nile Style: Egyptian Cuisine and Culture,* and *The Mediterranean Diabetes Cookbook.* Amy has lived, worked, and traveled extensively through Egypt and enjoys fusing cuisine, culture, and history into all aspects of her work. Please see www.amyriolo.com, www.baltimoreegypt.org, and diningwithdiplomats.blogspot.com for more information and further reading.

**Owen Roberts** is a journalist, communications instructor, and director of research communications for the University of Guelph in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. He holds a doctorate of education from Texas Tech University and Texas A&M University.

**Fiona Ross** is a gastrodetective whose headquarters is the Bodleian Library in Oxford, United Kingdom. She spends her time there investigating the eating foibles of the famous and infamous. Her cookery book *Dining with Destiny* is the

result: When you want to know what Lenin lunched on or what JFK ate by the poolside, *Dining with Destiny* has the answer.

**Signe Rousseau** (née Hansen) is Danish by birth but a long-term resident of southern Africa and is a researcher and part-time lecturer at the University of Cape Town. Following an MA in the Department of English and a PhD (on food media and celebrity chefs) in the Centre for Film and Media Studies, she now teaches critical literacy and professional communication in the School of Management Studies (Faculty of Commerce).

**Kathleen Ryan** is a consulting scholar in the African Section of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia. She has carried out research in Kenya since 1990, when she began a study of Maasai cattle herders in Kajiado District.

**Helen Saberi** was Alan Davidson's principal assistant in the completion of the *Oxford Companion to Food.* She is the author of *Noshe Djan: Afghan Food and Cookery;* coauthor of *Trifle* with Alan Davidson; and coauthor of *The Road to Vindaloo* with David Burnett; her latest book is *Tea: A Global History.*

**Cari Sánchez** holds a master of arts in gastronomy from the University of Adelaide/Le Cordon Bleu in South Australia. Her dissertation explores the global spread of the Argentine *asado*. She currently lives in Jacksonville, Florida, where she writes the food and travel blog *viCARIous* and is the marketing manager for a craft brewery.

**Peter Scholliers** teaches history at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and is currently head of the research group "Social and Cultural Food Studies" (FOST). He studies the history of food in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. He co-edits the journal *Food and History* and is involved in various ways in the Institut Européen d'Histoire et des Cultures de l'Alimentation (Tours, France). Recently, he published *Food Culture in Belgium* (Greenwood, 2008). More information can be found at http://www.vub.ac.be/FOST/fost_in_english/.

**Colleen Taylor Sen** is the author of *Food Culture in India; Curry: A Global History; Pakoras, Paneer, Pappadums: A Guide to Indian Restaurant Menus,* and many articles on the food of the Indian Subcontinent. She is a regular participant in the Oxford Food Symposium.

**Roger Serunyigo** was born and lives in Kampala, Uganda. He graduated from Makerere University with a degree in urban and regional planning, has worked in telecommunications, and is now a professional basketball player for the Uganda National Team. He also coaches a women's basketball team (The Magic Stormers).

**Dorette Snover** is a chef and author. Influenced by French heritage and the food traditions of the Pennsylvania Dutch country, Chef Snover teaches exploration of the world via a culinary map at her school, C'est si Bon! in Chapel Hill. While the stock simmers, she is writing a novel about a French bread apprentice.

**Celia Sorhaindo** is a freelance photographer and writer. She was the editor of the 2008 and 2009 *Dominica Food and Drink Guide* magazine and content manager for the Dominica section of the magazine *Caribbean Homes & Lifestyle*.

**Lyra Spang** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Anthropology and the Food Studies Program at Indiana University. She has written about food, sex, and symbolism; the role of place in defining organic; and the importance of social relationships in small-scale food business in Belize. She grew up on a farm in southern Belize and is a proud promoter of that country's unique and diverse culinary heritage.

**Lois Stanford** is an agricultural anthropologist in the Department of Anthropology at New Mexico State University. In her research, she has examined the globalization of food systems both in Mexico and in the U.S. Southwest. Her current research focuses on the critical role of food heritage and plant conservation in constructing and maintaining traditional foodways and cultural identity in New Mexico. In collaboration with local food groups, she is currently developing a community food assessment project in the Mesilla Valley in southern New Mexico.

**Aliza Stark** is a senior faculty member at the Agriculture, Food, and Environment Institute of Biochemistry, Food Science, and Nutrition at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

**Maria "Ging" Gutierrez Steinberg** is a marketing manager for a New York City–based specialty food company and a food writer. She has a master's degree in food studies from New York University and is a graduate of Le Cordon Bleu. Her articles have appeared in various publications in Asia and the United States.

**Anita Stewart** is a cookbook author and Canadian culinary activist from Elora, Ontario, Canada.

**Emily Stone** has written about Guatemalan cuisine in the *Radcliffe Culinary Times,* and she is at work on a nonfiction book about chocolate in Central America. She currently teaches journalism and creative writing at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, China.

**Asele Surina** is a Russian native and former journalist who now works as a translator and interpreter. Since 1999 she has worked at the Institute of Classical Archaeology at the University of Texas on joint projects with an archaeological museum in Crimea, Ukraine.

**Aylin Öney Tan** is an architect by training and studied conservation of historic structures in Turkey, Italy, and the United Kingdom. Eventually, her passion for food and travel led her to write on food. Since 2003, she has had a weekly food column in *Cumhuriyet,* a prestigious national daily, and contributes to various food magazines. She was a jury member of the Slow Food Award 2000–2003, with her nominees receiving awards. She contributes to the Terra Madre and Presidia projects as the leader of the Ankara Convivium. She won the Sophie Coe Award on food history in 2008 for her article "Poppy: Potent yet Frail," presented

previously at the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery where she's become a regular presenter. Currently, she is the curator of the Culinary Culture Section of Princess Islands' City Museum. She is happy to unite her expertise in archaeology and art history from her previous career with her unbounded interest in food culture.

**Nicole Tarulevicz** teaches at the School of Asian Languages and Studies at the University of Tasmania.

**Karen Lau Taylor** is a freelance food writer and consultant whose food curriculum vitae includes a master's degree in food studies from New York University, an advanced certificate from the Wine and Spirits Education Trust, and a gig as pastry cook at a five-star hotel after completing L'Academie de Cuisine's pastry arts program. She is working toward a master's degree in public health while she continues to write, teach, test recipes, eat, and drink from her home in Alexandria, Virginia.

**Thy Tran** is trained as a professional chef. She established Wandering Spoon to provide cooking classes, culinary consultation, and educational programming for culinary academies and nonprofit organizations throughout Northern California. Currently, she is a chef instructor at the International Culinary Schools at the Art Institute of California–San Francisco and Tante Marie's. She is also the founder and director of the Asian Culinary Forum. She co-authored *The Essentials of Asian Cooking, Taste of the World,* and the award-winning guide, *Kitchen Companion*.

**Leena Trivedi-Grenier** is a Bay-area food writer, cooking teacher, and social media consultant. Her writings have appeared in *The Business of Food: Encyclopedia of the Food and Drink Industry, Culinary Trends* magazine, and the *Cultural Arts Resources for Teachers and Students* newsletter and will be featured in several upcoming titles by Greenwood Press. She also runs a food/travel/gastronomy blog called *Leena Eats This Blog* (www.leenaeats.com).

**Karin Vaneker** graduated from the AKI Academy of Visual Arts in Enschede, the Netherlands. She later attended Sint-Lukas Hoger Instituut voor Schone Kunsten in Brussels, Belgium. She has written for numerous Dutch newspapers and magazines, specializing in trends and the cultural and other histories of ingredients and cuisines, and has published several books. Furthermore, Vaneker has worked for museums and curated an exhibition about New World taro (L. *Xanthosoma* spp.). At present she is researching its potential in domestic cuisines and gastronomy.

**Penny Van Esterik** is professor of anthropology at York University, Toronto, where she teaches nutritional anthropology, advocacy anthropology, and feminist theory. She does fieldwork in Southeast Asia and has developed materials on breast-feeding and women's work and infant and young child feeding.

**Richard Wilk** is professor of anthropology and gender studies at Indiana University, where he directs the Food Studies Program. With a PhD in anthropology from the University of Arizona, he has taught at the University of California,

Berkeley; University of California, Santa Cruz; New Mexico State University; and University College London and has held fellowships at Gothenburg University and the University of London. His publications include more than 125 papers and book chapters, a textbook in economic anthropology, and several edited volumes. His most recent books are *Home Cooking in the Global Village* (Berg Publishers), *Off the Edge: Experiments in Cultural Analysis* (with Orvar Lofgren; Museum Tusculanum Press), *Fast Food/Slow Food* (Altamira Press), and *Time, Consumption, and Everyday Life* (with Elizabeth Shove and Frank Trentmann; Berg Publishers).

**Chelsie Yount** is a PhD student of anthropology at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. She lived in Senegal in 2005 and again in 2008, when performing ethnographic research for her master's thesis at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, on the topic of Senegalese food and eating habits.

**Marcia Zoladz** is a cook, food writer, and food-history researcher with her own Web site, Cozinha da Marcia (Marcia's Kitchen; www.cozinhadamarcia.com.br). She is a regular participant and contributor at the Oxford Symposium on Food and History and has published three books in Brazil, Germany, and Holland—*Cozinha Portuguesa* (Portuguese cooking), *Muito Prazer* (Easy recipes), and *Brigadeiros e Bolinhas* (Sweet and savory Brazilian finger foods).

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# Food Cultures of the World Encyclopedia

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# Food Cultures of the World Encyclopedia

## THE AMERICAS

**Volume 2**

KEN ALBALA, EDITOR

GREENWOOD

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# List of Abbreviations

c = cup
fl oz = fluid ounce
gal = gallon
in. = inch
lb = pound
mL = milliliter
oz = ounce
pt = pint
qt = quart
tbsp = tablespoon
tsp = teaspoon

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# Preface

This encyclopedia is the culmination of nearly a decade's work on the *Food Culture around the World* series. As that project expanded to 20 volumes, we realized that many peoples and places, fascinating and important in their own right, had not been covered. Considering that the cultural study of food has become more sophisticated and comprehensive over the past decade, that food has become a legitimate academic topic in curricula at every level of education, and that we seem to become more obsessed with food every day, we recognized that we simply could not leave out much of the planet. The only way to satisfy this growing demand is the set you see before you, which includes material covered in the series plus new articles that span the globe. We have gathered food scholars from around the world—people whose passion and expertise have given them deep insight into the ingredients, cooking methods, and ways of eating and thinking about food in their respective countries.

A number of questions regarding breadth and depth naturally arose in planning this work, particularly about the level of analysis for each article. Could we do justice to the vast array of distinct cuisines on earth? Could we include regional coverage for well-recognized food cultures? That is, rather than the nation-state as the criterion for inclusion, why not add Alsace, Provence, and Burgundy with France, or Sichuan, Hunan, and Canton with China? It became apparent that we would need another 20 volumes or risk very brisk, superficial coverage and that as arbitrary as the construction of nation-states has been historically, in particular the way minority cultures have tended to be obscured, the best way to organize this encyclopedia was by nation. Regional variations and minority groups can, of course, be discussed within the framework of nation-based articles. On the other hand, some groups frankly demanded separate entries—those who stood out as unique and distinct from the majority culture in which they happen politically to be included, or in some cases those people who either transcend national boundaries or even those very small places, whose great diversity demanded separate coverage as truly different from the culture around them. Thus we include the Basques separate from Spain and France, and the Hmong. We have not, however, included every single people merely on the basis of national status. This should not be taken to suggest that these cultures are unimportant but merely that many places share a common culture with those around them, though divided by national borders. In such cases we have provided cross-references. This seemed a preferable solution to suffering repetitiveness or unmanageable size.

The format for each entry also raised many questions. "Eating Out," for example, is simply not relevant in some places on earth. Would forcing each article into a common structure ultimately do injustice to the uniqueness of each culture? In the end it seemed that the ability to conduct cross-cultural analysis proved one of the most valuable assets of this set, so that one could easily compare what's for lunch in Brazil or Brunei. Moreover, tracing the various global currents of influence has been made possible since a shared set of parameters places each article on a common footing. We can trace, for example, the culinary influence of various peoples as they spread around the world. In this respect this work is unique. There are several excellent food encyclopedias on the market, all of which cover individual ingredients, topical themes, cooking methods, and sometimes recipes. None, however, treats individual food cultures as discrete units of analysis, and for students hoping to find an in-depth but succinct description of places, or for those hoping to compare a single food topic across cultures, this is the only source to which they can turn. We anticipate that this work will be invaluable for students, scholars, food writers, as well as that indomitable horde popularly known as foodies.

The other major question in designing this encyclopedia was how to define what exactly constitutes a *food culture*. This term should be distinguished from *cuisine,* which refers only to the cooking, serving, and appreciation of food. Naturally we include this within each entry and in doing so have taken the broadest possible definition of the term *cuisine*. That is, if a people cooks and recognizes a common set of recipes and discusses them with a common vocabulary, then it should be deemed a cuisine. Thus there is no place on earth without a cuisine. A nation, continent, region, and even a small group may share a common cuisine. This encyclopedia, however, covers much more. It explores the social context of consumption, the shared values and symbolic meanings that inform food choices, and the rituals and daily routine—indeed everything that constitutes a food culture. Thus we include religion, health, mealtimes, and special occasions, as well as the way certain foods confer status or have meanings beyond simple sensory gratification. Nor have we neglected the gastronomic angle, as recipes are an essential expression of what people think is good to eat, and their popularity is the outcome of decisions made at every level of society, from the farmer who grows food, and the environment and material resources that make it possible, to the government policy that promotes certain ingredients, to the retailers who market them, to the technologies by which they are transformed, and to the individual preference of family members at the level of the household. To this end we have added food culture snapshots to each entry, which puts a human face on the broader topics under discussion.

As with the series that preceded this encyclopedia, our aim is to present the panoply of human experience through the lens of food in an effort to better understand and appreciate our differences. We will find remarkably common experiences among us, especially as the world increasingly falls under the sway of corporate multinational food industries, but we will also find deep, profound, and persistent distinctions, ones that should and must be preserved because they are essential to who were are and how we define ourselves. These are differences

that should not be effaced nor lost as our tastes become increasingly cosmopolitan. I hope that in reading these articles you find, like me, that the world is a marvelously diverse place and what people eat tells us about them in such an immediate and palpable way that in a certain sense you feel you know the people at some level. This, of course, is the first step toward understanding, appreciating, and living with each other peacefully on this small lump of turf we call earth.

*Ken Albala*
*University of the Pacific*

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# Argentina

## Overview

The Argentine Republic is located in South America and is the second-largest Latin American country. It is divided into several culinary zones, each distinguished by individual gastronomic characteristics that are difficult to find elsewhere in Argentina. In the central region and las Pampas, dishes with a strong Italian influence, such as pizza, pasta, and polenta, are consumed on a daily basis. Pre-Hispanic dishes and ingredients, such as corn, potatoes, and chilies, are common in the northwestern provinces, while Welsh and Central European immigrants have influenced the gastronomy of the Tierra del Fuego region.

At the same time, the renowned Argentinean barbecue, the *asado,* which always starts with a *picada,* an aperitif, most often Vermouth and cold cuts, cheese, and olives; the preference for drinking red wine and yerba maté instead of other beverages; the passion for eating *dulce de leche* (thick caramelized sweetened milk); and the famous empanadas (small semicircular pies) are culinary examples present in all Argentinean households.

## Food Culture Snapshot

The Russo family manages several hotels in Necochea, a port city on the southern coast of Buenos Aires Province, where they have lived all their lives. Maria del Carmen and Alberto have four grown-up children: two daughters, also in the hotel-management profession, and two sons, the youngest living in Italy. The Russos exemplify a middle-class, Buenos Aires Province lifestyle, with very conservative culinary practices shown in part by a skeptical view not only of foreign cuisines but also of other regional Argentinean dishes.

Alberto and Maria del Carmen start their days with yerba maté (a hot drink made from the leaves of *Ilex paraguariensis* and drunk from a gourd vessel with a metal straw, or *bombilla*) followed by a light breakfast of *café con leche* (coffee with warm milk) and freshly baked *flautas,* a similar though smaller version of the French baguette, richly covered with butter and marmalade. Lunch is usually eaten around one o'clock and consists of an entrée, often just a steak or oven-baked chicken, with a salad on the side, accompanied by a red wine spritzer. Maria del Carmen's grandchildren are served another light meal called *merienda,* a custom common to countries with Spanish influence, consisting of a glass of milk and sandwiches or something sweet such as cookies or pastries. Adults might join the children with some yerba maté and a small bite of *algo dulce,* "something sweet."

Dinner is the most important meal of the day and is usually eaten at 9:00 P.M. Most often it consists of a single dish with vegetables or a salad on the side. At least twice a week, the Russos have home-delivered empanadas for dinner accompanied by a couple glasses of red wine. Maria del Carmen is enthusiastic about the new time-saving home-delivery services that have become part of their daily lifestyle and finds that the empanadas taste just like homemade. To round off dinner, a light dessert, such as flan (crème caramel), is served along with a cup of coffee or tea. The Russos follow the traditional custom of eating a simple

pasta dish on Tuesdays and a homemade, often-filled pasta entrée on Sundays. All generations look forward to the Saturday asado, when family and friends meet for an extended lunch of barbecued beef, spicy pork sausages, blood sausages, salad of lettuce, tomato, and onion, fresh bread, and red wine. A couple of bites of quince fruit paste (*membrillo)* and cheese may round off the meal.

## Major Foodstuffs

Argentina is an urban country, with approximately 90 percent of the population living in cities. It is also a mostly self-sufficient nation that has little need to import foodstuffs and exports a surplus of animal products, milk, corn, wheat, sorghum, soybeans, oilseeds, some fruits, and wine.

Beef is the most important staple in Argentina, accounting for the highest consumption rate in the world. Since the arrival of the Spaniards, cattle have thrived on the Pampas, the central flatlands of the country, where the humidity and soil quality result in high-quality grass. Nowadays, Argentinean cattle may be grain or grass fed, but there is an increasing awareness that the meat of grass-fed cattle is healthier. Lamb and young goat's meat are also popular choices for the barbecue, particularly in the Patagonian region. Chicken is often oven-baked or made into the traditional Spanish arroz con pollo (chicken with rice), a favorite in the northwestern parts of Argentina.

Grains such as corn and wheat play an important role in Argentinean cuisine. Corn is a staple of the Andean region and is the base ingredient in *locro,* a pre-Hispanic corn, vegetable, and meat stew, and in polenta, an Italian cornmeal dish sometimes served with tomato sauce and cheese or accompanying beef stews. Wheat is used to produce pasta and as flour for baking bread and a wide variety of pastries and cookies.

Cow milk is inexpensive and the primary ingredient in dulce de leche, a caramelized milk spread similar to toffee and a favorite filling in pastries. Cheese, both fresh and ripened, is an important staple. Argentinean provolone and reggianito, a regional Parmesan cheese, are two of the most popular in the country. Other dairy staples are *mendicream,* similar to cream cheese, and yogurt, categorized as children's food.



Argentian barbeque featuring beef asado. (Claus Mikosch | Dreamstime.com)

One of the most important beverages in Argentina is maté, a hot infusion made of yerba maté (*Ilex paraguariensis*) leaves grown in the northern part of the country. The leaves are steeped in a small gourd and drunk by sucking the liquid through a bombilla, or strawlike metal rod with a sieve on the bottom, which ensures that the leaves stay in the container. Drinking yerba maté, or *matear,* must follow certain rules: The host fills the gourd with hot water, sucks the liquid, refills the gourd, and passes it clockwise to the next person, who does the same. The gourd is refilled and passed around until the infusion becomes tasteless. This is an important social custom in the country, where friends and family often meet to share a gourd of the infusion. There are several kinds of yerba maté, including ones that are bitter, sweet, or flavored with orange rinds.

The consumption of legumes is not widespread in Argentina, aside from a few dishes such as the *fainá,* an oven-baked chickpea pancake usually eaten with pizza in Buenos Aires. Lentils and beans are used in soups and salads.

Red wine is one of Argentina's largest exports, and grapes are most commonly grown in the regions of Mendoza and San Juan. Climate and geography have played an important role in the cultivation of grapes in these regions. Due to drier weather conditions and higher altitudes, grapes in Argentina do

not suffer from as many diseases as their European counterparts. Malbec, Bonarda, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Shiraz varieties, among others, thrive in the area. More recently, organic red wine has become very popular.

## Cooking

Traditionally, women in Argentina are in charge of feeding their families. However, men may sometimes cook more elaborate pasta dishes and take care of the Saturday barbecue. Families that are able to afford it have a cook. Argentinean cooking methods are simple and straightforward. In cities, kitchens have gas stoves and ovens, and most dishes are prepared by frying, stewing, or baking. Since microwaves are very rare, leftovers are often warmed in ovens. Wood-burning stoves are commonly found in more rural areas of the country.

Barbecuing is an art in Argentina, and two different methods may be used. For smaller cuts of meat, sausages, and vegetables, a regular grill is preferred, but when barbecuing a whole animal (a pig, cow, lamb, or goat), an open pit is used. Seasonings are used sparingly; most often, some salt and nothing else is sprinkled on the meat. However, *chimichurri,* a spicy sauce, accompanies all barbecued meats.

***Chimichurri***

1 c olive oil

⅓ c white wine vinegar

⅓ c finely chopped onion

3 finely chopped cloves garlic

½ tsp cayenne pepper

1 tsp dried oregano

1 tsp salt

A pinch of black pepper

Put the ingredients in a container with a lid, and blend well. Put in a cool place or in the refrigerator, and let the chimichurri rest for a couple of days so the flavors really blend. Serve as a sauce with barbecued meats and vegetables.

## Typical Meals

Even though Argentina is large, the structure of meals, if not the contents, is very similar throughout the country. Usually, Argentineans have three meals a day, breakfast, lunch, and dinner, but children and some adults may also eat a light meal in the middle of the afternoon. Lunch and dinner are the main daily meals, with some kind of meat being the main ingredient.

Breakfast consists of crackers or toast with cream cheese or jam and a cup of coffee or tea. Children may also eat packaged cereals with milk or sometimes have a pastry and drink chocolate milk. Argentinean lunches are eaten around 1 P.M. Since meat is a major staple, most menus are planned according to the type of meat served. A great favorite is beef or veal Wiener schnitzel (flattened breaded cutlets), though sometimes it is made with chicken. It is served with French fries or mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, or pumpkin. Salads consist of tomatoes and lettuce. Vegetables on the side may include boiled broccoli or cauliflower. Or simple pasta dishes such as boiled spaghetti with melted butter and freshly grated provolone or Parmesan cheese may be served. Red wine spritzers or mineral water are the drinks of choice.

Dinner, eaten at 9 P.M., is the most important meal of the day and a chance for the family to get together after a long day. There are few dishes reserved for dinner menus, and unless it is a special occasion, Argentineans dine on roasted chicken and potatoes. A common starter is *matambre,* literally "hunger killer," made by filling a flank steak with carrots, spinach, and hard-boiled eggs, seasoned with oregano, garlic, and paprika; it is served cold. In the Buenos Aires metropolitan area, gnocchi are a must on the 29th of the month, and many people still maintain this tradition.

## Eating Out

Argentineans love eating and will gladly visit restaurants often, if affordable. Recently, Buenos Aires has seen a surge of restaurants driven by young chefs inspired by international cuisines. However,

Argentineans love their meat and are content if they are served a good steak and great bottle of red wine. Regional food restaurants, serving locro, fried empanadas, and other local dishes, are very popular in Buenos Aires. Going out for a pizza with friends is also common, and in this case Argentineans prefer a glass of cold beer instead of wine to accompany their meal. The most popular pizza is a plain mozzarella cheese pizza with a slice of fainá (the flat chickpea bread). Argentinean pizzas are similar to Italian ones, but the crust is thicker and they have a lot more cheese on top. In Buenos Aires all the different regional Italian pizzas are available in the same city. It is thus easy to enjoy a piece of Ligurian fainá (in Italian *farinata*), an Umbrian cheese and onion pizza, and the traditional Neapolitan tomato and mozzarella pizza in the same restaurant.



Empanadas are often served at parties as a starter or main course, or in festivals. Shops specialize in freshly made empanadas, with many flavors and fillings. (Viktorija Kuprijanova | Dreamstime.com)

Eating on the go is considered bad manners in Argentina; therefore, there are few street-food stands. However, the popular *choripán,* a chorizo-filled baguette seasoned with chimichurri, is sold only on the street. Still, this must be eaten by the stand and is not considered take-out food. American-style fast food has become popular during the last few years, and the younger generation often prefers to eat at McDonald's. However, *roticerías,* serving take-out barbecued chicken and vegetable and potato croquettes and empanadas, are still very popular. Other quick meal solutions that have appeared in the last few years are home-delivery services, which range from breakfast served at the home to a wide selection of empanadas. Sushi and Chinese food are recent popular take-out choices in Argentina today.

In Buenos Aires, the tradition of meeting friends for an espresso or cappuccino with grilled ham on toast is still very much alive and has spread to other parts of the country. Going out to ice cream parlors where ice cream from the Italian tradition is served in many varieties is also very popular.

## Special Occasions

With a strong Catholic heritage, most Argentinean festivities are related to Christian celebrations. However, some yearly events are celebrated nationally or regionally. Christmas is usually a family affair. Most families attend mass late at night on Christmas Eve and eat dinner around midnight. Christmas menus are flexible, but some dishes are a must on the Argentinean table such as the main course, an oven-baked stuffed turkey or a barbecued piglet. Cider (a carbonated alcoholic drink), Spanish *turrón* (an almond or nut confection that may be either soft or hard), and *pan dulce* (a sweet egg-laden bread similar to the Italian panettone) are irreplaceable elements in Argentinean homes. Cider and pan dulce are also essential on New Year's Eve.

During Easter, Lenten empanadas filled with tuna or sardines are eaten throughout the week. Cod stews are also a part of Easter meals and may be eaten with chickpeas and potatoes. The Ligurian *torta pascualina,* a deep vegetable pie, is often served as a first course. On Easter Sunday hard-

boiled colored eggs are used to decorate the table, and children receive candy-filled chocolate eggs. Dessert consists of a *rosca de Pascua,* a sweet Easter bread, which is also eaten on other religious celebrations such as All Saint's Day.

In some parts of Argentina, midsummer, or the Night of Saint John, is celebrated by making huge bonfires in towns and villages. Traditionally, sweet potatoes are cooked in the ashes and then eaten warm. Spring Day, which coincides with Students' Day, is celebrated in all parts of the country on September 21. On this day, high school students converge on parks and have daylong picnics and concerts. They drink maté and eat *sanwiches de pebete con jamón y queso,* sandwiches of ham and cheese on sweet bread.

## Diet and Health

Recently, Western health recommendations have become popular in Argentina, though it is difficult for these meat lovers to reduce their intake of meat and add more fish and vegetables to their diet. Those living in urban areas are more health conscious, and many avoid eating too much fat. The younger generations are great fans of American-style fast food, and visiting Starbucks, McDonald's, and Burger King has become a way of life for teenagers and young adults. Still, culinary traditions are very strong, and even though take-out sushi may be the rage at the moment, empanadas and choripán are still a part of the daily life of Argentineans.

*Gabriela Villagran Backman*

**Further Reading**

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# Aruba and Bonaire

## Overview

Procuring salt, conducting the slave trade, and establishing ports of trade—rather than developing sugar plantations—were the goals of the Dutch explorers who made the six islands of the Netherlands Antilles their colonies. Aruba and Bonaire are part of the ABC islands (Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao) that sit 15 miles north of the Venezuelan coast. Saba and Saint Eustatius (and Saint Martin) lie further east, bordered by the British Virgin Islands to the north and the British-held islands of Saint Kitts, Nevis, and Montserrat to the south.

Aruba was discovered and claimed for Spain in 1499, well before the 70-square-mile island was acquired by the Dutch in 1636. This Spanish past influences cuisine on Aruba almost as much as the Dutch ownership. At one time gold and oil dominated the island's economy. Today, tourism supports the population of 100,000.

Bonaire's population is 14,000. Bonaire's present fame comes from its dive sites rather than its sandy white beaches, which are rated the best in the Caribbean and in the world. The jewel of Bonaire's culinary crown lies high up in the hills far inland; the village of Rincon boasts a market of local food.

The Caiquetios, an Arawak tribe, were the original inhabitants of these islands. Before the Africans, the Caiquetios were enslaved by Europeans and forced to cultivate maize (corn) and dyewood (a tree that produces red dye for textiles). The slaves also harvested evaporated salt. The stone hovels in which they lived, less than four feet high and much too short for a man to stand in, are still evident on Bonaire around Rincon and along the saltpans where flamingos are drawn to the brackish water, which harbors their favorite dish, pink shrimp.

Saba, at five square miles, is the smallest island in the Netherlands Antilles; it is a dramatic volcanic island with its highest point, Mount Scenery, dominating the island's profile. Directly south of Saba, Saint Eustatius has a population of 2,900 and is under 12 square miles. Saint Eustatius—often referred to as simply Statia—lies 38 miles south of the jointly held French and Dutch island called Saint Martin or Sint Maarten. In the last decades the Netherlands Antilles have seen a tremendous boom in the tourism industry. This is particularly true for Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, which sit below the hurricane belt.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Mama Lou lives on the hill overlooking Kralendik in a semirural single home with her family—her husband and two daughters, both still in school. She has her own goats—which she raises for meat—and works at Buddy Dive Resort, about a 10-minute drive from her home. If she has breakfast before she drives to work, she may have a sweet bread she has baked herself, plus a fruit such as a banana or mango, and coffee. If there is a special occasion she might shop at Cultimara, the largest traditional grocery store on Bonaire, to pick up a variety of sweet and savory *pasteche* (pies) to share with her coworkers at Buddy Dive Resort. While at Cultimara she might also shop for ingredients for her renowned goat stew: potatoes, tomatoes, green peppers, hot peppers, onions, and *ketjap* (an Indonesian sweet soy sauce) as well as plantains to fry

as an accompaniment. She makes this quite spicy with Scotch bonnet peppers and brings it to share with her fellow workers.

On weekends she might prepare a breakfast called *wentelteefjes,* also known as *pain perdu* or French toast, made from day-old bread. However, her husband, Bobby, a dive instructor, prefers to add a Gouda cheese sandwich to his breakfast of fruit and coffee. When lunchtime comes around, the largest meal, they both might be found at a catering truck that stops by just outside the resort and serves ribs and various *stobas,* or stews.

Mama Lou shops three times a week to make dinner for her family. Her favorite is fresh fish. The fish might come from the local fishmonger Doei Diaz next to Richard's Restaurant. Or, if her husband has had time away from diving instruction, he prefers to catch his own fish. This might be snapper, wahoo, or mahimahi. She might make a simple fish marinade with lime juice, garlic, peppers, and olive oil.

One of the most looked-forward-to times on Bonaire is the sorghum harvest, or Simadan, in April. A communal feast is prepared that includes *repa*—a pancake made of sorghum meal often served with goat stew, goat soup, or *giambo* (okra soup much like gumbo) and *boontji kunuku,* which is local beans. All these dishes are part of the Bonairean staple diet, although the availability of sorghum meal and boontji kunuku depends on the rainy season. It is held in the village of Rincon, near the Mangasina di Rey (the "Storehouse of the King"), which years and years before had been the main storage place for the island's food stores. Flour is brought, and eggs are collected to prepare the repa for the feast. If the bean harvest is good, the area's kunuku owners bring the beans to Rincon in celebratory processions. After the baskets are blessed at the church, the beans are given to the priest for storage in the Mangasina di Rey.

## Major Foodstuffs

Local fruits available on Aruba and Bonaire often include bananas, pineapple, carambola (or star fruit), and *maracudja,* or passion fruit. Vegetables available include pigeon peas or congo peas and *belangere* (eggplant). The vegetable known as the christophene in other parts of the world is called chayote squash on the islands and are frequently included in a mélange or a curry dish. Unique to the locale is an indigenous root called *dashene* or *dachine*. Malanga, another starchy root, can be cooked as we might cook potatoes: boiled and mashed and served as a side dish. *Giraumon* is a local pumpkin or hard-skinned squash. Peppers are available in many varieties and are more often on the superhot scale such as Scotch bonnet peppers.

Beef, pork, and lamb are less available and are quite expensive because they are imported. Poultry is often raised by the locals. *Cabri* refers to goat, which is also a local favorite. Fish is caught fresh and is frequently featured on tables at home and in restaurants. Such varieties found include *chadron* or *oursin,* which is sea urchin; *chatrou,* small octopus; and *balalou,* which can mean any variety of small local fish. *Crevettes* (shrimp) are caught and denoted as *gambas* if quite large. Also appearing are *ecrevisse* or *ouassous,* freshwater crayfish that are rarer than the *z'habitants,* or marine crayfish, a cousin of the lobster. *Lambi* (conch) is harvested as well as *langouste* (lobster). *Morue* (codfish) and *moules* (mussels) find their way onto menus, often with *palourdes,* which signifies clams. If *vivaneau* appears on the menu, this means snapper, that is, the fish rather than a snapping turtle.

Prepared local seafood specialties include *blaff,* a highly seasoned soup of local fish, followed by *chiquetaille,* a shredded, spicy codfish. For shellfish lovers *crabe farci* is a spicy stuffed crab, and if listed as *columbo* this crab is also prepared with curry. *Feroce* is a fiery avocado with chiquetaille. Court bouillon is a steamed fish specialty. Sauce *chien* is a spicy sauce served with fish. Non-fish-oriented dishes might include *calalou,* or callaloo, a stew of herbs and greens, and homemade boudin, a spicy blood sausage. For drinks, there is a *planteur,* which is rum with tropical juices, or *ti-punch,* which is a liberal portion of rum mixed with cane syrup and lime.

## Cooking

The Amerindians had a fondness for gathering and therefore often ate such things as turtle and iguana

eggs. Sometimes these delicate foods were preserved by smoking, pickling, and salting. If these were not available, then even termites, ants, grubs, and caterpillars appeared on the table. They also developed a cooking method called *brabicot,* which was a wooden framework that held food over hot coals. The Spanish then improved this method, calling it *barbacoa,* and in English this is more familiar as the cooking method called barbecue. The most popular cooking methods include barbecuing (pork is especially prized), followed by stewing for the tougher, more economical meats (goat, lamb, and iguana), coupled with an affection for frying (especially for chicken).

In the past families had to decide on a single source of heat; usually this was wood, and the cooking area was at the rear of the house, for safety and also to allow smoke to leave quickly. Modern conveniences in the form of refrigeration and running water are moderately found outside of the major cities. People do not store much food. Whether this is due to lifestyle or the preference for fresh food is uncertain. Where the temperature is quite warm most of the year, fish is best when at its freshest and cooked immediately. Today, in rural areas it is not uncommon to see a small plot being cultivated for vegetables and herbs.



Keshi Yenaa, traditional delicacy from the Dutch Caribbean involving the shell of a scooped Edam. (Dreamstime)

***Keshi Yena***

One of the most typical Dutch-influenced and historical dishes is *keshi yena.* Frugality was the keynote of island living in earlier times, when provisions had to last from the visit of one sailing ship to the call of another. In this classic recipe the shell of a scooped Edam (the thin rind remaining after a family had consumed the four pounds of cheese) is filled with spiced meat, then baked in the oven or steamed in the top of a double boiler. For these methods of preparation the red wax must be removed from the empty shell after it has been soaked in hot water. In a more dramatic version the filled Edam, with the red wax intact, is tied in cheesecloth and suspended in boiling water for 20 minutes. The wax melts away in the hot water, leaving a delicate pink blush on the cheese. Use chicken or beef for the filling.

*Serves 10–12*

1 entire Edam cheese ball, about 2–2½ lb

For the Chicken Filling, Rub with the Juice of Several Limes

1 lb chicken breasts

1 lb chicken thighs

Season the Breasts and Thighs with

Salt and pepper

Poultry seasoning

Minced onion

Let them stand for several hours. Then either arrange the pieces in a shallow baking dish, brown the chicken under the broiler, and then bake it for 1 hour at 350°F, deboning it when cool enough to handle; or choose this more frugal method of preparation: Brown the chicken in 3 tablespoons butter, then place it in a heavy kettle with:

4 qt water

2 tsp salt

12 peppercorns

1–2 onions

1 celery stalk with leaves

Bay leaf, bruised

Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer for 20 minutes, or just until chicken is tender. Strain and reserve the broth, discarding the vegetables. Debone the chicken and set aside.

After the chicken has been prepared by one of the preceding methods, sauté in 2 tablespoons butter:

3 tomatoes, peeled and chopped

4 onions, sliced

1 large green pepper, chopped

1 tbsp parsley, minced, or a few drops Tabasco sauce

Salt and pepper

Add and stir in well:

2 tbsp ketchup

¼ c pimento olives, sliced

1 tbsp capers

¼ c raisins

2 tbsp piccalilli (a sweet, spicy pickle relish that typically includes tomatoes, sweet peppers, onions, cucumber, or other garden vegetables. It gets its bright yellow color from turmeric or sometimes mustard.)

The chicken (or substitute 1 lb ground beef, lightly browned, for the chicken)

Simmer until the tomatoes are reduced, about 20 or 30 minutes. Remove from the fire and permit mixture to cool. If keshi yena is to be baked, preheat oven to 350°F. If it is to be steamed, begin heating water in the bottom of a double boiler.

Beat 3 eggs, reserving about 6 tablespoons for brushing the top, and add the rest to the meat mixture. Generously butter a casserole or the top of a double boiler. Before placing the Edam cheese shell in it, spoon 3 tablespoons of the reserved beaten egg into the bottom of the container. Half fill with the meat mixture and add 1 or 2 hard-cooked eggs.

Fill shell to the top with remaining meat and cover with the original cap of the Edam, from which the wax has been removed, or a few slices of cheese. Never use soft young cheese for keshi yena; firm cheeses are required for a successful dish.

Drip the remaining 3 tablespoonfuls of beaten egg over the top of the cheese as a sealer. (Place the lid on the double boiler.) Set the casserole in a pan of hot water, or the double boiler top over the simmering water. Cook for 1¼ hours. Invert keshi yena on a heated platter, and keep warm, for the cheese becomes hard and unappetizing if permitted to cool.

In place of the cheese shell, 2 pounds of sliced Edam or Gouda may be used to line the cooking container. The slices should overlap and create the same effect as the shell. Add filling, cover with additional slices of cheese, and set the casserole in the oven at 350°F for 1½ hours. The traditionalist with a great deal of time and patience may scoop out a 4-pound Edam or Gouda, taking care not to pierce the shell.

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The open-air market in Rincon on the first Saturday of the month offers at least six stalls of prepared foods such as *kabritu stobá* (a goat stew with vegetables), *kabes ku higra* (a mix of goat brains and liver), and *sòpi di yuana* (iguana soup). Other cooking includes the Dutch-inspired *bokijow,* cod marinated in vinaigrette with hot peppers. *Sopa di banana* is the Dutch term for banana soup, which is often seen on Bonaire and Aruba. *Pika siboyo* is a pepper sauce with onions, vinegar, and two kinds of pepper; one is a hot pepper called Madam Jeanette, and the other is a Scotch bonnet from Venezuela.

## Typical Meals

For breakfast, the locals might enjoy fresh tropical fruit and coffee. Sweet pastries are also featured. For lunch the versatile pasteche might appear. This is a plump little pastry filled with spicy meat, shrimp, or fish. It can be found everywhere, around the clock: with coffee, tea, or cocktails; at beach parties; or on the most formal buffet tables. *Bitterbal* are fried meat croquettes served with mustard.

At dinner locals enjoy keshi yena. This dish is sometimes served with *funchi,* a cornmeal pancake, or *pan bati,* a corn pudding formed into pies.

*Soppi di pisca,* a very popular soup, is actually fish chowder flavored with coconut and also, occasionally, meat. For travelers who enjoy seafood, there are several unique ways of having it prepared. *Keri keri* is a dish of shredded barracuda infused with the South American spice annatto. This is what the Dutch first adopted from their Indonesian colonies, where it is called curry.

Drinks available on Aruba are unique Caribbean soft drinks. Desnoes and Geddes is a company that makes something called *kola champagne* and the more familiar ginger beer. Mixed drinks are also popular, particularly the island's famous rum punch, which is comprised of several types of rum mixed with orange and pineapple juices, sweet and sour mix, and grenadine.

A popular dessert might be *pan bollo,* an Aruban bread pudding that is served with rhum sauce, or a cake called *bolo di tres lechi* made with three forms of milk—condensed milk, evaporated milk, and cream.

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***Funchi***

*Serves 6*

1¼ c cold water

1½ c cornmeal

1 tsp salt

1½ c boiling water

1 tbsp butter

Funchi is a staple of the Dutch islands. A polenta-like dish made from cornmeal, it is often served with soup.

Mix the cold water, cornmeal, and salt in a heavy saucepan. Stir in boiling water and butter. Bring to a brisk boil over high heat and cook for 3 minutes. Continue cooking an additional 3 minutes, stirring the funchi vigorously with a wooden spoon.

When the mixture is very stiff and pulls away from the sides of the pan, remove from the fire. Turn out into a deep, well-buttered bowl and cover with a plate. Shake the funchi down into the bowl, and then invert it onto a serving platter.

For a special Sunday breakfast, fry sliced funchi in butter and serve with crisp bacon and scrambled eggs.

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## Eating Out

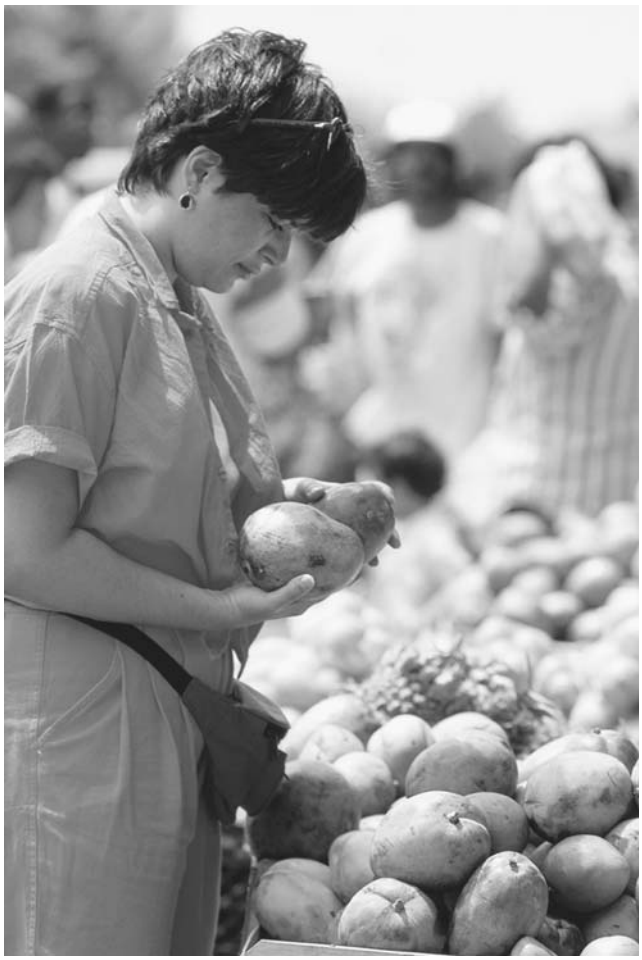
Meals eaten outside the home by locals differ substantially from those eaten by tourists. It is certainly possible to visit the resorts and never have local food. Cheeseburgers and French fries are widely available, and even the locals are beginning to be more inclined to eat these than take the time to prepare such time-consuming cooked dishes as goat stew. It is even possible, on Aruba, to find such chain restaurants as Hooters and Benihana to please the myriad tourists.

## Special Occasions

Monthly market days or even the smaller weekly version (*marshe chikitu*) are celebrations of their own in this arid climate. So are the Simadan (harvest) festival, Día di San Juan, Día di San Pedro, Día di Rincon, and the Bari Festival. Of particular note is the dance known as the Bari, which is still performed during the harvest festival of the same name, as well as during the Simadan festival, and in the period following New Year's (Mascarada). The Bari is led by a solo singer who, very much like a Calypsonian, improvises satirical lyrics based on recent events and local figures.

Typical foods during Simadan include funchi (similar to grits but less coarse) and repa (pancakes made of sorghum meal), served plain or with goat stew, goat soup, giambo (okra soup, similar to gumbo), and boontji kunuku (local beans). All of these dishes are still an integral part of the Bonairean diet, although the availability of sorghum meal and boontji kunuku depends on the rainy season.

In April, Coronation Day and the Queen's Birthday are celebrated. On Antillean Day in October there is a festival commemorating the island's Dutch heritage. In December, holidays are Christmas and Boxing Day, a public holiday exhibiting the island's special flavors of pepper-pot soup with lots of pork, okra, and onions.



A woman selects fruit at one of the many outdoor markets in Aruba. (StockPhotoPro)

## Diet and Health

The chief diet and health concerns on Aruba center on obesity and diabetes. For the last 20 years insight and proactive plans have been sought. Focusing on youth, a program called Extreme H Games began. Long-term goals aim to teach children the impact of nutrition and physical activity on health. In 2008 the National Plan for Aruba (2009–2018) for the Government of Aruba for the Fight against Overweight, Obesity, and Other Related Health Issues was launched. The plan was endorsed by the European Public Health Alliance in Brussels, Belgium.

Approximately 6 percent of all deaths are related to diabetes—with poor eating habits being targeted as the main cause. The improvement of these is suggested as the care and cure for 96 percent of cases. Increased consumption of simple and refined sugars and fried foods paired with a tendency toward little physical activity, or at least not enough to ward off this imbalance, contributes to this problem. With Aruba's inherent Arawak culture and love of dance—calypso, soca, merengue, and a mélange known as *socarengue,* vigorous dancing some might consider risqué, it seems possible that a revitalization of dance for all might hold the key to resolving both diet and health concerns.

*Dorette Snover*

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# Barbados

## Overview

Barbados is situated on the easternmost side of the Lesser Antilles with the west coast of the island on the Caribbean Sea, the east on the Atlantic Ocean. Formed less than a million years ago, the island is believed to have been created by the collision of the Atlantic crust and Caribbean plates during a volcanic eruption. With the formation of coral that accumulated to approximately 300 feet, Barbados is actually two landmasses that merged together over years.

The total landmass of Barbados is 267 square miles (430 square kilometers) and is mostly gently sloping land with some rolling hills and sharp elevations toward the northeastern coastline. Although the island is surrounded by coral reefs, its basic topography consists mainly of coral and limestone with some deposits of clay toward the northeastern side of its coastline. There are many underground caves with streams that create freshwater springs on land. Because of its coral makeup, the island's freshwater is noted to be one of the best on the Caribbean islands. Swept by northeast trade winds, Barbados enjoys a tropical climate and a soil with coralline limestone features that is suited to the growth of sugarcane and most tropical agricultural produce.

A parliamentary democracy, Barbados received its colonial independence in 1966 under the leadership of the prime minister at that time, the Right Honorable Errol Walton Barrow, now a national hero. Up until that time it had been a colony of the British Isles. Approximately 270,000 people live on the island. Quite distinct from others in the Caribbean chain, it follows Jamaica in terms of its uniqueness in expression, culture, and cuisine.

With average temperatures ranging from 75 degrees Fahrenheit (24 degrees Celsius) to 84–86 degrees Fahrenheit (29–30 degrees Celsius), Barbados boasts a climate that is mostly sunny with scattered showers and the occasional hard rainfall. With strong easterly breezes coming off the Atlantic Ocean beating on its east coast, with large rolling waves and a wind that seems interminable, nights are slightly cooler, more so from November to February. Barbados's economy is mostly based on tourism, with sugar and rum being its major exports.

While Barbados is one of the most developed and affluent islands within the Caribbean chain, it has over the years become a society of mixed races. Although traces of Amerindian existence go back thousands of years, there are no documented living descendants of these first inhabitants. With the arrival of the English in 1625 came African slaves, hence Barbados was known as one of the few islands that had both white (English and Irish, with a smattering of Dutch) and black people (Africans). More recently, Barbados became known as the island of opportunity, seeing the arrival of Dutch and Sephardic Jews, Middle Easterners, Indians, and political refugees from Pakistan. Add to this the new arrivals of moneyed North and South Americans, English, Irish, French, Italians, and even Arabs, together with sprinklings of Caribbean people that include mostly Guyanese, Jamaicans, Saint Vincentians, and Trinidadians, and this basically makes up the local society.



An outdoor market in Bridgeport Barbados, 2009. (StockPhotoPro)

## Food Culture Snapshot

Ena and Norris "Fishmout" Scantlebury live above Consetts Bay in St. John on the east coast of Barbados. Ena was born in Panama to a Barbadian mother and Grenadian father, who sent the child to Barbados to live with her maternal grandmother in the capital parish of St. Michael. Many islanders left their homeland during those days for economic reasons. Ena spent her formative years in Barbados, attending school, then leaving for her father's homeland to teach.

Years later, Ena and Norris would meet in Grenada. Norris's fishing boat, having taken off from Consetts Bay one fine morning toward the south coast, found itself in trouble when the seas began to swell and a harsh easterly high wind rocked the boat from side to side. The ensuing rain blasted the little vessel's only engine as he managed to round the corner of the east coast and the south coast. But by this time the boat was far out to sea, and the raging winds and strong current pushed the boat further and further southeast, until he landed on the shores of Grenada. Fishing can be treacherous work, so if an island boat washes up, help is usually given without a thought. Norris was taken in by villagers while his boat was repaired. Sitting at a local makeshift hut where men gathered after a hard day's work to share in a couple of bottles of white rum, slap a domino or two, and talk of perilous days at sea, Norris spotted Ena taking a walk, and the rest was history. Norris, once home, saved enough money to bring Ena back to Barbados for marriage.

Norris had purchased an acre of land next to the chattel house his parents had bequeathed to him, and with his savings he also got rid of the outdoor latrine and added on a "proper" toilet and bath to greet his new wife. People in the area were proud of Norris; there was a lot of respect for this fisherman who not

only had beaten death at sea but also had planned his life carefully when it came to his bride and his home. Now he had even managed to acquire three boats that employed two villagers each.

The village was a serene but cheerful place to live, and Ena spent her days happily there doing remedial work with the odd child who was being kept back at the local school. She loved her acre of land that had turned into a full-time agricultural exhibition, the produce of which went with her every Saturday morning to Cheapside Market in Bridgetown on the other side of the island. It allowed her to mingle with her cultured city folk and reap some extra money to give to the church come Sunday. She grew tomatoes, cabbage, cucumbers, okra, and pigeon peas, as well as yams, cassava, and sweet potatoes. One enormous pumpkin vine never let her down. Nearer to the back of the house where the bathwater flowed easily into the yard, Ena had all the "seasonings" possible—chives, normal thyme and broad-leaf thyme, basil, marjoram, parsley, dill, and, of course, several Scotch bonnet pepper trees. Ena would pick and grind the first six to make "Bajan seasoning," then bottle it. She would keep a bottle or two for herself, save one for the priest at St. John's church, and take the rest for sale in the market. The last six feet to the back of the acre were planted with one breadfruit, two lime, a golden apple, a grapefruit, two guava, three pawpaw, one avocado, one coconut, and approximately 12 to 14 banana trees. Interspersed in the garden were various pigeon pea trees. A trumpet tree stood away from these, a passion fruit vine attached to its trunk. To the side of that in a separate area were the plants required to make bush tea or bush baths, such as cerasee, fever grass, and leaf of life, and those to help in healing, such as aloe vera.

Early every morning Ena prepared a good hot herbal tea for her husband. While Norris sipped his tea, Ena would bring out the fresh salt bread from the brick oven at the back of the house, add a good chunk of cheese or even some sardines to it, and place it before her husband. If the chickens in the yard had left extra eggs, he also got one hard-boiled. Some mornings Norris was treated to porridge made from ground oats, drizzled with Bajan molasses, or two bakes (a kind of bun) made of flour, water, and spice, one of which she would fill with her homemade guava jelly. Ena would pack his *breakfass* in a three-tiered tin canister for the journey. There would be slices of sweet potato and yam, a little rice, and peas; and although he mostly ate fish such as dolphin (not the mammal but mahimahi), marlin, or kingfish, sometimes she would prepare a chicken (if she had killed one) or perhaps a lamb or beef stew. He sometimes got salt fish and *coucou,* and this was Norris's favorite meal. English tea thickened with condensed milk, placed hot in a Thermos, accompanied this feast for the seas.

At six o'clock in the evening they would sit together over a bowl of delicious Bajan soup in which various "provisions" floated, with pumpkin, carrots, and christophene (chayote) for color, a piece of salt pork or beef for taste, and dumplings for the "man-hood." As a drink Ena would always serve juice made from her garden fruits, sweetened with the golden brown sugar received from a nearby sugar plantation just after the crop season had ended. Norris, being a fisherman, would take a bagful of the much-sought-after sea egg (a kind of sea urchin now getting scarcer by the minute) for the nearby plantation owners, and they paid in sugar. Sometimes the exchange of sea egg for sugar produced more, and Norris also returned with a bundle of canes in the back of his truck. These would be squeezed of their juice. There was nothing like an ice-cold glass of cane juice after a hard day's work in the sun.

Every Friday Ena prepared her produce for the market, leaving the herbs, lettuces, and tomatoes for picking at dawn. And every Saturday Norris and she woke up at 2 A.M., packed the back of the truck neatly, and took off for Bridgetown. By 5 A.M. the market was open, and Ena was behind her counter selling her goods, chatting, and getting in touch with the world. Norris would retire upstairs to the food court. Here, Miss Dora ensured that Ena got her share of the delicious Saturday-morning Bajan special—pudding and souse. Norris would prefer to have Miss Harriett's fish broth to start with—later on enjoying one of her dishes of the day: macaroni pie with lamb stew, Creole marlin with peas and rice, flying fish (steamed or fried) and corn coucou, baked pork with green banana, or stewed lamb with sweet potato pie. To wash down these delicious meals, there was always Debbie's *mauby*—a drink made from the bark of a tree. Later

he would sit under the trees to the side of the market and slap some dominoes with the men, sharing a flask of rum among them "neat" in plastic cups with a little water on the side.

On Sundays they went to church and invited their grown children for a family meal. Sunday lunch always began with grace. Ena forced Norris to give the prayer every time. She felt he needed to pray more, especially as he was still, in his old age, going out to sea "like eff you is a young gully-boar" she would say. Once that was over, the feast began, and a feast it always was: roast pork with cracklings and thick gravy, roast chicken with stuffing, steamed dolphin or baked snapper, peas and rice, macaroni pie, breadfruit slices, and cornmeal coucou, the yellow butter melting over the golden mound in the dish and the pieces of okra peeking through as if to get a look at the rest of the fare. Sometimes Ena went real traditional, slicing a boiled egg and some cucumbers over the coucou. Coleslaw was also there, as well as salad with fresh lettuce from the garden, sprinkled with chives and herbs. On occasion, if she could save a little from Saturday, Ena would also produce pudding and souse—she knew the children hardly ever ate "the good one," preferring to meet friends at the over-popular Lemon Arbor on a Saturday morning. "It not like ours," Ena would say, even though she had never tasted it. Jugfuls of freshly squeezed lime juice, and passion fruit mixed with a touch of ginger, always sat on the table for anyone to help themselves. Pepper sauce made by Ena from extra peppers always graced the table too. No Bajan worth their life in salt would eat a meal without that good old Bajan pepper sauce, the mustard giving it that traditional yellow color. Dessert depended on Ena, and she loved to surprise everyone, including Norris. Some Sundays it would be bread pudding—a trickle of Red Label sherry giving it that edge—drizzled with Tate & Lyle golden syrup, other times a beautifully decorated rum triffle. Some days the dessert would be two pies baked to perfection, filled with something from the garden like golden apples with cinnamon or mango and bananas. Her favorite, however, was fresh coconut cream pie. She labored with cutting out the flesh from the dried brown coconut, grating it, and squeezing it through a muslin sieve until all the milk was drawn out. She then boiled it, sweetened with condensed milk, until it was thick, ready to be placed into the pie crust and into the fridge. Later, sprinkles of grated coconut would decorate her specialty. Needless to say, after a lunch like this the family would sit around, sometimes with a cup or two of coffee, talking about the week that had passed. Ena always praised God for her blessings.

## Major Foodstuffs

Barbados is one of the most populated islands within the Caribbean. Many years ago, it was covered in organic agricultural land, but this is sadly no longer so. Because of its beauty, as well as its steady economy and governance, Barbados has also become the home that all the rich and famous wish to have. Add to that the average Barbadian, whose interest in owning land and a house continues, and one finds more and more housing developments taking over the rich soil and, therefore, more and more imports happening foodwise. The importation of fertilizers and pesticides to the island in order to push the crops forward has taken its toll as well. Taking into consideration that Barbados is considered one of culinary stops of the Caribbean, with restaurants dotting most of the coastline, one would think that steps would have been put in place a long time ago to allow the island to be self-sufficient in food.

There is, of course, hope. Recently, more and more attention is being paid to culinary tourism and the health of the Barbadians. More and more systems are being put in place to encourage local farming. More and more farmers want to become "organic." The health of the soil is, however, in question now. The Ministry of Agriculture works closely with farmers, and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture is very much part of this new agricultural drive. Fridays and Saturdays at the various markets across the country see a resurgence in buying local. Although the seas are also showing extreme stress, the fish markets continue to bring in good hauls just about all year round, and fresh fish is very much part of the Barbadian diet. Barbados is still sugarcane country, and the rolling hills of the island are covered with this crop, hiding the few



Tropical coastline and sugar cane plantation in Barbados. (iStockPhoto)

remaining working plantations in-between. Sugar factories have been reduced to two, but during the crop season, from January to June or July, one can see cane cutters—both human and mechanical—working the fields and the canes being taken to the sugar factories. Special tours allow visitors to watch the process.

The island is known for its rum, 99 percent made from molasses, and Barbados was the first in the Caribbean to produce it. Today, Barbados has several brand-name rums, and Barbadians are very loyal in this regard. If a particular brand is favored, they stick with it no matter what. Mount Gay, Cockspur, Alleyne Arthurs, and Old Brigand are but a few of the many available. Falernum, concocted on the island from rum, lime, almonds, ginger, cloves, and vanilla, is a liqueur that is added to many cocktails. Corn & Oil is a traditional drink made with Falernum, rum, Angostura bitters, and a twist of lime. Banks is the Barbadian beer, and Guinness is a drink purported to give strength and is, therefore, a favorite. Plus is a sweet drink concocted by the Banks Beer Brewery that many locals drink for energy or for "putting it back" after a hard night or day.

The soft drink industry is big in Barbados, with bottling companies creating carbonated drinks in all colors of the rainbow with names like Kola Champagne, Grape, Orange, Banana, and Frutee. Fruit juices of all types, sweetened and unsweetened, are made at the island's well-known and time-honored Pine Hill Dairy, mostly from imported concentrate. The dairy also produces fresh milk, chocolate milk, and vanilla milk—all enjoyed by Barbadians. Evaporated and condensed milk can be found in most homes, the latter used in inordinate proportions. Syrups are also available to be used in the hotel industry or at home; adding water makes a refreshing drink. Mauby is a traditional drink with a slightly bitter taste, made from the bark of a tree and reputed to cleanse the kidneys. Ginger beer and



Brightly painted red "Rum Shop" in Oistins fishing village, Barbados. (StockPhotoPro)

sorrel, the latter usually a Christmas drink, are now served year-round. Mauby, ginger beer, and sorrel can be found in syrup form, to which one just adds water, but these are not as healthy nor as popular as the homemade variety. There are other traditional "strengthening" drinks purported to help men perform their duties better, such as *seamoss* (made by boiling seaweed, then removing the weed and mixing the remaining gel in a blender with condensed milk, water, and spices such as cinnamon and nutmeg). To this all manner of other ingredients such as linseed, oats, eggs, and stout are added for further strength.

In terms of traditional dietary staples, when the English arrived, the Amerindians had actually left for other shores, but there might have been some remnant of their culinary existence, such as cassava, sweet potatoes, corn, and Scotch bonnet peppers. The movement of food began with the island's new settlers, and plantation owners had to feed the slaves who toiled in the canes and those who lived in the great houses. Breadfruit arrived from Tahiti (Captain Bligh's voyage is of note here); yams came from Asia through Africa. This movement created a base of English/African cuisine. Today, Barbados still grows yams, dasheen, and sweet potatoes in abundance, as well as some English potatoes and *eddoes* (a kind of taro root); recent yields of cassava have been excellent. Rice is imported from Guyana, Trinidad, and the United States.

Vegetables and fruit grown on the island are now influenced by the arrival of other Caribbean people, including the Guyanese from the coast of South America, and also by the requirements of the tourism industry (hotels and restaurants). Vegetables include carrots, normal pumpkins and the slightly pear-shaped garden pumpkin, squash, cabbage as well as Chinese cabbage or *pachoy,* okra, christophene (*cho-*

*cho*), cauliflower, sweet peppers (red, yellow, and green), eggplant, broccoli, tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, various types of green beans, pigeon peas, corn, avocados, and various mixtures of lettuce and microgreens, the most popular for locals being Bajan lettuce. Two types of hot peppers are grown and used widely—the Scotch bonnet is farmed, while the smaller bird pepper grows wild in backyards and sometimes even on the side of the road.

Golden apples (*Spondias cytherea*) are grown as well mangoes, bananas (used ripe and green), plantains, grapefruit, oranges, shaddocks (a large citrus fruit), limes, sour oranges, sweetsops, soursops, and carambola. Growing wild are the famous Bajan cherry, tamarinds, *dunks* (jujubes), sea grapes (not related to grapes but in the genus *Coccoloba*), *ackee* (not Jamaican ackee but *guinep*—a green oval fruit with a pink interior), hog plums, gooseberries, cashews, and fat pork (*Chrysobalanus icaco*—a plum-like fruit). Barbados has a season for some fruits—mangoes, avocados, golden apples, and nearly all items sold in the markets, supermarkets, and small shops are priced according to the season. At times limes are out of season, meaning mostly that the fruit has been reaped and the next lot will take time to blossom and bear; meanwhile, imported ones with little juice that are more expensive take their place. Most householders know the importance of having a lime tree in their yard. Apart from being used to wash and season meats, lime is a staple juice—lemonade is favored by children and adults above all drinks. Today, a lot of juices are also being made with combinations of greens such as herbs, cucumbers, pumpkin, and carrots, and juice bars are popping up offering all manner of health drinks.

Fish consists of various types. Flying fish is the national darling, with its roe and melts (eggs) being much in demand. Dolphin (mahimahi), kingfish, marlin, yellowfin tuna, billfish, and swordfish are the larger fish brought in by the fishermen. Shark has begun to tickle the taste buds of Barbadians, although in the past it was not considered to be part of the average diet; the odd shark caught was used as dog food. Various types of snapper are offered, and barracuda is also found and revered. "Pot fish" or reef fish such as chub are also enjoyed. Jacks and sprats are caught by net off the shores. Conch and *seacat* (octopus) are eaten with gusto when available and are considered to have aphrodisiac properties. Lobster is enjoyed, but there are very few left on the reefs. Although salt fish is very much an integral part of the Barbadian diet, introduced by the Portuguese traders, sadly not much is salted on the island, and this remains mostly an imported product.

Barbados is known for its pork, which is, after fish and chicken, one of the most consumed meats. Turkey comes next. Several processing plants make ham and ham products including sausages, and fresh pork can be had in all supermarkets, small shops, and fresh from the market. Salt pork, beef, and pig tails are imported in brine and are an integral part of Bajan soup or used in the flavoring of white rice. The chicken industry is by far the largest, with chicken farmers introduced to fast-growing chickens. Although cattle are reared on the island, and the meat is organic, beef imports have harmed the industry. However, enough cattle are still reared for local beef to be sold in the markets. Duck and rabbit are two other traditional meats, usually served stewed. There is a game bird farm that supplies specialized restaurants. There are still a few man-made ponds and private clubs where members spend time during the northern migration of birds for a shoot—these birds are considered a secret delicacy. Blackbelly sheep (a Barbadian breed), although exported for its meat, is also now considered a treat by Barbadians. Although the average Bajan will say this is not so, monkey is eaten "stewed down" as a delicacy in certain parts of the island, particularly on the eastern coast.

Bakeries abound. The small local bakery is fast disappearing with the advent of large modern ones. Barbadians have always enjoyed their breads. The traditional one is the small rounded salt bread baked in ovens, each loaf decorated with a piece of banana leaf (the leaf is also fast disappearing). Salt breads are used for the traditional Bajan *cutter*—a salt bread filled with shop cheese (cheddar), fish, fish cakes (also served alone, these are circular balls of salt fish [salted cod], flour, seasonings, and finely chopped pepper that are fried in hot oil), ham, egg,

or pork, doused with yellow pepper sauce (made with mustard). All manner of sweet breads and pastries are consumed such as raisin loaves (called sweetbread), coconut bread, banana bread, currant rolls, Swiss rolls, jam puffs, coconut turnovers, rock cakes, and the well-known lead pipe—the last being a heavy four-inch-long and two-inch-wide rectangle-shaped staple made of pure hard dough—it is said you can give a heavy blow with a lead pipe. Used as a stomach filler when money is not handy, it certainly fulfills its job when downed with a soft drink. Various sponge cakes and cookies are also popular, with supermarkets carrying these made either by the larger bakeries or by small businesses at home. Cassava or cornmeal pone (with the consistency of a hard pudding and made with cassava and coconut) is eaten heartily. Bread pudding, sponge cake, fruit or great cake, rum cake, coconut cream pie, and lemon meringue pie are traditional, although all manner of pastries and cakes can now be found at specialized bakeries and supermarkets. Guava stew and crème caramel are traditional favorites. *Conkies,* made from sweetened cornmeal, pumpkin, coconut, and spices, wrapped in steamed banana leaf, are traditional at Christmas.

A *one in two* is a cutter with two salt fish cakes. Cutters are sold in most rum shops all week long or at specialized spots around the island. There are many savory pastries as well—beef, chicken, and vegetable patties or sausage rolls (a wiener or sausage meat is rolled in a pastry dough and baked). One of the best-known places for these is Beefeaters Ltd. on Swan Street. Roti, which is originally from Trinidad, has become a favorite. The bake made with *dhal* (yellow split peas), it is filled with curried chicken, beef, potatoes, chickpeas, pumpkin, or any combination of these.

Favored snacks range from salted plantain, cassava, or sweet potato chips to corn curls, Chee-Weez, peanuts, and cashews. Local companies and small home businesses do a roaring trade with these, as Barbadians enjoy snacking. Traditional sweets are tamarind balls, sugar cakes (white, brown, and pink, made from sugared grated coconut and colored with vegetable coloring), caramel and chocolate fudge, guava cheese (made from stewing down the fruits with lots of sugar and spices, placing it in baking pans until gelled, then cutting it in squares and rubbing it in white sugar), peanut brittle, mints, and governor plums. Not seen so much but still loved and returning slowly into the area of "exotic" sweets are ginger candy, shaddock rind, and paw-paw candy, just to name a few. Many Indian sweets are finding their way onto the shelves as the population of Indians has increased on the island. Snow cones are a favorite—shaved ice in a cup doused in different colored syrups with flavors of pineapple, strawberry, lime, and so on with an option to have condensed milk poured over that.

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### Barbados Coucou and Flying Fish

*Serves 6*

Please note that any fish can be used. Traditionally it is flying fish, but this may not be available readily to others. Salt fish (codfish) can be used instead of fresh fish. Yellow butter is equivalent to the red Irish cooking butter, but if it is not available, normal butter may be used.

#### Coucou

7 c water

1 small piece of pig tail, salt beef, or salt fish (optional)

2 tsp salt

14 okras, sliced thinly

3 c cornmeal

½ Scotch bonnet pepper, finely chopped, seeds removed

2½ tbsp yellow (red Irish) butter

In a large pot bring water (and pig tail, salt beef, or salt fish if using—this is not traditional but does give taste; if using, reduce salt by ½ teaspoon) and salt to a boil. Add okra, and continue to boil until very soft. Cool 2 cups of this water to room temperature, and stir into a bowl with the cornmeal. Add water if necessary; the cornmeal should be able to be poured. Do not put hot water in with the cornmeal.

Add pepper to the pot of boiling water. Slowly pour the cornmeal into the pot with the boiling water, stirring continuously with a coucou stick or with a large wooden spoon until the mixture is smooth and is turning easily. Add the butter and continue to turn. When mixture begins to stick slightly to the pot it is ready. Grease a glass bowl with butter, and add coucou. Taste for salt. Garnish with more butter, sliced hard-boiled eggs, or finely sliced cucumbers. Serve hot with steamed flying fish (or any other suitable fish).

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**Steamed Flying Fish**

12 filets flying fish, washed in lime and saltwater and patted dry

½ tbsp yellow butter

2 medium onions, sliced in rings

½ red pepper, ½ yellow bell, and ½ green bell pepper, cut in julienne strips

1 whole Scotch bonnet tied in muslin cloth

2 large cloves garlic, finely chopped

1 sprig thyme—whole

1 sprig marjoram—whole

4 large tomatoes, cut in chunks

2 c water

½ tbsp tomato paste

Juice of one lime

Salt and pepper to taste

**Seasoning**

1 medium onion, finely chopped

2 large cloves garlic, finely chopped

4 sprigs chives, finely chopped

1 tbsp parsley, finely chopped

½ tsp marjoram, finely chopped

1 tsp fresh lime juice

½ Scotch bonnet pepper, finely chopped, seeds removed

¼ tsp each salt and pepper

Make the seasoning by either combining the ingredients in a bowl or using a blender. Spread seasoning over the grooved side of each flying fish fillet, roll like a roll mop, securing it with a toothpick, and set aside. In a large frying pan, melt half the butter and sauté the onions, all the peppers, and the garlic. Add the tomatoes and water. Add salt and pepper to taste. Tie the thyme and marjoram together and place whole into the pan. Add lime and tomato paste. Cover and bring to a boil. Add the rest of the butter. Add the flying fish, allowing it to simmer for approximately 20 minutes, so that the gravy can penetrate it. A teaspoon of rum can be added to the gravy for taste (optional). Place hot in a dish and serve with coucou. When using other fish, use a fillet to make it easier to roll. However, a fish steak can be used; in that case, just place seasoning into grooves made into the fish—this allows the fish to be well seasoned and tasty.

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## Cooking

Traditional Barbadian cooking cannot be described as labor-intensive; it is, however, particular to the household cook. Everyone has a little secret, a touch of the hand that is seldom disclosed and that makes the food taste just that little bit different. Many Barbadian men pride themselves on their ability to cook and love of cooking—one prime minister, the late Honorable Errol Walton Barrow, even wrote a now-famous cookbook, *Privilege.* Women are, however, traditionally the cooks in the home.

While gas or electric stoves are now the norm, coal pots with their corresponding black buck (iron) pots or huge frying pans are still used in some households, although mostly on the side of the road at night in special areas/streets for frying fish or chicken. In the old days the kitchen was always built on the west side of the house so that smells would not bother the living areas, but this has now changed, the aromas of home cooking being more welcomed these days. Large cooking spoons and pots were and still are a must in the kitchen; a coucou stick had to be, and still is, a part of the cooking utensils. A coucou stick is a flattened spoon used to stir the thick mass of cornmeal and okra that

becomes coucou—a dish that originated in Africa and was brought to the island by the slaves. Coucou and steamed fish is a traditional Friday dish.

Barbadians like to season their meats and wash their rice. Seasoning consists of finely chopped chives, onions, garlic, thyme, parsley, marjoram, a touch of Worcestershire sauce, vinegar, cloves, salt, pepper, and hot chili peppers (Scotch bonnet or bird peppers). In the market one can buy bundles of the required fresh ingredients for seasonings. Seasonings are used in most dishes, although primarily it is particular to fish or chicken. Washing consists of placing rice in a sieve and washing it in cold water until the water runs clear; sometimes a little lime juice is used to help this procedure along and to take away the "rawness" of the rice. Rice is usually cooked with some kind of peas—pigeon peas; yellow, green, or brown lentils; red beans (really a pea)—to make a dish that is simply called peas and rice.

Bajans (as Barbadians are called) also love to marinate their meats overnight in the fridge, so that they are ready for frying, baking, or stewing the following morning in time to be served for lunch or dinner. Salt pork, salt beef, pig tail, and salt fish will always be part and parcel of a Bajan kitchen unless one is a vegetarian.

Fish and chicken are both washed with salt, lime, and water before seasoning. Holes are made in both these meats, and these are stuffed with the seasoning. Jars of Bajan seasoning have also become popular as they contain all that is required in the kitchen without the tedious job of all the fine chopping. Flying fish is treated differently; these come already cleaned and boned (mostly) from the fish market, but they are still washed and/or marinated in lime, salt, and water before their grooves are filled with seasoning and they are dipped in egg and a seasoned mixture of breadcrumbs and flour. They are then placed skin down into hot oil and fried until crispy before being turned over and fried on the other side. All fish is served steamed, fried, grilled, or baked. In steamed flying fish the fish is rolled into a sort of roll-mop position, kept in place with a toothpick, and then steamed. Steak fish (filets/steaks of fish, whether boned or not) or flying fish when steamed requires onions, tomatoes, garlic, chives, and peppers as well as a most important ingredient that is used in a Bajan kitchen to add a taste to just about everything—yellow butter better known as *mello-kreem* or just *shop butter*. It is bright yellow in color, has the consistency of ghee, and is purportedly made from fish oils. Some yellow butters give the ingredients as the same as margarine with coloring added, but the original traditional one was indeed made from fish oil. Fried fish and chicken are usually dusted with seasoned flour before being placed in hot oil to fry on both sides until well cooked. Barbadians do not like their fish undercooked, and of course chicken follows the normal worldwide rules.

Conch and octopus are both treated much the same. Both of them are found on the reefs that surround the island and are revered. The conch animal is removed from its shell, beaten with a wooden mallet, and usually eaten raw with lime and pepper, or it is deep-fried or made into curry, stew, soup, or souse. The shell is then sold to tourists as a decoration. Octopus is cleaned carefully of its ink, chopped into fine pieces, and boiled until soft, deep-fried, or soused. Another seldom-seen item is *wilks,* which are still eaten traditionally on the east side of the island. These are found close to the shores on rocks, plucked from the alabaster shell, and eaten raw, curried, or stewed.

Chicken, as well as other meats such as pork, lamb, beef, rabbit, and duck, is stewed; the first three meats are also baked or roasted. Stewed means the meat is browned first—oil and sugar are caramelized, and the meats are browned in this. Seasonings such as Bajan seasoning and/or onions, garlic, tomatoes, and chives are added, and then later carrots (sometimes potatoes for thickening) and dumplings (made from flour, water, cinnamon, and salt) are added if required.

Chicken is usually cut into quarters for baking, and many times there is a light barbecue sauce that is basted on the meat, basically made up of Bajan seasoning with some ketchup and pepper sauce, or it is roasted whole with stuffing until crispy (usually for a Sunday lunch). Stuffing is made with bread, crackers, the innards of the chicken, and seasonings; some people add nuts and raisins to this. *Steppers,*

or chicken feet, are used in soup or in souse (pickled in lime, cucumber, and parsley).

Baked pork is done in chops much in the same way as chicken, seasoned only sometimes or in a barbecue sauce as well. Similarly, lamb is baked in chops, but the seasoning is usually a little different, using rosemary or thyme. Sometimes a little water is added to both pork and lamb just before the baking ends to create a little gravy. Lamb legs or a shoulder or leg of pork are also roasted, usually as a Sunday lunch treat. In the case of the pork leg, crackling is made with the outer skin by rubbing salt and lime over it before scoring it into squares. Nearly all meats except for fish are sometimes curried, but this is not traditionally Bajan.

Ham (the two large processors on the island produce good ham) is always baked, after being marinated with the householder's or cook's special recipe; some use orange marmalade, for instance. If there is a bone it is usually saved for soup. Ham bone soup is made with "peas"—really yellow lentils—boiled down with seasoning until thick.

Breadfruit, yams, sweet potatoes, eddoes, cassava, and English potatoes are usually boiled; for breadfruit, sometimes a piece of pig tail, salt pork, or beef is added for taste. Breadfruit is sometimes roasted in its skin, and the blackened skin is removed once the breadfruit has been cooked. English potatoes and sweet potatoes are also roasted. Breadfruit and yams are also baked. Breadfruit and English potatoes are also fried or deep-fried. Recipes for these will be dealt with in the typical meals section. Rice is boiled, sometimes with pig tail or a piece of salt pork or beef for taste, and sometimes okra is added with seasonings, a dish called *privilege* by the older folk. The latter version is used as a meal. Cornmeal is an integral part of most Barbadian kitchens and is used in savory and sweet dishes.

There are many Barbadians who to this day still pickle or make their own pepper sauces, chutneys, jams, and jellies with much of the available fruit in season, but with the advent of so many good processors of these, this is becoming a dying household art.

Saturday morning is pudding and souse day. Pudding used to be made traditionally with pig's blood, but this has now been discarded and it has been replaced with sweet potato, coloring, and spices. Although some still use the pig's intestine as the casing for the pudding (more like a sausage), this is also a fast-dying art, and it is easier to prepare steamed pudding in a bowl. There is white pudding and black pudding (blood sausage), with the white having no or very little coloring. Souse is traditionally made from pork "features" (nose, ears, cheeks, and tongue), trotters (pig's feet), and bits of the meat itself. Now chicken feet, chicken breast, octopus, and fish souse can be found in specialized places. Today, one can ask for it lean, with fat, or without bone, with the last meaning the trotters. The pork is boiled in seasoning and drained. The pickle is made—finely chopped onions, grated cucumbers, parsley, chives, and hot peppers are placed into lime with some of the water from the boiling of the meat. The pork is placed into the pickle, with some of the latter being reserved for serving. This dish is served with slices of breadfruit, sweet potato, or avocado depending on the season.

## Typical Meals

The cuisine of Barbados traditionally is a mixture of colonial and African influences. The Indian influence was the first to peep into the cuisine, and now with Caribbean people integrating a lot more, there is a definite influence of their cooking creeping into what was very much just typically Barbadian. Meals depend on the family's social standing and financial means, and helpers and cooks are the norm for those who can afford it—labor in this area is still fairly inexpensive.

### *Breakfast or Tea*

Barbadians traditionally called breakfast *tea*. And they called lunch *breakfast,* while *dinner* refers to supper. This is now heard only among the older folk or villagers in the countryside. We can safely divide breakfast into *English local* or *local-local,* depending on the family's financial means and/or the social standing, as mentioned earlier. An English breakfast starts with fresh fruit of the season and continues with a cereal such as cornflakes, muesli,

or a porridge with milk, honey, or golden syrup, followed typically by eggs to order (scrambled, Creole [with onions and tomatoes], fried, hard-boiled or soft-boiled, poached, or omelet style), bacon, sausage, and toast. Marmalade, guava jam, or any other fruit jam and butter or margarine are served. English tea or coffee is served. Evaporated or condensed milk and brown or white sugar are used.

A local breakfast might include cereal or porridge, eggs, bakes (made of flour, water, and salt, either deep-fried or baked in the oven), and bush tea or English tea sweetened with condensed milk. There might also be salt bread, sweet bread of some kind, or sliced toasted bread with butter and/or fruit jams or jellies. Cutters would be served, as well as various canned fish.

All the preceding choices will be eaten with a juice (homemade or packaged) or a soft drink. Apart from the usual fruit juices, juice is also considered to include mauby, sorrel, or ginger beer.

### *Midmorning Snacks*

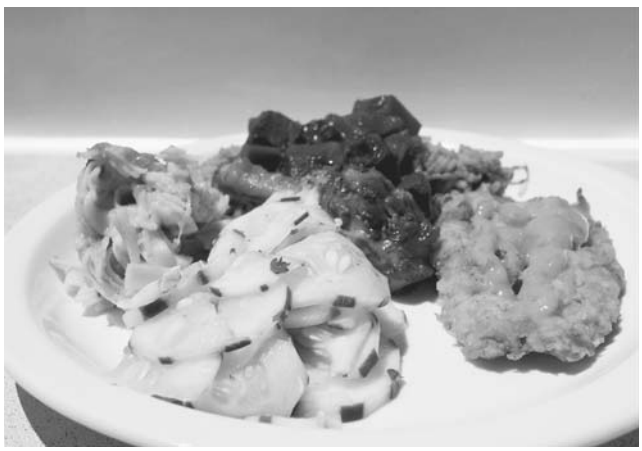
Depending on what was had for breakfast, the snack may include a cutter or a sandwich of some sort made with white bread or whole wheat bread; salt fish cakes; or an assortment of fruits; or a combination of these. All are accompanied by a drink. Many do not participate in having a snack at a particular time. Munching on various types of nuts; dried fruits; fresh fruit such as imported apples or local bananas; banana, yam, or potato chips (processed); or bagged salted snacks is normal.

### *Lunch or Breakfast*

Eating in Barbados depends on the financial means of the household. Lunch is usually the heavy meal, although some people still cook early in the morning and then cover the pots, leaving them on the stove to be warmed and eaten in the evening after work. Because of concerns about diet and bacteria, this is a dying art, and light meals are eaten in the evening if a big lunch was had. If not, then food is cooked fresh.

Lunch is eaten at home or in small eateries or restaurants, or it is obtained from van ladies who drive around with a full buffet in the back. For the middle class and more affluent, lunch can consist of a choice of starch and meat. Perhaps it would be easier here to say that Barbadians love a buffet with choices. So defining what a buffet consists of allows the reader to understand the choices that Barbadians might have in their daily feedings. Sunday lunches are usually the big meal of the week and might include several of these dishes.

Soups could be pea, pumpkin, vegetable, beef, or fish. One meat option is pepperpot, originally a Guyanese dish using *cassareep,* a thick black liquid derived from cassava that is used to cure the meats. If reboiled every day, this dish can remain out of the fridge for years. Pepperpot is now embedded in Barbadian buffet culture. Other meats include roast or stewed beef (with potatoes, carrots, and onions); suckling pig with stuffing; roast, stewed, or braised pork or lamb; baked, grilled, fried, or steamed fish (catch of the day); steamed or fried flying fish; and roast, baked, or fried chicken. Accompaniments might be stuffing, the respective gravies, peas and rice, macaroni pie, and boiled and sliced dasheen, yams, and sweet potatoes. Sweet potatoes are often made into a pie with pineapple and baked. Yams can also be found baked, sometimes in their shells, covered with cheese. Breadfruit is either boiled



A typical Caribbean lunch, including fried flying fish, cucumber salad, stewed pork, and macaroni salad. (StockPhotoPro)

or pickled. Breadfruit coucou is also served—it is boiled with salt beef, then mashed with a little milk, and stirred until the smooth and creamy consistency of the cornmeal coucou is reached. Other dishes include cornmeal coucou (just known as coucou), mashed green banana, pumpkin and spinach fritters, baked eggplant, green banana souse (served with pickle), and pork souse (traditionally served only on Saturdays, it is seen on buffet tables during the week). Pickle is a mixture of finely chopped onions, chives, parsley, cucumber, and lime juice. Vegetables such as carrots and christophene are usually served together boiled. Christophene is often seen in a cheese sauce. Mixed salad is always available, as is coleslaw. Beets in their own brine and cucumbers in lime are often served separately. Lunch is usually accompanied by juices as described earlier, or by wine or alcoholic beverages. Desserts can consist of several options as indicated earlier.

### *Tea*

In the traditional great houses of the plantation, a tea similar to an English tea was served, with all the various cookies, cakes, and pies to choose from. Today, very few people drink tea at teatime although the ritual does still exist among the well-to-do. In offices those at work may enjoy a cup of tea or coffee around 3 P.M. High teas are still served around 4 P.M. on Sundays or even later, depending on when lunch was served.

### *Dinner or Supper*

Barbadians have gone from traditionally being at-home eaters to being outside eaters. Dinner is usually picked up at a fast-food outlet, and this may include fried chicken and chips (French fries), fish and chips, or pizza. Chinese food is also very popular. Restaurants are finding more and more locals eating out to avoid having to cook at home. As the pace of life has picked up, the Barbadian diet has suffered. Many villagers still eat in the same way as described in the vignette, but many families very rarely sit and eat together anymore, as television and video games are taking over.

## Eating Out

Until the 1970s, Barbados did not really have a huge restaurant culture. Barbadians ate and entertained at home. Businessmen went to a restaurant occasionally for business lunches, and families went on special occasions. Today, although many Barbadian still entertain and eat at home, facilitated by the fact that many middle- to high-class homes have helpers and cooks, the number of restaurant has grown in such proportions that Barbados is being touted as "the Caribbean's culinary island." Tourism, a new influx of residents from other lands, and a growing affluent society of locals have influenced the opening of a bevy of restaurants that are visited by all with gusto, such as Chinese restaurants. Japanese sushi and sashimi bars are becoming popular using local fish. A few restaurants serve Mediterranean fare such as falafel and pita souvlaki. Thai food is also popular. Italian cuisine has always had its place, with lasagna having been incorporated into Bajan fare. One of the first restaurants on the island was Italian. Pizza is much loved, and the New York pizza on the south coast is excellent. Jamaican cuisine has found its place in the hearts of Barbadians, and jerk seasoning has managed to infiltrate Bajan seasoning as the next-best choice. Brazil has made its mark on the island as has India. The many Indians who settled in the Caribbean, having been brought to the islands as indentured slaves to take over when slavery was abolished, particularly in Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad, have a vibrant Caribbean Indian cuisine. Caribbean curries are slightly different from real Indian curries but nevertheless infused with wonderful spices. There has been a lot more interest of recent, mostly started by foreign chefs, in using local ingredients to fuse into these gourmet dishes, and this has become what is now known as "Caribbean fusion."

The average Barbadian still prefers good Bajan staples, and to give the fast-food outlets a run for their money, van ladies have cropped up in built-up areas. They have full buffets at the back of the van offering delicious homemade Bajan take-out fare at affordable prices. Small eateries are also dotted around the countryside. With the influence of the



A beach restaurant in Barbados. (Robert Lerich | Dreamstime.com)

Rastafarian movement *ital* (vegetarian) food has become a popular food source for those who consider meat to not be an option, and even raw-food dishes are increasing in popularity.

There are three fast-food chains: TGI Fridays, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), and the local Chefette. The latter serves up pizza, hamburgers, and broasted chicken, with some offering the BarBCue Barn with salad bar; grilled steak, fish, or chicken; and baked potatoes. Chefette is locally owned, has 15 outlets around the island, and has managed to stave off other American fast-food businesses by providing colorful, clean, well-organized outlets with drive-through facilities and children's indoor playgrounds.

## Special Occasions

Barbados as a small island is definitely on the list of the islands with many festivals. Almost every other weekend there is something going on that denotes food and drink. Clubs and bars abound. Rum shops are plentiful. Jazz, reggae, soca, or gospel on De Hill at Farley Hill brings out all manner of local foods and a bevy of alcohol. New Year's Day (January 1), Errol Barrow Day (January 21), Heroes' Day (April 28), Labor Day (May 1), Emancipation Day (August 1), Kadooment Day (the first Monday of August), Independence Day (November 30), Christmas Day (December 25), and Boxing Day (December 26) are all official holidays in Barbados.

On most days except Christmas Day and Kadooment Day, excursions take place in which families, their baskets filled with all manner of culinary delights, a cooler in hand, board special buses to take them to a particular picnic area—sometimes on a public beach or in special parks allotted for just this purpose. Typically *pelau* is precooked—sugar is burned in oil, seasoned chicken with onions and garlic is added, this is stirred until brown, and then

water is added, brought to a boil, and peas and rice are added. Sometimes raisins and nuts are placed into the finished pelau. Fried chicken and fish are also popular picnic foods, served with peas and rice, macaroni pie, coleslaw, and salad. Pig or chicken souse can also be added to the picnic basket. On these days many flock to the beach and then eat at home later, while others take their picnic baskets and coolers with them.

On May Day the celebrations are islandwide, but the biggest one takes place on Bay Street on the beach. The traditional Tukk Bands, Landship, Stilt Walkers, and Junkanoo (dressed in costumes made of bright pieces of cloth sewn up to cover the whole body) perform on stage and in the crowd, while grills sizzle with hot dogs, hamburgers, pork chops, and chicken or fish, and the oil in the buck pots on wood or coal fires bubbles with salt fish cakes or fried chicken parts. Vendors selling cotton candy, snow cones, or peanuts ply their trade. Banks beer and brand-name rums open their tents with cold drinks for sale. Huge speakers begin blasting soca, calypso, and dancehall in between the performances, and there is much festivity and frolicking in the sea for the day.

The yearly Agrofest is attended by people from all over the island. This is a weekend where all local food processors and anyone involved in the agricultural and animal-farming sectors come together at Queen's Park in Bridgetown for a huge fest of food, produce, exhibitions, and sales of flora, as well as competitions for various categories of animals bred on the island. On this day the Inter-American Institute for Co-operation in Agriculture, apart from its general involvement in the fest itself, puts on a Sunday Caribbean breakfast/brunch with various different island dishes; it is usually sold out before the first dish is served.

Another major festival is Crop Over. Based on the days of slavery when the crop had ended and the slaves were allowed a small celebration, it has now become a full-fledged carnival, a celebration of the end of the sugarcane crop season. The festivities that lead to the major costumed frenzy parade on the first Monday in August begin weeks in advance.

Although Christmas Eve and Christmas Day bring special menus offered by hotels and restaurants across the island, they are usually spent at home with family or friends. The fare may consist of any of the following depending on the financial means of the household: split pea and pumpkin soup, roast stuffed turkey, stuffed suckling pig with cracklings (or a roast pork leg or shoulder), baked ham with pineapple rings, roast stuffed chicken and/or duck, and a selection of all the dishes mentioned in the preceding sections. Dessert is usually plum pudding with brandy or rum sauce, rum cake, or black Christmas cake. Eggnog, sorrel, and ginger beer are served. Conkies are eaten throughout the season.

Old Year's Night begins with a dinner at home or at the various restaurants that serve up a special menu, moving on to home parties, clubs, and hotels for the traditional midnight countdown and ensuing fireworks across the island. New Year's Day involves an excursion or picnic or is a quiet day.

Easter Sunday follows the fashion of Christmas except for the Christmas pudding or cake. Hot cross buns are fashionable, and chocolate Easter bunnies fill the supermarkets.

Weddings follow the traditional English wedding but with typical Caribbean flair. They are particularly huge on the island, no matter how affluent the household is. The fruit for the wedding cake (as is done with the Christmas cake) is soaked in rum, brandy, and sherry for months before baking, and then the cake is pricked at intervals for one month prior to the wedding and before the icing is put on. Buffet lunches or dinners are the norm, and most of the dishes already mentioned are found on the tables. Alcoholic beverages and champagne flow like water. Depending on finances the guest list could be from 50 up to 1,000. Some weddings take place in churches, and others at the beach or any particularly specified place—those who can marry a couple will go anywhere on the island including out to sea.

Funerals are huge across the island. People who do not even know the deceased appear from nowhere to attend. Traditionally, the family of the deceased will have a gathering at a home that could be either just a few family members and friends enjoying snacks, full buffet lunches, or a distinctively Caribbean fete (a massive party with music and dancing).

## Diet and Health

Barbadians have always been known for their centenarians coming from all walks of life and from all financial sectors of the society. The problem now stands as to whether this reaching of such a ripe old age will continue, for it was attributed to the healthy diet before the influx of imported goods and fast-food outlets. Although Barbadians do lead a fairly healthy lifestyle compared to people who live in big cities, they are subjected to American cable television with its adoration of processed, unnatural, and fast foods. There is also the problem of pollution of the soil through the fertilizers and pesticides imported from the United States (in some cases those banned in that country); through the sudden massive amounts of construction of hotels and homes; and generally through the people's use of everything plastic, including foam containers for fast food, and bad waste and garbage practices.

Today, there is much concern about the diet and, therefore, the health of the average Barbadian. Heart disease, diabetes, and cancer are becoming almost the norm, and health and diet are in such question that government officials and those in the health care sector (doctors, nurses, etc.) have been finally forced into action. Far more information is available on keeping healthy, and an ever-growing number of people are following vegetarian or vegan diets, or simply eating less meat and more fish, fewer carbohydrates and more greens and salads. However, the fight has only just begun.

Organic farmers are popping up, but the soil itself is still in question. Help has also come with the setting up of recycling plants and educational material on problems of pollution. Exercise is now becoming a priority for many, as can be seen on the various boardwalks on the south and west coast, around the Garrison (a race course in Christ Church), or simply in neighborhood streets or in the many gyms across the island. But there is still much work to be done.

*Rosemary Parkinson*

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# Belize

## Overview

Belize is an English-speaking country located in the heart of Central America and measuring 8,866 square miles, slightly smaller than the state of Massachusetts. Its small population numbers about 308,000 people. It is bordered by Mexico to the north and Guatemala to the west and south. The Caribbean Sea demarcates its extensive eastern coastline, which is characterized by over 200 small *cayes* (islands) and has the world's second-largest barrier reef, which runs the length of the country. On land, the country is characterized by diverse ecosystems ranging from open pine forest and seasonally flooded grass wetlands to the low but rugged Maya Mountains, which run parallel to the coast, as well as dense tropical hardwood forest in some portions of the southern and western regions of the country.

Belize was occupied by at least four different Mayan-speaking groups before the arrival of the Spanish in the 1540s. The Spanish never exercised full control, allowing buccaneers and refugees from elsewhere in the Caribbean to settle the coast, exploiting marine resources like manatees and turtles and cutting logwood (used for dyeing clothing in Europe) for export. These early "Baymen" imported African slaves and in the early 1700s began cutting mahogany in the rain forest, which remained the major export until the 20th century. The mercantile export-oriented colonial culture, which centered on natural-resource extraction, led to specific culinary traditions that can be seen in Belize today.

The people of Belize are a varied blend of descendants of immigrants and native groups. The ethnically diverse population encompasses an array of peoples, including three Mayan groups (Yucatec, Mopan, and Kekchi), Afro-European Creole descendants of slaves, the Afro-Carib Garifuna, East Indian, Chinese, Mennonites, and many others. Mestizo or "Spanish" people have replaced the Creole as the majority population during the past 30 years, now making up 48.7 percent of the populace. English is the official language, while Kriol is the lingua franca for much of the population. Spanish, various Mayan languages, Garinagu, and other languages are spoken as well. The population is relatively young, with 37.9 percent under the age of 15. The country is almost evenly divided between rural and urban dwellers, and is now rapidly urbanizing at a rate of 3.1 percent per year. Belize City is the largest settlement, with 25 percent of the nation's population. This rural/urban divide is expressed in many aspects of Belizean culture including food. Full independence from Britain was achieved on September 21, 1981, although the country was given limited self-government in 1964.

Forestry has been succeeded by agriculture and a rapidly growing tourism-based economy. While Belize is better off than its neighbors, its economy was strongly affected by the global recession, and the country has experienced increasing poverty and a broadening income gap in recent years. About 10 percent of the population is involved in agricultural production, with 71 percent in services, including tourism. The tourism sector has been extensively promoted by the government and private sector. Fishing and fish farming as well as the production of sugarcane, bananas, and citrus are complemented by expanding niche markets in organic

products such as cacao, spices, and tropical fruits including papaya and *pitahaya* (sold in the United States as dragon fruit).

## Food Culture Snapshot

Linda Flowers is an urban Creole, a full-time single maternal grandmother and legal guardian of two teenagers, Janelle and Lewis. She is also raising a neighbor's son, James, whose parents migrated to New York and are planning to fetch James once they have good jobs. Such arrangements are common because so many Belizeans move back and forth to the United States. Janelle and Lewis's parents, Natalie and Don, are separated but live in Los Angeles, where Natalie works in a hospital as a nurse's aide and Don is unemployed. Natalie sends money home on a semiregular basis to help raise the children. James is not in school and often eats outside the house, but Janelle and Lewis are students, so they can come home every day to have their grandmother's rice and beans for lunch. The entire family appreciates her early-morning johnnycakes with jam, butter, and honey. On Sundays and special occasions such as Easter and Christmas, Linda cooks large meals and makes special desserts to celebrate the season.

Far to the south in the rural district of Toledo, Emilia Choc, a Kekchi Maya mother of seven children, three girls and four boys, lives with her husband, Eduardo, in Blue Creek, a small agricultural village with a mixed Maya population. All but her eldest son, Lorenzo, are in school; Lorenzo works in the tourism industry at the beach town of Placencia in the north and regularly sends money home to help pay for his siblings' schooling and other expenses. Eduardo farms rice and organic cacao for sale, and corn and beans for subsistence, while Emilia tends a garden near the house to provide vegetables and root crops for the kitchen. Every morning she gets up early with her eldest daughter, Teresa, to prepare corn tortillas for the entire family. Often for the evening meal she cooks stew beans and tamales accompanied by the ubiquitous corn tortillas and hot pepper. The youngest children come home from grammar school for lunch, but the older ones have to travel to reach the nearest high school, and so they buy food there or bring a few corn tortillas along instead of returning home.

## Major Foodstuffs

Urban Belizeans in places like Belmopan and Belize City may buy groceries at supermarkets, but most Belizeans purchase their foodstuffs at open-air markets and dry goods stores, and some farmers grow a significant portion of their own food. Because of the broad diversity of Belize's people, there is a lot of variety in foodstuffs and recipes across the country. However, certain dishes are omnipresent. Rice and beans and stew beans and rice (dishes distinguished on the basis of predominance of one ingredient or the other) are two popular staple foods that can be found in every corner of the country. The beans are almost always red kidney beans, initially imported into Belize from New Orleans but adopted as the nation's favorite bean, over the native black beans.

Rice, another introduction from the Old World, was quick to replace corn among urban Belizeans, although rural farmers and Maya groups still depend on corn, in the form of corn tortillas, as a staple. Mestizos and other urban folk consume factory-made corn tortillas and other corn-based street foods, such as tamales, *garnaches* (a fried tortilla topped with refried beans, cheese, cabbage, and other garnishes), and *panades* (fried corn dumplings stuffed with shredded shark or catfish). Imported wheat flour is also used, especially in towns, to make flour tortillas. Wheat flour is also used to make fry jacks and johnnycakes, which are both eaten as breakfast breads; yeast breads such as coconut-based Creole bread; and holiday treats such as black fruit cake.

The Garifuna people make a staple bread from cassava, which is grated, washed, and processed to remove poisons, then cooked on a griddle into durable large round wafers. Declining in popularity, it is still sold in places such as gas stations and eaten as a snack. Cassava is also eaten extensively in soups and stews, along with other root crops like cocoyam, soup yams, sweet potatoes, and potatoes. Green plantains and bananas are grated or cooked, mashed, and made into dumplings called *maltilda foot* or

*bundiga* by the Garifuna. They and other cooking bananas are fried when ripe and commonly served alongside rice and beans, stew beans and rice, and other entrées as a side dish.

Belizeans enjoy a wide range of meat and fish. Especially along the coast, fish, lobster, conch, and shrimp have long been a part of local cuisine. Along the rivers freshwater fish are commonly consumed. Chicken, pork (including imported salted pork such as pig tail, which is used to flavor beans), and some beef are the most common meats. All three are often prepared stewed and served with rice and beans or stew beans and rice. Cow-foot soup and chicken *escabeche* (a vinegar and onion soup) are other common and popular meat dishes. Various large wild birds, deer, large rodents such as *gibnut* and agouti, armadillos, iguanas, and peccaries (similar to a wild pig) are eaten in the countryside and valued by all at holidays. Imported canned meats such as corned beef, Spam, and Vienna sausages are also eaten, though they have become relatively expensive as the price of chicken has gone down.

Almost all Belizeans love spicy food and enthusiastically apply hot sauce or hot peppers to every dish. The most famous Belizean hot sauce is Marie Sharps, made from fiery habaneros. Pepper plants are often grown around doorways or in yards to provide spice on demand. People make their own hot sauce with vinegar, onions, and hot peppers; it is kept in a jar on the table.

Until recently, all dairy products were imported, with canned milk a regular feature of the diet and an ingredient in most desserts. In recent decades the Mennonite farmers have established a local dairy industry, and fresh milk, yogurt, and some cheese are now available, while imports have also rapidly increased. Coconut milk and oil have traditionally been used instead of butter and milk. Lard, and now vegetable shortening, is another staple fat. Coconut oil is used in rice and beans and to flavor meat and fish dishes, while coconut milk is used to flavor breads and in many Garifuna soups and stews. Coconut is also used to flavor desserts and candies. Lethal yellow disease has been killing most coconut trees since the mid-1990s, so imported dried or canned coconut milk has become popular.

Belizeans eat a variety of vegetables including Old World introductions such as cabbage, carrots, onions and garlic, and okra, as well as tomatoes, peppers, and others from the Americas. Other popular vegetables include callaloo (amaranth) leaves, chayote, cucumbers, tomatoes, onions, carrots, and, in the countryside, a variety of wild leaves, mushrooms, and vegetables. Coleslaw made from cabbage is associated with Creoles and is served in most Belizean restaurants, and various salads are increasing in popularity as they are promoted as healthy foods and demanded by tourists.

Belizeans love and regularly eat a wide variety of fruits including pineapple, bananas, mangoes, watermelon, citrus fruits, and lesser-known tropical fruits such as golden plums, soursops (*guanábana*—a prickly green fruit), mameys (a kind of sapote that is round and light brown with a creamy interior), custard apples, cashew fruit, tamarind, and *craboos* (a small round yellow fruit). Children especially relish green fruits dipped in salt and chili powder.

Many of these fruits are used to make beverages; lime juice is especially common and often served with meals. Tamarind drink is also quite popular. Many fruits are fermented to make homemade wines. Cashew wine is particularly famous and is also commercially produced. A strong corn beer called *chicha* is also made at home, especially by the Maya groups. A thick beverage made with seaweed is often sold in markets or on the street as sexual fortifier. Sodas of various flavors, called soft drinks, are very popular, as are imported beers, especially Jamaican Red Stripe and Guinness. Locally produced Belikin Beer is the brew of choice for most, and rum is the traditional hard liquor, locally produced from sugarcane. Black tea, a colonial legacy, is popular, as is instant coffee, both served with imported sweetened condensed milk. Herbal teas, especially lemongrass ( *fevergrass*), are also popular as both medicine and drink.

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**Rice and Beans**

1 lb dried red kidney beans

½ lb salted pig tail, salt pork, or cured pork hock

8 c water
2 cloves garlic
1 large onion, chopped
12 oz coconut milk (fresh or 1 can)
1 tsp black pepper
1 tsp salt
½ tsp thyme or ground allspice
2 lb long-grain white rice

Soak beans overnight or for a minimum of 4 hours. Boil the pig tail or salt pork once for about 5 minutes to remove salt, and discard the water. Repeat if necessary. Cook the beans in a covered pot in the 8 cups of water, with garlic, chopped onion, and pork, until tender. Add the coconut milk, black pepper and salt, and thyme or ground allspice, then cook for about 10 more minutes. Add the dry rice, and stir thoroughly. Cover well, and cook over a low flame until all the water has been absorbed and the rice is tender (about 25 minutes). Add a small quantity of extra water if needed, but don't worry if a crust forms on the bottom.

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This is typically served with some type of stewed meat, fried plantain (*bluggo*) or another type of cooking banana called *flaggo,* and coleslaw made with carrot and cabbage and dressed with imported "salad cream."

## Typical Meals

Most Belizeans eat three meals a day: breakfast, lunch, and supper, which is often called tea. Breakfast can vary from a few fresh corn tortillas and leftover beans to more elaborate fry jacks (puffed fried dough), refried beans, eggs, cheese, and fried bacon or canned meat. Biscuits like johnnycakes and powder buns are often hawked on the street or sold door to door by children. Breakfast is usually eaten quite early, especially in rural areas.

Lunch is normally eaten at noon, particularly in urban areas, when school lets out and government offices close. The meal is traditionally the heaviest of the day, with rice and beans providing the bulk of the calories, usually accompanied by fried bananas, potato salad, and fried or stewed fish or meat. This is often followed by a brief siesta. While traditionally students and workers go home for lunch, nowadays it is often more convenient for some of them to buy food from street vendors. In agricultural areas men may return home for lunch or, if they are working far from the house, may pack a lunch of corn or flour tortillas and cheese or meat. Convenience foods like canned soup and soda crackers have been used for many years, and now ramen noodles have also become common.

Supper is eaten relatively early, usually between 6 and 8 P.M., although in the cities this dinner may be later. This meal is usually much lighter than lunch and may consist of leftovers or even just a couple pieces of bun and cheese, often served with tea, either imported black tea or local herbal infusions, often mixed with milk and heavily sweetened.

## Eating Out

Urban Belizeans often purchase street food during the day, especially if they live too far from home to return for lunch or if there is no one at home to cook. Small "cool spots" serve cold drinks and plates of rice and beans, barbecued chicken, fish, and stewed meat, or "Spanish" foods such as garnaches; while vendors in the street hawk tamales, panades (small crescent-shaped pies), conch fritters, *dukunu* (a green corn tamale), and various breads and buns. These same vendors cater to rural Belizean families on market days and to men drinking together in town bars (which often serve conch fritters, ceviche, or other snacks). In Belize City a wide range of different restaurants, including many Lebanese and Chinese, as well as Mexican, Indian, pizza, and Japanese restaurants, may be found. The influence of East Indians means that many Belizean restaurants serve curried chicken along with rice and beans. Chinese fast-food shops, known for their fried chicken, are a fixture of Belize City street corners. Especially on Saturdays the smell of barbecued chicken fills the air in many towns as grills are set up along roads and beaches.




The Shak, one of many beach restaurants in Placencia, Belize. (StockPhotoPro)

## Special Occasions

Most Belizeans are Christian, with 49.6 percent Catholic and 27 percent Protestant. Fourteen percent espouse other religions, including Islam and the Baha'i faith, while 9.4 percent do not claim any religion. Christianity has blended with Maya and Garifuna religions to create hybrid practices and beliefs. An offering of food and drink to the ancestors is a common practice in Garifuna ritual.

Christmas is an especially important holiday for most Belizeans and is typically celebrated with imported goods and food. This tradition dates back to the logging days, when the holiday was marked by mahogany crews streaming back to town from distant camps to spend their earnings. Special drinks such as *rum popo,* a very strong eggnog, and foods like turkey, ham, and black fruit cake, are essential parts of the festivities. Imported grapes, apples, and pears are sold at extravagant prices and are purchased for stockings and treats for children. The old custom of the "Christmas Bram" involved a crowd of merrymakers wending their way from house to house, eating and drinking at each one. The custom has been adapted into a two-week-long celebration where most work in the country comes to a halt. Easter, which falls during the beautiful weather of the dry season, is associated with trips to the islands for those living near the coast, and fishing or barbecuing for those inland. A special dish made with river turtle (*hicatee*) and parboiled rice is a customary Easter dish in the Belize River valley.

Secular holidays such as the September Celebrations commemorating independence and the Battle of Saint George's Caye Day are occasions with high levels of alcohol consumption, in addition to street celebrations and parades. Many vendors congregate to sell food, drink, and snacks to the celebrants.

## Diet and Health

Lifestyle diseases are common in Belize, especially heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. Today, many Belizeans, especially those of middle age, try to eat healthier although the most popular foods still contain too much sugar and saturated fat. The sudden death of the Belizean world music star Andy Palacio from a heart attack in 2008 shocked the entire nation and dramatized the problem of a sedentary lifestyle and unhealthy diet. The influence of American relatives and mass media such as television on Belizean attitudes toward food and bodily health and appearance is also apparent, especially in more cosmopolitan places such as the capital Belmopan and Belize City, where even diet television dinners can be purchased at American-style supermarkets.

*Lyra Spang and Richard Wilk*

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# Bolivia

## Overview

Bolivia, one of the poorest and least developed countries in South America, is one of the hemisphere's highest, most isolated, and most rugged landlocked nations. Bolivia is bordered by Brazil to the north and east, Paraguay and Argentina to the south, and Chile and Peru to the west.

Bolivia's topography and climate are varied, from the peaks of the Andes in the west to the eastern lowlands, situated within the Amazon basin. Its topography includes some of the earth's coldest, warmest, windiest, and steamiest locations: the dry, salty, and swampy natural landscapes of the dry salt flats of Uyuni; the steaming jungles of the Amazon; and the wildlife-rich grasslands of the southeast.

Bolivia is a democratic republic, divided into nine regions, and it is home to more than seven million people. Bolivia has a concentrated indigenous population (60%) with heritage including Aymará, Quechua, Guaraní, and over 30 other ethnic groups. Famous since Spanish colonial days for its mineral wealth, modern Bolivia was once a part of the ancient Inca Empire. After the Spaniards defeated the Incas in the 16th century, Bolivia's predominantly Indian population was reduced to slavery. The remoteness of the Andes helped protect the Bolivian Indians from the European diseases that decimated other South American Indians. But the existence of a large indigenous group forced to live under the thumb of their colonizers created a stratified society that continues to this day. Wealthy urban elites, who are mostly of Spanish ancestry, have traditionally dominated political and economic life, whereas most Bolivians are low-income subsistence farmers, miners, small traders, or artisans.

Bolivia is a country rich in natural resources, with key exports including gas and zinc. The country's agricultural exports include soybeans, coffee, sugar, cotton, corn, and timber, as well as coca, sunflower seed (for oil), and organic chocolate. Despite these rich resources, Bolivia continues to be one of the poorest countries in Latin America, with almost two-thirds of its people, many of whom are subsistence farmers, living in poverty. Population density ranges from less than 1 person per square mile in the southeastern plains to about 25 per square mile (10 per square kilometer) in the central highlands. The annual population growth rate is about 1.45 percent (2006).

Bolivia's estimated 2006 gross domestic product (GDP) totaled $10.3 billion. Economic growth was estimated at about 4.5 percent, and inflation was estimated at about 4.3 percent. The average annual earnings are around US$900, and GDP per capita is around US$2,900 (2005 estimate).

The economy of Bolivia has had a historical pattern of a single-commodity focus. From silver to tin to coca, Bolivia has enjoyed only occasional periods of economic diversification. Political instability and difficult topography have constrained efforts to modernize the agricultural sector. Similarly, relatively low population growth coupled with a low life expectancy and high incidence of disease has kept the labor supply in flux and prevented industries from flourishing. Rampant inflation and corruption have also thwarted development. The mining

industry, especially the extraction of natural gas and zinc, currently dominates Bolivia's export economy.

There is widespread underemployment; a large percentage of the underemployed supplement their income by participating in coca production, mainly in the Yungas, and in the informal street-market economy. The government remains heavily dependent on foreign aid. A large part of agricultural revenue comes from the illegal growing and processing of coca leaves. The Bolivian government has tried to have coca replaced by other crops, but this has given rise to a number of problems, and the coca leaf remains one of the major sources of national revenue.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Acarapi and Claudia live in La Paz, one of the more affluent areas of Bolivia. Acarapi works in the local mines, while Claudia is the primary domestic provider, looking after their four children and managing the household and all other household duties including the cooking. Their lifestyle is common among the more affluent neighborhoods of La Paz, and their diet is made up of a combination of meat and potato dishes.

For Claudia, shopping for food to prepare meals is a daily ritual. Bread is purchased daily fresh from a street vendor or bakery. Breakfast is taken in the local market or in the home and is a simple preparation of coffee, tea, or a hot maize beverage (*api*) served with bread.

For Acarapi and Claudia, following Bolivian tradition, lunch is the main meal of the day. According to Acarapi, because of the altitude and work ethic in Bolivia, most people don't eat dinner until very late, and they don't like to go to bed on a full stomach. Acarapi returns home every day to eat lunch with his family. Lunch typically consists of soup, up to three "main" dishes, and sometimes dessert. Most lunches would include some potatoes—fried, boiled, or whipped together with other foods.

Meat, normally beef, chicken, or sausage, accompanies most dishes, and vegetables usually include red onions, tomatoes, shredded lettuce or cabbage, carrots, peas, and broccoli. All meals are usually accompanied by *llajhua,* a hot spicy salsa made from tomatoes and hot peppers ground on a large stone.

Claudia begins making lunch around 10:30 and continues preparation for several hours. Meals in Bolivia are a big challenge, with no premade ingredients available, so lunch takes considerable time to prepare. Around 5 P.M. the family may have a snack of tea and rolls with jam or *dulce de leche* (caramel sauce). A light dinner is usually served around 9 P.M.

## Major Foodstuffs

Though Bolivia is currently self-sufficient in sugar, rice, and beef, it still has to import certain foodstuffs. The chief Bolivian crops are potatoes, cassava, sugarcane, coffee, maize, rice, and soybeans with a major share of farm income derived from the illicit growing and processing of coca leaves, the source of cocaine. The relationship between access to land, poverty, and food security appears to be a kind of vicious cycle, particularly for the rural altiplano population in Bolivia. In the context of widespread poverty and limited access to institutional social security, access to land is a crucial factor in creating favorable conditions for subsistence agriculture and hence food security.

The typical diet is abundant in carbohydrates but deficient in other food categories. In the highlands, the primary staple is the potato (dozens of varieties of this Andean domesticate are grown), followed



Two women harvesting in their potato field in Bolivia. (iStockPhoto)

by other Andean and European-introduced tubers and grains (e.g., *oca,* quinoa, barley, and, increasingly, rice), maize, and legumes, especially the broad bean. Freeze-dried potatoes (*chuño*) and air-dried jerky (*ch'arki*) from cattle or Andean camelids (llama, alpaca, and vicuña) are common, although beef forms an insignificant part of the daily diet.

Bolivia is self-sufficient in almost all food staples with the exception of wheat. Highland crops include tubers, maize, and legumes. Other crops (e.g., peanuts, citrus fruits, bananas, plantains, and rice) are grown in the Oriente, while large cattle ranches are prominent in the departments of Beni and Pando. In eastern Santa Cruz, large agricultural enterprises supply most of the country's rice, sugar, eating and cooking oils, and export crops such as soybeans. Enormous forests provide the raw materials for the lumber and wood-products industry (deforestation is an increasing problem). The coca leaf, which is fundamental in Andean ritual, social organization, and health, has always been cultivated in the eastern regions, but the international drug trade has made Bolivia the third-largest coca-leaf producer and exporter in the world.

The simultaneous processes of demographic transition and urbanization currently underway in Bolivia are having a significant impact on cooking traditions and the use of traditional recipes and ingredients in the family home. Food preparation is an important daily ritual for Bolivian families, with family meals playing a critical role in family relationships and socialization. Until the mid-1970s, the average Bolivian family consisted of close to seven children per woman, and the average family as of 2008 is estimated at four children. Food preparation and cleanliness are closely associated with national folklore and taboo; the family kitchen is a space where food is the focus, and the rituals associated with making the raw cooked and the dirty clean are primarily the responsibility of female family members.

Bolivia is in a situation of chronic food insecurity, which seems to be particularly acute in the traditional rural settlements of the altiplano and the valleys. Heavy-handed state intervention has resulted in some improvement in the food supply in recent years, with families being able to enjoy fixed prices for staples such as flour, bread, and oil. Purchasing groceries is increasingly occurring at specialized shops set up by the government where rice, flour, red meat, poultry, and oil are sold at lower prices. The availability of produce significantly influences the family meal and its preparation, as do the strong social and cultural mores of the Bolivian people.

## Cooking

Bolivia is home to numerous culinary styles, each with its own personality representative of the nation's diverse climatic and geographic conditions. Bolivian dishes consist mainly of meat, fish, and poultry blended with herbs and spices. The diet also consists of fresh fruit and vegetables. When using meat, every part of the animal (particularly cows) is consumed. Tongue, kidney, stomach, and all cuts of meat are used during cooking.

Bolivians typically prepare and eat *salteñas* in the morning and empanadas in the afternoon (both of these are meat or vegetables pies) and can have up to five small meals a day. Meals generally consist of potatoes, meat, a large assortment of breads made from corn or quinoa, and pastries. Fresh fruit juices are also abundant and can include blackberry, peach, and lemonade. In the more traditional rural areas, coca leaf is often chewed in the evening after a meal. Bolivian food preparation is dominated by meat dishes, accompanied by potatoes, rice, and shredded lettuce, and food is often accompanied by traditional hot sauces made from tomatoes and pepper pods.

Some typical Bolivian dishes include *ají de lengua,* spicy cow's tongue; *lechón al horno,* roast pig, served on New Year's Day; *fritanga,* spicy pork and egg stew; *majao,* a rice-and-meat dish served with fried egg, fried plantain, and fried yucca (tapioca); *cuñapes,* a bread made of cheese and yucca starch; *pan dulce,* a sweet bread served at Christmas; *chuño phuti,* freeze-dried potatoes; *escabeche,* pickled vegetables; *cicadas,* coconut candies; *leche asada,* roasted milk (a dessert); and *helado de canela,* cinnamon sorbet.

Some traditional dishes include majao, *silpancho* (meat served with rice and potatoes), *pacumutu* (a

rice dish with grilled beef, fried yucca, and cheese), salteñas and empanadas, *locro* (a soup made with rice, chicken, and banana), and *chicharrón de pacu* (made with the local Pacu fish, rice, and yucca).

Some potatoes are freeze-dried after they are harvested. Bolivians cover raw potatoes with a cloth and leave them outside during the cold nights and dry days of early winter. The potatoes freeze at night, and the next day the people stomp on them to press out the water the vegetables retained. After a few days, the potatoes have been freeze-dried and are called chuño (CHEW-nyo). They last for months, even years, and can be cooked after being soaked overnight in a pot of water.

Corn is also used to make the fermented maize drink called chicha (CHEE-chah). It is a sacred alcoholic drink for the Incas. They drink it from bowls made from hollowed gourds. Before and after drinking it, Bolivians spill a few drops onto the ground. This gesture is meant as an offering to the Inca earth goddess Pachamama, to ensure a good harvest.

Traditional cooking methods revolved around use of a fire for the majority of dishes. Meals were prepared by placing food directly on the heat or grilling it on wooden sticks in order to smoke it. Food is sometimes placed over the embers or on flat pottery or covered with leaves and buried to cook over stones heated from the fire. The subsequent influences of numerous global cuisines have seen these traditional cooking methods replaced or adapted in some areas, particularly the more urban centers.

### *Picante de Pollo* (Chicken in Spicy Sauce)

*Picante de pollo* is chicken in a special spicy sauce, and there are many variations of this traditional Bolivian dish.

#### Ingredients

3 lb chicken, cut into medium-size pieces

2 c white onion, cut into small strips

1¼ c carrots, julienned

1 c turnip, diced

1 tbsp salt

3 c chicken stock

¼ c fresh *locoto* or chili pepper, finely chopped

1 tsp ground cumin

1 tsp ground coriander

1 tsp ground black pepper

2 garlic cloves, peeled, chopped

In a large casserole dish combine the chicken pieces with the onion, carrot, turnip, and salt. Pour the chicken stock over this, until all ingredients are covered. Cook over high heat until the dish is bubbling. Turn heat to low and simmer for 90 minutes until the chicken is soft. Stir occasionally and continue to check on the level of chicken stock. If it seems low, add more stock, as you need some liquid to serve the dish. Add the fresh locoto or chili pepper, cumin, coriander, ground black pepper, and garlic, and stir and cook for 30 minutes. Serve with steamed rice.

## Typical Meals

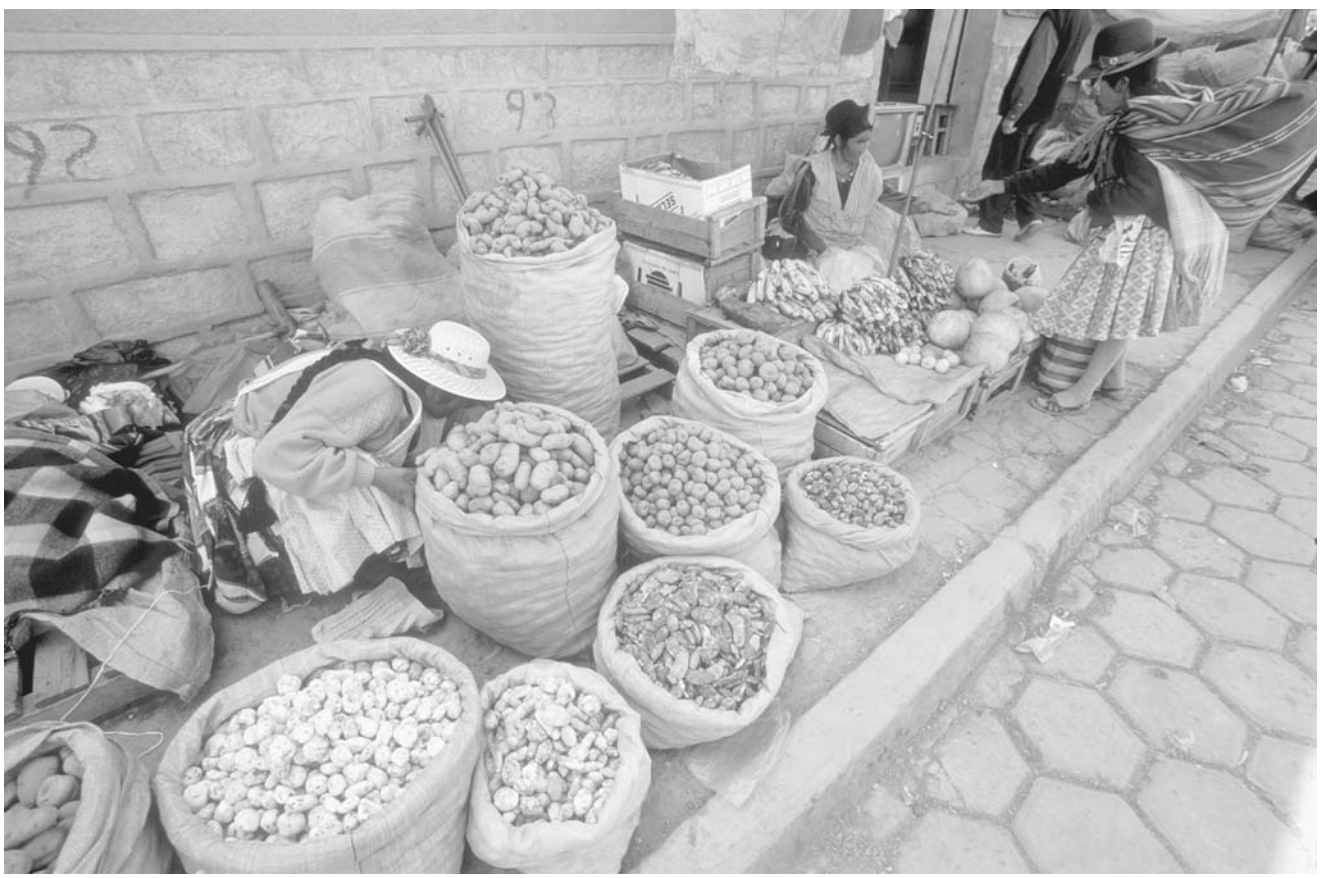
Like the people of the other nations of the Andean highlands such as Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador, Bolivians prefer to eat a good breakfast, a substantial lunch, and a small dinner. As the main meal of the day, lunch is eaten with family whenever possible and often consists of soup, a main dish, and perhaps dessert. Bolivian meals are heavy on the pork and potatoes, with chicken, rice, and vegetables also being popular choices. The potato is the main staple, served at most meals, sometimes with rice or noodles. Potatoes, originally cultivated by the Incas in this region, are often served with meat. They are the country's number one crop, and more than 200 different varieties are grown. The most popular meat is beef. No part of the cow is wasted, not even the tongue, which is used to make a popular spicy cow-tongue dish. Bolivians also enjoy chicken and llama—they even eat llama jerky. In rural areas, rabbits and guinea pigs are also eaten.

Bolivian food is not often spicy, with the majority of heat and spice found in condiments such as a sauce la llajhua which is made with tomato and locoto (hot chilies). Maize beer (chicha) is a traditional and ritually important beverage in the highlands.

In the Oriente, rice, cassava, peanuts, bananas, legumes, and maize constitute the cornerstone of the daily diet, supplemented by fish, poultry, and beef. Favorite national delicacies include guinea pig (also consumed during important ceremonial occasions) and deep-fried pork (chicharrón). Meals are served with hot pepper sauces.

The people of Bolivia start their day with a light breakfast. Many people eat empanadas—cheese- and meat-filled turnovers. People often wash them down with api, which is a sweet breakfast tea made from corn, lemons, cloves, and cinnamon. This is common in the cities and towns, with the api often served with bread. Breakfast is followed by a mid-morning snack of salteñas (sawl-TAY-nyahs). Similar to empanadas, salteñas are sweet meat pastries filled with a wide variety of ingredients such as diced meat or chicken, vegetables, potatoes, raisins, and hot sauce. Along with empanadas, salteñas can be purchased from many street vendors, and in marketplaces hot meals and stews are also consumed. In the countryside, breakfast sometimes consists of toasted ground cereals with cheese and tea, followed by a thick soup (*lawa*) at 9 or 10 A.M.

The most important meal of the day is lunch (*almuerzo*), which in upper-class urban households and restaurants typically is a four-course meal. It usually includes soup and a main dish. The soup typically contains beef, vegetables, potatoes, and quinoa. Peanut soup is also popular. The main dish that follows the soup usually includes meat, potatoes, rice, and vegetables. Favorites include *pique macho* (PEE-kay MA-cho)—grilled chunks of meat, tomatoes, onions, and hot peppers. The spicy chicken dish picante de pollo is also popular. Silpancho, beef that is pounded thin and served on a bed of rice or



Street vendors sell bananas, melons, and a variety of potatoes, including chuno (preserved potatoes), at an open air market in the mining town of Oruro, Bolivia. (Anders Ryman | Corbis)

potatoes with a fried egg on top, is another favorite. Lunch for those living near Lake Titicaca may include fresh lake trout. Bolivians in this region tend to enjoy fish grilled, fried, stuffed, steamed, or served covered in a spicy sauce. Frogs' legs from the lake's frogs are also eaten and are considered a delicacy. Peasants and lower-income urban dwellers have a lunch of boiled potatoes, homemade cheese, a hard-boiled egg, and hot sauce (llajhua) or a thick stew with rice or potatoes.

Corn, a major crop in Bolivia, is the main ingredient in *humitas* (ooMEE-tahs), which are a popular side dish. Corn kernels cut off the cob are combined with spices and wrapped in a small package made from corn husks. The package is tied with string and steamed in a pot of simmering water. Another popular meal choice is quinoa. Quinoa grows well in Bolivia's cold and arid climate. For meals the outer coating is removed to reveal seeds, which are ground or boiled in water and used for baking breads or as an ingredient in soups and stews.

A much lighter meal is eaten at around seven in the evening. Bolivians also snack on locally grown fruits including oranges, grapes, apples, peaches, cherries, papayas, pears, and avocados. Sweeter options include sweet pastries, ice cream, sorbets, and coconut candies called cicadas.

## Eating Out

Eating out is not a common occurrence in Bolivia, with most families eating in the home. Bolivians tend to eat out when celebrating major occasions, or if they have traveled, there is a tendency to eat out more often or entertain friends at home. Typically the restaurants in La Paz and other affluent



A meat vendor at an outdoor market in La Paz, Bolivia. (Shargaljut | Dreamstime.com)

areas in Bolivia, such as the tourist resort areas, are not restricted to traditional Bolivian dishes. Increasingly, cuisine from all over the world can be found in Bolivia including Asian, Indian, Middle Eastern, and other international tastes. Fast-food chains are also increasing due to their convenience and family-oriented style. The cost point also makes the eating-out experience more accessible for the less-affluent Bolivians.

## Special Occasions

There are many holidays and festivals held throughout Bolivia. Many holidays celebrated in Bolivia are of religious or political origin, usually celebrating a Catholic or Indian saint or god, or an event such as a historic battle. Festivals or carnivals typically feature local music, bands, costumes, parades, dancing, fireworks, alcohol, and food.

The most elaborate and hearty meals, with abundant fresh vegetables and beef, chicken, or pork, are eaten at ceremonial occasions, such as the life-cycle events of baptism, marriage, and death. Public displays of generosity and reciprocity, offering abundant food and drink not often available at other times of the year (e.g., bottled beer, cane alcohol [*trago*], and beef), are an important cultural imperative. On All Souls' Day, meals are prepared for the recently deceased and those who are ill. Many important meals mimic those of upper-class restaurants in the major cities, including dishes such as *ají de pollo* (chicken smothered in hot chili sauce and served with rice and/or potatoes).

Social life is punctuated by many rituals that coincide with major agricultural seasons and/or are linked to the celebration of Christian deities, with specific foods associated with many of these rituals. For example, Epiphany or the Twelfth Night on January 6 is a celebration where gifts are given to children to celebrate the Day of the Kings. Children place their shoes outside the door, and the Three Kings (usually the family) fill them with candy and pastries at night. These can include sweet fritters, or *tawa-tawas*. The Bolivian version is unique in the use of cane syrup in the final product.

In Bolivia, Christmas (Navidad) continues to be deeply religious, maintaining the original meaning and purpose of the holiday. Most families set up a *pesebre* (nativity scene) in their homes, and families gather to feast together at midnight after mass, others on Christmas Day. As these holidays take place during the hottest time of year (summer in the Southern Hemisphere) meals usually feature *picana,* a soup made of chicken, beef, corn, and spices that is eaten traditionally on Christmas. The table is also set with salads, roast pork or roast beef, and an abundance of tropical fruit. For the same reasons, the table is usually adorned with fresh flowers. At midnight the families toast with champagne or wine and eat taffy-filled wafer cookies called *turrón*.

The *canastón* is another important holiday tradition. A large gift basket, it is given by employers to their employees on the day prior to taking their vacation. The canastón is a simple but usually large basket (sometimes a plastic washtub is used) filled with the basic food staples such as ketchup and mustard, bread, jam, crackers and cookies, sugar, rice, flour, and sometimes chocolates or candy. These canastónes are almost never decorated, except for a clear plastic covering closed off with a large red bow. A *panetón* (a delicious traditional holiday sweet bread with raisins and nuts) and a bottle of *cidra* (sparkling nonalcoholic cider) are included.

On New Year's Eve the family gathers again, feasts at midnight, and toasts with champagne. Each family member must also eat 12 grapes at midnight.

Bolivians celebrate All Saints' Day on November 1 to honor the Catholic saints. This has been combined with Día de Todos Santos, also known as the Día de los Muertos, or the Day of the Dead. Like many other Catholic celebrations, this melds existing indigenous festivities with the "new" Catholicism and "old" pagan beliefs. The dead are honored by visits to their grave sites, often with food, flowers, and all family members. In Bolivia, the dead are expected to return to their homes and villages. During this time, families and guests, who enter with clean hands, share in traditional dishes, particularly the favorites of the deceased. Tables are laden with bread figurines called *t'antawawas,* sugarcane, chicha, candies, and decorated pastries. At



Cocoa leaves are often used in Bolivia for their medicinal properties. (StockPhotoPro)

the cemeteries, the souls are greeted with more food, music, and prayers. Rather than a sad occasion, the Día de Todos Santos is a joyous event.

Death, marriage, and almost any other social or religious ritual in Bolivia will include an offering of coca. "Guard its leaves with love," warns the "Legend of Coca," an 800-year-old oral poem. "And when you feel pain in your heart, hunger in your flesh and darkness in your mind, lift it to your mouth. You will find love for your pain, nourishment for your body and light for your mind."

## Diet and Health

Most Bolivians, particularly in the rural areas and low-income neighborhoods surrounding the large cities, lack access to basic medical care, with most sick people cared for by family members. While Bolivia has improving trends in terms of food supplies, these have not been sufficient to overcome widespread poverty, particularly in rural areas, and there is still a high incidence of hunger and malnutrition.

Many only partially understand and accept Western biomedical ideology and health care, as Bolivian health beliefs and practices typically revolve around rituals and ritual practitioners such as diagnostic specialists, curers, herbalists, and diviners. Divination, rituals, and ritual sacrifices are important in treating illness, as is the use of coca leaves, alcoholic beverages, and guinea pigs. Traditional medicine attaches importance to the social and supernatural etiology of illness and death, which often are attributed to strained social relations, witchcraft, or the influence of malevolent spirits. Dozens of illness categories, many psychosomatic, are recognized. Many curing rituals emphasize balanced, reciprocal relations with deities, who are "fed" and offered drink to dissipate illnesses.

The coca leaf is used extensively for traditional medicines for a supply of nutrients and natural energy. For high-altitude dwellers of the Andes, the leaf, when chewed or brewed into tea, acts as a palliative and stimulant, and a certain amount of cultivation is allowed for local use. Chewing of coca leaf is a common practice among peasant farmers, miners, laborers, and night workers. Soothsayers and indigenous priests use it in rituals passed down by their ancestors. And in many hotels in La Paz, foreign guests are welcomed with a cup of coca-leaf tea, which helps to relieve altitude sickness. Ancestral beliefs, confirmed by scientific research, credit coca-leaf chewing with alleviating hunger, fatigue, and sleepiness.

Bolivia has one of the highest infant mortality rates in South America—between 68 and 75 per 1,000 live births. Major causes of infant and child mortality include respiratory infections, diarrhea, and malnutrition; almost 30 percent of infants under age three suffer from chronic malnutrition. In Bolivia, more than one-quarter of infants are stunted. But between 1994 and 1998 the number of overweight women increased 9 percent, with the greatest increases seen among women with less education. The infant death rate is between 68 and 75 per 1,000 births, higher than anywhere else in Latin America. Life expectancy is 62 years, compared to the Latin American average of 69. Indigenous women prefer to deliver at home because they do not feel confident in hospitals, mainly because their customs are ignored or denied in such health services.

In Bolivia, a culture of rural midwifery known as *partera* is adopted, where midwives speak the local language. Some of them understand the importance of evaluating risks, and for that purpose they use a

sort of oracle, based in coca leaves. In traditional deliveries, women can choose the position. Most of them choose to squat, with their family around, and drink infusions of medicinal plants. Soon after the childbirth, women must keep warm and avoid contact with cold water.

Many projects supported by international organizations have been implemented over the past decades with very low success in terms of decreases in maternal mortality. Currently, the Bolivian government is developing a new strategy based on an intercultural reproductive health care approach, which incorporates the religious and traditional medicinal approach of the Bolivians with Western technologies and practices, uses the indigenous languages, takes advantage of the regional resources, and respects the habits and traditions of the people.

The annual expenditure for health care in Bolivia is $125 per capita. Health care providers are scarce, with only 3.2 physicians per 10,000 people and even fewer nurses. It has been estimated that 80 percent of the curable diseases in Bolivia are caused by polluted water. Although the country has abundant supplies of water, very little drinkable water is available to the people. Privatization of water delivery has resulted in price increases and "water wars" among providers.

*Katrina Meynink*

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# Brazil

## Overview

In a letter written in 1500, the first document describing the land and the native people of what later became Brazil, scribe Pero Vaz de Caminha reported to the king of Portugal, D. Manuel I, that apparently the new land had so many riches and the nature was so exuberant and well favored that "rightly cultivated it would yield everything." The Portuguese explorers landed on the Brazilian seacoast in April 1500. At the time, it was inhabited by roughly five million native people, with different cultures and languages, in a territory spanning from the equator to well below the Tropic of Capricorn.

The new arrivals settled down with the objective of extracting the riches and exploiting the land; to this end, they slashed down forests, at first for brazilwood, used as a red dye during the Renaissance, and later for huge sugarcane, cotton, and tobacco plantations. Coffee, for which seeds were smuggled in from French Guiana, and cocoa beans, a native species from the Amazon rain forest, became export products only in the 18th century. Because of its climate the country was a major haven for many new plant and animal species, and nowadays almost nobody is aware, for example, that bananas and coconuts were transplanted from India and Sri Lanka and are not native trees. The new settlers brought a variety of Mediterranean fruits and vegetables, such as oranges and sugarcane, which had been brought to the Iberian Peninsula by the Arabs. Today, Brazil and the United States are the world's biggest producers of concentrated orange juice.

The new colonial inhabitants were, in turn, introduced to corn, prepared in many different ways, by the natives. Some roots, such as manioc, were ground into flour; the capsicums pepper, either wild or cultivated in small quantities, was used for medicinal purposes. Peanuts, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, and beans of different colors and sizes, all native species that had migrated from different regions of the Americas, soon became staple foods for the newcomers. The beaches, devoid of coconut trees, were thickly populated with huge cashew trees, a source of vitamin C. In the 16th century, the Portuguese settlers introduced rice.

The Portuguese learned how to hunt and tame wild animals that did not exist in Europe, such as *capivaras* (capybaras—a rodent the size of a small pig), *pacas* (spotted cavies—a kind of guinea pig), *tatus* (armadillos), *cotias* (agoutis—a relative of the guinea pig), deer, and *antas* (Brazilian tapir). The newcomers brought chickens and dairy cows, as well as horses and mules for transportation. The native population did not use salt systematically for seasoning or for food conservation. Brazil's extensive seacoast became the location of salt works that are still producing salt.

The Portuguese colonizers came to Brazil to develop a large colonial business. To this end, they brought slaves from Africa, who introduced to their new country their foods and eating habits. The slave trade between the two continents, especially between the state of Bahia and Angola, was very active from the 16th until the early 19th century, when the transport of slaves was banned.

Rice, beans, and manioc flour, the key foods of Brazilian cuisine, originally the nourishment of the native population, became staples in the course of the first two centuries after the arrival of the Portuguese settlers. The Brazilian diet is still based on these three ingredients. Ever since then, the combination of native, Iberian, and African foods has been enriched by the influence of Spanish, German, Polish, Turkish, Greek, Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian, Hungarian, Bolivian, Argentinean, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Russian immigrants.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Nowadays, since the majority of the population lives in cities, Brazilians buy their dried goods and the very basic items of their local kitchen in large multinational supermarket chains. A typical shopping list will include coffee and milk (for breakfast), either dark brown or black beans, rice, manioc flour and its different starches, corn flour (which can be found in many grinds, some very soft, known as *fubá mimoso,* "delicate flour," used in a very traditional cake), wheat flour, sugar, onions, garlic, bay leaves, red pepper (*capsicums*), and a typical cheese from Minas Gerais, in the central region, to be served with guava paste as dessert. Fresh food is bought at the supermarkets, too, although local street markets still have a very good reputation as providers of better produce. Bread is bought in huge bakeries.

A typical visit to a street market begins with a stop at a pastel stall. The *pastel* is a dumpling made of a thin dough with a filling; these are fried right in front of the customers in huge oil woks. The most popular flavors are hearts of palm (*palmitos*), chicken with olives, cheese, cheese and banana spiced with cinnamon, and pizza (cheese, tomatoes, and oregano). These open-air markets, with their exuberant colors and smells, attest to the variety of nature in the tropics. The stalls sell all sorts of very fresh fruit in large amounts, such as mangoes, papayas, bananas, apples, pears, persimmons, grapes, and different kinds of citrus fruits. Shoppers can buy vegetables, legumes, roots, fish, chicken, dried and cured meats, and beautiful flowers; because of the mild climate, seasons are extended, and most produce is available all year long.

Everyday meals, both lunch and dinner, in the large cities consist of a mix of rice and beans, one vegetable, and either red meat or chicken, prepared either grilled or stewed. The use of seasonings and herbs varies according to regional preferences. Fish is eaten along the extensive Brazilian coast, which measures 5,592 miles (9,198 kilometers), while the Amazon River basin offers many delicious freshwater fish like the *pintado* (*Pseudoplathystoma corruscans*), the *pirarucu* (*Arapaima gigas*), and piranhas (*Serrasalmus* spp.), the ferocious meat eaters. The South Atlantic has a wide variety of cold-water fish (sardines, flounder, and sole), shrimp, crab, and squid, which are regularly consumed. However, because of the price difference, a typical family would generally eat shrimp for dinner or serve it at a special occasion and have fried fish for lunch.

The cooking may seem labor-intensive, but the food has acquired a specific preparation methodology throughout the years that still makes it possible to eat a full traditional meal at home. Beans are cooked in a pressure cooker and frozen, rice takes no more than 20 minutes to be ready, and the meat of choice is grilled as the family members sit down to eat.

## Major Foodstuffs

The structure of each meal, regardless of social class, is supported by only five ingredients: rice, beans, manioc flour, coffee, and sugar. Meals are planned around them. Rice and beans is the staple dish for daily meals at home and at popular restaurants. Cooked beans mixed with only manioc flour are an important part of the menu in the surrounding countryside. The type of beans and the ingredients added during cooking vary from one region to another. Coffee has been a traditional drink in Brazil since the 19th century. In some regions, it is mixed with manioc flour to make a kind of porridge. Corn, especially in the central and southern regions, is used to make sweets and snacks.

Manioc, or cassava, is a native root that was readily adopted by Brazil's European and African populations. In colonial times, the roots would be washed to remove the hydrocyanic acid they contain, then toasted over live embers and eaten with salted butter, as a substitute for bread. The natives

ate peanuts and cultivated manioc roots and corn, which had migrated from Central America. They used each of these plants to make different products such as flour, tapioca, alcoholic beverages, or lightly fermented beverages for rituals.

Brazil has many kinds of native beans. Since precolonial times, fresh or dried beans have been cooked to soften them. Excellent hunters and fishermen, the natives cooked fish and game over small fires. As the natives were always roaming around the countryside, they taught the foreign conquerors who explored the hinterlands how to feed themselves and prepare the food they would have to take on their reconnaissance expeditions into the wild country, where they went first to search for gold and later to occupy land for farming. The natives showed the newcomers how to preserve different kinds of meals for traveling or for daily consumption, like the *paçoca*—a combination of salt-seasoned jerked beef and manioc flour. Paçoca was the main staple food for those long trips. Brazilians ate it frequently well into the 20th century. Today, every child will eat a small sweet with the same name that is a mix of ground peanuts with sugar.

Cattle became part of the national diet later on. In the beginning, the Spaniards established huge cattle ranches in the south of Brazil, a region that is now Uruguay. Soon thereafter, cattle ranches began to migrate northward and provided beef for Brazil's other regions. In the northeast, which had been settled much earlier, cattle were raised in the semiarid climate of its hinterlands, and the meat was processed as jerked beef to be sold in large cities. As in many other countries, milk and cheese are part of the diet. Cheeses are often country-specific, and many typical specialties are the result of the need to preserve them for longer periods of time. One very popular cheese is *requeijão,* or twice-coagulated cheese, a version of cream cheese. The coagulated curds are broken and stirred until a creamy consistency is obtained. It is found in all supermarkets, and Brazilians spread it on bread at breakfast or eat it with fruit compotes for dessert.

Brazil has been one of the leading sugar producers of the world since the 16th century, and the availability of sugar in large amounts has led to an excessive love for sweetness in confectionary, cakes, fruit pastes, and compotes. Although one shouldn't generalize—given that taste is something very individual—there is a common consensus among Brazilians that sweets must contain a high amount of sugar, much higher than is accepted in European countries, for instance. The excessive availability triggered the creation of typical desserts such as guava or banana paste and syrupy desserts with eggs and all sorts of fruits.

Because Brazil is one of the world's largest soybean producers, many soy by-products are readily available in supermarkets. Food is usually cooked with soybean oil or margarine, and the beans are sold for cooking or salted as appetizers. However, the oriental soy sauce and tofu, although easily found in chain stores, especially in the southeast of the country, are not part of the everyday diet. There are many



A Campesihno pressing sugar as his son looks on. (Corel)

other uses such as for heavy oils for machinery or polymers for making plastic objects, and so on.

The traditional Portuguese cuisine includes a wide variety of pastries, prepared with a high content of eggs and sugar. Most of these recipes can also be prepared with additions of coconut milk and grated coconut. *Cocadas* (coconut wafers), pies, *bolos de aipim com coco* (manioc cake with coconut), tapioca puddings, luxurious creams made with egg yolks cooked in coconut milk and sugar and served with almond cakes, *beijus* (fine tapioca pancakes), and fruit preserves are some of the best-loved sweets in Brazil, which has a delicious and rich tradition.

## Typical Meals

Each region in Brazil has its own specialty, and in some cases these regional specialties are served in other parts of the country as well, such as the *churrasco* (meat barbecue), which is typical of the very large plains on the frontier with Uruguay and Argentina. The cuisine of many regions has an African influence, especially in recipes that call for *azeite de dendê* (palm oil), used mainly in Bahia in the northeast. A large number of cakes and desserts mix native ingredients and Portuguese cooking techniques, like the recipes for egg-based desserts. Many Portuguese desserts took on a Brazilian nature through the addition of coconut milk to the list of ingredients, as is the case for *ovos moles,* a traditional egg-cream recipe from Portugal's Aveiro region, the Brazilian version of which is called *baba-de-moça* (ladies' dribble—there are quite a few sweet dishes with ribald names like this one, and they are part of the Catholic tradition not only in Brazil). Many of the dishes served in Brazil on special occasions stem from the ritual foods of the Candomblé, an Afro-Brazilian religion that has many followers. The following list of dishes shows the richness of Brazilian cuisine and its regional variations.

From Pará in the north, there is *pato no tucupi,* a delicious duck stew cooked in a scalded cassava broth called *tucupi,* a liquid extracted from cassava. Tucupi contains hydrocyanic acid, but when cooked for several hours, the liquid becomes harmless. *Jambu* leaves are added to the dish when the duck is ready to be served. Jambu (*Spilanthes oleracea*) is a low-growing plant whose leaves cause numbness of the lips when they are eaten.

*Caruru,* originally a Candomblé ritual dish, was brought to Bahia in the northeast together with slaves from Africa. To avoid being punished for religious practices that differed from Catholicism, the official religion, the Africans created deities that corresponded to the Catholic saints. For example, the martyr saints Cosmos and Damian are honored in the month of September. But when the children of the local community are served caruru, as tradition dictates, the people are actually honoring the *Erês,* free and innocent spirits that exist in each one of us. Caruru is a stew made with okra, smoked shrimp, peanuts, cashew nuts, and palm tree oil.

*Moqueca* is a savory stew prepared with fish, shrimp, and herbs such as parsley, basil, onions, garlic, and cilantro; it comes from Espírito Santo in the southeast.

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**Grouper *Moqueca***

*Serves 4*

4 or 5 lb grouper or any fish that will not break up as it cooks
Juice of 1 lime
2 onions
1 red pepper
1 yellow pepper
1 jalapeño pepper
8 tomatoes, seeded
1 big garlic bulb
3 or 4 large basil leaves
8 sprigs fresh cilantro (optional)
1 bundle each parsley and chives
2 bay leaves
Salt to taste
Black pepper to taste

Ask the fishmonger to gut the fish and cut it crosswise into four or five large pieces, the head included.

At home, wash the grouper in running water, and rub it with the lime juice and a bit of salt. Place the pieces of fish side by side in a clay or iron pot big enough to fit all the pieces in one layer.

Shred and mix the peeled onions, the peppers (seeds and ribs removed), and the tomatoes in the food processor. Cover the fish with this mixture. Spread the herbs on the top, side, and bottom. Add the whole peeled garlic cloves. Place a lid on the pan and cook the stew at low temperature for roughly 15 minutes. The pieces of fish must remain covered with the sauce. Taste the sauce and add salt if necessary. Cook for 5 more minutes. Serve with white rice and pepper sauce.

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The story goes that slaves on coffee plantations created the black-bean stew *feijoada,* cooked with pork parts that are usually rejected, such as ears and tails, plus different kinds of sausages. Allegedly, the prime cuts were reserved for the landowners. These stories are somewhat exaggerated, as each culture has its own bean-stew dish cooked with different kinds of meats and sausages made from the leftover meat of local animals. The French have cassoulet, made with goose legs, whereas foie gras and goose *magret* are sold in luxury food markets. The Portuguese have their own baked bean casserole, made with white beans and sometimes with seafood and small fish left over from the day's catch, or with regional sausages. Feijoada has become a national favorite despite its regional origin in Rio de Janeiro in the southeastern part of the country.



Feijoada, the national dish of Brazil, is a typical Brazilian dish made with black beans and several kinds of meat, mainly pork. (iStockPhoto)

## Eating Out

For centuries, ships would stop at Brazilian ports to replenish their supplies before sailing for Africa and India or when traveling south to cross to the Pacific Ocean. From the 20th century on, a cosmopolitan way of life spread throughout the coastal cities, always ready to welcome their visitors. Associations, clubs, theaters, cabarets, hospitals, and restaurants serving a variety of cuisines opened. Nowadays, places like São Paulo, with its 18 million inhabitants, offer a wide range of options to cater to all kinds of tastes.

There is a wide array of different kinds of restaurants in Brazil. The food ranges from traditional cuisine, with a strong Portuguese influence, to French and Italian cuisine, to the *churrascarias,* the barbecue palaces that serve tons of meat nonstop. The churrasco is the typical dish of the pampas, the frontier region on the borders of Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, and Paraguay. New restaurants and young chefs have added a new twist to the traditionally heavy food from Brazil's rural regions, and they look for forgotten—albeit important for local culture—ingredients from Brazil's history. Leaves of native palm trees are used to add a finishing touch to sauces; fruits from the Amazon region, such as the *açaí* (*Euterpe oleracea Mart*), are used to make soups and ice cream.

In addition to traditional restaurants, bistros, and restaurants where one can eat "today's specials," there are two kinds of restaurants that are specific to Brazil, the so-called *por quilo* and *rodízio* restaurants. At the first kind, people help themselves to a buffet lunch, weigh their full plates on a special scale, and sit at tables while waiters bring drinks and desserts. These restaurants are normally open only for lunch. Patrons can select what they want from a wide variety of dishes, which include different kinds of salads, rice, beans, meat stews, steamed

vegetables, and even Japanese food. The equally creative rodízio is somewhat different: Patrons choose the side dishes when they are already seated at the table, while waiters offer slices of different kinds of meat, fish, or pasta nonstop.

Pizza parlors are one of the most popular spots for eating out in São Paulo, in the country's southeastern region. The enormous influence of the Italian immigrants ensures excellent restaurants, but the pizzeria is the restaurant of choice to celebrate birthdays, to get a bite to eat after a soccer game, or to take the kids out for Sunday dinner. Some Brazilians proudly insist that Brazilian pizza is the best in the world.

For a romantic dinner, restaurant goers can choose from a wide selection of French, Spanish, or Japanese restaurants. The city of São Paulo is home to more than 300,000 Japanese descendants, many of whom live in a typically Japanese neighborhood and celebrate many traditional Japanese feasts. The Japanese influence on daily meals is attested to by the many sushi and *temaki* fast-food restaurants in the city.

One of the most popular activities all over Brazil is to go to a bar and eat delicious *salgadinhos,* which are small savory snacks. They come in a huge variety, each one tastier than the next—*bolinhos de bacalhau* (small, round codfish cakes), delicate chicken croquettes shaped like a chicken leg, and *empadinhas* (small, delicate pies filled with palm heart, shrimp, or meat), among many other tasty delicacies, which taste wonderful with ice-cold beer. Ice cream made from regional fruits is also a popular delicacy, because of Brazil's warm weather during most of the year.

Fresh fruit juice bars are found everywhere. There is a huge variety of fruits all year round—oranges, passion fruit, guavas, watermelons, mangoes, strawberries, açai, *mangabas, sapotis,* coconuts, cacao, and tamarinds, among other varieties. *Erva-mate* (known in the United States as yerba maté or *Ilex paraguariensis*) and *cachaça*—fermented sugarcane juice—are the original beverages. In the south, erva-mate is prepared as a hot infusion and people drink it like tea; in Rio de Janeiro, people drink ice-cold mate. Cachaça, a distilled beverage made from fermented sugarcane juice, differs from rum, which is made from molasses. Cachaça can be consumed pure and young, usually a white-colored beverage, or it can be aged and golden-colored. Today, the cachaças on the market vary from very plain ones to others aged in oak barrels in order to add a certain depth to their bouquet. They sometimes also have flavors added. But the favorite way of drinking them is as a summer drink with ice and fruit juices—they are called *batidas.* The combination of cachaça and fruit juice results in a typical cocktail called *caipirinha,* prepared with lime in its conventional flavor.

***Caipirinha***

1 small glass of the kind used for whiskey on the rocks

1 average-size lime

1 tsp sugar

Ice to fill the glass

40 mL (1.3 oz) cachaça

Cut the top and bottom of the lime off and then slice it into four equal wedges; remove the seeds and the rind; cut each one in half. Place them in the chosen glass with the pulp facing upward; sprinkle the sugar over them, and mash the two ingredients with a muddler to release the juice. Fill the glass with crushed ice, and pour the cachaça on top.

## Special Occasions

Such a rich regional culinary tradition means that delicious and decoratively arranged food is served all over the country on special occasions. There are many religious feasts in Brazil, and very frequently saints' days and different religions' meaningful dates are celebrated by everyone. In the northeast and in the state of Minas Gerais, the São João (Saint John's Day) festivities last throughout the month of June, and special dishes made from fresh and young corn are served during these celebrations, since it is also its harvest time. Before the corn is dried, the kernels are baked in cakes; churned with cream for

ice cream; cooked into different porridges, called *curau,* some with hard batter and other softer and mixed with coconut; and fermented with water and sugar to be served as a beverage with a low alcohol content.

In Bahia, caruru, a stew made with okra, dried shrimp, peanuts, and pepper, is served in September to honor Cosmos and Damian; actually, these are a Roman Catholic representation of a spirit of the Afro-Brazilian religion, the Erês or Ibejis. In Bahia, where the African culinary influence is stronger, there is a series of stews with shrimp and fresh fish, called moquecas, which are traditionally served on Sunday lunch for family gatherings.

In the former capital of Rio de Janeiro, New Year's Eve is one of the biggest celebrations. A lentil salad, grapes, and pomegranates are served for good luck. It is also the occasion when the population near the sea honors Iemanjá, the Brazilian goddess of the sea, with gifts and songs at the beaches. Family festivities, celebratory dinners, birthday parties, and Sunday lunches follow the same ritual, when an array of sweet and salty dishes is served.

The most beloved sweet is usually served at children's parties, and adults and kids love it. It is a very small chocolate sweet, similar to a truffle, called the *brigadeiro,* meaning "air marshal." The name honors a former military officer who was a presidential candidate during the 1940s. This sweet is made with a mixture of chocolate and sweet condensed milk cooked until caramelized and then rolled into small balls.

## Diet and Health

The Brazilian diet and consequently the population's health are guided by regional cultures and the different levels of economic development, which demonstrates a tremendous variation, although the country is one of the 10 most industrialized in the world. As Brazil's territory lies within several climate zones, there is not one single common diet, and there are also different food consumption levels, which depend on the highly heterogeneous availability of foods. People in the south plant extensive apple tree groves and will eat fruits and vegetables of European origin, such as spinach, red beets, lettuce, and carrots, to name a few. In the northeast, where the climate is drier, fruit consumption tends to be low, with the exception of the local tropical fruits, such as the wonderfully scented *seriguelas, pitombas, graviolas* (soursop fruit), and cashews.

It is important to notice that fruits play a very significant role in the local diets due to the variety of the species, whether native or introduced in the last 500 years. The same cannot be said of vegetables. Large areas do not consume them as part of their everyday lives. There is instead a preference for starches: potatoes, cassava, sweet potatoes, and yams as a side dish. A significant part of the northeast lies in a semiarid zone, where the climate resembles that of a desert. The Amazon rain forest is the northernmost region, and the Amazon territory also includes part of the Pantanal, the vast area of wetlands with seasonal inundations. Each region has its own specific plants and animals, both native and immigrant populations. Eating habits were influenced by the farm production of the colonial period and evolved according to the migration of people within Brazil, a constant event in Brazil's history. For instance, maté tea, which is a beverage in the pampas, the region that lies on the border with Uruguay and Argentina, is also widely consumed in Roraima, which lies on the border of Venezuela. This is due to the migration of people from the south to the far north as they followed the expansion of soybean plantations.

The preference for a specific type of bean might vary according to the region, but beans, which are full of iron, vitamin B, and amino acids, are a staple food all over Brazil, even though they are prepared in many different ways. Manioc flour is also produced and consumed from north to south, on the seacoast and in the countryside. Manioc flour is used in different ways, in both sweet and savory dishes, much like rice.

The fact that core nourishment is based on cooked beans, either accompanied by meat or, in very hard times, served with cassava flour, made it possible to avoid huge famines from historical times. Unfortunately, today their consumption is diminishing, and a new dietary parameter is establishing itself, more



Tropical fruit being sold in the market. (Corel)

as a consequence of the country's urbanization and industrialization: high consumption of saturated fats and industrialized sugars, as well as a more sedentary life, resulting in a lower consumption of fresh vegetables and fruits, which are replaced by small industrialized snacks that are leading to obesity. The local dishes are losing importance in everyday life and more and more are turning into restaurant fare, as in most places in the Western world.

*Marcia Zoladz*

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# Canada

## Overview

Covering about 5.6 million square miles (almost 10 million square kilometers), Canada has the second-largest landmass of any country in the world. Its climatic and geographic variety is as vast as the land itself—mountainous terrain, great plains, three seacoasts (Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic), fruitful valleys, and northern tundra. The food culture is likewise diverse.

The 2006 agricultural census indicates that only 1 percent of the nearly 33 million Canadians are involved in agriculture, working on approximately 230,000 farms. Over the course of the country's relatively short history, Canadians have slowly but steadily moved from the countryside to the city, a move that has impacted both what Canadians eat and how they produce it. The majority of the Canadian population can be found in the urban centers of southern Ontario, British Columbia, and western Quebec. As more people leave the bounty of the countryside for the bustle of the city, not only have eating patterns changed but farms have continued to grow in size to meet increasing demand.

Despite the changes that have occurred since Canada was founded in 1867, the Canada of today is strongly influenced by its colonial history: The French and British competed for eastern and central Canada—what is now Ontario through to the Atlantic provinces—beginning in the 1400s. The Treaty of Paris established British rule over what became New France (now Quebec) in 1763. British and French culinary traditions still strongly influence these areas and were adapted to the available foodstuffs of the regions. They were sometimes fused with the culinary traditions of Canada's three indigenous peoples—the First Nations (as Native Americans are called in Canada), Inuit (formerly referred to as Eskimos), and Métis (those of mixed heritage now accorded aboriginal status, with a distinct culture).

Following colonization, years of immigration from the world over have led to an unusually diversified food culture. When the Germans arrived in Ontario, the Scottish in Nova Scotia, the French in Quebec, the Chinese in British Columbia, and the Ukrainians in Alberta, the bounty of the Canadian soil meant that their cultural and culinary traditions were adapted to the available ingredients, creating a unique nutritional and cultural milieu.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Joan and Ken Craig live comfortably in Guelph, a bedroom community of 130,000 people west of Toronto, Canada's biggest city. Housing is expensive in Toronto; the average price in November 2009 for a home in Toronto was CDN$420,000, compared to around CDN$280,000 for Guelph, turning people such as Ken into commuters. Mass transit leading into Toronto from Guelph is underdeveloped, so Ken drives about an hour a day, depending on traffic. Financially, Joan and Ken are comfortable—he's a national marketing manager for an imported-auto manufacturer, earning CDN$190,000 annually along with a company car. Joan works as an administrative assistant at the local university, earning CDN$40,000 a year. They have two children, Lilly, age five, and Watson, age three.

Ken is usually harried, so his morning diet is often poor and built on fast food. Typically, he hits the main

highway into Toronto at 5:45 A.M., to avoid as much rush hour traffic as he can. Just before the on-ramp, he stops at a drive-through coffee shop called Tim Horton's—started by a famous Canadian hockey player—for a "double-double" (two spoonfuls of sugar, two portions of milk) American-style coffee and a blueberry or bran muffin, or a chocolate doughnut on Fridays as an end-of-the-week treat. That might be all he eats until noon, at which time he will have a ham or peanut butter sandwich he slapped together on whole-grain bread at home that morning. Or he will run across the street to a fast-food shop for a submarine sandwich or perhaps a lettuce salad with raspberry vinaigrette. Another coffee follows in the afternoon, around 2:30 P.M., likely from the office dispenser, and possibly a snack, such as a granola bar. Then at about 5:30–6 P.M. Ken fights traffic for at least another hour on the way home.

Joan, a lacto-ovo vegetarian, has the main food-preparation responsibilities. She can get an excellent selection of fruits and vegetables whether in or out of season (citrus, root vegetables, etc.) at any of the five major grocery stores in the city. She may go to the local health-food store for her whole grains, such as oatmeal and brown rice. But she may also run to discount stores, which have the fastest-rising market share. Joan will try to buy as much as a week's worth of food at a time, especially in the winter. It is not unusual for a city such as Guelph to get hit with a major snowstorm that shuts down the city for one to three days, and householders need to stock up.

Joan works five days a week, but she does not start until 8:30 A.M. and she is done at 4:30 P.M. sharp. So she often has time to get the kids from the daycare and still get home to cook something for supper, which they will eat around 6:30 P.M. One of the family's favorite dishes is Elora Road butternut squash soup, adapted from Anita Stewart's *Flavours of Canada*.

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**Elora Road Butternut Squash and Buttermilk Soup**

*Makes 6 to 8 Generous Servings*

Butternut squash has deep orange-colored flesh. Buttercup or Hubbard squash may also be used. This is such an intensely flavored autumn soup that it can be garnished with yogurt. The name comes from a road near where butternut squash are grown.

2 tbsp canola oil
1 large onion
2 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
1 tbsp minced fresh ginger
½ tsp black mustard seeds
1 tsp cumin seeds
1 tbsp garam masala
4 c diced butternut squash
4 c chicken stock
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
2 small cobs of corn, husked *or* 1 c frozen corn
1 sweet red pepper, seeded and minced
1 c buttermilk or half and half cream (10%)
Plain yogurt, as needed for garnish

Heat oil in a large soup pot over medium heat. Add onions, garlic, and ginger; cook and stir for 3–5 minutes or until beginning to turn golden. Add mustard seeds and cumin. Stir and cook for 30–60 seconds until the mustard seeds begin to pop. Add garam masala, and stir the entire mixture thoroughly for another 30 seconds. Stir in squash, tossing to coat with the spice mixture. Add chicken stock, cover, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low, simmering till squash is tender. Season to taste and remove from the heat. Let cool for 10 minutes before pureeing either with a hand blender or in a food processor. Return to medium heat. While soup is reheating, carefully cut kernels from the corn. Add to simmering soup with red pepper. Cook, covered, for 3–4 minutes. Stir in buttermilk or cream, and reheat till steaming.

Serve in heated soup bowls, topping with a spoonful of yogurt.

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In some countries, vegetarians such as Joan would insist on organic produce. Canadians are less fussy. Canada was one of the first countries in the world to embrace genetically modified food. Here, organic

food's market share is growing, but it still accounts for just 2 percent of the total production.

On days when Joan is too busy to cook, she might pop a frozen pizza in the oven. In Canada, the demand for frozen pizza has skyrocketed since just before the new millennium, jumping more than 400 percent. That makes it the leading frozen food in Canada, in terms of growth. If the Craigs do have pizza, however, vegetarian Joan might have to pick hers apart: Pork-based ingredients take the top three positions as the most-menued sources of protein on pizzas. At the top of the list is bacon, which appears on 18 percent of offerings.

## Major Foodstuffs

Food production is not important solely for meeting the demands of the domestic market; agricultural products are one of Canada's main exports, and food has always been vital to the economy. In 2006, the agricultural and agrifood system contributed almost CDN$90 billion to the country's gross domestic product, or 8 percent of the Canadian economy. Its relevance is increasing. The agricultural and agrifood system has been growing at an average rate of 2.4 percent per year over the past decade. The sector employs more than two million individuals, representing almost 13 percent of Canadian active human resources and directly providing one in eight jobs.

The predominance of agriculture and food in the economy is all the more remarkable given that little more than 7 percent of the nation's landmass is used for agriculture. That is almost microscopic compared to a nation such as Britain, where nearly 70 percent of land is dedicated to agricultural production. The relatively low land-use percentage is, to a large extent, due to the Canadian climate, which varies considerably across the nation's large landmass, limiting the amount of arable land.

Canada's history also explains why very few truly local foods exist—in fact, most foods came from abroad and were planted in Canada's fertile soil. About a millennium ago, aboriginal peoples brought corn, beans, and squash from the south along the well-established, intricate trading routes that spanned North America. In turn, Canada's foodstuffs have




Saint John City Market (built in 1876), New Brunswick, Canada. (Jamie Roach | Dreamstime.com)

influenced international cuisine; Basque sailors harvested the Grand Banks off Newfoundland and took shore-salted cod home to France and Spain in the 1500s, offering the basis for regional specialties that can still be tasted in those nations today. In the 1800s, Canadian cheddar cheeses and Westphalian-style hams went back to Great Britain, and today, ingredients such as mustard, flour, and oils all head to Europe and Southeast Asia.

Canada is also the number-one producer of mixed grains, linseed, and oats and the second in blueberries, mustard seed, canola, and cranberries. That means fine Italian pastas are made with Canadian durum wheat (semolina). In fact, Ireland's Guinness beer is founded on Canadian malt barley.

Canada's agrifood system is best understood by breaking the country into five regions, moving from west to east: the province of British Columbia; the prairies (the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba); Ontario and Quebec; the Atlantic

provinces (Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland); and the northern territories (Yukon, Nunavut, and the Northwest Territories).

### *British Columbia*

Situated on the beautiful Pacific shore, the food production of British Columbia reflects both its bountiful coast and fruitful interior. Foods originating from the coast include Pacific salmon, which has become a staple food in British Columbia since it was first harvested by the indigenous peoples of the region and, eventually, its settlers. Currently, farmed Atlantic salmon is relied on to meet the demand for British Columbian salmon, both domestically and internationally. Clams, oysters, and kelp are also farmed in the coastal waters of British Columbia.

Just west of the Rocky Mountain range, the Okanagan Valley provides an excellent climate for fruit production, including grapes. The Okanagan is at the heart of British Columbia's expanding viticulture industry. The Fraser Valley is also an important agricultural-production area, providing an ideal location for growing vegetables and berries and supporting the production of fresh milk, eggs, chickens, turkeys, and pork. Cow/calf operations are also common in the interior of British Columbia.

### *The Prairies*

The provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba make up Canada's prairie region, the nation's breadbasket. The west was initially opened in Canada when the trans-Canada railway was constructed in the second half of the 19th century. The fertile grasslands of the southern prairies are contrasted with the fish-filled lakes of the north, which eventually give way to northern tundra. Despite the diversity of the prairie climate, it is the grasslands of the prairies that often characterize the region, supporting grain, oilseed, and wheat production, as well as cattle ranches. The cattle of today have replaced the great plains bison of yesteryear that sustained the indigenous populations for thousands of years before large-scale bison drives eventually collapsed the population.

Canadian prairie farmers are one of the world's main producers of canola, a staple high-oil-yielding and nutritionally improved variant of rapeseed, developed in Canada, with reduced erucic acid. Canola production has become a cornerstone of Canadian agriculture and is used to produce oil low in saturated fat.

Canada is also one of the world's largest producers and exporters of pulses, the edible seeds of legumes, including dry peas, dry beans, lentils, chickpeas, and fava beans. The Canadian pulse and specialty-crop industry produces and exports more than CDN$1 billion worth of products to thousands of customers in over 150 countries each year. About 75 percent of the Canadian pulse production is exported. Most of this production comes from Saskatchewan.

### *Ontario and Quebec*

Like many Canadian provinces, Ontario is best analyzed with a north/south view, for nearly anything. For example, in Ontario's north, game hunting (deer, moose, ducks, and geese) is a way of life and sustenance, as the growing season is shorter. In contrast, the fertile soils of southern Ontario have been supporting agricultural production for more than a millennium. The Iroquois people had grown corn in what is now southwestern Ontario since 500 A.D. They expanded their agricultural production to include beans and squash in the centuries after their first crops were planted. Crops grown now in Ontario are varied and include soybeans (the biggest cash crop, with two million acres), corn, wheat, and a variety of legumes. Vegetable production is also strong, with asparagus opening the growing season. The fall harvest begins in September and includes root vegetables, squash, and corn, to name a few cultivars.

Within the province of Ontario is another of the nation's main fruit-producing regions—the Niagara Peninsula. Similar to the Okanagan, the Niagara Peninsula is a prime area for tree-fruit production

and is known for its plums, pears, peaches, apples, and grapes. Like the Okanagan, Niagara is one of the few areas in Canada that can support a substantial wine industry. Ice wine is a Canadian delicacy, and although it was first vinified in British Columbia, it has become one of Ontario's most widely recognized alcoholic beverages. To make it, grapes are allowed to ripen fully, then freeze on the vine. They are then pressed, and the juices are vinified, producing a sweet signature product for the Niagara Peninsula.

Another great Canadian signature food is maple syrup, which is made from the sap of the maple tree (the leaf of which is found on the Canadian flag). The sap is collected throughout the maple forests of eastern Canada but primarily in Quebec, where the food traditions are notably different and strongly influenced by the French settlers who came to Canada. Settlement occurred along the majestic Saint Lawrence River, with agricultural plots extending on either side of the river. Today, Quebec is home to a strong culinary tradition that has merged French cuisine with the available foodstuffs of the region. Situated on the Canadian Shield, the harsher climate and less-hospitable soil mean some of the staple crops grown in Ontario cannot be found throughout Quebec. Instead, Quebec is known for its unique ingredients and artisanal foods. Maple syrup production is still a strong cultural heritage, drawing many Quebecers to *les cabanes au sucre,* or sugar shacks, in the early spring. Dairy production is also important, and Quebec is well known for its yogurt production and artisan cheese makers. The eastern coast of Quebec, the Gaspé region, ushers in the Atlantic Ocean and is well known for its seafood, including lobster.



Held from April 2 to 6 in the Beauceron region of Quebec, the Beauceron Maple Festival celebrates the area's traditional production of maple syrup and includes stands that sell stacks of syrup-laden pancakes. (Corel)

### *The Atlantic Provinces*

Lobster is really the possession of the Atlantic provinces, but it is not as readily available as might be expected. The fisheries of the Atlantic provinces are strictly regulated to ensure fish stock sustainability. Conservation efforts have been only marginally successful. Fish, such as cod, have been mercilessly hauled out of the Atlantic, and the stock is significantly depleted.

Atlantic Canadians are great foragers and rely on the natural bounty of the earth, which includes berries, other wild fruits, and mushrooms. Fiddleheads are a special spring treat. Young ferns that have not unraveled and exposed their leaves are eagerly sought in May and June.

### *Northern Canada*

Traditional farming is a challenge for much of the Canadian north as the growing season is short, or sometimes absent altogether. However, the long daylight hours in the summer months (the average is 20 hours, but some regions enjoy 24 hours of sun in the peak of the summer season) and sufficient frost-free days mean that the climate is favorable for growing short-season crops. That is especially true in the western regions of the northern territories, which are more hospitable to agriculture. But despite the ability to grow some grains, berries, and vegetables (often in greenhouses), agriculture in the Canadian north is mostly seen as an act of import substitution, as most of the food for the region's inhabitants is imported from the rest of Canada

and internationally. Local agriculture is a means by which to reduce the dependency on imports.

Other forms of agriculture, including wild game herding (such as caribou and musk ox), are also practiced. Food production is new to the north, which has been historically populated by small groups of aboriginal peoples, particularly the Inuit, who have their own food culture that includes hunting seal, whale, and game animals. Canada's governor general Michaelle Jean caused an international stir when she obligingly ate raw seal heart, an Inuit tradition, on a visit to Nunavut in 2009.

## Cooking

The Canadian culinary tradition of fusing international influence with local flare began with the first French in L'Acadie, in what is now known as Nova Scotia, and lives on today. The Acadians began harvesting *dulce* (seaweed), samphire (sea asparagus), and goose-tongue greens, as they once had done in France. Soon the dishes of old France began to appear on the maritime tables but with a twist: The flour was the maritimers', the vegetables were grown on small farms, and the meat was slaughtered communally.

Despite the proliferation of regional cuisine and all its intricacies, there is only one cooking method that is indigenous to Canada—that is, the bentwood box on the north coast of British Columbia. Planks of cedar are notched, soaked, and bent before being lashed to form a tight cooking vessel. Four to five hours before cooking, a fire is lit, and rocks are placed into it. The hot rocks are then picked up with a split alder branch and placed into the water-filled box; seafood is added—prawns, scallops, clams, chunks of halibut or salmon—and a woven mat is placed over it to hold in the steam.

Otherwise, Canadians roast, boil, bake, stir-fry, microwave, pickle, freeze, preserve, pit cook, and barbecue ad infinitum. During the Canadian growing season (between April and September, depending on the region) a great plethora of grains, fruits, and vegetables are produced. The Canadian winter demands that the bounty of the growing season be saved for survival over the long winter months. Before the increased globalization of food trade, Canadians stayed fed all year round by tapping into prepared preserves. Canning is a great Canadian tradition in which the summer's fruits and vegetables are preserved for storage over winter. Pickled beets, beans, and cucumbers, as well as canned peaches, pears, apples, apricots, and tomatoes, meant that the Canadian pioneer would have a supply of fruits and vegetables over the long winter months.

While the plight of Canadian settlers is long past, remnants of their food culture persist today. Typical Canadian kitchens are set up for food storage and cooking that reflects the tendency to horde food for survival. Canadians typically buy groceries to last for several days, meaning most kitchens are equipped to handle long-term food storage, including a large refrigerator, freezer, and cupboard space for dried goods. Most food is cooked either



Two women preparing fruit to can in New Brunswick, Canada. (Alanpoulson | Dreamstime.com)

on an electric or gas stovetop or in the oven, or it is warmed up in the microwave. With constant food availability, fewer Canadians use fruit cellars (a cool, dry room, usually in the basement) where preserves and vegetables were typically stored in the winter months. Canadians now expect a great variety of fresh fruits and vegetables to be available all year. Imported fruits and vegetables come from progressively further away as the winter wears on: tomatoes from California, then Mexico, and apples from Canada, then the southern United States, and, finally, New Zealand. In 2005 the Food and Agriculture Organization ranked Canada 12th among importing nations, bringing in more than CDN$15.5 billion of food into the country that year. But the bounty of Canada was shipped internationally as well. In the same report, the Food and Agriculture Organization ranked Canada 9th among exporting nations, sending CDN$21 billion outside its borders.

The increased globalization of food has had far-reaching consequences in Canada. Some Canadians argue that it has resulted in a homogenization of food, as processing increases and taste decreases. Environmental concerns regarding the distance food needs to travel to make it to people's plates, and the resulting mental separation between the individual and the origin of the food, have contributed to a growing grassroots movement to reassess existing food systems. A manifestation of this reassessment is the burgeoning eat-local movement, sometimes called the 100-mile diet.

## Typical Meals

Canadians mostly eat three meals a day: breakfast, lunch, and dinner ("supper"). While the meal structure is reasonably consistent, there is little uniformity regarding what is actually found on any given Canadian's plate. The Canadian Food Guide recommends that available foods be broken down into four categories: vegetables and fruit, grain products, milk and alternatives, and meat and alternatives. Canadians are encouraged to eat a balanced diet with a focus on fresh fruit and vegetables as well as whole grains and low-fat, low-sugar options.

However, there is a growing disparity between what is recommended, and Canadians' eating habits. For example, there is a strong emphasis on fresh fruits and vegetables, but many Canadians eat a high percentage of processed foods. The Canadian food- and beverage-processing industry had sales of approximately CDN$78 billion in 2006, with CDN$68 billion accounting for food purchases alone.

Breakfast is typically eaten in the early morning before the beginning of the workday. It usually involves a cereal or grain of some kind—either processed or cooked—as well as fruit, yogurt, or eggs. A hot drink, such as coffee or tea, usually accompanies the meal. On weekends, brunch (a late breakfast combined with lunch) is popular. Hearty meals are always in vogue such as a combination of fried eggs, sausage or bacon, toast, pancakes, and/or fruit.

The changing socioeconomic terrain means that many Canadians are working longer hours in offices than ever before. This often results in a quick lunch that is eaten out or packed to take to work. For most Canadians, lunch is a light meal, and the emphasis is placed on dinner. Dinner is usually eaten at the end of the workday, between 6 and 7 P.M.

Vegetarianism is on the rise in Canada, with approximately 4 percent of the population following a vegetarian lifestyle. While the cultural diversity of Canada guarantees that some of the vegetarian choices are based on religious reasons, much of the vegetarian population has made changes based on lifestyle and moral concerns.

## Eating Out

The history of Canadian restaurant culture reflects the country's history and liberal immigration policy, which has long encouraged and invited newcomers. The variety of cuisine available reflects the nation's diversity—Italian, Chinese, Greek, East Indian, Thai, Vietnamese, and more can all be found. British Columbians eat out the most. The province has 27.3 food-service locations per 10,000 inhabitants, compared to the national average of 25.2. At the other end of the scale is Manitoba,

with 18.2 units per 10,000 people, the lowest in Canada.

The local-food movement is sparking some dining activity. One of the best examples in Canada is the Borealis Grille in Guelph, with its commitment to local foods and beverages. Chefs try to source more than 95 percent of the food from Ontario. Steaks, flatbreads, fish, pasta, and barbecue items make up the main menu. Olive oil has been replaced by cold-pressed soy, canola, and sunflower oils from the province. The beverage selection is almost exclusively local. The wines are predominantly Ontario VQA with some Okanagan wines and a few brands from the United States and South America to round out the list. All the draft beers are microbrewed within a 100-kilometer (62.1-mile) radius.

Despite the growing market for locally sourced restaurants, some ingredient providers are at loggerheads with buyers. For example, the Canadian Restaurant and Food Services Association, a lobby group, is pushing hard against a long-standing and highly political Canadian tradition called supply management, which it says distorts food prices, especially dairy, and exaggerates the price of restaurant meals. Under supply management, the amount of milk, poultry, and eggs that can be produced and their price are tightly controlled by legislation, as are imports of these commodities. Farmers say border protection is necessary; otherwise, they will get swamped by imports. They argue that cheap food is not necessarily safe food. For their part, Canadians do not seem to mind paying more for peace of mind and supporting Canadian farmers.




A man and woman preparing ribs as part of the World's Longest Barbecue in Guelph, Ontario, Canada, 2008. (Dreamstime)

## Special Occasions

Canadian diversity means that nationally celebrated feasts are few and far between; however, there are a couple notable celebrations that attract the participation of a large number of Canadians. Thanksgiving (the second Monday in October) and Christmas (December 25) are the main culinary-related holidays in Canada, usually recognized from a culinary perspective with a feast centered on roast turkey. For birthdays, people normally get a birthday cake. The same goes for weddings. Owing to Canada's multicultural nature, many other religious, secular, and ethnic holidays are also recognized, many with their own food traditions.

A food-related event called the World's Longest Barbecue, which is expanding into Food Day Canada, dubbed "a coast to coast to coast celebration of great regional foods," is informally recognized on the first weekend in August, traditionally a national holiday in Canada (Civic Holiday). The barbecue started in 2003 to help beef farmers rebound after an animal with bovine spongiform encephalopathy was found among the Canadian herd, prompting the United States, Canada's biggest trading partner, to close the border. Now, tens of thousands of Canadians light their grills on that weekend in support of farmers and Canadian food.

## Diet and Health

Canadians have a culture of eating "pioneer" food—high protein, high fat, high carbohydrates—and lots of it. This pattern dates back to the relatively recent settling of the land, and the hard-working rural and farm population. Now, only a fraction—less than 1 percent—of the population lives on farms. But some Canadians eat as if they still routinely drove a horse-drawn plow (which they do not).

Health Canada, a branch of the Canadian government, is entrusted with Canadians' good food and nutrition. The Canadian government calls maintaining the safety of the country's food supply a "shared responsibility" among government, industry, and consumers, based on what it calls evidence-based nutrition policies and standards. These policies and standards are reflected in Canada's Food Guide. The guide makes recommendations by suggesting food options rather than daily allowances of nutrients. Offering choices from four basic food groups is intended to supply Canadians with the proper intake of nutrients, but it does not account for the specific needs of all individuals, such as women who need more iron.

Furthermore, Health Canada recommends to Canadian consumers that they eat at least one dark green and one orange vegetable each day; have vegetables and fruit more often than juice; make at least half of grain products whole grain each day; drink skim, 1 percent, or 2 percent milk each day; have meat alternatives such as beans, lentils, and tofu often; eat at least two Food Guide servings of fish each week; include a small amount of unsaturated fat each day; and, lastly, satisfy their thirst with water. These messages do not seem to be getting through to the public, though.

Despite—or perhaps because of—Canadians' limited adherence to health precepts, new crops aimed at better health are constantly being monitored, trialed, and introduced into the food system. Value-added crops continue to be an area of exciting development, particularly those with health benefits. For example, Canadian-grown oilseeds such as canola, sunflower, and flax are known today for their health benefits, and the industry has successfully developed a strong market based on these qualities. Canola was developed in Canada and is often the nation's most valuable crop, with annual exports of canola seed, oil, and meal valued at more than CDN$3 billion. Canola is an achievement of Canada's research community and is a testament to how responding to consumer demands for quality and nutrition pays big dividends over time. Canadian wheat is renowned the world over for its quality as well. Looking into the future, an organization called the Advanced Foods and Materials Network is Canada's front line of research and development in the area of advanced foods and biomaterials, including improved frozen-food quality and reduced salt intake.

*Owen Roberts, Rebecca Moore, and Anita Stewart*

**Further Reading**

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# Chile

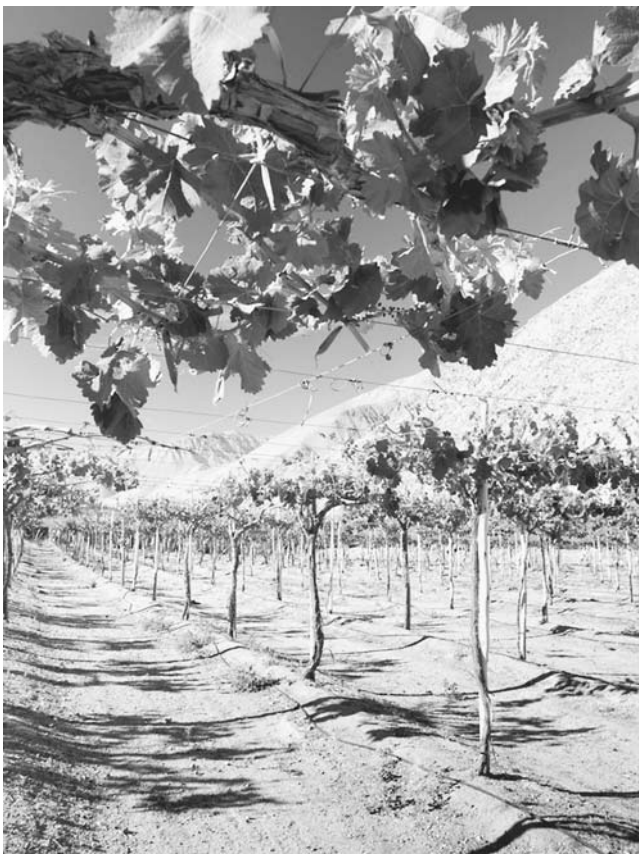
## Overview

The Republic of Chile has 15 provinces; it stretches 2,640 miles in length but is little more than 100 miles wide, and it is bordered by the Pacific Ocean and the Andes range. Its geographic extremes range from the Atacama Desert, the Earth's driest place, to the fertile Central Valley, from where produce and wines are shipped around the world, to the south, where volcanoes and virgin forests give way to Patagonia's glaciers and Antarctica. Stories vary as to the origin of the country's name. *Chile* may refer to an Inca word, to a Peruvian valley, or to indigenous Mapuche Indians' word *chilli,* possibly translated "where the land ends."

About 85 percent of Chile's 16 million people live in its Central Valley, and almost a third of those live in Santiago, the capital. About two-thirds of Chileans claim mixed indigenous and European descent. The indigenous Mapuche make up about 10 percent of the country's population and are among the poorest of Chileans.

Allowing for some regional specialties, the same foods are enjoyed and the same eating habits are practiced throughout the country. There's an abundance of seafood from the country's endless coastline, and beef, pork, and chicken are popular. The produce is excellent and plentiful. Chile's thriving wine industry continues to expand to new areas.

Chile's oldest cooking traditions come from the Incas, whose agriculture and irrigation methods in turn influenced the Mapuche. The Spanish intermarried freely with the indigenous cultures from their arrival in the 1500s and contributed their eating habits and some foods to the cuisine. In the following centuries, French cooking techniques were embraced, as was the food influence of those who came from Britain, Germany, Italy, and other countries.



The vineyards in the Elqui Valley, Chile often contrast beautifully with the dry valley walls and the clear, blue sky above. (iStockPhoto)

## Food Culture Snapshot

Juan and Cynthia live in Santiago's upscale suburb of Barrio Los Condes. Juan works in his family's fruit export business. Cynthia is a housewife. They have two children, ages 8 and 12. Juan's family history has British roots that date back to the early 1800s, mixed with both Indian and Spanish ancestry from the 1500s and before. Cynthia is from the south of Chile, where her family's German ancestors settled in the late 19th century.

Cynthia shops several times a week in both the nearby supermarket and the *feria,* the open-air markets. Daily meals are planned around fish (shrimp, mussels, and conger eel, as well as farm-raised salmon), beef, or chicken, served alone and in soups and stews, often with rice or mashed potatoes and fresh vegetables, especially salads with lettuces, avocados, tomatoes, carrots, green beans, and others. Cynthia serves such fresh fruit as apricots, peaches, cherries, plums, *lúcuma* (a fist-sized green or yellowish fruit with a big brown pit), pears, grapes, strawberries, and cherimoyas, which grow in abundance in Chile's Central Valley. Fruit is served at every meal except breakfast, alone or with pudding or cake for dessert.

During the week, the family eats breakfast together. Juan eats the midday meal out with business associates, and the children eat lunch at school. Cynthia has a sandwich or salad at home. When the children return from school, Cynthia sits down with them for *onces,* a light teatime snack. Cynthia and Juan have a maid who comes in daily to help prepare meals and do household work. The family eats together in the early evening. Occasionally, Cynthia and Juan go out for dinner out about 9:30 in the evening.

On weekends, *almuerzo,* the midday meal, is a relaxed dinner, sometimes consisting of several courses. Often, they invite their siblings and their families or friends, or they join them as guests. Guests may be invited for weekend onces, a heartier version of the weekday snack, including a selection of pastries, as well as bread and cheese, desserts, and tea and coffee.

## Major Foodstuffs

Chilean cooking draws on thousands of years of food traditions. The rugged *altiplano* in Chile's north is still home to the Aymara and Atacama Indians, who herd llamas, alpaca, and sheep in the high desert adjacent to Bolivia and Peru and grow potatoes, quinoa, and barley. Today, quality olive oil and Chile's famous *pisco* (distilled alcohol) come from this region.

In the south, the Mapuche cook from the ancient food trilogy of potatoes, corn, and beans. The Mapuche also raise livestock and gather the piñon, the pine-cone seed of the araucaria, or monkey puzzle tree. These ingredients, as well as squash, the grain quinoa, and chilies, are found in many of Chile's most popular modern dishes; the style is called *Chile Criolla.* Chilean Creole cuisine grew out of the melding of Spanish and indigenous foods and cooking methods.

The Spanish introduced grapes, citrus and other fruits, olives, nuts, rice, sugar, and garlic to Chile, as well as chicken, cattle, sheep, pigs, and rabbits. Milk, cheese, and chorizo were all Spanish contributions. Spanish food had already been influenced by medieval Moorish cuisine when the Spanish arrived in Chile in the 1500s. The fried bread sopaipilla, made with pumpkin and lard, has Arab pastries as its ancestor, for example.

Fruits and vegetables in Chile, largely grown in the Central Valley, are of the best quality and widely available throughout the country. Grapes, plums, apples, cherries, peaches, nectarines, berries, and avocados are diet staples. Native Andean fruits include cherimoya, the custard apple; lúcuma, a fruit with orange flesh, a sweet aroma, and a slightly bittersweet flavor that is pureed for creamy fillings and ice cream; and the *pepino dulce,* related to the tomato but with a mild melon flavor. The modern strawberry has a berry ancestor native to Chile.

The country's unusual geography means that fresh fish and seafood are never more than 100 miles away from most of the population. However, it's bread that the Chileans eat most often, about 200 pounds per person per year, second only to the Germans worldwide. About 80 percent of the bread is purchased fresh daily from bakeries, often carried warm from the shop. Fresh bread is the basis of breakfast and of the late-afternoon onces. Pasta is a diet staple in Chile. Rice is eaten less often.

Fish and seafood choices abound in Chile. Paleontologists have found and studied piles of shells from ancient meals of clams, abalones, and mussels, dating back 12,000 to 14,000 years. The diversity of Chilean fish and seafood is owed to the Humboldt Current, which carries frigid water from Antarctica northward along the west coast of South America. Chileans enjoy *centolla* (the king crab), *albacora* (albacore tuna), *pejerreyes* (whiting), *bacalao* (cod), *róbalo* (haddock), *merluza* (hake), *almejas* (clams), *choritos* (sea barnacles), *erizo* (sea urchin), and *jurel* (mackerel). Among the species distinct to Chile are *machas* (clams), *congrio* (conger eel), *cholgas* (mussels), and *locos* (Chilean abalones).

Fish is an important export, both as whole fish and as processed fishmeal. Salmon and trout are farmed intensively in southern Chile, raising concerns about disease and pollution, even while Chile has become the second-largest exporter of salmon worldwide after Norway. *Corvina* (Chilean sea bass) has been overfished to the point of concern about extinction.

Seaweed has been eaten in Chile for as long as seafood has. Seaweed varieties are nutritional powerhouses, being excellent sources of iodine, iron, protein, and such trace elements as cobalt copper, and manganese. Traditionally, seaweed was an inexpensive meat substitute. The variety *chochayuyo* grows up to 50 feet long among the coastal rocks and is a substitute for meat in the stew *charquicán,* which is renamed *charquicán de chochayuyo* when made with seaweed.

Grass-fed Chilean beef is leaner and less tender than the beef raised across the border in Argentina. Beef, pork, and chicken often are grilled or used as the basis for soups and stews. In southern Chile, there are excellent hams and sausages, a result of the area's German food traditions. Patagonian lamb is prized for its flavor due to the grass varieties on which the sheep graze. Chile's most popular cheese is the semihard, ripened *chanco,* known for its sour-salty flavor and tiny holes. It accounts for half of all the cheese sold in the country.

The traditional indigenous tea, maté, is served in a special cup with a filtered straw designed especially for the drink. The cup's shape is based on the gourds that people used for the drink hundreds of years ago. Yerba maté's dried green leaves are high in vitamin C and antioxidants. The drink is enjoyed throughout South America, in Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay, as well as in Chile.

Chilean cuisine has several ingredients, spices, and seasonings distinct to the country. Caramelized sweetened condensed milk, *manjar,* is spread on bread and poured over fruit. The Mapuche spice *merquén* (*merken*) is enjoying a resurgence in contemporary dishes as chefs and home cooks find new ways to use this mixture of dried, smoked chilies, cumin, coriander, and salt. Chili peppers are used in Chilean cooking but only lightly. The cuisine is not spicy hot, though the ground, hot Andean chili pepper, *ají,* is a common ingredient but in small amounts. *Ají de color* is Chile's paprika and a necessary ingredient in the traditional dishes. Chileans serve the salsa *pebre* in restaurants and at home with empanadas, sopaipillas, scrambled eggs, and grilled chorizo. In short, pebre's combination of finely chopped garlic, chilies, onions, cilantro, salt, oregano, vinegar or lemon juice, and tomatoes goes with everything.

### *Wines*

Long before the Spanish arrived, the Mapuche and other indigenous people made fermented beverages from fruit, potatoes, and the grains corn and quinoa. The Mapuche called it *chichi.* Today, it's made from lightly fermented grapes or apples and widely drunk in rural areas and for Chilean Independence Day.

A Spanish priest planted the first vineyard in Chile in 1548 to fulfill the sacramental need for wine. Wine production grew far beyond the needs of the Catholic Church, and wine was even exported to Peru and Mexico during colonization. Chile's ideal combination of hot, sunny summers, frost-free winters, good soils, and optimum humidity proved to be splendid; it is now considered one of the best wine-growing regions in the world.

Spanish grapes gave way to French vines in 1851, with more sophisticated wines resulting from the Old World Cabernet Sauvignon, Cot (Malbec),



Foods typically found in Chile including cazuela, bread, fruit, and pebre. (Ene | Dreamstime.com )

Merlot, Pinot Noir, Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillion, and Riesling varieties. By the late 1800s, Chilean wines won acclaim in Europe as the vineyards thrived. When the tiny phylloxera aphid infested and destroyed the original plants in France, Chile's geographic isolation proved an advantage, leaving its vineyards untouched. The industry was further aided when French, Italian, and Spanish winemakers brought their expertise to Chile as immigrants in the late 1800s. Chilean winemaking stagnated under political constraints in the mid-20th century.

In 1979 a Spanish winery introduced state-of-the-art winemaking technology. When democracy returned to Chile in 1990, the wine industry was poised for innovation and success. There are at least dozen wine-growing valleys in Chile, the newest just a few miles from the Pacific Ocean. In the 1990s DNA testing proved that one grape variety considered to be Merlot was actually Carmenére, a grape believed lost in the aphid devastation a century earlier. A further distinction for Chilean wines is research that has shown that its Cabernet Sauvignon has the highest levels in the world of antioxidant flavonols, which have a protective effect against heart disease.

Another Chilean signature, also claimed by Peru, is pisco, the basis for the cocktail *pisco sour.* Named for a pre-Incan bird, pisco has been produced since the 1500s, at first from the inferior grapes not used for wine. Peru's pisco, generally, has a more refined flavor. Chile's robust, clear, brandy-like liquor is produced from Muscat, Torontel, and Pedro Jiménez varieties in the microclimate valleys of the Atacama Desert and Coquimbo. Chileans and Peruvians both claim, as well, the cocktail pisco sour, made by blending pisco, lemon juice, powdered sugar, and ice. Finally, Chile has a wealth of *bajativos,* liqueurs made from the whole range of Chilean fruits: raspberries, strawberries, blackberries, peaches, plums, and even celery. These after-dinner drinks are meant to be sipped and aid digestion.

## Cooking

Chileans have modern kitchens separate from the dining area. Middle- and upper-class families hire household help, who may do the cooking with or without added help from the woman of the house. Kitchens have gas or electric ranges with ovens; only upscale homes have dishwashers. Kitchens are stocked with the pots and pans that are familiar to North Americans.

Common cooking techniques are roasting, baking, stewing, and frying. Knives are kept sharp for chopping fresh vegetables for the variety of Chilean salads. Small kitchen appliances such as food processors are uncommon. However, green beans have their own tool, a tiny hand-held gadget that shreds a single bean at a time.

An *asado* (roast) is a relaxed outdoor meal in Chile. The open gas or charcoal grills are the man's domain. Chilean asado calls for large, boneless cuts of meat and long cooking times. *Choripán,* literally *chorizo en pan,* or sausages in bread, are grilled alongside the meat and served while the main-dish meat cooks.

## Typical Meals

Chileans' daily eating habits are much more alike than the dramatically diverse geography of the country would suggest. Chileans eat three to four meals a day, starting with *desayuno* (breakfast), followed by the day's large midday meal, almuerzo (lunch), onces (afternoon tea), and *la cena* (supper) in the evening. Evening restaurant dining is always late, about 9:30 P.M.

Desayuno is built around bread, either rolls or toast, often warm from the bakery and eaten with cheese, butter, and thick fruit jams. The most popular bread in Chile is *marraqueta,* also known as *pan batido,* a French-style roll with a fold in the middle. It has a soft center and medium crust. Dimpled rolls called *hallalas* are a richer version of the same white-flour bread but made with lard. When bread is made at home, *pan amasado* is the classic recipe. Even one of Chile's national dishes is bread based. The meat-filled empanada uses tender yeast dough as the wrapping. Fruit is not universal at breakfast. Across a range of backgrounds, fruit is considered detrimental to digestion in the morning if eaten with milk products.

Chileans drink coffee or tea with breakfast and for afternoon tea, as well as after meals. Chileans' coffee of choice is instant Nescafé, usually prepared with hot milk and served as *café con leche.* When Nescafé was introduced in Chile in the 1970s, it became an instant hit as a large number of people chose it over brewed coffee, now called *café-café.* Brewed coffee is available in the growing number of coffee shops, including international chains, as well as upon request in restaurants.

Traditionally, the midday meal has been the centerpiece of an afternoon break from school and work between 1 and 4 P.M., allowing time for a leisurely lunch and a nap. Urban dwellers in Santiago and increasingly in Valparaiso have adopted a schedule that omits the afternoon break. Children eat lunch at school, and working Chileans eat almuerzo away from home. The tradition continues in smaller cities and in rural areas during the week. In urban centers on weekends, almuerzo remains a relaxed break in the day.

Families sit together at the table for the meal. Meals can be relaxed or served in several courses, including an *entrada* (appetizer), perhaps *sopa* (soup) or pasta before the *plato de fondo,* a hearty main course with meat or fish, followed by a *postre* (dessert) and coffee or tea. Wine may be served with the meal and a bajativo (liqueur) afterward.

Main dishes are as simple as grilled fish or meat or a casserole or stew. *Chile Criolla* dishes are popular for family meals. *Pastel de choclo* is a classic with its layer of *pino* (seasoned beef filling laced with raisins, olives, and quartered hard-boiled eggs) and whole pieces of chicken topped with sugar-crusted corn pudding. Chile's empanadas may be baked or fried and filled with pino, seafood, or cheese. The chicken soup called *cazuela de gallina* is filled with chicken, potatoes, and pumpkin. Chile's tamale is called *humita.* The bean dish *porotos granados* is made with dried beans, pumpkin, corn, garlic, and onions.

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***Pastel de Choclo***

*Serves 8–10*

6–8 medium ears corn on the cob, or 3½ c fresh or frozen, defrosted corn kernels
4 tbsp butter
¼ c milk
2 eggs
8 basil leaves, thinly sliced
4 tbsp vegetable oil, divided
1 lb boneless chicken breasts, cut in 3-in. pieces
Salt and pepper to taste
1 lb very lean ground beef
2 medium onions, chopped
2–3 cloves garlic, minced
2 tsp paprika
1–2 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp salt
½ tsp ground black pepper
¼ c raisins, soaked in hot water for 20 minutes and drained

12 black olives

2 hard-boiled eggs, quartered

¼ c confectioners' sugar

If using corn on the cob, grate corn into a bowl. Or process corn kernels in batches in a food processor. In a medium saucepan, heat butter and milk, add corn, and cook over medium heat until mixture boils and thickens, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat. Whisk the eggs in a bowl. Spoon a few tablespoons of the warm liquid into the eggs and whisk again. Then stir into the corn mixture, all at once, along with the basil leaves. Stir until thickened and bubbly, about 7 minutes. Set aside.

In a large skillet, heat 1 to 2 tablespoons oil, add chicken, seasoned with salt and pepper to taste, and sauté over medium heat until browned on all sides and cooked through, about 15 minutes. Remove and keep warm.

In the same skillet, heat 1 to 2 tablespoons of the remaining oil. Add ground beef and cook until lightly browned. Drain if necessary. Stir in onions and cook until translucent. Stir in garlic, paprika, cumin, salt, pepper, raisins, and olives, and let cook about 5 minutes to blend flavors.

To assemble: Place beef filling in a 3-quart casserole and press chicken into filling. Distribute hard-boiled eggs over the surface. Top with the corn pudding to seal the edges. Sift confectioners' sugar over the top. Place in a 350°F oven and bake for 30 to 40 minutes or until golden brown and bubbly.

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Chile's seafood inspired the Nobel Laureate Pablo Neruda to write "Ode to Conger Chowder" in honor of *caldillo congrio,* with its oniony-tomato broth. *Chupe de mariscos* is a rich casserole of shellfish baked with bread and cheese. Chilean clams are enjoyed baked as *machas de la Parmesana.* The seafood platter *mariscal* joins a selection of fresh seafood with an irresistible chopped green sauce of green onion, cilantro, parsley, chilies, and salt.

Chile's fresh vegetables are as ubiquitous as its fruits and often served as salads. Chile's signature salad, *ensalada Chilena,* is simply fresh tomatoes and slices of onion dressed with oil and vinegar and a sprinkle of cilantro or parsley and salt and pepper.

Desserts often feature Chile's wonderful fruits. One of the simple favorites is sliced bananas, apples, or peaches with either sweetened condensed milk or the caramelized version called manjar. Other fruit desserts include ice cream, compotes, baked flan (custard) mixed with fruits, and crisp meringues topped with fruit and whipped cream.

The late-afternoon onces ranges from a quick snack after school to a more substantial meal including bread, cheese, meats, butter, and jam, along with hot chocolate, maté, café con leche, or tea. A hearty onces may be the day's final meal. For a home evening meal, Chileans have vegetable salads, pizza, pasta, empanadas, or lighter fish, meat, or chicken dishes. Fruit, again, is dessert.

In the Andean highlands, the regional specialty is *charqui,* dried meat, from llamas, goats, or cattle. The English name *jerky* for dried, seasoned meat comes from *charqui,* coined by the Spanish. The stew of vegetables and jerky called charquicán is considered a Chilean original.

Residents of Chiloé, an island in the south of Chile, keep alive an outdoor seafood bake tradition called *curanto,* similar to a New England clambake and many Native American earth oven traditions. The process starts with stones, spread in a hole in the ground and covered with a blazing wood fire. Once the stones are hot, the cook assembles layers of *nalca* (Chilean rhubarb) or cabbage leaves,



Typical chilean dish named curanto, based on shellfish. (Francisco Javier Espuny | Dreamstime.com )

chorizo, mussels, clams or other seafood, pork chops, chicken legs, potatoes, other vegetables, and the dense potato-wheat bread called *chapaleles,* finishing with a layer of leaves before covering it with earth to seal in the heat while the food cooks. Cooks steam smaller proportions in a pot on the rangetop.

## Eating Out

In the mid-19th century wealthy Chileans brought French chefs to cook for their families. Later the chefs opened restaurants. Santiago's elegant Restaurant del Hotel Crillon embodied the ideal led by Chef Carlos Aranda, who published a cookbook in 1951. The introduction promises foods from the "heroic land" of the Three Musketeers including cassoulet, coq au vin, and *tripes a la mode.*

French and Continental European influence dominated Chilean restaurants until recently. While those traditions continue in high-end places, Chile's economic prosperity has fueled a wider restaurant bonanza especially in Santiago and Valparaiso. To the benefit of both adventurous chefs and appreciative diners, creative cuisine is thriving in Chile alongside the quality of its wines.

Many Peruvians have immigrated to Chile during the economic expansion and have opened restaurants featuring a cuisine that is one of the world's oldest and most diverse. The restaurants are among Santiago's most popular, ranging from inexpensive to highly sophisticated. Chilean Peruvian food tends to be less spicy than in Peru. Celebrated *cebiche,* citrus-marinated fish laced with onions and seasonings, comes in many forms. The potato holds a place of honor in Peruvian cooking in such dishes as *causa rellena,* yellow potatoes mashed with lime and hot pepper and stuffed with chicken or fish. Diners love *lomo saltado:* sautéed beef with onions, tomatoes, and chilies over French fries. *Suspiro limeño* is a meringue-topped vanilla custard.

Chilean *parrilladas* are grill restaurants offering meats, sweetbreads, and sausages cooked over an open fire. They are another restaurant category that ranges from the cheap to the most expensive ones, which feature seared meats or fish over foie gras. In the middle range, Italian and Middle Eastern restaurants are abundant, as are Cantonese Chinese places. There are a growing number of Japanese, Southeast Asian, Indian, and Korean restaurants as well.

Renewed interest in indigenous foods and the *Chile Criolla* tradition is influencing the country's chefs. Chefs from a selection of the country's restaurants are promoting Chilean food products abroad, and their energy, in turn, is bringing fresh interpretations back to familiar dishes. The *picadas* (small joints) are the places to find such home cooking as *arrolloado* (pork roll) and delicious *cazuelas* (stews). Then there's the famous pork sandwich, *lomito:* slow-cooked, marinated pork with avocado, tomato, and mayo, and even cheese and sauerkraut, piled high on a six-inch-wide bun.

Locals still eat at the picadas in Santiago's Central Market, operated continuously since 1872 in a classic art nouveau structure. The market has seafood restaurants and stalls selling fresh fish, fruits, vegetables, free-range poultry, goat cheese, local olives, and Chilean wine. Markets with good food for diners and shoppers are found elsewhere in Santiago and the length of Chile in the larger cities. Valparaiso has the Cardonal and Bombay Port, La Serena's market is called Revoca, and Angelmo is near Puerto Montt. Temuco, the heart of Mapuche culture, has the Municipal Market. Markets are also found in Coquimbo, Chillan, Concepción, and other cities of size.

In general, restaurant diners find salt but not pepper on restaurant tables. Usually, there's a cruet of vegetable oil to drizzle on potatoes and other side dishes. Salads are dressed simply with vegetable oil and vinegar or lemon juice. Many restaurants provide two napkins: one for the lap, the other for daubing the mouth during dining.

## Special Occasions

The highlights of the national Chilean calendar are Christmas, New Year's, and September 18, Chilean Independence Day. Fiesta Patrias commemorates Chile's 1810 independence from Spain. The official date is September 18, but in reality, the celebrations

go on for a week or more in homes and in fairs set up across the width and length of the country. The holiday centers around the asado, the outdoor barbecue, and the foods highlight the indigenous-Spanish Chile Criolla traditions. Menus feature empanadas, the meat pies filled with meats, seafood, or cheese; choripán, grilled sausage on a French roll; *anticuchos,* skewers of grilled beef, pork, chicken, and onions; bowls of pastel de choclo; and even whole roasted pig and lamb. For dessert there's *mote con huesillo,* a drink made of wheat berries and dried peaches. Chileans wash it all down with wine, beer, the lightly alcoholic *chicha,* soft drinks, coffee, and tea.

Chile remains largely a Catholic country, if a less strictly observant one than during much of its 450-year history. Christmas is a warm-weather holiday with beach vacations. The cultural symbols have been adapted from the Northern Hemisphere including nativity scenes of the Holy Family, Christmas trees, and snow suggested by puffs of cotton. Children anticipate the arrival of the *Viejito Pascuero* (Old Man Christmas) in full costume by reindeer-drawn sleigh. The bearer of gifts enters homes through the window instead of the chimney.

On December 24, families gather for midnight mass. Then, the holiday feasting begins, which may include roast turkey, beef, or chicken, or salmon or shrimp, accompanied by fresh vegetable salads, potatoes, tomatoes, avocados, peas, carrots, celery, green beans, and, of course, fresh bread. Chile's Christmas bread is *pan de Pascua,* packed with nuts, raisins, candied fruit, and spices. It resembles Italian panettone. In the south of Chile, there's always the German Christmas bread, stollen. While children open presents, the adults share glasses of *cola de mono* ("monkey's tail"), a rum- and milk-soaked coffee drink, served cold with a cinnamon stick. Holiday desserts range from *buche de noel* (Yule log cake) and Black Forest cake to layered meringue cakes filled with creamy cherimoya, raspberry, or lúcuma fillings. Strawberries, blueberries, and raspberries are stirred into mousse and layered into trifles.

A week later, families celebrate *Feliz Año Nuevo.* Traditionally, serving lentil stew with chorizo or lentil soup brings good luck for the coming year. Besides wine, Chileans toast with wine-and-fruit mixtures such as *borgoña* (red wine with strawberries) or white wine with peaches, ending with bajativos, the after-dinner liqueurs made from Chile's endless selection of fruits.

In addition to birthdays, saint's days have traditionally been celebrated in Chile. A saint's day notes the birth date of a saint in the Catholic Church. For example, Saint Francis was born on October 3, and that is the saint's day for those named Francisco or Francesca. When families gather in honor of a birthday or saint's day, the centerpiece is *torta de mil hojas.* The cake starts with either wafer-thin cookie slices, thin layers of baked cake, or pancakes that are layered with a creamy *dulce de leche* (cooked-down caramelized milk), often homemade, frosted with meringue, and finished with fresh fruit or flowers.

## Diet and Health

Chile's traditional diet—the blend of indigenous foods and those introduced by the Spanish—forms the basis of a diet with plenty of fruits and vegetables, legumes, grains, dairy foods, abundant seafood, and some meat. Until the late 20th century, many Chileans practiced this variation of the nutrient-dense, lower-fat Mediterranean diet coupled with a lifestyle that brought families together at the table for meals. During the midday meal break from 1 to 4 P.M., offices and schools closed, giving a relaxing break from school and work. At the same time, among Chile's poorest citizens, malnutrition and infant mortality were high.

Chile's growing economic prosperity from the 1990s on fueled a radical change in eating habits across the entire population. Malnutrition practically disappeared, infectious diseases decreased, and life expectancy increased to one of the highest in South America. The Chilean story is similar to the one in many countries where the abandonment of traditional foods and lifestyle choices and the choice of more highly processed foods and faster-paced urban lives have been followed by an increase in childhood obesity (at 20.8% for primary-school students in 2008) and risk for cardiovascular disease.



A vendor at the fish market in the Pacific port of Puerto Montt, Chile. (StockPhotoPro)

Heart disease is the cause of 28 percent of deaths, topping all other causes.

Chronic illness, including high blood pressure and obesity related to cardiovascular disease, increased significantly. Researchers are limited by the fact that Chile doesn't collect nationwide nutrition data. They rely on targeted studies, including a 2003 *National Health Survey* reporting that 38 percent of adult Chileans were overweight and 23 percent were obese, with higher rates among women and in lower socioeconomic groups. A third of Chileans had high blood pressure.

Chileans are selecting more energy-dense foods and meat for an average 25 percent increase in both calorie and fat consumption between 1988 and 1998. Per-capita consumption of soft drinks and tea is among the highest in the world. More people in Chile have moved to the cities, and rates of alcohol and drug abuse have increased. Add to that the high incidence of smoking (42% of adults) and the serious air pollution in Santiago, one of Latin America's most polluted cities. Chileans are also not keen to exercise: 90 percent of adult Chileans report a sedentary lifestyle.

One unusual finding in Chile's nutrition transition has been among the indigenous rural populations, who continue a traditional diet along with plenty of physical activity growing crops and tending animals. Despite being among the poorest of Chileans, the Mapuche in southern Chile and the Aymara in the north have each been found to have a very low incidence of diabetes. However, when the Mapuche move to an urban setting (about 60% of Mapuche are urbanites), the numbers of diabetics doubles from 4.1 to 9.8 percent, as does obesity. Among the rural Aymara, the incidence of diabetes was 1 percent. Researchers are intrigued because, unlike the rural Aymara and Mapuche, North American Indians, rural as well as urban, have epidemic rates of diabetes. Preliminary data point to the preventive

effect of the traditional diet and the activity it takes to produce it.

Chile does have a well-established national public health system with a succession of rural posts, public health centers, and hospitals. Since the mid-1990s, those involved in nutrition programs and academia have been actively advocating to better link that system with a stronger nutrition policy. Through that system, health-promotion messages have increased across the country, and programs have begun in schools to promote exercise and better eating habits. Advocates are pushing for laws to restrict advertising for cigarettes and alcohol and to limit advertising for energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods on television, especially during children's prime viewing times.

*Mary Gunderson*

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# Colombia

## Overview

Among the cuisines of South America, Colombia is second only to Peru in combining the culinary traditions of the native populations with those of the Europeans who arrived in the 1500s. The country's long coastline and historical trade routes have also fostered a strong Afro-Caribbean influence. That hybridization, along with the varied produce of a country with several distinct climatic regions, makes Colombian cuisine particularly interesting to study.

The volcanic Andes Mountains divide into three roughly parallel ranges as they enter Colombia, so that broad plateaus and valleys of high fertility occupy the center of the country. Those valleys, called the *tierra templada,* comprise only 6 percent of the land area but support over a quarter of the country's population. Along the Pacific coast are the world's rainiest tropical jungles, a sparsely populated area broken up by slow-moving rivers. The Caribbean coast is more dry and hospitable and includes relatively temperate zones, vast marshy lowlands, and a desert peninsula. The Andean foothills extend to this area, and the majority of the country's population is in this region where the central highlands slope to the Caribbean. Colombia also has sovereignty over a Caribbean archipelago that has an Anglo-African culture with no Spanish roots.

The natural flora of most of the country is thick jungle, which provided abundant fruit and game to hunter-gatherers, and there are still tribes that live in the same way as their Neolithic ancestors. The principal preconquest tribes of Colombia were the Tairona (or Tayrona) along the Caribbean coast and the Muisca in the highlands to the south. Both the Muisca and Tairona developed urban centers, and a Spanish chronicler of 1538 noted extensive plantings of potatoes, maize, and cassava in the highlands. The natives also raised beans, chili peppers, *arracacha* and malanga roots, and squashes. The coastal Tairona ate seafood, tortoises, manatees, tapirs, and iguanas and raised cassava. Their diet included fruits such as the tamarillo, papaya, guava, *guanábana* (soursop), and passion fruit, but whether these were actively cultivated before the arrival of Europeans is open to question. Lake and river fish were caught; insects, including snails and ant queens, were eaten; and they may have raised animals to supplement the birds and game that they hunted. There was some commercial activity in food and spices; coastal Taironas developed a salt trade with the interior tribes, though not with the Muisca, who had their own mines in the highlands.

About the only cooked item in modern Colombian cuisine that we can be certain is the same as a Mesoamerican dish is the arepa. This corn pancake probably gets its name from a word for corn in the Chibcha language, which was spoken by the Muisca and other tribes. (It is hard to tell because speaking Chibcha was illegal from 1770 until 1991.) In its most basic form an arepa is a thick fried cake made of ground corn, water, and salt, but modern arepas are often stuffed with cheese or topped with salad. A relative of the arepa, called the *casabe* and made from cassava root, is native to the area around the border between Colombia and Venezuela. Though it is now associated with Venezuela, it was probably eaten all along the southern Caribbean seaboard.



Arepa, breads made of corn flour popular in Colombia and Venezuela, usually filled with egg or cheese. (Raphael Chay | Dreamstime.com)

The natives also brewed a kind of corn beer and, in the highlands, made both alcoholic and nonalcoholic versions of *chicha,* a beverage incorporating corn and fruit. The latter caught on with the Spanish, who added citrus; in 1627, when Fray Pedro Simon first recorded it, he noted that the Spanish had "made it cleaner, more curious and gifted."

The colonial era brought Spanish techniques and ingredients that became integral to Colombian cuisine. The tierra templada of Colombia was the only part of northern South America suited to large-scale cattle ranching, and the importance of this industry led to the establishment of the Viceroyalty of New Granada, centered at Santa Fe de Bogotá, in 1739. The administrators in Bogotá were primarily from the Spanish regions of Andalusia, Aragon, and Valencia, and they brought a taste for paella and blood pudding that survives to this day. Though they initially tried to keep their culture and cuisine as Spanish as possible, in time native foods became part of their diet and a cuisine called *criolla* was born. This used Spanish foods such as pork, beef, chicken, and cheese along with imports from other parts of the empire such as plantains, rice, carrots, and sweet potatoes.

Bogotá's rival for cultural precedence was Cartagena, the gateway to the Caribbean, which had the advantage of being the port of call for the Spanish galleons and the disadvantage of frequent raids by pirates and enemy forces. Cartagena developed a distinctive seafood-heavy cuisine that uses the locally popular *sabalo* fish as well as shrimp, sea bream, carp, and the tiny local oysters. Among the signatures of Cartagena-style food is abundant use of coconut milk and rice. Plantains, originally imported by Portuguese missionaries from Southeast Asia, are eaten in many ways, including the delightfully named "kitten's head," in which they are baked and mashed with fried pork and pork skin.

The exceptional example of Afro-Caribbean cuisine in Colombia is the Raizal cuisine of the San Andrés and Providencia islands, which are owned by Colombia even though they are far closer to Nicaragua. The typical dish here is *rondón,* consisting of fish, sea snails, breadfruit, yucca root, and plantain boiled in coconut milk.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Santiago and Carolina live in a high-rise building on the edge of Bogotá and wake up every workday at 6 A.M. when the radio plays the national anthem. Like most of the inhabitants (who refer to themselves as *Santafereñas*), they enjoy a breakfast of *changua,* soup made from eggs poached in milk with scallions, cilantro, and bread. This they wash down with locally grown coffee, strong and black. They feed their children—Alvaro, Ernesto, and Maria—the same breakfast before sending them to school, though instead of coffee, the children drink fruit juice. It isn't necessary to pack a lunch for them, because, as in many schools, a lunchroom serves healthy meals. The children would rather run to a nearby stand that sells *perro caliente Colombiano*—the Colombian hot dogs that are topped with coleslaw, pineapple, ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, and potato chips—but Carolina does not approve of junk food.

Santiago drives to his job in the accounting department for a coffee broker, while Carolina takes a bus to the hospital where she is an administrator. Her mother is old-fashioned and would prefer that she stay at home, but like almost half the women in the country, Carolina prefers to work. She doesn't expect to rise to executive level nor to join the men who are at that level for social occasions, but she takes her

morning snack, known as a *medias nueves,* with coworkers at a similar level in the hierarchy. The medias nueves is likely to be a roll with coffee or a glass of *aguapanela,* a drink made from sugarcane and water.

Santiago and Carolina have their main meal of the day around one in the afternoon, both dining with their coworkers. Since Carolina works for a hospital, her place of business does not close, but like most of Colombia, Santiago's department closes for lunch. She eats at the hospital's canteen, while he dines at a fine restaurant, but both have similar meals; they start with a bowl of *sancocho,* meat or fish stewed with yucca, plantain, and vegetables. The second course, called *el seco,* or the "dry dish," is usually a grilled fish or meat, and it is followed by a glass of juice and coffee. After lunch, anyone who can fit it into their schedule takes a brief nap, the siesta, awakening refreshed by 3 P.M. to go back to work.

Both Santiago and Carolina are home by 7 P.M. and help the children with their homework while drinking glasses of passion fruit or mango juice. Carolina doesn't start to make dinner until after 8—they won't be eating until 10 P.M. When they do, it is a light meal: arepas or empanadas, savory little corn-flour turnovers; fried green plantains called *patacones;* and a small portion of the soup called *ajiaco,* made with chicken, several kinds of potatoes, and the aromatic herb called *guasca.* Santiago prefers his patacones with a spoonful of *ají picante,* the vinegary hot sauce made with habanero peppers, but the rest of the family likes them plain or with a dusting of cheese. The adults have coffee, the children hot chocolate, and after dinner Santiago enjoys a glass of rum mixed with water, lime, sugar, and cinnamon.

On weekends the family invites friends over for an afternoon meal of empanadas, followed by *parrillada,* the traditional barbecued mixed grill. This is served with grilled or boiled corn on the cob, yucca or potatoes, and spicy green garlic sauce. Afterward, while the children play, the adults enjoy glasses of fermented chicha, the corn-based fruit punch that turns mildly alcoholic after a night in the refrigerator. They have to drink it all that day, since it turns sour quickly, but the sweet, fruity taste is so enjoyable that there is rarely any left. When Santiago and Carolina can get an aunt to watch their children, they enjoy going out to dine, usually at restaurants featuring food from Colombia rather than from other parts of the world. They enjoy the food of their own country and don't see a reason to go beyond its culinary borders.

## Major Foodstuffs

Though the climate and altitude variations in Colombia are extreme, an extensive road system means that produce from all areas of the country is available in the cities. This has been true even during period of insurgency and civil unrest; it was dangerous for the drivers and transport workers, but fresh ocean fish was available in the highlands, and beef went from the plateaus to the lowlands.

This is especially impressive because Colombia's largest crops, bananas and coffee, are both grown more for export than local consumption. Colombians prefer green plantains to the yellow bananas that are popular overseas, and though they are voracious coffee drinkers, the greater part of the crop is grown with overseas sale in mind. In fact, though the coffee business employs fully one-fourth of the country's agricultural labor and coffee is the country's largest cash crop, the coffee served in cafés in Colombia is often not very good, since the best beans are exported. Lower-value beans stay at home and are often overroasted.

Colombia's lowlands produce sugarcane for both export and local consumption, but the sugar that stays in the country is not mixed into coffee—most Colombians drink theirs black and bitter. The sugar is refined into *panela,* a solid mass of fructose and sucrose sugars that is used in drinks and desserts, and the leftover molasses is made into local rum and *aguardiente,* a distilled clear spirit.

Other major lowland crops are rice, plantains, cassava, cocoa beans, tobacco, and fruit for both export and local consumption. The most popular fruits in Colombia are the coconut, passion fruit, orange, guanábana (soursop), mamey, mango, and varieties of guava, though star fruit, tamarillos, limes, cherimoyas, and others are eaten widely or made into juice drinks. Avocados are widely grown and used in soups and beverages, and tomatoes are a minor crop.



Colombian coffee farmer harvesting their coffee, 2006. (Hsahjd 2010 | Dreamstime.com)

As the land rises from the Caribbean coast into the foothills of the Andes, cattle ranches and family farms growing corn, beans, yucca, and squash take over. Colombia exports beef and some cheese, but the country makes few aged cheeses; instead, there are soft farmer cheeses, cottage cheese, and the crumbly, slightly acidic *queso fresco* (fresh cheese). Milk is drunk by both adults and children, usually mixed with juices or cinnamon and other spices.

In the highlands, the staple is the potato—or rather, many different varieties of potatoes, each suited to different climates, altitudes, and purposes. Potatoes in Colombia come in colors from almost pure white and yellow to red and deep purple, and they vary in size from tiny spheres to large and irregular.

Fish, mussels, shrimp, and lobster from both the Caribbean and Pacific coasts are popular throughout the country, and the *mojarra* (tilapia) is offered in almost every restaurant. The tuna fishery on the west coast has long been important, but concerns about sustainability have led to restrictions and decline. Freshwater fish from the tributaries of the Amazon is also widely available. There are over 800 known species of freshwater fish in Colombia, but the most popular is catfish, which sometimes reaches colossal size. The *bocachico* fish used to be eaten widely, but the construction of a dam almost wiped out the species, causing concern about how ongoing water projects affect the sustainability of freshwater fisheries.

Pigs and chickens are raised and eaten everywhere, and in the mountains barbecued *cuy,* a breed of guinea pig, is regarded as a delicacy. Wild tapirs are eaten by natives of the Amazon but are not raised commercially, and their numbers have been falling due to overhunting.

Colombian cuisine is not highly spiced as a rule, though chili peppers and garlic are used in moderation in many dishes. The most distinctive native Colombian herb is guasca, which is slightly similar to basil. Other commonly used spices are cilantro, chives, cumin, onion, and achiote (annatto seed).

## Cooking

Colombian cuisine is simple, and Colombian kitchens are comparatively free of the special gadgetry that is popular in many countries. Daily meals are rich in soups, and most kitchens will have many well-used large pots. In rural areas and in old-fashioned families, or among gourmets who have embraced traditional ideas, cooks will use "Tolima" clay pots of the type made by the Chamba people of the Magdalena River basin. This pearl-gray cookware has become a prestige item and is often displayed where guests may see it. Like all well-made clay cookware, it is naturally nonstick, holds heat, and heats food evenly. Since Chamba cookware has been discovered by outsiders and praised by modern cooking gurus such as Paula Wolfert in her book *Clay Pot Cooking,* the price of the best clay pots has risen to the point that many Colombians can't afford them.

Many Colombians believe that even soups and other items that never touch a fire will taste better when cooked over wood, so woodstoves are popular even where gas and electricity are available. Until the early 1990s, when tax laws designed to keep out imported items changed, electric kitchen appliances were very expensive. Their popularity has grown slowly but steadily, and one particular item has taken off—the electric arepa maker. Traditionalists scoff at these contraptions, which are similar to waffle irons, and claim superior flavor for old-fashioned arepas made in a cast iron skillet or using a special perforated grill that is set on a wood fire.

There will be a variety of skillets in any household, including a very large one that is used for *fritanga,* fried assorted meats. Most homes will also have an outdoor grill for making parrillada, or grilled meats. Large households may have a fire pit with a spit or a vertical roasting rack for this purpose.

## Typical Meals

Though there are regional differences between the Afro-Caribbean–influenced northeast and the Andean-influenced southwest, some things about any Colombian meal are universal: There will be soup, there will be corn or rice, and fruit or fruit juice will make an appearance somewhere. This is not a society with a profound difference between the meals of the rich and the poor; the wealthy will have better-quality ingredients, eaten from nicer dishes and in more formal circumstances, but except among the very poorest or the tribes who are subsistence farmers or hunter-gatherers, the general pattern will be the same.

Poor people live like their remote ancestors on a diet of beans and rice supplemented with vegetables, small amounts of meat, and the fruit that grows wild and abundant in the jungles. The national bean of Colombia is the *cargamanto,* a large red bean with white flecks that is nutritious and high in protein. Black beans are fried and served with rice in a style similar to the Cuban dish "Christians and Moors," and white canary beans are boiled with onions and served as a side dish or used in soups.

### *Sopa de Frijoles Canarios* (Canary Bean Soup)

This is a traditional Colombian dish. *Sazón preparado* is a popular seasoning mix throughout the Caribbean. The Goya brand is most popular in Colombia, but it contains more monosodium glutamate than many other versions.

*Serves 6–8*

**Ingredients**

1 garlic clove
¼ c onion, chopped
¼ c red bell pepper, chopped
¼ c green pepper, chopped
1 scallion, chopped
1 lb canary beans (or kidney, pinto, or cranberry beans), soaked overnight
2 lb pork ribs, cut into pieces
14 c water
2 c grated carrots
1 cube chicken bouillon
½ tbsp ground cumin
½ tbsp sazón preparado with saffron
½ c chopped cilantro
1 large potato, peeled and diced
Salt and pepper

1. In a food processor, combine garlic, onion, red bell pepper, green pepper, and scallion and process until finely chopped.
2. In a large pot over medium heat, combine the processed vegetables, beans, pork ribs, water, carrots, and chicken bouillon. Slightly cover and simmer for 1½ hours.
3. Add the ground cumin, sazón preparado, cilantro, and potato. Simmer for 30 to 40 minutes more, or until the beans are tender.
4. Season with salt and pepper. Serve with white rice and hot sauce on the side.

Even simple meals may begin with empanadas as an appetizer. Though savory turnovers

called empanadas are found from Mexico all the way to Argentina, Colombian empanadas are different. First, they are usually fried rather than baked, and, second, they are made with a mixture of corn and wheat flour. Colombian empanadas are usually filled with a mixture of minced chicken and onion but may also be filled with beef or cheese. In the Caribbean region you might also have *carimañolas,* yucca fritters stuffed with meat or cheese and served with garlicky hot sauce. Plantains feature throughout Colombian meals and may be served as an appetizer, either cut into pieces and fried; sliced lengthwise and baked with cinnamon; or mashed, salted, and fried (called patacones).

The first main course is almost always soup, of which there are many varieties. The most popular nationwide is sancocho, originally from the Tolima region. The iconic version is made with a whole cut-up hen, sliced green plantains, yucca, corn, and potatoes. It is seasoned with salt, black pepper, cilantro, and a seasoning paste called *aliños* that is made from green and red bell pepper, onion, scallions, cumin, garlic, and saffron. Aliños is used as a soup base throughout Colombia, and every family has its own recipe.

There are other bases as well, such as *mazamorra,* ground corn soaked in fern ash or lye (similar to American hominy grits, and also known as *peto*). This features in *mazamorra chiquita,* a soup made of beef ribs, tripe, onions, green peas, lima beans, carrots, several types of potatoes, garlic, pepper, and cumin.

The Caribbean coast is home to the spiciest food in Colombia, which in practice often means the soups contain a larger amount of aliños. On both the long Caribbean coastline and the shorter and sparsely populated Pacific coast, soups with coconut milk, rice, and fish are popular. The most exceptional example of this type of soup is from the San Andrés and Providencia islands, which are owned by Colombia but are actually far closer to Nicaragua. The people and cuisine here are called Raizal, and their signature dish is rondón, made from fish, sea snails, breadfruit, yucca, and plantain simmered in coconut milk.

In a Colombian meal, following the soup is the seco, the dry dish. In coastal regions this will usually be fried or grilled seafood with coconut fried rice on the side. Inland, roasted chicken or beef is extremely popular. As with coffee, much of the best Colombian beef is exported, but the cuisine is rich in techniques for making the most of tougher cuts. A specialty of Bogotá is *sobrebarriga,* flank steak simmered in beer until it is extremely tender, then rolled in breadcrumbs and broiled. It is then served half-submerged in the beer broth, thus a steak served in soup.

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### ***Sobrebarriga Bogotá*** **(Flank Steak)**

#### Ingredients

2 lb flank steak

2 medium tomatoes, chopped

1 white onion, chopped

1 carrot, chopped

2 cloves garlic, chopped

1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce

1 tbsp prepared mustard

1 tbsp lime juice

1 bottle dark beer

Beef stock or water

2 tbsp melted butter

1 c breadcrumbs

#### Preparing the Roll (*Prep Time: 15 Minutes; Marinating Time: 24 Hours*)

1. Lay out flank steak on a cutting board and trim off excess fat.

2. In a bowl mix together tomatoes, onion, carrot, garlic, Worcestershire sauce, mustard, and lime juice.

3. Spread the mixture on the steak, and roll along the grain so that when you slice it, you will be cutting across the grain.

4. Secure the steak with butcher's twine. The easiest way is to tie a slip knot once every couple of inches.

5. Place the steak in a large freezer bag, pour over any filling that has leaked out, and allow to sit in the refrigerator for at least a day.

**Cooking the Steak (*Cooking time: 2 Hours, 15 Minutes*)**

1. Place steak in a large saucepan, and add the beer. Fill the pot with enough beef stock or water to fully submerge the steak.
2. Bring to a boil, and then reduce heat to low and allow to simmer for 2 hours.
3. Preheat broiler 15 minutes before the steak is ready.
4. Remove steak from the cooking liquid, and increase the heat to reduce the liquid to a sauce while you broil the steak.
5. Place the steak on a baking sheet and drizzle melted butter over the top of the steak, then sprinkle with breadcrumbs. Place under the broiler until the breadcrumbs have browned, about 10 minutes.
6. Remove from the broiler, remove twine, allow to sit for 10 minutes, and slice across the grain.
7. Skim any particles from the top of the cooking liquid, and then pour it into a gravy bowl.

Among the nontraditional but popular methods of cooking beef are marinades using Coca-Cola; the citric acid helps tenderize meat and also adds a touch of sweetness. Beef in Colombia is usually sliced very thin and served medium-well—a Colombian steak covers a plate but is still a modest portion compared with an English or American portion of roast beef or prime rib.

The quintessential celebratory dinner is parrillada, a mixed grill that might be composed of beef, pork, tripe, *morcilla* (a blood sausage similar to boudin), sweet pork *longaniza* sausage, chorizo sausage heavily flavored with coriander, and other meats, served with corn and potatoes. If this same assemblage of meat is served fried instead of barbecued, it is called fritanga. By any name, it is an imposing spread that makes a siesta afterward seem like a wonderful idea.

Another dish with an impressive variety of meats is *bandeja paisa,* a combination of meats and vegetables from the region around Medellín in the northwest. This is a mixed grill distinguished by its accompaniments—the thinly sliced steak, pork skin with attached meat, and sausage are always accompanied by rice, beans, avocado, sweet fried plantains, arepas, and a fried egg.

To finish, Colombians enjoy simple desserts that are often based on milk, coconut milk, or fruits. Among the baked sweets is flan (custard), either plain or mixed with guava, pear, or other fruits. Fruit desserts include preserved *uchuva* (a type of gooseberry), tree-tomato juice, chopped fruit mixed in soda or orange juice, and fruit-stuffed crepes. Finally, there are simple sweet breads topped with *arequipe* caramel (the local version of *dulce de leche*) or ice cream. An unusual after-dinner sweet is candied *hormigas,* the queens of the world's largest species of ant. While the Guane Indians eat these ants fried as a savory, city dwellers prefer them enrobed in caramel or chocolate.



Bandeja paisa, a mixed grill distinguished by its accompaniments—the thinly sliced steak, pork skin with attached meat, and sausage are always accompanied by rice, beans, avocado, sweet fried plantains, arepas, and a fried egg. (StockPhotoPro)

Colombians of all ages enjoy fruit juices, either straight or mixed with milk, or aguapanela, sugarcane juice mixed with water. The other homemade soft drink is *chicha morada,* the traditional Andean fruit punch with corn and cinnamon. Chicha is usually homemade, but despite problems with a short shelf life, bottled versions have entered the market in the last decade. Colombians also enjoy sweet carbonated sodas, the most popular of which, Cola-Champaña, has been made by the Postobón company since 1904. Other popular bottled soft drinks are Pony Malta, a sweet nonalcoholic beer, and Kola Roman, a very sweet fruity drink popular in the Caribbean region. Colombiana, a tart soda made with tamarind, is also popular along the coast. In the mornings or on cool evenings, Colombians enjoy hot chocolate. In Bogotá this frequently has cheese melted into it and is called *santafereño.*

Among alcoholic drinks, the alcoholic version of chicha is popular, but there are no commercial producers due to its very short shelf life. Alcoholic chicha is drinkable for only about a week after it has finished fermenting—after that it turns very sharp and sour. Multiple attempts have been made to stabilize and commercialize chicha, but as of this writing none has been successful.

As might be expected in a hot country, beer is popular, with light lagers dominating the market. Rum drinks are popular, especially those that use local fruits, but it is also drunk with Coca-Cola or on the rocks. The other popular strong drink is aguardiente, a strongly flavored variant of rum that often contains anise. There is some regional market segmentation, with aguardiente most popular inland and rum drunk mainly along the coast.

Finally, there is coffee, the country's national beverage, which is drunk from morning to night by almost every adult. As might be expected, alcoholic coffee drinks involving rum or aguardiente and milk or cream are very popular as a nightcap.

## Eating Out

While Colombians enjoy dining out, they are not generally adventurous, and the overwhelming majority of restaurants serve regional Colombian cuisine. The exception is at the high end, where the most expensive places boast their fidelity to traditional Spanish cuisine. In the last decade other European cuisines have achieved a foothold in major cities, but they are still struggling to find a market beyond business dinners and the most sophisticated younger people.

Restaurants are patronized at all times of day, with cafés specializing in breakfast, called *desayunerías,* opening very early. The slang word for restaurants serving home-style food is *corrientazo,* literally meaning "a place to get energy." Whether a simple corrientazo or a top-notch restaurant, the evening pattern is similar—they open for dinner at about 7 P.M., but the rush begins around 9, and people will still be dining until almost midnight. Tourists are often amazed that they can be seated in the best places at 7 or 8 and don't realize that by local standards that is ridiculously early. Tourists also stand out because they are excessively casual; at all but the most modest restaurants, people are expected to dress up for dinner. In most restaurants, as at Colombian homes, the oldest person will always be served first, and it is expected that even finger-friendly items like empanadas will be eaten with a knife and fork.

## Special Occasions

As is the case throughout Central America, special versions of tamales appear at Christmas and Easter. One is the tamale Tolimense style, made with beef, pork, chicken, and vegetables with ground corn, boiled or steamed in corn-husk casings. Fruit and dessert tamales are also made. Colombian tamales are usually milder than Mexican versions but are otherwise similar and are almost always accompanied by hot chocolate.

Many Christmas pastry treats are deep-fried instead of baked. These include cheese fritters called *buñuelos* and *bolillas,* fried round doughnuts that are served with chocolate or coffee. *Hojuelas,* flat fried cookies topped with powdered sugar, are almost identical to the Polish Christmas cookie called *kruschicki,* though it is hard to establish a connection between the two seasonal treats. Other

seasonal treats are *natilla,* a coconut-milk custard that is sometimes fortified with rum or aguardiente, and *champus,* a drink similar to chicha but with chunks of fruit, extra spices, and orange leaves added.

## Diet and Health

The most famous living Colombian artist, Fernando Botero, famously portrays his countrymen as pudgy sensualists who are obsessed with food. His sometimes cruel, sometimes sympathetic portraits are an exaggeration of a fact; a 1999 study showed that over 40 percent of the country's citizens are obese, and that figure may be rising. It is ironic that a government that has historically focused on getting its rural and native citizens enough to eat now must change its focus to convincing them to switch to healthier foods. The popularity of sugary sodas and a diet heavy in meat, coconut milk, and cream, plus the increasing use of motor vehicles instead of walking for everyday tasks, are probably to blame. Colombians who can afford it often get weight-loss surgery rather than change their diets, and more of these operations are performed there than anywhere else in South America.

When Colombians do fall ill, traditional practices that are based on a diet of scarcity are actually counterproductive. Traditional ideas of health prescribe aguapanela, the mix of sugarcane juice and water, for almost any illness, and especially in diabetic people this can make things much worse. Colombians also ascribe characteristics of hot and cold to many foods and give beef broth the kind of reverence accorded to chicken soup in eastern European cultures.

There is a specific regimen called the *dieta* that mothers are supposed to observe for 40 days after giving birth. Besides never being exposed to direct sun, a new mother is supposed to eat sancocho and hot chocolate; at the end of this period, she takes a bath in herbs before going outside and resuming normal life. If the baby becomes sick at any time, putting slices of cucumber on its head is supposed to help protect it from sinus infection.

The influence of Colombian traditional healers has been growing, and the commercialization of their remedies based on Amazonian plants has been a boon for people who want to preserve jungle regions. Colombian culture is very macho, and there are many recipes for aphrodisiacs. Some of these involve eating insects such as leafcutter ant queens, a logical choice for someone obsessed with fertility, since ant queens are literally egg machines. Since leafcutter ant queens are high in protein and have low levels of saturated fat, this at least does no harm, unlike more toxic alternatives.

*Richard Foss*

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# Costa Rica

## Overview

Costa Rica is located at the crossroads of three distinct geographic regions: Mexico and Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. Costa Rican foodways have transformed over time as different cultural groups (Europeans, former Caribbean slaves, and Americans) have arrived and intermingled, creating new tastes. Costa Rica is often separated into three cultural sections: the Mesoamerican-influenced Guanacaste to the north, the Hispanic-based Central Valley, and the Afro-Caribbean Atlantic coast. Socioeconomic status also plays an important role, both contemporaneously and historically, in the development of Costa Rican taste. Today, international fast-food chains and cooking products compete with local ones, often garnering a place in the new eating habits of the middle class and wealthy and in the minds of those without the economic capital to partake.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Midmorning on Saturdays, Hilary typically bursts into the family home, arms laden with plastic grocery bags, with a taxi filled with more bags waiting outside beyond the gate. At 35, Hilary is the oldest daughter still living with her parents in their lower-middle-class home in Puntarenas, the southern province of Costa Rica. Another grown sister, Sandra, and brother, Mau, also live in the home of their parents, Don Mauricio and Doña Pilar, as well as two grandchildren, Jonathan and Gabriel, who are the sons of another daughter who does not live in the home. The daughters support the family through their work, one as an environmental educator and the other as a social security associate. Though nuclear families exist in Costa Rica, this household, comprised of multiple generations who at times contribute to the economic and social reproduction of the household, is equally common.

Outdoor markets are rare in Costa Rica, although a few farmers often bring some goods to town plazas once a week to sell. Instead, Costa Ricans purchase the bulk of their goods from chain supermarkets, with last-minute supplements from neighborhood *pulperías* (corner stores). Hilary's weekly purchases are dominated by large bags of white rice and red beans (though most Costa Ricans favor black beans). Knotted white bags contain cuts of pork, beef, and chicken, which poorer families rarely eat and middle-class families serve at least once a day. Two cartons of eggs are bought, though neighborhood families with roaming chickens often sell or share their eggs. Coffee, palm oil (used for frying), boxes of milk, bunches of green and ripe plantains, a carton of strawberry yogurt, flour or corn tortillas, boxes of gelatin, bologna, and packets of tomato paste, dehydrated soups, and spices are purchased weekly. Yellow onions and sweet red peppers are ubiquitous, and red cabbage, lettuce, carrots, papayas, apples, pineapples, potatoes, chayotes (vegetable pears), yucca (a starchy tuber), and *limones* (lemon-lime hybrid) will occasionally appear. Most Costa Ricans who live in the countryside grow their own fruit (limones; *mamones chinos,* which have mild-tasting, fleshy fruit; and mangoes) and spices (cilantro and oregano). Those who have enough space grow corn, beans, and other vegetables. Snack foods and sweets are purchased in small portions from pulperías.

## Major Foodstuffs

As has been the case for centuries, maize remains the staple food and gastronomic marker of identity for many of Costa Rica's northern Mesoamerican neighbors: Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Archaeological data in Costa Rica point to a similar history of maize-based foodways, although an influx of foods from other populations over time has downplayed corn in current usage. Outsiders often assume that Costa Rican foodways align closely with those of the country's northern neighbors. Tourists are often overwhelmed by the national culinary emphasis on rice and beans and the comparably scant attention paid to maize-based foods. Costa Rican foods also tend toward the use of savory aromatics (onion, garlic, sweet red pepper, cilantro, oregano) as opposed to the spicy or stronger tastes of Mesoamerica.

The Spanish influence on Costa Rican and other Latin American cuisines is indisputable. Perhaps no single food has been more influential on Costa Rican foodways than rice. Unlike beans, rice is not a domesticated, native food in the Americas. In Costa Rica, the cultivation of rice, albeit in small quantities, dates to the late 1700s among the Spanish. Today, the dish of mixed rice and beans is one of the principal meals of the culturally diverse region. The meal likely originated among emancipated slaves who migrated in the late 1800s to Costa Rica's Atlantic coast to work on railroads, banana plantations, and the Panama Canal. Bread and sugarcane are other important European contributions.

Central Valley cuisine has become the mainstay in Costa Rican food. *Gallo pinto* is the national dish. On the Atlantic coast, *gallo pinto* is called "rice and beans" in English; there, the rice is prepared with coconut milk instead of water, and red beans (although black can be used as well) and a special *pimienta roja* (locally grown spicy red pepper) that gives the dish a kick are used. Notably, the rice-to-bean ratio greatly favors the rice, which is different from other versions in Costa Rica, which have a roughly even mixture. In Guanacaste, *pinto* is often toasted to a crisp and called the full name, *gallopinto.* In the Central Highlands, locals say only *pinto* and include plenty of oil to make the mixture moister. Some families cook with red beans, but most Costa Ricans prefer black beans.

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**_Gallo Pinto_ (Beans and Rice)**

Remove any small stones from the dry beans, and wash them. Cover the beans with a lot of water (later to be eaten as a soup), and add cilantro, sweet red pepper, onion, and garlic, all finely diced. Also add salt. Cook until tender.

Rinse the rice several times. Cover it with water, and add cooking oil, salt, and sweet red pepper, onion, and garlic. Bring to a boil, then simmer about 20 minutes until done.

Prepare the frying pan to mix the rice and beans together. Dice onion, sweet red pepper, and garlic, and fry them in cooking oil. Add the cooked beans, a small bit of their broth, and salt, mixing them with the aromatics. If desired, mash the beans a bit. When the beans have dried to your satisfaction, add the cooked rice and chopped cilantro. Stir the rice and beans together and heat thoroughly. If desired add Salsa Lizano (which tastes like Worcestershire sauce).

Serve for breakfast with coffee, sour cream, eggs, fresh cheese, fruits, bread, tortillas, or meats.

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While most Costa Ricans currently do not base their diets on maize-based foods, such foods remain integral to their conceptions of themselves as members of a Central American culture. In learning about Costa Rican foodways, or those of any culture, one must pay attention to the difference between typical and popular foods. Typical foods are those eaten daily, perhaps with little thought as to why such foods are consumed, whereas popular foods are often invested with considerable outwardly symbolic meaning. Corn is such a food in Costa Rica. In Guanacaste, however, maize more closely approaches ubiquity. Costa Ricans differentiate the northern province of Guanacaste as culturally separate from the rest of the country, perhaps owing to its recent acquisition in 1828 from Nicaragua. Many present-day residents are of Nicaraguan

descent or are Nicaraguan immigrants, further casting the territory as a borderland between the two nations. In addition to daily tortillas (flatbread), other maize-based foods include empanadas (turnovers) made with masa (corn flour) and fresh cheese, *atoll* (a purple, gelatinous drink), *chorreadas* and arepas (hotcakes made with masa), and various tamales (masa filled with meat such as pork and steamed in plantain leaves, as opposed to the Mesoamerican tradition of corn husks).

Contemporary alimentary strategies of indigenous peoples in Costa Rica stem from and make use of ancient practices. In southern Costa Rica, the Chibchan practice slash-and-burn agriculture and plant polyculture fields, referred to as "homegardens." The most commonly cultivated crops include plantains, cacao, oranges, peach palms, *manzanas de agua* (watery apples), mangoes, and *Inga* species (pod fruit). Bananas and plantains are grown as monoculture crops. Of the foods cultivated by the Chibchan, oranges, bananas, and plantains are the principal nonnative crops. On the Caribbean coast among the Bribri and Cabecar nations, plantains have recently overtaken cacao as the most common crop. Maize nearly ties plantains in its popularity among the Bribri and Cabecar peoples, followed by rice. Beans figure less prominently in the diet when compared to other Costa Rican populations because of the region's high humidity. *El ñame, el yuca,* and *el tiquisque* are other commonly eaten tubers. Meats include pacas (large rodents known locally as *el tepezcuintle*), deer, freshwater shrimp, and iguanas.



Ripe cacao pods ready for harvest. (Pindiyath100 | Dreamstime.com)

## Cooking

Cooking is a domestic task primarily undertaken by the grown women in a family. In a household comprised of a mother and grown daughters, the daughters take on an equal share of the responsibility for preparing foods. Family members cherish the traditional foods made by mothers and grandmothers, such as handmade corn tortillas. In contrast, daughters often include more modern foods, such as spaghetti and cakes, in their repertoire.

Cooking revolves around the preparation of rice and beans. Women prepare rice fresh each day, often using an electric rice maker. Beans are frequently cooked on the stove or range once every few days using a pressure cooker. Poorer families in the countryside continue to cook with open fires outdoors, and Costa Ricans agree that food cooked this way always tastes better. Rice and beans are rarely refrigerated but are reheated as needed. The large pot of beans is brought to a boiling temperature daily to kill bacteria.

Costa Ricans love fried foods. For economic reasons, few people own ovens. Those who do tend to use the ovens to store already-cooked foods. Meats are always fried. Traditionally, pork lard was used for frying, but increasingly palm or vegetable oil is preferred. Frozen or prefabricated foods are uncommon, particularly among working- and middle-class families. Aside from the occasional use of dehydrated broths or packages of spices, foods are prepared from scratch, and Costa Ricans often disparage American culture for its reliance on fast foods.

## Typical Meals

At breakfast, gallo pinto comes accompanied by some combination of fried or scrambled eggs, fried sausage or bologna, fried or plain salty cheese, store-bought corn tortillas, toast or bread with sour cream, fried green or ripe plantains, fresh fruit (pineapple, mango, papaya, or watermelon), avocados bathed in salt, and coffee with plenty of sugar



Central valley coffee region in Costa Rica. (Corel)

and perhaps milk. Occasionally, fresh corn tortillas, arepas, or empanadas will appear. Despite its popularity in cultural discourse, gallo pinto does not appear on the breakfast table in the homes of all Costa Ricans, and when it does, economic resources dictate which foods sit beside it on the plate. Wealthier Costa Ricans or the children of middle-class Costa Ricans often prefer cereal with milk. Poorer Costa Ricans subsist on bread or tortillas and coffee.

Lunches in Costa Rica are large and follow a standard prescription. Lunches cooked at home revolve around a large plate of rice that has been prepared fresh that morning with finely diced sweet red pepper, yellow onion, garlic, and cilantro. If beans have been cooked that day, a favorite food is *sopa negra,* or a bowl of the broth with some beans and a hard-boiled egg. Another popular soup, one that stems from the colonial era and can be traced to Spain, is known as *olla de carne.* This dish contains large pieces of stewed beef on the bone and several large pieces of vegetable, including corn on the cob, carrots, green plantains, yucca, potatoes, and chayote. Other popular entrées include *picadillos,* comprised of cooked vegetables (potatoes, green beans, or chayote) and finely chopped meats stewed together in a hash; rice with chicken; and spaghetti. A small portion of beans and a light salad often accompany the meal. To drink, Costa Ricans prefer freshly made fruit juices, often from fruits gathered from their own trees. Flavors include *cas* (guava), blackberry, pineapple, mango, strawberry, lemon, carambola (star fruit), and tamarind (pod fruit). Drinks made from oatmeal and rice are also popular.

Dinners vary by family custom, though the foods are the same as those served at lunch and often are whatever was served for lunch that day reheated. Sometimes Costa Ricans add a freshly prepared side dish, such as *patacones* (fried green plantains). Between lunch and dinner, many Costa Ricans enjoy a quiet time called *cafecito,* in which they sit alone or gather with family or friends to share a fresh coffee and possibly sweet or salty breads, crackers, tamales,

or cookies. Desserts rarely follow meals directly, but they are served with cafecito or as snacks. Rice pudding, *tres leches* (three-milk cake), flan (custard), and *pudín* (gelatinous cake) are all popular.

## Eating Out

Restaurants in Costa Rica primarily feature the same foods that are cooked at home. Working Costa Ricans eat out most often for the midday meal. When bought on the street from small restaurants, called *sodas,* these meals are called *casados.* Separate rice and beans are accompanied by a picadillo, salad (often cabbage and grated carrot), and a choice of meat, whether pork, chicken, or fish. A soft drink or a fresh juice accompanies the meal.

In the past decade young professional couples have begun to dine out together after work, most frequently in American chain restaurants. As has been occurring in other countries, the McDonaldization of foodways in Costa Rica is a current trend. Pizza Hut, Taco Bell, Papa Johns, KFC, and McDonalds dominate the urban restaurant-scape, with their bright, multicolored buildings and multistory plastic playgrounds. In the 21st century, Costa Rican allegiance to American fast food is mixed, as resistant discourses argue that such food is unhealthy and does not speak to Costa Rican culture, even though McDonalds does serve gallo pinto. Furthermore, not all of Costa Rica's residents have access to these food choices (because of geographic or economic disparity), pointing again to the elusive difference between daily alimentary practices and desirable imagined foods. Rural and poor Costa Ricans may claim to love pizza and hamburgers, without consuming them at regular intervals.

In the urban areas of Costa Rica's Central Valley, a variety of upscale, ethnic restaurants exist. Chinese eateries are perhaps the cheapest, most commonly frequented, and most likely to be accessible in less urban areas. Costa Rican Chinese food involves plentiful portions of fried rice or lo mein with a few vegetables and mixed meats.

One final type of desirable restaurant cuisine can be found in Costa Rican bars. Ceviche (in coastal towns), patacones with refried black beans, nachos, fried yucca, and fatty fried pork cuts called *chicharrones* are the most popular. Beer is the near-ubiquitous alcoholic beverage, although men and women will occasionally order whiskey, wine, or *cacique* (a sugarcane-based liquor) with ginger ale and *limón.*

## Special Occasions

Holy Week and Christmas Eve are the two Costa Rican special occasions with the most well-known foods. The female members of an extended family often plan get-togethers during Holy Week to prepare various corn-based snacks. Palm-sized baked rings called *rosquillas* are popular, as well as empanadas filled with sweetened *chiverre,* a large gourd. Families gather together for large dinners on Christmas Eve, where pork tamales take center stage. Eggnog is a common drink at this time of year. While many Costa Ricans grew up preparing these foods at home, today many people prefer to purchase ready-made holiday treats at the supermarket.

## Diet and Health

The Costa Rican diet, grounded in a protein-laden rice-and-bean mix and supplemented by proteins from meats, eggs, and cheeses, as well as fruits and vegetables, seems quite healthy, aside from a tendency to prefer frying over other cooking methods. Additionally, Costa Ricans favor generous portions at lunch and breakfast, and light dinners. A simple diet combined with a national health care system fosters a relatively healthy population. Costa Rica even boasts one of the longest-living communities in the world, in the country's northern province, Guanacaste.

Nonetheless, changes in lifestyles and increases in unhealthy globalized foodways have spurred health concerns. Costa Ricans complain of constant gastritis and constipation. Better infrastructure and access to cars and public transportation mean that many Costa Ricans do not benefit from daily exercise. Recently, gyms and workout classes have come into fashion, but not all socioeconomic classes can afford such luxuries. Instead, rates of dieting, eating disorders, and self-medication with expensive medicines and health products are growing. A

discourse of healthy eating and favoring natural foods and medicine has grown in the media and on the ground, though practices are slower to follow.

*Theresa Preston-Werner*

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# Cuba

## Overview

Cuba is the largest country in the Caribbean. Cuba has almost as much land area as the rest of the Caribbean islands combined. It is north of Jamaica, west of Haiti, and southwest of the Bahamas. The northernmost point of Cuba is located just 90 miles south of Key West, Florida. The island contains three mountain ranges: the Sierra de los Organos, the Sierra del Escambray, and the Sierra Maestra in the southeast. However, the majority of the country is flat plain. Cuba has a tropical climate, but trade winds keep the temperatures relatively cool, with averages between 70 and 78 degrees Fahrenheit. The dry season is from December to April, and the rainy season is from May to November. Cuba is often hit by tropical storms and hurricanes from July to October.

Since 1962 Cuba under Communist rule has had a national food-rationing system. Under this system the Cuban national government centrally collects food and redistributes it in an equal manner, so that every Cuban family has the same basic foods that they need to survive and no one goes hungry. All Cuban citizens are eligible for a ration card, and with this card they can get their monthly allotment of food items. They do still have to pay for this food, but the prices are very heavily subsidized so it is only about 25 Cuban pesos, or one dollar. The food provided in the monthly ration varies; they try to provide people with the scarcest food items and do not include items that are readily available, such as bananas, mangoes, and other tropical fruits. A typical month's food ration would include 5 eggs, 5 pounds of refined sugar, 5 pounds of raw sugar, 5 pounds of white rice, 5 pounds of beans (black beans, red beans, or split peas), 0.4 pints cooking oil, and 200–500 grams (7–17 ounces) of pork or ground beef mixed with soy. Additionally, everyone gets one roll of bread per day, which is delivered to the house each evening. Children under the age of 7 get a liter (about a quart) of milk per day, and children from ages 7 to 14 get a liter of yogurt. The food ration is essential for basic nutrition in most Cuban households, but many people need to supplement their monthly food rations by buying food in other places as well. Cubans supplement their monthly food rations through state-run stores that sell in the Cuban national peso, and state-run stores that sell in Cuba's second currency, known as the CUC, which is worth about 25 times what the national peso is worth. They also get food at farmers' markets, through workplace cafeterias, and through the black market.

Cuban food on the island has some similarities to Cuban cuisine in the diaspora, including in American cities such as Miami and New York, but there are also many differences. The major differences between Cuban food on and off the island are due to the fact that Cuban food is rationed on the island, so many ingredients that were once a part of Cuban cuisine either are very difficult to access or are simply not available. For example, many Cuban dishes call for beef, but since beef is usually available to Cubans only as ground beef and rarely in other forms, Cuban beef dishes are rarely served in Cuban homes.




Typical state run grocery store in Havana, Cuba, with almost empty shelves. (Ulita | Dreamstime.com)

## Food Culture Snapshot

Pati lives in the heart of downtown Santiago, Cuba. She lives in a three-bedroom house with her five-year-old son, Gorgi; her mother, Susi; and her father and brother. They have lived in this house for many years. Pati's grandfather first moved into the house in the 1920s. Pati works as a secretary for the state legal services, her father works in construction, and her brother is in school studying to be a dentist. Her mother stays at home with Pati's son and does most of the household food preparation. Their lifestyle is typical for a relatively well-off urban household in Cuba.

For breakfast, the family starts off the day with strong Cuban coffee made with lots of sugar and served without milk. Gorgi drinks milk instead of coffee for breakfast. The family also eats half of a loaf of bread, which they either dip in the coffee or eat with homemade jam made with seasonal fruits. An assortment of seasonal fruits will also be served, including fresh mangoes, bananas, papayas (*fruta bomba*), grapefruit, cherimoya, passion fruit, and pineapple.

After breakfast Pati and her father head off to work, her brother goes to school, and Susi will take Gorgi out to pick up the ingredients for the day's food. First, they will stop at the ration station to pick up any dry goods, such as beans, and eggs. Then they will go to the *carnicería,* or butcher, where they pick up the ration of meat products. Susi picks up pork, because it is what is available, and she can use it for both the day's lunch and dinner. At both of the ration pickups, they may have to wait in line for up to an hour before it is their turn. Then Susi will head to the state market to pick up onions, garlic, and any other fresh herbs, vegetables, and fruit that they may need. Susi will buy whichever products are inexpensive, and she will have to buy whatever is in stock, since there is often not much variety.

Lunch is a big meal in Cuba, although not as big as it used to be. Some Cuban workers are able to go

home for lunch, and many Cuban children will come home from school or someone will drop off a hot meal for them. Lunch breaks are not as long as they are in other Latin American countries, and most Cubans do not take a siesta after lunch as people do in many other Latin American countries. Susi prepares white rice and pork for lunch for herself, her husband, and Gorgi. The rice is prepared in a rice cooker that was provided to each Cuban family by the government; these cookers help save electricity. Pati and her brother do not come home for lunch because they eat a free meal at their workplace cafeterias.

For dinner Susi will prepare a stew. To flavor the stew she will use the leftover pork pieces and the drippings from lunch and add chopped onions and garlic to prepare a roux. Adding water, she puts the roux ingredients into the pressure cooker, also provided by the government to help conserve electricity. She adds the beans from the ration, and if she has some potatoes or taro, she will cut them up and add them. This will simmer in the pressure cooker until later in the evening when everyone is home from work. The stew is served over rice. Susi prepares enough rice for both lunch and dinner at the same time.

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***Moros y Cristianos* (Cuban Black Beans and Rice)**

1½ c dry black beans
2½ c chopped green peppers
3 c chopped yellow onions or shallots
¼ c olive oil
4 cloves garlic, crushed
1 8-oz can tomato paste
2 tsp oregano
3 tsp ground cumin
1 bay leaf
3 tbsp white vinegar
Salt and pepper to taste
3 c white rice, cleaned and washed
4½ c chicken stock

Place beans in a saucepan, cover with water, and bring to a boil for about 5 minutes. Remove from heat and let stand for 1 hour. Drain and rinse the beans, place back in the saucepan, and add enough water to cover them again; bring to a boil, reduce heat to low, and cook for about 45 minutes or until tender. Once the beans are tender, drain them, and run cold water over them until they are clean.

In a large pot with a lid, sauté the onions or shallots with the green peppers and olive oil until tender. Add black beans, garlic, tomato paste, oregano, cumin, bay leaf, and vinegar. Cook about 7 minutes, stirring continuously.

Add the cleaned rice, and stir in the chicken stock. Bring to a boil, and then reduce to a simmer, cover, and cook for about 30 minutes or until rice is done. Add salt and pepper to taste. Place in a serving dish, and drizzle some olive oil over the dish before serving.

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## Major Foodstuffs

Cuba's tropical climate and rich soil allow a wide variety of crops to grow on the island. Since colonization by the Spanish, sugar has been one of the most important crops for the Cuban economy. Sugar, tobacco, coffee, citrus fruits, and fish are among the top commodities exported from Cuba. Despite these rich resources agriculture makes up less than 5 percent of the Cuban gross domestic product. Currently, many of the foods eaten in Cuba are imported from countries such as Venezuela, China, and Spain.

Rice is a very important part of Cuban cuisine. Cubans eat rice with lunch and dinner nearly every day. Rice is provided in the ration. Currently, Cuba imports most of its rice from Vietnam. Beans are also a very important dietary staple in Cuba. Different kinds of beans are provided in the food ration, including black beans, red beans, chickpeas, and mung beans. Beans are almost always served with rice. In eastern Cuba, also known as Oriente, the most popular way of preparing beans and rice is called *congri*. To prepare congri, first a *sofrito* is prepared. A sofrito is a sauce made with finely chopped onions, garlic, tomato, and sometimes bell peppers. These ingredients are slowly sautéed in olive oil

and added to the rice and beans, which are cooked together. In western Cuba, a very similar dish, referred to as Moros y Cristianos or *Arroz Morro,* is the preferred way to prepare rice and beans.

In addition to rice and beans, root crops known as *viandas* are an essential part of Cuban cuisine. The category viandas includes yucca, sweet potatoes, yams, potatoes, pumpkin, some squash, and plantains. Viandas are almost always served with lunch and dinner. Viandas can be prepared in many different ways. Although they are often boiled, many families prefer to slice them up and fry them. Others prefer to have mashed viandas with cream and sugar added, or they might take little balls of the mashed viandas and deep-fry them to make *tostones.* Viandas are rich in many different important nutrients and amino acids, including potassium, magnesium, manganese, and vitamins A and C.

Pork is the most commonly eaten meat in Cuba and a very important source of protein. Pork is prepared in many different ways, but it is rarely cured or prepared into forms such as bacon, pepperoni, or sausages. Pork is often bought and served on the bone. It is sometimes prepared with a sauce called a *mojo* sauce or *mojito* (not to be confused with the drink). The mojo sauce is thought to have been brought to Cuba by slaves and slave traders, who learned to make it in the Canary Islands. A mojito sauce is made of oil, garlic, paprika, and cumin. These ingredients are all sautéed together, and sometimes vinegar or the juice of a lemon, lime, or orange is added for additional flavoring. Stuffed pork is also a popular Cuban dish; in this case the bone is removed and the pork is tenderized, marinated, flattened out, and then wrapped around the stuffing. The stuffing might include ham and cheese or some other savory combination.

Chicken dishes are also popular in Cuba, although chicken is somewhat less available than pork in Cuban cities because pork is provided in the ration more often than chicken is. Chicken is often prepared in the same manner as pork by marinating and cooking the meat in a mojo sauce. Beef is rarely eaten in Cuban homes. Although beef dishes were once an important part of Cuban cuisine, currently beef is very difficult to find in Cuba. Cattle farming uses a lot of resources, so beef is difficult to produce in Cuba. Cubans get beef in their diet through the ground beef provided in the food rations; this ground beef is often mixed with soy to help stretch the limited supply on the island. Cubans in the diaspora are more likely to eat beef dishes, such as *ropa vieja,* a shredded beef dish.



A traditional Cuban feast of roast suckling pig (*lechón asado*), complete with signature Cuban rice and beans (congri), *yuca con mojo, malanga,* and a variety of side items. (Ted Henken)

Fish is another important part of the Cuban diet and is also a great source of protein. Mackerel, or *jurel,* is a type of fish often available in the food rations. Canned fish such as sardines are available for purchase at the state food stores. Recreational fishing is relatively uncommon in Cuba, compared to other island nations. Furthermore, many of the fish from commercial fishing are exported; therefore, fresh fish is a less common source of protein in Cuba compared to other island nations.

Cuban food is often prepared using the same basic ingredients to flavor the dishes. Cuban food is not usually very spicy, but the flavors are rich and savory. Onion, garlic, salt, and oil or pork fat provide the basic flavoring for many Cuban dishes. Sugar is added to many dishes as a flavoring and is a very important part of Cuban cooking. Sugar has been a central part of the Cuban economy and everyday Cuban life since colonization.

Tropical fruits grow very well in Cuba. Cubans have access to fruit throughout the year, eating

different fruits as they are in season. Many urban and rural families have fruit trees in their patios and yards from which they get fruit for much of the year. Families will often have more fruit than they can eat on their own, and they will share or trade fruit with extended family and friends. Mangoes are a very common fruit in Cuba; there are many different varieties of mangoes on the island. Other common fruits include bananas, papayas, grapefruit, cherimoyas, passion fruit, and pineapple. Fruit is eaten as a snack, as breakfast, or as a dessert after meals. These tropical fruits are also used to make fresh fruit juices.

Water is usually served with meals in Cuba. Sodas and packaged juices are served only on special occasions or in more affluent households. Malta is a Cuban favorite. It is a nonalcoholic carbonated malt beverage made from barley, hops, and water. Malta is often served mixed with condensed milk for an ultrasweet drink. Cubans often make smoothies as a snack or special drink. The smoothies will often use the milk or yogurt provided in the children's ration, mixed with whichever fruits are in season. Cubans drink small cups of coffee made with a lot of sugar, served without milk, a few times a day. Coffee is a very important beverage in Cuba.

## Cooking

Cooking in Cuba can take several hours and is usually done by an older woman in the household. Younger women will often help with various cooking-related tasks. Some families have cooks or paid workers who help with food preparation. In recent years, Cuban kitchens have changed drastically. Whereas before most people cooked on kerosene gas stoves with one burner or with charcoal over an open fire, today most Cuban households use many different kitchen appliances to cook their food. In an effort to save on fuel and electricity the Cuban government distributed many of these appliances to Cuban households. The rice cooker is one of the most important appliances. Soups, stews, and meat dishes are often prepared in the "multipurpose cooker," which is an energy-conserving electric pressure cooker. Blenders are also very important kitchen appliances for making smoothies and fresh juices.

In addition to these electric kitchen appliances, many Cuban dishes are prepared on the stovetop. Most Cuban households have old gas stoves from the 1950s or earlier, although some have newer imported gas stoves. Sautéing and deep-frying are used to prepare many Cuban dishes. Pans are often made of aluminum or stainless steel. Because it requires a lot of gas and gas is expensive and difficult to access, baking is rarely done at home; usually baked goods are purchased from a neighbor who makes baked goods for extra cash or from small local bake shops. Bread is provided in the rations and delivered to each Cuban household daily.

In some households charcoal fires are the predominant cooking method. Charcoal is often cheaper than gas and will sometimes be used in situations where there is no electricity. Some families prefer the taste of foods cooked over charcoal over that of foods cooked over gas, so they choose to make a charcoal fire. To cook with a charcoal fire, a big cast iron pot is used. Usually soups and stews are slow-cooked over charcoal in a large outdoor area.

## Typical Meals

Although there is a great deal of diversity in what Cubans eat in different regions of the island and in the diaspora, many elements of Cuban cuisine are found in most, if not all, varieties of Cuban food. Most Cubans eat three meals a day—breakfast, lunch, and dinner—as well as a small snack in the afternoon. Cuban meals do not usually arrive in courses; everything is placed on the table and usually mixed together on each individual's plate and eaten together. The exception to this is dessert, which is served after the meal. Very few Cubans are vegetarian, since meat is a mainstay in the Cuban diet.

For most Cubans, breakfast is a relatively light meal, consisting of bread and coffee. Sometimes jam will be spread on the bread, or the bread will be lightly toasted on the stovetop. Many enjoy dipping the pieces of bread into coffee. Coffee in Cuba is made with a lot of sugar, but milk is added

only when it is available. Sometimes fruit or eggs will be eaten at breakfast as well. In the countryside breakfasts tend to be heartier than in Cuban cities; rural families are more likely to enjoy eggs or meat with their breakfast as well as some rice for carbohydrates.

Some Cubans eat lunch at work, at school, or on the go during their workday. In these cases, they will stop at their workplace cafeteria or a government cafeteria for a subsidized meal. These meals might consist of a sandwich with ham or ham spread and mayonnaise on a bun, along with some fruit and a coffee. Other cafeterias will service rice and beans with a small piece of pork and plantains. Some Cubans are able to eat lunch at home. Lunch at home will often be a heartier meal, and it is eaten more slowly since it is eaten in the company of friends and family. Home lunches will include rice and a bean-based soup with some fruit or vegetables on the side.

Cuban dinners consist of pork, chicken, or fish dishes with sauces, served with rice, beans, and viandas. Dinners often include the popular Cuban salads. Two of the most common salads are the tomato salad, which consists of sliced tomatoes and sliced raw onions doused in olive oil, and the avocado salad, made of sliced avocados and sliced raw onions doused in olive oil. Sometimes salt is sprinkled over the salads for extra flavoring. Cubans rarely eat leafy lettuce salads, but during the late summer months when lettuce is in season, lettuce salads may appear on the Cuban dinner table. *Picadillo,* or ground beef cooked in a sofrito sauce, served over white rice, is another common Cuban dinner.

Between meals, Cuban snacks are popular ways to ward off hunger. *Bocaditos* are small bite-sized sandwiches with ham spread. *Pastelitos* are small pastries filled with meat, cheese, guava, or guava and cheese. While street vendors sell bocaditos and pastelitos, many people also sell them out of the window or front door of their houses. Little personal pizzas are also a common snack food, sold in government cafeterias and out of neighborhood houses. Croquettes, made of deep-fried minced pork, are very popular Cuban snacks, but they are more likely to be eaten at a street fair or festival than for everyday snacking.

Although most Cuban households are able to eat three meals a day along with a snack, some households may not have adequate resources to do so. Hunger and malnutrition are rare in Cuba, but some evidence shows that due to the lack of iron-rich foods in the Cuban diet, rates of anemia in eastern Cuba can be as high as 56 percent among children under two years old and 20 percent among children between two and five years old.

Although historically the cuisines in different regions of Cuba varied a lot, today with the nationalized food-rationing system, much of the food eaten in Cuba is the same across the island. There are a few exceptions to this, however. People are eating the same thing, but the items may have different names in different parts of the island. For example, in western Cuba a banana is called a *plátano,* but in eastern Cuba it's called a *guineo.* In central Cuba, it is common to have flatbread made out of cassava served with meals, but this is very rare in other parts of the island.

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***Picadillo***

**Ingredients**

1 lb ground beef

1 tsp oregano

1 tsp cumin

Salt and pepper

2 yellow onions

1 green pepper

7 cloves garlic

1 c tomato sauce

½ c water

1 tbsp olive oil

Combine ground beef, oregano, and cumin, and add salt and pepper as desired. Chop onions and green pepper, and mince the garlic. In a saucepan on the stove, heat the olive oil, and sauté the onions, green pepper, and garlic. Cook until soft. Add tomato sauce and water, stirring continuously, then

simmer for 10–15 minutes. After the beef is cooked, remove the cover, and cook for an additional 5 minutes or until the liquid has evaporated. Serve over warm white rice.

## Eating Out

In Cuba, there are many ways to eat outside of the home. In addition to foods and snacks from street vendors, Cubans also eat at government-owned restaurants or at privately owned restaurants called *paladares,* and on rare occasions Cubans may eat at hotels where many foreigners and tourists are likely to eat. In some cities, such as Havana, there is a vibrant Chinatown area where Cubans can eat excellent foreign dishes, but for the most part Cuban restaurants serve only Cuban food.

There are many privately owned restaurants, or paladares, all over Cuba. The Cuban government started allowing private restaurant ownership in 1997. The paladares are essentially a way for Cuban families to open up their homes and sell food to foreign or Cuban guests. Paladar owners must purchase and apply for a permit, and they must pay a monthly fee to keep their business going. Paladar menus often consist of a wide range of traditional Cuban dishes, but most of the time only a few of the menu options are available. Some patrons find this frustrating about paladares, while others have simply grown accustomed to always asking which menu items are available that day. Many paladares are known for having very slow service, but a few stand out because of their polite waitstaff and relatively quick service. Paladar prices vary widely: Some are quite affordable for most Cubans, while others have set prices




A Cuban man drinks at Bilbao, a bar in Havana. (StockPhotoPro)

that only foreign clientele can afford. Many paladares will have two different menus, one with affordable prices for Cubans and another with the same menu items set at high prices for foreigners.

Cuban Chinese food is a popular type of cuisine that many Cubans eat in restaurants. Many Cuban cities have Chinese restaurants, and Havana has the largest Chinatown of any country in Latin America. Over 100,000 Chinese people immigrated to Cuba in the 1800s as migrant workers, and many of their ancestors remain in Cuba. Chinese Cuban food is somewhat different from other Chinese foods since the ingredients are quite different due to Cuba's food-rationing system and the types of foods that the Cuban government is able to import. Nonetheless, many Cubans feel this is the best food to experience when eating outside the home since the dishes are not easy to make and are not common in Cuban home cooking. The prices at Chinese restaurants in Cuba tend to be very reasonable, making this an affordable option for the occasional dining-out experience in Cuba.

There are some government-owned fast-food restaurants in Cuba; El Rapido and Burgui are two of the most common chains. El Rapido sells hamburgers, hot dogs, pizza, and sandwiches along with Cuban-made soft drinks. Most Cubans rarely eat fast food both because they do not find it to be a filling or satisfying meal and because the prices are somewhat high.

## Special Occasions

Cubans celebrate many different occasions throughout the year. Many Cubans follow the Christian calendar as well as celebrating some of the saints of Santeria or other Afro-Cuban religions. In every Cuban city, Carnival and the anniversary of the 1959 Revolution are celebrated, as well as weddings, births, and deaths. Fasting is uncommon in Cuba; most celebrations involve feasting.

During Carnival many Cubans will celebrate by attending and eating at the local festivals. During this time street vendors set up along the streets with whole roasted pigs from which they sell sandwiches. Croquettes and bocaditos are also for sale during this time. Others vendors sell sweets and desserts such as sugar-roasted peanuts, candies, or cotton candy. During this time state-subsidized beer is also sold from very large kegs placed along the streets. The beer is very cheap, but all must bring their own cups because these are not provided. Some Cubans celebrate Carnival with a special dinner at home. It is common to share a roasted pork leg served with a tomato salad and boiled or fried viandas. After dinner, family members and guests might also have a few glasses of rum as they share stories and listen to Cuban music.

During Christmas and New Year's, Cubans will also celebrate with a special meal. This meal might include croquettes or tostones as appetizers along with marinated olives. The main meal consists of black beans and rice, viandas, Cuban salad, and roasted pork. Desserts for these holidays are often much more elaborate than everyday desserts. Many families serve rice pudding (*arroz con leche*), Cuban flan, *tres leches* cake, or homemade jams and jellies with cheese. Rum is usually shared following special-occasion meals, and smokers will enjoy a good Cuban cigar. For New Year's Eve, some Cubans will eat 12 grapes at the stroke of midnight to celebrate the 12 months of the year.

Birthdays and wedding celebrations are also very important in Cuba. Usually, these occasions are celebrated at home with a special meal rather than by going out to celebrate. At a typical birthday or wedding celebration the host will serve a macaroni or potato salad with lots of mayonnaise, chunks of cheese, and ham. Smoothies or fruit juice will be served along with a cake bought from a local cake maker. At weddings and adult birthday parties, guests will drink Cuban beer or rum together throughout the celebration.

## Diet and Health

Recently, in Cuba, the government has tried to encourage people to eat more vegetables and less fatty foods. Many Cubans claim that this is very hard for them, as they have grown accustomed to eating fried foods and a lot of pork, which can be a very

fatty meat. For a long time fresh vegetables were hard to find in Cuba, so many Cubans are not used to eating vegetables daily. However, fresh fruits have always been an important part of a healthy Cuban diet, and most Cubans eat several servings of fruit everyday. Nearly all of the grains Cubans eat—mostly rice—are refined grains. The white rice that is eaten daily has far less nutrients in it than brown rice would; however, brown rice is nearly impossible to find in Cuba and, even if it were, Cubans are not accustomed to eating it.

In addition to encouraging healthier eating, the Cuban government encourages Cubans to get plenty of exercise and take part in healthy physical activity. Eating more fresh vegetables and exercising daily is thought to help reduce the chances of getting heart disease or acquiring other related health problems.

*Hanna Garth*

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# Curaçao and Sint Maarten

## Overview

The five islands of the Netherlands Antilles are divided geographically into the Leeward Islands (northern) group (Saba, Saint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten, which is the Dutch half of the island shared with France, known as Saint Martin) and the Windward Islands (southern) group (Bonaire and Curaçao). In October 2010 the Netherlands Antilles was broken up. Curaçao and Sint Maarten became autonomous territories of the Netherlands, and the remaining smaller islands were given the status of cities.

Curaçao was first settled 6,000 years ago when the Arawak Indians journeyed to an island 35 miles to their north, Curaçao, the middle island in what is known as the ABC islands (Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao). The group of Arawaks that settled on Curaçao were the Caiquetios, who some historians believe gave the island its name. Others trace the name to the island's reputation as a place to cure scurvy-stricken sailors. The indigenous population was followed by large numbers of Spanish who settled on the island. However, by the early 16th century the Spaniards abandoned the island because of the lack of a freshwater supply and valuable minerals.

In 1634, long after the Spanish had abandoned Curaçao, the Dutch West Indies Company claimed the island. The natural harbor of the capital, Willemstad, was ideal for trade. Commerce and shipping became the center of Curaçao's most important economic activities. Curaçao played a pivotal role in the Atlantic slave trade. During this period, the local language, Papiamentu, a mixture of Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and African dialects, began to develop, and it became the primary means of communication between slaves and their owners.

The capital city of Willemstad became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1997, putting it on the list of some the world's most famous landmarks. Willemstad's Saint Anna Bay became one of the busiest ports in the Caribbean. Raw materials from South America were traded for finished goods from Europe and North America.

The end of slavery in 1862 led to an economic downturn that lasted until Shell built an oil refinery on the island in 1915. Curaçao became the seat of government for the newly autonomous Netherlands Antilles in 1954. However, the 1970s oil crisis ended the long economic boom and reduced international investment, leading to further economic decline. Shell closed the refinery in 1985. Curaçao's government took over the refinery in the 1990s and leased it to a Venezuelan company. Other industries like tourism, offshore banking, shipping, and ship repair all make a considerable contribution to the economy.

Curaçao's population of 192,000 spreads out over 182 square miles. The official language is Dutch, but English, Papiamento, Spanish and Portuguese are also spoken. With respect to religious affiliation, 85 percent are Catholic, while the remainder are Methodists, Seventh-Day Adventists, Pentecostals, and other Protestant denominations. The Jewish congregation on Curaçao dates back to 1651 and is the oldest in the Americas.

Curaçao is the largest island of the Netherlands Antilles, whereas the island of Saint Martin is the

smallest landmass in the world to have been harmoniously shared for 350 years by two independent countries; the French owned Saint Martin and the Dutch the territory of Sint Maarten. The border between north and south is all but invisible, and in most ways Saint Martin/Sint Maarten is simply a strikingly beautiful neighborhood with two distinct cultures.

The French side (Saint Martin) has first-class beaches and exclusive restaurants. Marigot is their "Mediterranean resort," with yachts in the harbor and open-air markets lining the waterfront. On the north side, Grand Case is known for the island's best restaurants. The Dutch side (Sint Maarten) also boasts white sand beaches and offers casinos, historical sites, shopping venues, and lots of nightlife. Philipsburg, a duty-free port, is the main entry point for cruise ship passengers.

## Food Culture Snapshot

For breakfast a Curaçaon might rise early and search out the "schooner" market along the Ruyterkade in Willemstad, the capital. Here, Curaçaons may shop for melons, pineapples, plantains, chilies, limes, oranges, papayas, mangoes, potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, okra, fresh nutmeg, and cinnamon sticks for the next few days' menus filled with *stobas* (stews) More so than 50 years ago, the tourist trade has increased the choices at open-air markets, grocery stores, and the docks.

While shopping Curaçaons may opt for a stand-up breakfast of *pastechi,* fried pastries filled with savory cheeses, tuna, ham, chicken, or, more rarely, beef. In addition to shopping for supplies, a small percentage of islanders raise a few chickens or iguanas and/or enjoy fishing for their own supper.

At the modern grocery store they would purchase other staples such as coarse-ground cornmeal and peas for such dishes as *tutu,* which is cornmeal with black-eyed peas, or *funchi,* a cornmeal porridge much like *fufu* or the African *ugali.* Because of the humidity, cornmeal and any flour or sugar items are stored in refrigerators, but the dried beans are shelved in kitchen pantries. At times these pantries are still called closets, like in Europe.

Caribbean people are descendants of Europeans and Africans, among other groups. Those of European descent have typically been the ruling classes. Though European customs prevail in terms of shopping a little each day, the spirit is decidedly Caribbean. Wealthy families dine late in the evening, sipping on wine and scotch as well as the ubiquitous rum and, of course, Curaçao liqueur, which is a sweet lurid blue drink flavored with the peel of the Lahara citrus fruit, a descendant of the Valencia orange. The name of Curaçao may have originated in part due to the "cure" part of the drink's reputation. No actual Curaçao liqueur made in Curaçao is imported into the United States.

Later in the day after work, Curaçaons may stop at a fishmongers as the fresh catch is brought in, to prepare a *guiambo,* a seafood and okra stew. If it is Christmas time they may purchase salt cod to make *pekele,* a dish similar to the *bacala* eaten elsewhere in the Caribbean—a dish of cooked salt cod and potatoes. Another very specialized holiday ritual dish is *hallaca,* which are cornmeal cakes stuffed with beef, pork, chicken, olives, capers, and raisins, then wrapped in plantain leaves, tied with string, and boiled or steamed. Recipes and ingredients appear in the local papers in early December to give ample time to gather the long list. The true hallaca are made during a matriarchal family fest that produces hundreds to last the entire season.

It is favorable for Curaçao, as well as Bonaire and Aruba, that the island is located below the hurricane zone, but it can still be challenging to receive any fresh produce and meats from Venezuela if a hurricane is rolling through the Caribbean.

## Major Foodstuffs

Market women ("hucksters") offer tubers, including yams, potatoes, dasheen, *tannia* and *eddoes* (both small starchy root vegetables), and cassava (the flour of which is used to make farina), as well as citrus, bananas and plantains, and breadfruit, in the floating local markets. An 18th-century soldier's diary mentions "syrup beer and a country drink called mawbey," a bittersweet drink made from the bark of a tropical tree. *Mauby*'s taste is perfect with the

salty sea urchins called sea eggs. Slave markets offered a significantly broader range of items than the historical record has suggested. Staples such as rice, wheat flour, beans, corn, and salted meats were imported, both from Europe and the United States, except during interruptions caused by war.

Various herbs are sold and used for both culinary and medicinal purposes; in Obeah, Voudun, and other Afro-Caribbean religious ceremonies; and in the past as a poison against slave masters and in rebellions. Tropical and semitropical fruits include bananas, mangoes, citrus fruits, papayas, guavas, and pineapples. Dietary staples like potatoes, tomatoes, and green peppers were brought by the Dutch. Families who live on Curaçao often raise goats, iguanas, chickens, rabbits, and pigs. Fresh fish found in the waters and used extensively include kingfish (*mala*), sea bass (*mero*), king dolphin (*dradu*), and some very fine shrimp and warm-water (i.e., tropical) lobster. Dairy products are all imported. Salt is an important part of Sint Maarten's history, as it is for Bonaire.

## Cooking

On Curaçao, cooking is a bit more Spanish than on Sint Maarten but still filled with common key local foods. Oil is involved in making the all-time favorite breakfast, *mangú,* a green plantain puree with fried eggs, fried cheese, or sausage. Variations include other tubers and vegetables as well as potatoes and bread. Strong coffee with milk is part of the daily morning ritual.

The roots and tubers used in the local cuisine are preferably cooked, and that is more the focus rather than presenting fresh vegetables, even tomatoes and



The famous floating market market at Willemstad in Curacao. (Dreamstime)

peppers, raw in salads. Noon is considered lunchtime. Lunch is the largest meal of the day. Again, the preferred cooking technique is stewing with generous use of fresh ingredients and spices. The mainstay is rice, either cooked with beans or served with any type of bean on the side. Beans are stewed in a flavorful liquid to a creamy state and served over the rice. Meat, perhaps served only twice a week (from leftovers), is either chicken, beef, pork, or goat, generally stewed in Creole fashion with pimentos and tomatoes.

Dinner is at 7 to 8 P.M. and is similar in proportion to breakfast. Plantains are served mainly, but variations do include boiled roots and bread, accompanied again by bread or sausage, eggs, or leftovers from lunch. Because of the weather, meal patterns remain similar, except for holidays, throughout much of the year. Spicy braised pork and hot peppery stews of seafood as well as barbecuing are popular.

Guavaberry is the legendary folk liqueur of Sint Maarten. It was first made here hundreds of years ago in private homes. People made as much as they needed to serve family and friends. Guavaberry became and still is an integral part of the local island culture. The word itself conjures up memories of the olden days, folk songs, and stories. The guavaberry itself is a wild local berry that is found in the warm hills at the center of the island. Guavaberry fruits are rare and seasonal, making the liqueur even more unique.

There are Curaçao cucumbers, which are small spiny vegetables with a long stem, not to be confused with cucumbers used in salads, which are used in the classic stew *stoba di komkomber*. Prickly pears grow wild, as do *melon di seru,* or mountain melons.

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**Iguana Stew**

Fresh tuna or chicken can be substituted for the iguana. This is a rough approximation of the dish. This stew is quite hot.

*Serves 4–6*

2 lb iguana meat (if unavailable, substitute tuna or chicken, in large chunks)

Juice of 1 lime

3 c water

1 c coconut milk

10 small potatoes, diced

3 tomatoes, chopped

3 bell peppers, cut into 1-in. pieces

1 c noodles, such as macaroni

2 bay leaves

½ tsp oregano

1 sprig parsley

1 sprig thyme

3 stalks celery, cut into ½-in. pieces

2 habanero chilies, seeds and stems removed, chopped

3 cloves garlic, chopped

Salt and pepper to taste

1 oz whiskey of choice

In a bowl, toss the meat with the lime juice. Cover; while the meat is marinating, combine all the remaining ingredients, except the whiskey, in a large pot or stockpot, and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat, cover, and cook over low heat for 45 minutes.

Add the marinated meat, adjust the consistency if necessary with coconut milk, cover, and cook over low heat for the following times: iguana, 1 hour; tuna, 20 minutes; chicken, 40 minutes.

Just before serving, add the shot of whiskey and stir well.

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Other dishes may include local green papaya, a special kind of cucumber, or cabbage, this being stewed with corned beef. Okra and cactus soup is also part of the local cooking as well as a sweet soup made from plantains and vegetables seasoned with peppers and cinnamon. *Ayaca* are savory meat tamales wrapped in banana leaves. *Keshi yena* is a Dutch holdover and is a whole Edam cheese stuffed with stewed meat, raisins, olives, and capers and baked until the cheese melts. Then come the Dutch favorites of pickled fish, salted herring, salmon, and mackerel marinated with onions, hot peppers, and

spices. Pickled pig's ears and feet are cut into thin strips, soaked in brine, and flavored with onion and spicy peppers. *Bolo pretu,* the black cake, is reputed by the islanders to be the world's best fruitcake. Another dessert is *sunchi,* or meringue "kisses" made from sugar, egg whites, and food coloring. *Panseiku* is a praline of toasted peanuts and almond essence cooked in a brown-sugar brittle. *Djente kacho* ("dog's tooth") is coconut cooked in sugar syrup. *Kokada* are patties of freshly grated coconut. *Tentalaria* is ground peanuts or cashews cooked till tender in a sugar cream, and *zjozjoli* are chewy sesame seed bars.

Curaçao is known and recognized the world over for its Curaçao liqueur, which was discovered by accident. The liqueur is made from the peels of the bitter Lahara orange. The Spaniards had brought juicy sweet Valencia oranges to the island, but the fruit was unable to flourish because of the very different climate, which changed the flavor, transforming the sweet Valencia orange into the sour Lahara orange. Decades later, it was discovered that the peel of Lahara oranges contains sweet-smelling oils that could be used to make the Curaçao liqueur. These oils were combined with exotic spices, which results in the familiar liqueur millions recognize and enjoy. Amstel Brewery makes its home on Curaçao too.

## Typical Meals

Breakfast embraces the breads that are an important part of Sint Maarten's culture. *Pan dushi* (often made for New Year's) or *pan serra* (a dense loaf of bread with a Holland heritage) are common, as are pastechi.




A typical roadside resturant in Sint Maarten specializing in krioyo. (Dreamstime)

For lunch there is the wide variety of local cuisine, called *krioyo*. Roadside stands, called *truki pan,* on Sint Maarten are quite sought after. Dishes offered include *morro,* which is rice and beans, often served with fried plantains or banana *hasa* (*gebakken banaan,* baked banana). *Sopa pika* is fish stew; if made with shellfish, it is called *zarzuela*. *Kadushi* is a hearty soup made of the kadushi cactus with fish, more vegetables, and herbs. Ayaca is chopped beef wrapped in banana leaves. *Cachapas* is a cornmeal and beef tamale with a huge reputation for being delicious. Stoba are stews. They can be made of goat or lamb and include such ingredients as capers, cumin, celery, garlic, ginger, olives, limes, sweet peppers, hot peppers, cucumbers, and shallots. *Berehein na forno au aubegine* (eggplant) in coconut milk is also popular on Sint Maarten. Often by 1 P.M. the roadside stands have shuttered their windows as they are completely sold out.

At dinner time *sopito* may be featured; this is a seafood chowder made with coconut milk, salt pork or corned beef, onions, tomatoes, garlic, peppers, fresh cream, and a variety of spices as well as whatever seafood the boats have brought to shore that day. Though a Curaçao meal often centers around fish or meat, many a Curaçao meal ends with sweets, a custom stemming from the colonial era that aided the northern Europeans by giving the body sugar to help in tolerating the extreme heat.

## Eating Out

Restaurant culture began after the Dutch arrived. Foreign travelers to Curaçao and Saint Martin are likely to come in contact with a broad range of dishes professed to be authentic in character. Most food produced for tourists reflects the particular tradition of transatlantic shipping from which not only the foodstuffs but also the contemporary populations emerged. Perhaps the most contentious debate among contemporary scholars of the Caribbean concerns the origins of the region's cultural influences. Many argue that African cultural influences define the region.

Resort restaurants feature dishes as worldly as the tourists who arrive into Curaçao, but the Dutch influence can be seen in such dishes as Dutch pea soup. A few restaurants even boast authentic windmills that were dismantled and shipped from Holland and reconstructed on the premises. *Callaloo*—which means "herb porridge"—is served often, even at lunchtime roadside stands or shacks. Another favorite dish on Sint Maarten is *christophene farci,* which is stuffed chayote squash. Chinese restaurants serve the traditional *rijstaafel,* a 21-course meal created by Dutch colonial rulers in Indonesia, since there are few Indonesians here. French fries are served with an African-influenced peanut sauce.

## Special Occasions

For special occasions, two culinary traditions may still be found in well-to-do households. The birthday reception is basically an open house held from sunup to sundown on the day in question. It should be well attended by everyone who even slightly knows the person having a birthday. Another social time well anointed with cultural significance and food is teatime. When in the past circles of friends and acquaintances were more manageable, this was a very important time. The servants of these households often whispered that this was the gossip hour, and in Papiamento this would be called *awa di redu,* or gossip water. Such a traditional teatime menu would include pastechi, cachapas, and also another chopped beef delicacy stuffed inside banana leaves.

Curaçao's fine restaurants provide for vacationing tourists, and as such the locals struggle to preserve traditions. They are often so busy working that they cannot celebrate, at least not with the vigor they used to have.

For weddings they make a cake called bolo pretu, which includes nuts, figs, citron, almonds, raisins, currants, dates, prunes, Angostura bitters, brandy (both regular and apricot), vermouth, cherry cordial, Curaçao liqueur, rum, and spices. It is important to bake the cake a day or two before the wedding. It is baked in round pans and iced with fondant. The decorated cakes are cut into squares, wrapped in wax paper, and placed in a small tin for guests to take home.

## Diet and Health

Pork- and fat-laden "resort" food is consumed on Curaçao and Sint Maarten. It is recommended that locals return to their original foods and seafood and avoid the trap of fast foods, which, while quicker to consume, also pose greater health and long-term risks as well as leading to a loss of food culture. When eaten, chicken, goat, and iguana are high in protein and, depending on the cooking method, may contain less fat. As on many of the Dutch Antilles, iguanas are now protected and are now often raised on farms instead of depleting the already-challenged wild population.

Irish moss is a beverage consumed for health and aphrodisiac purposes. It is made with Malta, a non-alcoholic beverage and a seaweed. It is thought to aid in the cure of bronchitis, tuberculosis, and intestinal dilemmas. Ginger beer is often offered as a tonic for digestion and menstrual cramps and as an alternative to aspirin.

*Dorette Snover*

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# Dominica

## Overview

Officially the Commonwealth of Dominica, Dominica is nestled between two of the last vestiges of French Caribbean colonialism, Guadeloupe to the north and Martinique to the south. The most northerly of the Windward Islands, at 15° north and 61° west, Dominica is 291 square miles (750 square kilometers) in area, 29 miles (47 kilometers) long and 18 miles (29 kilometers) wide.

The island was formed by volcanic action, evident in the verdant majestic mountains as well as numerous volcanic fumaroles and hot water springs. With two-thirds of the island covered in a lush rain forest canopy hiding towering waterfalls and rivers flowing through valleys, as well as boasting an array of colorful and interesting flora and fauna, Dominica is paradise for nature lovers and a top scuba-diving destination. Warm but sometimes very wet, the temperature in this tropical climate ranges from 80 degrees Fahrenheit (26 degrees Celsius) in January to 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32 degrees Celsius) in June. The heaviest rainfall occurs between July and November, and the interior has the highest average annual rainfall at around 275 inches (700 centimeters).

Dominica was first claimed by France in 1635 and, after a period as a neutral island, was ceded to the British in 1760. Now a republic within the British Commonwealth, Dominica became an independent island nation on November 3, 1978. With a small population, challenging topography, historical dependence on agriculture, and devastating hurricanes, Dominica's economy has suffered many setbacks. Agriculture, especially banana exports, was the dominant sector, but recent decisions by the World Trade Organization heralded an end to the preferential treatment given by the United Kingdom. This has led to a sharp decline in the sector. The island is now trying to diversify its economy and is expanding tourism, focusing on ecotourism and attempting to vary its agricultural exports.

The population, estimated at around 72,000, is an ethnic mix, the majority of whom are descendants of West African slaves brought to work the plantations. The remainder consists of Amerindian descendants and a small percentage of Europeans, Lebanese, Syrians, and Asians. Dominica is one of the few places in the Caribbean that still has a population of pre-Columbian indigenous people, the Kalinago (Caribs). Numbering around 3,000, the Kalinago mainly live in the east, in an area secured for them in 1903. This dedicated Kalinago Territory, unique in the Caribbean, is communally owned. The remainder of the population mainly resides in the coastal villages, with the capital Roseau on the southwestern coast being the most densely populated, and Portsmouth on the northwestern coast being the second-largest town. This vibrant synthesis of French, African, Amerindian, and British influences has created a unique but distinctly Creole culture that is evident in the language (French Creole or patois), traditional dress, customs, music, dance, and cuisine.

## Food Culture Snapshot

John and Sylvia Charles live in the Roseau Valley village of Trafalgar with their children, Robert (age 13),

Zoe (age 8), and Joshua (age 4). Sylvia's mother, Petula, also lives with them. It is 6:30 A.M. on Friday, and Sylvia, who works as a bank clerk in Roseau, has already returned from her morning walk, has eaten her perfunctory two oranges under the tree in the yard (a knife is kept tucked away in the branches for this purpose), and is now preparing breakfast. At the same time she is getting the lunch ingredients ready for when the helper arrives later in the morning.

Lunch will be tuna in Creole sauce, which she already seasoned last night. Yesterday John picked some lettuce and tomatoes from their little backyard garden, and his brother David, who lives nearby, brought over carrots and string beans from his garden earlier in the week. Sylvia puts a bag of white rice on the kitchen counter, checks the pot of lentils left soaking on the cooker overnight, and gets the last of the figs (as green bananas are called here) from the pantry.

She then writes her shopping list. They don't need much, as it's nowhere near payday and things are already tight. Some garlic, onions, butter, ultrapasteurized and evaporated milk, and macaroni, perhaps. She will, however, have to pick up some whole wheat bread from the depot even though she knows the children will complain. Making a start on breakfast, the thought crosses her mind how this meal has become a trial. The children no longer want to eat her usual offerings of porridge oats—Joshua in particular refuses to eat anything but the very expensive chocolate-flavored cereal he saw on TV. She and John will have fried plantains and boiled eggs and share the leftover bread with the children.

Sylvia begins to prepare cocoa tea for the kids, grating the rolled chocolate her husband's brother brought in fresh the week before, boiling the water, and adding the chocolate to "melt" before pouring it into hot milk and placing a couple of teaspoons of brown sugar into the mixture. Milk would have to do today for the cocoa tea although dried coconuts sat on the counter ready for the inner hard flesh to be removed, which would then be grated; the far more nutritious milk would then be forced out by repeatedly pouring hot water over the grated coconut. Sylvia herself has already downed her ginger tea, made fresh from the grated ginger that she had grown in the garden.

Suddenly, the morning peace is shattered by the sound of the boys running down the wooden stairs. Zoe is good girl and has always given Joshua his breakfast before getting him ready for school. Robert, however, is a typical teenager, as sullen as his grandmother, so he arrives fretting as usual. John, a forestry officer at the nearby Trafalgar waterfall, walks in and tells the children to be quiet—peace is required before his daily routine of ensuring the forests and its wild animals are kept safe. Hunters out of season are penalized severely for catching *manicou* (opossum) and agouti (wild meat revered by Dominicans) on this island—even the now-almost-extinct "mountain chicken" (an edible frog)—but although these laws have worked well as a deterrent, one still has to keep a sharp eye out for the odd criminal.

During breakfast Sylvia plans out the weekend in her head. The family will probably go to the local barbecue stall in the village after grocery shopping tonight. She can almost taste the deliciousness of that well-seasoned chicken. Tomorrow, Saturday, John will go to the Roseau market, make his social rounds, and pick up some hot stone-oven bread, blood sausage, and souse for their breakfast. He will also buy what vegetables, fruit, provisions, and herbs they need for the week and whatever fish is available from the nearby fisheries complex. On Sunday they might visit John's parents in Castle Bruce village and take a tour of the Kalinago model village on the way. Sylvia has always wanted to go there and hopes they have fresh cassava bread. Or maybe if the weather is fine they will join friends for a picnic on Mero beach after mass. She makes a mental note to add some Irish potatoes and mayonnaise for potato salad and chicken for frying to her shopping list, just in case. Sylvia has always insisted that weekends become a special treat for her family.

## Major Foodstuffs

Dominica has small-scale farming including traditional subsistence horticulture or backyard gardens; the fertile volcanic soil lends itself to growing a large variety of crops. The most common include bananas, plantains, "provisions" (these include root crops such as yams, dasheen, *tannia,* cassava, and sweet potatoes, as well as other starchy foods such

as breadfruit and green bananas, known locally as figs), chayotes, seasoning peppers, hot peppers, avocados (known locally as pears), lettuce, carrots, tomatoes, pumpkins, ginger, coconuts, and a variety of pulses. A selection of seasoning herbs are also grown, like chives, thyme, parsley, celery, and bay leaf as well as an assortment of herbs for bush or herbal tea, like vervain and sacred basil (basilic).

In an effort to diversify the agricultural sector, cacao is one of the crops being targeted for increased production, and coffee cultivation is likely to grow with talk of a Venezuelan-funded coffee plant. The local Café Dominique, a pure ground coffee made from the roasted arabica bean, is produced by PW Bellot & Co. Limited.

Fruit trees are all over, and local fruit juices are drunk on a regular basis. Fruits include citrus, such as oranges, limes, grapefruit, and tangerines, and exotic fruits, like passion fruit, West Indian cherry, carambola, soursops and sweetsops, sapodillas, guavas, tamarinds, pawpaws (papaya), and a variety of mangoes. Pineapples and watermelons are mainly grown on the drier west coast.

Native rums are produced by Belfast and Shillingford Estates. The Shillingford *macoucherie* rums are distilled from pure sugarcane juice using sugarcane that is still cultivated on the old estate lands. These rums form the basis of a wide variety of punches, bush rums, and cocktails. Bush rums are overproof rums infused with spices or herbs—these are usually found in every home or bar.

Cattle and poultry are reared for local consumption, including beef, chicken, pork, lamb, mutton, goat, and, more recently, rabbit. Across the island the sound of the queen conch shell being blown signifies that fishermen have returned or that a truck with fish is nearby. The catch can include tuna, marlin, or dorado (also known as mahimahi, and locally



A small backyard farm on the island of Dominica. (StockPhotoPro)

as *dolphin* or *dowad*) and flying fish. Jacks, snapper, and *balao* (a thin fish with a long pointy beak) are caught inshore, and during hunting season there is fresh river crayfish. Spear fishermen hunt for reef fish, lobster, and octopus. Imported codfish (salt fish) is also used in a variety of dishes. The tiny *titiri* is revered. Caught three to four days after the quarter moon using huge nets at the mouth of the rivers (particularly the Layou River), it is washed of sand, seasoned well, and made into *titiri accra* (spoonfuls of a seasoned fish/flour mixture are fried in buck pots of hot oil).

**Crab Backs**

**Ingredients**

¼ c oil

½ tbsp soy sauce

2 cloves fresh garlic, grated

1 large onion, finely chopped

2 mild chili peppers, finely chopped

1 stalk fresh celery, finely chopped

1 sprig parsley, finely chopped

5 sprigs chives, finely chopped

2 sprigs thyme, finely chopped

1 tbsp lime juice

¾ lb crabmeat, fresh or canned

2 tbsp tomato paste

1 hot Scotch bonnet pepper, seeded and finely chopped

3 tbsp breadcrumbs

Salt and black pepper to taste

6 crab back shells, cleaned and scrubbed

Heat oil in a deep frying pan. Add soy sauce, garlic, onion, chili peppers, celery, parsley, chives, and thyme. Stir and let steam for just a few seconds. Add lime juice. Let steam for another 5 minutes. Add enough water to cover ingredients. Add all the crabmeat. Stir. Add tomato paste and hot pepper, and sprinkle breadcrumbs over the mixture, stirring constantly until a good thick consistency is reached. More crabmeat than breadcrumbs is preferred. Add salt and pepper to taste. Reduce heat. Let steam for another 2 minutes just to get rid of excess water. Place mixture into crab backs, sprinkle with more breadcrumbs, and brown under a grill just before serving. Crab backs can also be prepared and frozen; when ready for use, remove from freezer, defrost, and use same way as described. Serve with a sprig of parsley as garnish. Two crab backs are usually served per person.

Bread is a major staple, and there are several family-owned bakeries with satellite bread depots in most of the populated areas. A few still bake using the traditional stone oven. The bread types include *mastiff* (a long, dense bread), *jackery* (a small square bread with small holes on the surface), and *butterflap* (a roll that is folded and filled with salted butter). Rolls and sandwich loaves, including whole wheat, are also available.

Most bakeries also bake meat pies, pasties, and a selection of sweet breads, cakes, and pastries such as raisin bread or buns, coconut cake or turnovers, sponge cakes, and bread pudding. Cassava bread and *kanki* (a sweet made with cassava/manioc roots, sugar, and spices and steamed in banana leaves) can be found in the Kalinago territory.

There is currently no local dairy, and all dairy products are imported. Milk is predominantly evaporated, ultrapasteurized, or powdered. Items such as rice, sugar, flour, pasta, garlic, onions, and Irish potatoes are additional major imported foodstuffs.

## Cooking

The native Carib Kalinago influence can still be seen in some culinary styles and dishes such as smoked meat and fish or even in the traditional cooking method of the island, in which large black iron pots sit above a wood fire or coal-fired coal pots (iron or earthenware pots). The word *barbecue* is in fact derived from *barbacoa,* the indigenous method of cooking meat or fish over a fire. The use of *roucou* (annatto) as a natural food coloring and of cassava flour (known locally as *farine*) to make bread also stems from Kalinago culture.

One of the most important steps in Creole-style cooking, influenced by the French, is the use of seasoning and the marinating of meat and fish prior to cooking. Seasonings, including seasoning peppers (these are slightly different in shape from hot peppers and have flavor and no heat), garlic, ginger, thyme, parsley, celery, salt, and sometimes onion and chives, are chopped and used in meat preparation and to flavor a variety of dishes. Meat and fish are washed with salt, lime, and water and marinated in seasonings overnight.

Chili peppers are widely used, both in dish preparation and sprinkled over cooked food. The main varieties grown are the West Indian red and Scotch bonnet, and households and eating establishments will have a bottle of one of the locally produced hot pepper sauces. Curry is also used to season, and although not a traditional Dominican dish, curried goat is common.



Caribbean jerk chicken served with red beans, rice, and plantains. (Eddie Lepp | Dreamstime.com)

The main dishes usually consist of meat or fish, a mixture of fresh seasonal vegetables, salads or coleslaw, rice or pasta, and pulses and are cooked in the following manner: Seasoned and marinated meat, largely chicken, pork, lamb, mutton, and beef, can be stewed in a light curry or Creole sauce or roasted. Chicken and pork can also be baked plain or in a barbecue sauce, and chicken can additionally be served fried. Fish is served steamed, fried, grilled, or baked and often in a Creole sauce.

Pulses including kidney beans, black-eyed peas, and lentils are bought dry, soaked overnight, and boiled with seasonings or heated from cans. Rice, normally white rice, is washed to remove excess starch, seasoned, and boiled, and sometimes pulses are added. Vegetables are served boiled, and provisions are served as boiled chunks or sometimes in the form of a deep-fried seasoned "puff" or *accra* (fritter).

Light stews such as goat, fish, or *shatou* (octopus) water and soups made of vegetables, cow heel, or pumpkin are eaten in the early evening. These are also considered to be aphrodisiacs—soups to "put it all back in." *Callaloo* soup is made from young dasheen (taro) leaves or spinach and is sometimes cooked with land crab. Flour-and-water dumplings can be added to soups. The ears, nose, tail, and trotters of the pig are boiled in seasoned brine for a traditional dish called souse. It is served with a mixture of cucumbers with lime juice.

Putting all the ingredients into one pot is a common cooking style. The one-pot *braf* (a broth made from a variety of provisions, dumplings, and seasonings, flavored with smoked meat or fish and cooked in a large iron pot over an open fire) and stewed chicken *pelau* (a seasoned rice dish) are examples.

Wild meat such as manicou (opossum), agouti, and wild pig is revered but available only during hunting season. Land crab also comes under this heading. The mountain chicken (*Leptodactylus fallax*) has almost become extinct because of a viral infection affecting these frogs, and efforts are underway to study not only the problem but also the solution, as this meat (frog legs) was a staple in most Dominican households.

**Manicou or Agouti (Dominican Game)**

Any smoked or unsmoked meat or wild meat can be used for this recipe.

*Serves 4*

1 whole smoked manicou or agouti
2 tbsp vinegar
¼ tsp crushed fresh garlic
¼ lb onions, peeled and chopped
1 tbsp soy sauce
1 tsp thyme
1 tsp celery powder
½ tsp fresh grated ginger or ground ginger
3 mild chili peppers
1 slice hot pepper or ½ tsp cayenne
1 sweet pepper
1 tbsp butter
2 bay leaves
¼ c red wine
1 tbsp tomato paste
1 c water
1 c cornstarch

Cut the manicou or agouti into small pieces with a sharp Chinese chopper and wash with vinegar. Season with garlic, onion, soy sauce, thyme, celery powder, ginger, and chili peppers. Melt butter in a heated iron pot on the stove. Add the meat, bay leaves, and red wine, and stir vigorously. Stir in tomato paste and water. Cover the pot and let boil over moderate heat for 15 minutes or until meat is tender. In a separate bowl make a paste of the cornstarch and a little water. Add the paste to the pot and boil for another 30 seconds. Serve with plain boiled rice or slices of boiled dasheen. Boil a plantain in its skin, peel and slice, and serve with the meal.

Rastafarians who are Italists (eating a vegan diet that also excludes canned and dried food and often alcohol) and other vegans and vegetarians in the community prepare similar dishes, but the meat is replaced with vegetables, pulses, nuts, tofu, soy chunks, or mushrooms.

Baking is another traditional form of cooking, and baked or roasted dishes (in addition to meat, bread, cakes, and other desserts) are macaroni and cheese, yam and sweet potato pies, vegetables au gratin, casseroles, and roasted breadfruit. These days, although coal pots and open fires are still used, most households cook on propane gas or electric stoves and use microwaves.

## Typical Meals

The average person would start their day with one or more of the following: Cereal or porridge made from oats, figs (green bananas), farine, or arrowroot; bread filled with local fruit jam, boiled egg, smoked herring, codfish, tuna, or cheese; plain *bakes* (deep-fried dough made of flour, water, and salt) or bakes stuffed with smoked herring, codfish, tuna, corned beef, or cheese; farine and pear (cassava/manioc flour mixed with avocado); fresh fruit; and cocoa tea (made with grated cocoa sticks, nutmeg, cinnamon, water, and milk or coconut milk), herbal bush tea, or coffee. If a more substantial breakfast is required, then boiled provisions, fried breadfruit, or plantain may be included.

Coconut water fresh from a jelly coconut, blood sausage, pork souse, and deep-fried accras (made with codfish, tannia, or *titiwi*) are Saturday favorites. On Sundays, smoked herring, codfish, or tuna may be cooked Creole style with onions, garlic, and tomato and eaten with boiled eggs and salad. Codfish *sancoche,* made with coconut milk, or ground and boiled codfish, seasoned and fried with onions and sweet pepper (codfish *bulljaw*), are also eaten on a Sunday morning or for lunch.

Daytime snacks include local plantain or breadfruit chips; plain or stuffed bakes; accras, meat or fish pies and patties; barbecued or roast chicken, corn, or plantains; or imported crisps, chocolate bars, and biscuits. Roadside stands sell children's favorite sweets: tamarind balls, coconut cheese/tablet (a kind of sweet coconut fudge), guava cheese, gooseberry sticks, shaddock rind, and peanut brittle as well as fruits like *kenips* (*genips* or *mamoncillo,* a little, oval green fruit) and governor plums. On hot days, snow cones (flavored syrup poured

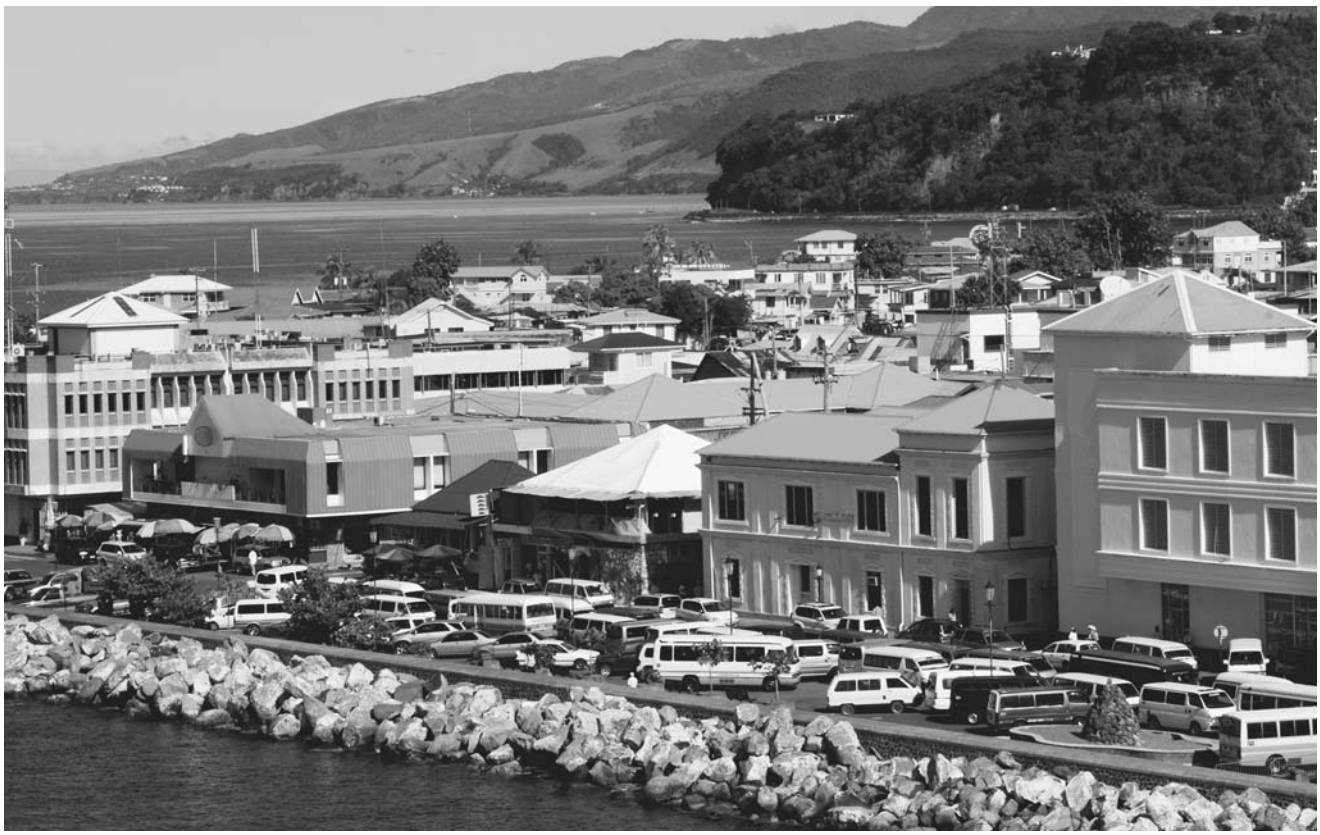
over shaved ice in a cup), frozen joys (sweet, fruit-flavored frozen ice pops sold in small plastic bags), and locally made ice cream are welcome treats.

Lunch is normally the heaviest meal of the day, and many families get up early to prepare the meal so it is ready when they come home between 1 and 2 P.M. It typically consists of meat or fish, provisions, fresh vegetables, salads, rice or baked macaroni and cheese, and some sort of pulse. Lighter lunches include pelau, soup, sandwiches, or roti (a flatbread stuffed with curried chicken, fish, or vegetables). As Dominica is a primarily Catholic country, many Dominicans eat only fish on a Friday. Beverages such as carbonated drinks, imported and local fruit juices, natural spring water, coconut water, sugarcane juice, sorrel, sea moss (made from seaweed, milk, and spices), and ginger beer complete the meal. Sunday lunch is traditionally a sit-down meal with roast meat or fish and a selection of the mentioned accompanying dishes. The last meal of the day, supper, is usually very light. It could consist of soup, bread or toast, and English or herbal bush tea.

## Eating Out

Dominicans rarely eat out in the evening, but over the last few years this has been changing. There is a good selection of dining establishments to suit all budgets, commonly serving traditional cuisine. The majority are located in or near the capital Roseau and in the second-largest town, Portsmouth.

*Snackettes* are the most prevalent eating establishment, very casual and inexpensive, serving everything from snacks to full lunches. The larger hotels and restaurants offer both local and international dishes. Ross University, a U.S. offshore medical school located in Picard, Portsmouth, has meant that eating establishments in that area normally offer a more varied international menu. There are also



Restaurants line the water on the port of Roseau in Dominica. (Richard Goldberg | Dreamstime.com)

several Chinese restaurants and a few French restaurants, extending the variety of what's on offer.

Fast-foods outlets, although not as prevalent as on other Caribbean islands, are slowly making their way to Dominica, and Kentucky Fried Chicken, pizza franchises, coffee shop franchises, and Subway ready-made sandwiches are available. Friday night is barbecue night, and in most of the towns and larger villages, vibrant roadside barbecue stalls will offer barbecued chicken, fish, and pork ribs, accompanied by various side dishes like chips, green salad or chow mien, and potato salad.

## Special Occasions

Throughout the year Dominicans celebrate a range of religious, community, and national events, most of which involve a strong emphasis on food. Village feast days are associated with a patron saint; after a church service and procession through the village, the music, drinking, and eating begin. Weddings, christenings, first communions, and confirmations, as well as funerals, normally offer buffet-style fare. At Carnival and during Independence time, Dominica's culinary heritage is really in the spotlight. Traditional Creole favorites include crab callaloo, crab back (flesh of a land crab is mixed with a secret blend of spices and served in its shell), breadfruit and codfish, *fachine* (cattle skin boiled in seasoned brine), and the stewed or smoked bush-meat delicacies of agouti and manicou. The island's national dish, "mountain chicken," Dominica's largest frog or *crapaud,* would normally be a delicacy at this time, but due to the decimation of the population by the chytrid fungus, it is strictly forbidden to eat or hunt the mountain chicken.

Recent additions to the calendar of celebrations include the community-based Titiwi Festival held in Layou village and Cochrane's Rabbit Festival. At these events, against a backdrop of music and other entertainment, residents and visitors get to sample titiwi (a tiny translucent fish) or rabbit cooked in a variety of different ways. Most bank holidays and some weekends often involve a family outing or beach picnic. On these occasions lunch is prepared and packed, or goat water, fish braf, or breadfruit is cooked in the open air, over a fire made with branches and twigs.

Christmas is another special time for food. Blood sausage, pork souse, and braf are served after midnight mass together with *chaudo* (eggnog), ginger beer, and sorrel. The main course on Christmas Day would be similar to meals during the rest of the year, with the addition of smoked pork, baked ham, and roast turkey or chicken. For dessert, there would be a slice of rich, dark fruitcake made with currents and sultanas soaked in cherry wine or other liqueur for several months.

Alcoholic beverages such as spirits, ginger wine, and Guinness are found at most social occasions or celebrations. Rum punch is also common and normally made with a lime or passion fruit base. Beer selections are the local Kubuli or imported Heineken, Carib, and sometimes Corona.

## Diet and Health

The nutritious local food, the use of herbal remedies and bush teas, the more traditional methods of cooking, and Dominica's clean natural environment, which is more conducive to a healthy lifestyle, all contribute to the island's fast-growing reputation as a center for mental and physical well-being. The high ratio of healthy centenarians per capita is testimony to this.

But there is doubt whether this phenomenon will last very much longer, as the lifestyle of younger Dominicans is changing and many do not lead the same active lifestyle as their parents and grandparents or follow the same healthy diet. Tobacco smoking is on the increase, as is drug and alcohol abuse. Food imports are also on the rise, as local food production has begun to decline. The largely unregulated diversion of former agricultural land into real estate development raises concerns about the nation's long-term ability to feed itself.

The prevalence of noncommunicable diseases is rising. Stroke, heart disease, diabetes, and cancer account for a high percentage of deaths. Initiatives such as healthy eating campaigns, screenings, and government proposals to combat noncommunicable diseases, as well as organizations like the

recently established Dominica Organic Agriculture Movement, will likely help reduce some of the underlying causes of ill health.

*Celia Sorhaindo and Rosemary Parkinson*

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# Dominican Republic

## Overview

Christopher Columbus arrived on an island in the Greater Antilles during his first voyage in 1492. He named the island Hispaniola, and it figured prominently in the Spanish conquest of the Caribbean and the Americas. However, the French gained control over the western third of the island, and this portion was named Haiti in 1804 when the African slaves revolted and successfully achieved independence. The remainder of the island, then known as Santo Domingo, tried to gain independence in 1821. They were not successful and were conquered by the Haitians, who ruled them for 22 years. By 1844, the Spanish on the eastern portion of Hispaniola gained independence and named it the Dominican Republic.

The original inhabitants of Hispaniola were the Arawak/Taino Indians, a group believed to have arrived from as far away as South America, island-hopping until they found themselves on the island of Hispaniola. The Taino built canoes, some large enough to carry 100 people, used for deep-sea fishing as well as for trade among the islands. Long-distance travel by canoe was done from March to August, guided by the North Star and the constellations of the Milky Way.

Subsequent Spaniards who arrived brought no women. The children they had with Taino women resulted in a mix called mestizo. The Carib Indians had been fierce enemies of the Taino, forcing them northeastward in gradual retreat. In time the Taino were devastated by diseases, which gradually forced their assimilation into the Spanish culture.

The Dominican Republic, the second-largest country in the Caribbean, is equal in size to Vermont and New Hampshire combined. The country has over 1,000 miles of shoreline, bordering the Caribbean to its south and the Atlantic Ocean to its north. Possessing a variety of highland and lowland areas, the Dominican Republic has a favorable amount of land suitable for agriculture. The country, a representative democracy, has a population of nearly 10 million. The capital city, Santo Domingo, is also the largest city in the country, with nearly three million people, and it is also the oldest European city in the New World.

The Dominican Republic itself has four rugged mountain ranges bisecting it from the northwest to the southeast. The highest is the Cordillera Central; its Pico Duarte is the highest point in the Caribbean, at over 10,000 feet. Three large, agriculturally friendly valleys lie between the ranges. One, in the southwest, contains Lake Enriquillo, a saltwater lake with crocodiles.

Annual temperatures in the Dominican Republic average 77 degrees Fahrenheit. Any change in seasons is determined by amounts of rainfall. The summer months, May to October, are the hottest, reaching around 87 degrees during the day with nighttime temperatures around 72. The high humidity makes it feel hotter than it is. Annual rainfall is close to 58 inches per year, and the western part receives the most rain. The heaviest tourist season is from December through April.

The Dominicans have relied on agriculture as a base for their economy, and sugarcane is their most important crop. Other major crops are coffee, cotton, cacao, tobacco, and rice. The mining of minerals is growing in importance. The country has deposits

of nickel, bauxite, gold, silver, and limited amounts of other minerals. There has been an increase in light manufacturing of textiles and clothing thanks to free-trade zones. Tourism is also important for the economy. Outward migration from the Dominican Republic has been large due to globalization. The United States, only 600 miles away, is already home to a million Dominicans. There is also a large population of former Dominican citizens in Puerto Rico, Canada, the Netherlands, Spain, and Venezuela.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Christy Garcia lives with her husband and two children. She cooks a Dominican diet for her husband every day in their home in Santo Domingo. "The mornings start with breakfast at 7:00, and we usually have a cup of hot chocolate with a piece of bread called water bread in English (*pan de agua*). The typical chocolate milk is made with a hard chocolate bar called Embajador. To make it we have to boil it in water to dissolve it, then we add sugar, a stick of cinnamon for flavor, and a very small amount of salt. We buy the fresh bread from the store. Sometimes we add butter and cheese, but not usually because the typical way was just wetting the bread with the chocolate. Some people add milk to the chocolate, but again, the typical way was just dark chocolate with water.

"Then lunch is about noon, and the typical white rice is made with boiled water with some oil and salt. We just add the rice, simmer it for a few minutes, turn it off, and wait till it is dry. We have it with red beans. The beans are boiled for a few hours because they are dried, not canned, and then we add a seasoning called *recaito,* which is made from lots of condiments and vegetables. If we don't use the recaito from the store, we fry a big onion till it burns a little (is caramelized), then add tomato paste, tomatoes, peppers, garlic, other vegetables, and salt.

"For the evening meal, at about 7:00, we mostly have chicken with the same seasonings as for the beans. In a hot pan we put oil and sugar till it burns a little. Once it is really hot, we put the chicken into the pan and watch it, adding water when needed. Once it has a nice color and taste, the chicken is ready. We also have yellow sweet plantain. We peel each of them, cut them into six pieces, and then we fry them. Sometimes we will make sweet white rice (*arroz con leche*), made by boiling water with lemon and salt in it, adding the clean, white rice, and then, once it is soft, adding sugar, a stick of cinnamon, and canned Carnation milk. After it is on the plate, we sprinkle it with powdered cinnamon. This was also used as dessert once in while."



A Haitian migrant worker cuts sugarcane in Barahona in July 2003. The Dominican Republic's economy is agrarian-based; the main crop is sugarcane. (AP | Wide World Photos)

## Major Foodstuffs

Before Columbus, the Tainos arrived in the Dominican Republic with *barbacoa* (barbecue), yucca or cassava, and cassava bread. Other cultures contributed foods as well. African slaves brought plantains and bananas, as well as the custom of eating the organs of animals; the ears, feet, and heads of pigs;

and cows' intestines. People from the British West Indies brought johnnycakes, the Middle Easterners brought kibbe (ground lamb and bulgur) and tabbouleh (bulgur, parsley, and vegetables), and the Chinese a chicken and seafood stew.

As the early Tainos settled in, they were fortunate to have their skills as canoe makers, fishermen, and sailors and navigators. Thanks to their seamanship skills, they hunted ducks and turtles and fished with homemade nets made from cotton they grew. On land, there was a scarcity of wild animals, so they relied on birds, snakes, rodents, and any other small animals.

The Taino's early system of agriculture was far from labor-intensive. Crops were raised in *conucos,* large farming mounds they protected from erosion with a system of stacked leaves. They also planted a wide variety of foods to ensure an adequate harvest, no matter the type of growing season they experienced. Crops planted were a lot of cassava (also known as yucca or manioc), a staple in their diet; this is a root crop that contains a poisonous juice that needs to be extracted. It is then baked in a slab, resulting in flat bread. It was used as a wrap for fish, meat, and vegetables. They also planted garlic, potatoes, *yautías* (a root vegetable), mameys (or sapotes, a fruit), and guavas. The early Dominicans also grew corn (maize), squash, beans, chili peppers, sweet potatoes, yams, and peanuts, and they cultivated fruits such as guavas, papayas, and pineapple. Besides cotton, their other nonfood crop was tobacco, used in religious ceremonies.

Today, rice is the country's most important crop, while sugar is the Dominicans' largest crop, and as many as 30 percent of the population work in it. Additionally, many thousands of cane cutters, frequently Haitian immigrants, are necessary for harvesting. Other major food crops included starchy staples such as plantains and an assortment of tubers such as cassava, taro, sweet potatoes, and yams, which are easy to grow. Plantains are usually fried and are popular due to their sweet taste. Grains planted were usually corn, sorghum, and wheat, which they exported. Much of the corn is used for animal feed. Fresh ingredients raised by Dominicans are fruits, vegetables, and spices. These include bananas, peanuts, guavas, tamarinds, passion fruit, soursops, coconuts, tomatoes, carrots, lettuce, cabbage, scallions, cilantro, onions, and garlic.

The Dominicans take much pride in their coffee production. They drink coffee in small cups, very strong and with lots of sugar. In fact, most brew their coffee together with sugar. It is usually served alone at any hour. Their arabica coffee is grown in the southwestern and northern sections of the country. Regardless of social class, Dominicans are eager to share it with guests. They also export their coffee, and the demand for it is increasing. The coffee bushes need the shade of trees, which is discouraging deforestation in the region. A local brand, Santo Domingo, is affordable, in demand, and considered smooth and rich.

## Cooking

The cuisines of the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Puerto Rico are similar because they are all based on available foods and Iberian influences. Because their foods are mostly fresh, cooks do not rely heavily on spicing. Popular pantry items include achiote oil, an oil that has been flavored with achiote (annatto) seeds. This makes the oil bright yellow. It is used in yellow rice and as a coloring for other dishes. *Achiotina* is lard flavored and colored with achiote seeds.

*Adobo* is a mixture of garlic, herbs, and spices used dry as a rub for meats or used wet with a little oil as a marinade. *Sazón* is blend of seasonings available in small foil packets. It is used with annatto for yellow rice. *Sofrito* is a sauce that is added to many dishes. It can be purchased, but it tastes better if made at home from crushed canned tomatoes, Anaheim-type peppers, yellow onions, garlic, olive oil, sweet paprika, and cilantro or parsley. These are sautéed and then simmered for about 10 minutes. Recaito is basically the same as sofrito but without the tomatoes. Dominicans' favorite spices include anise, *bija* (annatto), cinnamon, *clavo* (cloves), *malagueta* (allspice—not be confused with the chili pepper or *melegueta* pepper from West Africa), *nuez moscada* (nutmeg), oregano, *sal en grano* (sea salt), and *tomillo* (thyme).

Dominicans also eat a lot of beans. Beans are high in protein and low in fat, calories, and salt, as well

as being cholesterol free. The most commonly used beans are black beans, chickpeas, pink beans, kidney beans, navy beans, and pigeon peas. The popular Dominican beans and rice dish is also called *LaBandera* for their national flag. The rice used is long-grain white rice. Frequently, instant rice is used. Shorter-grain rice is used for paella and rice desserts. Most fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs have a short shelf life in the tropics and are purchased close to the time of use.

Dominicans also use a wide variety of utensils. A *caldero* is a cast iron cooking pot, similar to a Dutch oven, with a tight-fitting lid. A flan mold is used to make flan, an extremely popular caramelized custard dessert; various molds exist to make it into interesting shapes. Fryers are electric pots that hold deep fat heated to a controlled temperature. Seasoned cooks use their calderos and adjust the heat based on the food's appearance. Rice cookers are often used. These are a small electric pot that cooks rice automatically until the rice is soft and the liquid has been absorbed by the rice. Experienced cooks accomplish this in their basic caldero.

The *pilón* (mortar and pestle) is also essential. In Latin Caribbean cooking, it is used to crush, grind, and mash ingredients, herbs, and seasoning. Mortars and pestles can be made of ceramic, metal, stone, or wood. Some use a coffee grinder for dry items or a food processor for wet ones. A plantain press, or *tostnera,* can be made from wood, plastic, or metal. One type is used to flatten sliced plantains for frying. The other is used to stuff plantains. It has a ball on one end and a hole on the other. Many cooks improvise and don't have one. *Loco con los platanos* is a three-piece unit that comes with a plantain peeler, a smasher, and a cookbook.

Some sandwiches are pressed, like Italian panini sandwiches, in a special gadget. One can invest in a panini press or a handheld grill press. As a substitute, one can use a cast iron skillet to press down the sandwich or place a heavy foil-wrapped brick on top.

## Typical Meals

Most Dominicans, who are not rich, get their calories from rice and fried plantains, as well as fruits like papayas, pineapples, bananas, and avocados. They get very little of their protein from beef, most of which is exported, and some pork when they can afford it. More plentiful sources of protein are chicken and fish, usually shrimp, marlin, mahimahi (dorado), or lobster. Dominicans' diet is less spicy hot than food in most other Latin American countries. They depend on onions, garlic, cilantro, oregano, and sweet *cubanelle* peppers for flavoring. Their one exception to this is *chivo picante,* a goat stew. They also avoid cold gazpachos based on the theory that hot soups eaten in hot weather cause perspiration, which is more cooling to the body.

Typical breakfasts consist of eggs or meat, and maybe some cheese; a strong favorite is mashed plantains (*mangu*).

***Mangu***

4 large plantains, peeled
2 tbsp oil
2 large onions
2 tsp salt
1 tbsp vinegar
4 tbsp butter
1 c cold water

Boil plantains in salted water until very tender. Meanwhile, put oil in a skillet, and sauté the onions, then add salt and vinegar. Reserve. Drain plantains and mash with butter and cold water until smooth. Garnish with onion, and serve with eggs or meat.

Another popular way to serve plantains is called *monfongo*. Here, green plantains are fried, seasoned with garlic, olive oil, and pork cracklings, and mashed with a little liquid. Still another favorite plantain recipe is fried plantains or plantain chips. Unripe ones are peeled, cut into pieces, and fried in deep fat. They are then flattened with the base of a bottle and quickly fried once more.

Lunch is usually a mix-all dish they term *LaBandera Dominica,* the Dominican flag. When possible, workers return home for this meal. This dish is

usually composed of white rice with beef, pork, chicken, or goat, accompanied by beans, sometimes white, red, or black. The following dish has three variables—the meat, the beans, and the vegetable—and it can be the base for almost all lunches.

### *LaBandera Dominica* (Basic Beans, Meat, and Rice)

4 tbsp oil
2 c boiled or canned beans
2 c squash, cut into small cubes
½ lb pieces of meat
3 bay leaves (optional)
1 tsp thyme leaves
2 tsp cilantro, finely diced
1 chicken stock cube (optional)
1 large green pepper, diced
3 tsp crushed garlic
2 tbsp tomato paste
4 c water
Salt
4 c rice

Heat half the oil in an iron pot, and add beans, squash, meat, seasonings, stock cube, green pepper, and garlic. Sauté until well combined. Add tomato paste and water. Bring to a boil, adjust salt, add rice, and stir regularly to prevent sticking. When water has been absorbed, add remaining oil, cover, and place over low heat for 15 minutes. Remove from heat, cover, and wait 5 minutes. Rice should taste done. Remove any bones and bay leaves. Serve hot.

The following fish dish is a favorite and very popular during Lent. It is made with potatoes; however, it is also served with rice. The salted codfish must be soaked in many changes of fresh water overnight.

### *Bacalao a La Criolla* (Codfish a La Dominicana)

2 lb salted dried codfish
1 lb potatoes
2 tbsp oil
1 small red onion, sliced
¼ c pitted olives, sliced
2 green bell peppers, diced
4 plum tomatoes, each cut into 4 quarters
½ tsp mashed garlic
2 tsp Tabasco sauce (optional)
2 tbsp tomato paste
Salt
2 lemon wedges (optional)

Boil the codfish and potatoes in 2 quarts of water until tender. Flatten the codfish, and peel and dice the potatoes. Set aside. In a skillet, heat oil, and sauté onion, olives, pepper, tomatoes, and garlic. Add 1 cup water and simmer for 3 minutes. Stir in codfish, Tabasco sauce, and tomato paste. Add another cup of water and the potatoes. Let simmer until potatoes are cooked, and there is a thin sauce. Season to taste. Serve with rice and garnish with lemon wedges.

A suitable luncheon dish utilizing eggplant and eggs can be made simply on the stovetop. To sautéed onions, peppers, tomatoes, garlic, and vinegar, add roasted, skinned, and mashed eggplant and simmer until the liquid is absorbed. Next, add four eggs and simmer until they harden.

### *Camarones Guisados* (Shrimp Stew)

2 tbsp oil
1 small onion, cut into strips
4 plum tomatoes, cut into strips
2 bell peppers
8 chopped, pitted green olives
½ tbsp crushed garlic
2 lb shrimp, peeled and cleaned
1 tbsp tomato paste
1 c water
Tabasco to taste
Salt

Heat oil, and sauté onion, tomato strips, peppers, olives, and garlic. Add shrimp, tomato paste, and water. Simmer for 3 minutes. Add Tabasco and salt to taste. Serve with fried plantains or rice.

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A conch stew can also be made using the preceding recipe: Just omit the olives and cook the conch about six minutes until tender.

The heartiest meal is at lunchtime, and evening meals are light and simple, often variations of breakfasts. Usually there are also leftovers available. Fresh fruits and fruit beverages are also evening favorites.

Holiday foods are elaborate in the Dominican Republic. Besides personal family days of joy and celebration, every February is Carnival time and the celebration of Dominican independence. The end of August is the annual Merengue Festival, and on June 24 they celebrate the feast of St. John the Baptist. These are in addition to the Christian holidays of Easter and Christmas Eve, which is celebrated on January 5. At these times everyone eats and drinks heavily.

A favorite is banana-leaf bundles (*pasteles en hoja,* similar to tamales). Sautéd chopped vegetables, spices, and minced beef is simmered with tomato paste and water until the liquid is reduced. In a separate bowl they combine. A mixture of cooked, mashed yautía root, *name* root, plantains, and bouillon powder is spread onto a banana leaf, and then it is topped with some of the meat mixture. The leaf is then folded, tied, and placed in boiling water for 35 minutes. They are served with hot sauce and ketchup.

Another popular dish at Easter is *habichjuhelas con dulce,* described later, but no holiday season is complete without pork roast:

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***Puerco Asado* (Pork Roast)**

1 5-lb shoulder roast of pork

½ c sliced pitted olives

½ c capers

1 large onion, diced

4 tbsp mashed garlic

1 tsp parsley, finely diced

4 tbsp ground oregano

2 tbsp ground black pepper

1 c green peppers, diced

2 tbsp vinegar

2 tbsp oil

¼ c salt

Mix all the ingredients for the seasoning. With a sharp paring knife carve deep holes in the meat, each a few inches apart. Using a teaspoon, stuff the holes with the seasoning mixture, and spread the remaining seasoning on the surface of the meat. Marinate for at least 5 hours before cooking. Put in a 350°F oven. Baste every 30 minutes. A meat thermometer should register at 170°F when it is done. Serve with pigeon peas with rice and coconut, as well as a green salad.

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The most celebrated holiday dish is a seven-meat stew called *sancocho*. This dish is expensive due to the amount of meat required, as it calls for lemon-rubbed beef bones, goat meat, *longaniza* sausage, pork, chicken, pork ribs, and smoked ham bones. These are browned and simmered with root vegetables, plantains, lemon, vinegar, and many spices. Near the end cheese-filled fritters are added. Sancocho is served with white rice.

An almost-universal holiday and family-occasion favorite is Dominican cake (*bizcocho Dominicano*). Its status is also heightened because the cake is difficult to make. There are three parts to it. First, there is the very rich cake, and then comes the equally rich pineapple filling. The cake is then topped with a caramel-infused meringue.

Beverages are important in a hot climate. Most milk is reconstituted from powdered milk. Smoothies (*batidas*) are popular and are made from fresh fruits and condensed milk. Particularly favored is ginger and lemongrass tea, as well as thick hot chocolate drinks. Their coffee is strong and served in three-ounce cups. The local beer is Presidente, and local rums are Barcelo and Brugal.



Empanadas, johnny cakes, and fritters. (Dreamstime)

## Eating Out

The culture of the cuisine of the Dominican Republic is referred to as *Comida Criolla,* a blend of Spanish, African, and Taino heritage adapted to the availability of local ingredients, cooked with ancient methods. Besides formal restaurants, there are three distinct venues to in which to eat out: (1) Comedors, popular with locals, can be a room in a private home where plain Dominican foods are served. (2) Basic cafeterias are found on almost every street, some of them in chain supermarkets. These specialize in the locals' favorites of red beans and rice, and also meat stews. These are also very popular with locals. (3) Food stands serve street food, both snacks and small meals. Some sell barbecued pork, while others specialize in local-style hamburgers, pork skins, fried meats, and homemade sausages. Sandwiches are popular from store fronts. Barbecue stands serve chicken with yucca or banana. Other establishments serve *chimichurri* (*chimmi*), which are Dominican-style hamburgers, hot dogs, and pork sandwiches.

Ice cream (*helados*) is very popular in the Dominican Republic and is made with tropical fruit. It is sold in a cone or in a cup with a plastic spoon. Candy is called *dulces* and may have the consistency of fudge but be flavored with pineapple, coconut, or guava. Their peanut brittle is very popular as well.

The Dominican diet rests heavily on healthful fresh fish, seafood, and locally grown vegetables and exotic fruits. Beef is expensive, which makes pork and goat more popular. Locally made rum and beer are cheaper than hard liquor, which must be imported. Some favorite foods are red beans and rice, pork rinds, fried chicken, and soup with meat and vegetables.

Local restaurants fall into the categories of barbecue, seafood, Dominican, international, Mexican, Italian, Middle Eastern, Chinese, and Caribbean. Most resort menus reflect what management believes will cater to U.S. and Continental tastes. However, a few local influences may be evident.

## Special Occasions

Music is a way of life in the Dominican Republic. Births, weddings, deaths, comings-of-age, all victories, falling in love, planting, harvest—these are all gala excuses for music, singing, and dancing. Merengue, salsa, and *bachata* ring forth in many public spaces, either live with homemade instruments, over the radio, or from professional musicians.

Every February is Carnival time with even more dancing, singing, and music. It is also a celebration of Dominican independence. The annual Merengue Festival is at the end of August and in early September. Every Easter each town's patron saint is celebrated widely, and June 24 is a very special day celebrating the feast of St. John the Baptist.

Dominican national holidays include January 1, New Year's Day; January 6, Three Kings Day (Dominican children receive their gifts on this day, not on December 25); January 21, Feast of Our Lady of Altagracia (Dominican patroness); January 26, Duarte's Birthday (first of the three founding fathers);

and February 27, Independence Day. Dates vary for Good Friday, Easter Sunday, the National Carnival Celebration at Malecon, Labor Day, Corpus Christi Day, Independence Restoration Day, Lady of Mercedes Day, and Constitution Day. Note that Christmas Day is casual for most Dominicans. The real Dominican nativity celebration takes place on January 5, when families get together to share a heavy late-night dinner and have a lot to drink.

The following are some celebratory dishes served on holidays:

***Pasteles en Hoja* (Banana-Leaf Bundles)**

Combine chopped green pepper, onion, oregano, salt, and pepper with minced beef. Cook evenly in oil. Add a small amount of water and tomato paste, and simmer until the meat is cooked and liquid is reduced. In a separate bowl, combine yautía root, name root, plantain, chicken bouillon powder, and salt. Place 2 tablespoonfuls of this mixture in the center of a banana leaf, add 1 teaspoon of the meat mixture, and cover with 2 more tablespoons of grated root mix. Fold shut and fasten all sides with string. Place in boiling water and boil over medium heat for 35 minutes. Cool, unwrap, and serve with hot sauce and ketchup.

***Habichuelas con Dulce* (A Popular Easter Dish)**

Puree red kidney beans in a food processor until smooth. Combine beans, coconut milk, and some milk in a pot and boil. Add more milk, sugar, cinnamon sticks, raisins, and sweet potatoes, and cook over low heat for 20 minutes. Add coconut milk and cloves, and simmer until smooth. Serve chilled over browned cassava bread.

***Sancocho* (Holiday Stew)**

This is a special, hearty, seven-meat stew served throughout the holiday season. Brown and combine goat meat, pork sausage, pork meat, beefsteak, chicken, pork ribs, and smoked ham. Season with lime, garlic, oil, bell peppers, thyme, yam, celery, cassava root, potatoes, plantain, oregano, coriander, cilantro, and hot sauce. Stew all until tender. Serve with avocado slices and rice.

***Pudín o Bizocho* (Special Dominican Holiday Cake)**

This dish is probably the one way to declare a totally festive occasion. It is made in four parts: the cake itself, its filling, caramel icing, and a stiff meringue.

The cake is composed of butter, margarine, lime peel, orange juice, flour, sugar, vanilla, baking powder, and eggs. The caramel icing is made of sugar and water. The filling is cubed fresh pineapple, water, sugar, and vanilla extract. The meringue is made with five egg whites, fine granulated sugar, salt, and cream of tartar. Beat until peaks are formed, then very slowly add in the caramel icing.

Popular beverages are eggnog (*poncho de huevo*) with or without rum. As an after-dinner drink, monkey anise (*anis del mono*) is enjoyed. A gingerroot beverage ( *jengibre*) is made of boiled gingerroot, cinnamon, and lots of sugar.

## Diet and Health

Type 2 diabetes is prevalent in the population of the Dominican Republic. This is no doubt aggravated by diets high in rice, sugar, starchy roots, fatty meats, and sugars from many fresh fruits. Additionally, dietary problems in the Dominican Republic tended to be concentrated in the areas of deficiencies in iodine, vitamin A, and iron, and approximately 5 percent of school-age children have goiter problems. The severity varies regionally, and the World Health Organization has enforced use of iodized salt in cooking since 1920.

*Marty Martindale*

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# Ecuador

## Overview

Ecuador lies on the equator in western South America, bordered by Colombia to the north, Peru to the south, and the Pacific Ocean on the west. The Galapagos Islands also belong to Ecuador. It measures 283,561 square miles and has a population of about 14.5 million people. This region enjoys an incredibly rich biodiversity with a remarkable number of unique species, especially on the Galapagos. The country is divided into three distinct regions: the coast, which is tropical and very humid; the Sierra, or highlands, which is cooler and drier and spans a section of the Andes Mountains; and, lastly, the Oriente, a part of the Amazon basin that is rain forest. The altitude is also a crucial factor in determining which crops can be grown, with tubers more common in higher areas and rice in the lowlands. More than half the population lives in cities, the largest of which is Guayaquil on the coast, but the capital is Quito, which sits at 8,464 feet and has a beautifully preserved historic center.

People of mixed heritage (Spanish and Native American), or mestizos, make up 65 percent of Ecuador's population, with indigenous Amerindians making up 25 percent. The latter come from a variety of groups, the majority of which in the highlands are Quichua, but there are also Caranqui, Otavaleños, Cayambi, Pichincha, and others. There are also many indigenous peoples of the Amazon. A small number of white, mostly Spanish, inhabitants comprise 7 percent, and there is a smaller number of people of African and mixed African descent, at 3 percent. Most people speak Spanish, but there is a large number of people who also speak Quichua (as it is called there). About 95 percent of Ecuadorians worship officially as Roman Catholics, though historically in practice this religion has incorporated many elements of indigenous religious beliefs and festivals. There is also a great disparity of wealth in Ecuador, with marked social inequality. Many people, especially the indigenous population, live well below the poverty line.

The cuisine of Ecuador, like its people, is a mix of indigenous and European components, with many native New World species forming the basic staples and many Old World plants and animals combined with these. Likewise, the culinary techniques span a broad range of styles, some of which are clearly descended from medieval Spanish cuisine, while others are still completely indigenous, in addition to many completely unique combinations of the two. It is also important to remember that what is today Ecuador entailed many indigenous cultures through history, only the last of which, centered in Quito, was engulfed by the Inca Empire in 1463. Not long after this, the Incas in turn were conquered by the Spanish under Francisco Pizarro in 1533. In 1809 Ecuador was also the first Latin American country to declare independence from Spain, but it did not become an independent republic until 1830.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Hector González Vargas and his wife, Concepción, live in the city of Guayaquil. They have a two-year-old daughter named Manuela. Hector has a university education and works as a petroleum engineer for a large multinational company. His wife works in the

home, does all the cooking, and takes care of the baby. Her mother still lives in the northern highlands, in a small village called Atuntaqui, which is known for its textiles. Concepción learned to cook from her mother, so she knows many traditional dishes, but Hector prefers modern international cooking and sometimes eats fast food in the city for lunch with his colleagues. As an educated urbanite, Hector is anxious to buy modern appliances for his household, though his wife prefers cooking at a leisurely pace, taking time to make traditional dishes. She fears that expensive imported foods not only will drain the household budget but will also make Hector fat. Concepción is often found making *humitas,* a kind of tamale from Ecuador that she folds delicately in corn husks and ties with a torn strip of husk, then steams in a special pot that her mother gave them as a wedding present. Sometimes she fills them with onions and cheese, or sometimes she makes them sweet, studded with raisins and a pinch of cinnamon. She hopes some day to pass on her love of cooking to her own young daughter.



A vendor cooks potatoes at a market in Otavalo, Equador. (iStockPhoto)

## Major Foodstuffs

The starchy staples of Ecuador, sometimes grains and sometimes tubers, depend primarily on the region, though most are enjoyed to some extent throughout the nation. The most important indigenous plants are potatoes, corn, quinoa, and yucca (or cassava). Potatoes were domesticated in the Andes and represent this area's greatest contribution to the world food supply. One of the unique Ecuadorian dishes, which derives from the highlands, bears the delightful name *llapingachos.* They consist of boiled potatoes, mashed and rolled into balls that are filled with cheese. These are flattened and cooked on a griddle. They are usually colored yellow with achiote (annatto) and can be served with a peanut sauce (*salsa di maní*) or with sausages on the side. They are now enjoyed throughout the country practically as a national dish.

Maize, or corn, was domesticated to the north but may have been introduced to this area and cultivated here as early as 10,000 years ago, making its cultivation roughly contemporaneous with the development of agriculture in the Middle East. Corn features in many dishes, often simply roasted on the cob or sliced into rounds on the cob and cooked in soups. This is not the sweet corn with which North Americans are familiar but instead *choclo,* a huge-grained, chewy, and very flavorsome variety that is used extensively in soups and stews. Preparations familiar elsewhere in Latin America are common too, though. Freshly ground corn is steamed in corn husks to make humitas, which are something like tamales from Mexico and can be either savory or sweet. Field corn that has been nixtamalized—soaked in lye or calcium hydroxide so that the kernel swells and the outer pericarp comes off—is ground into dough and cooked in various ways. The whole kernels, called *mote,* similar to hominy in the United States, are also cooked into various dishes, like *mote pillo,* in which they are mixed with eggs, chives, and cilantro. An even more unique corn dish is *cancha,* which is a fried corn kernel that puffs up a little and becomes crunchy, familiar in the United States as corn nuts. Popcorn is also a familiar food, served interestingly with the raw fish dish of ceviche.

Quinoa was in precolonial times one of the most important grains, though its connection to fertility rites and indigenous religion meant that the Spanish did everything they could to eradicate it. This is a shame since it has one of the highest protein contents of any grain on earth; it has recently enjoyed a

resurgence outside of South America among health-food enthusiasts.

Yucca, also known as cassava, is a starchy root, used primarily in the rain forest. It is familiar in the United States only as tapioca, which is made from the starch. There are both bitter (poisonous) and sweet varieties of the plant, and it is remarkable that indigenous peoples learned to process it thousands of years ago as a staple food.

Bananas, introduced ultimately from Southeast Asia, apart from being one of the principal agricultural products of Ecuador and one of its main exports, are also used in cooked dishes, especially green plantains, which are starchier than the types eaten out of hand. These may be simply fried, squashed, and refried as a snack called *patacones,* known throughout Latin America under various names. Plantain chips are also known as *chifles,* eaten as a snack. The more interesting plantain variants include the *bolon de verde,* a fried plantain dumpling that is also featured in soups, as discussed later on.

Surprisingly, rice, another Asian plant, is today one of the most popular side dishes in Ecuador. It is often served as *arroz amarillo,* meaning yellow rice, with achiote (annatto seeds) taking the place of saffron, which would have been used in Europe.

Squash in the Cucurbitaceae family were almost certainly the earliest domesticated plants in this region, though archaeologists debate exactly how their cultivation developed and what connection it might have to permanent dwellings and the use of ceramics. Today, squash is added to many soups and stews or even made into fritters called *pristinos.* The pumpkin (*calabaza*) is first cooked, then combined with flour, baking powder, and cheese to make a dough that is then rolled out, cut into circles, and fried. They are sometimes served with cinnamon syrup as well. This is a perfect example of a native plant being used in a thoroughly European recipe. Squashes like zucchini are American and are used throughout Ecuador.

Beans are one of the most important sources of protein historically, and the lima bean is native to western South America. Beans are used in countless soups and stews, as are other members of the *Phaseolus* genus, as well as chickpeas and lentils. The latter are used in the popular soup referred to simply as *menestra.* There is even a kind of bean called *nuñas* that is used specially for popping like corn. Peanuts, in the same large family of legumes, are another very important South American native and are used extensively in Ecuador in sauces (salsa di maní) as well as in a soup made with potatoes, onion, and ground peanuts. For flavorings there are all the familiar herbs and spices, but everywhere one finds chili peppers used in *ají,* a hot sauce, though in general Ecuadorean cooking is not very spicy.

Although the *cuy,* or guinea pig, is probably the domesticated animal most readily associated with Andean cuisine since ancient times, Ecuadoreans enjoy a broad range of proteins including beef, pork, goat, and to a lesser extent chicken and turkey, though the latter is an American native. Beef can be sliced thinly and served with onions and tomatoes as a *lomo salteado,* but more often it appears in stews; likewise, pork is used in stews like *seco de chanco* and chicken in a *seco de pollo.* These usually also include a variety of vegetables, perhaps beans or grains, and are filling, especially when served with rice, avocado, and perhaps a slice of lime.

On the coast, seafood is the favorite, with various fishes such as tuna, sea bass, shark, and snapper finding their way into soups and stews, as well as a



Guinea pigs (*conejillos de indias*) or cuy as they are called in Ecuador, are cooked over an outdoor grill. (David L Amsler)

wide array of shellfish such as shrimp (which form one of Ecuador's major industries), clams, mussels, squid, octopus, and scallops. Perhaps the dish most readily associated with the South American coast is ceviche, and justly so. Ceviche is a kind of fish salad marinated in lime juice, which "cooks" it by firming up the proteins and killing the bacteria. Its history is a matter of speculation, and it has been suggested that before the introduction of citrus fruits by the Spanish it was soured with *chicha,* a fermented corn drink. The dish also bears some relation to a medieval Spanish dish called *escabeche,* which was cooked, but cold, fish marinated in vinegar. The fish is soaked in lime anywhere from 30 minutes to a couple of hours, along with chili peppers, cilantro, often tomatoes in Ecuador or some tomato sauce, and pickled onions (*cebollas encurtidas*). It is light and refreshing and in the heat of summer can form a meal unto itself.

There are dozens upon dozens of fruits native to Ecaudor. Apart from those familiar in the United States, there is the *naranjilla,* a small fruit in the Solanaceae family related to tomatoes, which is eaten fresh or juiced. There are several kinds of passion fruit: the standard *maracuya,* as well as the *taxo,* or banana passion fruit, so called because it is longish and yellow, as well as the smaller round, yellow *granadillo.* The tamarillo, or tree tomato (*tamat de árbol*), is used for juice as well as in a spicy salsa. Cherimoyas are also popular.

## Cooking

Most familiar cooking methods are used in Ecuador, with some having a longer pre-Columbian history and some having been introduced in the past five centuries. Roasted foods (*horneado*) are especially appreciated, in particular, pork with potatoes. Grilled foods (*a la brasa*) and steamed food (*al vapor*) are also common and of ancient use. The most popular dishes, however, are stews like *seco,* while deep-fried foods (*brosterizado*) and breaded fried foods (*apanado*) are more recent introductions. The following is a simple recipe that can be made with practically any fish and variety of vegetables on hand:

### *Chupe de Pescado* (Fish Soup)

*Serves 4*

2 stalks celery
1 green bell pepper, chopped
1 onion, chopped
2 large tomatoes, finely chopped
¼ tsp annatto
2 carrots, peeled and cut into slices
2 parsnips, peeled and cut into slices
2 small waxy potatoes
8 oz hominy (or 1 can)
1 bay leaf
Pinch of oregano
1 8-oz container fresh lump crabmeat
½ lb shrimp, raw in shell
1 egg per person

Sauté the first three ingredients in olive oil until lightly browned. Add the tomatoes and stir vigorously. Then add the annatto. Add 4 cups of water or more as desired, and bring to a boil. Add all the other vegetables and herbs, and lower to a simmer for about 15 minutes. Before serving, add the crabmeat and shrimp and just cook through. Serve hot with a little of each vegetable in each serving and a few shrimp on top. Just before serving crack in the egg raw. It will cook in the soup. You can use any fresh fish with this recipe as well. You can also sprinkle crumbled fresh white cheese on top if you like.

## Typical Meals

Ecuadorean meals usually comprise three parts: a soup, main dish, and dessert. Breakfast is usually small, consisting of a basic starch or bread, pastry, fruit, and coffee, though laborers may often sit down to a bowl of chicken stew with rice or a hearty seafood stew to fortify them for the day. Lunch and dinner are usually larger meals, with lunch (*almuerzo*) usually the larger of the two. Dinner may even be as light as bread and coffee, or steamed humitas.

Soups are perhaps the most important range of dishes in the Ecuadorean repertoire. There is a very popular potato soup with cheese and avocado called *locro,* as well as a potato soup sprinkled with lamb's blood called *yaguarlocro.* There are fish soups with vegetables like chupe de pescado, and one particular soup, noted for its ability to promote virility, is made with boiled cow's hooves and called *caldo de pata.* On the coast there are various menestra made with lentils or chickpeas simmered in a *refrito,* or sauce of tomato, peppers, and onion. Soups can even be extremely elaborate like the *caldo de bollas* from Guayaquil, which includes plantain dumplings stuffed with meat served in a beef broth with corn segments and other vegetables. Likewise, there is *encebollado* with onions, tuna, yucca, and tomatoes with a dash of lime for acidity. The most popular soup is eaten on Easter, a vegetable soup called *fanseca.* Stews are equally important and can be made of virtually any combination of meats, vegetables, and grains or tubers.

Drinks that accompany meals include the familiar soft drinks, imported wine, and beer, but there are unique indigenous drinks as well. The most important of these is chicha*,* made with corn that traditionally had been chewed and mixed with saliva to start the fermentation. Today, the corn is ground, and bacterial cultures are added. Chicha can also be made with rice or yucca, and it is essentially a kind of thick creamy beer that is light in alcohol.

Ecuador also produces distilled *aguardiente,* which is a legacy of Spanish influence. It is normally made of sugarcane or the by-products of sugar manufacture (i.e., molasses) and thus can be similar to rum, but it tastes quite different and is normally unflavored. It literally means "burning water" and can be drunk straight but is more often found in mixed drinks like *canelazo,* which is made from boiling water, lemon, sugar, cinnamon, and aguardiente. This spirit can also be distilled from virtually any grain or fruit, but the best is from sugar. Fruit juices are also very popular and can be made of virtually anything, though the most familiar kinds are pineapple and passion fruit.

Coffee is one of Ecuador's principal cash crops as well as one of the most significant causes of environmental degradation and loss of rain forest. Some regions have turned to coffee as their sole monoculture industry, leaving them particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in price on the international market.

## Eating Out

Street foods are very popular in Ecuador, and one find a variety of fritters and fried doughs like *buñuelos*—a kind of donut—and other pastries. Much simpler is choclo, the large chewy Andean corn barbecued, though this corn also features in empanadas (small pies), which include meat or other vegetables.

There are many restaurants in Ecuador, whose height of business is the lunch hours since many people eat out at midday. In rural areas restaurants may even be closed at night. Some serve local food or cater to tourists in larger cities. In recent decades many fast-food restaurants have also appeared, including all those common in the United States as well as McDonalds, which is very popular. One can also find various ethnic restaurants, most notably Chinese. In fact, there is still a Chinese community that originated in the 19th century, and most Ecuadoreans would be familiar with dishes like fried rice with chicken, which goes by the name *chaulafan de pollo.*

## Special Occasions

Since the majority of Ecuadoreans are Roman Catholic, they follow traditional fasting restrictions during Lent and on other fast days, when meat and meat products are prohibited, as well as celebrating Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter. Celebrations are nonetheless often syncretically mixed with indigenous religious practices so that holidays like All Saints' Day may bear little resemblance to the holiday elsewhere. Certain foods are associated with holidays, especially fanseca for Easter. *Guaguas de pan*—stuffed breads shaped like children—are eaten on November 2, the Día de los Fieles Difuntos (Day of the Dead), and *colada morada* is drunk, a sweet purple drink made from

blackberries, a kind of blue berries called *mortiños,* pineapple, and spices and thickened with corn flour. On this day families dress up and visit cemeteries, where they make offerings of flowers, crosses, and paper crowns as well as fruits, cooked eggs, and bowls of cooked food.

## Diet and Health

Ecuador is a country of great disparities in income and food security. While a privileged minority enjoys general good nutrition and health, a significant proportion of the indigenous rural population as well as the urban poor is undernourished. This has partly been the result of failed government policies to implement equitable food distribution, but it means that iron-deficiency anemia is a serious problem and as many as 15 percent of children's growth is stunted. There is also an extremely high infant mortality rate. Water-borne illnesses are a serious problem, and many people have no access to clean water. Parasites are also a problem, as are malaria, hepatitis, and typhoid.

*Ken Albala*

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# El Salvador

## Overview

El Salvador is the smallest country in Central America, sandwiched between Guatemala and Honduras, and the only one without an Atlantic coastline. The country was originally inhabited by Native Americans, specifically the Pipil tribes. The Spanish controlled the area from the 1500s until the 1821 revolt for independence.

Nearly 97 percent of the 7,185,218 inhabitants of El Salvador are mestizos, or a blend of Native American and Spanish descent. The remainder of the population is comprised of indigenous Americans, Africans, and Creoles, or people of unmixed European descent. There is a large income gap between the country's wealthiest and poorest citizens, with nearly 50 percent of the population subsisting below the national poverty line. The country survived a 12-year civil war that ended in 1992, which had a definite impact on Salvadoran cuisine with respect to availability and the division of cooking labor within the home.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Julia Garcia is a single Salvadoran mother raising her three children, Jesus, Juanita, and Pedro, in a rural town north of San Salvador, the capital, near the foothills of Mount Guazapa. The town is a new *comunidade* (community) given to the leftist Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) guerrilla organization and their land-poor families as part of the peace agreement signed to end the civil war in 1992. Julia was a guerrilla with the FMLN during the war and was rewarded with a small bit of land, materials, and money to restart her life. Although it is rural and surrounded by dirt roads, Julia has enough space in her 30 by 10 foot cement dwelling for beds for herself, her children, and her mother and father, who also live with her and help run her *milpa,* or farm.

The Garcias grow corn, rice, and beans and raise the occasional chicken or cow. Not only does this provide income for the family but also their daily food. The morning starts early for Julia, who wakes up at 6 A.M. to start grinding the maize (corn) for the day's tortillas. Most meals in the Garcia household revolve around tortillas and beans. For breakfast, Julia fries up leftover beans and rice from the previous night's dinner into a dish called *casamiento,* which she serves to her family with tortillas that are still warm from the griddle and coffee.

Lunch is made of freshly cooked black beans with more warm tortillas and slices of banana from her neighbor's milpa. Dinner is more beans and tortillas accompanied by *sopa de pata,* or a soup made with tripe, cow feet, and corn, flavored with lemon and chili. The family recently butchered their cow, and the extra pieces that are not sold in the market are saved for family dinners. On the weekends, Julia's mother treats the family by making a *semita,* a coffee cake filled with papaya jam.

## Major Foodstuffs

Indigenous American populations in El Salvador were mainly vegetarian prior to European settlement, cooking with little fat and eating meat only on special occasions. When the Spanish took control

of the country in the 1500s, they brought along with them a variety of new cooking methods like frying and sautéing and ingredients like animal fat and rice that influenced the native cuisine.

The climate in El Salvador is tropical, with a rainy season between May and October and a dry season between November and April. Mountains encompass most of the terrain, along with a central plateau region, as well as slender coastlines. The focus of food production in El Salvador revolves around coffee, rice, beans, and corn, as well as shrimp and grass-fed beef. All of these ingredients figure into the average daily diet of a Salvadoran depending on their social class. For example, beef is highly prized and part of at least one meal a day for middle- and upper-class families, but it remains a rare indulgence for the poor. Seafood and pork are also eaten, and rural diets can be enhanced with *cusuco,* a breed of armadillo. Corn is used daily to make tortillas, *pupusas* (stuffed tortillas), tamales, drinks, and desserts.



A girl picks coffee beans on the San Salvador Volcano in San Salvador in October 1997. El Salvador's economy, heavily dependent on agriculture, has been weakened during the 1990s and into the 2000s because of civil war and weather phenomena. (AP | Wide World Photos)

Volcanoes are found all across Central America, and they have made the soil incredibly rich in nutrients and ideal for growing many kinds of produce. These include but are not limited to mangoes, watermelons, papayas, guavas, lettuce, coconuts, tamarinds, cabbage, bananas, squash, yucca, peppers, and tomatoes. The plantain is a staple starch in El Salvador, even more so than potatoes, and can be used unripe (green) in savory applications or ripe (black) in sweet applications.

An important ingredient in Salvadoran and Central American cooking is annatto seeds, which come from an indigenous tree known as achiote and were used by the indigenous population for special rituals, body and pottery painting, and even currency. Today, the seeds are ground into a paste with salt, pepper, lime or sour orange juice, and vinegar to be used as a marinade for meats. Before refrigeration, achiote paste prevented the meat from spoiling, and although flavorless raw, the flavors are emphasized through the application of heat.

Salvadorans value fresh, seasonal produce and prefer making food from scratch, so shopping at an open-air market is often a daily occurrence. Community marketplaces are considered to be social venues where one can catch up with family and friends. Most Salvadoran culinary traditions are passed down orally, and the marketplace is where families share and trade cooking tips. In middle- and upper-class families, which tend to have a family chef, one member of the family is assigned to help the chef cook the family's style of cooking, so the home kitchen is another place where Salvadoran oral culinary history and traditions are passed along.

Purified drinking water is not available to the entire population, and tropical, sugary fruit juice drinks called *aguas frescas* are popular. Kolachampan is a sugarcane-flavored soda, and *ensaladas* (literally, "salad") are blended mixed-fruit juices. Corn is used to make several different drinks, including a warm glass of *atole,* a filling drink served salty or

sweet, and *chicha,* an indigenous alcoholic beverage. Pilsner is the beer of choice in El Salvador.

## Cooking

Corn is a popular Salvadoran ingredient, but it takes a great deal of work to make it usable. Dried corn is soaked in a lime-water solution until soft, then ground (with an appliance or by hand) into masa, a soft corn dough that is used as the base for tortillas, tamales, empanadas, and more. To make tortillas, a small bit of dough is rolled or pressed out into a circle of the desired size, then quickly cooked on a hot griddle. The same dough can be made into tamale dough with a slight adjustment of ingredients, filled with meat or cheese, then wrapped in banana leaves before being steamed or boiled.

Another well-liked Salvadoran dish that uses masa is the pupusa. Said to be created by the Pipil tribe that used to inhabit El Salvador, a pupusa is a stuffed tortilla, a common street food. The method is similar to that for making tortillas, except that the dough is wrapped around a range of fillings including cheese, *chicharrones* (pork rinds), beans, squash, and so on before being griddled. It is served with *curtido,* a spicy pickled mix of cabbage, carrots, and chili peppers that is said to enhance the pupusa's subtle flavors.

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**Cheese-Stuffed *Pupusas***

*Serves 4 people (1 pupusa each)*

**Ingredients**

*Dough*

2 c masa harina

1 c water

1 tbsp olive oil

Salt and pepper to taste

*Filling*

½ c crumbled *queso fresco* (fresh cheese)

½ c white melting cheese, like Chihuahua

**Method**

Mix the masa harina, water, and olive oil in a bowl until combined into a soft dough. Taste for flavor, and then adjust seasonings with salt and pepper to your preference.

Split the dough into 8 evenly sized balls, roughly 2 inches in diameter. Roll out each ball into a 6-inch circle. Sprinkle cheese evenly over the middle of the tortilla, then top with another rolled-out tortilla, pinching the edges to seal the filling inside. Place the stuffed tortilla on a preheated ungreased griddle, and cook on both sides until the tortilla is crispy and the cheese is melted and warm, a few minutes. Serve with spicy, room-temperature curtido (recipe follows).

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***Curtido***

**Ingredients**

¼ head red cabbage, thinly sliced

¼ head green cabbage, thinly sliced

1 carrot, peeled and grated

2 scallions, thinly sliced

1 c water

1 jalapeño pepper, minced

1½ c apple cider vinegar

½ tbsp salt

1 tsp brown sugar

½ tsp Mexican oregano

Place the cabbage, carrots, and scallions in a large bowl. Bring the water, hot pepper, vinegar, salt, sugar, and oregano to a boil in a small pot. Pour the hot pickling liquid over the bowl of vegetables, and stir. Cover and let sit for at least 24 hours, then pack into a container and store in the refrigerator for 2 to 3 weeks. Let the curtido come to room temperature before serving with pupusas.

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Rice is another important staple ingredient in Salvadoran cooking, and it is said that cooks are judged by the fluffiness of their rice. After the rice has been

rinsed, the grains are browned in oil with some onion, which allows the rice to remain fluffy after it is cooked and flavors it as well. Most meat is marinated in citrus juices, which help to flavor and tenderize the meat, especially in dishes like *carne asada* (roast meat).

Cooking was traditionally handled by the woman of the house, especially if the man of the house (if there was one) worked outside of the home. It wasn't until after the civil war ended in 1992 that women's rights became an important cause in Central America. Women gained a right to education and began working outside the home. Another positive result of the war was that men started helping out more at home, especially in the kitchen. Fathers, husbands, and sons are pitching in to assist with grinding the daily corn, helping to cook a family meal, and even cleaning up, as the civil war emphasized the importance of all people, men and women, rich and poor, being considered equal.

## Typical Meals

For breakfast, beans and tortillas are the most common and affordable dish in El Salvador. Tropical fruits are also served, such as bananas, papayas, and mangoes. *El huevos picados* (scrambled eggs with vegetables) is a popular dish, along with cheese. *Plátanos fritos* is another popular breakfast dish, made from deep-fried plantains, which can be served savory (unripe plantains) or sweet (ripe plantains).



Traditional tamales, a mix of meat and vegetables with rice or corn folded in a banana leaf and then steamed. (Raphael Chay | Dreamstime.com)

For lunch and dinner, a variety of popular Salvadoran dishes can be made or purchased, depending on the situation. Pupusas are stuffed tortillas, a popular street food that is quick and cheap. Other popular street foods include empanadas (flour pastries stuffed with meats or vegetables) and tamales, which are stuffed with meat or sweet corn and wrapped in banana leaves before being steamed.

*Sopa de pollo* (Salvadoran chicken soup) is another common dish, made from chicken, chickpeas, potatoes, yucca, cilantro, onions, and lime. Beef is a standard meat for those who can afford it, and Salvadorans grill it in carne asada (grilled skirt steak) and cook it in *bistec encebollado* (beef simmered with onions). Since El Salvador is a coastal country, seafood and fish are commonly eaten, typically in stew or soup form. Snacks are often fried, like chicharron (pork rind), *yucca frita* (fried yucca), and *pacalla* (cornmeal-breaded palm flowers fried and served with tomato sauce).

Hot chocolate and coffee are the most popular drinks in the country, along with *refrescos,* or fruit drinks. Common Salvadoran desserts include *tres leches* cake (cake made with three kinds of milk), *arroz con leche* (rice pudding), and semita (coffee cake–type pastry filled with different jams or preserves). The Salvadoran quesadilla is another famous dessert, essentially a sweet cheese pound cake flavored with sour cream, sesame seeds, and queso fresco or Parmesan cheese.

## Eating Out

In major cities throughout El Salvador, fast-food restaurants and more expensive, sit-down restaurants thrive. Subway, Pizza Hut, Burger King, and several other American fast-food chain restaurants have made their way down to major Salvadoran cities. Outside of the cities, the most common style of restaurant is the *comedores,* which function like cafeterias with either a menu to order from or a buffet to choose from, and a waitress that brings the food to the table. Also, street-food vendors are popular all over El Salvador; they sell items like pupusas

with curtido for busy workers with no time to cook. Pupusas are also sold in *pupuserías,* or restaurants that specialize in making pupusas.

## Special Occasions

Much of El Salvador is Roman Catholic, so Christmas and Semana Santa, or Holy Week (the week before Easter), are especially important occasions in the average Salvadoran life. Tamales are one traditional food made for such celebrations, as are pupusas with curtido and *panes con chumpe,* which are Salvadoran turkey sandwiches typically made on Christmas Eve or New Year's Eve.

## Diet and Health

The general diet of El Salvador, which consists of corn and beans supplemented with meat, dairy, and fresh produce, is healthy. Tortillas and beans provide more than enough complex protein for the body; beans provide fiber, magnesium, and vitamin B, among other nutrients, and tortillas gain zinc and iron from being ground on a grinding stone. Tropical fruits that are native to El Salvador, such as mangoes, bananas, sour oranges, and papayas, offer plenty of carotenoids and vitamin C.

With almost half of the population living below the national poverty level, financial distress often prevents families from getting a well-balanced, healthy diet in El Salvador. Fresh fruits and meats like beef and chicken are not affordable to all income levels, and the little meat purchased by the poor tends to be high in fat and low in nutrition, like sausages. Food security in El Salvador has been threatened by natural disasters (including an earthquake and a mudslide), rising food prices, little education, lack of food production, and financial hardship. Sixteen percent of rural families do not make enough money to buy food. A civil war in the 1980s displaced rural communities that had been relied on to produce cereals for the country, which has led to reduced food supplies. Malnutrition in children under the age of five has led to an increase in stunted growth among Salvadoran children.

*Leena Trivedi-Grenier*

**Further Reading**

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# French Guiana

## Overview

French Guiana, called La Guyane in French, has a complex and intriguing history that has had a direct effect on the country's food culture. It is an overseas department of France (*département d'outre-mer,* or DOM). Located on the northeastern Atlantic coast of South America, between Suriname and Brazil, it is a small country in terms of area and has a population of approximately 220,000. The capital and largest city is Cayenne, with a population of a little over 60,000. The country has a tropical climate, with coastal access, low plains, mountains, and dense rain forest that covers the majority of the land.

Historically and culturally, French Guiana is more akin to the Caribbean rather than other countries in South America. The area was originally inhabited by Amerindians (predominantly Carib, Arawak, and Kali'na tribes), long before European colonization. The Amerindians gave the area an appropriate name based on the ocean and many rivers, as *Guiana* means "land of many waters."

Christopher Columbus explored the coastal area near French Guiana on his third voyage in 1498, but it was the French who began to settle the region during the first half of the 17th century, albeit with pushback from the Portuguese. They managed to establish Cayenne in 1643 as a trading port, along with setting up some small plantations in the region. Facing more attacks, the French made Cayenne a permanent settlement in 1664. Throughout the latter half of the 17th century, the area switched hands a number of times between the Dutch, French, British, and Portuguese. The regular fighting over the land hindered the area that is now French Guiana from developing as substantially as in the rest of the Guianas, where the Dutch had more control. Sugarcane, though, was the main product here as well, which saw slaves from West Africa being brought over to work the plantations.

The territory was seized by the combined British-Portuguese forces based in Brazil in 1809, and it was under Portugal's control until 1814, when the French regained the land after the signing of the Treaty of Paris. The plantations almost collapsed after the abolition of slavery in 1848, but, as in the rest of the Guianas, laborers were brought in from India and China to fill the void.

Devil's Island, off the coast of French Guiana, became home to a penal colony from 1852 until the mid-20th century, with convicts from mainland France being sent there to carry out their prison terms. The infamy of the prison was captured in the book and movie *Papillon,* based on the life of an inmate there. French Guiana became an overseas department of France in 1946.

Demographically, the country is very diverse. Today, the population of French Guiana consists of Creoles (those with African ancestry), Europeans (not surprisingly, mostly French), Chinese, East Indians, and Amerindians, as well as immigrants from Haiti, Suriname, and Brazil. The majority of the population lives in the coastal towns. There are also Hmong refugees from Laos, who arrived in the 1970s and settled in smaller rural farming communities, such as Javouhey and Cacao. Most are market farmers, growing fruits and vegetables that they

sell in the cities, and actually supply the country with the majority of its produce. Maroons (escaped slaves) established themselves deep in the interior rain forests, preserving a lifestyle and culture closely tied to their African roots. These communities, descendants of the original Maroons, still exist today.

French Guiana's economy is dependent on France, relying on subsidies, which makes the standard of living one of the highest in South America, at least in the cities. The rural villages are poorer, and the Amerindians and Maroons live a subsistence lifestyle inland. Unemployment is high.

Even though the soils are fertile, a small percentage of the land is cultivated; a good amount of the food in French Guiana is imported. Fishing is one of the main industries, particularly for shrimp. Rice, manioc (cassava), sugar, rum, livestock, gold, and timber are among other important industries. The space center, Centre Spatial Guyanais, was established in 1964 near Kourou and accounts for about 25 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP).

## Food Culture Snapshot

Jean-Claude, Marie, and their children live in Cayenne, the largest city in French Guiana. They start the day with a stop at the local bakery to buy croissants for breakfast. Today is market day, so they go to the open-air market, as do most residents in Cayenne. There, they purchase fresh fruits and vegetables for their meals from a Hmong family who grew the items themselves and brought them in from Cacao. While at the market, Jean-Claude and Marie also look for fresh seafood and chicken to round out their upcoming meals. Rice and other staples are purchased at the supermarkets.

## Major Foodstuffs

Starches, such as cassava (also called manioc or yucca), sweet potatoes, yams, taro root (dasheen), and plantains, are staples in the French Guianese diet. Rice is also an important staple, eaten with



A shrimp trawler in the early morning in French Guiana. (StockPhotoPro)

most meals. With the majority of the population living near the coast and the many rivers, the incredibly wide variety of seafood is a major part of the diet. Shrimp is one of the main industries in French Guiana and as such is widely eaten. Snapper, tuna, shark, and anchovies are among the fish found in the country, as well as many native South American species, such as *acoupa, atipa, jamais goûté, machoiran, pirai,* and *pacu*. Chicken and other meats, such as duck, beef, pork, lamb, and local wild game, are also consumed as protein sources but do not hold the same place as seafood does in the French Guianese diet.

Vegetables in the diet include tomatoes, zucchini, cucumbers, bitter melons, Chinese long beans, red (kidney) beans, eggplant, and pumpkin. Tropical fruits are plentiful, including mangoes, papayas, coconuts, bananas, and citrus fruits, such as oranges and lemons. Fruits not common in other areas of the world grow in French Guiana, too, such as the sugar apple, the Cayenne cherry, and the acerola cherry.

## Cooking

French Guianese cuisine is a reflection of the various ethnic and cultural groups that have, over the history of the country, contributed and adapted their dishes and techniques with local ingredients, merging them into a unique food culture. A strong theme in French Guianese cooking is using French technique with local ingredients. An example is the many soups and stews that feature the country's variety of fish and meat. Aromatics, such as onion and garlic, are often used in them. Soups and stews often simmer on the stove for most of the day. These stews also have their roots in African foodways. A carbohydrate-rich starch is inevitably a part of the meal, served along with the protein. Vegetables can be either included in the dish or served on the side. Root vegetables are also prepared as gratins, another nod to combining local ingredients with French technique.

When prepared other than in soups or stews, seafood or meats are sautéed, grilled, broiled, poached, or fried. Herbs and spices, such as cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, ginger, and hot peppers, flavor many dishes. A popular way to serve fish and meats, such as chicken, is to wood-smoke it (*boucané*). This technique is believed to date back to the Amerindians in the region, as a way of preserving their protein sources.

## Typical Meals

Breakfast is similar to the Continental French breakfast, usually coffee and a baguette, croissant, or pastry, either eaten at home or found at the cafés and bakeries in the towns and villages. Lunch may be anything from a sandwich or crepe to Asian noodles. For dinner, cod fritters (*accras*) and blood sausages (boudin) are often served as appetizers, as well as marinated fish or shrimp. Smoked chicken or fish boucané is often served cold, on salads. The main dishes, including the soups and stews, are almost always served with rice. *Couac,* toasted cassava flour, is an alternative staple served with meals. Red (kidney) beans often accompany the main dish. *Blaff* is a court bouillon (broth) made with celery, onion, garlic, herbs, and spices in which fish or shrimp is poached. *Pimentade* is similar but contains tomatoes. *Colombo* is a well-liked stew with vegetables and chicken or pork in a spicy curry sauce. Fricassees, meat stews in a rich sauce, are considered specialties here. Wild game from the forests is especially popular prepared this way.

*Bouillon d'awara* (also spelled *aouara* or *awarra*) is considered French Guiana's national dish, served only on Easter and Pentecost. It is a dish of vegetables, cured meats, smoked fish, crab, prawns, and chicken, made with the fruit of the awara (*Astrocaryum vulgare*) palm tree that grows in the savannas in French Guiana and nearby regions. According to legend, anyone who tries this will be certain to come back one day to French Guiana.

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***Bouillon d'Awara***

*Serves 10*

Cooking time: 7 hours plus overnight soaking

**Ingredients**

1 lb corned beef, diced

1 lb salt-cured ham

1 lb pig tails
3 lb *awara* (*aouara*) paste
1 lb smoked bacon, diced
1 lb roast chicken
1 lb roast pork
2 lb green or white cabbage, chopped
2 lb green beans
1 lb cucumbers, chopped
1 lb eggplant, cubed
1 lb shrimp
1 lb crabmeat
1 lb smoked fish
2 lb spinach
Salt, pepper, and assorted spices, to taste

**Instructions**

1. Soak the corned beef, ham, and pig tails in water overnight. Change the water in the morning, and leave them in the clear water for another 2 hours.
2. Fill a very large soup pot about halfway with hot water. Mix in the awara paste until dissolved.
3. Put the cured meats, including the bacon, in the awara liquid, and cook over low heat for 2 hours.
4. Add the chicken, pork, cabbage, green beans, cucumbers, and eggplant to the bouillon.
5. Stir, and cook over low heat for 6 or 7 hours. The bouillon will be very thick and reduced.
6. Add the shrimp, crab, smoked fish, and spinach, and season with salt, pepper, and spices. Cook for 5 minutes more, or until the shrimp are cooked through and the spinach is wilted.

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Considering the history of sugar production in French Guiana, rum is popular and is made into various drinks and cocktails. A local favorite is *ti'punch,* a mixture of rum, sugar syrup, and lime juice. It is usually served as an aperitif, without ice, and drunk in one shot. *Punch planteur* is another rum drink, made with fruit juice.

## Eating Out

Restaurants are found mainly in larger cities in French Guiana, such as Cayenne and Kourou. The range of cuisines reflects the population, so one can find Creole, French, Brazilian, Laotian, and Chinese restaurants, to name a few. French cafés and restaurants serve typical Continental French dishes, along with wine imported from France. Inexpensive food stalls are found in and around the city markets. Asian noodles and fried rice are sold, as well as foods such as French crepes and sandwiches.

## Special Occasions

Many of the holidays and special occasions in French Guiana center on religious and national festivities. As the majority of the population is Roman Catholic, holidays such as Christmas and Easter are an important part of the culture. Bouillon d'awara is made only during Easter and Pentecost. Carnival in French Guiana is considered one of the liveliest, including costumes, music, parades, and dancing, stretching from Epiphany to Ash Wednesday. *Galette des rois* (king cake) represents the Three Kings and Epiphany and kicks off Carnival. Blaff is commonly eaten during Carnival, seen as a means of sustenance during the celebrating.

Bastille Day (the national French holiday, July 14) is cause for a big celebration each year in French Guiana, with plenty of food and wine. The capital city holds its own yearly celebration, Cayenne Festival, every October 15. Abolition Day is celebrated countrywide on June 10, to commemorate the end of slavery. In the areas with Asian communities, holidays such as the Chinese New Year are celebrated.

## Diet and Health

The French Guianese diet is rich in fresh fruits and vegetables and seafood, yet with a poor economy, some may not have access to a healthy, balanced diet. Relying too heavily on inexpensive starches, such as rice, could deprive one of important nutrients and lead to malnutrition, especially among

children. With the country's geography, access to a safe water supply is also an issue. The country's status as a French overseas department means that the population has access to health care that otherwise would not be available, including implementation of public health services and health education.

The Hmong, in the smaller villages, have been able to maintain some of their traditional ways of life and culture, including religious beliefs such as shamanism, even if they have converted to Christianity. Appeals to shamans for improving health often involve animal sacrifices. The Hmong are also fairly healthy, growing and eating their own fruits and vegetables and keeping fit through the physical demands of farming.

*Erin Laverty*

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# Grenada

## Overview

Grenada is located in the eastern Caribbean at the southernmost tip of the Windward Islands between Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the north and Trinidad and Tobago to the south. The nation of Grenada comprises three main inhabited islands plus around 30 islets and rocky pinnacles.

Grenada is the principal island of the three; the capital of the entire country is Saint George's, which is located on the southwestern coast. Grenada is about 21 miles (34 kilometers) long and around 11 miles (18 kilometers) wide. It has a mountainous, forest-covered interior, and its coastline has an abundance of attractive beaches and bays. Known as the "Isle of Spice," Grenada became world famous for its nutmeg and mace, though these spice crops were severely impacted by two devastating hurricanes in 2004 and 2005, leaving the industry in disarray. Today, the island is still in the process of recovering and successfully combines its traditional spice and agricultural industry with a thriving tourism sector.

Carriacou and Petite Martinique are Grenada's other two main islands. Carriacou is located some 23 miles (37 kilometers) to the north of Grenada. It is approximately 7 miles (11 kilometers) long and 3 miles (5 kilometers) wide. Largely dry, this pretty island has undulating hills, a number of idyllic beaches and bays, and a national park. Carriacou is famous for its tradition of boat building, sailing, and its Big Drum Dance festivals. Petite Martinique is a tiny island located 3 miles (5 kilometers) to the northeast of Carriacou. Just 1.2 square miles (2 square kilometers) in size, it also has a tradition of boat building and fishing.

Grenada was granted full independence from Britain in 1974. In 1979 the incumbent prime minister, Eric Gairy, was overthrown in a bloodless coup by the People's Revolutionary Government, led by the enigmatic Maurice Bishop. In October 1983, Bishop himself was overthrown and, together with a number of his supporters, executed on the orders of his former comrade, Bernard Coard. In a move to rid Grenada of its Cuban-backed regime, the United States initiated Operation Urgent Fury just a few days later. This military action lasted just a week. Free elections were held a year later, in 1984, and Grenada has been a peaceful place since then.

The majority of Grenadians are the descendants of slaves that were brought to the islands by the British and French from the 1700s to work plantation estates that grew sugar, coffee, cacao, and later nutmeg. Like most of the Caribbean, the islands were originally inhabited by Amerindian people, collectively referred to by the Europeans as Caribs. These indigenous people migrated from the Amazon River delta and were proficient canoe builders, hunters, and fishermen. With the arrival of Europeans, most Caribs were enslaved, murdered, or absorbed into the new society. Many died of diseases against which their bodies had no immunity. Following emancipation, many plantation estates were abandoned, and in their place villages were formed and a new nation built. Today, the islands of Grenada are English-speaking, and the government, judicial, and education systems are still based on the

old British model. Grenadian culture is shaped by a combination of African and European heritage, as indeed is its cuisine.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Louisa decided to cook a traditional *oil-down* (pronounced *oil-dong*) for her four guests. Right now they were off hiking to the island's pride and joy—the very pretty Concord Falls—and she planned to meet them on their return for a cook-up on the beach close by. Though her guesthouse was quite small and unassuming, she had developed a good reputation for attention to detail and for taking care of "her people." Today would be no exception.

Michael, a local gardener, had brought yams, coconuts, plantains, green bananas, and sweet potatoes early this morning just as Louisa was seasoning the chicken wings with garlic, thyme, onions, and seasoning peppers that grew in her kitchen garden. She had the salt fish (cod) plumping overnight in water, and that sat on the counter, waiting to be drained and later added to the pot. During the early hours of the morning, Louisa had peeled and chopped the ground provisions (starchy staples), cut open the coconuts, and squeezed the pulp in a muslin cloth to extract the delicious milk. She now packed all these things into a cooler, together with a dozen bottles of Carib beer and three bottles of rum punch—she was revered for this traditional West Indian drink that followed the recipe one of sour (lime), two of sweet (sugar syrup), three of strong (rum), and four of weak (water), although she tended to cheat a little, adding only three of weak and relying on ice to make up the four. Nutmeg and Angostura bitters had to come along as well.

By the time her guide, Gerry, arrived with her four guests, a fire was burning and the ingredients were all cooking in a large pot. The waterfall hike had been great fun, and now all her guests were ready for something to drink. Knowing her rum punch well, they chose this readily. Louisa poured the punch into plastic cups filled with ice, added a dash of Angostura bitters, and, with her little portable grater, grated the fresh nutmeg straight into the same. Traditions are not to be messed with. Two drinks each, and it was time to take a bath in the sea—this allowed her guests and herself to freshen themselves up. The waters of the Caribbean were warm and gentle, but Louisa had her pot that needed attention now. Leaving her guests, she clambered to her duty, tasting her oil-dong every now and then to ensure perfection. Once all the ingredients had boiled down, the turmeric giving the dish just that slight nutty flavor and a touch of yellow color, the coconut oil and the shop butter now coating the fish, chicken, provisions, and dumplings, all cooked to perfection, Louisa called out to her guests and opened a beer for each one as they gathered around the pot, their bowls being filled with the goodness of this Grenadian dish, its sweet aroma of pepper and spice filling the air. She remembered the first time this lot had tasted her oil-dong and how they had never heard of plantain before and couldn't imagine eating cooked unripe bananas. With full stomachs, weary limbs, and a liqueur in hand—Louisa had not forgotten the bottle of De La Grenade nutmeg liqueur they so loved after this heavy meal—they all sat in comfortable silence on the beach, watching the sun now setting, the skies slowly bursting into flames of yellow and red.

## Major Foodstuffs

Grenada's volcanic soil is very fertile, and a variety of crops are grown on the hillsides of the island's mountainous interior. Though no longer a significant export, grown largely for domestic consumption, bananas are cultivated all around the island. In addition to the banana we all recognize, several other varieties are farmed, including plantains and *bluggo,* which are usually cooked before eating. Ground provisions such as yams and dasheen are also very traditional and commonly grown foodstuffs.

It is for its spices that Grenada has become famous, and despite recent hurricanes, nutmeg, cacao, cinnamon, allspice, cloves, star anise, and black pepper are still farmed in the island's lush green interior. Nutmegs thrive in a cooler, more elevated habitat, which unfortunately makes them vulnerable to severe weather. It is said that nutmegs were

first planted as an experiment in the mid-1800s and were so successful that, just 100 years later, Grenada was the second-largest exporter in the world behind Indonesia, where the crop originated. When ripening, the roundish, thick yellow pods that cover this evergreen tree begin to split open, revealing a tough kernel. Within this kernel is the nutmeg itself, and around the nutmeg is a reddish, lacy coating called mace. After harvesting, the mace is removed from the nutmeg and dried. It is used in cooking and also as a natural meat preservative. Nutmegs are usually ground into a powder and used for flavorings, often in desserts. They also contain an essential oil that is used in the cosmetic and pharmaceutical industries. Bay leaf is native to the Windward Islands, and although also used in cooking, it is primarily used in bay rum. Not to be imbibed, bay rum is an essential in every home's medicine cabinet, used as an aftershave lotion. Turmeric and ginger are also grown. Cacao is grown both on smallholdings and on large estates. The Belmont Estate on the east of the island grows organic cacao that is used to make Grenada's very own chocolate.

Carriacou and Petite Martinique are both dry, and water is usually in scarce supply. This means that the variety of crops is quite limited. Traditional staples are pigeon peas and maize, which are often seen growing together in smallholdings and back gardens. These gardens also tend to house a small chicken shed and may also be home to a goat or two.



Interior of a nutmeg factory in Grenada. (PhotoDisc)

**Grenadian Oil-Down**

3 dry coconuts or 6 cans coconut milk

1-in. x 2-in. piece fresh turmeric, peeled and grated

½ c vegetable oil

2 lb chicken wings

1 lb salt fish, soaked in water overnight

1 salted pig tail, whole

6 green bananas, peeled and cut in half

1 whole breadfruit, peeled and cut into chunks

12 medium-sized leaves of callaloo bush

1 leaf *chadon bennie* (also known as *shadow-bennie*), finely chopped (or a handful of cilantro can be used instead)

4 onions, peeled and finely chopped

6 cloves garlic, finely chopped

3 sprigs parsley, finely chopped

6 stalks fresh chives, finely chopped

3 leaves broad-leaf thyme, finely chopped

4 fresh mint leaves, finely chopped

6 leaves fresh basil, finely chopped

1 red hot pepper or Scotch bonnet, seeded and finely chopped

2 red hot peppers or Scotch bonnets, whole

2 seasoning peppers, finely chopped

1–2 tbsp butter

Salt and pepper to taste

**Dumplings**

2 c flour

½ c butter

1 tsp salt

1 tsp ground cinnamon

Break the coconuts, and remove and grate the hard interior white flesh. Add the turmeric to the grated flesh. Pour hot water over this mixture and squeeze through a muslin bag until all the coconut milk has been extracted. When substituting this method

with 6 cans of coconut milk (unsweetened), add the turmeric, bring to a boil, and still put the liquid through a sieve in order to remove the grated turmeric, just keeping the coloring, which should be a bright yellow in both cases.

Place a large iron pot on the fire. Add vegetable oil. When hot, add chicken wings and brown slightly. Add the turmeric coconut milk. Add all other ingredients except the whole peppers. If there is not enough coconut milk to cover these, add a little water or normal milk. Add the whole peppers, tied in muslin cloth in case they break. Cover until mixture begins to boil.

Meanwhile, in a bowl, begin the dumplings by mixing the flour and butter. Crumble the mixture. Add the salt and cinnamon and mix well. Add enough water to make a sticky but firm dough, form the dough into small balls, roll into 4-inch lengths, and set aside.

Allow the oil-down to slowly boil for approximately 45 minutes, adding the dumplings 20 minutes before it is finished, while there is still liquid. Cover for 5 minutes. Remove cover, stirring now to ensure that the bottom of the oil-down does not begin to burn. When finished and all ingredients are cooked but not mushy, serve in calabash bowls (or ceramic bowls) and eat with a spoon. The pepper can now be removed from the muslin cloth and mashed, and a little can be placed on the oil-down for those who can tolerate the pepper. Salt and pepper can be added to taste.

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In addition to pigeon peas and maize, vegetable plots will also usually include carrots, cabbages, potatoes, peas, and beans. Fruit trees grow in the wild and in orchards. Common fruits include several varieties of mango, grapefruit, lime, pawpaw (papaya), guava, passion fruit, pineapple, watermelon, and breadfruit.

The sea provides Grenadians on all three islands with a variety of fish and crustaceans. Tuna, mahimahi (dorado), marlin, and kingfish are regular catches. Queen conch, known as *lambie,* and lobster are caught to supply Grenada's restaurants and hotel resorts. Both are also revered by locals.



A Rastafarian man cooks oil-down, a traditional dish in Grenada. (Dreamstime)

## Cooking

Caribbean Creole is the predominant culinary style in Grenada and is a combination of African and European influences. Traditional dishes are usually quite simple and are a good reflection of seasonal fruits, vegetables, and fish catches. Staples are rice and ground provisions. Grenada also has an Indo-Caribbean community, particularly on the east coast, and some spiced curry dishes, such as roti (a circular Indian-type bread wrapped around fillings), reflect the diversity of the island's heritage. The preparation and cooking of meals usually take place in an indoor kitchen over a gas stove, though many still enjoy an outdoor "cook-up" on a beach, especially as a weekend treat.

Meats are usually seasoned in advance, either with prepared, dried seasonings or with a combination of seasoning peppers, garlic, thyme, salt, and pepper. Fish and chicken are often washed with lime before cooking. Marinating meats is a common

practice and may often be done the day before. Vegetables and ground provisions are either bought from local markets or roadside stalls or harvested from gardens. Queen conch (or lambie) is extracted from its shell and beaten with a wooden *cosh* to tenderize before it is cooked, often in a curry or hot Creole sauce.

The national dish of Grenada is pronounced oil-dong but written as oil-down. Its traditional ingredients include a selection of spices, turmeric, ground provisions, breadfruit, green (unripe) bananas, and plantains combined with pig trotters (feet) and salt fish, with callaloo (young dasheen leaves—taro) placed on top to retain steam and add flavor. Today, the recipe has changed little except for the meats, which could be one or a combination of beef, pork, the more inexpensive chicken wings, salt pork (pig tail), or salt beef. Everything is cooked in one large pot together with coconut milk and spices until the liquid reduces down to leave an oily residue at the bottom of the pot that coats the meat and provisions. Often cooked outdoors over a fire, oil-dong is typically eaten on special occasions or as a weekend picnic.

Another very traditional dish that also employs coconut as an ingredient is *cou-cou*. Again cooked in a single pot and usually outdoors over an open fire, cou-cou is made from cornmeal, flour, a selection of seasonings, and coconut milk. Everything is cooked together and continually "turned" until the mixture thickens. In Carriacou, cou-cou is often eaten with fresh fish and pigeon peas.

## Typical Meals

Lunch has traditionally been the main meal of the day in the Caribbean, though with modern lifestyles and the introduction of fast food, the increasing variety of restaurants, and prepacked sandwiches in plastic lunch boxes from well-stocked supermarkets, things are steadily changing. Whether it is lunch or dinner, the typical main meal in Grenada will consist of meat or fish accompanied by a selection of vegetables, rice cooked with peas, and ground provisions. Perhaps one of the most popular accompaniments is callaloo, the stewed young green leaves of the dasheen plant.

Because of Grenada's appeal to overseas visitors, investors, and returnees, not to mention the impressive St. George's University medical school, traditional cooking is now far more entwined with international culinary influences. This is particularly true along Grenada's southwestern peninsula where luxury resorts, boutique hotels, yachting marinas, supermarkets, bars, and haute cuisine restaurants line the powder-white sand beaches and sublime natural anchorages. Elsewhere in Grenada, particularly in the more remote villages of the north, a traditional breakfast of locally baked bread, local jams, and fresh fruits may be followed by a lunch of meat or fish, rice and peas, provisions, and vegetables. Dinner or supper is often a lighter affair, perhaps consisting of leftovers or a freshly stewed callaloo soup.

## Eating Out

Grenada's southwestern peninsula offers an excellent choice of high-class and local restaurants. Finding somewhere to eat in the rest of the island can, however, prove to be a little more challenging, though there are some hidden gems. In Carriacou there are some very nice restaurants in and around Hillsborough and along the waterfront at Tyrell Bay.

Some of Grenada's restaurants are truly world class, serving a sumptuous selection of international and traditional Creole dishes. Many profess to use local ingredients and locally caught fish and shellfish. The renowned British chef Gary Rhodes has a restaurant on the L'Anse Aux Épines peninsula, and several others have been the recipients of international culinary awards. On Carriacou, dining options reflect the island's love affair with the sea, and queen conch, or lambie, is a particular favorite.

For those looking for something a little more casual or inexpensive, Grenada's southwestern peninsula offers plenty of variety, from bar meals to local snackettes. A fabulous option for anyone traveling on a budget is roti, a dish with East Indian influence that is comprised of a flatbread that is stuffed with either curried vegetables, chicken, or fish. Roti

and a range of local snacks such as fried chicken, fish, and *titiwi* cakes (a seasoned, fried fritter containing small fish) can be found at eateries all over Grenada.

Fish Friday takes place every week from around 7 P.M. in the village of Gouyave on Grenada's west coast. A vibrant atmosphere fuses with a wonderful selection of seafood dishes, including freshly caught and barbecued lobster. It is a lovely way to pass an evening, eating delicious food, sampling local rum, and enjoying the sounds of a steel pan band.

## Special Occasions

Village maroon festivals on Carriacou are cultural occasions where communities come together for an outdoors cook-up, some drinks, and a traditional Big Drum Dance. Commonly referred to as a *saraca,* a village maroon (cook-up) usually consists of smoked meats, cou-cou, ground provisions, rice, and pigeon peas. Traditionally, it is held to give thanks for a bountiful harvest or to pray for one, along with rain, ahead of planting.

A rather haunting occasion, and also very traditional on Carriacou, is the tombstone feast. On the first anniversary of a burial, the deceased's headstone is carried to the grave site and put in place. Rum and water are sprinkled around the tomb, and sometimes an egg is broken to symbolize a new beginning for the surviving family. The ceremony is followed by a traditional saraca, drumming, and dancing. A parent's plate is a food offering to ancestral spirits. At a village maroon and a tombstone feast, a plate of food rests on a white tablecloth along with a candle. After midnight, when the spirits have had their fill, the plate is removed and people eat from it.

## Diet and Health

Despite the arrival of fast-food franchises in Grenada, the typical diet is a healthy one. Fresh fruits, vegetables, and ground provisions have not yet become foods that are scorned by the young in favor of hamburgers and southern fried chicken. With fishing villages along the coastlines of all three islands, fresh seafood is also a healthy staple of the Grenadian diet. Combine this fresh food with sunshine and the great outdoors and there is no reason why anyone should put on too many extra pounds—though some of those wonderful restaurant desserts may indeed prove too much to resist.

*Paul Crask and Rosemary Parkinson*

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# Guatemala

## Overview

With a land area of about 42,000 square miles and a population of 14 million, Guatemala is one of the largest of the small countries on the isthmus of Central America. Guatemala borders on and shares many features of its culture, climate, and topography with Mexico, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador. At the same time, the natural and social landscape within Guatemala is varied enough that highland Mayan farming communities and Caribbean fishing villages can exist at the same latitude, and door-to-door tortilla vendors and trendy baristas can be residents of the same city.

Guatemalan legal documents officially recognize the country as "multiethnic, pluricultural and multilingual," and not only does Guatemala have the largest Maya community in the Americas but indigenous Maya make up anywhere from 40 to 60 percent of the population. (Some surveys classify only those who speak a Mayan language and wear traditional Mayan dress, or *traje,* as indigenous, while others include all Guatemalans who chose to identify themselves as such.) Guatemala's population encompasses more than 20 distinct Mayan ethnic groups (the most populous among them are the K´iche, Mam, and Kaqchikel) and as many as 50 distinct languages and dialects. By many accounts from both within and outside Guatemala, mixed-race, mixed-culture *ladinos* (or mestizos) make up the majority of the population. Some Guatemalans of European descent choose to identify themselves as white or *criollo.* Other ethnic groups in Guatemala include the non-Maya indigenous Xinca, the Afro-Caribbean Garifuna, and recent immigrants from Asia, the Middle East, and elsewhere, though all of these groups together make up only about 1 percent of the population. The majority of Guatemalans identify themselves as Catholic, but up to 20 percent of the population has joined an evangelical Protestant movement that began in the late 20th century.

Guatemala's history has been one of voluntary and often-involuntary cultural and economic exchange. In pre-Columbian eras, cacao (or chocolate) traveled complex routes from lowland Mayan villages to the highland Maya and Aztec kingdoms in the region. Spanish colonists established an international trade in Guatemalan cacao and also replanted indigenous squash, tomatoes, chilies, and maize in Europe. Over several centuries, European conquistadors, entrepreneurs, scholars, and missionaries introduced crops from colonies in Africa and Asia to Central America; rice (most often combined with beans) has become a definitively Guatemalan food, and once-foreign crops such as bananas and coffee have shaped Guatemalan trade, particularly with the United States, from the 19th through the 21st centuries.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Sandra lives on a busy street in Antigua, a small, volcano-surrounded town at an elevation of 5,000 feet that has the dual distinction of being Guatemala's colonial capital and—with its cobblestoned streets and striking Spanish churches partially demolished by an 18th-century earthquake—the contemporary tourist capital of the Central American country. Of

her immediate family, only Sandra's 25-year-old daughter lives with her, but the house is always buzzing with students from the United States, Germany, Holland, and elsewhere in the world who attend a nearby Spanish-language school and who board with Sandra for several weeks or even a few months at a time.

On a typical day, Sandra is up well before 6 A.M., slicing fruit for breakfast. From the abundantly available local produce, she often selects papayas and bananas though she avoids berries, which are more expensive and more likely to be contaminated by food-borne illnesses. She lights the gas on the stove and begins to cook the beans that have been soaking overnight. A woman selling corn tortillas comes to the house around this time, and Sandra buys at least a dozen, transferring them from their large straw basket to a smaller one of her own and wrapping them in a kitchen towel to prevent them from drying out. Before noon, Sandra will walk five blocks to Antigua's traditional market (where dozens of individual produce, meat, and dry goods vendors set up their stalls under a heavy tarp) to buy a particular variety of squash indigenous to the region. She will also buy a few avocados (the vendor will ask if they are for today or tomorrow and help her select ones with the appropriate ripeness), a few other vegetables, and small bunches of the herbs cilantro and *hierba buena.* Since she's not cooking meat today, Sandra doesn't visit her regular butcher in the market. Next, she buys *pan francés,* a basic white bread, at a bakery nearby but not inside the market; she buys just enough bread for tonight—it will be stale tomorrow, good only for making breadcrumbs or dunking in tea or coffee. Antigua has two supermarkets, both within walking distance of Sandra's house, but she shops there only for staple processed foods like ultrapasteurized milk and chicken bouillon powder. In rural areas—where about 60 percent of the population lives—supermarkets are not available at all, while the capital, Guatemala City, is home to several branches of an upscale supermarket chain now owned by the American giant Walmart.

At lunch, Sandra reheats last night's *caldo* (a general word for stew), choosing to serve the tender chicken and potatoes without the broth today, accompanied by rice (fried lightly with carrots, tomatoes, onions, and garlic) and the black beans that she cooked this morning and pureed in the blender immediately before the meal. Along with lunch, she serves the fresh tortillas and a Guatemalan-style *guacamol,* which differs from Mexican guacamole in that it contains no ingredients other than avocado, lime juice, and salt. For dinner, Sandra follows a recipe she clipped from a magazine for *soufflé de güicoyitos,* a crustless quiche made with the squash she bought this morning. She places a salad of thinly sliced tomatoes and cucumbers on the table, along with the pan francés. Much of Guatemalan cuisine, like tonight's dinner, is not spicy, though it is common to pass around a small dish of pickled chilies.

## Major Foodstuffs

The religious book the *Popol Vuh,* often called the bible of Guatemala's K´iche Maya, presents a creation story is which the ancestors of all human beings were molded by the gods from maize dough. Such a dough—made by soaking corn in lime (calcium oxide) to remove the tough outer coating of the kernels and then grinding it either by hand or by machine—is still the basis for Guatemala's essential tortillas (flat cakes cooked on a griddle, smaller and denser than North American supermarket varieties) and tamales (dense packets stuffed with sweet or savory fillings, wrapped in corn husks or banana leaves, and steamed). Today, Guatemala produces over a million metric tons of corn annually. A study carried out in the rural region of Tecpán found that 98 percent of households in that particular area grew corn and beans on subsistence plots known as *milpas.*

Major cash crops grown in Guatemala's fertile volcanic soil, such as coffee, bananas, and cardamom, are produced almost exclusively for export. Cacao (an indigenous crop) and sugar, both grown in Guatemala's balmy lowland Pacific coastal region, were historically strong export crops but are now primarily consumed locally (the production of sugar also allows for the distillation of a wide variety of rums). Animal husbandry practices, along with meat and cheese production, bear the influence of European settlers, including not only the

Spanish colonists but also German and Swiss coffee farmers who arrived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Nontraditional crops like broccoli, snap peas, and French beans are increasingly a part of Guatemala's export economy but have yet to make a significant impact on local cuisine, while cabbage (a cousin of broccoli) came to Guatemala with the Spaniards and is now an important part of the pickled slaw called *encurdito* used as a topping for many snacks. Guatemala's extremely varied terrain is responsible for some striking variations in cuisine; fish and seafood stews made with coconut milk are common on the Caribbean coast near the Belizean border, while the sparsely populated jungle in Guatemala's northern Petén region borrows culinary traditions from Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula.

## Cooking

The ancient Mayan technique of grinding ingredients into a powder or paste by using a slightly concave stone slab, called a *metate,* together with a matching piece that resembles a rolling pin, called a *mano,* is still an essential part of Guatemalan cooking. Tortillas and tamales are made from treated and ground maize. Cacao is ground together with sugar and cinnamon (European introductions) and then whisked into water or milk to make chocolate drinks. Peanuts, sesame seeds, and squash seeds are often ground up and used in recipes for beverages called *atoles* and *pinoles* and in a variety of stews. Households in very remote areas without a lot of income may rely on metates and manos as the only



A vegetable market in Chichicastenango, Guatemala. (Shutterstock)

technology for preparing ingredients in this way. In more central and financially stable villages, commercial grinding services (by machine instead of by hand) are available. Affluent homes have easy access to food processors, though they may keep a metate or a mortar and pestle for special recipes.

Purchasing purified water is routine in Guatemala, except in impoverished homes that cannot afford to do so, because municipal water supplies are not reliably potable. Running water is not universal, and many houses have only a single tap in a central courtyard rather than a sink in the kitchen. The Guatemalan culinary tradition is one in which fresh produce is readily available and refrigeration is limited and unreliable, so menus tend to emphasize cooking from scratch instead of reheating leftovers. Several appliances are standard in Guatemalan kitchens, including blenders and pressure cookers. Even modest homes may hire a worker (almost always a woman) to help with cooking and cleaning, and affluent families normally employ a household staff, something that is no longer either the social norm or an economic possibility in most European and North American homes.

## Typical Meals

Guatemalan food can best be described as a constellation of traditional ingredients: maize, beans, and squash. Several rich stews combine indigenous and European ingredients and flavors to create singular dishes that are distinctly Guatemalan. *Pepián* is slow-cooked beef in a smoky and flavorful combination of spices. *Jocón* is a chicken stew in a tangy green sauce made with *mil tomates* (usually called tomatillos in Mexico and the United States). *Kakik* is a restorative soup traditionally made with a wild turkey.

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***Pepián***

*Serves 8, with rice and tortillas*

1 whole small onion, peeled

4 whole garlic cloves, peeled

½ c whole tomatillos

1 whole small ripe tomato

2 dried chilies, such as *guajillos*

2 corn tortillas

2 lb beef chuck, cut into 2-in. cubes

5 c water

1 tsp salt

2 oz sesame seeds

2 oz squash or pumpkin seeds (*pepitas*)

10 peppercorns

1 1-in. cinnamon stick, broken up

1 leafy stalk of cilantro, chopped

1 *güisquil,* chayote, or zucchini, cut into ½-in. cubes

1 small potato, peeled and cut into ½-in. cubes

Char the onion, garlic, tomatillos, tomatoes, and chilies either by holding them directly over the flame of a gas burner (turning them regularly) or by heating them in a dry skillet.

Quickly char the tortillas by holding them over the flame of a gas burner with tongs (turning them over a few times), or toast them in the oven or toaster oven until they are crispy.

Bring the water and salt to a boil, add the beef, and simmer for about 1 hour, until tender.

While the beef cooks, add the tortillas to the boiling water for 5 minutes, then remove the tortillas, tear them into pieces, and set them aside.

Toast the sesame and squash seeds in a dry skillet until they are dark but not burned. Grind the seeds into a fine powder in a coffee grinder or food processor. Add the peppercorns and cinnamon, and process the mixture until everything is finely ground.

Combine the ground seed mixture, the moistened tortillas, the chopped cilantro, and the charred onion, garlic, tomatillos, tomatoes, and chilies with 1 cup of the cooking liquid from the beef in a food processor or blender until smooth.

When the beef is almost tender, add the cubed potato and güisquil or other squash, and continue simmering until the vegetables are cooked through, about 10 minutes.

Add the sauce to the beef and vegetables, and simmer for an additional 10 minutes, or until the sauce is thick and chocolate brown.

Small items such as green beans (*ejotes*) or hot peppers stuffed with ground beef (*chiles rellenos*) dredged in egg batter and fried make popular snacks and side dishes. In addition to the *atol* drinks made from ground seeds and nuts, there are several common soft drinks or *refrescos,* including limeade, steeped hibiscus flower, and a tamarind-infused drink. Eating *camotes* (sweet potatoes) in honey or syrup as an after-dinner treat is probably a millennia-old tradition, and the candy makers of Antigua have been selling molded marzipan and condensed milk sweets at least since 1613, when they formed a confectioners' guild.

What constitutes an everyday meal varies from household to household, region to region, and income level to income level. By some estimates, 80 percent of Guatemalans live below the poverty line, and for many Guatemalans eating is more a matter of survival than pleasure.

## Eating Out

The elegant restaurants run by charismatic chefs and the convenient restaurant chains in Guatemala City, Antigua, and a few other pockets of the country take their cues from global rather than local culinary culture. European travelers and speculators who arrived with the coffee trade in the mid-19th century were surprised to find that Guatemala had so few cafés or salons where people could meet, and visitors to Guatemala today may have a similar reaction. In the 21st century, social gatherings are still less likely to be in restaurants than in someone's home, a custom influenced both by the cultural importance of hospitality and by a persistent occurrence of violent crime in public places in the wake of a heavily armed 36-year civil war that ended only in 1996. Most towns and urban neighborhoods have at least one *comedor* serving simple meals to workers who cannot return home for lunch and other passersby. While Guatemalans have access to several American chains, by far the most popular fast-food restaurant is the nationally owned Pollo Campero, which specializes in fried chicken; in recent years, several branches of Pollo Campero have opened in the United States. Some of the tastiest and most traditional foods consumed outside the home are served at informal stalls or stands on busy streets. Common street foods include roasted corn, sliced mangoes coated in powdered chili and salt, the same *pupusas* that are popular in El Salvador (thick tortillas stuffed with cheese or another filling before they are cooked), and *enchiladas,* which bear no resemblance to the food of the same name in Mexico (here, they are a crisp tortilla topped with cabbage-and-beet encurdito, tomato sauce, and salty cheese).

## Special Occasions

The ancient Mesoamerican tradition of preparing specific kinds of tamales for special occasions continues into the present day at Mayan festivals and during Catholic holidays like Christmas and Easter. Meat grilled over a charcoal fire or roasted on a spit, accompanied by guacamol or a condensed tomato sauce called *chirmol* along with grilled scallions, fresh bread or tortillas, and cold beer is a popular celebratory meal for a large crowd. Without a doubt, the most distinctive Guatemalan holiday meal is *fiambre,* a vibrant and pungent salad whose seemingly endless list of ingredients includes the local stalky vegetable *pacaya,* just-caught shrimp, imported capers, and Spanish-style chorizo, all mixed together with several different broths and pickling agents that take days to prepare; fiambre is served during the consecutive Catholic holidays of All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day in November, and the meal is sometimes eaten as a picnic at the local cemetery to commemorate the lives of parents, grandparents, and past generations of ancestors.

## Diet and Health

Healthy communities in Guatemala are tied both physically and metaphorically to healthy maize harvests. For thousands of years, Maya households have blessed a single ear of corn, which is neither

planted nor eaten for the entire season, at the beginning of the harvest. To this day, corn is a symbol of life and health, and many families continue to practice the ancient birthing ritual of cutting the umbilical cord above an ear of corn. Contemporary Maya shamans make use of carefully guarded herbal recipes employed for both religious and medicinal purposes.

Today, lack of access to clean water severely compromises good health for many Guatemalans. While Guatemala's traditional staple foods are the core of a healthy diet (beans combined with maize to make up a complete protein, a diversity of vitamin-rich vegetables, little meat, and many dishes prepared without animal fat of any kind), struggles related to diet in Guatemala and throughout Central American include diabetes provoked and agitated by increased consumption of processed foods and rampant malnutrition as a consequence of extreme poverty.

*Emily Stone*

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# Guyana

## Overview

Guyana is a land of diversity geographically, ecologically, and culturally. Situated on the northeastern coast of South America, Guyana has a history and culture that are distinct from the rest of the continent. The country is surrounded by Venezuela, Suriname, Brazil, and the Atlantic Ocean. It is the only English-speaking country in South America. With a tropical climate, Guyana's geography is a combination of the coastal region and nearby low plains, mineral-rich hills inland, and dense rain forests still further in.

The history of Guyana has shaped its food culture, influenced by the diverse ethnic groups that have come to the country. Guyana is considered to be part of the Caribbean, based on a common culture and history, despite it being in South America. Guyana was originally inhabited by Amerindians (Arawak and Carib tribes), long before Europe entered the picture. The original name for the area, *Guiana,* is said to come from an Amerindian word meaning "land of many waters"—fitting, based on the number of rivers that run through it.

Although the area that is now Guyana saw various European explorations over the 16th century, including the Spanish and the British (Sir Walter Raleigh went in search of the fabled El Dorado), it was first colonized by the Dutch toward the end of the 16th century. In 1616, they set up a permanent trading post in Essequibo that became part of the Dutch West India Company. The Dutch expanded their settlements in the area, including Berbice and Demarara, throughout the 17th century, with agriculture, mainly sugarcane, the focus. As the production grew, the Dutch began bringing in slaves from West Africa in the mid-16th century to fill the void in labor. Slavery on the sugarcane plantations and the resulting sugar, molasses, and rum production remained the backbone of the economy in Guyana and of Dutch rule throughout the 18th century. The area was fought over and changed hands several times between the Dutch, British, and French in the late 1700s, with the British taking control in 1796. After it returned to the Dutch for a short period of time, the British took over once again, with the colonies being ceded to them in 1814. The colonies were united as British Guiana in 1831 and remained so for over 130 years.

Although the slave trade was abolished in 1807, full emancipation was not reached until 1838. With the freeing of the slaves, the plantation owners began desperately looking elsewhere for a workforce, first in Madeira, Portugal, then for indentured laborers from India and China. The country gained independence from Britain on May 26, 1966, with its new name, Guyana, and on February 23, 1970, Guyana became a republic.

Today, Guyana's population is approximately 770,000, with people of East Indian heritage at 43.5 percent of the population, followed by people of African heritage at 30.2 percent, people of mixed heritage at 16.7 percent, Amerindians at 9.2 percent, and others, including Portuguese, Chinese, and whites, making up the rest of the population. The coastal towns are home to the majority of the population. Georgetown, the capital, is the secretariat headquarters of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). With a per-capita gross domestic product

(GDP) of about $4,000 per person, Guyana ranks as one of the poorer countries in the world. Guyana's main economy centers on agricultural exports, in particular, sugar and rice. Shrimp and livestock are significant industries, along with gold, bauxite, and timber. Production of molasses and rum, derivatives of the sugar industry, also plays an important role in Guyana's export economy. The different ethnic backgrounds and cultures that have shared in the history of Guyana have contributed to and influenced the food culture of Guyana today. Guyanese cuisine is similar in some ways to that in other parts of the Caribbean, based on a shared history and foods grown in the area.



Chandana Jagunandan cooks vegetable pakoras in her Queenstown home in Guyana. (AFP | Getty Images)

## Food Culture Snapshot

Sam, Betty, and their two children live in Georgetown. They start the day with a trip to Bourda Market, a large open-air market in town. There, they purchase fresh fruits and vegetables for their meals, as do most people. Another stop for buying food and other household items in downtown Georgetown is Stabroek Market. They also look for meat, especially chicken, and fresh seafood at the open-air markets. These markets also allow people to purchase food at better prices than in the supermarkets. They do stop by the supermarket, though, for food staples, such as rice, seasonings, and hot sauces. When visiting relatives in a smaller village on the coast, the family is able to buy fresh seafood directly from the fishermen.

## Major Foodstuffs

Ground provisions (a term used to describe root vegetables and fruits) are staples in the Guyanese diet and are part of or served with most meals. These include cassava (also called manioc or yucca), sweet potatoes, *eddoes* (also called taro root or dasheen), and plantains. Rice is also an important staple and is eaten with most meals. Corn plays a dominant role in the diet, as do beans, peas, and other legumes (such as pigeon peas).

Chicken is eaten often as a protein source and is found in many Guyanese dishes. Seafood is plentiful, given the coastal access and many rivers. Shrimp, tilapia, snapper, and trout are among the fish found in Guyana. Salt cod is also consumed. Other meats, such as beef, pork, and goat, are eaten but in smaller amounts than chicken and fish.

Vegetables in the Guyanese diet include okra (often called *ochroes*), tomatoes, cucumbers, pumpkins, squash, *bora* beans (also known as Chinese long beans), eggplant (called *boulanger*), and breadfruit. Tropical fruits abound, such as guavas, pineapples, mangoes, papayas, bananas, soursops, and citrus fruits. Coconut is used extensively in Guyanese cooking, including the meat, water, and coconut milk as a flavoring in some soups and rice dishes.

## Cooking

The foodways in Guyana have become a true melting pot. The different ethnic and cultural groups that came to the country, many by force, contributed their own familiar ingredients, dishes, and techniques that have melded into the Guyanese cuisine that is now consumed by everyone, regardless of their origins. So, dishes that originated in India, for example, are now prepared and enjoyed by those other than just the Indo-Guyanese.

Food and cooking in Guyana typically revolve around the family, especially on the weekends. Hearty one-pot dishes, stews, and soups are often cooked, simmering on the stove for most of the day.

A thick split pea soup is an example, made with chicken, beef, or pig tail as well as ground provisions, such as potatoes, yams, cassava, or plantains made into dumplings. A carbohydrate-rich ground root vegetable or starch, like rice, is almost always a part of the meal, many times incorporated into or used as the basis for a dish. A smaller amount of protein, such as chicken, fish, salt pork, or beans, and vegetables and seasonings are cooked with the carbohydrate. Alternatively, chicken and fish are often fried and served over rice.

Herbs and spices, such as thyme, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, and fresh hot peppers, flavor many dishes. Aromatics, such as onion and garlic, are often used in one-pot dishes. Bottled hot pepper sauces are always on the table and used as a condiment.

Guyanese do use certain methods in cooking that are particular to their dishes. When preparing bitter cassava, for example, it must be grated, the juice squeezed out of it, and allowed to dry in order to make it edible. A *matapee,* which is a long, cylindrical basket that originated with the Amerindians and is used to squeeze out the juice, is still used today. When making roti flatbreads, Guyanese use a *tawah* (also called *tawa* or *tava*), a round, cast iron flat plate, which is East Indian in origin.

## Typical Meals

Guyanese typically eat three meals a day. Breakfast is usually fairly hearty—a hot cereal or porridge made from a starch such as cornmeal, cassava, plantains, or rice, made with milk or water and brown sugar, and served with tea or coffee and bread. Eggs are also commonly eaten at breakfast. One of the most popular Guyanese breakfasts is salt fish and bake (bakes are bread dough that is fried, not baked). Dried, salted codfish has been eaten in Guyana since colonial times. It was imported from North America, and slaves on the plantations were given an allowance of it to last throughout the week. While some start their day with hearty stews and one-pot meals, these mainly make their appearance at lunch and dinner. *Pepperpot,* a stewed meat dish that originated with the Amerindians, is considered the national dish of Guyana. *Cassareep,* a sauce made from the liquid of the bitter cassava, which is poisonous until cooked, is a key ingredient. (It is also sold in stores.) Cassareep is used as a preservative for the stew. It is said that through the addition of more cassareep and meat to them, pepperpots can last indefinitely. There are rumors of the stews lasting 25 years or more. Pepperpot is always served at Christmas.

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***Pepperpot***

*Serves 8*

**Ingredients**

1 cow heel, quartered, or 2 pig trotters
2 lb beef stew meat
2 lb oxtail
1 c cassareep (recipe follows, or use bottled)
1 large onion, chopped
3 cloves garlic, chopped
2 red hot peppers
1 cinnamon stick
3 cloves
2 tbsp brown sugar
1 bunch fresh thyme, or 1 tsp dried thyme
Salt to taste

**Instructions**

1. Clean meat. Place the cow heel or trotters in a large, covered soup pot. Cover with water, and bring to a boil. Cover with lid, reduce heat to a simmer, and cook for about 1 hour. Skim any accumulated fat off top.
2. Add beef and oxtail. Add more water to cover. Cover with lid and cook for about 1 hour.
3. Add remaining ingredients, and simmer until meat is tender. Serve hot.

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***Cassareep***

*Makes about 1 cup*

**Ingredients**

4 lb bitter cassava
1 c water

1 tbsp brown sugar

1 cinnamon stick

1 tbsp cloves

**Instructions**

1. Peel and grate the cassava.
2. Place grated cassava in a dishtowel or cheesecloth. Twist and squeeze to extract liquid into saucepan. Discard the solids, or reserve for another use. (The liquid at this stage is poisonous until cooked.)
3. Add water, brown sugar, cinnamon, and cloves. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the mixture becomes thick and syrupy.

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Other one-pot dishes include *cookup rice*—the Guyanese version of rice and peas, made with coconut and salt pork—and *metemgee,* a stew made with plantains, yam, okra, coconut, meat, and salt fish.

Curry with roti, East Indian in heritage, is a very popular meal for lunch or dinner. The curry may be meat, fish, or vegetarian, such as *dhaal* (peas). Roti is a flatbread made of flour and a little fat. The curry is often stuffed inside and eaten as a wrap. The Chinese introduced their noodle dishes, lo mein and chow mein, into Guyanese cuisine. Made as an entire dish, they contain vegetables and sometimes meat. Chinese fried rice is another popular complete dish, often served with fried chicken.

Pastries, found in all shapes and sizes and made with a variety of ingredients, are no doubt a British influence. Examples of popular Guyanese pastries are *pine* (pineapple) tarts, cheese rolls, cassava pones, *salara* (coconut roll), meat patties, and tennis rolls (which are sweet rolls flavored with lemon).

Black cake is made around Christmastime. It is similar to fruitcake in the United States and western Europe, although it is closer to, and stems from, British plum pudding. Fruits such as raisins, prunes, and cherries, considered luxuries compared to the local tropical fruits, are soaked in rum for several weeks to several months, even up to a year. The fruit is then ground and, along with brown sugar and spices, made into a dense cake.

Most Guyanese prefer homemade beverages, with soft drinks made out of local fruits and spices. Ginger beer, sorrel drink, and *fly* (made with sweet potatoes or mangoes) are popular, especially during Christmastime. *Mauby,* made from the bark of a local tree, is a favorite. Homemade wine is made out of anything from potatoes and rice to mangoes and corn. Rum is ubiquitous in Guyana, considering the history and prevalence of the sugar plantations and rum factories.

## Eating Out

Many Guyanese can rarely afford to eat out; it is much more common to visit family and friends for entertainment, rather than going to restaurants. Restaurants in Guyana usually serve foods similar to what people make in their homes. Nonetheless, there are street snacks, like fried plantains and *channa* (roasted chickpeas) and casual takeout-type places, often for lunch, serving things like curry and roti, macaroni pie, and Chinese fried rice and chicken.

## Special Occasions

Religious and national holidays and festivals mark times to celebrate in Guyana. Christmas is one of the biggest celebratory times of the year, and food plays a major role. Pepperpot is always made; ham is a special treat, along with black cake. Ginger beer, mauby, and sorrel drink are especially popular this time of year. There are always huge parties on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and Boxing Day (the day after Christmas), influenced by British culture.

The season's parties continue into the New Year, with celebrations happening on New Year's Eve, New Year's Day, and the day after New Year's. As the holiday party season comes to a close, Guyanese tend to rev up the intensity of their parties, in a sort of competition, putting everything into a party before the end of the holiday season.

For entertainment year-round, people usually have parties at home and invite family and friends over, rather than going out. Social occasions revolve around food and music. Guyanese parties include day-to-day foods, but the mark of a successful party is the quantity and variety.

Religious customs around food are observed by the various groups in Guyana. For example, fasting is observed during Lent by Christians, and Hindus and Muslims in Guyana observe various religious holidays and festivities. Hindus celebrate Phagwah, or Holi, the Festival of Colors, in the spring. Another Hindu celebration, Diwali, the Festival of Lights, takes place in October. The sharing of sweets is a significant part of this celebration. With the melting-pot culture of Guyana, non-Hindus also participate in these celebrations. Guyana has a notable number of Muslims, and Eid al-Fitr is a celebration marking the end of Ramadan, the holy month of fasting.

Republic Day, also called Mashramani (or "Mash" for short), is celebrated on February 23. Established in 1970, the day commemorates Guyana becoming a republic. It is a colorful, festive day, with parades, costumes, music, and dancing. Food is, of course, a big part of the celebration. Guyana also celebrates Independence Day and Emancipation Day.

## Diet and Health

The Guyanese diet is full of a variety of foods, but the goal is to maintain a healthy, balanced diet, which can be difficult, particularly in rural areas. With a poor economy, relying too heavily on inexpensive and plentiful ground provisions may mean missing out on important nutrients, which could lead to malnutrition, especially among children. The Food and Nutrition Unit of Guyana's Ministry of Health is working hard toward making sure the country's citizens have access to and maintain a healthy diet.

*Erin Laverty*

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# Haiti

## Overview

Covering a total of 10,700 square miles, only 28 percent of which is arable land, the republic of Haiti comprises 10 departments (*departements*) and lies adjacent to the Dominican Republic on its eastern border. Both countries cohabit the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean Sea. Formerly a French colony called Sainte Dominique, in 1804 Haiti became the only nation in the world to have undergone a successful slave rebellion. Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere: Over 80 percent of Haiti's 8,400,000 inhabitants live in poverty. Most Haitians live in rural areas, with a large proportion of the population centered in the capital of Port-au-Prince, though this is less the case since the devastating earthquake in January 2010. Many wealthy Haitians and foreigners live in Petionville, a French-like suburb located north of Port-au-Prince high in the mountains surrounding the city. Exports traditionally have been based on the major agriculture and industries in Haiti: baseballs and clothing manufacturing, coffee, sisal, sugar, bananas, cacao, cotton, textiles, rice, rum, and fish. Deforestation contributes to soil loss and subsequent problems with cropping, agriculture, and food supplies.

With respect to religious affiliation, the population includes 80 percent Roman Catholics and 16 percent Protestants; the remainder follows other practices. Over half the population practices vodun (voodoo), regardless of their primary religious beliefs.

The average caloric intake in Haiti runs around 1,730 per day, in contrast to the 3,330 average in the United States. Most Haitians eat a vegetarian diet, not because they choose to, but because they cannot afford meat. The percentage of calories from meat comes to about 0.8 percent of total intake. Grains provide approximately 43.8 percent, while roots chip in 10.6 percent, milk and eggs 1.8 percent, and beans 9.6 percent.

Haitian cooking results in a true melting pot—French, West African, native Indian, and Spanish, sprinkled with a bit of Syrian and Lebanese tastes from waves of immigration in the 19th century. Some regionalism is apparent, as in the use of nuts like cashews in the north around Cap Haïtien and fish and seafood in the south near Jacmel and on down to Jeremie. Geographic isolation and seasonal factors have affected the diet of Haitians over the centuries, and still do. In 2010 a catastrophic magnitude-7 earthquake struck near Port-au-Prince, killing thousands and leaving perhaps a million people homeless.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Claude and Marie-Louise Latortue live off John Brown, a major thoroughfare in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Claude works for one of the many nongovernmental organizations offering humanitarian assistance to Haiti, and Marie-Louise teaches at a local high school. Their four children range in age from 2 to 15 years. Living with the Latortues is Claude's mother, Celeste, who does most of the food shopping and the cooking, although three times a week a young woman named Ritha comes to help with house cleaning and the laundry.

Celeste still likes to shop at the huge Marché en Fer (Iron Market), also called Marché Vallières, in the

center of Port-au-Prince, built from iron girders originally destined for India but delivered instead to Port-au-Prince, another twist in the turbulent history of Haiti. If she doesn't have time to shop at the Marché en Fer, Celeste goes to the street next to the cathedral in Petionville, where the "Madame Saras" (female street vendors) set up their wares on the ground. Following local custom, Celeste always buys from the same vendor and, therefore, in return for her loyalty, receives excellent quality for less money. Bargaining often helps Celeste to bring the prices down considerably. Celeste also shops occasionally at a French butcher shop on Delmas, another busy street leading down from Petionville to central Port-au-Prince. When she needs certain special foods, she goes to the only large Western-style supermarket, the "Caribbean," also located in Petionville.

A wide range of foods—both local and imported—are available to the Latortues, many of which they buy only for holidays and feast days. Celeste usually fills a typical weekly market bag—a large basket-like bag modeled on those of French country housewives—with the following foods: salted fish, beef, pork, chicken, evaporated milk, red beans, white rice, cornmeal, smoked herrings, spaghetti, hot dogs, yams, cassava, Scotch bonnet peppers, seasonal fruits, plantains, avocados, peanut butter, a pumpkin-like squash called *joumou,* okra, onions, shallots, garlic, thyme, parsley, Maggi bouillon cubes, sweetish Haitian bread, and oatmeal.



The Iron Market gate's cupolas rise above a sea of stalls and vendors, Port-au-Prince, Haiti. (National Geographic | Getty Images)

## Major Foodstuffs

Because Haiti is so mountainous and arable land is so scarce, Haitians use ingenious methods of terracing to increase the land available for planting. The most important Haitian food is *diri,* rice. The old saying goes that without rice in the meal, "Nou poko manje" (we haven't eaten). Other grains of importance include corn, wheat, and millet, although only the extremely poor eat millet (*piti mi*). The majority of the calories available to the average Haitian come from grains and other carbohydrates, eaten as porridges, noodles, and mush. One interesting item illustrating the fusion of foodstuffs in Haiti is the bulgur wheat brought to the islands by Syrian and Lebanese immigrants in the 19th century. Although in the larger cities, and particularly in the capital Port-au-Prince, bakeries provide French-style baguettes, the bread of choice for most Haitians regardless of class is bread baked in a square shape, with a slight sweet taste and a fluffier texture than the French bread.

Beans, or legumes, play a vital role in the Haitian diet. A daily favorite of Haitians from all economic levels, rice and beans together form the bulk of the diet for many Haitians. The flavor of the beans, and the different colors (red, pinto, black, petite, pigeon, Congo), cause people to feel they're not eating the same thing again and again. In addition to beans,



Men and women winnowing rice in Haiti. (StockPhotoPro)

peanuts add protein and flavor to the Haitian diet, chiefly as spiced peanut butter and in the form of peanut brittle.

Pork and other meats form only a small part of the diet for most Haitians. In 1978, because of fear of African swine fever, the United States and the U.S. Agency for International Development eradicated the native Haitian black pigs, the *cochons noirs* sacred to the *loas,* or vodun gods. The newly introduced pink American pigs never really took the place of the beloved black pigs, because they ate everything with no discrimination. Other meat—in the form of beef, goat, and lamb or mutton—appears on Haitian tables, regularly for the wealthy and only occasionally for the poorer citizens.

**_Griyo_ (Glazed Pork)**

*Serves 4*

¼ c peanut oil

2 lb boneless pork, cut into 2-in. cubes

1 c finely chopped onions

¼ c finely chopped shallots

1 c fresh orange juice

¼ c fresh lime juice

¼ c water

½ tsp crumbled dried thyme

1 tsp salt

½ tsp freshly ground black pepper

½ small Scotch bonnet pepper

In a large, wide, heavy stainless steel pot, heat the oil over medium heat until almost smoking. Add pork cubes and turn them frequently with a wooden spoon to brown them on all sides. Stir in the onions, shallots, orange and lime juices, water, thyme, salt, black pepper, and hot pepper. Bring mixture to a boil over high heat, cover, and reduce heat to low. Simmer for about 30 minutes. Uncover the pot, turn heat up to high once more, and stir often to keep meat from sticking. Cook for about 10 minutes, or until the sauce thickens to a syrupy glaze.

Poultry plays an important role in Haitian cooking; chiefly chicken is used, but turkey, duck, and guinea fowl end up in pots and frying pans, too. Eggs tend to be sold in the markets rather than eaten by people in the rural areas.

Because Haiti enjoys a long 1,100-mile coastline, seafood figures prominently in the diet of some of the population. Most coastal dwellers include some fresh fish in their diets: shrimp, conch, and *tri-tri,* a small, almost-invisible fish that some say resembles plankton, only larger, used to flavor rice. Lobster, prized for its succulent white flesh, often ends up sold to tour companies for beach parties, grilled on racks set right on the sand over flaming wood fires. Dried, smoked, and salted fish also augment the Haitian diet, much as they did during the days of slavery and early years of freedom, and they remain one of the very West African–influenced components of the Haitian diet.

As a country situated on a tropical island, Haiti enjoys a rich variety of fruit. Mangoes, oranges, loquats, mandarins, *quenepa* or *mamoncillo* (a small, tart, oval green fruit), pineapples, bananas, papayas, coconuts, passion fruit, limes, lemons, cantaloupes, soursops, star apples (a purplish fruit with a star-shaped seed pattern inside), watermelons, and even strawberries from the mountains of Kenscoff high above Port-au-Prince—all contribute to the astonishing variety of the Haitian diet and form the basis for many delicious drinks.

Many types of vegetables grow in Haiti, most brought from elsewhere, joining some of the native varieties. Root vegetables like malanga, yams, sweet potatoes, and cassava provide another source of carbohydrates other than bread in the Haitian diet. Other vegetables include beets, corn, cabbage, pumpkin-like squash (joumou), eggplant (*aubergine, bélangère*), hearts of palm (*chou palmiste*), okra (*gombo*), green beans, carrots, tomatoes, green peas, watercress, sweet bell peppers, christophene (mirliton, chayote), and breadfruit.

Flavorings run the gamut from the usual black pepper and salt to onions, shallots, garlic, parsley, thyme, cilantro, Scotch bonnet peppers, cashew nuts, cloves, and tiny black mushrooms called *djon-djon,* usually added to rice to turn it black. *Picklises,* vegetables cut up and pickled in vinegar with hot peppers, turn up in a multitude of dishes, but diners also add spoonfuls of picklises (or *pikliz*) to their food at the table. Fats used in Haitian food preparation include lard, shortening, peanut oil, and vegetable oil. Butter appears in some European pastries and in upscale restaurants catering to the wealthy and to foreigners.

Sugarcane served as the mainstay of the slavery-driven economy of the French colony of Sainte Dominique. Nowadays, most of the sugarcane on the island grows in the Dominican Republic, but Haitians still chew sugarcane stalks and suck out the juice from the fibers. Haitian sugarcane forms the basis for some of the best rum in the world. Another product that comes from sugarcane is *clairin,* a clear, raw alcohol produced only in Haiti and drunk by many rural people and poor people in the cities. Haitians also use raw clairin and drinks called *trempés,* steeped with medicinal herbs, in vodun ceremonies and practices. *Tafia* is another strong drink made from sugarcane.

## Cooking

Haitians say of a woman who is a good cook, "Li gen dis dwet li," or "she has her 10 fingers." History has influenced modern Haitian cooking considerably. A veritable cauldron of culinary stew, Haiti's cuisine hints of Africa, France, Spain and the Middle East, and native Taino and Arawak Indians.

The Black Code of 1685 of Louis XIV decreed the following for food per week for the slaves over age 10: 2.5 pots of manioc, 3 cassavas, and 2 pounds salted beef or 3 pounds salted fish. Salted fish was one of the ways in which slaves were paid for, other than rum and Spanish coins. Slave dishes still part of the Haitian diet include *diri ak djon-djon* (rice with djon-djon), *diri ak pwa kole* (rice with beans in their own sauce), *lambi* (conch), griyo (*griots,* or fried pork cubes), and *akra de mori* (salt cod fritters) mixed with malanga (yautia). *Pen patat* (*pain patate*), a popular pudding-like dish, is made with sweet potatoes. Cooks make *thiaka,* a stew of corn and beans, which is also called *mange-mete* and thought to be a favorite of Azzaca, the vodun god of agriculture. *Akassan,* a beverage made with corn, resembles the *horchatas* of Mexico and Spain. Slave names stuck with these despised foods, particularly names for animal parts. Food-gathering traditions common to all slaveholding areas—gardening, fishing, salting, and smoking—persist in Haiti.

Wealthy families employ cooks. They may also have a few *restaveks* (from the French *rester avec,* "to stay with"), a modern version of child slavery. Poor families hand over their children to a wealthier family in return for small fee and the added relief of not having another mouth to feed. In families with restaveks, the restaveks cook their own food, generally cornmeal with the heads of dried herring. The restaveks assist the other servants in their chores, including cooking.

Aside from the wealthier families, who possess Western-style kitchens but don't always use them for cooking typical food, most Haitians cook over small one-burner grills called *rechos,* fueled with small gas or propane tanks or charcoal (*charbon*). The need for this traditional cooking fuel is the chief reason for the devastating deforestation all over Haiti.

Because of the simplicity of most Haitian kitchens, the most used cooking techniques are boiling, sautéing, frying, and grilling. Pots generally are aluminum, and except in very remote areas, plastic tubes, bottles, and other equipment help cooks in meal preparation. Measuring utensils include dis-



Typical cooking equipment in a makeshift kitchen in Haiti. (iStockPhoto)

carded cans. Large wooden mortars and pestles, similar to those still used in Africa, provide a mechanism for pulverizing corn, millet, and other foods. Long wooden spoons carved from tree branches serve as stirrers for corn porridge.

A number of flavoring methods assist in making blander foods like cornmeal more palatable. As is the case with many cuisines, Haitians prepare a sort of mirepoix, or aromatic base that flavors many dishes, called *zepis* (derived from the French word *épices,* or spices), consisting of garlic, bell peppers, onion, scallions, cilantro, parsley, and oil. Pikliz (picklises, pickles) provide another flavoring agent with a bite. Essentially pickled Scotch bonnet peppers, the mixture also includes shredded vegetables—cabbage, carrots, onions—as well as other vegetables like green peas or green beans, garlic, black peppercorns, cloves, and vinegar. Cooks use Maggi cubes of differing flavors, including one manufactured with the flavor of djon-djon, the beloved Haitian black mushrooms.

## Typical Meals

In Haiti, people tend to follow a pattern of three meals a day. In rural areas, people tend to share utensils, and not everyone can eat together at the same time because of the lack of utensils for each person. Because tables and chairs are also in short supply, the oldest people sit (or the father sits), while others squat down and eat off of a plate or from a dish made out of a calabash. The poor eat a mixture of red beans, corn, and yams with their fingers and might utilize old cans as drinking glasses. Manioc bread takes the place of the more expensive wheat bread usually found in the larger towns and cities.

### ***Sos Pwa Rouj* (Red Beans in Sauce)**

*Serves 8*

2 c small red beans, cleaned and picked over
½ small white onion
3 tbsp peanut oil
2 cloves garlic, peeled and finely chopped
¾ c fresh flat-leaf Italian parsley, finely chopped
Salt
Freshly ground black pepper to taste

Put beans and half onion in a large pot with enough water to cover the beans by 2 inches. Bring to a boil. Cover pot, reduce heat to low, and simmer about 1½ to 2 hours, or until beans are very tender. Drain, retaining the cooking liquid. There should be about 3 cups of liquid. If there is too much liquid, boil it down. If too little, add water to reach 3 cups of liquid. Take 1½ cups of cooked beans, and put into a blender or food processor along with 1 cup of bean liquid. Puree. Stir the puree into the remaining liquid and remaining whole beans.

Heat the oil in a heavy frying pan. Add the garlic and ½ cup of the parsley and cook briefly, making sure to avoid burning the garlic. Stir in the bean mixture, and season with salt and about ½ teaspoon of ground black pepper. Heat the sauce gently, until the raw garlic taste is no longer apparent and the sauce is the consistency of thick buttermilk. Stir in the remaining parsley and check for seasoning. Serve over white rice with griyo and hot sauce.

Breakfast usually occurs between 6:30 and 7:30 A.M., before people rush off to school or work.

The meal generally always includes sweetened coffee (café au lait) and could consist of bread with spiced peanut butter called *mamba;* cornmeal mush with sliced avocado and smoked herring; oatmeal; breakfast spaghetti with a light tomato sauce and sliced hot dogs; rice pudding; small boiled breakfast plantains with hard-boiled eggs and smoked herring with onions and tomato sauce; or yams or cassava served with hot dogs in a tomato sauce. Cold, dried breakfast cereals are perceived as food for the wealthy.

The big meal of the day, lunch, takes place when people come home from work or school during the midday break, which usually lasts several hours. The menu is generally rice and beans cooked with ham hocks if the family is wealthy enough, peas, and meat in a sauce (chicken, goat, pork, turkey). Occasionally there is fish or some wild game. Dumplings made with wheat flour are also added to stews at times. Families might place a Scotch bonnet pepper on the table so people can cut off a bit to put on their own plates to eat with the meal. Otherwise, jars of pikliz or bowls of *sauce ti-malice* —a hot pepper sauce made with peppers, tomato paste, garlic, and onions—provide the fire that many Haitians love so much.

The evening meal is small and consists of simple foods, such as sweetened oatmeal or a fried rice–like dish, plantain puree (a sweetened porridge-like dish), or boiled sweet potatoes with rice and beans. Generally cornmeal is not eaten at night.

## Eating Out

Haitians living in rural areas eat at home. Occasionally, they might eat something on the street made by the numerous women cooking fried dough like *marinades* or *patties* and other street snacks. Eating street food most often is a trend in cities and larger towns. The cries of the vendors—*Akasan cho* (hot corn drink) and *Mayi bouyi* (cornmeal mush with red beans)—ring through the air, adding to the chaotic cacophony of sound. Another popular dish eaten on the street is griyo (griots), fried pork cubes drenched in a lime sauce.

One long-standing Haitian custom, the weekly Saturday parties or get-togethers called *bamboches,* allows people the opportunity to eat outside the home. Friends and families gather to drink, eat, and tell stories. *Legim* (*legumes,* or vegetables) is eaten on Saturdays, rich with beef stewing in it. Eaten with rice, cornmeal, or boiled root vegetables, eggplant, and/or cabbage, legim is a dish influenced very much by African cooking traditions.

In Port-au-Prince and Cap Haïtien, restaurant-going plays a larger role in the daily food experience, especially among the wealthier classes. A number of high-class French restaurants always remain open and serve menus that anyone could find on the Boulevard St. Germain in Paris. One of the most famous of these restaurants was located in the arty gingerbread-facaded Hotel Oloffson, made famous in English novelist Graham Greene's *The Comedians* (1966). Lebanese restaurants also serve a wealthier clientele, and the food appears to be the same as that served in Beirut or elsewhere in the Middle East—lamb kebabs, kibbe, and hummus, accompanied by pita bread. Pizza places like Domino's Pizza in Petionville provide Italy's most famous dish as well.

Other opportunities exist for eating out at the various beach resorts dotted across the country but mostly located in Jacmel and south of Gonaive. Like the restaurants in Port-au-Prince, the fare leans toward French cuisine with a Caribbean twist, including lambi (conch) creole or breadfruit beignets.

## Special Occasions

Haiti, because of its Roman Catholic heritage, follows the feast-day calendar of the Roman Catholic Church and celebrates a large number of holy days. Several other major holidays occur throughout the year, including many associated with vodun. In addition to the official church or national holidays, birthdays, weddings, christenings, and funerals provide people with special festive food.

On January 1, New Year's Day (also Haitian Independence Day), *soup joumou* appears on menus across the country and wherever Haitians live

around the world. Made with a pumpkin-like squash and beef, this thick minestrone-like soup is usually served with homemade grenadine sherry. The following day, January 2, is Ancestors' Day, when Haitians pay tribute to those who fought for Haiti's independence from the French in 1804. Families serve turkey as they prepare the largest meal of the year in a feast not unlike the American Thanksgiving feast but cooked very differently from the U.S. manner—piquant pikliz vinegar seasons the turkey.

Carnival-like festivities take place on January 6, the day of Epiphany in the Roman Catholic Church, and again in May. Just before Lent, on Mardi Gras, *benye* (beignets) or fried fritters satiate appetites. Roving *rara* bands dance and sing in the streets, asking listeners for food and money during Carnival and Lent and on Good Friday. People give them whatever they have. On Good Friday, cooks prepare meals featuring the white beans usually cooked on Sundays. For breakfast, people might eat herrings, boiled eggs, and bread, while the dinner menu includes fish, root vegetables, salad, white rice, and more white beans.

A summer pilgrimage celebration of the Virgin Mary takes place on July 16—also the day of Our Lady of Mount Carmel—in Saut d'Eau, a site where an apparition of the Virgin Mary appeared in the 1800s. This celebration also commemorates Erzulie, the vodun goddess of love. A number of cows and goats are sacrificed, and people drink a lot of clairin, dance, and throw themselves into the water.

The Day of the Dead, November 2, is the Roman Catholic All Souls' Day, as well as a vodun feast day, Fete Gede, which honors the family of *loa* or spirits associated with death and fertility. In Fete Gede celebrations, people rub themselves with hot pepper juice for "possession" and drink coffee and peppered alcohol. Fete Gede is like a New Year's Day for the dead; the practice originated with slaves brought from Dahomey, Yorubaland, Congo, and Angola. A typical menu, subject to variation, features greens, yams, macaroni and cheese, cornbread, red beans and rice, cabbage, baked chicken, fried red snapper, and sweet potato pudding. People also eat thiaka (also called mange-mete) or cornmeal mush with red beans. The day serves as a way for Haitians to get in touch symbolically with their familial roots.

As in the Mexican Day of the Dead practices, Haitians celebrating Fete Gede build altars for remembering their dead and all the good things they liked while alive. A typical altar in honor of Gede might include cigarettes; clarin spiced with Scotch bonnet peppers; a picture of a small white skull; white, black, and purple candles and satin cloth; numerous crosses; a miniature coffin; sequined bottles; and a portrait of St. Gerard, the Catholic saint associated with Baron Samedi, the vodun god of death, along with the mandatory top hat and cane, symbols of the baron. In November, along with the Day of the Dead celebrations, Manje-Yam, a harvest festival celebrating the yam, takes place.

Christmas Eve celebrations tend to follow the French pattern of *reveillon,* or "reawakening," with a large meal after midnight mass. Children are allowed to drink anisette. On the following day, Christmas, families offer guests *kremas,* a type of eggnog often made with pineapple; fried pork (griyo); pickles (pikliz); fried plantains; and sweet potato pudding (pain patate).

Other special occasions include all the family-related events like Sunday dinners and get-togethers, when white beans, macaroni and cheese, and chicken or Haitian turkey load down the tables in wealthier families. Weddings, first communions, funerals, and wakes see such traditional foods as *akra* (fried patties) made with malanga, patties, and roasted or fried goat being served. Traditionally, goats were slaughtered for family reunions, first communions, and confirmations.

Birthdays bring out the best in cooks. A typical menu in a wealthier household might include fried plantains, *tassot* (beef), chicken, green salad, *macaroni au gratin,* potato salad, *gratin pomme de terre* (potatoes au gratin), and diri ak djon-djon (rice with djon-djon mushrooms) with shrimp and green peas.

Another special occasion for Haitian villagers is the *coumbites,* or common work parties, when people work together on a community project. Either



Flowers are sold to observers of Day of the Dead celebrations at the National Cemetery in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. (Getty Images)

yams with milk or cornmeal covered with red bean sauce are served at the end of days spent working on coumbites.

## Diet and Health

Aside from some of the foods associated with vodun, Haitians profess beliefs about food as it relates to health. In Haiti, bread soup is said to have properties similar to those of chicken soup in U.S. culture. Pineapple-skin juice is thought to be a blood and body cleanser, while people believe that drinking beet juice will rejuvenate and invigorate people, by putting more red in their blood, and give them strength for difficult and trying times.

Humoral medical theories, based on ancient Greek ideas passed down through the centuries by groups throughout the Mediterranean, still hold sway in Haiti, particularly in rural areas. Many people in rural Haiti suffer from varying degrees of malnutrition. Hot–cold beliefs impact greatly on nutritional status, particularly that of pregnant and lactating women. One practice illustrating the poverty of Haiti is the eating of clay by pregnant women, which may increase their calcium intake, a practice also common in parts of Africa.

Clay eating is not limited to pregnant women. Mudcakes, called *teh,* are eaten in conditions of extreme hunger. People take what vegetables they can find and mix these with mud that has been strained to get out the stones and other debris. They form the mud and vegetables into flat cakes and then dry them in the sun. People eat them like that, without further cooking or preparation. In contrast, obesity

is becoming a problem among those Haitians with more money to spend on food.

*Cynthia D. Bertelsen*

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# Hawaii

## Overview

Hawaii is an isolated archipelago in the Pacific Ocean located thousands of miles from the nearest continent. Of the hundreds of islands comprising the chain, only seven are occupied by humans: Niʻihau, Kauaʻi, Oʻahu, Molokaʻi, Lanaʻi, Maui, and Hawaii. Polynesians originally settled the Hawaiian Islands more than 1,000 years ago, bringing with them many of their principal foodstuffs. Western contact began in 1778, when Captain Cook encountered Hawaii for the first time. The independent Kingdom of Hawaii was eventually annexed by the United States and, in 1959, became America's 50th state.

Since contact, subsequent settlers have added foods from their homelands to Hawaiian cuisine. Hawaii has a diverse population, with no single ethnicity constituting a majority. Many Hawaii residents have mixed ethnic backgrounds and claim numerous modern ethnicities as their own. The population is roughly 56 percent Asian, which includes a mixture of Japanese (39%), Filipino (36%), Chinese (10%), and Korean (5%). Caucasians make up 34 percent of the population. Only 11 percent of Hawaii's population now claims Pacific Islander descent. Hawaii's mixed heritage is reflected in the eclectic local foodways common throughout the islands.

## Food Culture Snapshot

The Baker family live in Mililani, on the island of Oʻahu. Katie Baker is an attorney who commutes to downtown Honolulu for work. Her husband, Nic Baker, is a chemist and works for a local diagnostic laboratory. Their young daughter, Eleanor, attends preschool. Like most middle-class Hawaiian residents, the Bakers' foodways are diverse and, despite personal preferences, fairly representative of contemporary Hawaiian foodways.

The Bakers do most of their grocery shopping at one of the large supermarkets. Dry goods, produce, meats, and dairy are all readily available from any one of the chains located near their house. Nic takes Eleanor to a farmers' market every Sunday morning to shop for additional veggies and fresh bread. The Bakers also make occasional trips to specialty shops, such as a fish store, wine shop, bakery, or chocolatier.

Much of what the Bakers buy are foods that they prepare at home themselves. This includes basic ingredients such as meats, vegetables, and staples like flour, sugar, and eggs, as well as commercial products like dried pasta, bottled sauces, and canned or frozen goods. They also buy some prepared foods, like bread. Additionally, child-friendly foods are purchased for Eleanor, such as animal-shaped crackers or fruit juice. These foods are only supplementary; Eleanor usually eats the same foods as her parents. The Bakers, who are environmentally conscious, buy many items in bulk with reduced packaging and employ reusable containers for portioning these foods and beverages.

Breakfast is made and eaten at home, early in the day, after which point Katie and Nic pack lunches for themselves, often including leftovers from the preceding night's dinner that they will reheat at work. Both Katie and Nic occasionally eat out for lunch, frequently with colleagues or clients. A hot lunch

consisting of typical local food is provided for Eleanor at preschool. Dinner, which Nic usually cooks, is eaten together as a family in the evening. Meals are somewhat health conscious, to encourage Eleanor to develop healthy eating habits. The Bakers also eat dinner out at least once a week. The Bakers' routine is relaxed on weekends, when mealtimes change, foods may be more elaborate and/or luxurious, and snacking is more common.

## Major Foodstuffs

Hawaii produces very little of its own foodstuffs. Once the host of pineapple and sugar plantations, Hawaii now produces very little of these products. High land values and the cost of labor have made Hawaii unattractive for agricultural use. Specialty goods, which fetch higher prices, have managed to remain successful in Hawaii. There is some commercial coffee production and a large grass-fed beef industry on Hawaii Island. Most of these products, however, are exported. Small-scale production of fruit and vegetables is becoming more common and provides farmers' markets and fruit stands with their goods. Beyond this, almost all of the food residents of Hawaii consume is imported.

One exception is fish. Hawaii has a multi-million-dollar fishing industry that is one of the largest in the United States. Hawaii residents fish recreationally, as well as commercially, with more than a quarter of the population participating in some form of fishing annually. While fish is one of the chief exports, it is also one of the most popular local foods. Hawaiians, on average, consume more than twice as much fish per person per year as other Americans. Although most of the seafood consumed is locally caught, some cold-water varieties, such as salmon and mussels, are imported to Hawaii.

**Salmon Poke**

1 lb raw salmon, cut into bite-sized cubes

½ c soy sauce

¼ c green onion, diced

½ tsp Hawaiian salt

1 tsp honey

1 tsp sesame oil

2 tbsp orange juice

¼ tsp orange zest

½ tsp fresh ginger, grated

½ tsp minced garlic

3 tbsp *yasai fumi furikake* (Japanese rice seasoning)

Mix ingredients in a bowl. Cover and refrigerate at least 3 hours. Stir and serve chilled.

Tropical fruit is also consumed in large quantities in Hawaii. Some of these fruits were introduced from tropical Asia, while others are South American in origin. Many fruits, such as bananas and papayas, are grown on a small scale for year-round consumption. Locals favor petite apple-bananas, which have a firmer, sweeter, but also slightly tangier flesh than the common Cavendish bananas, known in Hawaii as "mainland bananas." Papayas are often cultivated but are also known as an invasive weed species. Several types of guavas are available, including common guavas, lemon guavas, and strawberry guavas, the last of which are also considered a weed fruit. Tart yellow passion fruit, called *lilikoi* in Hawaii, is a more seasonal fruit that is popular for its strong flavor but is also an invasive vine in the wild. Mangoes are one of the most popular seasonal fruits in Hawaii, ripening in the late summer and early fall. Hadens are, by far, the most common variety of mangoes, although dozens of others can be found as well. Mangoes are not exported from Hawaii due to the prevalence of mango seed weevils in the state. Coconuts, both green and ripe, can also be found, but derived coconut products are more common than the actual fruit. A firm pudding made of coconut milk, called *haupia,* is a popular dessert often served at luau or as part of a traditional Hawaiian meal.

Wheat and rice are the most important grains in Hawaii. Wheat flour is used for bread as well as for noodles. Bread is eaten on its own, as an accompaniment for meals, or as the basis for sandwiches, much like in the continental United States. White bread made from refined flour is predominant, but

healthier whole wheat and multigrain breads are gaining popularity as Hawaii residents become more health conscious. Wheat noodles, such as the thin ramen-like *saimin* noodles, are a regular part of the Hawaiian diet and reflect Japanese and Chinese influences. A strong Asian influence is also witnessed in the preference for short-grain white rice, which has become a staple in Hawaii, accompanying many, if not most, meals.

Many native Hawaiian foods are still eaten. The most important of these foods is taro, known as *kalo* in Hawaiian. The kalo plant has several edible parts, including the leaves, the stems, and the corm, which is the starchy bulbous portion of the stalk found underground. All parts of kalo must be cooked well to break down the calcium oxalate crystals, which can cause an itching or burning sensation in the mouth and throat if not treated properly. Kalo is distinguished by the color of the corm (white, pink, yellow, purple) and whether it was grown in a marshlike wetland field system or a dryland field system. Kalo is prepared in a number of different ways, but *poi,* a paste of cooked and mashed corm, was the cornerstone of the Hawaiian diet and is still eaten by locals. Poi can be eaten when it is freshly prepared, but it may also be left to ferment for several days so that it requires a stronger sour flavor and a more favorable texture.



Poi being scooped by two fingers, the traditional way to eat it, on a tea leaf. (808isgreat | Dreamstime.com)

The other principal native Hawaiian food still eaten today is the sweet potato (*ʻuala*), which was introduced to Hawaii from Polynesian contact with South America hundreds of years before Western contact. Other native Hawaiian foods, such as *ʻulu* (breadfruit), a starchy arbor crop; bananas (*maiʻa*); coconuts (*niu*); and mountain apples (*ʻohiʻa ʻai*), are all still part of the modern Hawaiian foodscape. The native Hawaiians also cultivated *ko,* a grassy plant originally domesticated in Southeast Asia and Papua New Guinea. Eventually ko was commoditized and became an important part of the emerging global economy. Although ko production has all but vanished from Hawaii, it is still, at least in the United States, strongly associated with the Hawaiian Islands. Ko, more widely known by its English name, sugar, is still a large part of the modern Hawaiian diet but in an increasingly less healthy way.

## Cooking

The cooking techniques of Hawaii are the same as those found in most westernized kitchens in developed countries. Electric rice cookers are commonly employed to make the steamed white rice that is one of the islands' staples, as already discussed. Baking, roasting, and broiling are done in modern ovens, and boiling, steaming, sautéing, and frying are done on modern gas or electric ranges. Quick cooking techniques, such as sautéing and broiling, are favored due to Hawaii's largely tropical climate, which makes the heat from slow cooking methods unpleasant, especially in summer months.

The warm weather also results in the relishing of cold and raw foods. Frozen and iced desserts are especially popular, and fresh fruit is a readily available room-temperature treat. Hawaii has indigenous raw-fish traditions, as does Japan, whose culture has so heavily influenced the Hawaiian Islands. *Poke* consists of chopped, usually raw, seafood, which is marinated and eaten, similar to ceviche. Poke is featured at most local picnics and cookouts, and it can be purchased at any supermarket or fish shop.

The climate also favors outdoor cooking. Outdoor grilling and roasting are common practices in the evening on weekdays or for lunch or dinner during weekends. Self-contained grills, either gas or charcoal, are used for this purpose. Portable grills are also popular and are set up at beaches or in parks so hot meals can be prepared away from home, often as part of a social gathering or celebration. Occasionally food is roasted over a small open fire or a beach bonfire, usually whole fresh-caught fish, but this practice is becoming rare as restrictions on fires become more stringent.

Another outdoor cooking method is the use of an *imu,* or underground earthen oven. Imu, one of Hawaii's most traditional ways to cook, were common in precontact times. Imu are now reserved for special occasions because their use requires more labor and time than do other cooking methods. To construct an imu a large hole is dug in the ground, into which parcels of food are placed with hot stones from a fire and then buried, allowing the food to steam-roast for hours. Many of the native Hawaiian foods favored for celebrations were cooked using this method, which is still occasionally used today.

Prior to Western contact, cooking was the provenance of native Hawaiian men. Many foods were considered *kapu,* or sacred, and were, therefore, not thought suitable for consumption by women. Women were not allowed to handle kapu foods because it was believed that contact with kapu items might endanger those women. There was also a fear that women might contaminate kapu foods they had contact with and the men who consumed them. To safeguard consumers from supernatural peril, men prepared not only their own food but also the women's food as well, keeping men's foods and women's foods separate. Today, after decades of American and Asian influence, women do the majority of domestic food preparation. Men, however, still dominate professional cooking.

## Typical Meals

Hawaiian food habits result from the combination of cultures that make up the islands' mixed population. Forks and knives, along with spoons, are the most common eating implements, although chopsticks are also ubiquitous. Most locals learn to use chopsticks as children and will use them for Asian, or predominantly Asian, foods.

Meals are typically eaten socially. Until relatively recently eating took place at a table surrounded by chairs or at a *chabudai,* a low table where diners sit on mats or cushions on the floor. Tables and chairs were set in designated eating areas in kitchens, in dining rooms, on *lānaʻi* (outdoor porch areas), or in a living room. Gathering around a table for a social meal is becoming increasingly less common, mirroring the trends found on the mainland and elsewhere. Many meals are now taken individually, on the go, and/or in front of the television. The meal pattern in Hawaii is also very similar to that of the American mainland. Breakfast is eaten in the morning, followed by lunch at midday and dinner in the evening. Snacking has become increasingly common and can take place at any time before, after, or between meals.

Breakfast ranges from simple to elaborate and can be either sweet or savory. The most common breakfast is cold cereal, eaten with milk. It is a fast meal, popular with both children and adults, and is often eaten with quick accompaniments such as toasted bread and fruit juice. Many of these cereals are high in sugars, although healthier options are also available. Other sweet breakfast items include assorted pastries, French toast, or pancakes. Tropical ingredients, such as bananas and macadamia nuts, are frequently incorporated into such dishes, which are served with tropical fruit sauces, such as coconut or guava syrup. Many sweet dishes are accompanied by savory side dishes of meat products, such as Spam or Portuguese sausage. Eggs are the basis for many savory breakfasts, alongside meat-based dishes such as corned beef hash. Savory breakfasts combine American and Asian elements. Rice is usually served in lieu of potatoes. White rice is the most common, but fried rice or kimchi fried rice is also sometimes available. *Loco moco,* a dish made of rice, hamburger patties, and fried eggs, topped with brown gravy, not only is eaten for breakfast but is popular for lunch and dinner as well.

Lunch is a variable meal that is eaten outside of the home more often than not. Workday lunches are brought from home or are purchased from restaurants, cafés, or cafeterias. Brownbag lunches often feature a sandwich or leftovers from a previous dinner. Pre-prepared items offered by stores, such as sushi sets, are frequently purchased items. Restaurant offerings are almost innumerable. Fast-food chains are also numerous, which offer their standard fare as well as some local adaptations, such as Hawaiian burgers, which include teriyaki sauce and pineapple. Most schools offer catered lunch options, which, like fast food, are criticized for the less-than-ideal nutrition they offer. Many parents opt to pack lunch for their children in order to provide a healthier meal. Weekend lunches vary greatly. Lunch may be eaten in the home, at a restaurant, at the beach, on the go, or not at all.

Dinner is typically the most substantial meal of the day and is arguably the most variable. It is eaten in the evening and often provides leftovers for future meals. Dinner is most commonly eaten in the home or at one of the thousands of restaurants in Hawaii. Local foods are eaten as well as a wide variety of ethnic food from all over the world. Many people in Hawaii finish dinner with a sweet dessert, which can be anything from simple desserts like fresh fruit or ice cream to elaborate cakes and pies.

Periodic snacking has become increasingly common in Hawaii, and there are a number of snack items frequently offered there that are not common to the rest of the United States. Favored Asian snack items include the small Japanese rice crackers called *arare,* wasabi-coated peanuts, dried shredded cuttlefish, and a variety of candies coated in salty-tart Chinese *li hing mui* powder. Li hing mui–coated fruit, both fresh and dried, is also popular, as well as a variety of pickled fruits. *Mochi,* made from sweetened rice dough, are flavored or stuffed with a variety of fillings and sold fresh or packaged. These items are found alongside typical American snack foods in grocery, drug, and convenience stores, as well as in specialty snack shops, known locally as "crack seed stores."

Many people in Hawaii are coffee drinkers, and although coffee may be drunk throughout the day, coffee is most typically an accompaniment of breakfast, regardless of what breakfast may be. Iced coffee beverages are popular in Hawaii due to its tropical climate. Tea is also consumed with meals or on its own, and like coffee, tea may be served hot or cold. Green and oolong teas are the most common. Soda is very popular, as well as sweetened juice drinks that feature local flavors such as guava, lilikoi, and lychee. Meals are typically served with a beverage, even if that beverage is plain tap water. The tap water in Hawaii is potable.

## Eating Out

Eating out has become common practice in Hawaii, and there are restaurants that cater to almost every taste and budget. Inexpensive and midrange restaurants make up the majority of dining establishments, although fine dining options are available as well. Local tastes are largely represented, but restaurants catering to tourists are also prevalent, especially in the major hotel zones.

Restaurants representing Asian cuisines are numerous in Hawaii, as are many American-style restaurants. These range from cheap take-out counters to expensive restaurants that serve as special-occasion destinations. European and Latin American foods are rare and relatively expensive, while offerings from elsewhere, such as Africa, are nonexistent. Native Hawaiian food can be purchased from a number of specialty restaurants, although some of the more common Hawaiian foods, such as *lau lau,* a ti-leaf-wrapped package of fish, pork, and kalo leaves, can be purchased at many local-style restaurants. (The ti plant was introduced from Polynesia and has broad, sturdy leaves, also used to make hula skirts.)

Hawaii has many local-style restaurants that enjoy great popularity. Diner-like restaurants, sometimes called drive-ins, serve Hawaiian plate lunches. They typically include two scoops of white rice, a scoop of macaroni salad made with a mayonnaise base, and a choice of meat, such as chicken *katsu* (a fried dish based on the Japanese *tonkatsu*), fried fish, or *kalbi* (Korean-style grilled spareribs). Chili is usually also on offer at plate-lunch establishments,

where it is eaten with rice or as a sauce for a plate lunch. These meals tend to be heavy, with large amounts of starch and protein. Many plate-lunch establishments have responded to health-conscious trends by offering smaller portions, grilled options, and brown rice. Despite the name, plate lunches are not eaten only at lunch. Many plate-lunch restaurants offer breakfast and dinner as well. Saimin shops are common, and ramen shops serving Japanese-style noodle soups are an inexpensive favorite with locals and tourists alike.

Street food is uncommon in Hawaii, but occasionally vendors offering marinated grilled or smoked meats, like *huli huli* chicken, can be found. O'ahu's north shore is also known for the shrimp vendors near the towns of Haleiwa and Kahuku, who sometimes sell live prawns from the local farms in addition to shrimp sautéed in garlic sauce. Sweets are often purchased as well. Baked goods, such as guava cream pies and haupia cakes, are sold both whole and by the slice. Shave ice, known elsewhere as snow cones and consisting of fluffy snowlike ice topped with flavored syrups, is especially popular in hot weather and is often eaten with azuki beans, ice cream, and a drizzle of sweetened condensed milk called a "snow cap."

**Hawaiian-Style *Kalbi***

4 lb beef short ribs, sliced thin

2 c shoyu (soy sauce)

2 c sugar

3 cloves garlic, minced

1 tbsp fresh ginger, grated

1 tsp sesame oil

¾ c green onion, diced

1 tsp toasted sesame seeds

Mix beef, shoyu, sugar, garlic, ginger, sesame oil, and ½ cup green onions in a bowl. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Remove short ribs from marinade, and grill over high heat until well cooked. Remove from heat, and sprinkle with sesame seeds and remaining green onion. Serve hot.

Fine-dining restaurants are most commonly found in the larger cities or luxury resorts. These restaurants tend to be more informal than their mainland counterparts but just as expensive. Most Hawaiian diners prefer a relaxed atmosphere and dress code. Hawaii boasts several internationally acclaimed chefs who have helped develop the Pacific Rim fusion offered in most of these high-end restaurants. American, Asian, Hawaiian, and European elements are blended to create Hawaii's fancier food, much in the same way everyday Hawaiian cuisine has been formed. These restaurants rely heavily on tourism as Hawaii residents tend to reserve such dining for special occasions.

## Special Occasions

Special occasions are celebrated in a number of ways. As on the mainland, dining out at nice restaurants is popular for small or intimate celebrations. When a larger celebration is desired, a party is held, either at a home, at the beach, or in a park. These are Hawaii's most famous form of celebration: the luau. A luau is a festive gathering with native Hawaiian roots that includes feasting. Similar to an American cookout, a luau is normally held outside, sometimes under a party tent. Family and friends gather to eat and drink and, more often than not, sing and dance. Local-style food is served in copious amounts. It is common for guests to bring a dish or beverage to share, although the hosts typically provide a full meal. Luau dishes often include chicken long rice (a noodle dish similar to Korean *japchae*), poke, rice, *lomi lomi* salmon (made from minced salt-cured salmon massaged with diced tomatoes and onions), roasted sweet potatoes, adobo (a savory Filipino stew), spareribs, squid *lu'au* (made from squid and taro leaves cooked in coconut cream), sweet bread (like the Portuguese *pau doce*), macaroni salad, lau lau, poi, and haupia. Luau are held for birthdays, graduations, anniversaries, and even weddings. Some of the largest luau are held to celebrate a child's first birthday, which is given special significance in Hawaii.

Commercial luau offered by hotels and tourism outfits are an entirely different affair. These luau



Traditional food that would likely be served at a luau in Hawaii. (StockPhotoPro)

are Polynesian dance showcases performed by professionals for tourists. Such events may or may not include dinner, depending on the package. When dinner is served it usually includes a variety of native Hawaiian, local, and American dishes.

Many major religious and secular holidays are celebrated in the same manner in Hawaii as they are on the U.S. mainland or elsewhere. The food served at such events often demonstrates some local variation but is in keeping with the parent tradition. Thanksgiving turkeys, for example, may be basted with soy sauce, called by its Japanese name shoyu, and dressed with rice stuffing. The day prior to Ash Wednesday, known elsewhere as Fat Tuesday, is known in Hawaii as Malasada Day. Warm *malasadas,* a fried doughnut of Portuguese origin, are eaten in revelry on this day in preparation for Lent, at which time luxuries, such as sweets, are given up by members of some Christian orders. Bon season, or Obon, is also celebrated in Hawaii. Many Hawaii residents enjoy attending Bon dances, a Japanese Buddhist custom that honors one's ancestors. Many temples host food festivals to showcase Japanese food during Bon. Watermelon and other summer foods are offered to both ancestors and festival participants alike.

Makahiki, however, is a festive period unique to Hawaii. Sometimes called Hawaiian New Year's, Makahiki celebrates the return of Lono, the god of agriculture, rain, and prosperity. Makahiki, which lasts approximately four months, was a time of peace for native Hawaiians. Offerings were made to the chiefs, religious ceremonies were conducted, family was visited, and feasts were held. Makahiki is still celebrated by native Hawaiian practitioners today, although on a much smaller scale. Traditional native Hawaiian foods are served, and food offerings may be given to Lono. Makahiki is related to other traditions in Polynesia, such as the Matariki celebration in Maori culture.

## Diet and Health

Prior to Western contact native Hawaiians enjoyed relatively good health. The combination of regular light manual labor and a diet high in nutrients and low in fat was beneficial to the majority of the population. Kalo and ʻuala are good sources of vitamins, minerals, and dietary fiber. Native Hawaiians supplemented these starchy foods with fruit, vegetables, and fish. Necessary fats were provided by regular consumption of food such as coconuts and the occasional consumption of pork, dog, and chicken.

Western contact had catastrophic effects on the native Hawaiian population, who had no resistance to the illnesses common to Europe and Asia. Many died in a short period of time, and much was lost. The introduction of new foodways has also been detrimental to native Hawaiians' health. Many new foods, such as white rice, are high in calories and low in nutrients. Eaten in moderation they pose no threat, but these foods have been incorporated into daily life, and Hawaiian portion sizes remain large despite an increasingly sedentary lifestyle. This new diet has led to a number of health problems that continue to plague the native Hawaiian community.

Native Hawaiians are significantly more likely to suffer from obesity, heart disease, and diabetes than members of the other major ethnic groups in Hawaii. These conditions have been directly linked to diet. Native Hawaiians are also more likely to suffer from many forms of cancer, including breast, lung, colon, rectal, and prostate cancer. Native Hawaiians are among the poorest Hawaii residents and some of the most underserviced in terms of health care. They are less likely to receive preventative care, diagnostic care, or treatment than other ethnic groups.

Overall, Hawaii's population is relatively healthy when compared to the rest of the United States. Hawaii has one of the lowest overall rates of adult and childhood obesity. This reflects the active, healthy lifestyle associated with the local culture. Eating patterns in Hawaii are moderate, and dietary excess is offset, in part, by outdoors activities, such as hiking, swimming, and surfing. The obesity rate, however, is following the national trend and increasing. Hawaii's population needs to embrace a healthier diet, but it doesn't necessarily need to give up tradition to do so.

*Kelila Jaffe*

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# Honduras

## Overview

Honduras, or *Guaymura* as it was originally called, covers approximately 43,000 square miles, with 510 miles of coastline, in Central America. Bordered by the Gulf of Fonseca on the south coast and the Caribbean Sea on the north coast, Honduras abuts El Salvador in the west, Guatemala in the north, and Nicaragua in the south. Honduras resembles the U.S. state of Tennessee in size, with a total population of almost eight million, 48 percent of whom live in urban areas. Only 9.53 percent of Honduras's land is arable, due to the mountain ranges cutting through the center of the country.

History, as well as geography and tropical climate, also affected the cuisine of Honduras. Christopher Columbus landed in the Bay Islands on his fourth and last visit to the New World. The Spanish brought numerous Old World foods to the area. English pirates settled the Bay Islands, and people there still speak an archaic form of English. Later, U.S.-based multinationals—United Fruit Company and Standard Fruit Company—moved in to grow and export bananas, tying Honduras to U.S. culture. Another cultural infusion came from the Lebanese and Palestinians who settled in Honduras in the early 20th century.

In spite of its Mayan heritage, amply illustrated by the classic Mayan ruins at Copán, where a stone for grinding corn for *nacatamales* (large square tamales nowadays wrapped and steamed in banana leaves) dates to 1300 B.C., Honduras today is 90 percent mestizo, or mixed Spanish and Native American. Modern-day Native American groups make up only 7 percent of the total population. Some of the cultural groups include Pech or Payas, Lenca, Xicaques, Miskitos, Chortí, and Tawahka. Another group, the Garifuna, or Black Caribs, live mostly along the north coast and contribute unique flavors to the cuisine in that region.

Religious beliefs influence some culinary practices, most centering around the 97 percent of the Honduran population professing Roman Catholicism, with the other 3 percent Protestant. The Black Caribs, or Garifuna, who live along the north coast, retain certain deities resembling those of Africa, including Liwa Mairin, a sea goddess and protector of lobster fishermen.

Caloric intake varies with social class. Over 50 percent of Hondurans live in poverty. An average of 2,400 calories per day is available to the wealthy class, in contrast to 1,972 calories per day for the poorer strata of society. Grains supply 50 percent of total calories in the Honduran diet, with fats providing 11 percent and dairy 7.4 percent.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Juan and Elvira Sanchez live in a *colonia,* or neighborhood, in Tegucigalpa, the capital and Honduras's largest city. Juan works for a bank as a loan officer, and Elvira enjoys her secretarial position with another bank. Their three children attend a Catholic parochial school not far from their house. Elvira counts on her maid, Clara, to keep the household running by cooking, shopping, and cleaning.

Clara shops in the traditional open-air San Isidro market most of the time, but she will go to the modern Paiz supermarket as well, if she needs an ingredient

not readily available at the open-air market. Clara buys a number of local foods for the Sanchez pantry, including small red beans, oil, white rice, *mantequilla crema* (a slightly soured cream with a consistency between sour cream and heavy cream), wheat flour for making bread and wheat tortillas, beef, pork, chicken, cilantro, limes, tomatoes, cabbage, salty white cheese like farmer cheese, chicken- and beef-flavored Maggi bouillon cubes, ground corn masa for making tortillas, oranges, papayas, eggs, sugar, and coffee. She prefers the big cones of sugar, called *rapadura de dulce,* which she grates for the corn-based drink *atol,* unless she makes it using the instant *Maizena El Bebe* or *pinol* mixture made with ground toasted corn kernels and cacao beans. She sometimes buys beef to make *salpicón,* a shredded beef filling for tortillas; ground beef for *picadillo,* a filling reminiscent of many Arab meat fillings; or *chuletas,* pork chops. Occasionally she buys fish or shellfish, because she likes to cook some of the dishes she learned growing up as a child in La Ceiba on Honduras's north coast. If she's in a rush and pressed for time, Clara buys the thin, ready-made tortillas at the *tortillería* around the corner from the Sanchez house.

## Major Foodstuffs

Honduras's geography and history influence what foods appear on Honduran tables. Its rich bounty has changed little since pre-Hispanic times. Grains play a vital role in Honduran cuisine. Corn, native to the Americas, forms the hub around which the Honduran diet revolves. In the form of corn on the cob, it is a snack, and, in ground form, it provides tortillas and other similar breadlike foods. Ground corn thickens stews and, when toasted, adds even more flavor. Rice and wheat also contribute tremendously to the cuisine, with rice being almost as important as corn in some areas and among certain social strata of the country. Wheat-flour tortillas and bread are major staples, as are noodles made from wheat flour.

Beans, along with corn, are central to the Honduran diet, serving as a source of protein for those without the means to eat animal protein on a daily basis. Most people choose the red bean for their meals, but black beans grace their tables at times. Beans can be eaten boiled or refried (that is, mashed and then cooked briefly in oil, generally lard).

Meat is a highly desired food item in Honduran culture, a major source of animal protein. Cattle, their importance stemming from the Spanish emphasis on herds and horses, provide beef. Pork and chicken appear frequently in recipes on tables, chiefly those of the wealthier classes. *Carne asada* (grilled meat) is one of the most popular Honduran dishes. Chorizo sausage is another highly desired food. Iguanas also are eaten, but Honduran law prohibits this; in fact, conservation projects attempt to protect iguanas. Game animals provide protein in some areas but do not form a regular supply of food.

### *Carne Asada*

*Serves 4–6*

2–3 lb flank or skirt steak

1–2 medium onions, thinly sliced

Juice of 2–3 oranges

Juice of 1 large lime

Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

¼ c extra-virgin olive oil

In a large stainless steel or glass mixing bowl, coat the meat with the onions, orange and lime juice,



*Carne asada* grilling at a Latin American food festival in Honduras. (Andrea Skjold | Dreamstime.com)

salt, pepper, and oil. Cover and marinate at least 1 hour or overnight.

Heat the grill, using mesquite charcoal if possible. Remove the meat from the marinade. With paper towels, pat dry. Grill over a hot flame until well browned on one side, about 5 to 7 minutes. Flip the meat over, and grill on the other side until cooked to desired doneness. Place on a clean platter, and let sit for about 5 minutes. Serve with rice, beans, *chilmol* (salsa), and *tajadas* (plantain chips).

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Apart from the coastal areas, seafood doesn't play a big role in Honduran cooking. Fish, shrimp, spiny lobster (caught in traps baited with cow hides preserved in salt), conch, dried salted fish, turtle, and sometimes clams add protein and flavor to the cooking of many Honduran households.

Honduras's geographic location assures the growth of a vast choice of tropical fruit. Coconuts, papayas, mangoes, *guayaba* (guavas), limes, lemons, sour oranges, pineapples, *zapotes,* passion fruit, avocados, cherimoyas (custard apple), plantains, and bananas all provide much-needed vitamins, calories, and sweetness in the diets of many Hondurans. People turn these fruits into a wide variety of juices and other drinks.

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**Baked Sweet Plantains with Cheese**

*Serves 4–6*

2 ripe plantains (*plátano maduro;* the skin should be almost black)

1/3 c butter

1 c mantequilla crema or crème fraîche

2 tbsp brown sugar

¼ tsp cinnamon

¼ c *queso fresco* or farmer cheese, crumbled

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Peel plantains and slice in half lengthwise; cut each slice in half. There will be 8 slices.

Heat 2 tablespoons of the butter in a heavy skillet until just foaming. Add the plantains and fry lightly until just golden brown. Remove from heat. Drain on paper towels.

Place the 8 slices of plantain in a greased baking dish just large enough to hold them. Cut the remaining butter into small pieces and distribute it on top of the plantains. Cover the plantains with the mantequilla crema, sugar, and cinnamon. Sprinkle the cheese on top. Cover with foil and bake at 350°F for 25 minutes, remove foil, return to oven, and bake another 5 minutes or until bubbly and golden brown.

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Vegetables grow well in Honduras, and markets abound with cabbage, carrots, squashes of various types, green peppers, hot peppers, greens, onions, garlic, tomatoes, and chayote. Cassava, white potatoes, malanga (taro), yams, and sweet potatoes all add calories and substance to the Honduran diet.

Milk products in Honduras tend to be somewhat limited. Mantequilla crema, a sour cream–like condiment, is used on refried beans and in numerous other dishes, including baked ripe plantains. *Queso blanco* (salty, crumbly white cheese), *quesillo* (white cheese similar to jack cheese), and *dulce de leche* (formed from thick, caramel-flavored, boiled-down whole milk) round out the roster of common Honduran dairy products. Ice cream, especially a homemade type called *paletas,* is very popular.

Flavorings commonly used in Honduran cooking include ground cumin, cilantro, *culantro,* chilies, salt, black pepper, achiote, cinnamon, cloves, vanilla, citrus juices, vinegar, and lard. Other fats used include palm oil, mostly on the north coast; shortening; and vegetable oil. Sugar flavors food as well and ranges from the raspadora type to fine sugar for cakes and frostings.

As in many areas close to the Caribbean, Honduras has many alcoholic beverages and products. With respect to rum, there's Flor de Caña and Bacardi, made from molasses or sugarcane juice. *Aguardiente* derives from sugarcane as well but is a rawer, less expensive product than rum. *Guaro* is another strong drink, clear and slightly sweet, made from sugarcane. When United Fruit Company owned half the north coast of Honduras, every male employee at a certain level received a bottle of Johnny

Walker Black Label scotch for Christmas. *Chicha,* made from fermented pineapple slices, is a household product, accessible to anyone with pineapples. The Garifuna make *giffity,* a liquor made with herbs and spices.

## Cooking

Cooking typically takes place on a small burner over a charcoal- or propane-fueled fire, sometimes in an outdoor kitchen or fire pit, unless a family possesses a modern Western-style kitchen. And even in those cases, the taste of the food is thought to be better if cooked in the traditional way with its smoky aura. Eye and lung damage from cooking smoke caused the government to start a program among indigenous groups like the Pech to ensure that people installed chimneys called *lorenas* in their houses. Among groups like the Pech, cooking equipment consists of wooden bowls and spoons, plastic and metal utensils, and terra-cotta and metal pots.

Boiling, baking, frying, stewing, roasting, and grilling—all cooking methods commonly used around the world—are techniques called on by cooks every day in every sort of Honduran kitchen. The principal foods of the country, tortillas and beans, both begin the cooking process by boiling. The corn is treated with *cal,* a form of lime (not the fruit but an alkali called calcium hydroxide), and ground to make masa, a process called nixtamalization. With the freshly ground masa, women traditionally spent hours patting out tortillas by hands. Thicker than the commercially produced tortillas, the hand-patted ones are becoming a thing of the past. To cook beans, cooks add water to beans and cook them until tender, a process that requires a lot of fuel.

Honduran cooks prepare foods with several different flavoring agents. One such agent is a simple *recado,* similar to the Caribbean *sofrito.* Consisting of garlic, onions, bell peppers, garlic, and perhaps achiote (annatto), this mixture goes into hot oil first. Some cooks add *aiguaste,* or toasted ground squash seeds, which thickens the liquid in a dish, an ancient practice found in many cuisines. Then cooks add the recado to meat, soups, stews, rice, or beans. On the coast, palm oil is used, as is just plain vegetable oil.

Another flavor generator is chilmol, a fresh salsa very similar to Mexico's *pico de gallo,* made with tomatoes, onions, peppers, and salt. Cilantro, ground cumin seeds, and oregano flavor a number of dishes. Thick fuzzy culantro leaves are used for meat. Cinnamon, sugar, chocolate, and vanilla flavor sweet dishes. Coconut, and coconut milk, imparts its unique flavor into numerous dishes, including soups and stews, as well as desserts. Turmeric adds yellow coloring instead of the more expensive saffron. Some local, native plants—unknown to cooks outside Central America—provide flavor. *Juniapa* (*Piper auritum*), with its heart-shaped leaves, flavors fish dishes on the north coast of Honduras.

Cooking techniques also add flavor. In Honduras, cooks fry dry rice first in recado, or just with onion. Then they add water and salt and cook the rice until tender. The prefrying adds a layer of taste absent from just plain white rice. Leaves add flavor as well. The ubiquitous tamales come wrapped in plantain leaves, which add a nutty and fresh flavor to the corn dough surrounding the various fillings used for tamales. Grilling is popular, as in the case of carne asada, or roasted meat. *Pinchos,* or grilled kebabs, are also popular and easy to prepare.

Cooks take discarded pineapple skins and make pineapple vinegar or an alcoholic beverage called chicha. Another preservation method is found in *encurtidos,* or pickled vegetables, using pineapple vinegar.

## Typical Meals

Meals in Honduras tend to follow fairly strict patterns on a daily basis, reflecting what's in the market and what culinary skills the cooks possess. Rice, beans, and tortillas form the core of meals. Breakfast begins early, around 6:30 A.M., and generally consists of the *plato típico:* fried eggs, refried beans, fried plantains, mantequilla crema, sausage, tortillas or bread, and thick sweet coffee. Some people eat milk soup for breakfast, which is boiled milk flavored with cinnamon, sugar, and lime wedges to which small cubes of bread are added.

At noon, people make their way home, if they can, and eat lunch, another version of the plato típico: meat (beef, pork chops, chicken), beans, rice, salad, tortillas or bread, and juice. Or they may just eat *sopa de olla,* a stewlike soup made with whatever meat and vegetables might be in the pantry. A jar of encurtidos (vegetable pickles) usually sits on the table to be enjoyed in small bites with the meal.

The evening meal, or *cena,* starts very late in the evening because people generally do not get home from work until around 6 or 7 P.M. The meal can be similar to lunch, but meat dishes may be *encebolleada* (smothered in onions) or *entomatada* (smothered in tomatoes) instead of grilled or roasted. Or they might just eat a simpler meal of *enchiladas* (more like Mexican tostadas, with the fillings on top), quesadillas (cheese-filled tortillas), or tortillas with beans, mantequilla crema, and a small salad of shredded cabbage. Soups like *mondongo* (tripe soup) or chicken soup with tortillas often suffice. Rice is always served, along with bread or tortillas.

Another common dish is rice and whole beans, called *Moros y Cristianos,* a linguistic tribute to Spanish history and Spain's fight to drive out the Arabs, or Moors, around the time Columbus discovered the New World. *Casamiento* (marriage) is yet another name for rice and beans, not used as much now as in the past. Stews and soups also appear often on Honduran tables. In the north, along the coast, fried fish with lime and garlic joins *bando,* a fish stew, and *sopa de hombre,* a fish soup thought to be excellent for curing hangovers. *Sopa de caracol* (conch soup) is another favorite and practically a national dish. Picadillo (ground meat scented with ground cumin and sometimes enriched with chopped zucchini-like squash) adds zest to plates of beans and rice, as well as serving as a filling for tortillas.

Like people in many countries bordering on the Caribbean, Hondurans utilize tropical fruits and tubers in unique and flavorful ways. Shredded coconut or coconut milk appears in many dishes, including rice and stews, but especially in desserts like coconut flan or coconut bread, a specialty of the Garifuna (Black Caribs) on the north coast. Another bread baked by the Garifuna is *casabe,* made with cassava. Guavas, made into a thick paste and served with salty white farmer cheese, form a simple dessert with Spanish roots that is well loved by many Hondurans. Plantains, both green and mature, augment many meals. Tajadas (fried plantain chips; also called *caras de gata*), salted lightly, make a tasty snack with drinks, both those made with alcohol and fresh fruit juices.



Moros y Cristianos, the Honduran version of black beans and rice. (StockPhotoPro)

Snacks such as *fritas,* cornmeal mixed with milk and sugar and fried on a griddle, are popular, as are the various drinks called *pozols* or *horchatas,* similar to those made in Mexico, made with ground rice, corn, or seeds for thickening. Tamales, filled with various ingredients, provide a hearty snack, a simple meal, or a ritualistic dish for special occasions. Another snack, often prepared for men going off to work all day in the fields, is the *burra* or *pupusa,* thick tortillas with beans and a little meat, if available, and a little piece of rapadura or cone sugar used traditionally in *torrejas* (a sweet dessert made with roasted fresh corn kernels). Placed in a square of clean cloth tied at all four ends, the burra can ride

on a person's belt, leaving the hands free. Another popular tortilla-based snack is the *baleada,* a tortilla filled with beans, cheese, and many other things. On the north coast, ceviche made from fresh seafood appears on many tables. And *pastelitos,* fried corn-crust turnovers, crackle with their rice and meat fillings. For dessert, there might be a simple *arroz con leche* (rice with milk) or *tres leches,* a yellow cake made with three different types of milk.

## Eating Out

With modernization, eating outside the home has become more common in Honduras, where most people still eat at home for the main meal of the day. In the past, and still, small eateries called *comedores* served the plato típico to travelers and tourists. Now, in the larger cities of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, U.S.-based fast-food chains provide quick food.

In Tegucigalpa, a number of upscale restaurants serve a wide range of foods, including sushi, Chinese fare, French haute cuisine, Middle Eastern kebabs, and Italian dishes, as well as Honduran specialties like carne asada and *anafres,* little braziers filled with refried beans and topped with mantequilla crema. Open-air restaurants along the north coast feature fried fish and fish stews made with coconut milk.

Street food is especially popular. Vendors selling *licuados* (smoothies), *jugos* (juices), and small plastic bags filled with chunks of fresh fruit set up shop on street corners. Other sell pinchos (grilled meat kebabs), baleadas (bean- or meat-filled tortillas), grilled corn on the cob, *chicharrones* (fried pork rind), tajadas (plantain chips), pupusas (bean- or cheese-stuffed tortillas), *semitas* (sweet bread), and *rosquetes* (corn dough rings, also called *rosquillas*). Shops sell *sambuseks,* a Middle Eastern meat-filled pastry, as well.

An old tradition still exists of meeting at friends' houses at 3 P.M. for a *cafecito* (little coffee) and sweet breads. Bar-going, particularly for men, offers another opportunity for eating and socializing outside the home. Beers commonly drunk include Salva Vida, Port Royal, Barena, and Imperial.



A vendor grills corn on the streets in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. (Owen Franken | Corbis)

## Special Occasions

The predominance of Roman Catholicism in Honduran culture ensures that most holidays revolve around the major religious holidays of Easter and Christmas. Other holidays include baptisms and christenings, wakes and funerals, weddings, and birthdays. Nowadays, often no special food is prepared since most meals are Americanized buffets catered by companies hired by families, particularly wealthier families. Nacatamales, or tamales, are one of the major special-occasion foods, served for many events, including weddings, Sunday family get-togethers, and Christmas. Elaborately decorated cakes are another food item commonly served on many special occasions.

Birthdays merit very special preparations, with piñatas (candy- and toy-filled papier mâche in the

shape of animals and other objects) and fancy decorated cakes for young children. The traditional girls' party, the *Quinceañera,* celebrates young women's arriving at womanhood at the age of 15. Caterers generally provide the food, and the parties tend to be held by wealthier people.

In the villages, people celebrate the Day of the Dead (November 2) in a manner similar to that of Mexico, visiting cemeteries and cleaning ancestral graves. In the larger cities, particularly among the wealthier classes, U.S. Halloween customs hold sway. Nine days after funerals, families get together for coffee and *panes dulces* (sweet breads).

Christmas is one of the biggest holidays of the year. Like Mexicans, Hondurans also follow the idea of *posadas* (similar to caroling), but this practice tends to be limited. Some smaller villages have posadas and serve *ponche infernal,* which is served hot and contains pineapple and aguardiente, or *rompopo* (an eggnog-like drink imbued with rum) to the singers. On Christmas Eve, families prepare punch and other foods, including tamales to hand out to people who come by singing. Feasting after midnight mass generally includes banana or plantain leaf–wrapped nacatamales filled with chicken or pork and some combination of rice, potatoes, garbanzos, peas, and green olives. People drink rompopo and eat grapes and apples. A typical Christmas dinner can include roasted pork leg. A special dessert associated with Honduran culture is dough called *torrejas,* fried and soaked in syrup flavored with cinnamon and brown sugar. Or the family may serve rosquetes (corn dough rings) with the same syrup. Stuffed ham with a beef/pork meat filling is popular. Some families serve dried-fish soup, yucca appetizers, stuffed turkey, chicken, meringue sweets, and *horchata de arroz,* a drink made with sweetened rice. Other foods commonly served on Christmas might be carne asada (grilled meat) and *plátanos fritos* (fried plantains). The day after Christmas, most Hondurans take the opportunity to visit relatives and friends. Food is secondary; people eat leftovers or go to restaurants.

At Easter time, artists create elaborate sawdust carpets in Comayagua during Holy Week. Cooks, especially in the north, prepare *sopa de pescado* (fish soup) with fish and egg patties cooked in a broth made with fish heads and garlic, *pan de yema* (egg-yolk bread), and *torrejas de piñol* (fried dough), glazed with boiled honey. Some families spend time at the beach on the north coast, where both men and women of the Garifuna (Black Caribs) make casabe, a flat cassava bread eaten spread with butter.

For folkloric, and national, festivals called Fiestas Catrachas, celebrating the Honduran nation, menus consist of carne asada, beans, tamales, baleadas, cassava with chicharrones (fried pork skins), and tortillas. Different ethnic groups within Honduras celebrate their own special days. The Miskitos, for example, celebrate July 23 as their Day of the Dead, called the Parayapti, similar to the Garifuna's Novenario. To feed all the people, at least three cows are slaughtered.

In western Honduras, particularly in the towns of Gracias, Lempira; Ilama, Santa Barbara; and Texiguat, El Paraiso, a corn-based drink called *chilate* is made for use in a ceremony called the *guacaleo,* or "ceremony of peace," dating to Mayan times. Starting with atol, people add cacao and perhaps a little chili pepper to this slightly fermented drink.

## Diet and Health

As is the case in many cultures, Hondurans associate various foods and dishes with good health and with cures for sick people. Some of these beliefs include the idea that meat tenderizers like papaya cause stomach ulcers. Sick people, including those with ulcers, should eat *leche dormida* ("sleeping milk"), made with part of a rennet tablet and sweetened to taste, resulting in a dish very similar to yogurt. Many old beliefs—such as the old hot-cold theory—no longer hold, but some people still drink sour orange juice when they don't feel well to balance out their systems. Drinking lemongrass tea for nerve problems is still common in some areas. Folk belief has it that drinking a tea made from *kalaica,* a plant that grows wild in Honduras, will help anemia, as will drinking an infusion made with beets. Many beliefs surround the states of pregnancy and lactation, including the exclusion of certain foods from the diets of pregnant and lactating mothers.

In Honduras, people still experience severe malnutrition, particularly children. One out of four Honduran children under the age of five still suffers from life-threatening bouts of malnutrition, exacerbated by diseases like chickenpox and measles.

*Cynthia D. Bertelsen*

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# Inuit

## Overview

*Inuit* is a general term for a group of culturally similar indigenous peoples inhabiting the land above the Arctic Circle in Canada and Greenland. In 1977 the term *Inuit* replaced the term *Eskimo* in Canada and Greenland based on the erroneous belief that the term *Eskimo* has pejorative associations. In English the word *Eskimo* is of uncertain origin. It is believed by some to have come from the French word *Esquimau.* Others believe that the term *Eskimo* comes from an Ojibwa word that is translated as "eater of raw meat," hence the pejorative connotations. However, linguists now believe that the term *Eskimo* was actually derived from a Montagnais name, *ayassime'w,* a name that refers, in the upper western North Shore dialect, to the Micmac and, in the central and lower North Shore dialect, to the Eskimo. Regardless of the origins of the term, *Eskimo* is no longer used in Canada and Greenland but is still used in Alaska to refer to the Arctic peoples of that state. While the indigenous peoples of Alaska prefer to be called by their autonyms, for example, the Yup'ik, they do not mind being collectively referred to as Eskimo. They do, however, object to being referred to as Inuit. The term *inuit,* in the native languages of Greenland and Arctic Canada, is the plural of *inuk,* meaning "real, genuine person."

Three-quarters of Canada's Inuit population lives in Nunavut, a territorial subdivision of the former Northwest Territories. Nunavut comprises the part of the Canadian mainland and Arctic Islands that lies north and northeast of the tree line as it runs from the west end of the Dolphin Strait to 37 miles (60 kilometers) south of the point where the Thaanne River flows into Hudson Bay. The Inuit of Greenland are descendants of the Dorset and Thule cultures who moved into Greenland from Canada between 900 and 1500 A.D. The population of Greenland is 55,000, the majority of whom are Inuit.

The Inuit are subsistence hunters and gatherers and are therefore seasonally nomadic. In preparation for the seal-hunting season, during which the Inuit move out onto the ice to hunt, the Inuit start building large dome-shaped snow houses in early winter. The snow houses feature a central workspace; radiating from the sides of the central workspace are tunnels. At the end of each tunnel are family living quarters. In the spring season, nuclear family groups spend the summer hunting and gathering on the tundra. Housing in the spring and summer is traditionally caribou-skin tents; however, in the modern era tents are typically made of canvas. In addition, small, semipermanent huts of plywood are built on the tundra for use during the inland hunting season. During the spring and summer the Inuit also travel great distances to trade and to obtain the raw materials needed for carving. When fall comes the Inuit begin the trek to the wintering grounds where they congregate in larger groups to prepare their winter clothing and hunting equipment. Despite the availability of modern winter clothing, most outer winter clothing continues to be homemade. Traditional Inuit clothing is made from seal pelts, seal intestines, caribou skins, animal fur (including polar bear), and canvas. The traditional materials are warmer and more adaptable to the environment in which the

Inuit are working. Clothing is layered, with an inner jacket of fur facing inward and an outer jacket of fur facing outward. Outer fur jackets may also be layered with jackets made of down or duffle cloth.

Inuit religion is based on the relationship between humans and the spirits of the animals on which the Inuit depend for their food and livelihood. It is therefore important to the Inuit that they observe proper rituals and taboos when hunting. An animal spirit who is offended through the violation of a taboo, through the omission of a ritual, or through a lack of proper respect might take revenge on the group. Illness, starvation, and death can occur. Conversely, an animal that is treated properly by a hunter will share the good news with other animals, bringing good fortune to the hunter.

Today, the Inuit live in a modernized world. They regularly use snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles to get to their hunting and fishing grounds. Many Inuit live in settlements in housing provided by the Canadian and Greenland governments. In the towns, amenities, such as running water, are provided, as are social services and education. While the traditional subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering lifestyle is still highly valued among the Inuit, more and more young people are choosing to enter the wage economy. The options for employment in the towns are limited; therefore, young Inuit may choose to cater to the tourist industry by becoming hunting and fishing guides. Other Inuit turn to arts and crafts as a living and carve soapstone statues and create other art forms for sale in the southern cities. There is also an increasing demand for designer clothing made from sustainably harvested seal pelts. Students at the Nunavut Arctic College are learning to be furriers, and the fur design industry in Nunavut is seen as an example of the melding of traditional cultural heritage with a modern economic strategy. Regardless of the choice of occupation and place of residence, traditional Inuit food remains a central focus of Inuit identity and culture.

### Food Culture Snapshot

Jimmy Nirlungayak and his wife, Elisapee, live in the Arctic near a small town in Nunavut. They are among the respected elder members of the community and pride themselves in being traditional Inuit. The Nirlungayaks eat what some call "Inuit style" and most others call "country food." This means that they continue to eat a traditional Inuit diet and depend primarily on subsistence hunting and gathering for their food supplies. Their annual income does not provide enough ready cash to purchase all their food from the Northern or from the Co-Op Store, especially given that the cost of buying groceries in the north can be two or three times higher than the cost in the south. Therefore, the Nirlungayaks' store purchases are limited to flour, baking powder, sugar, and tea. To get the money needed to purchase these staple supplies, the Nirlungayaks used to process and sell sealskins and carve small soapstone carvings. However, the Nirlungayaks are among those Inuit impacted by the antisealing campaigns that started in 1983. While these campaigns were primarily targeting commercial sealers around Newfoundland and the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, the banning of imports of seal products into the United States has impacted the Inuit economy. In 2009 the European Union also moved to ban the import of seal products, an action that caused the market to experience a further decline. As a result, the Nirlungayaks now rely more and more on their carvings as a source of income, and they have joined the many Inuit who depend on welfare.

## Major Foodstuffs

The environment of the Inuit peoples dictates that the majority of their foods will consist of meat and fish; however, the local environment, which varies greatly for the different Inuit groups, as well as resource availability, ultimately dictates what the Inuit will be able to eat in any given season. During the winter season the Inuit depend primarily on seals. A seasonal shift from seal hunting in the winter to fishing in the spring and summer to caribou hunting in the fall is common. The Inuit will also hunt, either seasonally or year-round, a variety of land and sea mammals as well as ptarmigan and waterfowl. In addition, and only during the summer months, they will gather roots, greens,

and berries. The discussion of foods here gives a representative sampling of the kinds and varieties of food that the Inuit eat.

Seal is the primary, and most important, food of the Inuit, and they make use of the many seal varieties that live in the Arctic. Seal hunting is conducted with the help of snowmobiles, and seals are hunted along the edges of the ice floes and at their breathing holes. The bearded seal (*Erignathus barbatus*), the harp seal (*Phoca groenlandica*), and the ringed seal (*Phoca hispida*) are all hunted by the Inuit. And, as with all animals hunted by the Inuit, all parts of the seals are either eaten or used. The blubber and meat of the seals are eaten raw, while the intestines are either boiled or eaten raw. At times the Inuit will also boil the meat and blubber of the seals; however, the liver of the bearded seal is never eaten because the high levels of vitamin A found in the liver are toxic to humans and can cause acute hypervitaminosis A. Ringed seal blubber may also be liquefied and aged, and the meat may also be aged. The ringed seal's liver, heart, brain, eyes, and blood are eaten raw. The pups of the ringed seal are also taken, and the meat is eaten either raw or boiled.

The beluga whale (*Delphinapterus leucas*) and the narwhal (*Monodon monoceros*) are both toothed whales living in the Arctic and are hunted by the Inuit. The blubber of the beluga is eaten either raw or boiled, and the meat is often eaten raw or dried for later use. The *maktaaq,* or skin and underlying blubber, of the beluga is eaten raw or boiled. Beluga whale oil is kept and aged for later use. Narwhal blubber and maktaaq are eaten raw, boiled, or aged, and the maktaaq of the flippers is aged. The blubber may also be aged. The meat of the narwhal is dried for later use.

The walrus (*Odobenus rosmarus*) is another of the sea mammals eaten by the Inuit. Walrus blubber is either aged, boiled, or eaten raw. The liver is eaten raw, and the meat is eaten raw, boiled, or aged. The maktaaq of the walrus is eaten raw or aged. More and more often, however, walrus meat is being cooked before it is eaten because of the presence of *Trichinella,* a tiny parasitic roundworm, in the meat. *Trichinella* can cause trichinosis, a gastrointestinal illness with flulike symptoms that, in severe cases, can cause death. Alternatively, walrus meat is being stored until it can be tested by laboratories in Kuujjuaq, Quebec, for the presence of *Trichinella*. Walrus meat is digested slowly, and an individual may eat large quantities of walrus meat without getting sick. This ability is adaptive and allows the Inuit, who may go a long time without any food, to remain out on the ice hunting.



Subsistence hunting for narwhal whales remains an integral part of the Inuit culture in Alaska. (Corel)

Among the land mammals eaten by the Inuit, the polar bear (*Ursus maritimus*) is certainly the most dangerous animal hunted. Polar bears are hunted primarily for their fur. However, when a bear is taken, it is eaten so as not to waste the food. The fat is boiled or eaten raw. Polar bear meat would traditionally be eaten raw; however, as with walrus, there is concern about the parasite *Trichinella* in the meat, so polar bear meat is most often boiled. The liver of the polar bear, like the liver of the bearded seal, is never eaten because the concentration of vitamin A in the liver is toxic to humans and can cause acute hypervitaminosis A.

Another large mammal that the Inuit depend on for food is the caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*). As with all animals hunted by the Inuit all parts of the caribou are used. Caribou meat is prepared in a variety of ways. It may be eaten raw, or it may also be aged, dried, boiled, or roasted. The liver and tongue of the caribou are also eaten raw or baked. The stomach, brains, heart, lungs, and kidneys may be eaten raw, and the brain, heart, and kidneys may also be

boiled or roasted. The bone marrow is collected and eaten raw or aged. The fat is eaten raw.

Other large mammals that are hunted by the Inuit are the moose (*Alces alces*), the musk ox (*Ovibos moschatus*), and the black bear (*Ursus americanus*). Moose meat is eaten raw, cooked, smoked, or dried. The fat and bone marrow may be eaten raw or cooked, and the fat may also be dried. Moose kidneys, livers, lungs, and blood are eaten raw. Musk ox meat, blood, and fat are eaten raw. Bear meat is eaten raw or smoked.

Many small mammals are also hunted and eaten. The Inuit will eat muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*), rabbit (*Lepus* sp.), and beaver (*Castor canadensis*). The meat of all these animals is eaten raw or baked. Beaver meat may also be dried.

Among the birds eaten are the black scoter (*Melanitta nigra*), the Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*), duck (*Anas platyrhynchos*), ptarmigan (*Lagopus mutus*), and grouse (*Dendragapus canadensis*). The meat of these birds is all eaten raw or either oven- or fire-roasted. The innards of the Canada goose may also be boiled, and the lungs of the goose are roasted. In addition, the eggs of the fowl are eaten.

Traditionally, fishing grounds would have been accessed by foot. Today, however, all-terrain vehicles are common, and a network of trails now exists in the tundra. Among the fish that Inuit eat are arctic char (*Salvelinus naresi*), cod (*Boreogadus saida*), inconnu (*Stenodus leucichthys*), burbot (*Lota lota*), salmon (*Oncorhynchus*), sculpin (*Myoxocephalus* ssp.), whitefish (*Coregonus clupeaformis*), lake trout (*Salvelinus namaycush*), and grayling (*Thymallus arcticus*). Fish are eaten either raw, dried, salted, smoked, boiled, or baked. The Inuit also gather shellfish, and the meat is eaten raw or boiled. Among the shellfish gathered are mussels (*Mytilus edulis*) and clams (*Mya* sp.).

During the long summer days the Inuit take full advantage of all the plants and fruits that grow in the northern environment to supplement their diet. Among the favorite foods gathered are the many berries that grow in the tundra and northern woodlands. These include blackcap berries (*Rubus leucodermis*), black hawthorn berries (*Crataegus douglasii*), blueberries (*Vaccinium uliginosum*), bog blueberries (*Vaccinium uliginosum*), gray blueberries (*Vaccinium ovalifolium*), watery blueberries (*Vaccinium alaskaense*), mountain bilberries (*Vaccinium membranaceum*), red huckleberries (*Vaccinium parvifolium*), cranberries (*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*), rosehips (*Rosa nutkana*), bunchberries (*Cornus canadensis*), crowberries (*Empetrum nigrum*), high bush cranberries (*Viburnum edule*), kinnikinnick berries (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), red elderberries (*Sambucus racemosa*), salmonberries (*Rubus spectabilis*), wild raspberries (*Rubus idaeus*), saskatoonberries (*Amelanchier alnifolia*), soapberries (*Shepherdia canadensis*), stink currant berries (*Ribes bracteosum*), swamp gooseberries (*Ribes lacustre*), green gooseberries (*Ribes oxyancanthoides*), purple gooseberries (*Ribes oxyancanthoides*), wild currants (*Ribes laxiflorum*), thimbleberries (*Ribes parviflorus*), wild strawberries (*Fragaria vesca*), and cloudberries (*Rubus chamaemorus*). Of these berries, only the elderberry and wild "green gooseberries" are usually cooked; all the others are eaten raw. Some berries may also be used in bannock (flatbread). And, although not a berry, the fruit of the wild crab apple tree (*Pyrus fusca*) is also eaten.

The greens most commonly gathered and eaten are mountain sorrel leaves and stems (*Oxyria digyna*), cow parsnip (*Heracleum lanatum*), fireweed shoots (*Epilobium angustifolium*), lamb's-quarter (*Chenopodium album*), salmonberry shoots (*Rubus spectabilis*), thimbleberry shoots (*Ribes parviflorus*), wild "green gooseberry" leaves (*Ribes divaricatum*), sheep sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*), stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*), seaweed (*Porphyra perforata*), and kelp (*Rhodymenia* and *Laminaria* sp.). All the greens, including kelp, are eaten raw with the exception of the seaweed, which is dried.

In addition to greens and berries, the Inuit also eat a variety of roots. Among the roots eaten are those of cinquefoil (*Potentilla pacifica*), clover (*Trifolium wormskioldii*), wood fern (*Dryopteris expansa*), licorice fern (*Polypodium glycyrrhiza*), lupine (*Lupinus nootkatensis*), and riceroot bulbs (*Fritillaria camschatcensis*). The ferns are either eaten raw or steamed. The cinquefoil and clover are steamed, and the lupine, licorice fern, and riceroot are eaten raw. The Inuit also eat the inner bark of cottonwood trees

(*Populus trichocarpa*), the dried leaves of Labrador tea (*Ledum decumbent*), and parts of the arctic willow (*Salix arctica*) and the netted willow (*Salix reticulata*).

## Cooking

The Inuit eat only two main meals a day, although they do snack between meals. Traditionally, much of Inuit meat and fish is eaten raw or frozen. After a hunt the hunters are served first, eating their prey raw where it has been caught. Their first choices of foods to eat are liver and blood. Another delicacy is brain mixed with seal fat. The women and children eat after the hunters. Their food of choice is the intestines and any remaining liver. No fish or meat can be cooked where it is caught.

Food that is to be cooked must be transported far away from where it was caught, and when it is cooked the Inuit have taboos that prohibit cooking products of the land and sea in the same pot. This taboo extends to the storage of products of the land and sea as well. Thus, seal meat may not be placed next to caribou meat when stored. Traditional Inuit cooking was done over the central fire of the igloo or tent, and the cooking vessels were made of carved soapstone. Currently cooking pots are available in the stores, and cooking is done over camp stoves when out in the bush or in modern kitchens in their homes in the towns. When cooked, meat is often stewed in a large pot, with very few spices or other seasonings. In the winter the pot would be packed with snow and meat and left over the fire or on the stove until the snow melts and the meat is thawed and warmed.



Arne Lange, a 39-year-old Inuit fisherman and his family have a family seal meat barbeque. (Getty Images)

## Typical Meals

Country food, or Inuit-style meals, consists mostly of meat or fish with bread, jam, and fruit on the side. When fresh meat or fish is eaten, slices of raw meat or fish are simply sliced off the whole animal or fish by each individual and eaten. When dried fish is eaten it is commonly dipped in a dish of aged seal blubber to moisten it. With the easy availability of soup seasonings and cooking pots, fish heads can now be stewed as an additional way of using as much of the fish as possible.

Other Inuit meals consist of bearded seal flippers soaked in blubber for two weeks, after which the flesh is stripped from the flippers and eaten. Maktaaq, the outer covering of the whale including the skin and blubber, which is one to two inches thick, is cut in blocks from the whale. The maktaaq is left hanging to dry for two days and then cut into smaller pieces. The maktaaq is then boiled until tender and stored in a cool place in oil in a 45-gallon drum.

Bannock, a typical home-prepared bread product consumed by the Inuit, as well as other First Nations peoples of Canada, is one of the staples of the Inuit diet and can be fried in a small amount of fat or baked in an oven, over a campfire, or on a camp stove in a covered pot. However, Inuit bannock is typically prepared in large rounds that will fit in a cast iron frying pan, and these are cut into wedges or squares for individual servings. While many different recipes for bannock exist, it is typically prepared from two cups of white flour, a half teaspoon of salt, a quarter cup of sugar, two teaspoons of baking powder, a quarter cup of fat (oil, lard, vegetable oil, or shortening), and a half cup of milk, reconstituted powdered milk, or water. Other recipes for bannock include one egg, berries, dried fruit, and nuts. When baked in a conventional oven the temperature is set at 350 degrees, and the bread is baked for 15 to 20 minutes.

During the summer months, when berries can be found, *akutuq,* sometimes called "Eskimo ice cream," is a favorite treat for many. This delicacy is a dessert made with whipped fat and berries. To make this dessert one recipe calls for grated reindeer tallow, seal oil, and water. All the ingredients are whipped until white and fluffy, and then the fresh berries are added.

During an Inuit meal the chunks of food will be presented on sheets of cardboard, metal, or plastic, and guests are invited to use their own knives or to borrow a knife to slice off a portion of the raw meat or fish. The meal is typically eaten sitting on the ground or on the kitchen floor with the food in the middle of the circle.

## Eating Out

Given the isolated nature of their traditional hunting and gathering territories, Inuit people do not have a history or culture of eating out that is comparable to that of their white neighbors. Acculturated Inuit living in northern Arctic towns will visit the various fast-food restaurants that have proliferated in places such as Whitehorse and Yellowknife. In addition, there are a variety of small cafés and family restaurants, not to mention the ubiquitous Chinese restaurants, which Inuit families will frequent when visiting or living in town. Also present in many northern towns are more expensive restaurants catering to the tourist clientele; these restaurants focus on northern game meats and country food such as musk ox, caribou, arctic char, pickerel, whitefish, whale meat, clams, turbot, shrimp, and waterfowl.

## Special Occasions

Winter is the season for festivities. Traditionally, ceremonial snow houses, called *qagli* among the Copper Inuit, were built for the festivities. Because of the winter storms and blizzards that frequently sweep across the Arctic tundra, many days are spent indoors. Playing games, drum dancing, and observing shamanic performances therefore passed the time.

Traditionally, food is shared among the Inuit, and distribution occurs with both kin and non-kin and follows a preestablished pattern. For example, among the Copper Inuit, each seal that is caught is divided into 12 to 14 parts, and each part is given to a predetermined exchange partner who would then reciprocate in the future with the same body part. A

hunter's parents determined the hunter's *piqatigiit,* or seal-sharing partners, at the time of the hunter's first kill. The partners are all members of the same generation as the hunter, which helps forge a bond among age-mates. Other forms of food distribution, which function on a volunteer or ad hoc basis, also occur. Some food-distribution forms involve giving meat to a hunter who did not make a successful catch during a hunt or giving food to a member of the kin group who has no food because of age or illness, while other forms involve communal eating after a hunt. Today, food distribution appears much more idiosyncratic than in the past; however, it has been found that modern sharing continues to take forms that range from highly formalized gift giving to the informal sharing of prepared meals.

Faced with rapid social change the Inuit see food as the connector to everything that surrounds Inuit culture. The hunting and gathering, preparation, and eating of country food are an especially key aspect of Inuit identity. The sharing of food reminds the Inuit of their cultural heritage and serves as a connector to their past. In addition, food sharing highlights the interconnectedness between Inuit families and households. Hunting is seen as being more than simply providing food for families; hunting is also about sustaining the Inuit language and culture. The teaching of hunting skills from one generation to another is a way to build solidarity between generations and within families and remains an important part of a young person's maturation process.

## Diet and Health

Increased modernization and the availability of *qallunaat,* or white people's food, has had an impact on the health of the Inuit. The shift from the traditional diet of meat and fish to a diet of processed foods high in sugar and carbohydrates has caused an increase in obesity, cardiovascular disease, acne, anemia, dental cavities, and type 2 diabetes. To try and understand the paradox of the Inuit diet—the fact that eating a diet of seal meat, which is high in fat, prevents the very diseases that are common throughout much of the Western world—researchers at McGill University's Centre for Indigenous Peoples' Nutrition and Environment have carefully documented the traditional foods eaten by Inuit peoples, complete with a nutritional and caloric analysis of each of the different Inuit foods.

What has been discovered is that is that there are no essential foods, only essential nutrients. And the Inuit get these nutrients in their traditional diet. Vitamin A, for example, which is usually found in fruits and vegetables, is available to the Inuit in the oils of cold-water fish and sea mammals, as well as in the animals' livers, where fat is processed. These dietary staples also provide vitamin D, another oil-soluble vitamin needed for bones. Vitamin C is found in raw caribou liver, seal brains, and maktaaq, and in even higher levels in kelp. The traditional Inuit practices of freezing meat and fish and eating them raw conserve the vitamins, which are easily cooked off and lost in food processing.

The Inuit are genetically well adapted to process a diet that is high in protein. However, protein can't be the sole source of energy for humans; anyone eating a high-protein diet that is low in carbohydrates must also have fat. While fats are considered to be detrimental to Western health, it is the kind of fat that is eaten that is important. Processed and farm-animal fat is high in trans fats, whereas wild animal fat is healthier because it is less saturated and more of it is in a monounsaturated form. In addition, the traditional Inuit diet consists of cold-water fish and sea mammals that are high in omega-3 fats, while a Western diet is high in omega-6 fats. Omega-3 fats help raise high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol, lower triglycerides, and are known for anticlotting effects. These fatty acids are believed to protect the heart from life-threatening arrhythmias that can lead to sudden cardiac death. In addition, omega-3 polyunsaturated fats help prevent inflammatory processes, which play a part in atherosclerosis, arthritis, diabetes, and other diseases commonly associated with a Western diet.

While the positive aspects of eating traditional Inuit food have been accepted, data also show that there is an increase in the levels of cadmium, lead, and mercury in the traditional meat and fish eaten by the Inuit. Increased levels of PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) and DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane) have also been found in traditional Inuit

foods. The ingestion of metals and chemicals has been found to affect the neurological development of fetuses and children and can affect the immune systems of children. The primary foods that account for a higher level of intake of metals and chemicals are ringed seal meat and liver, caribou meat, narwhal maktaaq, beluga meat, and beluga maktaaq.

Despite the potential dangers of eating country food, the Inuit remain strongly tied to their traditional diet. For the Inuit the connection between eating seal and Inuit beliefs about health, physiology, and identity is stronger than the fears associated with the contaminants found in Arctic foods, and thus country food remains the main diet choice for Inuit today. The traditional Inuit diet is more nutritious and less expensive than commercial food, and it is believed to have healing properties. If an Inuit is feeling well, then he can eat store-bought food with no ill effects, but if he is ill or depressed, he needs country food to make him well. The Inuit believe strongly that their diet of seal meat is life giving. Inuit blood is believed to be thick and dark like seal blood, so when one eats seal blood and seal meat, one is rejuvenating one's blood supply. Eating seal meat, they believe, warms them in the cold Arctic weather, and when the body is warmed by seal blood, then the Inuit's soul is protected from illness and harm.

*Laura P. Appell-Warren*

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# Jamaica

## Overview

Jamaica is a Caribbean island located about 90 miles south of Cuba. It is the third-largest island in the Caribbean and exhibits beautiful natural features such as world-famous coastal lowlands, a limestone plateau, and the Blue Mountains, which are famous for producing high-quality coffee. Jamaica's diverse terrain has contributed to producing a wide variety of crops.

Jamaica is an English-speaking country, although it has a Creole dialect called Patois, which is influenced mostly by West African languages. Approximately 95 percent of the country's population is of African descent, and nearly the whole population is native-born Jamaican.

Jamaicans enjoy the country's tropical maritime climate. The mean daily temperature ranges from a seasonal low of 79 degrees Fahrenheit in February to a high of 86 degrees Fahrenheit in August, averaging around 80 degrees Fahrenheit. Jamaica's tropical climate and its miles of beautiful white beaches have attracted many tourists from all over the world. The island is also constantly exposed to hurricanes and recently suffered more than $210 million in damage when Hurricane Gustav hit in 2008.

As for religions, Christianity is the dominant religion in Jamaica. The main denominations in Jamaica include the Church of God, Seventh-Day Adventist, Baptist, Pentecostal, and Anglican. The Rastafari movement, a religious movement that originated in Jamaica, contends that Haile Selassie I, the former emperor of Ethiopia, is the incarnation of God. The lifestyle the Rastafarians follow has created a unique food culture. Some adherents follow the dietary laws of the Old Testament; others are strict vegetarians, eat only natural foods, and abstain from alcohol.

Jamaica is proud of its unique culinary history. Enid Donaldson, author of *The Real Taste of Jamaica,* argues that Jamaica's culinary evolution, described as "out of many one pot," reflects the history of the island. The Taino, a group of the Arawak Indians who had inhabited the Greater Antilles in the Caribbean Sea before Columbus's arrival, came from South America about 2,500 years ago. The Tainos named the island *Xaymaca,* which meant "land of wood and water." They grew various crops such as cassava, sweet potatoes, maize, fruits, vegetables, callaloo (a green, leafy, spinach-like vegetable), beans, cotton, and tobacco. Fish and shellfish, along with wild animals such as iguana, were also a major part of their diet. The *barbacoa,* which is a wooden grate standing on four forked sticks placed over a slow fire, was a special technique Tainos used. Jamaicans nowadays call it *jerk*. In addition, Tainos created a habit of making a soup pot with meat, vegetables, and seasonings. Saturday beef soup is still served in most Jamaican households.

The arrival of the Spanish in Jamaica in 1494 greatly influenced the further creation of a modern Jamaican cuisine. The Spaniards brought cattle, goats, pigs, horses, and lard to the island. Not only animals but also plant products, such as citrus fruits, ginger, date palms, coconuts, plantains, grapes, sugar, and bananas, were brought by the Spaniards. Some popular dishes such as *escoveitched fish* (a variation of Latin American ceviche) originated in Spain.

After the Spanish, the English started controlling Jamaica in 1655. The English settlers started growing crops that could easily be sold in England, such as tobacco, indigo, cacao, and sugar, which became the main crop for the island. Sugar, rum, and molasses were taken back to England and were also traded for flour, pork, and salt fish, a present staple food of Jamaica. The English, who also had colonies in different parts of the world, brought important food items such as breadfruit, ackee, mangoes, spices, and coffee to Jamaica.

Africans who were brought to Jamaica as slaves also contributed greatly to the creation of today's Jamaican cuisine. The Spanish turned to trading slaves from Africa's west coast for labor. The slaves brought with them okra, peanuts, and a variety of peas and beans, all of which are considered staples in today's Jamaican cuisine. Africans blended their traditional foods with foods that were already available locally in Jamaica. Some signature dishes of Jamaica, such as ackee and salt fish or Jamaican *rundown,* were invented by African peasants.

Many slaves, unhappy with their harsh conditions, escaped from the plantations and joined the Maroons in the remote mountains of Jamaica. Later, trading in African slaves was declared to be unlawful. The British made into law the Emancipation Act in 1834, and full freedom was granted to the slaves in 1838. After the abolition of slavery, Indians and Chinese were brought to the country by the British as cheap laborers. Just like Africans, these two ethnic groups blended their culinary traditions with food products available in Jamaica and created popular dishes such as curry goat.

In 1962, Jamaica was finally granted its independence from England. The constitution provides for freedom, equality, and justice for all who dwell in the country. Just like the country itself, Jamaican culinary art continues to evolve with its rich history and diversity that Jamaicans are proud of.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Natalie and Michael Campbell live in a suburb of Kingston. Natalie is a secretary for a food company, and Michael works as a sales representative for the same company. Natalie is originally from Port Antonio, a beautiful town located 62 miles (100 kilometers) northeast of Kingston. Michael is a native of Kingston.

They get up early to avoid Kingston's notorious heavy morning traffic. At 6:30 A.M., they eat chicken patties and drink instant coffee with condensed milk. They occasionally eat ackee (an indigenous fruit with a texture and color like scrambled eggs) and salt fish, a typical Jamaican breakfast, with *bammy* (cassava bread). They leave home around 7 A.M. and arrive at their offices around 7:30 A.M. They get fresh coconut juice from a street vendor in front of their office building in New Kingston. Sipping fresh coconut juice is a great way to start their work.

They have a quick lunch at a local cafeteria near their company around noon. Although there are numerous fast-food chains in New Kingston, they prefer to eat traditional Jamaican foods rather than hamburgers and fries. Natalie's favorite is curry goat. Michael likes to have callaloo and salt fish. When they are on the go, they get light meals to go from roadside vendors. For a dessert, they enjoy chewing fresh sugarcane, which is cut into smaller pieces by the street vendor with his sharp machete.

After getting back home, Natalie goes to a local market to buy various food items. At the local market, she buys popular fruits and vegetables including callaloo, *chocho* (chayote), ackee, breadfruit, green bananas, and mangoes. She also realizes that she is almost out of kidney beans, the important ingredient for "rice and peas." There is a new supermarket three bus stops away from their house. Although the supermarket sells some imported foods Natalie has seen in television commercials, Natalie prefers to go to the local market where she can chat with the vendors she knows.

Michael's friend Damian is a Rastafarian from Port Antonio, and he has invited the couple for dinner. Damian doesn't use salt in his *ital* cooking due to his Rastafarian beliefs, which demand that nothing impure or processed be put in his body. Out of his thick clay pot, Damian serves a small fish dish flavored with a large amount of coconut milk and various herbs and spices such as pimento (allspice) and thyme that he grows in his backyard. Callaloo and boiled green banana

are also served with the dish. Damian also serves a sweet herb tea in the beautifully carved calabash bowls his Rastafarian friend made for him. In rural areas such as Port Antonio, people still enjoy cooking foods from scratch.

## Major Foodstuffs

### *Starches*

Jamaican dishes almost always consist of some roots, tubers, or starchy fruits such as breadfruit, yams, cassava, plantains, and green bananas. Breadfruit, native to the Pacific Islands, was brought to Jamaica in 1793 by Captain Bligh and was an inexpensive food for slaves. Breadfruits can be roasted or baked. They are often made into puddings. Yams are also popular in Jamaica. There are different types of yams, such as the yellow yam, renta yam, St. Vincent yam, sweet yam, and Tau yam. Cassava is another tuber that was once the Arawaks' staple food. A round, flat bread called bammy is made from grated cassava and can be served with escoveitched fish and other dishes. Bananas are eaten ripe or green. Ripe bananas can be eaten raw or grilled. Jamaicans enjoy baked ripe bananas with coconut milk for dessert. Boiled green bananas are often served with meat and fish.

### *Animal Protein*

Chicken is a popular meat in Jamaica. Both locals and tourists enjoy highly seasoned chicken barbecued on a sweltering pimento wood grill over a small pit: jerk chicken! Boston Beach, located in Port Antonio, is considered the birthplace of the spicy jerk seasoning and is known for authentic jerk pork and chicken. Other meats commonly consumed in Jamaica include beef and goat. Curry goat was introduced by the East Indians.

### *Fish and Shellfish*

Fish is also commonly consumed in Jamaica. Codfish, kingfish, blue marlin, and mackerel are popular. Popular fish dishes include ackee and salt fish (salted codfish), mackerel rundown (fish simmered in coconut milk with tomatoes, onions, scallion, and pepper), jerk fish, and escoveitched fish, which is a variation of Latin American ceviche, except that the fish is seasoned and fried. Kingfish or snapper is often used for escoveitched fish. Shrimp, lobster, crab, and conch (sea snails) are popular shellfish in Jamaica. They are boiled, frittered, or grilled and are often part of delicious soup dishes.



Proper readying of Jamaican pepper shrimp. (Corel)

### *Plant Sources*

Just as in other Caribbean countries, coconut is central to Jamaican food culture, used for many types of dishes. Jamaicans seem to know how to take advantage of every part of the coconut. They enjoy refreshing coconut water that is sold on the street. Coconut milk is used for numerous dishes such as rice and peas, curried goat, and mackerel rundown. Coconut oil is a popular oil that gives foods a nice authentic flavor. Jamaicans make soup out of *copra* (a by-product of coconut). Jamaicans enjoy cooking kidney beans together with rice in coconut milk. The dish is called rice and peas and is often served as a side dish.

Callaloo may mean different things in different countries of the Caribbean. For example, callaloo is a green leafy vegetable stew made with okra in Trinidad and Tobago. Callaloo is quite important in Jamaica, where it refers to a green, leafy, spinach-like vegetable served as a side dish or in dishes. It is also used as a popular filling in patties. Besides its use for dishes, callaloo is also well known for its

ritual and spiritual use. Chocho, also called chayote in some Latin American countries, is a pear-shaped, light green, light-flavored squash and is a nice accompaniment for famous Jamaican dishes such as escoveitched fish.

Jamaicans enjoy many tropical fruits grown on the island. There are fruits unique to Jamaica. Ackee, native to West Africa, is the national fruit of Jamaica and is used to make ackee and salt fish, the Jamaican national dish. Ackee must be harvested, prepared, and cooked properly since raw ackee contains toxins that can be fatal. Because it is illegal to export raw ackee to the United States, canned ackee has become a major export product in Jamaica. Ugli fruit is another fruit unique to Jamaica. It appears to be a cross between a Seville orange, a tangerine, and grapefruit. It is mainly grown in Jamaica and is exported to the United States and Europe. Ugli fruit has a rough, lumpy, greenish-yellow skin and is sweeter than grapefruit.



Group of spices and other condiments commonly found in Jamacian cooking, including allspice. (Dreamstime)

### *Spices*

Jamaica is a spice island. The culinary history of Jamaica shows that people from different parts of the world, such as Africans, Indians, Chinese, and others, brought their culinary traditions accompanied by their unique use of various spices. Jamaicans enjoy using many kinds of spices including pimento (allspice). Jamaica grows the majority of the world's supply of allspice. Allspice is used for a numerous dishes including jerk dishes. Jerk flavor comes from meat seasoned with pimento placed on top of a grill made of pimento leaves and wood and slowly cooked.

East Indians brought their traditional habits of using many spices for cooking to Jamaica. Curry powder, often a mixture of turmeric, fenugreek, coriander, cumin, anise, and pepper, is used for various curried dishes, such as curried chicken, goat, and shrimp. Ginger, often used in Chinese dishes, is also used for making ginger beer. *Escallion* (a Jamaican culinary herb similar to scallions) and thyme, which grow well in Jamaica, are used together for Jamaican meat dishes. The essence of Jamaican cuisine is the use of herbs such as thyme, according to Norma Shirley, who is often referred to as the Julia Child of the Caribbean. Finally, the Scotch bonnet pepper is one of the hottest varieties in the world and is used for many dishes including jerk dishes.

### *Coffee*

In 1728, Sir Nicholas Lawes, then governor of Jamaica, imported coffee into Jamaica from Martinique, and it was discovered that the island was suitable for growing coffee. Today, blue mountain coffee, cultivated in the area of the Blue Mountains located in the northeastern part of the country, is considered one of the highest-quality coffee crops in the world. Blue mountain coffee is exported to other countries. Many locals drink instant coffee with condensed milk.

### *Rum*

Jamaica produces a great variety of types and flavors of rum, and Jamaican rum is famous for its high quality. The history of rum in Jamaica is closely associated with the nonsweet history of British colonization. In the 17th and 18th centuries, sugar was at the center of the triangle trade: Molasses was produced by African slaves on the Caribbean sugar plantations. Molasses was transported to New England for distillation into rum, which was shipped to Africa in exchange for the slaves. Today, rum is

the spirit of Jamaica. Jamaicans enjoy a shot of rum on different occasions, and no Jamaican Christmas is complete without sorrel made from rum. Sorrel is a punch made with hibiscus and ginger.

## Cooking

One of the unique cooking methods native to Jamaica is called jerk. To make jerk, meats are rubbed or marinated with spices such as allspice and Scotch bonnet peppers. The history of jerk has been well documented. Taino, who had inhabited the Greater Antilles in the Caribbean Sea before Columbus's arrival, would build a platform of sticks above a shallow pit of ashes of pimento (allspice) wood and place the meat on the grid and cover it with pimento leaves and seeds to enhance the flavor of allspice.

Jamaicans also use preparation methods commonly found in other parts of the world, such as boiling, roasting, seasoning, drying, baking, and frying. Many stews are specialties in Jamaica. The use of spices and coconut is a unique cooking style in Jamaican cuisine.

The cooking style among Rastafarians is quite different from that of non-Rastafarians in Jamaica. Because of their beliefs that follow the laws of nature, many Rastas avoid foods that contain food additives such as artificial colorants, flavorings, and preservatives, as well as salt. Devout Rastas avoid canned or dried foods and even prohibit the use of metal cooking utensils; instead, clay and wood cooking pots, crockery, and cutlery are used. Ital food, which reflects a natural and healthy way of life, is served as a one-pot stew made without meat, salt, or other preservatives. The stew is often served in carved calabashes accompanied by calabash spoons.

## Typical Meals

### *Breakfast*

Jamaicans enjoy a hearty breakfast that consists of a main dish accompanied by delicious side dishes. Ackee and salt fish is a popular breakfast menu. Salt fish is also served with callaloo or okra. Mackerel rundown and escoveitched fish are other breakfast



A round flat bread called bammy is made from grated cassava. Here, it is topped with breaded grouper. (Rui Dias Aidos | Dreamstime.com)

dishes. Codfish fritters can be served for breakfast or as an appetizer. *Bully beef* (a corned beef dish) is also a typical Jamaican breakfast dish.

Dumplings, breadfruit, bananas, potatoes, and yams go well with Jamaican breakfast dishes. Bammy (cassava bread) is a wonderful accompaniment to fish dishes, and rice and peas goes well with any main course.

Among the poorer families, the morning meal frequently consists of just a cup of bush tea prepared by steeping the leaves in hot water. A small portion of carbohydrate-rich foods such as a piece of bread or a little cornmeal porridge may be served along with the tea.

### *Lunch*

The dishes for breakfast can also be served for lunch. However, the most popular Jamaican lunch item would be *patties and coco bread.* Patties, delicious crescent-shaped flaky pies, are Jamaicans' favorite choice for lunch. There are a number of patty shops across the island where patties are made into a sandwich with coco bread, which despite the name is just a sweet soft bread roll that does not contain coconut. In Kingston, one sees a line of people at a patty shop during lunchtime when people want something quick and delicious. There are spicy beef patties, curried chicken patties, and vegetable

patties that contain callaloo and other vegetables. Meat dishes accompanied by rice and peas are other popular lunch items in Jamaica.

### *Dinner*

A variety of dishes are served for dinner. Rice and peas with either chicken or beef are served with some side dishes. Curried chicken, curried shrimp, escoveitched fish, steamed fish, oxtails, stew peas, stew pork, tripe and beans, and cow feet are all popular. Curry goat may be served, but it is mostly reserved for special occasions.

Chicken, rice and peas, raw and cooked vegetables, and a fruit drink are typical Sunday dinner menu items among most Jamaicans. More vegetables are consumed on Sundays than on weekdays. In addition, desserts are consumed on Sundays, mainly potato and cornmeal puddings or ice cream.

## Eating Out

Jerk dishes (chicken, pork, fish) are popular, and jerk-dish stands are everywhere. Locals enjoy stands and casual restaurants that serve traditional Jamaican foods. For snacks, patties are one of the most popular food items.

Today, there are numerous fast-food restaurants in Kingston and popular resort areas such as Montego Bay. There are also restaurants that serve international cuisines including Italian, Japanese, and Thai. In addition, there are elegant and innovative Jamaican cuisine restaurants such as those run by Norma Shirley, which are famous for their use of fresh and local ingredients.

## Special Occasions

Jamaicans enjoy celebrating various special occasions; curried goat is often served for celebrating a special occasion. *Mannish water* is a spicy goat-head soup that also contains a goat's intestines, green bananas, and a variety of root vegetables like yams or potatoes. Believed to be a tonic, mannish water is often served at wedding receptions.

Christmas Day is a special occasion for many Jamaicans who follow Christian faiths. On Christmas Day common dishes served include chicken, oxtail, curry goat, roast ham, roast beef, and rice and *gungo* peas, which are in season in December. One or two weeks prior to Christmas Day, Jamaicans begin soaking fruits in rum to prepare Jamaican-style Christmas cake, another special food for Christmas. The cake is eaten with sorrel, a popular drink for Jamaicans during the Christmas season. It is made from sorrel sepals (hibiscus), cinnamon, cloves, ginger, sugar, orange peel, and rum. As a favorite Easter dish, *bun* is a spicy bread that is eaten with cheese. Popular fish recipes for Easter include Jamaican escoveitched, fried, and stewed fish.

Nine nights, influenced by African religious and cultural traditions, is an extended wake to give comfort and support to the relatives of the deceased. Fried fish and bammy are served along with 100-proof Jamaican white rum.

**Easter Spice Bun**

2 c brown sugar
1 beaten egg
1 tbsp butter
¾ c whole milk
3 tsp baking powder
1 tsp grated nutmeg
1 tsp cinnamon
Pinch of salt
1 tbsp vanilla
1 c raisins
½ tsp lime juice

Grease a loaf tin and line it with greased paper.
Preheat oven to 350°F for about 15 minutes.
Add sugar to beaten egg, and then add melted butter and milk
Add all dry ingredients, and beat until smooth.
Add vanilla and the fresh raisins to the mix, plus lime juice, and then pour into the lined and greased tin.
Bake for approximately 1 hour.

**Glaze**

½ c brown sugar

½ c water

Boil water and sugar until thick.

Spread the glaze on the Easter bun, and return to the oven for an additional 5–8 minutes.

If desired, press a few whole cherries into the top of the bun.

## Diet and Health

Various medical and belief systems from the indigenous Arawak Indians, African slaves, and Europeans, primarily Spanish and British, have influenced the contemporary Jamaican folk medical system. Indigenous people developed knowledge of medicinal herbs that were available on the island. The Europeans brought the Hippocratic humoral system, based on the idea that the body is regulated by four fluids, blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile, each of which is described as being hot or cold and wet or dry.

During the slavery era, slaves adapted and utilized the concept of obeah, a morally neutral spiritual power, folk magic, or sorcery, which was derived from Central and West African origins. Later, obeah practitioners, yard healers, and bush doctors or herbalists, who normally combine their spiritual and herbal knowledge, became primary healers during the postemancipation era.

Today, most Jamaicans employ both Western biomedical and folk medical systems. Jamaicans attempt to treat an illness first at home using their herbal knowledge or with help from herbalists or bush doctors. Some herbs are linked to the supernatural roles they play in healing. A number of herbs that have been recognized as medicinal are available in Jamaica. "Duppy" (spirit) coconut, "duppy cherry," and "duppy cotton" are some examples of herbs that are related to spirits. If the home remedy is not effective, Jamaicans go to the biomedical doctor that practices Western medicine. If this does not work, some of them ask spiritual practitioners for help or use both biomedical and folk medicine concurrently. Physicians and patients often have different concepts about causes of illness, symptoms, treatment, and lifestyle factors such as diet, which often creates miscommunication.

Besides the use of plants to prevent or treat illnesses, Jamaicans perceive that diet is associated with their health. The Rastafarians are a group of people who generally follow strict guidelines regarding diet. Eating pork and crustaceans is universally prohibited among Rastas. They also tend to be vegetarians and avoid eating other meats such as beef, chicken, and goat. Many Rastas also avoid consuming fish with no scales or large fish, which are perceived to have more developed souls. Most Rastas believe in not killing other creatures and, therefore, prefer a vegan lifestyle, which is referred to as ital, meaning a natural and healthy way of life. Because of their adherence to nature and their belief that their bodies are the temple of the living God, most Rastas also avoid processed foods, which are not ital and pollute their bodies. The use of any added salt is discouraged among Rastafarians.

Because Rastafarians believe in nature's magical healing properties, they rely on herbs and trees instead of pharmaceuticals. Religious healers called Rasta doctors practice in their "balm" yard, an herbal healing garden where the doctors practice their magic, utilizing different herbs as nature (herbs) provides remedy to any illness.

Obesity has become a major public health issue in many developed and developing countries including Jamaica. Diet has been identified as a major factor associated with onset of obesity in those countries. Recent studies have demonstrated that increased fiber intakes in women, as well as increased vegetable consumption in both genders, were associated with a lower body mass index, indicating that promoting a traditional food culture that emphasizes the consumption of fiber-rich vegetables, fruits, and grains may be important to prevent obesity and noncommunicable diseases in Jamaica. At the same time, child undernutrition, especially stunting, is still a public health issue in Jamaica. Researchers in Jamaica recently revealed that stunting

was associated with poor psychological functioning in late adolescence. Just like other middle-income countries, Jamaica is experiencing the coexistence of under- and overnutrition, and globalization and lifestyle changes appear to play an important role in Jamaica's nutrition transition.

*Keiko Goto*

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# Martinique and Guadeloupe

## Overview

Martinique and Guadeloupe are two of France's four overseas departments (the other two are French Guiana, on the mainland of South America, and Réunion, an island in the Indian Ocean). Martinique and Guadeloupe are thus fully French territories that fly the French flag, and their inhabitants are French citizens who speak French and Creole. Both are islands in the Caribbean Sea, part of the Lesser Antilles island chain located to the east of Puerto Rico, Hispaniola (Haiti and the Dominican Republic), Jamaica, and Cuba. Martinique is a single island with an area of 417 square miles and a population of 399,000. Guadeloupe is considered an archipelago. The two main islands, Grande-Terre and Basse-Terre, resemble a single butterfly-shaped island whose sections are divided by a narrow sea channel called la Rivière Salée. The other smaller islands of the Guadeloupe archipelago are Désirade, the Saintes, Marie-Galante, Saint Martin, and Saint Barthélemy. All together, the Guadeloupe archipelago has an area of 687 square miles and a population of 458,000. Martinique and the main islands of Guadeloupe are separated from each other in the Lesser Antilles chain by the island of Dominica.

The two islands were home to Arawak and Carib populations who were largely killed or chased off the islands by the French, who first settled there in the 17th century. The islands supported tobacco and then sugar and indigo plantations through the period of slavery (1635–1848) and later. Export agriculture based on crops and products such as bananas, sugar, and rum is still a major sector of the economy of both islands. The current inhabitants (Martiniquais and Guadeloupians) are the mixed descendants of native Caribs and Arawaks, small numbers of original French settlers, much larger numbers of African slaves brought by the French to work the plantations, Indian and Chinese indentured laborers who were brought in the 19th century for the same reason, and other European, Carib, and African mixed peoples of neighboring Caribbean islands and the American mainlands. The culinary practices of Martinique and Guadeloupe's inhabitants thus reflect the tropical Caribbean geography of the islands themselves and this colonial global history that resulted in the transplantation of both people and foodstuffs. For instance, French supermarkets selling metropolitan French dietary staples are common on the islands, where open-air market vendors also sell a mix of local foodstuffs, *local* in this case meaning both native crops and those imported across oceans long ago to feed both captive and free populations. Through this mix, the culinary cultures of Martinique and Guadeloupe contribute in clearly identifiable ways to the vast panoply of cuisines of the African diaspora.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Odile and Maximilien Chivallon live in central Fort-de-France, the capital of Martinique since 1902 when Mount Pélée erupted, destroying the historical capital of Saint Pierre. Odile, who grew up in Gosier, a small town close to Point-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe, is an account advisor at the local branch of BNP Paribas, a major French bank, and Maximilien, who was raised in a Martiniquais family in Seine-Saint Denis, a suburb of Paris,

is an archivist with the Archives départementales de la Martinique, located in Schœlcher, a short distance from Fort-de-France. Both start the day with typically small breakfasts: Maximilien has the remainder of a coconut cake that Odile prepared the week before, accompanied by strong black espresso coffee with sugar, and Odile has the same coffee at home before she leaves and then picks up a *pain au chocolat* (chocolate-filled pastry), croissant, or other pastry (*viennoiserie*) at a bakery close to her workplace.

When working, both Odile and Maximilien often buy lunch from nearby bakeries: sandwiches such as baguettes filled with flaked dried cod, grated carrot, and sliced tomatoes, dressed with a mustard-based vinaigrette, or perhaps two or more *petits pâtés salés,* small, savory wheat-flour pastries stuffed with spicy pork, chicken, or crab fillings, or with guava or other fruit fillings for dessert. Both finish their lunches with more espresso coffee. More substantial evening meals at home, featuring dishes such as lentils with marinated salt cod, or octopus fricassee, both served with plantain or pumpkin or both, are eaten at 8:30 P.M. or later.

When buying food to prepare at home, Odile and Maximilien shop at open-air markets, large supermarkets, and neighborhood grocery stores. Open-air markets such as the Lafcadio Hearn market in Fort-de-France are ideal and inexpensive sources for coconuts, fruit, many varieties of bananas and plantains, ginger and other spices, peppers, and a large range of locally grown tubers. In large supermarkets, Odile and Maximilien can find many products imported from France: canned vegetables (beans, peas, carrots, soups), cheeses, yogurt, butter, other dairy items, biscuits and cookies, dried sausages, canned fish, lentils, rice, and pasta. Supermarkets also have fresh meat sections selling a variety of both imported and local meat. As well as selling convenience food such as canned goods, smaller neighborhood grocery stores often carry a range of local manufactured products such as coffee, dried cod and other fish, fruit juices, and sugar syrups.

## Major Foodstuffs

The dietary staples of Martinique and Guadeloupe, like those of many of the other Caribbean islands, are the extensive range of local tubers and roots that have supported populations since before the arrival of Europeans in the 15th century; although the two islands share similar histories and tropical climates and ecosystems, the names of some crops differ. These crops provide the essential carbohydrate base for the dietary regimes that developed historically and that have adapted to the significant transformations brought about by French colonization and settlement over the last five centuries. The historically dominant tuber is manioc, of which there are two main types: The larger bitter manioc is intensively processed to produce a range of edible goods: a thick starch used for baby food and as a thickener for soups and stews, a coarse meal that can be cooked like rice, a finer meal that can be sprinkled on top of other dishes, and the flour that is the base of cassava bread, one of the region's best-known specialties. The smaller sweet manioc (*kanmanioc* in Guadeloupe), which needs no processing other than peeling, is simply chopped and boiled in salted water and then eaten as an accompaniment to main dishes.

Other important tubers include the many varieties of yam (*igname*; both native American varieties such as *couscouche* and the African varieties that had served as provisions for slave ships during the Middle Passage); sweet potatoes (*patate* or *patate douce*); taro, originally from Asia (*madère* in Guadeloupe from its transatlantic associations with the island of Madeira, and *dachine* in Martinique, literally meaning "from China"); malanga (*chou caraïbe*), whose leaves are eaten as well as its roots; and Jerusalem artichokes (*topinambours*).

Legumes such as beans and peas also play a vital role in the carbohydrate complex of Martinique and Guadeloupe, much as they do in other African diasporic cuisines. Again there is a vibrant mix of local varieties such as *pois-savon* (a kind of butter bean), lima beans, red kidney beans (*haricots rouges*), and peanuts (*cacahuète,* from the Aztec *cocohuat*), in addition to African varieties such as pigeon peas (*pois d'Angole*) and black-eyed peas (*pois de canne* in Guadeloupe and *pois-chique* in Martinique). In addition, this carbohydrate base includes foodstuffs technically classified as fruits, such as the

many types of banana (starchy green and sweeter yellow ones) and plantains, as well as breadfruit (*fruit à pain*) with its edible seeds, *chataigne-pays,* or "local chestnuts." Although cultivated and eaten, rice and maize are less significant on the islands than on the mainlands of the Americas.

Other vegetables eaten widely on the islands are okra (*gombo*), onions and garlic, a wide range of peppers (*piments*), squashes such as *christophine* (chayote) and *giraumon,* and a plethora of leafy green vegetables, often derived from the tubers already described and other local plants, as well as those imported from Europe during the first generations of colonial settlement, such as lettuce and sorrel (*oseille*). These leaves are often cooked together in a kind of stew known as *calalou,* a name that also refers to a specific plant whose leaves are typically used in its preparation. Herbs and spices such as thyme, cinnamon, allspice (both leaves and berries), and vanilla are grown locally and used widely. The best-known French Caribbean spice mix is Colombo powder, also associated with Réunion, the French overseas department in the Indian Ocean, and it contains *curcuma* (turmeric), cumin, coriander, fenugreek, pepper, cloves, mustard, and ginger; cardamom, saffron, fennel seed, and anise are other spices that can be added. This spice mix is directly related to the Indian populations of the islands, particularly on Guadeloupe, and it is used in the preparation of several classic dishes such as *colombo au poulet* (stewed chicken with Colombo powder) or *riz jaune* (yellow rice).

Like other Caribbean islands, Martinique and Guadeloupe are home to a vast number of fruit trees and plants. Here again are local or mainland American fruits such as pineapples, several types of guavas, papayas, apricots, avocados, passion fruit (*maracuja*), star apples (*caïmite*) and sugar apples (*pomme cannelle*), the purple *mombin* (*prune-chili*), sea grapes (*raisins bord-de-mer*), and sapodillas (*sapotille*) growing today next to nonnative varieties. Fruits imported across the Atlantic or Pacific oceans from the colonial period on include the bananas, plantains, and breadfruit already mentioned, as well as mangoes, figs, jackfruit, and, importantly, the many varieties of citrus fruits now growing there, including grapefruit, lemons, limes, pomelos, and sour oranges, first introduced to the Caribbean by Columbus in 1493.

The native Arawak and Carib diets of Martinique and Guadeloupe traditionally supplemented this array of tubers, other vegetables, and fruit with the mollusks, crustaceans, fish, and other seafood that are abundant in the Caribbean Sea, and this is still the case today. Widely consumed shellfish include sea urchins (*oursin*) with their eggs (*chadron*), conch (*lambi*), clams (*palourdes*), shrimp of various sizes (*z'habitant* and *ouassou*), langoustine, and small octopus called *chatou.* A wide range of fresh fish also makes its way into common dishes: Well-known types include red snapper (*vivaneau* or *poisson rouge*), sea bream (*daurade*), shark (*requin*), and,



Vendor at the fruit market in Fort-de-France, Martinique. (Corel)

especially in Martinique, the flying fish (*poisson volant*) and king mackerel (*thazard*). Lesser-known fresh fish such as *coffre* and *balaou* are caught by artisanal or small-scale fishermen and are difficult to find in large markets. In the realm of seafood, colonial history also lives in the present day, here in the form of dried cod, which is a ubiquitous filling for sandwiches and other savory baked goods and can appear as a main dish as well. This cod originated in the North Atlantic fishery off of Newfoundland and in the Gulf of the Saint Lawrence, first developed by the British and the French in the 17th century, largely to feed their slave populations in the West Indies.

Although large quantities of meat and poultry are imported, there are also local sources that provide the basis of several Martiniquais and Guadeloupian specialties, beef cattle, goats, and pigs all having been introduced to the islands by the Spanish. Goats, in particular, are raised on a small scale, and goat meat (*cabri*) is found in many stews and fricassees and is eaten in dried form (*cabri salé*). Pigs are also raised on a relatively small scale, making local pork available today, *cochon créole* being particularly prized in Guadeloupe. Pig tails, trotters, blood (in boudin), and offal such as tripe make up a substantial portion of pork consumption, and there is a well-established tradition of sausage and ham production (charcuterie). Although the great majority of beef consumed on the islands is imported, beef cattle are raised on Guadeloupe (*bovin créole*) and are used in stews and roasts; the Martiniquais specialty *peau saignée* is made from frying or slowly simmering a dice of the flesh and skin of the cow's head.

## Cooking

There is a range of typical ways of preparing dishes on Martinique and Guadeloupe. Both islands have long traditions of baking, beginning with cassava bread, which depended on the processing of bitter manioc in order to rid the tuber of its poisons. The traditional labor-intensive process that the French and Africans learned from the Arawaks and Caribs involves peeling, soaking, and grating the tuber, after which the grated mass is pressed, then dried and sifted. Liquid and other products including starch and flavorings are added to the meal, which is then formed into cakes and roasted in metal vessels placed over a fire. The process of drying grated pulp to produce flours that then serve as the base of baked goods is common to other tubers, roots, and fruit as well; examples include sweet potatoes, yams, coconuts, and bananas. These manufactured flours are available in local grocery stores. The ubiquity of refined and unrefined sugar, sugar syrups, and rum and the deeply rooted French baking traditions—evident in the many *boulangeries* and patisseries (bakeries selling bread and pastry)—have also contributed to the large assortment of sweet and savory baked goods available on the two islands. As well as the baguettes and *flûtes* familiar to all Frenchmen and Frenchwomen, local specialties such as *zacharie, pain au beurre, galette moussache,* and *jalousies* abound. Also, because of the easy availability of local fruits and their involvement in sugar production, the islands have a long history of candy and jam making (*confiserie*).

One-pot cooking is very common on Martinique and Guadeloupe: Main dishes are often rich stews or fricassees in which onions, garlic, aromatics, and seasonings such as peppers are added to the pieces of meat and often vegetables, which are then cooked together for a long time in stock or water, producing a gravy. Sometimes the meat has been marinated beforehand to tenderize it: In Martinique and Guadeloupe these marinades almost always include lime or lemon juice, peppers (piments), and thyme. This stew or fricassee is commonly accompanied by what can be a surprising amount of quite bland carbohydrates: Small quantities of plain boiled yam, plantain, banana, breadfruit, and taro can be found on the same plate as a small portion of pasta and cheese and/or rice and peas.

Another important method of cooking is deep-frying, which is used in preparing the wide array of fritters and croquettes available on the islands. The most well known are *accras de morue,* small deep-fried battered salt cod fritters, often spiced with Scotch bonnet peppers, but *accras* in general can be based on any other seafood or vegetable such



Accras de morue, small deep-fried battered salt cod, spiced with Scotch bonnet peppers. (StockPhotoPro)

as giraumon or taro. Unlike the rice-based accra found elsewhere in African diasporic and French New World cuisines, such as those traditionally prepared in New Orleans, on Martinique and Guadeloupe, the batter is made from wheat flour.

Soups also play a vital role in the cuisines of Martinique and Guadeloupe: There are a number of widely known bean soups—*soupe z'habitants* and *soupe à congo*—in which local beans are cooked in combination with a large quantity of other vegetables (giraumon—a kind of squash, sweet potatoes, yams), seasonings, and sometimes meat. Calalou, another dish common throughout the African diaspora, is made of a large quantity of different leafy green vegetables, four or five or more varieties. These greens are often the tops of tubers and roots eaten separately; the greens are cooked in water, often in combination with a small quantity of lard or smoked ham, garlic, piments and other seasonings, and okra.

## Typical Meals

The structure and frequency of meals in contemporary Martinique and Guadeloupe resemble those in metropolitan France, particularly for middle-class and urban residents. Most people begin the day with a light breakfast, often of baked goods such as coconut or banana cake, if not packaged cereal, followed by strong coffee. Indeed, breakfast often takes the form of a pastry bought at a local bakery. However, much heartier breakfasts based on local foodstuffs were traditionally consumed in the past by agricultural workers: One classic example is *ti-nain morue,* a dish in which small, starchy green bananas are stewed with soaked salt cod and seasonings such as garlic, lemons, and cloves; toasted manioc meal is often sprinkled on top. A traditional breakfast beverage would be coconut water (*dlo coco* in Creole), considered to have a very high vitamin and mineral content; or a tea called *té péyi* ("country tea" in Creole) made from infusing the bark and leaves of a local tree (*Capraria biflora*) in hot water.

Lunch and dinner meals are often based on a one-pot stewed or fricasseed dish accompanied by a selection of boiled tubers such as yams, breadfruit, plantain, and rice and peas. In recent generations pasta such as macaroni cooked in a cheese sauce and then cut into squares formed another common accompaniment to main dishes.

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### ***Blaff de Poisson Blancs*** **(Fish Blaff)**

*Blaff de poisson blancs,* a dish common to both islands, is cooked in another style: It is fish poached in a classic French court bouillon although the dish itself is associated with early Dutch settlers to the Caribbean. The word *blaff* derives from the sound that the fish apparently makes as it is lowered into the poaching liquid. This dish is traditionally accompanied by a selection of boiled yam, breadfruit, sweet potatoes, taro, and so on.

2 to 3 lb firm-fleshed white fish (such as swordfish, sea bream, or king mackerel), scaled, gutted, and cleaned; they may be left whole if small or cut into thick slices if large

4 limes

4 garlic cloves

1 allspice leaf (or bay leaf)

1 Scotch bonnet pepper, chopped finely after removing the seeds and inner veins (use latex or other kitchen gloves and pay special attention to not touch your face or eyes after preparing)

1 French yellow onion (regular cooking onion), diced

3 local onions (these resemble American shallots; use French shallots—*échalotes*—if not available), chopped

1 bouquet garni (a sprig of thyme, an allspice or bay leaf, and 3 sprigs of flat-leaf parsley tied in cheesecloth)

1 tbsp neutral vegetable oil such as grape seed

3 sprigs flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped

Salt and pepper to taste

Limes and Scotch bonnet peppers, for garnish and/or consumption

1. Rub the fish, or slices of fish, with the cut halves of one of the limes, paying special attention to the insides of the fish if left whole. If the whole fish are thick, make small slices at regular intervals so that the seasoning penetrates. Place fish in a shallow dish with the juice of 3 limes (including the one you have already sliced), one minced garlic clove, the allspice or bay leaf (roughly crushed), the diced Scotch bonnet pepper, and salt and pepper. Add a little water until just covered, and let marinate in the refrigerator for 1–2 hours.

2. Ten minutes before the end of the marinating time, prepare the court bouillon by bringing all of the onion (both types if available), 2 crushed garlic cloves, the bouquet garni, salt (in Guadeloupe the blaff is always very salty), and pepper to a boil in a large stew pot or Dutch oven in 1½ quarts of water. Simmer for 10 minutes on a medium flame.

3. Remove the fish from their marinade, drain them, and immerse them in the court bouillon, putting in the largest whole fish or fish slices first. Bring the court bouillon back to a boil, and let simmer for 5 to 15 minutes, depending on the type and size of the fish. Remove the fish or fish slices as soon as they are cooked through, and keep warm.

4. Place all of the poached fish on a large shallow plate. Discard the bouquet garni from the court bouillon. Mash the remaining garlic clove with the tablespoon of oil, the juice of the last lime, and the chopped parsley. Add this mixture to the court bouillon, and when all is well blended, pour the court bouillon over the poached fish so as to present it bathed in its cooking liquid. On a separate plate, arrange quartered limes and peppers for presentation (and consumption for those who wish).

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The evening meal in contemporary Martinique and Guadeloupe often begins with an aperitif (before-dinner drink), in the French style, served with a selection of small appetizers such as spicy fritters, croquettes, small crepes, or puffs made from a variety of vegetables such as sweet potatoes or from seafood such as salt cod or crab. The most common aperitif on the islands is *ti'punch* ("small punch"), a cocktail made of sugar syrup, sections of lime, and rum, with the proportion of syrup to rum ranging from 1:3 to 1:8. Purists prefer the cocktail without ice cubes, but it is often served with them as well. A large variety of sugar syrups are available, ranging from dark ones that can resemble molasses in taste and appearance (*sirop de batterie*) to syrups that are clearer in color and lighter in taste (*sirops de canne à sucre*). There is an even larger range in the varieties of rum available: Rum is one of the most important exports of both islands, and there are many *rhummeries* producing rums of differing tastes, ages, and qualities. The two main categories of rum are *rhum agricole,* a more artisanal product distilled directly from the fermented liquid of the crushed sugarcane; and *rhum industriel,* a larger-scale product distilled from the fermented molasses, a by-product of the refining of sugar. As well as these two categories, rum is also distinguished by the number of years it has been aged, ranging from 3 to 15 years, or even older, and the French system of *appellation d'origine contrôllée* is in place for rum from Martinique and Guadeloupe, restricting the use of names, geographic identifiers, and manufacturing terms according to strictly regulated criteria.

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***Féroce D'avocat***

*Féroce d'avocat,* a spicy avocado and salt cod dish, is a common appetizer served with the aperitif.

*Serves 4*

**Step 1: *Morue en Chiquetaille* (Shredded Codfish)**

1 lb dried salt cod (choose a piece that is as thick as possible and preferably from the tail)

1 French yellow onion (regular cooking onion), finely diced

3 local onions (these resemble American shallots; use French shallots—échalotes—if not available), finely diced

2 cloves garlic, finely diced

2 sprigs flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped

2 sprigs thyme, leaves removed and stems discarded

1 Scotch bonnet pepper, chopped finely after removing the seeds and inner veins (use latex or other kitchen gloves and pay special attention to not touch your face or eyes after preparing)

Juice of 2 limes

5 tbsp neutral vegetable oil

1. Scrape the cod before soaking in order to remove as much surface salt as possible. Cut into strips and grill directly over a gas flame, browning the strips lightly. Then place cod strips in a bowl, cover generously with cold water, and soak for 1 hour. Drain them carefully and shred the strips as finely as possible, making sure to remove all the skin and fine bones you find.

2. Place the shredded cod in a salad bowl with the aromatics (onions, garlic, parsley, thyme, pepper). Mix carefully to fully combine all ingredients, sprinkle with the lime juice, and then slowly add the vegetable oil. Let marinate for at least 2 hours

**Step 2: *Féroce D'avocat***

2 large ripe avocados

1 Scotch bonnet pepper, prepared as in Step 1 (optional: this will make the dish extremely spicy)

¾ c cassava (manioc) meal

Salt and pepper

1. Slice avocados lengthways, remove the pit, and scoop out the flesh, keeping the skins intact and putting aside. Mash the avocado flesh, and add the *morue en chiquetaille* and the second Scotch bonnet pepper, if desired, combining until you obtain a smooth texture.

2. Add the cassava meal and combine again. Taste for salt and pepper, and mound the mixture into the avocado skins for presentation. Another common method of presentation is to shape the mixture into small balls and place on a plate.

## Eating Out

There are many options for eating outside of the home on Martinique and Guadeloupe. Traditionally, there has been a wide selection of casual eating establishments in the marketplaces of towns and urban centers; these serve stews, fricassees, boiled roots, rice and peas, fresh fruit juices, and baked goods, alone or in combination, particularly at lunchtime. These eateries are often partially or wholly out of doors. In addition, there are many indoor cafés and casual restaurants that serve similar dishes away from marketplaces during the daytime; some combine them with extensive baking facilities. Full bakeries are a well-established institution on the islands. In addition to selling French breads, cakes, pies, and pastries, they prepare sandwiches for lunchtime crowds. All of these places typically close in the evening.

Tourism is an extremely important sector in the economies of Martinique and Guadeloupe, with many metropolitan French visitors owning second homes on the islands and spending their annual vacations there. Their presence and that of other international tourists have encouraged the development of a range of mid- and upscale restaurants that cater to them in towns, cities, and resorts and on beachfronts throughout the day, but especially for evening meals. The growing number of middle-class Martiniquais and Guadeloupians are also clients for these businesses. Many of these restaurants, and the network of formally trained chefs who invest and work in them, consciously offer dishes with



A bakery van filled with bread on the streets of Le Diamant, Martinique. (Philip Gould | Corbis)

traditional touches reflecting the islands' creolized history and in this way support the blossoming of a *cuisine antillaise* that is continuing to gain in popularity and recognition.

The large fast-food chains such as McDonalds, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Pizza Hut, and Quick (a French hamburger restaurant) have not implanted themselves on Martinique and Guadeloupe as they have in metropolitan France, although there is a Hippopotamus (a French fast-food chain) on each island. Nevertheless, there are local versions of fast-food restaurants in most urban centers on both islands that are open in the evening. These establishments sell a combination of Western fast food that has both Caribbean and French touches: French fries (*frites*), grilled brochettes of conch and other seafood, pizza, hamburgers and other hot sandwiches, and couscous.

## Special Occasions

Festivals and other special occasions, often linked to harvests or the Catholic calendar, are celebrated on Martinique and Guadeloupe with special foods or food rituals. One of the most important is Christmas, which is celebrated with a *réveillon* (Christmas Eve party) before going to midnight mass on December 24. Three traditional foods commonly eaten as appetizers at this party are small, spicy blood sausages (boudin), savory stuffed pastries (petits pâtés salés), and Christmas ham (*jambon de Noël*). All three make extensive use of pork: Boudin is prepared from pork blood, seasonings, manioc, sweet potato meal or breadcrumbs, and lime juice, which are stuffed into casings after being cooked together and the casings are tied off with string at four-inch intervals. The strings of boudin are then boiled until

cooked through. Cooks jealously guard their recipes for boudin as there can be much variation in the ingredients, particularly in the seasonings. Petits pâtés salés make use of spiced chopped pork filet, which is seasoned, covered with classic French *pâté brisée* (short crust pastry), and then shaped into two-inch rounds before being baked. The majestic Christmas ham is characterized by its large size, 10–15 pounds on the bone, by its time-consuming preparation, and by its reddish sugar glaze, which was traditionally enhanced by the application of a clothes iron to the outside after the cooking.

One of the most important food-related festivals on the two islands is the long-standing annual Fête des Cuisinières (Festival of the Women's Cooking Association) on Guadeloupe. This event takes place in mid-August in honor of Saint-Pierre, the patron saint of the organization, and entails a parade in Point-à-Pitre, the capital, led by the 250 or so members of the Women's Cooking Association dressed in traditional skirts, scarves, and headdresses. The parade finishes with a celebratory lunch of local specialties for all participants.

There are also local agricultural or seafood festivals on both islands that celebrate and highlight specialties, such as the Fête du poisson et de la mer (Festival of Fishing and the Sea) on Guadeloupe in late April or early May, and the Semaine Gastronomique de Sainte-Marie (Week of Gastronomy in Saint Marie) on Martinique at the end of April, which provides culinary histories and recipes for traditional Caribbean foodstuffs such as yams, pineapple, coconut, and squashes.

## Diet and Health

For French citizens residing in the overseas departments of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana, life expectancy has continued to rise during the 2000s so that it now matches that of metropolitan France: 77 years for men and 84 years for women in 2005. This rise in life expectancy is almost entirely due to a decrease in infant mortality. In terms of health, high blood pressure, cancer, and cardiovascular disease are the most important threats to life expectancy on the islands, as they are in metropolitan France and in the West, generally. One enormous difference in the health of metropolitan and overseas French citizens is caused by endocrinal diseases, which kill at double the rate on Guadeloupe, Martinique, and French Guiana compared to the metropole. All of these pathologies are linked to diet, and endocrinal disease in particular is connected to type 2 or sugar diabetes, which can develop in those whose diets feature too much starchy and sweet food. Diabetes affects women in the overseas departments at a higher rate than men.

The rates and nature of alcohol-related problems also differ between the metropole and the islands. While alcoholic psychosis kills at a higher rate overseas, cirrhosis of the liver kills at a lower rate, with Guadeloupe being the island most affected by all alcoholic disorders. The reason for this discrepancy lies in the type of alcohol consumed: rum on the islands and wine in the metropole. These statistics notwithstanding, female alcoholism is lower on Martinique and French Guiana than in the metropole.

While health is assessed and medical care is provided on the islands in institutionally similar ways to metropolitan France, there exists nonetheless in the French Antilles an extensive body of folk remedies that rely on local plants for the production of botanical tonics (*rimèd razié*). Considered part of the legacy of slaves' knowledge of healing, this body of knowledge is currently experiencing a renewal of interest. On Guadeloupe, for example, the Association pour la promotion et le développement des plantes médicinales et aromatiques de Guadeloupe (Association for the Promotion and Development of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants of Guadeloupe) has inventoried 625 varieties of medicinal plants that can be used to create remedies. While some of these remedies are familiar to all localities where the particular plant grows—for instance, using cloves to soothe toothaches—there are many specific to the islands. Examples include a flower called *atoumo* in Creole ("against all evils"), whose petals in combination with rum and honey are considered to bring down fevers; the bark of the red gum tree (*gommier rouge*) macerated with allspice berries in rum, which is thought to soothe rheumatism; and a bath

containing the leaves of the sugar apple (*pomme cannelle*), which is reported to lift fatigue.

*Bertie Mandelblatt*

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# Mexico

## Overview

The Republic of Mexico forms part of the North American continent; nonetheless, culturally and linguistically, it has greater affinity with Latin America. Some consider it part of Central America, which includes Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama. Mountains form the backbone of the country and divide it into three geographic precincts: a central highland located in south-central Mexico, a southern highland in southern Mexico, and a southeastern highland in the southeastern part of the country. Economically and politically, the most important of these precincts throughout history has always been the central highland, where Mexico City is located at 7,000 feet above sea level. Throughout history the country has always been controlled from some seat of power in the central highland.

The population of Mexico is over 100 million, divided into 30 states. Catholicism is the predominant religion, making up 87 percent of the population, while Protestant evangelical groups form 7 percent of the population, with other religions making up the remainder. Geography plays an important role in determining the diet of Mexicans. The country occupies an area of 2,000 miles from north to south, with diverse plant and animal life, which is reflected in the food traditions of the various regions. Gastronomically, the country can be divided into six regional areas, based on local food traditions: northern Mexico, the Pacific Coast, western Mexico, central Mexico, the isthmus of Tehuantepec, and the Maya area.

The Mexican diet has a common substratum throughout the country, based on corn, beans, and chili peppers. There are many ways of preparing corn, different varieties and methods of preparing beans, and a great diversity of chili peppers and sauces that are popular in each region. Mexico produces a plenitude of fresh fruits and vegetables, whose preparation is also regional.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Felipe and Aurora Urrutia live in an apartment in a middle-class neighborhood of Mexico City, known as La Irrigacion. Felipe is an engineer from Celaya, Guanajuato, and works at Teléfonos de Mexico. Aurora is from Guadalajara, Jalisco, and works in the accounting department of a local department store, El Palacio de Hierro. Their combined incomes allow them to live a comfortable life, without luxuries, but after the bills are paid, there is little money to save toward the purchase of their own home or for starting a family.

Their diet is simple Mexican and international-style food. They seldom eat out at good restaurants, because of the extra expense. Like most immigrants to Mexico City, they rely on friends, rather than family, for their social contacts. To save time, Aurora purchases nearly all of their food products at a nearby supermarket.

A typical day's food consumption for the Urrutias is as follows: Their day begins at about 6 in the morning with a cup of strong, black coffee to wake them up. This may be followed by a sweet roll, *pan dulce,* if there is time. Around 10 A.M., during their morning coffee

break, they consume an *almuerzo,* or small breakfast, which Felipe buys from a street vendor and Aurora purchases at her place of work. This small meal may consist of juice or fresh fruit, along with any of the following: eggs, meat, beans, *chilaquiles* (a tortilla-based dish), tortillas, chili sauce, and coffee. Mexican sweet rolls are a favorite for this time of day.

The most important meal of the day is served in midafternoon, anytime between 2 and 4 P.M. Felipe and Aurora generally do not have enough time to go home on their lunch hours, so Aurora usually takes a hard-roll sandwich, called a *torta,* and a salad or leftovers from the previous night's dinner, which she can warm up in the microwave oven in her office. Pizzas are a popular take-out food for lunch. Felipe generally eats in a *fonda,* an inexpensive restaurant with a fixed menu that caters to office workers, or he may choose to resort to street vendors to sell him tacos or other fast food from a mobile street cart.

Felipe and Aurora eat a more substantial dinner than do middle-class people who have a heavy meal at midday. Their evening meal, served around 9 P.M., may consist of meat and a salad, tacos and beans, enchiladas, or tortilla-based dishes, such as *sopes, tlacloyos,* or *panuchos* (these are snacks but quite filling). Those who have a heavy meal at midday may prefer a light meal, or *merienda,* at night. This may consist of any of the following: soup, fruit, sweet bread, or tamales. A more ample dinner, or *cena,* may be shared with friends or family on more formal occasions.

During the past 50 years, supermarkets have become a favorite shopping center for housewives, who previously had to shop at several small specialty stores or buy at open-air markets. Today's supermarkets sell freshly baked breads, newly made tortillas, fruits and vegetables, and all products needed for cooking a complete meal. Large fruit and vegetable markets are still frequented by many housewives who have the time to shop there. Shopping at supermarkets saves valuable time.

## Major Foodstuffs

The most important food product in Mexico is corn. Many Mexicans eat corn or maize products at every meal in a variety of ways and as snacks between meals as well. It makes up over 50 percent of the caloric intake of middle-class Mexicans and up to 80 percent of the indigenous diet. There are many ways of preparing corn. It can be boiled, toasted, roasted, ground into a fine corn flour, or used as whole kernels and added to a variety of stews. The most common use of corn in present-day Mexico is in the form of tortillas and tamales.

Fresh corn can be purchased year-round; it dries well and can be ground into cornmeal for making tortillas, tamales, and *atoles* (corn-based drinks). Mexican housewives can buy cornmeal to make their own tortillas or purchase ready-made tortillas at the supermarket or the *tortillería* (tortilla shop). Tortillas must be made every day, since they do not keep well overnight. Women in urban Mexico City are not willing to spend the necessary hours grinding corn to make handmade tortillas, although some purchase ready-prepared masa and make tortillas for special occasions. The corn gruel atole can be purchased in the supermarket as a semiprepared product. Corn tortillas are preferred in central and southern Mexico, while wheat-flour tortillas are popular in northern Mexico.

Beans have been an important ingredient in the Mexican diet throughout history. They are a good complement to corn in the diet and contain the amino acids lacking in corn. When consumed together, corn and beans provide the necessary protein requirements for a healthy diet. There are more than



Authentic Mexican dish of tamales with red peppers and pinto beans. (Shutterstock)

20 varieties of beans on the Mexican market; these are commonly known to the public by the color of their seeds, their shapes, or the region where they are grown. Beans are sold in a variety of colors, such as black, pink, white, and beige (*bayo*). Spotted (*pinto*) and mottled (*moteado*) beans are also distinguished, as are particular shapes, such as goat's-eye beans and peanut-shaped beans. Quick-cooking beans called *instantaneos* have become popular in recent decades. They are easily and quickly prepared by adding a small amount of water to the ground beans and frying them as refried beans. Beans are consumed daily by a majority of the Mexican population at any or all of the three meals.

Vitamins and minerals are provided by a variety of fruits and vegetables, some native to the country and others of European origin. Tomatoes, squash, onions, chili peppers, and tomatillos are the most consumed vegetables in the diet. A pear-shaped member of the squash family, called a chayote, is popular, as are cactus paddles, known as *nopales.* Avocados and jicamas, a tuber with white flesh and a radishlike texture, often eaten as a snack or in salads, are other vegetables native to Mexico that have been part of the Mexican diet since pre-Hispanic times. When the Spaniards arrived in the 16th century, they introduced vegetables from the Mediterranean area such as carrots, lettuce, cabbages, onions, garlic, cauliflower, broccoli, eggplant, radishes, okra, spinach, and many other vegetables that have become part of the Mexican diet over the years.

Citrus fruits play an important role in the Mexican food tradition. Sweet and sour oranges, grapefruit, tangerines, sweet and sour lemons, and limes arrived in Mexico soon after the Spanish conquest and adapted easily to the Mexican soil and climate. Many other fruits were brought to Mexico from other parts of the world. Apples, pears, cherries, mangoes, grapes, strawberries, plums, peaches, bananas, melons, and watermelons all arrived in the 16th or 17th century. Mangoes were brought from the Philippines by merchants on the Manila Galleon, which traded between Manila in the Philippines and Acapulco for 250 years. In Mexico, the finest mangoes are known as "manila mangoes." Mexico contributed many tropical fruits to the international diet, such as the papaya, as well as fruits from the *Anona* family like the custard apple, called cherimoya, and the *guanábana.* The *zapote* family includes the mamey, sapodilla (*chicozapote*), and several varieties of zapote distinguished by the color of their pulp, which are popular Mexican fruits, as are guavas. Fruits from the cactus plant include the prickly-pear fruit called *tuna* and the *pitahaya.* Their use in the Mexican diet dates from ancient times.

Special meat shops called *carnicerías* are popular for purchases of all kinds of meat products, as are meat stands in markets or in supermarkets. In Mexico beef is known as *carne de res* and is considered the highest-status meat available and the most expensive as well, making it out of reach for many Mexicans. Pork is a popular meat product and is used in many traditional Mexican dishes. Mutton is appreciated for roasting in a barbecue pit, and roast kid is a popular dish in northern Mexico. Chickens are inexpensive and probably the most popular meat on the market. Eggs are consumed widely and are a good source of protein. Fish is plentiful but more expensive than meat, making it a less popular choice for economy-minded housewives. It can be purchased at special fish shops called *pescaderías,* in markets, or in supermarkets.

Rice is a popular carbohydrate in the Mexican diet and is consumed on a daily basis as an accompaniment for the main dish. It can also be served as a "dry soup" with fried plantains on top or as an ingredient in liquid soups. *Arroz a la mexicana* is red rice, prepared with pureed tomatoes. In addition to white rice, green rice made with fresh cilantro, parsley, and roasted poblano-type peppers that have been pureed and added with the liquid to the cooking rice is a festive method of preparing rice. Black rice is prepared with black bean broth from the bean pot, known as *frijoles de olla.* White rice is also used for making rice pudding, *arroz con leche,* a typical and popular Mexican dessert of Spanish origin.

Sugar found new uses when it was introduced into Mexico in the 16th century. The sugar industry was established early in Mexico on land belonging to Hernán Cortés, at his great hacienda in the

state of Morelos. It became a popular ingredient for making Mexican sweets and candy in the convents and nunneries and was also employed in the manufacture of rustic rum, called *chinguirito,* with a high alcohol content. The most important use of sugar today is in the manufacture of soft drinks, making Mexico the highest consumer of sugar in the world. Soft drinks are also manufactured with a fructose base. Mexican desserts are very sweet, but they are eaten only on special occasions, not on a daily basis. The candy industry is well developed in Mexico, often as an artisan product. Several regions of the country are known for the particular type of candy they produce.

Mexican cooking is well known for its spicy flavor, which mainly comes from the use of hot chili peppers; nonetheless, many other spices are also used for flavoring food. Black pepper, cinnamon, cumin seeds, sesame seeds, aniseed, oregano, cloves, and nutmeg are only a few of the spices on the market that are regularly used in cooking. Mexicans are especially fond of cinnamon, which is used in desserts, coffee (*café de olla*), hot chocolate, and cinnamon tea, as well as in breads and cookies. Mexico is the principal consumer of cinnamon in the world. Local spices include annatto (achiote) seeds, used almost exclusively in Yucatecan cooking. Green or white pumpkin seeds (*pepitas de calabaza*) are popular for cooking or eating as snacks. Chili peppers, garlic, onions, and tomatoes make up a seasoning often referred to as *a la mexicana.*

## Cooking

Throughout Mexican history, the preparation of food has always been considered women's work. Men sometimes took part in outdoor cooking, such as barbecuing meat on a framework of sticks over an open fire or preparing the underground ovens called *pibs* in the Maya area, used for cooking large animals, massive tamales, or large fowl. Men may also have participated as cooks for feasts, banquets, and funerary rites; however, the principal role in everyday cooking was assigned to women.

Many cooking utensils found in present-day Mexican kitchens are cultural remnants of pre-Hispanic implements. Some are still being manufactured and used today. A typical example of this would be the griddle, or *comal,* used to heat tortillas. They are now manufactured from metal, rather than clay, but they serve the same purpose. *Metates* for grinding corn and spices can still be found in more traditional kitchens, as well as *molcajetes,* better described as a stone mortar and pestle, for grinding seeds, tomatoes, and chili peppers for salsas. Clay pots have a long tradition in food preparation in Mexico and can be found in many kitchens as storage vessels for water or grains. Small braziers, called *anafres,* are now made of tin rather than clay, but they are still being manufactured and used in Mexico.

Traditional Mexican cooking is labor-intensive and time-consuming. The cooking is generally done on gas stoves as electricity is expensive. Kitchens are fairly well equipped except in the poorer neighborhoods of Mexico City, where one can find only basic implements such as blenders for soups and salsas, pots and skillets, and sometimes a small refrigerator or icebox to avoid a daily trip to the marketplace.

Kitchens in middle- and upper-class homes in Mexico City are as well equipped as many American kitchens and include dishwashers, microwave ovens, blenders, hand beaters, garbage disposals, gas or electric ovens, toasters, electric coffeepots, and any other equipment they may find useful. Upper-class women are not known for their interest in the kitchen and hire household help for daily meals



Mixture of ingredients on a metate ready to grind into a Mexican paste-sauce called mole. (Leon Rafael | Dreamstime.com)

and use caterers when they invite guests to their homes.

Sautéing and deep-frying are the most common cooking techniques and are carried out in cast iron skillets. Boiling and soup making are done in deep pots; beans are cooked in pressure cookers, and electric blenders are necessary for preparing soups and salsas. Tortillas and spices are heated on cast iron griddles, or comales. Ovens are not a required item in Mexican kitchens, as they consume a lot of gas and cooks prefer stovetop cooking, when possible. Most middle- and upper-class kitchens do have ovens, but they are not used on a daily basis.

## Typical Meals

The definition of a typical Mexican meal depends on the cultural group, setting (rural or urban), age group, social and economic level, and geographic region. One can, however, speak in general terms about Mexican food traditions. Corn is combined with beans, squash, chili peppers, tomatoes, and tomatillos to form the basic diet of the country. Secondary foods, which are eaten less frequently but are consumed throughout the country, are represented by native vegetables such as cactus paddles, avocados, vegetable pears, jicamas, and greens, known as *quintoniles, verdolagas,* or *quelites.* Peripheral foods may include seasonal crops such as insects, mushrooms, chokecherries, the fruits of the prickly pear, and small cactus fruits known as *biznagas.* These foods are produced during the rainy season and are generally collected by the rural population.

Tortillas and hot chili sauces accompany meals throughout Mexico at all social levels. These two elements can be considered a common food denominator among social classes. Small plates of salt and cut limes are common table accessories. Meals are eaten two, three, or more times a day, depending on the occupation and resources of the family and how one defines a meal. Rural Indian groups are at considerable nutritional risk, especially those who live in the southern states of Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Chiapas. The daily diet of some of the elderly members of these groups consists of tortillas, chili sauce, and little more.

Food and meal schedules in rural Mexico vary considerably according to local activities, resources, and customs. Breakfast may be eaten any time between 5 and 7 A.M. Farmers usually rise very early and have a light breakfast of atole or tortillas and chili. They take their midday meal, which may consist of corn prepared as *pozol,* made of fresh or fermented corn and water, into the cornfield. After they return home in the afternoon, a meal that includes hot tortillas, beans, chili sauce, and coffee or atole is eaten between 4 and 6 P.M. These are the general guidelines of an Indian diet.

In urban Mexico City, many Mexicans start the day with a cup of coffee, herbal tea, or hot chocolate. These beverages may be accompanied by a sweet roll. The beverage is followed later by a heavier meal called an almuerzo. This may be eaten around 10 A.M., depending on the work schedule and whether it is taken at home, on the street, or in a restaurant. A variety of dishes can be served at this meal. Juice and fresh fruit are popular dishes to begin the meal. Eggs, meat, beans, stew, salsa, and tortillas are the general elements of the almuerzo.

The most important meal of the day is served in midafternoon, sometime between 2 and 4 P.M. In provincial Mexico, families try to take the main meal of the day together; however, in large urban areas, it is generally no longer possible for the family to gather at home to eat because of work schedules and heavy traffic at this time of day. The meal may begin with an *antojito* (appetizers), such as a quesadilla, or directly with a bowl of hot soup. The custom of serving both a liquid broth or creamy soup, and also a dry soup, such as rice or pasta, has become less popular in recent years due to the extra calories two soups represent. The main course may be meat, fish, or chicken, served with a salad or vegetables. The most popular carbohydrate for accompanying meat dishes is rice. Beans may be served with the main course or as a separate dish following the principal dish. Desserts include fresh fruit, ice cream, rice pudding, or a custard called flan. The most common after-dinner beverage is coffee. Plain water or fruit-flavored water are common beverages for a meal. The younger crowd prefers soft drinks at any time of day.

After eating a substantial meal in midafternoon, most people do not feel like a heavy meal at night. A light meal, or merienda, may be served around 9 P.M., when light snacks, antojitos, tamales, soups, sweet rolls, or fruit may be eaten. A more formal dinner, cena, may be shared with family and friends on special occasions. This gastronomic scheme is by no means standard throughout the country. The majority of the population does not have sufficient resources to eat on such an elaborate scale. Life in provincial Mexico is less hectic than in Mexico City, and people enjoy their meals at a more leisurely pace.

A typical evening dish for the merienda are *sincronizadas,* or tortilla ham and cheese sandwiches. Sincronizadas may be considered fast food, but they can be very good, depending on the cheese used.

***Sincronizadas***

1 tbsp oil

12 small corn tortillas

6 slices Port Salut cheese

6 slices ham

6 tsp chili salsa

Heat a frying pan over medium heat, and add the oil. Top 6 of the tortillas with a slice of cheese and a slice of ham. Spread 1 teaspoon of salsa over the ham. Cover with a second tortilla and place in the hot skillet. The tortilla edges may be held together with a toothpick, so that they do not separate. Toast over medium heat until the cheese begins to melt and the tortilla begins to brown. Flip over and toast the other side. Transfer to a plate and keep warm. Serve guacamole sauce on the side.

### *Provincial Mexico*

The typical Yucatecan dietary pattern is somewhat different than that in other parts of the country. In Mérida a businessman or white-collar office worker may begin his day with a cup of coffee or juice before rushing off to the office; then, around 10 A.M. he may order an almuerzo or *tentempie* (literally, a little something to keep him on his feet until lunch). This may consist of a torta with a *cochinita pibil* (a pork-based dish) filling or some other meat filling. The food can be purchased at a market stand near his place of work. This is an important time to share experiences with fellow employees, although some comment that it is not healthy because of the high fat content in food eaten during this early morning recess.

If it is Monday, his midday meal will probably be a dish of beans with pork (*frijol con puerco*), as this is the typical Monday menu in middle- and upper-class homes and restaurants in Mérida. The dish may be accompanied by a vegetable soup, rice and tortillas or bread, and fruit-based water or a soft drink. The evening meal, taken at home or at a nearby restaurant, may consist of a Yucatecan antojito such as panuchos (small bean-stuffed tortillas, fried and topped with shredded chicken, pork, or turkey and pickled red onions), served with Yucatecan hot sauce. A dark Yucatecan beer usually accompanies this dish.

In northern Mexico a cattle rancher may begin his day with a hearty plateful of *machaca con huevos,* which is dried and shredded beef fried with tomatoes, onions, and green chili peppers and cooked with scrambled eggs. The dish may be served with pinto beans (*frijoles charros*), flour tortillas, and a mug of strong, black coffee. If he is in Monterrey for lunch, he may be served a cheese soup (*caldo de queso*), pickled shrimp (*camarones en escabeche*), and broiled kid (*cabrito al pastor*) with guacamole, onion, tomato, cilantro, and chili peppers and served with pot beans (frijoles de olla) sprinkled with cheese and *pico de gallo* sauce. A good selection to accompany this meal would be a cold Bohemia beer.

The evening meal would no doubt include a broiled strip of beef (*carne a la tampiqueña*) served with red enchiladas, beans, and guacamole, to be washed down with another cold Monterrey beer. Northern Mexican men are noted beef eaters and beer drinkers.

***Frijoles con Tequila* (Beans with Tequila)**

Traditionally, *frijoles borrachos* (drunken beans) are made with beer and pieces of pork and bacon. In this recipe, tequila replaces the beer and is added

twice—during the last stage of cooking and again just before serving.

1 lb pinto beans
10 c water
3 tbsp lard
1 tbsp salt
1 medium onion, chopped
1½ c tomatoes, seeded and chopped
4 serrano chilies
½ c tequila
2 tbsp chopped cilantro

Simmer the beans covered with water with 1 tablespoon of lard for about 2 hours or until soft (or cook them in a pressure cooker). Add 1 tablespoon salt after the first hour. Drain the water from the beans, reserving 1 cup of the broth.

Heat the remaining 2 tablespoons of lard in a large pot over high heat until it starts to smoke. Add the onion, tomatoes, chilies, and a little salt. Cook until the fat rises to the surface and the vegetables are soft, about 10 minutes. Add the beans and cook for 5 minutes, stirring constantly. Add the reserved broth and half the tequila. Continue cooking until almost all of the liquid has evaporated. Just before serving, add the remaining tequila and sprinkle cilantro leaves over the top.

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Oaxaca is a gourmet's paradise. It is famous for serving seven different types of mole, and all are exceptionally good. One of the best places to try traditional Oaxacan food is in the main market, which begins serving meals very early in the morning. Clients sit at long, rustic wooden tables, covered with plastic tablecloths, with other clientele. There is nothing exclusive about eating in the Oaxaca market. A breakfast menu usually begins with fresh orange juice, followed by roasted cheese in green sauce (*quesillo oaxaqueño*); black turtle beans seasoned with avocado leaves, which gives them a distinctive flavor; large, hot corn tortillas called *tlayudas;* and coffee with brown sugar and cinnamon or hot chocolate. Oaxaca produces a variety of sweet rolls, which are also favorite breakfast items. Lunch at the same market may include a cactus paddle and shrimp soup (*caldillo de nopales y camarón*) or an appetizer of tacos, made of corn tortillas filled with Oaxaca cheese and a sauce. Fried-grasshopper tacos with guacamole are also a favorite first course. Pork in yellow mole sauce is also popular, simply called *amarillo* (yellow) due to the yellow chili, *chilcoztli,* used to prepare it. Black beans usually accompany this dish. The meal may end with ice cream, for which Oaxaca is famous, and black coffee. The evening meal in Oaxaca is often Oaxacan tamales wrapped in banana leaves and served with atole or hot chocolate.

Mexican food is hearty and not for those who are watching their weight. Much of the food is fried and has a high calorie content, and ample portions are served. This is reflected in the obesity problem, which may contribute to diabetes and has become a serious health problem in the country.

## Eating Out

Good food and good cooking have become fashionable in Mexico in recent years. The number of eating places, from simple *taquerías* that offer unpretentious fare to elaborate, upscale restaurants, where clients gather both to eat fine food and to see and be seen, have increased 10-fold since the early 1980s. In the past few years Mexico City has become a gourmet's delight.

The number of food stalls, taquerías, *torterías,* fondas, *loncherías,* cafés, and elegant restaurants catering to different social and economic levels is truly prodigious. Until the economic crisis of 2008–2009, people were increasingly eating outside the home, because women's increasing involvement in the labor force gives them less time and energy to spend in the kitchen.

Street foods play an important role in providing food for a large percentage of the Mexican population. Mexico has a long tradition in selling street food, which is food and drink sold on public streets, ready for consumption, and offered by nonpermanent sellers. Long before the arrival of the Spanish conquistadores, Aztec vendors were setting up their

stalls in the Tlatelolco Market to serve the public. They sold a variety of stews, sauces, insects, fish dishes, and tortillas, prepared daily for the buyers and sellers of the great market. This custom continued throughout colonial times and is now more prevalent than ever. It also reflects the unemployment and underemployment Mexico City is experiencing due to the economic crisis.

Street food offers a good option for those workers who cannot afford to eat in a restaurant or fonda, as they sell inexpensive food with fast service. Street foods are sold on city corners, in markets, outside bus or train stations, in public parks, near factories or office buildings, or wherever there are plenty of people looking for a good, quick lunch. The preferred type of food sold in the stands is typical Mexican food such as tacos that can be eaten with the fingers, so no cutlery is needed. Some offer a complete meal of soup, served in a cup, with a meat stew, Mexican red rice, beans, and tortillas, served on a plastic plate. A soft drink, to be drunk straight out of the bottle, and a hot chili sauce complete the meal. This type of food is nutritious, filling, and probably cheaper than a housewife could prepare at home.

Fondas are another option for eating away from home. They are small, inexpensive restaurants that cater to office workers and set up their establishments near office buildings or wherever large groups of potential customers congregate. Many offer fixed menus, posted at the entrance. These usually include a soup, pasta or rice, tacos, enchiladas, beef stew or stuffed vegetables, and a simple dessert. These small restaurants are quite economical if one considers the amount of food received.

Mexican markets sell almost all of life's necessities, including good food. Market food stands open early for breakfast but really get into full swing about 10:30, when the almuerzo crowd arrives. They offer good, simple, inexpensive food such as tostadas, tacos, hearty broths, meat, eggs, and fruits and




A fast food stall in Papantla, Mexico specializing in antojitos. (StockPhotoPro)

fruit juice. One gets good value for one's money at a market stand.

Tacos are Mexico's favorite fast food. They can be eaten at any time of day and are sold in all types of eateries or in taquerías that specialize in tacos and other corn-based *botanas* or antojitos. Tortas are the Mexican equivalent of sandwiches, made with a hard roll called a *telera,* sliced horizontally and stuffed with a variety of fillings. Special restaurants called torterías prepare and sell thousands of tortas every day to people who must eat outside their homes. Tortas are also sold in baskets on the street, at bus stations, or near subway stations. They are an easy-to-eat finger food.

In recent decades Mexico City has become a cosmopolitan city where restaurants that specialize in food from all parts of the world can be found. Asian, African, Mediterranean, Caribbean, South American, European, North American, Middle Eastern, and Mexican restaurants abound throughout the city. Japanese sushi bars have become very popular in the past decade. Japan is also represented by fine restaurants that charge according to their status. French-style bistros are also popular eating places. Peruvian food has been discovered by the Mexican public, and the city has several fine Peruvian restaurants. Many restaurants belong to consortiums, with several restaurants, which may be owned by the same group of investors, sharing publicity and other expenses. There are a few top-notch restaurants that specialize in serving fine Mexican food. These are no doubt the finest Mexican restaurants in the world.

## Special Occasions

Mexicans love a good fiesta and readily admit to being a fun-loving people when they say, "Somos muy fiesteros" (We are a very festive people). They have many opportunities to celebrate throughout the year, as the Mexican calendar is full of official, unofficial, and religious holidays. Rite-of-passage fiestas such as baptisms, first communions, coming-out parties for 15-year-olds, weddings, and funerals, as well as birthdays, saint's days, graduation parties, and fiestas on many other occasions give one a good panorama of Mexican social life. The fiesta cycle can be considered one of Mexico's most distinctive cultural traits. Some festive occasions have become customary throughout the country and are considered national fiestas. These may coincide with religious or civic fiestas.

Rite-of-passage celebrations are carried out on a personal or family level. These include the baptism ceremony, confirmation in the Catholic Church, first communion events, coming-out parties for young girls when they turn 15, weddings, and funerals.

Some religious fiestas involve the participation of the entire community. Rural harvest festivals are held in early autumn, when most agricultural produce is harvested or harvests are about to begin. The rural population may give thanks for a particularly good harvest or ask for the protection of their crops until they can be gathered. To these activities, one must add a list of civic fiestas such as the Day of the Constitution, celebrated on February 5; the Battle of Puebla on May 5 (i.e., Cinco de Mayo); Independence Day festivities on September 15 and 16; and the Day of the Revolution, on November 20.

Food and drink are important elements in the fiesta cycle. Specific dishes may be associated with certain celebrations and are traditionally served at those functions. Typical fiesta dishes include tamales in all shapes, sizes, and flavors; a variety of mole dishes served with turkey, chicken, or pork; a codfish stew called *bacalao*; poblano-type chili peppers stuffed with chopped meat and dried-fruit stuffing and topped with a nut sauce, called *chiles en nogada*; barbecued kid, lamb, and beef; a pork and hominy dish called *pozole*; and many, many others.

When food is prepared for a community fiesta, the responsibility is shared by several members of the community. Every family in the community has to pay their share of the fiesta; if they do not cooperate, they are ostracized by the rest of the community. Festive food may depend on the customs of the particular region of the country preparing the celebration. It also depends on the economic resources of the participants and the social level of those involved.

One of Mexico's most colorful fiestas marks the Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos) on November

1 and 2. It is one of the most important rituals in the Mexican fiesta cycle. It can best be described as a festival to welcome the return of the souls of the dead and provide them with the pleasures they enjoyed during their lifetimes. The fiesta incorporates elements of pre-Hispanic religious beliefs and practices, which differentiates it from other more orthodox Catholic fiestas on All Saints' and All Souls' Day. In Mexico, it is celebrated like in no other Catholic country in the world.

A unique bread called *pan de muerto* (bread of the dead) is baked especially for this occasion. It is generally a round, domed loaf with extra dough filleted on top in the shape of a head and extremities to symbolize a skeleton. Breads are also produced in the shape of skeletons and ghosts.

The Day of the Dead is essentially a private or family affair, as the core of the celebration is carried out within the family and takes place in the family home or at the family plot in the cemetery. Each household prepares its offerings of food and drink for their dead, which traditionally consist of the deceased person's favorite dishes. A temporary altar is set up on a table where the food is served in clay dishes, along with vases of marigolds (*cempasúchil*), white candles, and photographs of the dead and of the saint to which they were devoted. Small dishes of salt, glasses of water, and a plate of incense sanctify the ceremony. Hollow skulls made of sugar paste display the name of the dead person across the forehead.

November 1 is the day to celebrate children, particularly those who died during the year. The ringing of church bells on October 31 at 8 P.M. announces the arrival of the "spirits of the children." By this time altars have been set up where the food



Offerings being sold as part of the celebration of the Day of the Dead or Dia de los Meurtos, Mexico City, Mexico. (Jesús Eloy Ramos Lara | Dreamstime.com)




Sugar skulls are seen in a store window in Mexico City as part of celebrations for its Days of the Dead beginning on October 31. (AFP | Getty Images)

is placed. This consists of Day of the Dead bread, sweet tamales, fruit, ears of corn, atole, milk, candied pumpkin, and fruit jam, accompanied by yellow marigolds and sugar skulls. Fast foods, such as potato chips, Doritos, Coca-Cola, candy, and cookies, as well as plastic toys, may also be placed on the children's altars, demonstrating the change in the diet of Mexican children.

The main ceremony is held on November 2, when the souls of the adults are celebrated and given the most splendid offering the family can afford. Tamales are always included, as is a loaf of Day of the Dead bread and chicken or turkey in a mole sauce. Other dishes may include enchiladas and *chalupas* (small boat-shaped tortillas filled with beans and hot sauce), or other favorite dishes. Beverages range from coffee, chocolate, and atole to whatever alcohol the deceased preferred. A bottle of beer or a shot glass of tequila or *mezcal* (a distilled liquor from Oaxaca) will form part of the offering. If the person was a smoker, a package of his favorite cigarettes will be included. There is an element of pride and status in providing an elaborate offering for relatives.

The deceased's souls are believed to be present as spirits who have returned from the other world. The spirits are not seen; however, their presence is sensed. They do not physically consume the food and drinks but rather absorb their essence. When the souls have had their fill, it will be the turn of the living members of the family to share the offering. Some of the food will be taken to the cemetery to be placed on the graves of the deceased and consumed by family members at the grave site. Sometimes a path of marigold petals is laid out to lead the souls to their proper destination in the cemetery. The sight of thousands of candles lighting up the night cemetery on November 2 is indeed impressive.

Federal and city governments and cultural organizations now promote the celebration of the Day of the Dead as a way for Mexicans to express their identity. Contests are organized by these groups to encourage the population to set up altars in town squares, markets, or public buildings, and a prize is often awarded the most well-made display. Banks, hotels, supermarkets, public buildings, businesses, and cultural organizations have begun to offer a display of the altar of the dead to stress their commitment to this most Mexican of all customs. This celebration is not disappearing; rather, it is becoming more and more important in Mexican cultural life.

## Diet and Health

Mexico is a country of profound and often conflicting contrasts. At the same time as government and health officials attempt to cope with malnutrition and anemia in rural Mexico, one in every three adults in urban Mexico is overweight, making obesity the most serious health problem in the country today. Solving the problems of malnutrition and anemia is proving to be easier to resolve than obesity, which has risen to epidemic levels during the past decade.

Mexican food habits have changed substantially in the past few years. Nutritionists have observed an increase in the consumption of wheat products, replacing corn, in the form of breads, cereals, pastas, cookies, and pastries. This is in part caused by the transition from a rural to an urban diet due to the heavy migration from the countryside to urban areas during the past few decades. The general availability of refined, high-fat, and high-sugar products in urban areas makes fast-food products convenient purchases.

The new products available on the market, introduced by the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994, often replace rather than complement Mexican ingredients in the diet. The increased participation of women in the labor force results in less time for women to prepare family meals and forces them to rely on ready-made foods, which may be higher in fats and simple carbohydrates than homemade meals. There is also a tendency to accept the new food imports because of their higher status compared to the traditional diet, especially for those at middle and high income levels. The external influence is less dramatic on rural diets; however, the migration of undocumented Mexican laborers to the United States has proved detrimental to the rural diet as well, when workers return with a preference for diets high in animal fats and sugars. The frequency of obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular problems as a result of the change to a more refined diet high in fats and sugars can be observed in both urban as well as rural Mexico.

For several decades, the Mexican government has carried out various programs in an attempt to improve the diet and nutrition of the Mexican population. These have included changes in economic policies, control of food prices, subsidies for the production of food, retail sale of government-subsidized foods, and programs of food distribution. These include free primary-school breakfasts in rural schools and food boxes or baskets containing products that make up the basic diet.

One of the most noted deficiencies in the Mexican diet at all social levels is iron, which reflects an inadequate diet. This has been shown to cause anemia in both children and expectant mothers, as well as retarded growth patterns in children. School-age children who are affected by an iron deficiency show less interest in learning, a reduced attention span, and chronic fatigue. Anemia is more prevalent in rural Mexico than in urban communities.

Nutrients have been added to industrialized food products in the form of vitamins and minerals since 1987 in an effort to improve the Mexican diet. The addition of vitamins and minerals to both wheat and corn flour plays an important role in the Mexican diet, as many products are made from these basic ingredients.

Obesity represents the most serious health problem in Mexico today. One in every three urban adults in Mexico is overweight or obese, and the prediction is for these numbers to continue rising for both children and adults in coming years. The increase in excessive weight and obesity is associated with chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes mellitus, hypertension, atherosclerosis, high cholesterol, certain types of cancer, cardiovascular diseases, and orthopedic, respiratory, and psychological problems. Coping with the health costs that result from obesity is a heavy burden for the Mexican health system to carry. Thirty percent of obesity is attributed to cultural factors, such as the high-fat diet popular in Mexico and a general lack of discipline in food habits. Soft drinks, such as Coca-Cola and Pepsi, contribute heavily to obesity, because Mexicans drink on average more than a 12-ounce can of soda every day. Forty-five percent of the cases of obesity are attributed to nontransmissible environmental factors. The consumption of processed foods with a high oil content and of simple and refined carbohydrates, with less fiber and complex carbohydrates, plays a role in the surge in obesity.

Recent statistics indicate that 10.75 percent of Mexicans between the ages of 20 and 69 are afflicted by some type of diabetes mellitus, which is equivalent to more than 5.5 million persons. Almost 23 percent of those affected with diabetes are unaware they have the illness. It is one of the principal causes of death in Mexico, along with cardiovascular problems and cancer. Obesity has become one of the major factors in the risk of acquiring the disease. A diet high in carbohydrates, lack of exercise, excess weight, chronic stress, and inheritance all play a role in the disease.

Anorexia is a growing problem in Mexico and has increased considerably in the past five years. It is more prevalent among young women than in young men and affects mostly young people between the ages of 11 and 25. Food deprivation is not a novelty in Mexico. It was common behavior in Catholic convents, where food was considered a spiritual

element that converted eating into a ritual act. The convent dining room was a space of penitence and purification, where food was transformed into something sacred through which the nuns could expunge their sins and purify their spirits. Fasting and penitence were methods by which they attempted to attain purification of their bodies and souls. To leave a morsel of their favorite dish on their plate for the guardian angel was considered a manifestation of high spirituality.

*Janet Long-Solís*

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# Native Americans

## Overview

The term *Native American* encompasses an extremely broad spectrum of peoples spread across the various regions of the United States; it is therefore impossible to speak of Native Americans as one monolithic entity or cultural group. Among the thousands of extant tribes in America are the Iroquois (Six Nations) of upstate New York; the Narragansetts, Micmacs, Pequots, and Mohegans of the northeastern United States; the Plains tribes, including the Blackfoot, Lakota, Sioux, Comanche, Apache, Pawnee, Wichita, and Osage; the Navajo, Hopi, and Pueblo in the Southwest; the Coeur d'Alene and Nez Perce in the Pacific Northwest; the Paiutes in the West; the Cherokees, Seminoles, and Choctaws of the Southeast; the Caddo of Texas and Louisiana; and the Inuits and Tlingits in Alaska. Additionally, the term *Native American* can also apply to the First Nations people of Canada and the various peoples of Central and South America.

Therefore, when speaking of Native American foodways, it is necessary to take each tribe's regional ecosystem into account, as food procurement and preparation, agricultural methods, and hunting techniques vary widely depending on each tribe's geographic location. However, one could argue that traditional Native American foodways of any stripe should serve as the model for locavorism, as much of their food practices are tied inextricably to their natural surroundings.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Lucinda Crow is a 48-year-old Ojibwe who lives in northern Minnesota. She was recently diagnosed with diabetes, and her doctor has stressed the importance of changing her diet in order to manage this disease. Like 70 percent of Native Americans, Lucinda is overweight, which likely contributed to her developing diabetes. As she faces her important and very necessary lifestyle change, Lucinda must reconsider every meal and snack of every day.

Rather than purchase a box of pricey sugary cereal for her breakfasts, Lucinda instead chooses a box of plain oatmeal. With its high fiber content and low glycemic index, the oatmeal will keep Lucinda satisfied longer and keep her blood sugar in check. She also purchases some bananas and skim milk to round out a nutritious and diabetes-friendly breakfast.

Lucinda is a schoolteacher on her reservation, so she needs to pack healthy, filling lunches to take with her to work. She used to take microwavable frozen dinners, which are full of fat, salt, and unhealthy fillers. These days, she chooses a loaf or two of multigrain bread, some lean turkey lunch meat, some low-fat cottage cheese, a head of lettuce, carrots for a crunchy alternative to potato chips, and some apples or other seasonal fruit for a sweet finish to her meal.

For dinner, Lucinda plans balanced meals featuring a lean protein, at least one green vegetable, and a grain. Where she once would have purchased frozen potpies and pizzas, Lucinda instead buys salmon and chicken breasts, broccoli, and brown rice. The days of white

breads and pastas are behind her now, as are prepackaged, processed desserts like cupcakes and brownies. If Lucinda wants a sweet treat, she purchases a low-fat frozen yogurt to enjoy in moderation.

Many Native Americans find that they have limited access to fresh foods, their choices circumscribed because their reservations are somewhat isolated. Often, grocery shopping takes place at convenience stores, supplemented with government-subsidy foods like cheese and beans. However, with careful planning and scrupulous attention to details like portion control, Native Americans like Lucinda can eat healthfully for life.

## Major Foodstuffs

After a long, complicated, and painful history including displacement onto reservations and forced integration into mainstream America, most Native American tribes eat the same diet as non-Natives, like soft drinks, pizza, and so on. However, many Native American tribes have a particular food item that is integral not only to their diet but also to their tribal identities, reaching back to precontact times; this section provides an overview of some of these significant food items.

It is widely understood that, regardless of region or tribal affiliation, the most important Native American foodstuff is corn (maize). Many tribal origin stories, particularly among the southeastern tribes, feature the Corn Woman, who is responsible for the continued presence of corn on the American landscape. The foodstuffs most commonly associated with Native American foodways are the Three Sisters: corn, beans, and squash. The primary agricultural technique for these crops is companion planting, in which the three crops are planted in clusters on mounds, with corn occupying the central spot in the mound. The stalks provide poles for the climbing beans, while the squash plants spread out along the bottom of the mound to help prevent weeds; the squash leaves also act as mulch for the companion mound. Expert farming tribes include the Hopi and the Navajo in the Southwest and the Cherokee in the Southeast.



Atraditional set-up for growing the Three Sisters—corn, beans, and squash—is utilized in this Cherokee garden. (Marilyn Angel Wynn | Nativestock.com)

The Ojibwe of the Great Lakes region rely on fishing, growing squash and maize, and cultivating *manoomin* (wild rice, which is actually a grass rather than a grain). Manoomin is an important part of the Anishinaabe (the larger umbrella group of Native peoples to which the Ojibwe belong) migration stories, in addition to being a dietary staple, a commodity to be sold, and a vital component of sacred ceremonies. Manoomin is native to the Great Lakes region and is harvested by canoe. Ricers bend the stalks of the rice plants over the side of the canoe and knock the ripe grains loose. After it is harvested, the rice is dried, roasted, and then "danced" in a process reminiscent of grape stomping in order to remove the husks.

**Winnebago Wild Rice**

1 c wild rice

1½ tsp salt

2½ c water

4 strips bacon

6 eggs

¼ tsp pepper

⅓ c melted butter or bacon fat

Put rice, 1 teaspoon salt, and water in a saucepan. Bring to a boil and reduce heat to a simmer until all water is absorbed. Cook bacon until crisp, and break into small pieces. Beat eggs with ½ teaspoon salt and pepper until fluffy. Cook eggs in the same skillet where the bacon was cooked. Combine bacon, eggs, and butter or bacon fat with wild rice. Serve warm.

Chokecherries are another plant-based staple in Native American foodways, particularly for the Plains tribes; they were especially important to the Blackfoot and Cheyenne. The cherries were pounded out, seeds included, then dried in the sun.

The Iroquois (Six Nations), based primarily in upstate New York, are credited with discovering the edible properties of maple syrup as early as the 1600s. One tribal legend credits the discovery of the sap to Chief Woksis, who, in frustration at having failed to successfully hunt for his family's food, threw his tomahawk into a tree, which caused sap to flow into his water bucket. His wife mistook the sap for water and used it to cook deer meat, which lent it a sweet taste and made the chief realize what had actually been in his pail. In actuality, the Iroquois likely discovered maple syrup by eating frozen icicles hanging from the sugar maple trees on their lands. They would set up winter sugaring camps amid groves of sugar maple trees and devote the cold months to harvesting the sap. To procure the sap, they would cut V-shaped slashes into the trees and collect the sap in a vessel of some sort. They would boil down the sap into solid hunks of maple sugar, which they would then use to season grains or to sweeten water for a special drink; they would also use the sugar for gifts or to trade.

Many Native American tribes have diets comprising mainly hunted proteins like fish and game. For example, the Inuit of Alaska and the Northwest Territories of Canada eat a very protein- and fat-heavy diet comprising whales, walrus, caribou, and seals. In fact, the seal is a prized catch for the Inuit, in that its meat is a valuable source of fat, iron, and vitamins A and $B_{12}$; additionally, the pelt provides much-needed warmth in the bitterly cold winter months. While seal hunting is an extremely controversial topic in Western culture, the Inuits' practices are protected in governmental bans and proscriptions against commercial seal hunting. When an Inuit boy kills his first seal or caribou, a feast is held in his honor.

The Salish (or Coast Salish) peoples of Oregon, Washington, and western Canada relied primarily on fishing but also maintained inland grasslands, which provided a variety of small game animals, as well as vegetables, roots, berries, and ferns such as bracken. Salmon and a freshwater fish called *kakanee* were staples, as well as shellfish like clams and cockles. The Salish hunted in the sea, air, and land for whale, fowl, and game.

The Tlingit of southern Alaska and the Yukon have a saying, "When the tide goes out, the table is set," which illustrates this people's heavy reliance on the sea for their primary diet. Among the foods available for harvest on the beach are razor clams, mussels, seaweed, oysters, and crabs. However, to eat "beach food" exclusively is to earn the contempt of tribesmen and is considered a sign of poverty. Salmon is the central foodstuff of the Tlingit, with seal and game closely following. To provide their bodies with essential vitamins and minerals alongside the protein found in the fish and game, the Tlingit eat every part of the animal; bones used in soup stock supply calcium as well as vitamin D and iron. Stomachs and intestines provide vitamin E and the vitamins in the B complex. Vitamin C can be found in plant matter. The Tlingit are also very fond of packaged and processed food like Spam and ice cream.

Bison was the primary game for the nomadic tribes among the Plains Indians; their weapon of



Buffalo meat dries at an Arapaho camp near Fort Dodge, Kansas in 1870. Once an agricultural people, the Arapaho migrated from Minnesota to the Great Plains in the late 1700s, when they began to hunt buffalo. (National Archives)

choice in hunting bison was the bow and arrow. Bison were a major source of several usable goods for tribes like the Blackfoot and the Sioux. In addition to being a primary source of food, the animals provided warmth, clothing, and shoes from their pelts; the makings of knives, arrowheads, and tools from their bones; and material for cups, rattles, ornaments, and switches from the horns, hooves, and tails. The edible parts of the bison such as the meat, bone marrow, tongue, liver, blood, and intestines were either cooked into a stew, using the stomach as a cooking vessel, and eaten right away, or preserved and made into jerky. Unfortunately, the U.S. government began hunting bison, which numbered around 60 million, and encouraged commercial hunters to do the same in the 19th century (approximately 1872–1874) as a means of starving the Natives into extinction. Thousands of bison carcasses, stripped of their pelts, were left rotting on the plains, rendered worthless to the Natives who relied on them so heavily for food, trade, and culture. Only a few hundred bison remained in North America by the late 19th century; thanks to the efforts of a few private ranchers in the West and northern Plains states, the American bison was brought back from the brink of extinction. In fact, bison meat has be-

come very popular, praised for its low fat content and nutritional qualities.

**Buffalo Stew (Lakota)**

**Ingredients**

Buffalo stew meat, cut into bite-sized chunks

*Tsinpsila* (prairie turnips)

Onions, sliced

Get a large pot and put in the meat, tsinpsila, and onions. Cover with water and boil until done.

Pemmican was another important foodstuff for Native American tribes, especially as the winter months or long hunts approached. The primary ingredient was lean meat from large game animals like elk, bison, or deer. The meat was cut into thin slices and dried until brittle. It was then pounded into a powder and mixed with melted fat; some recipes included dried and powdered cranberries, while blueberries, cherries, and/or chokeberries were used exclusively in ceremonial pemmican. The mixture was stored in rawhide pouches; if stored correctly, pemmican could last for very long periods.

The Caddo Indians of Texas and Louisiana were farmers who cultivated the Three Sisters crops. Additionally, the women would gather wild plant matter like blackberries, persimmons, and acorns while the men would hunt small game like deer, turkey, and rabbits in their local area. The men would also gather periodic hunting parties to hunt buffalo in the west.

Perhaps the most legible edible reminder of the troubled relationship between the Native peoples and the settlers is the Navajo fry bread. Many tribes have their own recipes for fry bread, but the Navajos are credited with inventing this beloved treat with a sad history. In the summer of 1863, the U.S. Army failed to elicit surrender from the Navajos, who had been raiding army forts that had infiltrated their lands in eastern Arizona and western New Mexico. The army then scorched the areas surrounding Navajo lands in order to starve the Natives and force them to surrender; the tactic worked, and thousands of Navajos surrendered. In January 1864, the army began a series of long walks from Navajo territory to the Bosque Redondo camp near Fort Sumner in southeastern New Mexico. Hundreds of Navajos died on these long walks. While they were interred in Bosque Redondo, the government supplied the Navajos with commodity foods like flour, lard, powdered milk, salt, sugar, and baking powder; the Navajo made fry bread out of these ingredients. It was adopted and adapted by many southwestern tribes and is now a common foodstuff found at powwows and restaurants across the Southwest, in addition to being a potent symbol of Indian solidarity and perseverance. Native author Sherman Alexie has said, "Frybread is the story of our survival."

Fry bread is the foundation of the Navajo or Indian taco, which contains a combination of beans or ground beef, chopped lettuce, tomatoes, and cheese, with green chili as an optional topping. After the fillings are added, diners roll up the plate-sized fry bread and eat the taco with their hands.

**Fry Bread**

4 c flour

2 tbsp baking powder

1 tbsp powdered milk

1 tsp salt

1 tsp cinnamon (optional)

½ c shortening

1 c warm water

Mix flour, baking powder, powdered milk, salt, and cinnamon. Add in the shortening and water gradually, until the dough sticks together. Knead dough until smooth, and make into large balls. Roll or pat them out into circles about the size of a small plate. Fry in hot cooking oil until brown on both sides. Drain on paper towels or blot to remove excess grease.

First Nations people know fry bread as bannock, and it does not carry the same political and cultural weight as it does for peoples like the Navajo.

## Cooking

Native American women, regardless of tribe or geographic location, were tasked with the job of preparing food, in addition to gathering berries, plants, and roots for their families. They were extremely innovative in the wide variety of dishes they concocted out of maize, including mixing it with meat, fish, nuts, maple syrup, and berries. They did this using a variety of different cooking vessels and tools.

Common cooking utensils and tools included tongs, stirring sticks and paddles, ladles, and scrapers, often made from the horns and antlers of hunted game. *Metates* are flat surfaces used to break down grains, and mortars and pestles (called *molcajetes* in Central and South America) are still used today to grind herbs and spices, as well as maize; they were even sometimes used on meats.

One central cooking vessel was the kettle, as boiling was a primary preparation technique. Boiling took place either over a direct fire or by placing extremely hot stones into a kettle along with the food to be cooked. Sometimes the kettle was edible; as previously mentioned, the stomach of the bison could be used as a cooking vessel and then consumed along with the stew that was cooked in it. Other types of cooking vessels included clay bowls in the Southwest and tightly woven baskets among the southwestern Apache and the northwestern tribes.

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**Cherokee Succotash**

2 lb fresh or dry lima beans

3 qt water

3 c fresh corn cut from cob

2 pieces smoked ham hock

Salt to taste

Pepper to taste (optional)

4–6 onions (wild or pearl)

2 tbsp melted bacon fat

Soak beans, if using dry ones, for 3–4 hours. Bring the water to a boil, then add the beans. Cook at a moderate boil for 10 minutes, then add the corn, ham hocks, salt and pepper, and onions. Add the bacon fat. Reduce heat, and cook for 1 hour on low heat.

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Hopi (Arizona) women used a special griddle called a *piki* stone to prepare their revered blue-corn *piki* bread. Women prepared the stone in individualized rituals involving smoothing it with gravel and moistening it with cottonseed oil; it was then placed on four legs over a fire. The stone was handed down through generations, just as many women pass on their cast iron skillets to their daughters and granddaughters. The piki was made in a special house that contained the stone. The women would combine the blue maize meal, hot water, and ash, knead this into a batter, and then smear the batter toward their bodies across the hot piki stone. After a short time, the bread was ready, and it was peeled off the stone, rolled up like a crepe, then stacked and stored. A woman who was skilled in making piki was held in very high regard, much as a talented male hunter would be.

Because corn is still a central cultural and dietary staple for many Native American peoples, certain preparation rituals are still observed, such as roasting corn. At harvest time, Native Americans will dig a pit in the ground, which is then lined with rocks. They then burn wood on top of the rocks until it is reduced to embers and cover the embers with corn husks and stalks. They then place ears of corn on this heated bed, cover up the ears with more husks and stalks, pour water on the pit, bury it, and leave it for several hours. Southwestern Native Americans are credited with developing the process of making popcorn out of maize.

The Aztecs and Mayans of Mexico are credited with developing the process of nixtamalization, which is soaking corn in lime. This process breaks down the walls of the corn kernels and makes the protein inside more accessible. Once those thick walls have been broken down, the kernels can be ground into meal, which is then used in tortillas, tamales, cornbread, and so on.

Baking was another commonly employed cooking technique. The *horno* is an adobe oven used by Native peoples in the Southwest to bake breads, roast corn, and cook meats. It is shaped like a beehive and is heated by wood. To prepare the oven for

use, the wood is burned until the horno has reached the appropriate cooking temperature. The embers are removed, and the bread is inserted. For preparing meats, the oven is brought to about 650 degrees Fahrenheit, the embers are moved to the back of the oven, and the meat is placed inside. Because the oven is made from adobe (dried mud), it is a naturally moist environment and results in tender, succulent, juicy meat.

Some Native peoples also steamed their food; in fact, the clambake is often attributed to certain tribes in Massachusetts who steamed their clams in large rock circles within which the mollusks were layered with rockweed (a type of seaweed) and heated until the clams broke open and steamed in their own juices.

Native Americans had to develop many methods of food preservation in anticipation of lean times and winter months. Drying food by laying it out in the sun or placing it close to a fire was the most common preservation method. Meat that wasn't consumed at the site of a successful hunt or fishing expedition was dried right away for later consumption. In the Pacific Northwest, women dried huckleberries for year-round use to sweeten various dishes and bitter plants. Smoking was also used to preserve meat, particularly salmon in the Pacific Northwest. In the Northeast, Native people preserved meats by sprinkling salt on fish or game and drying it near a fire. Other East Coast and Northern Plains tribes used the vinegar produced from fermented maple syrup to preserve venison.



A Pueblo woman in San Juan Pueblo, New Mexico, bakes bread in an adobe oven. (Marilyn Angel Wynn | Nativestock.com)

## Typical Meals

Due to the nearly complete assimilation of Native Americans into mainstream American culture, despite the geographic isolation of many reservations, the typical Native American meal looks identical to the average meal of a low-income family. (This is not to suggest that all Native Americans are of low socioeconomic status but to speak to the realities of life on the typical contemporary Native American reservation.) Portion sizes are typically very large, with fat intake between 30 and 40 percent of dietary calories. Typical foods are low in fiber and extremely heavy in refined carbohydrates and starchy vegetables like potatoes.

Breakfast begins much like any other American morning, with a bowl of cereal like Cheerios or Cocoa Puffs, or fried eggs with processed meats and coffee. Lunch might consist of a sandwich on white bread with Spam or lunch meat, cookies, chips, perhaps a can of fruit cocktail, and a sweetened soda to drink. For dinner, the menu might consist of a taco made with flour tortillas or fry bread, or macaroni with canned vegetables.

Where traditional Native American foodways once consisted of wild game, foraged wild greens, cultivated gourds, and other fruits, the reservation and government-subsidy systems have dramatically altered Native American lifestyles and effected a profound loss of culture, as reflected in their contemporary eating habits. The emphasis on processed foods devoid of proper nutrition, along with a shift away from a highly physically active to a largely sedentary lifestyle, has contributed to what might be described as an epidemic of obesity and obesity-related diseases among Native American and First Nations populations in the United States and Canada.

## Eating Out

Most Native Americans who do not live in remote, rural areas practice the same dining-out habits as other Americans. They are just as likely to go to

McDonald's or any other restaurant as any other American. Most Native food is shared at home, but even then, more mainstream fare populates the plate. While Native American culture is not a restaurant culture per se, a number of restaurants across the country specialize in and focus on Native American foods, from dives in the Arizona desert to grilled seafood in the Pacific Northwest to fine dining in Santa Fe.

The Frybread House in downtown Phoenix is owned and operated by members of the Tohono O'odham tribe, and it specializes in various iterations of fry bread and Indian tacos. Diners can order fry bread loaded with refried beans, green or red chili beef, or chorizo, topped with lettuce, tomato, and cheese. Also on the menu is a variety of stews, including the ubiquitous southwestern specialty, green chili; hominy stew; and menudo. Dessert options include fry bread drizzled with honey or chocolate and butter. The average price for menu items is $6.

Also found in Phoenix is Kai, a fine-dining restaurant located in the upscale Sheraton Wild Horse Pass resort on the Gila River Indian Community reservation. Taking its name from the Pima word for "seed," Kai features Native ingredients, honoring the local Pima and Maricopa tribes and emphasizing sustainability via produce and other ingredients sourced from the Gila River Indian Community farms. The menu is presented in oral tradition and storytelling terms: Appetizers are labeled "The Birth," salads are named "The Beginning," and entrées, which range in price from $39 to $52, are "The Journey." The tasting menu, priced at $140, is called "Short Story."

Across the country at the National Museum of the American Indian, the Mitsitam ("let's eat" in the language of the Delaware and Picsatawney tribes) Native Foods Café showcases Native foods and ingredients from five discrete regions across the country. This includes buffalo burgers representing the Plains tribes, venison steak from the Pacific Northwest, and turtle chowder with pickled ramps from the Northern Woodlands.

In response to the relative dearth of Native chefs in American restaurants, the Native American Program at the Classic Cooking Academy in Phoenix, Arizona, recruits and trains Native American youth in its specialized culinary program. The six-month course focuses on classical French training, while a major component centers on Native American culinary history and the role of indigenous foods in contemporary diets.

Observant and informed diners may notice Native American foods and cooking practices reflected on the menus of their local restaurants. Salmon grilled on a cedar plank or fiddlehead fern salads are two such examples. Many Native dishes have been adapted into mainstream culinary culture. Dishes like chili, wild rice, gumbo, succotash, cornbread, fried green tomatoes, and even corn on the cob have their roots in early Native American food practices as well.

## Special Occasions

At traditional weddings, rather than exchange rings, the bride and groom gifted one another with food. The groom would bring venison or other meats as a symbol of his commitment to provide for his family. The bride brought corn or bean bread to symbolize her commitment to nurturing her household. The wedding feast menu at a traditional Native American wedding includes fry bread, venison, squash, beans, corn, and fresh fruits like blueberries, raspberries, and strawberries, if available and in season. The food is placed on a blanket and served buffet style. After the food is blessed, the elders and officiant eat first, followed by the bride, groom, and guests. Any leftover food is given to the elders.

When a baby is born among the Pueblo of New Mexico, the baby's family rubs cornmeal on his or her body. The Hopi conduct naming ceremonies featuring maize rituals. When a girl comes of age among the Hopi, she must perform maize-grinding ceremonies (recall that the Hopi women are revered for their maize-handling skills at the piki stone). Later, when she wants to propose to a boy, she makes piki bread and, accompanied by her mother and an uncle, presents it to the boy's family; if they accept it, the betrothal is official, and the girl would next bring a basket of white cornmeal and blue piki bread.

One unusual (to contemporary minds) feast food was dog. The Oglala Sioux prepared and ritually consumed dog on three occasions: to honor prominent men, in healing ceremonies called *Yuwipi,* and at fraternal society rituals. The Chippewa boiled dog in bear grease in order to recognize the adoption of white captives or visitors. The Ojibwe annually stewed a dog in wild rice as part of a sacred feast.

Native American spirituality and religious beliefs are intimately connected to the land and to food and aim to ensure a continued supply. Even mundane activities like hunting and planting corn were considered sacred and holy. Therefore, many, if not the majority, of Native celebrations prominently feature food and its consumption or abstention from it. Every tribe has a number of ceremonial feasts with sacred foods attached to them. Here are just a few examples, many of which are feasts of first food, honoring the new seasons of corn, fish, and a variety of local agricultural products.

In the Pacific Northwest, many tribes practiced First Salmon rituals in the spring. In these rituals, the shaman would place the first catch of the season, which had been caught by a specially selected fisherman, on an altar, where it would be welcomed as an honored guest and then cooked over a newly built fire. The head of the fish would be placed upriver so that it could find its way home. After all in attendance had tasted of the fish, its head and bones would be returned to the river so that it could be reborn and continue its way upstream. This ritual marked the commencement of fishing season, and the people were careful to treat the salmon with respect to ensure its continued return to the river.



The interior of a traditional Nez Perce longhouse during the feast of roots, bulbs, salmon, and venison. This canvas and pole longhouse was built specifically for use in celebrating the First Fruits and First Salmon Rites ceremony by the Looking Glass Band of Nez Perce in Kamiah Idaho. (Marilyn Angel Wynn | Nativestock.com)

In June, the Iroquois held a Green Bean Ceremony, honoring the first crops of one of the Three Sisters. The Oneida held Strawberry Ceremonies in June as well, feasting on a wide variety of dishes featuring the summer fruit, including drinks, fry bread, and strawberry-flavored corn soups.

In the southeastern United States, the Creek and Seminoles observe Posketv, a Green Corn festival that emphasizes fasting in anticipation of celebrating the new year, marked by the midsummer growth of new corn. The Cherokees also celebrate Green Corn days; their festivities include feasting on roasted corn. Indeed, many tribes across North America hold Green Corn festivals, which are the most important harvest festivals of the year and feature fasting, dancing, games, sacred fire building, and feasts that ended the fasts.

The Miwoks of northern California held an acorn festival in late September, as the tree nut was a staple of their diet. The gathering was called the Big Time, and tribal members would come from their villages and harvest the nuts, feast, exchange news and supplies, and perform ceremonial dances. Acorns are traditionally pulverized on a grinding rock, then leached in water to remove the bitter tannins.

**Acorn Griddle Cakes**

*Makes 12–15 cakes*

⅔ c unbleached flour

⅓ c finely ground leached acorn meal

1 tsp baking powder

⅓ tsp salt

1 tbsp honey

1 egg, beaten

¾ c milk

3 tbsp melted butter

Combine dry ingredients. Mix together honey, egg, and milk, and add dry ingredients, forming a smooth batter. Add butter. Drop batter onto a hot greased griddle, and cook until browned and slightly puffy.

## Diet and Health

Many of the most common causes of death among Native Americans are directly related to diet. Many medical and nutrition experts agree that the radical changes in Native diets due to displacement to reservations have had a direct effect on the physical health of this population. Heart disease is the leading cause of death among Native Americans, and diet-related obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes are all risk factors associated with heart disease. Experts indicate that, on average, 30 percent of Native adults are obese. In some areas, like Arizona, nearly 95 percent of Native diabetics are also overweight.

Fry bread is often scapegoated as a primary cause for obesity and diabetes in Native populations. Because it is fried bread drenched in grease, it has nearly no nutritional value and is ultimately a delivery mechanism for 25 grams of excess fat and 700 empty calories (U.S. Department of Agriculture). Fry bread, along with other government-supplied commodity foods like potted meats, lard, and processed cheese, is often blamed for the widespread obesity and diabetes "epidemic" among Native populations. Many Native activists feel that these problems are a direct result of government programs of relocating tribes to reservations, thereby cutting them off from their traditional lifestyles, which lent the Native American diet a natural form of regulated caloric intake, an optimal balance of nutrients, and survival-inspired dietary adaptations.

In addition to having extremely high-fat diets and sedentary lifestyles, malnutrition is also a problem among Native American peoples; studies show that a mere 21 percent eat the recommended amount of fruit on any given day, while 34 percent eat the recommended amount of vegetables. The extreme poverty of reservation life also leads to prevalent hunger: Native Americans are also four times more likely to report not having enough to eat than other U.S. households. Proper nutrition education would help to mitigate this problem.

Other, more obscure threats to Native diets present themselves in genetically modified organisms

(GMOs). While naturally growing wild rice crops in Wisconsin and Minnesota have dwindled to half in the past century, agricultural firms and food corporations have developed a way to grow cultivated or paddy "wild" rice, which poses a threat to the Ojibwe, who rely on proper wild rice for income and preservation of their culture and traditions. There is fear among the Ojibwe that genetically modified rice may come to contaminate the naturally occurring wild rice they depend on; residents of the White Earth reservation in Minnesota have launched the Save Wild Rice campaign to prevent this from happening.

*Melanie Haupt*

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# Nicaragua

## Overview

With 46,430 square miles of area, Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America. The name of the country comes in part from the Nahuat-speaking Nicarao people, who inhabited the shores of Lago de Nicaragua at the time of the conquest, and in part from the Spanish word for water, *agua.* The country occupies the eastern portion of the Central American subcontinent and is comprised of three distinct geographic regions. A range of volcanic mountains defines an upland portion that divides the Pacific coastal plains from the Atlantic lowlands, an extensive underdeveloped and sparsely populated area known as La Mosquitia consisting of inland savanna with swamps and mangrove forest. The Corn Islands (Islas del Maíz) skirt the east coast of the country out in the Caribbean Sea. Nicaragua is bordered on the north by the Gulf of Fonseca and Honduras and on the south by Costa Rica.

Present-day Nicaragua includes over five million people, most of whom are considered mestizo, or of mixed ethnic ancestry. There are smaller populations of Europeans, Asians, and Afro-Antilleans as well as indigenous groups such as the Miskitu and Sumu, who inhabit La Mosquitia and neighboring areas. Nicaraguans often refer to themselves as *Nicas* but also as *pinoleros* in reference to the popular toasted maize and cacao beverage, *pinolillo* (see the following), which is an emblem of national identity. Almost half of all Nicaraguans live in rural areas and work in agricultural activities for their livelihood. The rural sector has an especially high incidence of poverty and malnutrition.

The abundant land and water resources and a relatively low population density have in Nicaragua accommodated an extensive, export-oriented agricultural sector since the time of the conquest. Production is differentiated across the country: Bananas, peanuts and soybeans, sesame seeds, sugarcane, sorghum, and livestock are produced in the Pacific region, whereas almost all the coffee, beans, and rice are produced in the Central region. In the Atlantic region, some rice, beans, and sugarcane are also grown. Agricultural holdings are unevenly distributed into a small number of commercially oriented, extensive private estates and a large number of very small subsistence-oriented family plots, creating two tiers in the farming sector. Most rural Nicaraguans are either landless agricultural laborers or small holders with plots (*milpas*) of 3.7 acres (1.5 hectares) or less. Farmers and farmworkers alike grow maize, beans, rice, and sorghum primarily for local use. Cacao, yucca, plantains, and other fruits and vegetables are also produced for household consumption and for sale in the local markets. In good years, it is possible to plant and harvest two crops; the first, or *siembra de primera,* is planted in June and harvested in August, providing food and income for the household. The second crop, *la postrera,* is planted in August and harvested in October. This latter crop provides seed for the next year's plantings, and any excess is sold to purchase chemical inputs, supplies, and equipment.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Throughout the Northern Autonomous Region of the Atlantic (RAAN) on the Caribbean coast of

Nicaragua are towns such as Waspam overlooking the Rio Coco. Here, Miskitu Indians have made their living raising crops in small gardens, hunting in the forest, fishing in the river, and turtling in the nearby Miskito Keys since precontact times. Ernesto and Sylvia Kaisni share an elevated, two-room wooden frame house with their three children. Like many Miskitu men from Waspam, Ernesto works as a commercial lobster diver and is away from home for long periods of time. In a manner favored by Miskitu custom, Sylvia looks after the house and children and coordinates food purchasing, preparation, and parenting chores with her sisters and mother, who live nearby.

Miskitu custom also includes very clear ideas about food; some foods are taboo, and others are thought to have curative properties. Ideally, proper Miskitu meals must include two complementary elements, *tama* and *upan.* Tama includes all the starchy foods: cassava, cocoyam, sweet potatoes, maize, rice, and plantains. Tama must be complemented by upan, the protein component that provides a contrasting taste, texture, and nutrients not found in the tama. The most common form of upan in the Miskitu region is turtle meat. Fish and other wild game animals as well as beef and chicken are readily accepted by the Miskitu and are consumed with relative frequency. Fish, turtle, and other animals are butchered occasionally, but as there is no refrigeration, all meat foods must be consumed immediately. By custom, Miskitu give away meat foods to close relatives and friends and sell them to others. The demand is always greater than the supply, and much of the conversation and daily activity about food centers on locating the ephemeral upan foods. When upan foods are not included, the meal is said to be "sad," and such meals are often the cause of discord and unhappiness.

When at home, Ernesto will start his day around 6 A.M. and go to the plantation (milpa) to tend to the food plants or go to the river to fish with a seine net. He does not eat breakfast at home but may carry along fruit or partake of the ripe fruit found in the plantation. Miskitu do not regard fruit as a real food; rather, they snack on it opportunistically throughout the day. Those remaining in the house will have a breakfast of sweetened coffee and bread with an occasional egg. All cooking is done in a stand-alone kitchen house, on a wood-burning, horseshoe-shaped, baked clay stove known as a *kubus*. After the breakfast is prepared and served, the children leave for school and Sylvia begins her housework. Twice a month she travels to the central marketplace to buy rice, beans, flour, coffee, sugar, and lard. With a blend of store-bought and locally accessed provisions, she prepares the main meal, which ideally includes some form of upan—a fried fish or turtle meat. Boiled plantains or cassava serve as the tama for the meal along with an accompaniment of rice and beans or homemade bread, prepared with coconut milk. Ernesto and other adult men eat first and in silence. Conversation is reserved for other settings. Children and others eat in the second seating, and the women who have prepared the meal eat separately, often during the course of their housework. In the evening, leftover food from the main meal is served along with coffee. Afterward, people visit with family and friends and converse for a time before going to bed.

## Major Foodstuffs

Many of the important Nicaraguan foods are produced locally. White maize, for instance, is well adapted to the climate and soil conditions and is a highly nutritious plant; it features prominently in the diets of all Nicaraguans. Typically, maize is harvested, dried, processed into masa flour, and consumed fresh, or processed into the forms of tortillas, tamales, or maize-based beverages such as pinolillo, which are enjoyed by people in all social groups.

***Pinolillo***

**Ingredients**

3 ears fresh maize on the cob
½ c cocoa powder
½ tsp cinnamon
½ tsp salt
2 tsp ancho chili powder
Sugar to taste

1. Remove husks and silk from maize, and boil ears of maize for approximately 12 minutes or microwave at high heat for 6 minutes (long enough to allow the kernels to be removed from the cob easily). Remove kernels from cobs and spread on a baking sheet; sprinkle lightly with salt and place in a 325°F oven for approximately 10 minutes, or until the kernels appear lightly toasted. Monitor closely to guard against burning.

2. Place all ingredients into a blender or food processor, and blend on low speed for about a minute or until the corn kernels are pulverized.

3. Pour mixture over ice or add to ½ glass of cold milk, and sweeten to taste.

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Beans and rice are important foods in the field and on the table. Rice is grown in a wide range of climates, soils, and moisture conditions, with about a third of the crop grown in irrigated paddies. The greater part of the rice crop is grown under rain-fed conditions in upland areas, where it is planted either as monocrop or in mixed fields alongside other food crops including beans, which provide dietary fiber, calcium, iron, and vitamins and serve as a cheap source of protein when meat is unattainable.

Meat consumption conveys social status in Nicaragua. It was once customary for a middle-or upper-class family to have beef at least once a day, and beef was and remains a luxury for the poor. As consumers, Nicaraguans are thrifty, using organ meats, skin, hooves, and blood in various dishes. Nicaraguans also eat turtle eggs, lizards, armadillos, and other game animals, but poultry remains the most popular form of animal food.

While less significant in terms of overall consumption, Nicaraguans do eat fruits, including pineapples, bananas, plantains, mangoes, guavas, breadfruit, and coconuts. The consumption of root vegetables such as cassava provides an important source of calories, and other vegetables such as avocados, tomatoes, peppers, squash, cabbage, and carrots provide vitamins, minerals, and trace elements in the Nicaraguan diet. Cabbage is commonly consumed and is featured in the preparation of a staple Nicaraguan side dish or condiment known as *curtido de repollo.*

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***Curtido de Repollo***

**Ingredients**

1 cabbage head (shredded)

1 c water

1¼ c white distilled vinegar

1 tbsp salt (if using a giant cabbage head or a fairly large one, use 2 tbsp)

½ tsp sugar

2 serrano chili peppers or other green chili peppers

2 medium tomatoes, diced

1 medium or small onion, minced

2 spicy serrano chili peppers or other green spicy chili pepper, minced finely

1 medium lime, sliced

Place shredded cabbage in a large bowl. Combine water, vinegar, salt, sugar, and 2 chili peppers in a blender or food processor. Blend until peppers are liquefied, and pour over shredded cabbage and toss well together. Cover and refrigerate for 2 hours or more. Toss occasionally to pickle evenly. Drain all the excess liquid. Moments before serving, add the fresh ingredients: tomato, onion, and the remaining chilies. Dress liberally with lime juice *y ¡buen provecho!*

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## Cooking

The processes and techniques used to prepare Nicaraguan dishes arise from various cultures and places. Some methods and materials are indistinguishable from those used in North America; others originate in South America and Mesoamerica, mirroring the ancestry of the Nicaraguan people. Some cooking equipment followed in the wake of European contact, while other methods and implements are likely blends of two or more ideas from varied origins. The most common form of food preparation in pre-Hispanic Nicaragua was likely cooking over an open fire. Contemporary grill cooking—*a la parrilla*

or *asada*—is a direct descendant of this method, favored especially for cooking beef or poultry. Grilled *elotes* (ears of corn on the cob) are widely available as street food, served on a stick and seasoned with a smear of butter or mayonnaise, and then a topping of salt, lime juice, or chili powder. As there were few sources of animal fats in pre-Hispanic Nicaragua, frying was an unknown cooking technique but one readily adopted and favored by contemporary Nicaraguan cooks. Deep-frying in oil is the preferred method for preparing many foods ranging from plantains to yucca. Rice, too, is often fried in oil, often with finely diced red chilies or onions.

## Typical Meals

As in other parts of Central America the daily meals in Nicaragua are designated *desayuno, comida,* and *cena.* The desayuno is eaten early in the morning and usually consists of eggs, cheese, rice and beans, and plantains, served with bread or tortillas. Fresh juice or coffee accompanies most Nicaraguan breakfasts. The main meal of the day is a late lunch known as the comida; many try to take this meal at home with their family. A characteristic comida might feature *indio viejo*—a stewed dish of shredded beef, onions, tomatoes, and peppers fried with shredded stale tortillas, then thinned with orange juice and broth and flavored with mint. The meal is often accompanied by deep-fried plantains, rice and beans, and curtido (see the preceding). There is great variety in the execution of the final meal of the day, the cena. In some cases the term is used to describe a formal meal shared with friends or family on special occasions; in other uses the cena is simply the family meal eaten very late in the evening. In the rural areas, this would be based on the staples of tortillas and *frijoles* (beans) and may include a stew of vegetables seasoned with garlic, onions, tomatoes, and chilies.

## Eating Out

In Nicaragua the demand for eating out is proportional to the size and complexity of the settlement. In small villages, "eating out" may mean eating at a friend or family member's house, whereas in the large towns or cities a range of establishments provide food for sale to the public. When Nicaraguans eat out in the city it typically means visiting street-food vendors or similar very casual dining establishments. Take-out foods available from itinerant vendors on the street include *quesillos* (a white corn tortilla topped with creamed cheese, salt, chopped pickled onions, and sour cream), roasted elotes, and *vigoron* (boiled yucca topped with *chicharrones*—crunchy pork rinds—and curtido) served up on a banana leaf. Eating out in the bigger cities does offer more variation, including restaurants that serve Nicaraguan cuisine along with other Latin American, European, and Asian cuisines. An influx of fast-food restaurants in recent years has affected the landscape of urban Nicaraguan food culture as well.



Beef and stewed yucca with banana tree leaves and vegetables available for sale in a street market in Leon, Nicaragua. (Shutterstock)

## Special Occasions

Many Nicaraguan fiestas are focused on the Roman Catholic liturgical calendar. Christmas, Easter, Lent, and the saints' days are widely celebrated holidays. The Christmas cycle begins on December 7, with a celebration of the Immaculate Conception known as La Purísima. The festivities include la Noche de Gritería (the Night of the Screaming) as children and young adults roam the streets and sing for the Virgin Mary. They stop at each house, where treats are offered, including *rosquillas* (donuts similar to biscotti), oranges, lemons, and chopped *caña* (sugarcane). The height of the Christmas celebration comes on Nochebuena (Christmas Eve). Family and guests gather for the holiday and are served *gallina rellena navideña*—a chicken stuffed with papaya, chayote squash, capers, olives, raisins, and tomatoes.

The Easter holidays begin with Carnival, the celebration of excess preceding the austere Lenten period. Carnival (*carne vale*) is thought to derive from an expression meaning "farewell to meat." Per the fasting tradition, meatless dishes abound in Nicaragua during the 40 days of Lent. During the colonial period the Catholic Church declared the iguana a type of fish and therefore acceptable for consumption on meatless days. Throughout Lent and Holy Week, Nicaraguans cook dishes made from the meat and eggs of the iguana. Its popularity has placed the species under threat of extinction, and measures have been put in place to protect the lizard whose unfortunate nickname is "the chicken of the tree."

## Diet and Health

Poverty is the main social determinant of the quality of diet and overall health status in Nicaragua, and the traditional diet has undergone a transition, fueled by globalization and urbanization. Major changes in trade and exchange among nation-states have meant for people on the ground an increased use of processed foods including sugar, refined flour, hydrogenated fats, and animal products coupled with a decline in the intake of whole grains, fruit, and vegetables of local provenance. Despite the availability of many healthful foods, the average Nicaraguan's diet is unbalanced. Various data concur that more than a fifth of the overall population is malnourished, and approximately one in four children in Nicaragua is stunted due to malnutrition. Paradoxically, Nicaragua has witnessed a growing incidence of obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease in the same era. A health problem related to diet is the lack of access to sanitation and safe drinking water. Most rural dwellers in Nicaragua rely on contaminated water sources, and a significant proportion of the overall population does not have access to basic sanitation. Both factors amplify various health problems originating in poor diet.

Good health in Nicaragua is challenged by a wide array of health problems including a high prevalence of malaria and other parasitic diseases, various respiratory ailments, diarrheal diseases, anemia, periodic natural disasters, malnutrition, and high rates of maternal and infant mortality. The Sandinista regime substantially increased spending on health care, broadening and equalizing access to services. There was a substantial drop in infant mortality and the transmission of communicable diseases. However, the system was increasingly strained by shortages of funds. The current health care system aligned against these challenges mirrors the stratified nature of Nicaraguan society. Members of the upper classes rely on private physicians and hospitals, and often travel abroad for specialized care. The Nicaraguan Social Security Institute provides health care to the small segment of society employed in government and industry. The vast majority of the population is served at public facilities, and some 40 percent of Nicaraguans have no access to any health care services due to the uneven provision of services and the locations of health care facilities.

Various governmental and nongovernmental programs have taken aim at overall health status by improving people's food security and nutritional health. For instance, a program of free school meals for all primary-school children provides daily meals of rice, beans, corn, oil, and cereal, which are prepared by parents in rotation as part of a school-supervised food-aid program. Likewise, the government has

distributed food-production packages including livestock, seeds, and agricultural inputs to families in rural areas of Nicaragua to boost food production and stabilize rural communities.

*Michael R. McDonald*

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# Panama

## Overview

Panama is a nation-state located in Central America. It borders on Costa Rica on the west and Colombia on the southeast. Panama is considered one of the "crossroads of the world." During colonial times, Panama was a strategic place for the Spanish Empire, as a barrier between the Caribbean and the Pacific Ocean. In the 19th and 20th centuries, it became a commercial point of connection in the Americas. In 1821, Panama was incorporated into Gran Colombia after its independence from Spain; it became a republic when it declared its independence from Colombia in 1903. Panama has been the location of large and significant infrastructural projects, including the Panamanian Railroad (1850–1855), the French efforts to build a canal (1880–1889), and the U.S. construction of the Panama Canal (1904–1914).

Throughout its history as a nation-state, Panama has emphasized its Spanish roots. In fact, as a result of its geopolitical location, Panama's peoples represent a great diversity of cultures and ethnicities, including eight indigenous groups (Ngöbe, Buglé, Naso, Bokotá, Kuna, Emberá, Wounan, and Bri-Bri), five different waves of migration of peoples of African descent (connected to slavery in the 16th century and to voluntary migration from the British, Spanish, and French West Indies in the 19th and 20th centuries), and sizable numbers of immigrants from China, Greece, Spain, and India, among others. This ethnic diversity has produced a multiplicity of foodways as well as some dishes that are generally viewed as characteristic of the "national cuisine," such as *sancocho* (soup), arroz con pollo (rice with chicken), and *arroz con frijoles* (rice and beans).



Arroz con pollo, a Panamanian dish made with rice and chicken. (StockPhotoPro)

## Food Culture Snapshot

Beatriz is an Afro-Antillean woman who lives with her youngest son in Bocas Town, Colón Island (Archipelago of Bocas del Toro). She is the mother of five children; her four daughters are married and have children of their own. All but one also live in the archipelago or the province of Bocas del Toro. Beatriz works as a cook and administrator of a bed and breakfast owned by a permanent resident expatriate. She cooks every day for herself and her family, in addition to working at the bed and breakfast. She also runs a small informal food business, preparing spicy sauce and other food

items based on her own recipes. She sells these items at her home and in the few stores that cater specifically to tourists and resident expatriates.

A common meal that Beatriz cooks for her son and herself is a hearty meat-and-tubers soup. As is common among Afro-Antilleans, Beatriz prizes deep-fried food and uses large quantities of vegetable or coconut oil to fry her food. Some of the common dishes Beatriz cooks include rice and beans with coconut milk, *rondón* (fish soup with coconut milk and tubers), *michilá* (boiled ripe plantain with coconut milk), *chicheme* (boiled hominy with coconut milk, condensed milk, and spices), *bragadá* (fried codfish cake made with flour), ackee (the fruit of a tree brought to Bocas del Toro from Jamaica) with codfish, ackee with eggs, pig's tail, *sauce* or *souse* (pig's feet cooked with cucumber and vinegar), *patí* (a turnover of spicy meat), and *janny* cake (flour bread made with coconut and baked), also known as *journey cake*.

Beatriz is extremely proud of her cooking abilities and the opportunities her extensive knowledge of Afro-Antillean cuisine has brought her. She is praised by all the tourists who stay at the bed and breakfast where she works. Beatriz is particularly generous in sharing her knowledge and secrets with friends, particularly resident expatriates. This is not common in Bocas, as women who keep their cooking secrets may acquire status within the community through them. Accordingly, most women prefer to guard their cooking secrets, handed down from their grandmothers or neighbors, for themselves. These secrets become their personal intellectual and cultural wealth, as they guarantee their prestige in the community and further opportunities to be hired as cooks.

## Major Foodstuffs

City- and town-dwelling Panamanians consume three main meals daily. A hearty breakfast with fish or other types of meat, *hojaldras* (deep-fried dough), *patacones* (fried plantains [*Musa paradisiaca*]), and fried rice is common. People eat lunch (either at home or out) between noon and 2 P.M. Lunch is generally composed of either soup or rice with meat (beef, pork, or chicken) and beans or lentils; tubers such as yucca, *ñampi* (a small gnarled yam [*Dioscorea* sp.]), *ñame* (yam), *otoe* (*Xanthosoma* sp., similar to taro), and dasheen (taro [*Colocasia* sp.]); and an occasional salad. Fried fish is also a common option for lunch, dinner, or a snack. Dinner is lighter and might include fried snacks. It is customary to eat a *bolsita* (literally, "small bag") in the afternoon, as an appetizer or in lieu of dinner. A bolsita consists of a piece of fried chicken with approximately three pieces of patacones, three pieces of fried yucca, or a few French fries. Bolsitas are sold in small restaurants or on the streets in a small paper bag (hence the name) for one to two dollars.

Processed snacks (colloquially known as *burundanga*) and Panamanian snacks are eaten very commonly. They include maize empanadas (fried corn-flour cakes filled with meat or cheese), *carimañolas* (fried yucca rolls filled with ground beef or chopped eggs), and tortillas (fried maize patties that are much thicker than the Mexican tortillas). These snacks are available on street corners and small restaurants, or they can be bought frozen in supermarkets to be fried at home.

Rural Panamanians and indigenous groups often do not follow a regular three-meals-a-day regimen, but the foodstuffs they consume on a daily basis do not vary much from those already listed, except that processed snacks are uncommon. Also, meat is consumed less frequently, not for lack of desire but for lack of availability.

As already noted, Panamanians have a cuisine understood to be the "typical" or "national" cuisine, along with regional cuisines, including indigenous, Afro-Antillean, Indian, Chinese, Greek, Spanish, and Italian, among others, represented by the larger minorities in the country. A recipe for one of those typical or national dishes, the soup *sancocho de gallina,* follows. Depending on the region of the country, the same dish will include fewer (if cooked among indigenous peoples) or more (if cooked among Afro-Antilleans) ingredients, transforming the consistency and flavor of the soup.

***Sancocho de Gallina* (A Recipe from Panama's National Cuisine)**

**Ingredients**

1 chicken (3 lb), cut in pieces

1 medium-size onion

4 cilantro leaves (often called "Chinese parsley" in the United States)

2 sweet chilies

1 tsp oregano

½ c annatto seed water

Salt

2 lb ñame

Cook the chicken in pieces with the onion, cilantro, chilies, and oregano. Add annatto seed water. (To make the annatto seed water, boil the water and add 1 teaspoon of annatto seeds. Wait 20 minutes, then strain out the seeds.) When the chicken is tender, add salt and ñame in pieces, and wait until the ñame becomes tender.

## Eating Out

It is common for city- and town-dwelling Panamanians of all social classes to eat out often. Whereas members of the middle and upper classes in Panama City visit upscale restaurants that offer international cuisine (Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Indian, French, Greek, Italian, Spanish, North American, Australian, Peruvian, Chilean, Argentinean, Brazilian, and Colombian food, just to name a few), members of the lower classes have access to inexpensive restaurants offering Chinese food, North American fast food, and Panamanian snacks.

## Special Occasions

Panamanians celebrate special occasions by preparing and consuming dishes that are regarded as traditional and part of the national cuisine. Secular and religious festivities as well as life-transition events are marked by the consumption of these dishes; old-time favorites are sancocho and stewed, roasted, or fried chicken with rice and fried bananas. Among Afro-Antilleans in the provinces of Bocas del Toro and Colón, special occasions call for a hearty soup (including the Afro-Antillean version of sancocho) or rice and beans prepared with coconut milk and accompanied by chicken, fish, or turtle (in Bocas del Toro). Because of the overexploitation of marine resources—partly as a result of the growth of tourism—dishes that were considered daily meals, or *comida corriente,* are now considered delicacies, or *comida de fiesta,* and thus can be consumed only on special occasions. This is particularly true of lobster, octopus, and snails, among others. These resources are also scarce throughout the country and, thus, have become more commonly consumed for special events.

## Diet and Health

Studies conducted in connection to the dietary practices of Panamanians indicate that excess consumption of oil and salt among most ethnic groups has produced frequent cases of hypertension and obesity, in both urban and rural areas. Exceptions include the diets considered traditional for rural populations and indigenous peoples, such as the Kuna, whose diet has been studied from nutritional and cultural perspectives recently. The Kuna who have moved to urban areas and away from their *comarcas* (administrative regions with substantial indigenous populations) have tended to adapt to the less healthy dietary norms of mainstream Panama. A similar situation occurs with the largest indigenous group in Panama, the Ngöbe. Among the Ngöbe, greater involvement in the cash economy and greater availability of cash, due to government subsidies and more people working for wages, have produced a substantial shift away from the traditional diet, which was nutritionally balanced overall. The Ngöbe diet now includes large quantities of purchased polished white rice and white sugar and less of the traditional healthy foods. Consequently,

rates of undernutrition and malnutrition have risen substantially.

*Carla Guerrón Montero*

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# Paraguay and Uruguay

## Overview

Paraguay and Uruguay are located in the Southern Cone of South America and are two of the smallest countries on the continent. Paraguay is a landlocked country of 5.2 million inhabitants, bordered by Argentina, Brazil, and Bolivia. The country is divided by the Paraguay River into two unequal and distinct portions. To the west is the Chaco prairie, an inhospitable and sparsely populated region that makes up over half of Paraguay's land area. Less than 3 percent of the population lives in the Chaco. The capital city of Asunción is located east of the Paraguay River, where most Paraguayans live. The country has suffered from isolation, civil war, dictatorships, and periods of extreme political and economic instability.

An important factor in Paraguay's food culture is the influence of the native Guaraní Indians, who likely lived in the region for thousands of years before the arrival of the Spanish conquerors in the 16th century. Today, over 90 percent of Paraguayans are considered mestizos, descendants of the native Guaranís and the Spanish colonists. Paraguay is unique in South America in that both Spanish and Guaraní are official languages, and the country's indigenous language is more widely spoken than its European one. Ninety percent of Paraguayans speak Guaraní, which they usually learn before Spanish. Today, Paraguayan gastronomy is a hybrid of European and Guaraní ingredients, cooking methods, and customs.

Uruguay is a Spanish-speaking country of 3.5 million people. Uruguay's only land border is with Brazil, to the north. The Río de la Plata and Uruguay River form the border with Argentina to the west, and to the southeast is the South Atlantic Ocean. Almost a third of the population lives in metropolitan Montevideo, the capital and largest city. Due to its advanced education system including a high literacy rate, large urban middle class, and relatively even income distribution, Uruguay is often said to have one of the highest standards of living in Latin America.

Uruguay was a Spanish colony until independence in 1828. It is a country of immigrants, mainly of European and chiefly of Spanish and Italian descent. Uruguayan food culture is therefore primarily European with minimal indigenous influence. Beef is the most fundamental element of Uruguayan cuisine. The country is one of the world's top per-capita consumers of red meat, often grappling with neighboring Argentina for the top spot.

Most Uruguayans are nominally Roman Catholic although most do not actively practice a religion. Church and state are officially separated, making it one of the most secular countries in Latin America. Religion therefore does not play a major role in the daily diet of Uruguayans. However, many European food traditions are practiced on major Christian holidays such as Easter and Christmas.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Pedro Luis and Lucía Spagnolo live in a suburb of Montevideo. Their lifestyle is similar to that of a well-off Paraguayan family living in the capital city of Asunción. The Spagnolos have two children, Jimena and

Martín, who both live at home. Martín is in high school, and Jimena is in her mid-twenties (unmarried women tend to live at home). Family is important to the Spagnolos, and even some longtime friends are considered a part of the extended family. The Spagnolo household is always bustling, with friends and family frequently coming over for afternoon tea and snacks or a late dinner.

Lucía stays at home and is responsible for the bulk of the food shopping and preparation. She makes a trip to the supermarket a couple times a week to stock up on coffee, tea, pastas, potatoes, milk, eggs, cheeses, soft drinks, and dry goods. Most days she visits a local produce market to pick up fresh lettuce and tomatoes for salads and fruits for dessert, and she stops at the butcher down the street for fresh cuts of beef or chicken for making breaded cutlets, panfried steaks, or stews. Lucía tries to make a homemade lunch every day during the week, as it is important to her that the family eat together for this biggest meal of the day. However, sometimes Pedro Luis cannot make it home from work for lunch, instead eating a fixed-price meal at a favorite restaurant near his workplace, and Martín often picks up a quick sausage or steak sandwich at a café with friends. After lunch, Lucía visits a local bakery where she purchases breads or pastries with sweet or savory fillings to accompany the afternoon tea. For dinner, Lucía uses leftovers from lunch to make a soup or stew, orders take-out pizza and empanadas (savory turnovers) from a nearby pizzeria, or serves pasta with a sauce purchased at the supermarket.

While Lucía performs the daily shopping duties, Pedro Luis is in charge of visiting the local butcher on weekends to procure the meat for the Sunday *asado,* or barbecue. Because he is the man of the family, the asado is his domain. Pedro Luis has purchased meat from the same trusted butcher for many years. The asado is the most important and anticipated meal of the week, and Pedro Luis takes great pains to ensure its success.

## Major Foodstuffs

The major foodstuffs of Uruguay are primarily of European, rather than indigenous, origin. The greatest European culinary influences come primarily from the countries of Italy, Spain, and France, but the cuisines of Germany, England, and other countries also play a role. These influences are due to the great waves of European immigration into Uruguay beginning in the mid-19th century. The largely European population solidified a food culture based on Old World culinary habits. Today, the foodstuffs that appear most on the tables of Uruguayans are beef, dairy, wheat, sugary pastries, and wine. The two other important foodstuffs in Uruguay, potatoes and yerba maté, are indigenous to the continent.

Paraguayan cuisine, or *tembi'u paraguái* as it is known in the Guaraní language, is a result of the combination of European culinary techniques and ingredients with those native to the region. The names of Paraguayan specialties often use both Spanish and Guaraní terms. Spanish colonists adapted European foodstuffs to use ingredients they found in the New World, such as substituting corn and yucca flours for wheat flour to make breads, and adding peppers and other native vegetables to stews. The major foodstuffs of Paraguay are beef, yucca, corn, dairy products, and yerba maté, plus squash, peppers, and beans.

When European colonists arrived in Uruguay, they found a land with a temperate climate, grasslands, and fertile coastal lowlands. The domesticated breeding animals they brought in the 17th century,



A traditional corn soup made in Paraguay. (Shutterstock)

such as cattle, pigs, sheep, and goats, thrived on the Pampas grasslands. Today, the Pampas are still important cattle-raising land and are home to large estancias and cattle ranches. Beef is the largest export and a main driver of the Uruguayan economy. Beef is also the central element of the Uruguayan diet and a marker of national identity as it is tied to the culture of the gauchos, Uruguayan cowboys. Indigenous wildlife plays a much smaller role in the diet of Uruguayans, but the native, flightless *ñandú* (rhea) is today raised on Pampas farms and has become an export item. The majority of land is devoting to raising livestock, but the fertile soil also supports food crops. Today, the main food crops in Uruguay are wheat and rice, followed by corn, potatoes, barley, sugarcane, and soybeans. Due to the small size of the Uruguayan population, a large percentage of meats and crops are exported.

Agriculture is also economically significant in Paraguay, especially cattle ranching and the industries with which it is associated. The traditional meat-based diet is reminiscent of a time when beef was cheap and abundant. While chicken, pork, and to a lesser extent lamb are eaten in Paraguay, beef is undoubtedly the most popular meat used for typical Paraguayan meals. Beef exports are substantial for such a small country, and Paraguay also produces cotton and soybeans for export. Due to increasing prices, many Paraguayans cannot afford to eat as much beef as is traditional.

The staples of the Paraguayan diet are two native ingredients: yucca and corn. Yucca (known as *mandioca* in Paraguay but variously called manioc or cassava) is a starchy tuber that is highly poisonous and must be properly processed before consumption. It was cultivated and processed by the Guaraní centuries before the arrival of the colonists and continues to be grown throughout the country. Yucca processing yields three distinct edible derivatives that are all used in Paraguayan cuisine: *fariña* (flour), *typyraty* (a dry, fibrous residue), and *almidón* (starch). Corn (maize) is similarly used in many forms and at different stages of maturation: *choclo* or *maíz tierno* (young, fresh corn), *choclero* or *maíz cau* (semimature corn), and *maíz* (dried corn). Many of the traditional foods of Paraguay are prepared from these staple grains. Yucca appears boiled as a common side dish, in dough for empanadas (turnovers), in fried fritters called *bolitas de mandioca,* and in many other preparations. Corn also takes various forms, from toasted dried corn eaten as a snack, to a hominy-based stew called *locro,* to various forms of polenta (*mbaipy* in Guaraní). A uniquely Paraguayan polenta preparation is *kivevé,* a sweet pumpkin polenta served with grilled meats or as a dessert. Another classic is *mazamorra* (dried corn stew), one of the oldest and simplest indigenous dishes.

*Chipás* are Paraguayan breads that accompany most meals. There are over 80 different types of chipá, which range from crisp flatbreads to corn custards and use a range of ingredients such as peanuts or anise seeds. They are most frequently shaped like bagels or rolls and are made from yucca starch, cornmeal, fresh cheese, eggs, lard or butter, and/or milk. Common variants include *sopa paraguaya* (Paraguayan cornbread), made with cornmeal and fresh cheese; *chipá guazú* (big chipá), a creamy corn custard flavored with onion; *mbejú* or *mbeyú,* an unleavened fried pancake made from a crumbly dough of fresh cheese and yucca starch; and *chipá caburé,* which is cooked around a stick. Sometimes chipá are filled with ground meats or vegetables, like *chipá so'ó.*

Dairy plays a large role in Uruguayan and Paraguayan food culture. Milk, eggs, yogurt, cheese, and *dulce de leche* (caramelized sweetened condensed milk) are consumed daily. The Uruguayan cheese industry produces local versions of famous European cheeses such as mozzarella, Gouda, provolone, Brie, Camembert, and Parmesan. Cheese-making techniques were brought to Uruguay by immigrants chiefly from Italy, France, and Switzerland. The cheese most used in Paraguay is a salty cow-milk farmer cheese called *quesú paraguái* (Paraguayan cheese). It is used in a number of traditional dishes including breads and soups and is often the only variety of cheese available in the countryside.

For a country surrounded by water on three sides, seafood plays a surprisingly small role in the repertoire of traditional Uruguayan dishes, although along the Atlantic coast the Spanish culinary influence can be seen in the preparation of dishes that feature cockles, mussels, and shrimp. Beef remains

paramount, however, especially in the interior. Although Paraguay is landlocked, the country's extensive river and lake system provides freshwater fish such as the dorado (a firm-fleshed white fish), the coveted *surubí,* and the popular *bagre* (catfish). Fish in Paraguay is grilled, fried, or stewed in soups and most often eaten in areas around the rivers and lakes.

The large number of Italian immigrants to Uruguay in the 19th and 20th centuries accounts for the popularity of fresh and dried pastas. Pasta is served with a variety of sauces including the popular *tuco* (meat sauce) and the Uruguayan Caruso sauce made from cream, beef stock, onions, ham, and mushrooms. Ravioli, lasagna, gnocchi, and baked cannelloni are also popular, and polenta and mashed potatoes are often topped with meatballs or braised meats. Italian-style pizza is also widely eaten in Uruguay, as well as *lehmeyun,* an Armenian pizza topped with ground meat and vegetables. Pies and turnovers abound, such as empanadas in a huge range of sizes and fillings and *pascualina* (spinach or Swiss chard pie).

The most popular vegetables and fruits in Uruguay and Paraguay are a combination of European and indigenous products. In Uruguay, the most-eaten vegetables are Swiss chard, red bell peppers, onions, spinach, lettuce, tomatoes, carrots, and squash. The most popular fruits are citrus, apples, and bananas. The Paraguayan diet incorporates indigenous foodstuffs such as squash, pumpkins, beans, and peanuts, all foods that were cultivated by the Guaraní before colonization. Onions, garlic, and various herbs and spices of European origin are also important to the Paraguayan diet. A wide variety of tropical fruits are also found and eaten in Paraguay.

The Spanish colonists introduced techniques for harvesting and processing sugarcane to the New World. Before the conquest, sweetness was provided by honey and fruits. Today, Uruguayans have a sweet tooth, and their desserts are rich and often very sweet. French pastries are especially popular in Uruguay, such as those incorporating meringues, mousses, soufflés, and cream. A typical Uruguayan dessert is *chajá,* a layered sponge cake with cream, jam, peaches, and meringue.

***Postre Chajá***

1 thin sheet of purchased sponge cake

2–3 tbsp orange liqueur

2 c heavy whipping cream, whipped to soft peaks

2–3 large peaches, peeled and sliced

1 lb purchased dry meringues, lightly crushed

Using a large round cookie cutter, cut circles from the sponge cake and brush each circle with liqueur to moisten the cakes. Top half of the rounds with a dollop of whipped cream and a few peach slices. Place the remaining rounds on top of the peaches and cover the cakes with whipped cream. Top each cake with pieces of meringue and the remaining peaches. Refrigerate for a few hours before serving.

Dulce de leche (caramelized sweetened condensed milk) is a national obsession in both Uruguay and Paraguay and is used to fill cookies, cakes, pastries, crepes, and *alfajores* (shortbread cookies), or as a topping for flan, a rich custard dessert originating in Spain. Sweet fruit pastes called *dulces* are popular in both countries and are used as fillings for empanadas, pastries, or cakes. A sweet quince paste called *dulce de membrillo* is especially popular in Uruguay and fills mini-shortbread cakes called *pasta frola.* A typical treat for breakfast, dessert, or a snack is *Martín Fierro,* named after an epic gaucho poem. It consists simply of a slice of cheese and a slice of dulce de membrillo.

Uruguay has produced its own beer and wine since the late 19th century. The country's wine industry is indebted to French and Italian immigrants and is the fourth largest in South America. Most Uruguayan wine is produced in the southern coastal departments. A red wine called Tannat is produced exclusively in Uruguay and southern France. In Uruguay, as in neighboring Argentina and coastal Chile, there exists a vast wine culture that is not found on the rest of the continent. Wines are consumed not only solo but also mixed in the form of *medio y medio,* a mixture of white wine and sparkling wine, or *clericó,* a mixture of fruits, fruit juice, and white wine. Often considered the Uruguayan

national spirit, *grappamiel* claims Italian roots and is a potent spirit made with alcohol and honey. Gin Fizz is popular, especially in Montevideo, as is *limoncello,* an Italian lemon liqueur. In Paraguay, beer and a locally produced dark sugarcane spirit called *caña* are the most widely consumed alcoholic beverages.

A drink universally enjoyed in both Paraguay and Uruguay, regardless of geographic location or socioeconomic situation, is a bitter tea called maté. The drink is native to Paraguay and is made from the dried leaves of the *Ilex paraguariensis* shrub, which grows wild along the upper reaches of the Paraguay River. In pre-Columbian times, yerba maté was harvested by the Guaraní Indians. The Spanish subsequently adopted the beverage, and Jesuit missionaries in Paraguay and northeastern Argentina were the first to cultivate the shrub. Today, maté is consumed in vast quantities in Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina in a communal ritual that attests to the social nature of the culture of these countries.

## Cooking

Cooking habits can differ greatly between urban and rural areas, although women are usually in charge of daily culinary tasks. Uruguayan and Paraguayan kitchens, especially those in cities, make good use of modern appliances like microwaves and blenders to ease the culinary workload. In Uruguay, most dishes involve techniques that originated in Europe, such as rolling fresh pastas and doughs, baking cakes and pies, making vinaigrettes, and pickling vegetables, meats, or seafood. The French culinary influence can be seen in the frequent use of *salsa blanca* (béchamel) and puff pastry. Today, many of these foodstuffs are available ready-made in supermarkets.

Traditional Guaraní cooking techniques and names are still reflected in the Paraguayan kitchen. Today, urban Paraguayans use a gas or electric stove, but a brick-and-clay oven called a *tatakua* ("fire hole" in the Guaraní language) was traditionally a fundamental part of Paraguayan food preparation. It is still widely used, especially in rural areas and for special occasions, for baking the breads called chipá or roasting meats. Many traditional dishes are available ready-made or partially made, canned, frozen, or packaged in supermarkets in urban areas. In rural areas, many families cannot afford the luxury of convenient ready-made products, so dishes are made from scratch.

Soups, stews, and braises are especially popular in Paraguay and Uruguay and combine European and native techniques and ingredients. They often begin with a *sofrito* of tomatoes, bell peppers, onions, garlic, and other aromatics. Various vegetables and beans are then added, as well as meats, depending on the economic means of the family. Soups and stews are traditionally prepared in cast iron or earthenware pots, but some modern kitchens use pressure cookers to speed cooking time.

Typical Uruguayan soups and stews include *buseca,* a winter tripe soup, and stews called *locros* or *pucheros,* made with meat, beans, lentils, and vegetables. The native ñandú (rhea) is used in stews, in either fresh or dried form. *Carbonada criolla* is a typical Uruguayan beef or veal stew with vegetables and fruit and is usually served in the shell of a winter squash.

In Paraguay, soups and stews are often finished with a handful of rice, milk, beaten eggs, or fresh cheese to stretch the dish. The popular *borí borí* is a meat soup with cornmeal and cheese dumplings. To make the much-loved traditional *so'o yosopy* (beef and rice soup), popularly called *soyo,* ground beef and rice are traditionally mashed together in a mortar to form a paste. This paste forms the base of the soup and is cooked with onions, peppers, tomatoes, and other aromatics in an iron pot with beef or pork fat. Today, many simplify the process by grinding the meat and rice in a blender and have made it healthier by using vegetable oils instead of animal fats.

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**_So'o Yosopy_ (Beef and Rice Soup)**

1 lb ground beef

2 tbsp white rice

2 medium onions, chopped

1 tomato, chopped

1 green bell pepper, chopped
3 tbsp lard or oil
1 tbsp flour
1½ qt cold water
1½ tbsp parsley, chopped
Salt

Pound meat and rice in a mortar or grind in a food processor until a paste forms. Remove, and then grind the onion, tomato, and pepper until smooth.

Heat the oil in a large, heavy-bottomed pot. Cook the vegetables until they begin to brown. Add the flour and stir for a minute. Then add the meat paste and water. Stir until the soup comes to a boil, and then cook for a few more minutes, just until the meat is cooked. Add parsley and salt to taste.

## Typical Meals

The Uruguayan meal structure is similar to that in southern Europe, with three meals, an afternoon teatime, and snacks. Uruguayans eat a simple breakfast at home or in a café, most often consisting of coffee with milk or maté tea and simple pastries or croissants. Lunch is the main meal of the day and is traditionally homemade and eaten at home with the family, even on weekdays. A typical lunch involves three courses: an appetizer; a main dish of meat (usually beef) accompanied by potatoes, bread, and a simple green salad; and a simple dessert. Appetizers might be cold marinated beef tongue or *matambre,* a cold beef or veal roulade stuffed with vegetables, served with Russian salad (potatoes, peas, and carrots bound together with mayonnaise). The main-course meat dish is often steak, *milanesas* (fried breaded cutlets), stews, meat pies, *estofados* (braised meats), hamburgers, or pastas. Dessert might be fresh or canned fruit, or ice cream. Since lunch is the heaviest meal of the day, Uruguayans often take a siesta (nap), then return to work until 7 or 8 in the evening. At night they will have a light dinner, usually around 10 or 11. Dinner is usually low-fuss, with families eating take-out pizza, empanadas, or *bocatas* (sandwiches of cold cuts on a baguette) or repurposing leftovers from lunch into stews, soups, or casseroles. Milanesas or other simple beef dishes can also be eaten for dinner. Soft drinks, beer, and wine are commonly served at lunch and dinner, and juices and *licuados* (juices mixed with milk or water) are also popular in Uruguay.

Between lunch and dinner is the *merienda* (teatime) when people drink maté, a very important custom in both Uruguay and Paraguay. Maté is a tea that is sipped from a gourd using a metal straw in an elaborate ritual shared among family and friends. It is enjoyed everywhere—at work, at school, at home, or in the street. In Uruguay, maté is accompanied by snacks called *bizcochos,* which are buttery, flaky pastries of European origin with many sweet and savory variations. Paraguayans often drink a cold infusion of yerba maté leaves called *tereré.* Tereré is excellent for mitigating the intense heat of the Paraguayan summer.

In Paraguay, typical meals and mealtimes vary between the countryside and urban areas. Urbanites are likely to follow a European meal structure similar to that in Uruguay: a simple breakfast, a large lunch followed by a siesta, an afternoon teatime, and a light dinner. Rural Paraguayans are more likely to eat two meals a day, including a more substantial breakfast and a large lunch. The typical meal structure involves meat-based dishes such as milanesas or *bife koyguá* (steak topped with onions and fried eggs) accompanied by yucca, chipá, and simple salads.

Uruguayans and Paraguayans get together most weekends with family and friends to enjoy an asado, an event similar to the American barbecue that traces its roots to the culture of the gaucho. The asado is considered the national dish of Uruguay. The centerpiece of the asado is simply seasoned grilled beef, variety meats, and sausages, all cooked slowly over wood embers at a low temperature until well done. A generous one pound of meat per person is usually allotted, and the meat is handled almost exclusively by men. In Uruguay, the asado is accompanied by simple salads, sauces, bread, and fresh fruit or fruit salads for dessert. Yucca and chipá are also present at the Paraguayan asado. Wine, beer,

and maté are always on hand, and music, dancing, and card games are enjoyed throughout the day.

## Eating Out

While eating out is popular in the cities, country towns have limited options. Both Paraguay and Uruguay have their fair share of local fast food and street food that easily rivals competition from global multinational chains. Hamburgers and hot dogs (called *panchos*) are popular, but beef sandwiches called *chivitos* in Uruguay and *lomitos* in Paraguay, along with *milanesa al pan* (fried cutlet sandwiches) and *choripán* (sausage sandwiches), can be found on the streets, in bus or train stations, and, in Uruguay, in cafélike establishments called *confiterías.*

Other popular urban snacks sold on street corners or at stalls in Uruguay include *garrapiñada,* a mixture of peanuts, cocoa, vanilla, and sugar, and *tortas fritas,* fried cakes that are often topped with sugar, dulce de leche, or marmalade. The European influence on eating out in Uruguay can be seen in the popularity of cafés and pizzerias. Apart from pizzas cooked in wood-fired ovens, Uruguayan pizzerias typically offer a variety of empanadas and a specialty called *fainá* (chickpea-flour bread).

In Paraguay, chipás are sold as inexpensive roadside snacks, on buses, or by vendors called *chiperas* who ride bicycles around town or walk door-to-door selling their fresh breads in the late afternoon. *Asadito* stands are found in the streets offering roasted meat on a stick served with yucca. Paraguayan markets sell traditional ingredients and foods that are not available at the major supermarkets, such as fresh artisanal cheeses and game meat like ñandú (rhea) or deer. Vendors in these markets also sell many prepared traditional dishes, such as soyo with *tortillitas* (beef soup with fried cakes).

Uruguayans are mainly traditional in their eating habits, and most restaurants offer some combination of pastas, pizzas, salads, meat platters, and local beers and wines. The most expensive and exclusive eateries in Montevideo tend to offer French cuisine. It has been said there is a lack of ethnic eateries even in cosmopolitan Montevideo, and vegetarians often feel left out of the local cuisine. This is especially true at the ubiquitous *parrilla,* the most popular type of restaurant in the country. It is here that the asado is served in a public setting. Another specialty restaurant is the gaucho club, which specializes in typical gaucho dishes such as *asado con cuero* (beef cooked in its skin) and *mazamorra* (dried-corn stew). In Uruguayan cities and resorts along the Atlantic coast, restaurants offer freshly caught seafood.

Traditionally, meals have been eaten in the home with family, and this continues to hold high value in Paraguay, even though many living in big cities are forced to eat out at least once a day as urban sprawl and work schedules prevent a trip home. Restaurants continue to remain out of the budgetary reach of many Paraguayans, especially in rural areas where diners are conservative in their tastes and prefer traditional dishes and ingredients. Urban Paraguayans have a more adventurous palate, and Asunción has its fair share of eateries offering foreign food. The contribution of Paraguay's immigrant groups is seen in restaurants offering Italian, French, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, German, and Arab fare, as well as foods from neighboring Brazil and Argentina. Parrillas are a popular place to eat grilled meats as well as traditional Paraguayan dishes like chipá guazú, sopa paraguaya, and breaded and fried surubí. Until recently, typical Paraguayan foods were enjoyed almost exclusively in the home, but recently specialized restaurants and shops in urban areas have begun selling uniquely Paraguayan dishes in a "local" atmosphere.

## Special Occasions

Because of the social nature of Uruguayan and Paraguayan culture, holidays and special occasions make great excuses for friends and families to gather and enjoy a special meal. In general, traditional special-occasion dishes are prepared by women, with the exception of the asado. Families in both countries hold asados to celebrate private events like birthdays, weddings, or the christening of a newborn. In Paraguay, chipá is considered a festive food and can be found at every popular religious celebration. Sopa paraguaya is the traditional

dish served at weddings, for holidays, and on special occasions.

In Uruguay, the two major holidays are Christmas and Easter. Christmas falls at the height of summer in southern South America, so meals are light, with cold meats, salads, and seafood playing a central role. The most traditional Christmas dishes are *pan dulce* (sweet bread) and English pudding with dried fruits and nuts. Uruguayan Easter festivities begin in February with Carnival, a monthlong, countrywide celebration involving street parties, musical theater, masquerades, parades, music, dancing, singing, drinking, and eating.

For Christmas in Paraguay, the main celebratory meal occurs after midnight mass on Christmas Eve, and most Paraguayans prepare a mixture of traditional Paraguayan specialties along with more modern fare like a turkey or rice and meat dishes. Clericó, a mixture of fruit, wine, and sugar, is drunk throughout the day, and the arrival of Christmas is celebrated with a champagne toast. Holy Week calls for major celebration and features traditional Paraguayan dishes, especially various chipás, which are made more "special" by shaping them like animals and baking them in the traditional tatakua oven. During the days leading up to Easter, meatless preparations of traditional dishes are consumed, such as the corn-based *locro de Cuaresma* (Lent stew) or *locro blanco* (white stew). *Kyrype,* a fried tortilla of starch, cheese, egg, and onion, is also typically eaten during this time, as well as meatless *empanadas de Vigilia* (abstinence turnovers), which are typically filled with a tuna stuffing. After mass on Easter Sunday, families gather to celebrate and eat a festive meal centered on meat.

Another major Paraguayan holiday is the Feast of Saint John. It is enthusiastically celebrated all over the country on June 24, during Paraguay's winter. The day begins with mass, and many typical winter specialties such as polenta, *chipá asador* (chipá wrapped around a wooden dowel or broomstick and roasted over coals), or *payaguá mascada* (Indian fried fritters stuffed with ground beef, also known as *lampreado*) accompany the festivities. Pagan rituals and contests are enjoyed throughout the day, especially in the countryside, and include *pelota tata* (kicking around a ball of fire), fire walking, climbing up greased posts, and the burning of Judas Iscariot in effigy.

## Diet and Health

Uruguay has one of the best health systems in South America, and life expectancy is high for the region. The country has one of the lowest poverty levels on the continent, and energy and protein malnutrition are not serious threats. Most of Uruguay's health problems are those associated with excess. Obesity is quite prevalent and is caused by a high consumption of beef and dairy products, which lead to a diet rich in saturated fats. The Uruguayan diet also includes high consumption of sugars and carbohydrates in the form of potatoes, pastas, breads, sodas, alcoholic beverages, and sugary desserts. The major causes of death in Uruguay are diet related and include heart disease, cancer, and digestive disorders. Uruguay has the highest percentage of diabetics in South America. Studies suggest that Uruguayans' knowledge, attitudes, and practices concerning food and nutrition are inadequate, and measures are being taken to influence dietary choices to include more fruits, vegetables, fish, and fiber.

In Paraguay, access to proper health care and fresh drinking water varies greatly from city to countryside. Paraguay also has among the lowest rates of undernourishment and malnutrition in Latin America, yet deficiency disorders do occur, especially among the lowest-income population and in rural areas. The typical Paraguayan diet includes a high amount of carbohydrates and saturated fats. Yucca is the main source of carbohydrates, but corn products, sodas, fruit juices, sugar, and beer also contribute. Saturated fats come in the form of meat, especially beef, and animal fats used in cooking. Due to changing dietary trends and increasing knowledge among some sections of the population, some Paraguayans are changing traditional recipes by substituting vegetable oils for animal fats such as suet or lard. Cardiovascular diseases are among the leading causes of death for Paraguayan adults.

The botanical-medicinal heritage of the indigenous groups of Paraguay has been preserved to

some extent, particularly in rural areas. Paraguayans frequently add herbs to the water used to brew tereré to heal minor ailments such as headaches or stomachaches. Certain traditional dishes are also believed to provide specific health and nutritional benefits. An example is *itacurú cué* (tripe soup), believed to restore health to the ill, provide strength to the frail, and increase milk production for women who are nursing.

*Cari Sánchez*

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# Peru

## Overview

Peru stretches from the Pacific coast of South America east to the Brazilian jungle. Ecuador and Colombia border Peru to the north, Chile to the south. Bolivia, formerly known as Upper Peru, lies southeast of Peru. Bolivia separated from Peru to become its own country in 1825. The capital of Peru, Lima, is located in the arid coastal section of the country and has its own world-renowned cuisine, sometimes called *cocina criolla.* The cuisines of the Andes Mountains, both the traditional indigenous cuisine and the more modern *cocina novoandina,* are also popular. The *selva* (jungle) region around the Amazon River is less developed but provides the country with beverages made from its exotic tropical fruits.

The Andes Mountains run north to south through Peru in at least three chains, with valleys and plateaus at different altitudes between them. The resulting vertical landscape, made up of diverse microclimates, has been under cultivation for centuries. Fertilization, natural pest-control techniques, cross-breeding, and crop development are practiced simultaneously in different climatic zones, perpetuating an agro-organic system that is better adapted to this geography than a monocrop plantation system, though there are large sugar and cotton plantations in the coastal area.

The Inca Empire, an empire made up of various indigenous tribes, existed for roughly 100 years before the Spanish conquest in 1532. After the conquest, indigenous foodways intersected with Spanish culinary traditions to form the basis of Peruvian cuisine. Labor shortages during the colonial period were addressed by the importation of slaves from Africa. Afro-Peruvians working in coastal agriculture, livestock production, and food preparation impacted Peruvian cuisine significantly, especially as it developed in the colonial period. In fact, the burst of creative culinary experimentation that eventually produced Peruvian cuisine was a result of the coming together of these three ethnicities—indigenous Peruvians, Spanish, and Africans. The introduction of new ingredients as a result of the Columbian Exchange and the growth of Lima, the capital and trade center of South America for much of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, also impacted the development of Peruvian cuisine.

In the 19th century, immigrant groups like the Chinese, Japanese, and Italians inserted their food traditions into the Peruvian culture and influenced the cuisine. In Peru, new culinary ideas are embraced with a spirit of innovation. Peruvian Chinese food and Peruvian Japanese food are subgroups of Peruvian cuisine. Dishes from these traditions combine flavors from their ethnic roots with distinctly Peruvian tastes.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Felipe and Giannina Quevedo live in a spacious apartment in the Surco district of Lima. Felipe is an industrial engineer, and Giannina is a professor of hospitality administration at St. Ignacio de Loyola University. They have two young children.

Felipe and Giannina have a simple breakfast of rolls and coffee each morning before going to work. If possible, they will both return home for the midday meal, which consists of typical Peruvian dishes, such as *arroz con pato* (rice with duck), *ají de gallina* (shredded

chicken in a spicy sauce), or *carne asada* (grilled beef). A British-style afternoon tea is served around 5 P.M. It usually consists of tea, small sandwiches, and/or sweets. The family has a light supper later in the evening, which may include a soup or *tortilla de patata* (potato omelet).

Giannina buys most of their food and household supplies at a supermarket. She also shops at local specialty stores for items such as bread, milk, and meat. On Sundays, the family goes to Giannina's mother's home for a large meal with her brothers and sisters and their children. For this meal, they may purchase fish directly from the fishermen at the port of Callao, or they may visit the open-air market in Lima where they can purchase fresh produce or prepared specialty foods.

## Major Foodstuffs

The potato and its distant relative the sweet potato are native to Peru and were unknown to the Old World before the Spanish conquest in 1532. The number of potato varieties grown in Peru may be as high as 4,000, not including the 2,000 varieties of sweet potatoes. Of all the varieties, the buttery, soft, and starchy yellow potato (*papa amarilla*) is one of the most popular. Before mills for grinding flour and baking ovens were widespread in Peru, Spanish nobles served platters of different-colored potatoes at banquets in place of bread. Today, many dishes, such as ceviche (raw fish marinated in lime), are typically served with a piece of boiled potato or sweet potato as a garnish. *Escribano,* a dish from Arequipa, is a type of potato salad soaked in *chicha de jora* (corn beer). *Causa* is a cold "torte" made out of layers of colorful vegetable or seafood salads and pureed potato. *Huanacayna* sauce, a creamy egg-based sauce, is always served over potatoes, as is *ocopa,* a sauce made with *huacatay* (Peruvian black mint).



A variety of potatoes being sold at a Peruvian market. (Dreamstime)

### ***Huancayna* Sauce**

*Sauce for 6 servings of papas a la huancayna*

1 tbsp *ají amarillo* paste

½ lb *queso fresco*

½ lb ricotta

1 oz fresh breadcrumbs (no crusts), soaked in milk

1 egg, hard-boiled

1 c oil

3 lemons, juiced

2 saltine crackers

Salt and white pepper to taste

In a food processor, mix the ají paste, cheeses, soaked bread, and yolk from the hard-boiled egg. Add the oil and lemon juice to the cheese mixture slowly while food processor is on. Add the remaining milk from the soaked bread and saltine crackers. Thin the sauce with milk or thicken with saltines as needed; it should have the consistency of a light

sauce to coat the potatoes. Season with salt and pepper.

Pour over cold potatoes and decorate with bibb lettuce, Peruvian olives, and hard-boiled eggs.

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Corn (maize) was cultivated in Peru perhaps as early as 3000 B.C. There are 35 varieties of maize found today in Peru. *Choclo* is the Peruvian name for the large-kernel maize that is used in Peruvian cuisine. Like potatoes, choclo is often used as a garnish for traditional Peruvian dishes, such as ceviche. *Humitas* are soft maize pastes folded into leaves and cooked in steam, similar to Mexican tamales. Purple maize is boiled to provide a richly colored juice base for the dessert *mazamorra morada* and for the refreshing purple drink *chicha morada* (now sold in the United States as "natural Peruvian purple corn-based drink"). The juice of the purple maize is known to be high in antioxidants.

Quinoa, which is native to Peru, is a pseudograin containing all eight essential amino acids. Its high protein content made it a valued grain in the starch-based pre-Columbian diet of the Incas. Its recent popularity in the United States has led to an increase in production for export. Taking advantage of its newly acquired popularity, *novoandina* chefs use quinoa in haute cuisine preparations, creating such dishes as wild mushroom quinoa pilaf, "quinotto" (quinoa risotto) with truffle oil and *pallares* (giant lima beans), and quinoa-crusted flounder with grilled vegetables.

Quinoa contains saponins, toxins that leave a bitter taste on the grain. To remove the taste and the effects of the toxin, quinoa must be pre-rinsed or quick-boiled before cooking. Agricultural engineers have produced genetically modified strains of quinoa without saponins; however, this quinoa attracts pests and birds. Peruvian farmers prefer to sell the quinoa with its natural toxin rather than introduce pesticides into their agricultural practices.

Peruvian chili peppers are called *ají.* Their flavor is more subtle than the biting hot chili peppers found elsewhere in Latin America. Most Peruvian dishes contain ají in some form, though the cuisine, on the whole, is not overly spicy.

The Peruvian guinea pig, *cuy,* is a traditional meat item in Peru, especially in the Andean regions. Cuy are often kept in and around family homes, where they breed and require very little maintenance. They are slaughtered and prepared at home. The meat of the cuy is usually rubbed with an ají-spice mix, then roasted, stewed, or grilled. In Peru, cuy is considered a delicacy preferable to rabbit or suckling pig.

A large array of domesticated animals came into Peru's food supply as a result of the Columbian Exchange, including cows, pigs, goats, sheep, chickens, and rabbits. In the colonial period, the inability of cattle to reproduce at high altitudes, which persisted for some years after the conquest, as well as the indigenous Peruvians' fears of these large animals, kept the beef industry on the coast near the city of Lima, where it was also closer to the wealthier, beef-eating population of Europeans. From these early times, the beef industry was manned mainly by Africans. Cattle slaughterhouses were located in the San Lazaro district, the African section of the city, near the slave quarters and the slave market. Even today, the majority of the slaughterhouses are staffed by Afro-Peruvians. *Anticuchos,* Peruvian street food at its best, are made from beef hearts macerated in a spicy marinade, then threaded on skewers and grilled over a wood fire. Afro-Peruvians took advantage of their proximity to the slaughterhouses to create beef dishes like anticuchos that they could sell on the streets. Many bought their freedom with money earned from food-related side businesses. Dairy products were unknown in Peru before the Spanish conquest. Peruvian cuisine takes advantage of the textural qualities of cheese and evaporated milk but rarely exploits these ingredients for their flavor.

European plant foods that influenced Peruvian cuisine include wheat, grapes, olives, garlic, lemons, rice, and sugar. Peruvian *botija* olives were derived from a Spanish breed of black Alfonso olives. The name *botija* comes from the type of clay pot in which they were originally cured. Their purple color and creamy flavor come from a unique system that involves fermentation with live bacteria. Botija olives have become a specialty food export product. They are served in a type of olive mayonnaise with octopus in the Peruvian dish *pulpo al olivo.*

Peruvian lemons are similar to key limes. They are bright green and aromatic. Their flavor is smooth and sour, not quite as bitter as lemons. Peruvian lemons are important ingredients in ceviche and the cocktail *pisco sour.*

The closest Pacific port to the city of Lima is the Port of Callao. The particular way in which the Humboldt Current passes by this port draws in large quantities of plankton, making it a perfect feeding ground for a wide variety of fish. Before the conquest, indigenous *chasquis* (runners) had an established relay system whereby they delivered fresh fish, and other goods, from the Pacific coast to the Inca royalty in Cuzco at an altitude of 10,000 feet above sea level in less than 24 hours. The most famous Peruvian dish is ceviche, made from raw fish marinated in Peruvian lemon juice, similar to lime juice. Ceviche is usually served with a slice of sweet potato and a few kernels of choclo as a garnish.

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**Ceviche**

*Serves 6*

2 lb wild striped bass or fresh grouper

25 limes or 50 key limes

Salt and pepper

Red onions, julienned and rinsed in cold water

Ají amarillo to taste, minced

Large-kernel corn, boiled

Sweet potato, boiled and cut in rounds

Cut fish into bite-size pieces. Place them in a glass or ceramic bowl. Add lime juice, salt, and pepper. (If using American limes, you may need to add a little orange juice concentrate if the acidity level is too high.) Add onions and ají. Garnish with sweet potato and corn. Keep cold in an ice bath. Serve refreshingly cool.

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Peru's rivers also provide fish for dishes such as *chupe de camarones.* Large Peruvian freshwater crayfish are cooked whole to make this one-pot meal that includes breadcrumbs, garlic, onion, tomato, corn, peas, potatoes, rice, cheese, milk, stock, ají, and chicha de jora.

In the Andean highlands, the dry mountain air and dramatic temperature changes from day to night facilitated the development of techniques for producing freeze-dried and air-dried foods. Indigenous dried foods that are still present in Peruvian cuisine include *chuño* and *papas secas* (two types of dried potato), *charqui* (dried meat), dried, salted fish, and *cancha* (toasted, dry corn kernels). Papas secas are the main ingredient in the traditional dish *carapulcra,* a meat stew similar to chili.

Catholic European settlers, who used wine in the celebration of their religious liturgy and enjoyed it as a beverage as well, were eager to produce wine in the New World. However, it was not until 1560, when the fertile grape vineyards of the Ica region of Peru were fully developed, that the first vintage of New World wine was produced. Peru had a flourishing wine export industry until it was shut down in 1614 due to complaints from competing wine producers in Spain. The grape harvest was then used to produce *pisco* (Peruvian grape brandy), which became the main ingredient for the famous Peruvian cocktail, the pisco sour. Another pisco cocktail is *algarrobina,* made with pisco, condensed milk, and the sweet sap of the Peruvian *algarroba* tree.

Even when wine was abundant and cheap in Peru, the indigenous people preferred their own traditional drink, chicha de jora (maize beer). Euro-Peruvians from the colonial period also enjoyed chicha; the aristocratic Doña Josepha Escurrachea put a recipe for chicha de jora in her 1776 cookbook, listing it after a series of fruit drinks also called chichas. Contemporary Andean women continue to make chicha de jora at home. A red stick outside the door of one of their dwellings indicates that there is chicha for sale there. Modern chefs use chicha de jora for marinades and salad dressings.

Rice came to Peru from Spain via the Moors, who introduced it there in the Middle Ages, though strains of African rice breeds have been found among the Peruvian rice crops as well. In Peru, rice is often served with potatoes.

*Olluquito con charqui* is a traditional Peruvian dish that illustrates the blending of cultures in the cuisine. *Olluco* is a small tuber, native to Peru, with moist, juicy flesh. Olluco is popular with indigenous

Aymara, who liken it to "drops of rain." *Olluquito* is *olluco* with the Spanish diminutive *ito* attached. Charqui is dried meat. The word *charqui* is similar to the Quechua word for "dry," but it is also an Arabic word. In olluquito con charqui, the olluco and the charqui are cut in a fine julienne and cooked in an ají-garlic sauce. Ají is from Peru; garlic is from Europe. Olluqito con charqui is always served with rice, which indicates that the dish probably has Moorish or African roots, or both.

Three Peruvian tubers, olluco, *mashua,* and *oca,* are frost-resistant and grow together with potatoes in the highlands of Peru in an agro-organic system that controls pests and diseases. Although these tubers are part of the Andean diet, only the olluco is used in popular Peruvian cuisine. From the temperate highlands comes *lúcuma,* a tuberous fruit with a high starch content and flavor somewhat like coffee or maple. Lúcuma is the most popular ice cream flavor in Peru. Lúcuma is also used to flavor puddings and dessert beverages. Fresh lúcuma pulp can be frozen, making it useful for export along with other fruit purees.

## Cooking

One-pot meals cooked in Spanish *ollas* (covered cooking pots) over wood fires are called *chupes* in Peru. *Ollas de barro* (clay pots) are traditional and are valued for the flavor they impart to food cooked on the wood fire. Wood-fired stoves are important for grilled dishes as well, such as anticuchos and *pollo a la brasa* (rotisserie chicken). Peruvians like to cook *chicharrón de cerdo,* pork fried to a crisp in its own fat, in large *sartenes* (pans) on open-air wood-fired stoves. Among the hardwoods that are used to fire these stoves, the wood of the Peruvian algarroba (a cousin of the mesquite) is valued. Since city dwellers rarely have wood-fired stoves in their homes or apartments, these dishes are usually enjoyed in restaurants or at vacation homes in the country.

Fried foods are popular in coastal cuisine. *Jalea* is a fried fish platter that includes fried plantains, fried yucca, and a corn salsa called *chalaca. Tacu tacu* is a fried "tortilla" made out of day-old rice and beans. It is used as a bed for meat, eggs, and/or ripe plantains. *Lomo saltado* is a Peruvian stir-fry of beef tenderloin, onion, tomato, cilantro, soy sauce, garlic, and ají. It is served with rice and French fries. The stir-fry technique was introduced by Chinese immigrants in the 19th century. Lomo saltado is cooked in an extremely hot pan to produce a crisp, slightly charred flavor. Sometimes the pan is flamed with pisco as a finish to the dish.

For centuries in the high Andes, at the time of the potato harvest, indigenous families have met in the fields, where they cook humitas and new potatoes on heated stones buried in a pit. The festive meals cooked in these rustic outdoor cooking pits are called *pachamanca.* A large pachamanca, organized to celebrate the anniversary of a hacienda (ranch), may include meats, corn, potatoes, native tubers,



Lomo saltado, a Peruvian steak dish. (iStockPhoto)

and humitas. Coastal pachamancas use yucca and plantains. Harvest-time *huatias* are outdoor meals cooked in fires built under mounds of earth. Potatoes and fava beans cooked under these mounds are said to take on the deep, rich flavors of the minerals in the soil.

Potatoes and sweet potatoes are often served in their simplest form: boiled. Boiled potatoes of all colors are mashed or left whole to serve as the base for refreshing salads and spicy cold sauces. To prepare sauces, the *batan,* a large concave stone with a matching oval stone, used to grind grains, herbs, and ajís, is sometimes used. The batan is favored in Peru over the mortar and pestle for many culinary tasks.

## Typical Meals

Typical breakfast fare in Peru is hard rolls, a cheese platter, butter and jam, and hot milk with coffee extract. *Almuerzo* is the main meal of the day. It usually falls between 1:30 and 2 P.M. and consists of two courses and a dessert. More recently, so as to adapt to the modern workday schedule, Peruvians have abandoned the traditional midday meal on weekdays. This means that the weekend almuerzo has become even more important. On workdays, people eat a small meal in the middle of the day and a heavier supper than usual in the evening.

For a weekend "family meal," the following are some popular first courses: *solterito* (a salad of fava beans, choclo, olives, and fresh cheese with a light vinaigrette), causa, papas a la huancayna, ceviche, anticuchos, or *papas rellenas* (meat-stuffed potato croquettes). In colder weather a soup, such as *parihuela* (Peruvian-style bouillabaisse) or chupe de camarones, may be served. The main course would be a heavier meat or fish dish, of which there are many in the classic repertoire of Peruvian cuisine. The cooking techniques, sauces, and accompaniments for most of these traditional main dishes are well known and well defined owing to the long food history of the country.

Desserts might include *suspiro a la Limeña,* which means "sighs of person from Lima" (a pudding of condensed milk, butter, and cream), *arroz con leche* (rice pudding), *milhojas* (layered pastry crisps with *manjar blanco*—caramelized reduced milk like *dulce de leche*), or ice creams flavored with native Peruvian ingredients such as lúcuma, cherimoya, *guanábana,* purple maize, or algarrobina.

*Merienda* is the common Spanish and South American name for the snack taken around 5 P.M.; however, in Peru it is often referred to as *el té* and resembles British afternoon tea. Foods may be salty or sweet, formal or informal, depending on the day or the family traditions.

Supper is served sometimes as late as 9 P.M. It is a simple, one-course meal. Soups, *sangos* (porridges), or *locro* (a thick soup/stew made from Peruvian squashes and cheese) are popular. Sandwiches or cold cheese and meat platters may also be served.

## Eating Out

Peruvians love to eat in public places, especially on weekends, surrounded by friends and relatives. Long-standing traditions of making, selling, and serving food outside of the home have created a varied, thriving restaurant and prepared-food industry. Perhaps the oldest type of Peruvian restaurant is the rustic *picantería,* typical of Arequipa. These family-run eateries are usually known for their spicy dishes and chichas.

Cocina criolla refers specifically to the traditional cuisine of Peruvian-born Europeans, but it can also refer to the cuisine of Lima. There are many restaurants in Lima, expensive and less expensive ones, where traditional cocina criolla is served. First courses almost always include ceviche, anticuchos, papas a la huancayna, and causa. Main entrées could be ají de gallina, *olluquito con carne,* carapulcra, jalea, *chicharrón,* or lomo saltado.

The most famous haute cuisine restaurant in Peru is superchef Gaston Acurio's Astrid y Gaston in Lima. Acurio is a French-trained chef who is determined to put Peruvian cuisine on the map. The restaurant is one of the first of several restaurants in Peru that have developed high-end standards and modern presentation styles for cocina criolla. These restaurants have also embraced the novoandina style of cooking, which showcases native Peruvian highland crops and indigenous cooking traditions

in a haute cuisine setting. A high-end novoandina restaurant may serve the low-brow Afro-Peruvian staple tacu tacu (fried beans and rice) with seared yellowfin tuna, orange-endive salsa criolla, and a gooseberry–ají amarillo sauce.

Family-run sandwich shops in Lima, called *chicharronerías,* sell classic Peruvian fried pork sandwiches. *Cevicherías* are usually quaint, fun, family-owned seaside restaurants. The decor is unpretentious. Often, the owner is the fisherman, and his wife is the cook. Cevicherías compete with Japanese sushi bars, which serve sushi, sashimi, and Peruvian-style sushi called *tiraditos.* There are many inexpensive Chinese restaurants in Lima and other coastal cities. They have been an important presence in the country for over 100 years. Italian restaurants serving pasta dishes, like ravioli, are also familiar. The Miraflores district of Lima has a street dedicated almost entirely to pizzerias.

Street vendors have been a fixture in the plazas of Lima since the 16th century. Many of Peru's most beloved dishes, like anticuchos and chicha morada, were first sold as street food. Famous 19th-century street vendors include Erasmo, the "negro" sango vendor, and Ña Aguedita, who wrapped herself in woven scarves and dished out *fresceras, mazamorras,* and *champus* from three stone pots in Lima's open market. These colorful characters became iconic representatives of the multiethnic cuisine of Peru. In the more recent past, attitudes toward street vendors have been both positive and negative. With the increase in poverty and crime in the later 20th century, the streets and their vendors became less attractive than they once were. Nevertheless, recognizing the economic potential inherent in a quality street-food industry, the government has begun to make it easier for food businesses in the informal sector to legalize their enterprises and become more profitable.

Many of the famous Peruvian sweets were invented in convents, which competed with one another for the business of wealthy Peruvians, especially in the colonial period. Peruvian sweets often contain manjar blanco (Peruvian dulce de leche). Peruvian sweets are usually dense, very sweet rectangular confections that are cut into small squares and served in the afternoon or as a dessert after the main meal.

International fast-food chains such as McDonald's, Burger King, and Starbucks can be found in Peru only in the city of Lima. Tourist sites in the Andes and Amazonia tend to focus on ecotourists and those who desire an "authentic" Peruvian food experience. Local Peruvians prefer Peruvian food to all other foods. One of Gaston Acurio's goals is to market fast-food operations that will sell *pan con chicharrón* (Peruvian fried pork sandwiches) internationally as an alternative to the hamburger.

Peruvians have such a strong sentimental attachment to their cuisine that they welcome packaged and frozen foods that enable them to experience the flavors of Peru when they are elsewhere. Powdered versions of huancayna, ocopa, and other sauces are available. Ají can be purchased dried or canned. Frozen kits for making anticuchos can be found in Latin markets in the United States. One can even purchase a microwaveable vacuum-packed pachamanca, complete with choclo; yellow potatoes; Peruvian roots such as olluco, oca, mashua, *yacón,* and *maca;* along with humitas, as far away from Peru as Germany.

## Special Occasions

Approximately 82 percent of Peruvians are Roman Catholic. While Catholic feasts, such as Christmas and Holy Week, are celebrated in Peru, days of fasting and abstinence are less common than in other countries because of *la bula,* a papal bull that gave privileges, including exemption from fasts, to Spain and her colonies. The bull was discontinued in the 1960s, but the spirit of feasting is still dominant in Peruvian culture.

El Señor de los Milagros is a specifically Peruvian feast celebrating a 17th-century mural painted by an Afro-Peruvian of a dark-skinned Christ on the cross. The mural stimulated popular piety but was not appreciated by local authorities, who made several unsuccessful attempts to have it removed from its prominent location. In 1655, when an earthquake reduced the entire section of the city in which the mural was located to rubble, the mural was found standing perfectly intact. The feast commemorating this event is celebrated on

October 18 after a number of days of penance in which people wear purple-colored penitential garments. On the actual feast day, copies of the mural are carried through the streets by crowds of people dressed in purple. These processions are followed by dinners that conclude with *turrone de Doña Pepa,* a pastry made of anise cookie logs bathed in a molasses-fruit glaze and covered with (purple!) sprinkles. Legend claims that Doña Pepa, a 17th-century Afro-Peruvian, made the first turrone to commemorate this feast after receiving the recipe in a dream from an angel.

The November feasts of All Saints' and All Souls' coincide with the returning rains of spring in Peru. During this time, guests visit family and friends to eat traditional dishes, particularly the favorite dishes of the deceased. Foods are also brought to cemeteries, where the dead are remembered with a joyful picnic. In Cuzco, the All Saints' Day feast traditionally includes a suckling pig and humitas (tamales).

Festivals of the saints and of the Blessed Virgin Mary are celebrated similarly throughout the country with processions, religious and folkloric ceremonies, traditional foods, and chicha. A feast that is popular among mixed-race Peruvians is that of the mulatto Peruvian saint Martin de Porres (1579–1639). Also called Fray Escoba (Friar Broom), St. Martin de Porres is known for his work feeding people and cleaning up after them. Many Peruvian homes have a small broom in the corner of their kitchen as a symbol of their devotion to this native Peruvian saint. He is known for having planted a famous olive grove in Lima, for preparing picnics and salads for the Dominican brothers in his convent, and for feeding the poor, especially the indigenous people, many of whom were homeless.

The Inca feast of Inti Rayni takes place in Cuzco at the winter solstice. It is a celebration in thanksgiving to the Sun God. The feast was banned in 1572 by the Catholic authorities, but it is celebrated today as a historical, folkloric, and religious festival. Among the festivities are many reenactments of Inca rituals, including a great feast consisting of meat, cornbread, chicha, and coca tea.

Christmas in Peru is a time to enjoy sweets. Sweet mango juice, bakery rolls, and *churros con chocolate* (fried donuts dipped in chocolate sauce) are popular. A common Christmas treat is imported Italian panettone and Peruvian-style chocolate milk made from evaporated milk, a chocolate bar, and cinnamon.

Carnival, the last day of feasting before the penitential season of Lent, generally does not include the kind of excessive eating and drinking often associated with this holiday in other countries. It is a day of "tricks" involving surprising people by bursting water balloons on them. In Cajamarca, guests are welcomed into family homes for papas a la huancayna, other traditional foods, and chicha de jora.

Holy Week is celebrated everywhere in Peru, but the most famous celebration is in the mountain city of Ayacucho. There, on the eve before Easter, it is customary to have a feast consisting of 12 typical Peruvian dishes. One of the dishes almost always included is *chiriuchu* (spicy roasted cuy). Chiriuchu is also served with beer, chicha, and cornbread on the vigil of the feast of Corpus Christi in June.

## Diet and Health

Archaeological remains of preconquest indigenous Peruvians indicate that they were in good health. Protein sources included cuy (Peruvian guinea pig), game, fish, and quinoa. Dried foods and multiclimatic agricultural practices ensured food security. Moreover, recent analysis of the preconquest indigenous diet reveals that ingestion patterns increased nutrient absorption. The "appetizer" for the midday meal was *cancha* (dried maize). The rough texture of this foodstuff opened the alimentary passages, preparing them for increased nutrient absorption. Custom prevented the drinking of chicha de jora (maize beer) until the end of the meal, when enzymes in this fermented beverage could aid in the digestion of the complex carbohydrate–rich menu. This eliminated the danger of losing nutrients due to excess liquid or fiber pushing food through the digestive system too quickly.



Coca leaf vendors sell the leaves out of large bags in a Peruvian market. The cultivation and use of the coca leaf in Peruvian culture is a way of life. However, because the leaves are also the raw material used in the production of cocaine, the tradition has come under fire from the Peruvian and United States governments as Peru is one of the largest providers of coca leaves to Colombia, a country that provides cocaine to the rest of the world. (Corel)

Indigenous Peruvians have chewed the leaves of the coca plant, which are used to make the narcotic drug cocaine, for centuries. When the leaves are chewed alone, they produce a mild burst of energy. When they are chewed with an alkaline agent, usually in the form of vegetal ashes, the effect is heightened. The chewing of coca leaves does not have the extreme narcotic effect of the chemically pure alkaloid cocaine, nor does it seem to be addictive. It seems to help relieve the symptoms of altitude sickness.

*Kelly O'Leary*

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# Puerto Rico

## Overview

Puerto Rico is an archipelago located between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean. It is composed of the main island of Puerto Rico, the smaller islands of Culebra and Vieques, and many uninhabited islands like Mona, Desecheo, and Caja de Muertos. Politically it is an unincorporated territory of the United States, or Estado Libre Asociado (Associated Free State). The food culture of Puerto Rico has been formed through centuries of adaptation, blending, and creation based on elements originating in Taino Arawak, Spanish, African, and U.S. cultures.

The precolonial indigenous inhabitants of Puerto Rico were Taino Arawaks, whose basic staple was yucca. They processed yucca by peeling and grating it, squeezing out the juice and its poisonous components, and drying it to form flour with which they made a flatbread called *casabe.* Yucca was supplemented with fish and shellfish, and with beans, maize, fruits, and vegetables that the Taino Arawaks cultivated in small plots of land called *conucos.*

The Spanish colonizers arrived in 1493, starting a colonial period that lasted four centuries. It redefined the ecosystem and the food culture of the archipelago. The Spanish learned local fishing and food-cultivation and -preparation techniques from the indigenous inhabitants, and they also introduced new foods and culinary techniques. Many of the foods considered essential by the Spanish were hard or impossible to produce in the Caribbean. Whereas pigs and cattle thrived on the islands, wheat flour, olive oil, *bacalao* (salt cod), and wine had to be constantly imported. These foods became an important part of Puerto Rican food culture even though they are not local foods. The Spanish successfully introduced many vegetables and fruits from Europe, Asia, and Africa, and today it is hard to believe that they did not originate in the Caribbean region. These include plantains, bananas, coffee, breadfruit, sugarcane, tamarinds, and mangoes. Dishes from different regions of Spain, including Moorish dishes, were slowly transformed as they were constantly adapted and reinvented using new ingredients and taste ideals. Contemporary Puerto Rican rice dishes like *asopao* (soupy rice) and arroz con pollo (chicken with rice) are based on *arroz caldoso* and Valencian paella, which have different versions all over Latin America and the Caribbean.

During the Spanish colonial period, Puerto Rico produced coffee and sugar for the Spanish market, and the food supply depended on subsistence agriculture and products imported from Spain. Thousands of slaves were imported from different regions of Africa. The Africans introduced vegetables like okra and *ñames* (true yams as opposed to sweet potatoes) as well as food-preparation techniques like the pounding and grating of plantains and other starchy vegetables to form savory cakes.

Contemporary specialties like *mofongo* (pounded fried plantains) clearly show an African lineage. As cooks on the plantations and in affluent homes, Africans had a formative role in the shaping of Puerto Rican cuisine. They were in charge of assembling and creating a new cuisine with disparate ingredients, techniques, and taste memories from diverse regions of the world.

When the United States invaded Puerto Rico in 1898, a distinctive cuisine already existed in the archipelago, but the local food culture continued to develop under U.S. colonial rule and its project of modernization. Important staples like rice and beans were increasingly imported from the United States, and the diet of Puerto Rican peasants in the U.S.-dominated sugar economy became more and more limited. Food aid and home economics instruction in the public school system helped to speed up the incorporation of cheap processed foods like oatmeal, dried milk, canned Vienna sausages, Spam, and canned corned beef. These and other U.S. products have been localized and incorporated into the matrix of Puerto Rican cooking. *Arroz con salchichas* (rice with Vienna sausages) and Thanksgiving turkey stuffed with mofongo are very common dishes. A more recent dimension of the impact of the relationship with the United States is the effervescence of a restaurant culture fueled by tourism, diasporic Puerto Ricans with professional culinary training and work experience acquired abroad, and the ambition of transforming Puerto Rican cuisine into the "grand cuisine" of the Caribbean. Another important aspect of contemporary Puerto Rican food culture is its resilient Caribbean character, constantly reinforced by cultural nationalism and by vibrant Cuban and Dominican communities that keep the Caribbean fusion constantly evolving.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Middle-class Puerto Ricans do most of their food shopping at supermarkets. Many families supplement supermarket purchases with produce from the *plaza del mercado* (traditional food markets) and with a few items grown at home or received from relatives and friends who cultivate small plots. In rural areas many people keep chickens and pigs, and in coastal areas noncommercial fishing is common.

The Rivera family—Yesenia, David, and their three kids—go to the supermarket together. In the produce area they choose from a variety of imported fruits and vegetables like apples, peaches, and plums, as well as local and imported tropical fruits like coconuts, mangoes, papayas, and different varieties of bananas. From the fresh vegetable area they get onions, garlic, tomatoes, potatoes, yucca, and *yautías* (the underground stem of a *Xanthosoma* plant), but they do not buy plantains and traditional flavoring ingredients like *ajíes dulces* (sweet chilies) and *recao* (long-leaf cilantro) because David grows them in their suburban backyard. From the refrigerated section they buy milk, eggs, sliced processed cheese, and several cartons of juice drinks including orange, passion fruit, and guava. From the dry foods aisles they pick up coffee, many bags of rice, canned and dried beans, canned tomato sauce, pasta, boxed cereals, and sandwich bread.

When looking at the meat section, the kids ask for hamburgers, but Yesenia shuns premade patties in favor of fresh low-fat ground meat, which she will season with an onion and garlic *adobo* (seasoning rub) to make her own burgers. She also selects packaged pork chops and chicken parts. At the frozen aisle they buy ice cream, fish sticks, and ready-made turnover wrappers to make savory *pastelillos*. Finally, in the bakery section they buy a loaf of *pan criollo* (Puerto Rican bread), which they will enjoy at breakfast the next day, and a lemon meringue pie, which the kids requested.

Sometimes Yesenia prefers to shop at her local plaza del mercado. She thinks that it is good for her children to experience the small-town atmosphere of the old-fashioned market, and she also likes the fresh local fruits and vegetables sold there. She buys three different varieties of yautía, one breadfruit, and a bunch of *guineos manzanos* (a short and fat variety of banana), which are rarely available at the supermarket. Before leaving they stop at the prepared-food stands where they eat *bacalaítos* (codfish fritters) and drink fresh fruit *batidas* (shakes).

## Major Foodstuffs

Rice and beans are the main staples of the Puerto Rican diet even though the diet has become more diversified in recent decades. Coffee is a necessity for breakfast, and it is also enjoyed throughout the day and after meals. Rice could be of the short- or long-grain variety, but together with beans it is the center of most meals. Many people consider that they have not eaten a full meal if they have not eaten rice

and beans, so it is not unusual to see pasta dishes like lasagna served with rice and beans on the side. A popular expression for making a living is *ganarse las habichuelas,* or "earning the beans." Red kidney beans and pink beans are the most common, together with chickpeas and *gandules* (pigeon peas).

Pork, chicken, and beef are the favorite meats. Many Puerto Ricans enjoy specialty dishes made with offal, like *mondongo* (tripe) and *mollejas* (gizzards), but there are many who dislike them. Canned meat products are very popular because their low price makes eating meat every day possible. Seafood is also appreciated, although at home it is not consumed as frequently as meat. Fresh fish is not widely available so people buy imported frozen fillets. Bacalao remains an important component of Puerto Rican cuisine, but nowadays imitation crabmeat is taking its place in many traditional dishes. Conch and octopus are well liked, and they can be found in many stores.

*Viandas* is a category of starchy foods that includes yucca, different varieties of yautía, ñames, *batatas* (white sweet potatoes), breadfruit, plantains, and green bananas. Viandas can be simply boiled and served as a side dish dressed with olive oil, or they are transformed into dishes like mofongo, *alcapurrias* (grated viandas stuffed with meat and fried), and *pasteles* (grated viandas stuffed with meat, wrapped in plantain leaves, and boiled). Simple lettuce and tomato salads, or salted avocado slices, are ways in which other vegetables are consumed. Fruits like oranges and bananas also have staple status, whether eaten for breakfast, dessert, or a snack.




A sign for a restaurant featuring mondongo, a Puerto Rican tripe dish. (iStockPhoto)

Another important category of foods includes the items necessary to make *sofrito,* a seasoning made with ground ingredients, used in beans, rice, stews, and meat dishes. A basic sofrito contains onions, garlic, ajíes dulces, and recao. However, each cook adds one or more additional ingredients, making the sofrito unique. Possible additional ingredients include *cubanelle* or bell peppers, roasted red bell peppers, cilantro, oregano, pimento-stuffed olives, capers, ham, or olive oil. Lightly frying the sofrito in olive oil or lard that has been colored and flavored with achiote (annatto seeds) is the first step in Puerto Rican cooking, and it gives dishes their distinctive taste and aroma.

Fruits like mangoes, bananas, guavas, and oranges are grown in many backyards, and they are frequently eaten as a snack. Coconuts are prized for their refreshing water and for their sweet flesh, which is used grated or in milk form to make innumerable desserts. Some less widely available but equally popular fruits include *parcha* (passion fruit), *guanábana* (soursop), pineapples, papayas, *acerolas* (West Indian cherries), and *quenepas* (a round green fruit with a thin brittle skin and a large pit covered by sweet pulp).

## Cooking

Daily Puerto Rican cooking combines traditional techniques with the use of modern equipment. Grating and pounding are two fundamental food-preparation techniques that are best performed with traditional tools. A simple hand grater (*guayo*) is indispensable when grating green plantains to make dumplings (*bollitos de plátano*) or when grating all kinds of viandas for alcapurrias and pasteles. Grating in a blender or in a food processor does not release enough stickiness in the viandas, which is necessary for them to form a cohesive dough or batter. Although it is indeed possible to make the batter

for pasteles and alcapurrias in a food processor, purists insist that this method produces inferior results. The *pilón* (wooden mortar and pestle) is another essential kitchen tool, particularly to make mofongo. Only the pilón makes plantains and other viandas come together with the right balance of softness and chunkiness, and it also gives mofongo its domed shape. In restaurants it has become commonplace to serve mofongo in the pilón, sometimes with a meat or seafood stuffing. Another important food-preparation tool is the *tostonera,* a wooden press used to flatten plantain slices between the first and second frying to make *tostones.* Newer tostonera designs shape the plantain slices into cups that can be filled with meat or seafood to make *tostones rellenos.*

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### *Gandules con Bollitos de Plátano* (Pigeon Peas with Green Plantain Dumplings)

*Serves 4*

#### Ingredients

*For the Bollitos*

1 green plantain
½ tbsp olive oil
½ tsp garlic, crushed
¼ tsp salt
¼ tsp ground black pepper

*For the Gandules*

1½ tbsp olive oil
1 small onion, chopped
1 clove garlic, crushed
2 oz smoked ham, cubed
2 tbsp sofrito (available in the Latin American foods aisle of most supermarkets)
¼ c tomato sauce
1 can pigeon peas, drained
2½ c water
1 bay leaf
Salt and pepper to taste

#### Procedure

Peel the plantain, and grate it using the smallest holes of a box grater. The result should be wet and sticky. Mix the grated plantains with the oil, garlic, salt, and pepper. Take teaspoonfuls of the mixture and shape into small balls. Cover until ready to use.

Heat the oil in a large pot, and sauté the onion, garlic, and ham until the onion is translucent. Add the sofrito, stir, and cook for 3 minutes. Add the tomato sauce, stir, and cook for 3 more minutes. Add the pigeon peas and stir well. Add the water, bay leaf, salt, and pepper, and simmer for 15 minutes. Drop in the dumplings one at a time, and stir carefully after 5 minutes. Simmer for 30 minutes, or until the broth has thickened and the dumplings are cooked through. Serve with white rice.

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The blender has become an important tool in the Puerto Rican kitchen primarily to make sofrito. Making sofrito in a blender rather than in the pilón is less labor-intensive and also gives excellent results. Additionally, the blender can easily make enough sofrito for a few weeks, which significantly reduces cooking time. Blenders, mixers, and food processors are used to make the occasional cake or flan (caramel custard), and microwave ovens are used mostly for reheating leftovers or for quick cooking of rice and beans.

The most important cooking vessel is a *caldero,* a thick and heavy pot similar to a Dutch oven. Cooking rice in the caldero produces *pegao,* a layer of crispy rice that sticks to the bottom of the pot and is considered a treat. Electric rice cookers have not become popular in Puerto Rico because they do not produce pegao. The caldero is also the preferred vessel for deep-frying tostones, alcapurrias, and many other snacks and appetizers. Calderos or regular pots are used to cook beans, soups, and stews. Pressure cookers are favored among many for their ability to cook dried beans and chickpeas quickly, which allows them to have home-cooked instead of canned beans.

Another important cooking vessel is a saucepan for making coffee. Water is heated to just below boiling before adding at least one heaping tablespoon of espresso coffee grounds for each cup of coffee desired. The coffee is stirred constantly for one minute without letting it boil, and finally it is strained with a *colador* (cloth strainer). The coffee can be drunk black or returned to the saucepan after heating up some milk in it. This technique produces coffee that is strong but not bitter, and most people prefer it to drip or espresso machines.

Today, the food industries offer many alternatives for busy Puerto Rican home cooks. Peeled and cut viandas are available frozen. Tostones and other fritters are available frozen and ready to fry. Many households use canned beans, chickpeas, and gandules rather than fresh, dried, or frozen ones. Canned tomato sauce is ubiquitous, as well as bouillon cubes, seasoning packets, and ready-made adobos. Sofrito is sold in jars or in frozen plastic tubs, and even those cooks who do not like to depend on these products keep one around just in case they run out of their own.

## Typical Meals

Puerto Ricans do not eat traditional meals every day. Many people have eclectic food habits and like to experiment with new flavors and cuisines that they have come to know about from the media, travel, and restaurants. However, certain patterns remain easy to identify. Breakfast consists of coffee with bread or pastries like bakery-bought *quesitos* and *tornillos* (puff pastry cylinders stuffed with cream cheese or pastry cream). Other breakfast options include eggs, pancakes, and French toast. Cereals can be of the boxed variety, but hot cereals like oatmeal, farina, and cornmeal and custards made with cornstarch are still popular. Lunch is often eaten outside of the home, and it can be either a fast version of dinner or just a sandwich or fast-food items like burgers, fried chicken, or pizza.

Dinner more often than not consists of rice, beans, and a meat dish. Rice can be white rice that is simply cooked with salt and oil or lard. Yellow rice is cooked with sofrito, achiote, and tomato sauce, and sometimes it includes beans and/or meat. Rice becomes a one-pot meal when cooked as asopao, a thick soup with plenty of meat or seafood. Asopao is considered the ideal meal to warm up on a rainy day or to fight a cold. Beans are stewed with sofrito and tomato sauce. Different versions can include cubes of pumpkin, potato, ham, or fresh pork hocks. The most common meat preparations are pork chops, boneless pork loin cubes, or chicken parts rubbed with adobo and fried. Beef cubes, Vienna sausages, Spam, and canned corned beef are stewed following the same procedure of adding sofrito, tomato sauce, bouillon cubes, and potatoes. Beefsteak is served as *bistec empanado* (breaded and fried) or as *bistec encebollado* (cooked in vinegar and onions).

The rice, beans, and meat dinner is sometimes complemented by side dishes and snacks, mostly made with viandas. Green plantains are served as tostones or *arañitas* (crispy clusters of shredded plantain) on the side or as bollitos de plátano in a gandules stew. Ripe plantains, sliced lengthwise and fried, are another common side dish. Ripe plantain slices are also used to make *pastelón,* a layered ripe-plantain casserole with a beef, chicken, or pork filling. Other viandas appear as side dishes simply boiled or as mofongo.

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### ***Arañitas*** **(Shredded Green Plantain "Spiders")**

*Yields 6 to 8 pieces*

1 green plantain

1 clove garlic, crushed

¼ tsp salt or adobo

Oil for frying

Peel the plantain, and grate it using the medium-sized holes of a box grater. Sprinkle the salt or adobo evenly over the thin, long plantain strands. Heat 2 inches of oil to approximately 350°F. Take a heaping tablespoonful of plantain strands and press lightly with your fingers until the strands stick together forming a cluster. They should look like

spiders with plenty of "legs" sticking out. Fry until golden and crispy. Sprinkle with salt to taste, and serve with a dipping sauce.

Dessert is served often but not daily. Traditional dessert options might include fresh fruit and homemade or store-bought flan, bread pudding, *dulce de lechosa* (semiripe papaya slices in syrup), or guava paste with *queso del país* (fresh cheese). Ice cream, cakes, pies, and pastries are other possibilities.

## Eating Out

Many coffee shops are open for breakfast. They offer coffee, batidas, and freshly squeezed orange juice. These drinks can be accompanied by toasted bread with butter or by pressed sandwiches made with ham, cheese, and/or fried egg. A special treat of some old Spanish cafeterias and bakeries is the *mallorca,* a brioche-like bun covered with powdered sugar. Mallorcas are usually split, spread with butter or margarine, and toasted in a sandwich press.

The most popular places to eat lunch are *fondas* (cafeterias) and fast-food outlets. Fondas serve traditional Puerto Rican food at low prices and with no-frills service that allows working people to enjoy a full meal during their lunch hour. Customers choose from food counters that contain the menu items of the day, which typically include white and yellow rice, stewed beans, and a few meat options. Side dishes might include pegao, tostones (fried, squashed, and refried plantain), mofongo, *amarillos* (fried ripe plantain slices), and French fries. Puerto Rican–style spaghetti and lasagna are other possible options, as well as dishes that are not generally made at home like mondongo and goat stew. Competing with fondas are fast-food outlets like McDonald's, Burger King, KFC, and Taco Bell, which can be found everywhere. Most fast-food restaurants have made concessions to the Puerto Rican palate and include items like rice, beans, tostones, and flan in their menus.

Festivals are occasions for eating out in Puerto Rico. Whether the theme is music, art, dance, agriculture, or a specific food item, all festivals offer plentiful amounts of traditional food and drink. Festival food vendors have created new versions of traditional snacks, many of which are supersized versions of their predecessors. Bacalaítos are made dinner-plate size, and arañitas have become *nidos,* large grated plantain nests stuffed with meat or seafood salad. Ironically, the names of the original dishes mean "little codfish" and "little spiders," making their supersized versions seem incongruent. Piña colada, with or without rum, is always present at festivals, sometimes served inside a hollowed-out pineapple. Another favorite food item sold at festivals are traditional sweet confections made with guava, sweet potato, coconut, bitter orange, papaya, sesame seeds, or caramelized milk. Thanks to festivals many traditional foods that were unknown to younger Puerto Ricans are now easy to sample. These include *guanimes con bacalao* (boiled cornmeal dumplings with salted codfish salad) and the sweet treat called *gofio* (toasted cornmeal mixed with sugar).

Other weekend and holiday eating-out options are *lechoneras* (roast pork restaurants) and seafood and fritter stands by the beach. Lechoneras are located all over the rural mountainous areas. They roast whole pigs and serve the meat with accompaniments that include rice, beans, viandas, pasteles, and alcapurrias. Even though most of the pigs are more likely to be roasted in gas ovens than over natural wood charcoal, lechoneras retain their reputation for serving old-style Puerto Rican food. The atmosphere is like a party, with plenty of music, dancing, and beer. In the coastal areas seafood outlets serve fried fish, as well as seafood salads made with *carrucho* (conch), octopus, bacalao, *jueyes* (land crabs), king crab, or imitation crabmeat. Beachside kiosks are also famous for their generously sized fritters, like *alcapurrias de jueyes* (land crab–stuffed yautía and green plantain fritters).

There is a wide variety of restaurants. Each town has at least a fonda, a *criollo* (Puerto Rican) restaurant, a pizzeria, and a Chinese restaurant. Criollo restaurants of all price levels abound all over, and seafood restaurants are the specialty of coastal towns but do not necessarily serve local seafood. The large metropolitan area, which includes San



A whole pig being grilled in a marketplace in Puerto Rico. (Dreamstime)

Juan and other municipalities, has a dynamic restaurant culture with a wide variety of international cuisines. The most popular restaurant categories are seafood, Puerto Rican, Italian, and Asian, followed by steakhouse, Caribbean, Iberian, and international. There are a few French restaurants and many upscale eclectic restaurants with renowned chefs like Wilo Benet of Pikayo and Peter Schintler of Marmalade. Upscale restaurants serve both international tourists and the growing local population of fine-restaurant enthusiasts. There is also a large number of fusion restaurants where chefs incorporate local flavors and ingredients into dishes from different parts of the world, with an emphasis on Asia. Fusion restaurants serve innovations like sushi rolls wrapped with ripe plantain strips and tandoori chicken with plantains and guava paste.

Restaurant culture in Puerto Rico is currently at a high point. In 2007 the first restaurant guide, called *Sal!* was published, and it has a companion Web site with editorial content, a calendar of food-related events, recipes, and customer-written reviews of restaurants in Puerto Rico and abroad. Many restaurants have been featured in U.S. gourmet magazines, and Puerto Rican chefs participate in U.S. cooking shows and competitions. Chef Roberto Treviño of Aguaviva participated in *Iron Chef America,* and Wilo Benet participated in *Top Chef Masters*. Many chefs working in Puerto Rico have lived, traveled, worked, or trained in the United States, Spain, France, and beyond, which gives their restaurants an international flavor, whether they serve criolla or international cuisine.

## Special Occasions

Traditional Puerto Rican food is expected at Christmastime. Even families without the time or expertise to cook the required dishes look for small caterers who sell specific dishes or full meals. The ideal menu consists of *arroz con gandules* (rice with pigeon peas), *pernil* (roasted pork leg), and pasteles in both the plantain and yucca varieties. These main dishes can be complemented with fritters and with store-bought snacks like potato chips, tortillas, and salsa. Traditional sweets are also required, particularly those made with coconut. Coconut flan, *tembleque* (cornstarch-thickened coconut milk custard), and *arroz con dulce* (thick coconut-milk rice pudding) are some of the favorites, and it is not rare to serve all three. Coconut milk is also the main ingredient in the Christmas drink *coquito,* which is often described as a coconut eggnog. Other treats expected for the Christmas meal are almonds, walnuts, hazelnuts, and *turrones* (almond nougats) imported from Spain. The Christmas meal is generally a gathering of the extended family, and throughout the holiday season schools, offices, clubs, and groups of friends have their own Christmas parties with a similar menu. The Christmas menu serves as the model for other family celebrations like New Year's Eve, Mother's Day, and Father's Day.

Thanksgiving is a part of the Puerto Rican holiday calendar. Families gather together to enjoy either a traditional Puerto Rican holiday meal, a traditional U.S. Thanksgiving meal, or a combination of both. Rice and beans could be served with a roasted turkey that has been generously rubbed with a garlicky adobo to make it taste like pernil. Turkey prepared in this way is known as *pavochón,* a combination of the words for turkey (*pavo*) and pork (*lechón*). The turkey could also be stuffed with plantain, breadfruit, or yucca mofongo. Dessert options are likely to include a pumpkin flan and homemade or store-bought pies.

Roman Catholicism is the dominant religion in Puerto Rico, although large numbers consider



Arroz con gandules, rice with pigeon peas, is one of the traditional dishes served at Christmastime in Puerto Rico. (iStockPhoto)

themselves nonpracticing Catholics, and many others combine elements of Catholicism with Afro-Caribbean religions like Santeria. This openness and eclecticism is manifested during Lent, particularly during Holy Week. Few Puerto Ricans abstain from meat in any officially prescribed way, but during Holy Week it is still customary for many families to consume seafood at home or in restaurants. Traditional peasant dishes like *serenata con bacalao,* a combination of boiled viandas served with a salted codfish salad, appear during this period, sometimes with more nostalgic than religious connotations.

For weddings and *quinceañeros* (15th-birthday celebration, particularly for girls), hiring a food caterer has increasingly become the norm. The menu could be similar to the Christmas meal, but often it consists of standard catering dishes that have been Puerto Ricanized. Such dishes include chicken legs in guava sauce and yucca-stuffed chicken breasts.

## Diet and Health

A history of a plantation economy followed by one dominated by industries and services means that Puerto Rico imports the bulk of its food. There is small-scale production of coffee, bananas, vegetables, poultry, and dairy products, but it is not enough to satisfy local demand, and many local producers find it hard to compete with cheaper food imports. In the 20th century the Puerto Rican diet shifted from one based on agricultural products and frequent scarcity to one based on agroindustrial processed foods and relative abundance. The results are well known in all industrialized countries: widespread obesity, including high rates of childhood obesity, and related diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease. In 2007 the government of Puerto Rico initiated a campaign to make exercise and nutrition instruction available in all municipalities.

Puerto Ricans are trying to improve the quality of their food in many different ways. Vegetarianism has become established as a viable diet alternative, and many stores and restaurants cater to this lifestyle. There are a few small organic farms, some of which offer community-supported agriculture programs. Most people have switched from lard to olive or vegetable oil, and many try to reduce their consumption of the fried and high-carbohydrate foods that are abundant in the Puerto Rican diet: rice, beans, viandas, fritters. Sedentary lifestyles, an abundance of heavily processed foods, and confusion and misinformation regarding diet and health guidelines are the norm.

*Zilkia Janer*

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# Suriname

## Overview

Suriname is the smallest independent country on the South American continent. The country is part of the greater Caribbean Basin and borders the Atlantic Ocean to the north, French Guiana to the east, Guyana to the west, and Brazil to the south. Suriname's official language is Dutch, but the Surinamese dialect Sranang Tongo is frequently spoken. In the 17th century the first Europeans settled in the area. Due to the colonization the native population of Amerindians was forced into the margins of a new society. From 1667 until 1975 Suriname was a Dutch colony and had a plantation economy. At the end of the 18th century, the majority of the population consisted of West African slaves. After the abolition of slavery, in 1863, immigrants from northern India, Indonesia (Java), and China started to constitute the workforce.

What Surinamese eat is strongly determined by ethnic background, geography, and religion. In this ethnically highly diverse country, no religion predominates. At present, around 27 percent of the Surinamese are Hindus, while various forms of Christianity are practiced by much of the rest of the population, which is comprised of around 20 percent Creoles (descendants of West African slaves and Europeans) and 15 percent Maroons (descendants of escaped slaves) and descendants of Europeans. The 15 percent who are Javanese are either Muslim or Christian. The remainder of the population consists of minorities such as Amerindians, Chinese, Jews, and Brazilians. The vast majority of Suriname's total population of around 470,000 people live in the capital Paramaribo. Following independence in 1975, a third of the population migrated to the Netherlands, where at present approximately 350,000 Surinamese are living.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Mavis Hofwijk was born in Paramaribo in 1939, where her husband Lesley was born in 1941. They were both raised in Suriname; the couple moved to the Netherlands in 1970, but they continue to live in Suriname as well, spending part of the year in each place. Lesley retired from teaching at an elementary school. Together with her daughter Candice, Mavis runs Surinaams Buffet, a well-known catering company in Amsterdam Zuidoost, a suburb where in the 1970s many Surinamese settled. The lifestyle and foodways of Mavis and Lesley are representative for many middle-class Surinamese, whose diet includes typical Surinamese but also Dutch and European-style dishes.

In Suriname the couple breakfasts on slices of bread or *Surinaamse puntjes* (Surinamese bread rolls) with *bakkeljauw* (salted dried cod), peanut butter, cheese, or jam. Breakfast is accompanied by a cup of tea or coffee. Every second or third day Mavis goes to the bakery to buy bread.

The couple eats a hot meal once a day, for either lunch or supper. Many times the meal is prepared with whatever is at hand or available, and served for lunch at around 1 or for dinner at 6. The main dish mostly consists of vegetables sautéed together with meat. Cooking is done without recipes. The taste of the dish should be good in the pot, and spices, salt, and pepper are added while cooking. The meal is always accompanied by rice. Together with rice, a few times a

week boiled roots and tubers are served. The meal is accompanied by *zuurgoed* (sweet and sour pickles) that are prepared with either *bilimbi* (a cucumber-like vegetable that grows on a tree; *Averrhoa bilimbi*) or cucumbers and onions in a mixture of vinegar, water, sugar, and spices such as allspice, peppercorns, garlic, and bay leaf. For dessert fresh fruits such as bananas, mangoes, and oranges are eaten. When in season, fruit is collected from the garden.

Like most Surinamese households, Mavis has a larder filled with food supplies. Her larder always contains *zoutvlees* (salted beef), bakkeljauw, dried shrimp, rice, legumes, spices, roots, and tubers. She buys her groceries either in one of the many local grocery stores or at the market; both are open seven days a week. From fresh meats to toilet paper, the mom-and-pop type of grocery stores sells all kinds of products. Ingredients are bought depending on the season and availability. Like most Surinamese, Mavis judges the quality of fruits, vegetables, meats, and other foodstuffs "with the eye" by touching, smelling, and looking at their appearance.

## Major Foodstuffs

In the 1700s the arrival of the colonists caused a major change in the diet. New foods like wheat, olive oil, beef, pork, chicken, beer, and wine and new preparation techniques (e.g., smothering in butter and/or oil and cooking in an oven) were introduced. The colonists that migrated to Suriname were foremost of English, Dutch, and Sephardic Jewish origin, and they brought with them their own culinary habits and traditions. During colonization and in the centuries that followed, these habits contributed to the development of Suriname's cuisine.

For centuries Suriname was a plantation economy with a strong focus on growing cash crops such as sugar, coffee, and cacao, so little attention was paid to agriculture. Since the colonial period grains, legumes, potatoes, beets, carrots, salt, meat, fish, and many other foods have been imported from abroad (Europe and North America). During the colonial period these costly imports provided the population with food but also ensured that the colonists could replicate their traditional foodways.

Suriname is an area that has a rich biodiversity. Over 90 percent of the country is covered with forest. Most of the agriculture and fishing takes place on the coast but hardly contributes to the country's economy. Of the 40 million acres (16.2 million hectares) of land, around 3.7 million acres are considered to have agricultural potential. Only 15 percent of the labor force works in agriculture. Rice accounts for about half of all cultivated land, and rice and bananas are the major export products. The small fishing industry mostly exports shrimp.

Historically, the livelihoods of Amerindians, Maroons, Creoles, and other small communities depend on the produce of home gardens and fishing. Long before Suriname was discovered, the indigenous people already cultivated more than 50 plants. In addition to agriculture and fishing, hunting and gathering of wild plants provided food.

The traditional and largely self-supporting system for food provision is still practiced by inland communities such as the Maroons and Amerindians. These communities are foremost located in remote areas that are covered by dense tropical rain forest with an abundance of flora and fauna. In these communities women are responsible for the household and the kitchen garden. To provide carbohydrates, they cultivate roots and tubers such as cassava, taro (*Xanthosoma* spp.), and sweet potatoes. Other cultivated crops include pineapple, corn, plantains, melons, pumpkins, and peppers (*Capsicum annum*), as well as edible fruits from palm species, cashew nuts (*Anacardium occidentale*), calabashes (*Crescentia cujete*), mangoes, guavas, lemons, coconuts, tropical almonds (*Terminalia catappa*), star fruit, bitter melons (or gourds), tomatoes, and all kinds of Chinese cabbages, legumes, and beans.

Surinamese hardly consume fresh milk. The use of powdered and (sweetened) condensed milk is very common. Condensed milk is frequently used for the preparation of pastries, porridges, and desserts. Sliced Dutch cheeses such as Edam and Gouda are imported and are popular eaten on bread.

Many different types of fresh- and saltwater fish can be found in the waters of Suriname. The fishing sector foremost thrives on the cultivation, catching, and export of shrimp. In the Surinamese kitchen



A Surinamese woman tends to her backyard garden. (iStockPhoto)

the use of (dried) shrimp and (imported) cod is very common. Besides catfish, grouper, mullet, shark, snapper, perch, snook, and anchovies, many kinds of known and lesser-known tropical fish from the ocean and the rivers are consumed. Fishing is done either privately or by local fishermen who sell their catch on the market.

Popular herbs and spices include allspice, bay leaf, celery, (black) pepper, masala (curry powder), cumin, coriander, nutmeg, and (hot) peppers. Due to the generous use of different kinds of chili peppers, Surinamese cuisine tends to be hot and spicy. The beloved Madame Jeanette pepper is one of the world's hottest. Other seasonings are salted meat (beef), bakkeljauw (salt cod), and dried shrimp. Surinamese celery is the most popular kitchen herb and is used in many dishes. Another distinctive feature of Surinamese cuisine is the balance between sweet, sour, and salt. For the proper balance of a dish, sugar, vinegar, salt, Aromat (a popular dry seasoning mix of salt, onion, mushroom, turmeric, and other spices), and stock cubes are added according to taste.

Surinamese love color. Red, yellow, blue, and green liquid colorings are frequently used to decorate pastry. The popular *schaafijs* (crushed ice) is flavored with sugar syrups made from almonds, roses, and tropical fruits such as passion fruit, pineapple, and coconut. The yellow fatty substances of the seeds of *masoesa* (*Renealmia exaltata* —a plant that belongs to the ginger family) are solely used for the flavoring and coloring of *moksi alesi* (literally, "mixed rice").

## Cooking

Surinamese cuisine is a mixture of ingredients and cooking techniques from local Indians, the colonial powers, African slaves, and Asian immigrants. Reflecting a rich and dynamic multicultural society, the cuisine became a melting pot and a patchwork that is continuously developing. Food and the preparation of specific dishes play a very important role in the daily and social life of the Surinamese community.

Depending on ethnicity, income, and social class, the Surinamese kitchen, kitchen equipment, cooking, and cooking techniques can vary immensely. During the colonial period many houses had an outdoor kitchen. Nowadays, the standard kitchen equipment in general consists of various aluminum or stainless steel cooking pots, a rice cooker, a (cast iron) wok, and several frying pans. Barbecuing is done on either a wood or charcoal fire. The possession of a *tawa* (a flat iron griddle) is common among Hindus.

## Typical Meals

Social, geographic, and ethnic differences make it hard to describe a typical Surinamese meal. On average Surinamese eat three meals a day. Two hot meals a day are not exceptional, and in between one or two snacks (which many times consist of fresh fruits) are eaten. For breakfast, white bread rolls (known as Surinaamse puntjes) or slices of bread with butter or margarine, topped with cheese, jam, peanut butter, and occasionally fruit, are eaten. The preferred drinks are coffee, tea, and sometimes fruit juice. Milk is not drunk, but it is used in coffee and for the preparation of desserts.

Overall and all year round, nourishing soups and stews as well as baked and rice-based dishes are served. Lunch or dinner many times consists of one main dish accompanied by several side dishes and condiments. In general Surinamese eat a lot of chicken and meats such as lamb, beef (with the

exception of Hindus), and pork (with the exception of Jews and Muslims). Larger cuts of meat are barbecued or boiled in stews and soups.

Boiled white rice, roots and tubers, and white bread are popular side dishes. The most popular rice variety is *Surinaamse rijst* (Surinamese rice), which has a very long and thin grain. Rice is either boiled or used for *alesi*—a mixed rice dish of which most Surinamese women prepare several varieties. Roots and tubers are commonly boiled in water. With or without meat, most vegetables are smothered or sautéed in oil or butter, in a pot or wok. Zuurgoed (sweet and sour pickles) accompanies most meals. The leftovers from hot meals many times end up on a slice of bread or a roll and are even consumed for breakfast.

Among the most frequently used vegetables are *kousenband* (gartner L. *Vigna unguiculata* subsp. *sesquipedalis*), *tajerblad* (taro leaf), *sopropo* (bitter melon), *klaroen* (Chinese spinach), *dagoeblad* (water spinach), *antroewa* (African eggplant), and (African) okra. Brown beans, yellow split peas, and lentils are the most popular pulses, and to a lesser extent soybeans, cowpeas, black-eyed peas, and mung beans are also used. Coconut milk and shredded coconut are used in many desserts and cakes such as the popular *bojo,* a flourless cake with grated coconut and grated cassava. Originally prepared from tapioca (cassava starch), *gomakuku* (corn-flour cookies) are the most distinctive cookies. Popular cakes include *fiadu* (a yeast-dough cake that is filled with butter, cinnamon, sugar, almonds, pineapple, and raisins) and *Engris boroe* (English cake) and *keksi* (cake). To preserve cakes these are either sprinkled with liqueur or spread with clarified butter.

Next to tea and coffee, popular drinks are *gemberbier* (ginger beer), *kasiri* (an alcoholic beverage from cassava juice), Parbobier (local beer), fruit syrups and lemonades, and fruit and egg punches prepared with and without alcohol.

Together with the development of a national cuisine, most Surinamese ethnic groups have managed to keep their own distinctive dishes and eating habits. The country's cuisine is a mixture of dishes with multiple foreign origins. Well-known dishes consumed by all Surinamese are roti (of Indian origin and prepared with baking powder), (Creole) peanut soup, *bakabana* (fried plantains), *telo met bakkeljauw* (fried cassava with clipfish), (Chinese) *bami* (noodles), *bruine bonen met rijst* (brown beans with rice), *her'heri* (literally, "fruits of the earth"), *peprewatra* (literally, "pepperwater"; a watery soup with catfish), moksi alesi (mixed rice), *pepperpot* (a savory stew and/or soup), cassava bread, and the Jewish Creole baked dish *pom.*

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***Pom***

Within the Surinamese community pom is the most popular and best-known festive dish. Within and outside of Suriname, the oven dish is prepared by both men and women, and each Surinamese ethnic group makes a slightly different version. Hindus add piccalilli relish, Javanese add soy sauce, Jews use oil instead of butter, and Chinese add ginger or lychees.

**Ingredients**

2.2 lb grated *pomtajer* (fresh or frozen malanga or *yautía*)
7 oz piccalilli relish
1 stalk celery, finely chopped
1 small onion, chopped
2 chopped tomatoes

1 stick butter
7 tbsp sunflower oil
½ lb chicken pieces
1 onion, chopped
1 small can tomato paste
1 stalk celery, finely chopped

¾ c cold water
½ stock cube (chicken or beef)
5 tbsp sugar
½ tsp black pepper

Nutmeg to taste

Preheat the oven to 375°F.

**Pomtajer preparation**

Put the package of pomtajer in a bowl, put it in the refrigerator, and let it defrost overnight. Put the tajer in a bowl, add the piccalilli, celery, onions and tomatoes, and mix the pomtajer with a spoon or fork.

**Preparation of the stewed chicken**

Melt half the butter and oil in a large casserole over low heat. Add the chicken pieces, and sauté the chicken over high heat for about 4 minutes. Reduce the heat, add the onions, and fry, stirring occasionally, until tender, about 5 minutes. First, add the tomato paste, then the celery; stir once or twice, and simmer the chicken for 2 to 3 minutes on low heat.

**Assembly**

Mix the chicken thoroughly with the pomtajer. Add the water, crumble the stock cube into the pan, add the sugar, and stir well. Add salt, pepper, and nutmeg to taste. Put the pom on a greased baking tray. Put pieces of the remaining butter on top, and bake the pom in the oven for about 60 minutes. The pom is done when the inside is yellow and the crust is golden brown.

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Surinamese cuisine is not regional but ethnically specific. Until the middle of the 19th century, Surinamese cuisine was foremost influenced by Amerindians, Europeans, and West Africans. Cassava bread, *cassareep,* and pepperpot are dishes of Amerindian origin. Pepperpot (or pepper pot) is a well-known savory stew and/or soup. In the region there are numerous pepperpot variations. The ingredients and thickness of the dish vary, but most recipes make use of hot (chili) peppers and cassareep: the thick boiled juice (syrup) of poisonous cassava that Amerindians used either as a preservative or as a cooking liquid. Depending on the season and availability, various meats and vegetables were added and boiled in the cooking pot, and, with addition of more meats and vegetables, it was frequently reheated.

During the colonial period, the European plantation owners considered food, like clothing, a sign of wealth. Especially in the 18th century this meant a rich dinner table. With soup as a starter and pineapple, oranges, and other fresh fruits for dessert, the main course often consisted of various meats, fish, and poultry. Stuffed pigs, ham, pork chops, lamb chops, game, pigeons, chicken, and pies were served together with fresh garden vegetables such as radishes, lettuce, endive, beans, celery, and parsley. Pickles and European wines, brandy, and liqueurs were imported.

The food on the table of Suriname's small but influential Jewish community was determined by the Jewish dietary laws. Eating pork and the consumption of milk and meat together are not allowed. Also, drinking of alcohol (wine and liquor) was not a habit. The Jews ate plenty of chicken and other poultry, fish, vegetables, fruits, and sweets. In the Jewish kitchen oil and spices, especially pepper, were used. For the Jewish holidays and Sabbath, special baked dishes, breads (challah), and matzos (for Passover) were prepared. The Jewish culinary influence includes the oven dishes pom and *popido* (prepared with rice with chicken).

Even as late as 1928, the diet of the former West African slaves still consisted of hard-to-digest starchy fruits and roots such as bananas (*Musa* spp.), *tajers* (both *Xanthosoma* and *Colocasia*), yams



Within the Surinamese community pom is the most popular and best known festive dish. (Dreamstime)

(*Dioscorea cayennensis Lam.*), *napi* (*Dioscorea trifida*), cassava, sweet potatoes, and rice. Vegetables and fruit were cultivated on so-called *kostgrondjes*—small plots of land or home gardens. The culinary influence of West Africa is reflected in the consumption of roots, tubers, plantains, okra, and dishes such as peanut soup, *tomtom* (balls of boiled plantain or roots and tubers), and her'heri.

***Her'heri***

This is plantains, sweet potatoes, Chinese taro (*Colocasia esculenta*), pomtajer (*Xanthosoma* spp.), and napi (*Dioscorea trifida,* a kind of sweet potato) with sautéed salt cod.

1 green plantain
1 yellow plantain
1 tsp salt (per quart of water)
½ lb peeled Chinese taro, in pieces
½ lb peeled pomtajer, in pieces
14 oz frozen cassava, in pieces
14 oz peeled napi, in pieces
14 oz peeled sweet potatoes, in pieces
14 oz bakkeljauw (salt cod)

Put a large pot of water on the stove, and bring to a boil. Meanwhile, peel the plantains. Add salt to the water, and put the plantains in the pot. Bring to a boil. Add the pieces of Chinese taro, pomtajer, frozen cassava, napi, and sweet potatoes. With a slotted spoon, remove the plantains after 30 minutes. Boil the rest of the tubers about 30 more minutes, and until tender.

Meanwhile, rinse the salt cod under cold running water. Cook it for 10 minutes in 2 quarts of boiling water. With a slotted spoon, remove the fish from the pot, and set aside.

Divide the fish into pieces. Use a slotted spoon to remove the tuber pieces from the pot. Serve the plantains and tubers with the fish and a little bit of its cooking liquid.

After the abolition of slavery in 1863, contract workers from Asia were hired. Between 1853 and 1913 approximately 50,000 new immigrants from the former Dutch East Indies (Java), British India (which part of India), and China arrived in Suriname, bringing along all kinds of ingredients and dishes from their own culinary traditions: rice, roti, soy sauce, chutney, piccalilli, noodles, ginger, Chinese cabbages, and lychee.

The ties with the motherland were always very close, and before and after Suriname's independence in 1975, many Surinamese settled in the Netherlands, where at present around 350,000 Surinamese are living. Upon arrival in the Netherlands, traditional food patterns were replicated. In order to be able to prepare Surinamese cuisine, ingredients such as cassava (manioc), taro, sweet potatoes, and bitter gourds (or melons) were either imported or replaced with locally available produce such as potatoes, endive, and spinach. Lacking familiar foods, many Surinamese suffered from homesickness. Two popular songs reflect the homesickness and the role of food within the Surinamese community abroad. At the same time, these songs, "Bruine bonen met rijst" (Brown beans with rice) and "Oh Nederland geef mij rijst met kousenband" (Please, Netherlands, give me rice with yard-long beans), familiarized the Dutch with Surinamese food. Due to the ongoing globalization, nowadays most Surinamese foodstuffs are available in the Netherlands.

## Eating Out

Traditionally, cooking and entertaining are done at home. Street vending to make a livelihood is quite a common phenomenon in Suriname; in particular, many Surinamese women make a living selling all kinds of foods on the street. Surinamese are used to buying take-out foods and snacking in public. Street-food vendors sell all kinds of cakes, fruits, snacks, ice, drinks, sandwiches, and sausages. Due to globalization, and since Suriname is becoming a more popular vacation destination, the number of eateries and restaurants that serve a variety of foods is on the rise. In Paramaribo, eateries and restaurants that serve Javanese and Chinese cuisine are popular. Furthermore, a growing number of eateries and restaurants, ranging from outdoor food courts

serving Javanese specialties to roti shops, sell a larger variety of seafood, pancakes, and curries.

## Special Occasions

Surinamese are very hospitable, and no matter the occasion guests are usually expected to partake in a meal. Regardless of ethnicity, Surinamese serve huge amounts of food at special occasions and festivities such as weddings, birthdays, and especially at a *Bigi Yari,* the celebration of a jubilee year. The most popular Surinamese festive dish that is served on all special occasions is pom. The Surinamese expression "without pom there is no birthday" specifies one of the occasions for which pom is prepared.

In Javanese religious life, during the *sadjén* and *slametan* (rituals commemorating events such as birth, circumcision, marriage, and death), special dishes with rice, chicken, boiled eggs, various fruits, and seasoned vegetables, as well as drinks such as water with blossoms, tea, and coffee, are served.

During funerals of Hernhutters (a small Christian community) everything is either black or white. After the burial *Anitri beri* (literally, "Hernhutter burial") is served. The two ingredients—rice and boiled salted beef—are eaten together with taro leaf smothered in butter.

## Diet and Health

Despite a wealth of natural resources and a small population of around 500,000, a large number of people in Suriname suffer from malnutrition and a poor health. According to a World Bank Report on Suriname, approximately 47 percent of the population lives in poverty and is deprived of sufficient and healthy nutrition. Although the government is responsible for the promotion, protection, and improvement of public health, Suriname's government lacks funding.

In Suriname, diet and health are intertwined. Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Creoles, and indigenous communities all follow their own medical system, and traditional healers are often consulted. The cuisines of the Chinese Surinamese and Javanese Surinamese communities are considerably healthier than those of the Creole Surinamese and Hindu Surinamese. The Hindu and Creole diets tend to be too fatty and monotonous. Many Creoles follow Winti, a traditional African practice, and largely a secret religion, with its own myths, rites, offerings, spirits, and taboos. In Suriname Winti is influenced by both Christianity and Judaism. In Winti taboos are often related to food and called *treefs* (from the Hebrew *tarefa,* for forbidden food). Similar to in Judaism, for followers of Winti certain types of animal food are prohibited such as turtle and deer but also plants like plantain. Also, *kaseri* (from the Hebrew word *kosher*) plays a role in forbidding, for instance, menstruating women preparing or touching food.

*Karin Vaneker*

**Further Reading**

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# Trinidad and Tobago

## Overview

Trinidad and Tobago are the southernmost islands in the southern Caribbean island chain. Trinidad is a mere seven miles off the coast of Venezuela and was, geologically speaking, once part of the South American landmass, separated from the mainland by tectonic shifts. As such, the island features flora and fauna otherwise seen only in South America. Tobago, a true volcanic island formation, has a slightly different geology and lies 19 miles northwest of Trinidad. Trinidad is 1,864 square miles, roughly the size of Delaware, and Tobago is 116 square miles, roughly the size of Martha's Vineyard.

In addition to the indigenous plant and animal species, Trinidad and Tobago feature a wide variety of fruits and vegetables originally brought by colonial settlers of Spanish, Dutch, French, and, lastly, English descent. Some notable additions are the now-ubiquitous breadfruit, pineapple, and *otaheite* (Malay) apple brought to the Caribbean by Captain Bligh of the infamous *HMS Bounty.*

The first European to set foot on Trinidad was Christopher Columbus, who came to the island in the summer of 1498 on his third voyage across the Atlantic. It was he who named Trinidad (trinity) for the three mountain ranges that cross the island at its south, center, and north. Columbus met native Amerindians of the Carib and Arawak tribes upon his arrival on Trinidad and Tobago. While legend has it the Arawaks were more peaceful than the warlike Caribs, both tribes were equally subject to slaughter at the hands of Spanish settlers and were highly susceptible to European diseases. Those who were not decimated were absorbed into the fabric of the colony, which would come to include French Catholics, invited by the Spanish king, and finally the English, all of whom brought African slaves to the island. When slavery was abolished throughout the English Caribbean, Trinidad, a British colony since 1802, employed a system of indentureship that brought first Chinese, then East Indian laborers to work the islands' lucrative cane and cacao fields from emancipation in 1838 to 1917.

Today, Trinidadian foods are categorized in the local mind as either Indian or Creole; the latter refers to foods of either African or mixed European and African descent. The myriad peoples who came together through ambition and hardship on the islands of Trinidad and Tobago have evolved into a population of 1.3 million that is a montage of language, culture, and food unique to the Caribbean.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Damian and Joy Luk Pat are young urban Trinidadians living in Port of Spain. Damian is of Chinese and Spanish-Venezuelan descent and works as an independent sales and marketing manager. He is president of the T&T Business Network, while his wife, Joy, is a senior marketing officer.

The couple define themselves as foodies. Damian is the family cook, often experimenting with foreign dishes or fusions of Trinidadian and foreign dishes. One of his favorite pastimes is ferreting out traditional and new eateries around the island and posting photos and reviews on Facebook.

Like most Trinidadians, the Luk Pats do their grocery shopping in a variety of venues, from traditional farmers'



Men spreading out cocoa beans in cocoa drying sheds around the turn of the century, Trinidad. (StockPhotoPro)

markets to Western-style supermarkets. Because of their relative affluence they can afford delicacies from gourmet markets from time to time as well as a fair amount of dining out, including at American specialty eateries and ice cream parlors such as Cold Stone Creamery. Many are newly opened in Trinidad but feature American prices that are cost prohibitive to most Trinidadians, as the exchange rate is roughly TT$6 to US$1.

Breakfast in the Luk Pat home is usually eggs and whole wheat toast or low-fat yogurt rather than the more traditional salted codfish, smoked herring, and fried *bake* (a kind of fried biscuit). Lunch and dinner fare is similar, featuring a mix of Trinidadian dishes in either the Creole, Chinese, or Indian style. Rice is a staple the couple enjoys, as well as potatoes and pasta. Salad is usually eaten, too. They most commonly eat beef, pork, chicken, and fish. While stewed beef often graces their table, steak is less common. Along with shrimp, the Luk Pats consider it a special-occasion item.

As Trinidad has become more global, a variety of new food styles have come to the island including Arabian, Japanese, and Mexican, mainly from international franchises. The couple are avid experimenters and particularly love sushi. It is quite common for Damian to research those dishes and recreate them at home on weekends or special occasions, sharing with family and friends. His parents, in particular, are always willing to try new dishes in his company though they are a far departure from what they are accustomed to eating. The family also enjoys partaking of the rich variety of traditional street foods available in their island home.

Health has become an increasing consideration for the Luk Pats, and they are trying to eat more vegetables that are steamed rather than fried or stewed. They are staying away from fried, high-sugar, and high-sodium foods as hypertension and diabetes are increasingly common in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Luk Pats' favorite foods are varied and include traditional dishes such as stewed chicken; callaloo; curried beef, chicken, or goat with roti (flatbread); and modern items like sushi and steaks. Damian lists some typical Trinidadian foods among his least favorite items,

including dasheen (taro), avocados, and *caraili* (bitter squash). Outside of his experimental cooking extravaganzas, when cooking at home during the workweek, Damian cooks items that are simple and fast to prepare including stewed chicken, mixed rice dishes, mashed potatoes, or items that make use of minced beef.

## Major Foodstuffs

Like the rest of the colonized Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago's value to their European rulers was their vast agricultural resources, particularly sugarcane, which was processed in the North American colonies not only into sugar but also into molasses, used in rum production. Sugarcane was also part of the triangular slave trade in which slave-produced sugarcane was shipped to America, processed into sugar, and sent to Europe. Europe in turn shipped it along with other goods to Africa to trade for more slaves to go to the Caribbean and work on sugarcane plantations. Although 80 percent of the sugarcane produced in Trinidad is used for export, the amount of sugar produced on the island has declined dramatically following the closure of the country's largest sugarcane estate, Caroni Ltd., in 1975.

By the late 1860s the cacao industry in Trinidad and Tobago became another major cash crop, produced on estates where indentured laborers worked. A crossbreed of Central American native *criollo* and *forestero* cacaos planted by the Spaniards, the resulting *trinitario* was considered superior in taste and hardiness, perfect for use in the then–newly discovered process of removing cocoa butter from the bean, which is necessary for the production of chocolate bars. While trinitario beans still fetch a high price on the world market, local production has steadily declined since 1920, and Central and South American trinitario beans, particularly from Colombia, have entered the market.

By the early 20th century petroleum production began in Trinidad and continued to grow, outpacing agriculture as the mainstay of the national economy. Today, agricultures comprises less than 1 percent of Trinidad and Tobago's gross domestic product while oil and natural gas comprise 40 percent.

Other major foodstuffs produced and eaten in Trinidad are directly related to the islands' heyday of sugar and cacao production, as a variety of fruits and vegetables were imported into Trinidad and Tobago from Africa, India, and the South Pacific as sustenance for farm laborers. Rice, brought by Indian laborers and produced on the island, has become a major starch in the Trinidadian diet and is eaten with Indian and Creole foods alike. It may be served as a side dish to curries or stewed meats and vegetables, or within a pilaf.

### *Pelau*

*Serves 6*

*Pelau* is one of those dishes that really exemplifies Trinidadian cuisine because it is an admixture of various cooking styles. Pelau, or rice layered with meats and vegetables, is a variation of East Indian *pilau,* which originated in Persia where it is called *polow.* The Anglicized version of the dish is called *pilaf*. The process of browning meat in sugar for pelau is an African tradition, and ketchup is a New World addition. It likely has its basis in tomato chutneys available in British India and brought to Trinidad by the English.

Chicken is the most common meat in pelau, but tender cuts of stew beef or lamb work just as well. In Tobago, pelau is often made with crab. Green seasoning is an herb paste made of chives, cilantro, thyme, oregano, parsley, garlic, and water that can be bought in West Indian groceries or made fresh at home.

1 c dry or 1 (12-oz) can pigeon peas, pinto beans, or black-eyed peas

3 tbsp canola oil

¾ c sugar (white or brown)

1 (3-lb) chicken, cut into 8 pieces, skin removed

1 small onion, chopped

1 clove garlic, minced

1 c coconut milk

1 bay leaf

2 tsp green seasoning

½ c chopped parsley
1 sprig thyme
2 carrots, peeled and chopped
5 scallions, chopped (white and green parts)
2 c long-grain rice
2 c cubed fresh calabaza or butternut squash
1 small Scotch bonnet pepper, whole
½ c ketchup
1 tbsp butter

1. If using dried peas, soak them overnight in 3 cups of water. Drain. Bring 3 cups of fresh water to a boil in a saucepan, and add the peas. Simmer for 15 minutes, or until cooked almost completely through. Drain and set aside. If using canned beans, drain, rinse with cold water, drain again, and set aside.
2. Heat the oil in a Dutch oven or other heavy, deep pot. Add the sugar and swirl in the pot; allow it to caramelize to a light brown color. Add the chicken and stir well to coat.
3. Lower the heat to medium, and add the onion and garlic. Cook for 1 to 2 minutes, stirring constantly.
4. Add 2 cups of water, the coconut milk, bay leaf, green seasoning, parsley, thyme, carrots, and scallions to the chicken. Cover and simmer over medium-low heat for 10 minutes.
5. Wash the rice by placing in a bowl and running cold water over it to just cover. Swirl the rice around with your hand until the water becomes cloudy, then carefully pour off the water. Repeat the process four or five times until the water runs clear. Drain well, and stir the rice into the chicken mixture.
6. Add the squash, peas, hot pepper, ketchup, and butter to the chicken. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and cook for 20 minutes, or until the peas and vegetables are tender.
7. Remove the lid and fluff the rice. The rice should be moist but not sticky.

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A variety of tubers and starchy vegetables, or *ground provisions* as they are collectively called, including yucca, Caribbean sweet potato (*boniato*), and pumpkin, are incorporated into a variety of dishes as a vegetable component, are used in desserts, or are simply boiled, fried, or roasted for use as a side dish with meats. Ground provisions also include breadfruit and plantains, though both are tree fruits.

Legumes are used by all Trinidadians, including dal (yellow split peas), *channa* (chickpeas), pigeon peas, black-eyed peas, and kidney beans. They are used in everything from breads to rice dishes to soups and stews to side dishes and desserts.

Breads and baked goods, both in the form of traditional Indian griddle breads and European-style breads and sweets, are heavily consumed in Trinidad and Tobago. Roti, a soft, round griddle bread cooked on a *tawa* (flat, round cast iron skillet), was brought from India by indentured laborers and includes variations like *dal puri,* a version of roti stuffed with ground, spiced lentils, and *buss up shut,* a version of roti that is torn up into pieces to resemble a "burst-up shirt." The latter is a late 20th-century addition to the Trinidadian bread repertoire. Bake, a savory beignet, is widely eaten for breakfast or as a sandwich roll.

Fish and fowl comprise most of the meat eaten in Trinidad and Tobago. The former is thanks to the abundant waters that both surround the island and form the rivers and streams inland. Kingfish, redfish, shark, salted codfish, smoked herring, shrimp, and crab are popular, but two—*Cascadura cascadoo,* a highly scaled fish in the catfish family that lives in muddy fresh waters, and flying fish, an ocean fish living in the waters between Tobago and Barbados—are the most prized. According to local legend, anyone who partakes of *Cascadura* is destined to return to Trinidad. Flying fish is so beloved that when the dredging of a deeper harbor in Barbados's capital disturbed the fish's habitat enough to cause a biomass migration to Tobago, it sparked an international argument.

The limited land for livestock rearing in Trinidad and Tobago, coupled with the limited palate for beef among Indian Hindus and pork among African and Indian Muslims, has made chicken the favored choice in the islands. Traditionally, every home, even in relatively crowded urban areas, kept "yard fowl" for both meat and eggs. However, increasingly, fowl are purchased from the local market or supermarket,

supplied by large-scale poultry farms, as the society has moved away from its agrarian roots. Goat was and still is widely eaten on both islands because goats' small size means that even those who do not have large land tracts, which correlates to most of the country, can keep them with relative ease. Goat is most often eaten curried.

As a society Trinidadians eat a large quantity of vegetables, due in great part to cultural influence. Vegetarian Hindu Indians brought caraili, a bitter squash; *bodi,* long Indian string beans; eggplant; and more. Greens, such as spinach and callaloo (Indian dasheen), hearken from both the Indian and African traditions. Crops are varied and include corn, tomatoes, zucchini, and other temperate-weather foodstuffs that have been adopted in the islands.



Platter of typical local Trinidad food including bodi, saltfish cod, fried accra, bread fritters, and vegetables with jonnycake bread. (Robert Lerich | Dreamstime.com)

The diversity of fruits available on Trinidad and Tobago is far more varied than that in even some of the other Caribbean islands, as they include South American items in addition to those items native to Central America and the Caribbean. Coconuts are available year-round, and numerous varieties of mangoes, another popular fruit, are available for 10 months of the year. Although too many to mention, some more commonly used fruits include avocados, guavas, passion fruit, *pomme cythere* (June apple), *pommerac* (otaheite apple), pineapple, soursops, *barbadine* (a large greenish fruit with cream-colored flesh), and sapodilla. Watermelon, which arrived on the islands in the 1980s, is incredibly popular as well.

In terms of beverages Trinidad and Tobago are noted throughout the Caribbean for the production of Carib and Stag, two local beers, and for Angostura bitters, used in many cocktails, which has been made following a secret recipe on Trinidad since 1824. Local rums of varying grades are also produced, including increasingly aged sipping rums, such as 1919 and 1824, also from the House of Angostura.

Nonalcoholic beverages, such as green coconut water, ginger beer, *mauby* (a punch made from the bark of the carob tree and having a flavor similar to root beer), and sorrel (a sweet-tart ade made from dried hibiscus flowers) are widely drunk. Commercially produced local soft drinks, such as Solo and Chubby sodas, reflect the extreme sweet tooth of people in this sugar-producing country. Interestingly, the British soft drinks Pear Drax and, to some extent, Apple Drax are highly favored—particularly around Christmas—in Trinidad and Tobago, creating a market for the drinks that no longer exist in their native England.

## Cooking

Historically, cooking in Trinidad and Tobago was most often done over a small fire on which an iron pot was directly set or hung, or on baking stones placed in the fire that a tawa could be settled upon. This method was based in the plantation era when slaves and laborers had only rudimentary wooden

barracks. Outdoor cookhouses did exist in the plantation houses, but for poor, average folk a simple fire served the purpose and also kept the heat and danger of live fire away from the home.

This cooking method was used well into the mid-20th century throughout many parts of the island and is still extant in the popular "river lime" or "beach lime," in which a hot food picnic is cooked over an open fire. The hallmark of those events is that the food might be prepared in any kitchen and closely mimic those that were historically produced on an open flame including pelau, a rice dish incorporating stewed meat, beans, spices, and vegetables; stewed chicken, in which chicken pieces are first browned in caramelized sugar; dumplings; and boiled ground root vegetables.

Mud ovens, specifically for baking, and similar to what was used in Mesoamerica, were also used in Trinidad and Tobago well into the modern era and can still be found in rural communities on both islands. In communities with a high percentage of people with Amerindian and *Cocoa Panyol* (Venezuelan Spanish) roots, "buccaneer" cooking is still done; this is a method of smoking using native hardwoods, such as tonka or *samaan,* and wet banana leaves to smoke highly seasoned and marinated foods, particularly bush meats such as iguana, *manicou* (in the muskrat family), and *gouti* (hare). The method harkens back to the original cooking methods of island natives and is similar to the process of jerking in Jamaica, where wild boar and now domesticated pig are the preferred meats and allspice wood is used for smoking. Later, the form evolved to what became known as barbecue (from the word *barbacoa*).

Pickling provided a way to reduce the gaminess of bush meats or goat, or preserve out-of-season fruits. Indian hot pickles, such as lime or mango *achar,* or *kuchela,* made from shredded, peppered, and pickled green mango, are typical condiments. Non–Indian-style hot pickles are collectively called *chow chow* and are similar to the American versions. They mostly make use of vinegar or saltwater and plenty of hot pepper. Some common chows are mixed vegetables including cauliflower and caraili, the Indian bitter melon. Other chows include pineapple, pomme cythere, and mango, but any variety of green fruits or hard vegetables can be used in chow. Pepper sauces are an absolute must-have on the Trinidadian table and, generally, are still homemade, though national brands like Chiefs and Matouk's provide various kinds for those who cannot make it themselves.

Cookery in Trinidad and Tobago was based largely on what could be achieved using the preceding cooking methods—stews and soups, roasted meats, griddle breads, and boiled vegetables—but those cooking styles remain the hallmark of the modern Trinidadian kitchen. It is not uncommon for foreign ingredients or methods to be adapted to this type of cooking or to local ingredients. Home cooking in Trinidad remains the standard, and most people eat breakfast at home, often carry their lunch to work or school, and eat a home-cooked hot meal for dinner. Given the heat of the country, lunch was, at one time, the heaviest meal of the day, with a lighter supper following at nightfall.

Teatime was a beloved ritual in Trinidadian life, taking place in the mid- to late afternoon, as in the United Kingdom, continuing even after independence. As time has passed, tea has fallen away or might comprise only a cup of tea, sweetened with condensed milk as is the local custom, and a digestive biscuit or small roll. The afternoon snack taken by schoolchildren when they return home from their day is still collectively called "tea," regardless of what it might comprise, and this has more to do with the hour than the foods eaten.

With the advent of modern conveniences like air-conditioning coupled with Trinidad and Tobago's rapid rush toward being a First World, industrialized nation, daily schedules have moved closer to those of people in Europe and America, with an eight-hour workday, including a lunch break and a busy commute home. Additionally, it is fairly usual for both husband and wife to work outside of the home, so there is no one present to cook a hot meal to which the family can return after a busy day. The end result is that a variety of adaptations, including the use of packaged and frozen foods, or eating out, have rapidly become solutions for the evening meal. Within some affluent houses a cook, or lady who comes in to cook, may still be employed, similar to what was the norm even in middle-class families in colonial times, though the

lady of the house would have been present. Today, this is fairly rare except among the most privileged.

## Typical Meals

Breakfast in Trinidad and Tobago is a mix of European and ethnic cooking and food styles. Eggs scrambled, fried, or in an omelet and served with toast are equally popular to *egg chokha,* or eggs fried with tomatoes, onions, and spices. Salted codfish, or salt fish, is popular at breakfast when served as *buljol,* a dish in which it is fried with onion, tomato, and spices and served with fried bake (a fried biscuit or fritter). Smoked herring, cooked in a similar manner but served with dumplings, is another breakfast that makes use of a typically English ingredient cooked in the local style.

Guava jam or jelly is a must-have on the breakfast table as is tea, though coffee is increasingly served. Coffee beans are grown and processed right on the island. Hong Wing is the most established and popular brand. Rituals, a Starbucks imitator, has popped up all over the islands and serves as a pit stop for many breakfast-goers, though, for the most part, the American price levels (US$3.50 for a latte) puts those drinks mostly in the "treat" category.

For those who choose to eat their breakfast out, *doubles,* or spiced chickpeas layered between two pieces of fried yeast-based dough, is a beloved breakfast standard. Doubles vendors can be seen throughout the island every morning and in the wee hours of weekend nights to service partying club-goers.

Once based in heavy dishes, such as rice and beef stew, curried chicken, fried fish, and other extensive meals, lunch has morphed to include sandwiches and take-out foods, particularly from the many Western chains popping up around the island, such as Kentucky Fried Chicken or pizza. Still, the island's vibrant street-food culture does provide lunch for office workers, just as it did for laborers a century before. The most popular offerings include roti and curry, barbecue, corn soup, roast corn, *phoulourie* (fried balls of split pea–flour dough), shark and bake, cow-heel soup, callaloo soup (the "national" dish of Trinidad), and more. Soft drinks are commonly consumed with lunch.



Curried shrimp, a very popular dish in restaurants in Trinidad and Tobago. (StockPhotoPro)

### Curried Shrimp

This is a popular curry in roti shops and is often paired with dal puri or *paratha roti* (a flat bread; see the following).

1 lb large shrimp, shelled and deveined

3 scallions, white and green parts, minced

1 small onion, chopped

½ tsp turmeric

½ tsp cumin

1 tbsp West Indian curry powder (such as Chief's Brand)

¼ Scotch bonnet pepper, minced

4 leaves *shado beni,* chopped, or 2 tbsp chopped cilantro

1 tbsp canola oil

2 Roma tomatoes, chopped

Salt and pepper to taste

1. Mix shrimp, scallions, onion, turmeric, cumin, curry powder, Scotch bonnet pepper, and shado beni together in a large bowl. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 2 hours.

2. Heat the oil in a large, deep frying pan, and add the tomatoes. Cook 1 minute, and add the shrimp mixture. Season with salt and pepper, and mix well.

3. Add 1 cup water and simmer until shrimp turns pink. Remove from heat and serve with dal puri or paratha roti.

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***Paratha Roti***

*Makes 4*

**Roti**

2 c all-purpose flour

2 tbsp baking powder, preferably Lion Brand

¼ tsp salt

Warm water as needed

**Paste (Loya)**

3 tbsp cold ghee

2 tbsp canola oil

Flour as needed

1. Whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt in a bowl and gradually add water, using your fingers to mix the flour and water together. Do not knead; simply gently combine the flour and water.

2. Continue adding the water until you achieve a soft, sticky dough that just comes together into a ball. Cover and set aside to rest for 15 minutes.

3. Make the paste by combining the ghee and oil. Set aside.

4. Flour a work surface and turn out the roti dough. Cut the dough into 4 large pieces and gently form into a ball. Flour your hands as needed to be able to handle the dough, and do not overknead.

5. Roll out each ball of dough into a circle ¼ inch thick, and brush with the Loya paste. Sprinkle the surface lightly with flour. Make a cut halfway through the middle of the circle and roll the dough away from you into a cone shape. Roll the cylinder into a ball by pushing the narrow end of the cone in towards the wider end, and pinching the edges closed. Repeat with the remaining pieces of dough and let the balls rest for 15 to 20 minutes on a floured surface.

6. Roll the rested dough into ⅛-inch-thick circles and place on a hot tawa or cast iron griddle. Brush with oil, immediately turn over, and brush with oil again. Continue to flip the dough until it is puffy. Remove from heat, and place in a clean dishtowel. Fold dishtowel to cover the rotis so they stay warm.

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What was once typical lunch fare has become the repertoire of dinners at home for those who have time to cook. Rice, curry, stewed meat and vegetable dishes, fried fish, Creole-style food, and the like are equally cooked regardless whether a home is primarily of Indian, African, or Creole descent. Takeout such as Chinese or pizza is often eaten as well.

In its most traditional form, dinner will include a green salad, and often a soup, followed by the main dish, which comprises a balance of protein, vegetable, and a larger portion of starch, whether that be rice, provisions (tubers), or bread. Bread is less often eaten at dinner except perhaps as roti and curry, though that is increasingly becoming lunchtime fare. Trinidadians tend to eat dinner fairly late by American standards, more aligned with those of Europe. It is not unlikely to find dinner taken at 8 or 8:30 P.M. in the average home. Water is the beverage most likely consumed at dinner, though wine is beginning to reach a larger audience. Drinks like beer are more often consumed separately, in the manner of a cocktail rather than accompanying food.

Trinidadians are champion snackers, enabled by the well-established and myriad street-food scene: *sahina* (a fritter of split pea flour), dasheen (callaloo), phoulourie, oyster shooters, spiced fried channa (chickpeas), boiled *peewah* (a fruit/nut in the palm tree family), and much more. A number of packaged snack food companies on the island provide Trinidadians with popular nosh—everything from potato chips to candy bars and English digestive biscuits, sold in packs of two.

Sugary snacks are ubiquitous and well consumed in the islands, most likely because of the abundance of sugar that has always been available. Indian sweets (collectively called *mithai*) are eaten by all and have a high sugar content. They include items like *kulma* (a fried dough stick dusted with sugar), *golab jamun* (syrup-soaked fritters), *jalebi* (deep-fried batter like funnel cakes soaked in syrup), and various types of

*barfi* (a kind of milk fudge). Other European preparations, such as fudge made from chocolate or coconut, cookies, cakes, and tarts, are supplemented by a wide variety of ice creams using local fruits. In 2009, Cold Stone Creamery opened in the capital city of Port of Spain.

## Eating Out

The dining-out option that has existed for the longest time in Trinidad and Tobago is street foods. Initially simple food stalls that served estate laborers in the 19th century, as the years passed street-food vendors have become more elaborate in their setup. Stalls are supplemented with food trucks, and some vendors even provide makeshift outdoor seating. Today, the government board of health licenses street-food vendors, and patrons are discouraged from purchasing foods from unlicensed stalls.

The best-known street-food collective in Trinidad was, perhaps, The Breakfast Shed, started in 1920 to provide a hot breakfast option to local schoolchildren. Situated in a galvanized-roof warehouse in Port of Spain's harbor district, inside were various vendors of Creole-style food, set-up stalls, and some seating from which patrons could choose. The original building was torn down to make room for a waterfront revival and promenade. The New Breakfast Shed, housed in a modern building, has retained some of the former vendors but is, in the estimation of locals, a shadow of its former self.

Since 1990, a robust fast-food and fast-casual restaurant culture has sprung up on Trinidad and Tobago. While the beef-heavy McDonald's doesn't have




A Kentucky Fried Chicken in downtown Trinidad. (AFP | Getty Images)

a major presence, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Popeye's, and the local chain Royal Crown are well patronized. Papa John's and Pizza Hut compete with the local chains Pizza Boys and Mario's, which serve a pizza featuring the far sweeter (sugar-enhanced) tomato sauce that appeals to local tastes. Subway and Burger King are here as well. Most of the fast-food chains are concentrated around the capital and the large cities of Chaguanas, in the central part of Trinidad, and San Fernando, in the south. Chinese takeouts that serve "Trini-Chinee" food are numerous throughout the country and offer a number of specialties specific to Trinidad and Tobago, including dasheen pork and fried wontons.

American fast-casual chains such as TGI Fridays and Ruby Tuesday's enjoy a status above what they do in the United States, as they charge American prices (the exchange rate is about TT$6 to US$1). They are considered stylish and unique in their offerings of "typical" American fare.

In the past decade, a crop of fine-dining restaurants that are the bailiwick of chefs classically trained in the French culinary style in Europe or America have opened, particularly in the capital city. The most creative of those chefs mix their formal training with local ingredients, adapting traditional dishes to more formal presentation or preparations to good result. Mélange restaurant is one good example of the nouvelle Trinidadian cuisine, as is Battimamzelle.

## Special Occasions

Celebrations are central to Trinidad and Tobago's culture, and the country is perhaps most known for holding one of the biggest parties on earth in its yearly pre-Lenten Carnival activities. The nation's population burgeons during the festivities, which feature reveling in the form of costumed street parades, steel drum music, and copious consumption of alcohol. Unlike other special occasions in Trinidad, Carnival is not particularly marked by certain foods. Instead, religious-based holidays and feast days are where food takes center stage.

Trinidad and Tobago's population is primarily Christian (75%) with a small percentage of groups that mix traditional West African religion with Christianity such as Shouter Baptists and practitioners of Orisha. Hindus comprise nearly 23 percent of the population, and Muslims nearly 6 percent. Some quick addition indicates that these numbers total well over 100 percent, which neatly tells the tale of religion in Trinidad: Like its people it is a mélange of practices that exist and intermingle, usually with no sense of dilution or lack of authenticity on the part of their practitioners.

Regardless of their self-proclaimed religious heritage, Trinidadians often celebrate holidays across religions. The Hindu festival of Diwali is a national holiday in Trinidad and Tobago and is most notable for Indian vegetarian foods such as vegetable and fruit curries and mithai, the traditional Indian sweets already mentioned.

Ramadan, the Muslim fast month, is shared with non-Muslim friends during Eftar, the breaking of the fast that starts with the consumption of a date and some water. Other foods are traditional Trinidadian foods that do not make use of pork. During Eid al-Fitr, the end of Ramadan, feasts are celebrated throughout the country and again feature Indian sweets, as the Trinidad Muslim tradition is largely Indian based though there is an increasing number of African Muslim converts. The small Trinidad Lebanese population tends to be Christian. *Sawine,* a vermicelli pudding, is a must-have during the feast.

Regardless of religion, nearly every Trinidadian celebrates Christmas in one fashion or another, and this is the occasion when food is most important. Much of the Trinidadian Christmas foods have their heritage in the Cocoa Panyol or Spanish community of the islands. Specialties like *pastelle,* a meat-filled corn turnover similar to a tamale, and *paymee,* a sweetened version of the same dish, without meat are also typical Christmas foods. Black cake, a descendant of Irish Christmas cake that was brought to Trinidad by the small population of Irish indentured laborers in the 19th century, is an absolute must-have for Christmas.

Popular holiday beverages include sorrel, ginger beer, and *ponche crème,* eggnog featuring condensed milk and Angostura bitters. Roasted turkey, imported from the United States, has become a major

dish for Christmas dinner, and it is usually stuffed with a local stuffing made from *chataigne,* a starchy tree fruit in the breadfruit family.

Weddings across cultures are another major feasting occasion. In Indian families, particularly, hundreds of guests may attend a wedding celebration, often for days at a time. Cooks who are well versed in cooking for traditional Indian weddings are employed during this time, making three-foot-long rotis on four-foot-wide tawas and huge pots of food. Dal puri is most often served at these events because it is complex to make and requires a delicate hand.

## Diet and Health

Trinidadian foods have come to be considered by nutritionists as overly carbohydrate- and fat-rich, based heavily in starches, once used to provide calories to field laborers along with limited protein and poorer, fattier cuts of meat unwanted by plantation masters. Oil, particularly coconut oil, was well used in African, Indian, and Chinese cooking and continues to be so today, even when vegetable or seed oils are substituted. In recent years, the government health department has undertaken health campaigns to promote more judicious use of fats and oils for heart health, as heart disease is the leading cause of disease-related death in Trinidad and Tobago.

According to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), obesity is not yet a problem in Trinidad and Tobago among children and young people, much like the United States, though the number of overweight individuals has increased as the country has moved away from an agrarian to an industrial society. The FAO reported in 1999 that nearly 17 percent of people over 20 are overweight, and within that group 31 percent are obese.

Childhood nutrition, particularly regarding the consumption of adequate calcium, is also a concern into which health officials are putting efforts. Hypertension and alcoholism are two other common diet-based health issues. Although no recent data have been gathered about food access, in 1995, 22 percent of the population was listed as living below the poverty level, half of which were considered "extremely poor" and therefore having limited access to food and proper nutrition. Most at risk for malnutrition in those households, according to the FAO, are children, the elderly, and pregnant and lactating women. While Trinidadians do eat a wide variety of fruits and vegetables on a daily basis, they also consume a great deal of sugar as alcohol, and diabetes is on the uptick.

*Ramin Ganeshram*

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# United States: The Mid-Atlantic

## Overview

The mid-Atlantic states of the United States are here defined as the heavily urbanized and industrial region stretching from north of Virginia to the south of New England including New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland as well as the interior of these states. While this region shares many features with states to the north and south, it is unique in its remarkable ethnic and religious diversity as well as the food cultures associated with vibrant immigrant communities, which have been arriving in successive torrents since the 17th century. New York City, for example, hosts perhaps the most eclectic range of cuisines on earth; its food culture is in a sense a convergence of practically every tradition covered in this encyclopedia, adapted to local conditions and often having evolved into foods eaten today around the globe. Its role as a financial and commercial hub of world trade has also given this region an astoundingly cosmopolitan character, always ready to integrate new ingredients, recipes, and ways of eating. Thus one finds as common everyday fare dishes descended from English roasts to Irish stews, Italian pizza to Jewish bagels, Chinese lo mein to Polish kielbasa, as well as soul food introduced by African Americans who migrated from the South, and more recent introductions from virtually every corner of the earth. Here one can dine in some of the most acclaimed French-inspired restaurants in the world as well as find Indian, Russian, Salvadoran, or Korean cuisine—the list is endless. This region also produces many of the industrial foods most commonly eaten across the United States, whether it be Campbell's Soup from Camden, New Jersey; Nabisco crackers, originally from New York; or Tyson chickens raised in Maryland. The majority of artificial flavors used in the United States are also developed in New Jersey. Thus one can rightly say that this region hosts the best and worst of American cuisine and every possible variety in between.

The original inhabitants of this region were the Lenape Indians. They survived by hunting and fishing as well as extensive agriculture based on native plants such as corn, beans, and squash. Although they suffered a devastating demographic catastrophe with the introduction of European diseases as well as more overt forms of aggression, the foods they consumed still form a solid backbone of mid-Atlantic food culture. New Jersey is still renowned for superior corn and tomatoes. Although many other New World plants were actually reintroduced to this region later, zucchini and peppers, for example, or potatoes introduced from South America—made into chips said to have been invented in Saratoga, New York—the legacy of the Native Americans remains in many favorite dishes: Maryland crabs, oysters all along the coast, native blueberries in the pine barrens of New Jersey, or native grape species made into wine in the Finger Lakes. Sunflowers, vitally important for their oil, seeds, and edible roots (Jerusalem artichokes), are native to eastern North America.

The first European settlers in this region were the Dutch, whose claim was staked with the explorer Henry Hudson in 1609. Within a few years a settlement named New Amsterdam was established on the island of Manhattan. The outpost of Albany up the Hudson River was established in 1614, and between these two points large Dutch landholders maintained

patroonships that, virtually feudal in organization and structure, encompassed small farmers working the fields of large "patrons." The fortified port of New Amsterdam welcomed virtually anyone regardless of origin or religion to settle and engage in commerce, so from the start there was a mixed population of Dutch and other Europeans, Jews, and Africans. Dutch cuisine, although relatively simple, survives in this region in dishes such as waffles and pancakes as well as in the concept and word *cookie*. In a series of wars the English sought to oust the Dutch from the mid-Atlantic, and this was accomplished permanently in 1674, when the city and region kept the name New York.

To the immediate south there were Swedish settlements in what is now New Jersey and Delaware, though ultimately the most important group to settle along the Delaware River were religious exiles known as Quakers. William Penn founded the colony of Pennsylvania and its capitol, Philadelphia, which by the 18th century became the second-largest English-speaking city in the world. English culinary traditions were introduced, but equally important were those derived from German settlers, Mennonites, and Amish Anabaptists also seeking religious freedom. Pretzels are one of the most recognizably American foods introduced by Germans, but hot dogs, sauerkraut, and mustard, not to mention beer, are considered quintessentially American. To the south the colony of Maryland was formed as a haven for Catholics by Lord Baltimore, and in many respects it is here that a uniquely English cuisine survives, especially in the fishing culture of the Chesapeake.

In the early 19th century the population began to move westward and inland. This was aided by a series of canals to facilitate trade and later railroads. Eventually, major industrial cities like Pittsburgh and Buffalo sprang up, as well as farms in rural districts. But the most important event of the 19th century was the massive influx of immigrants hailing primarily from eastern and southern Europe. Southern Italians introduced pizza, spaghetti, and other dishes that are culinary staples—not to mention the Philly cheese steak sandwich. Jews fleeing religious persecution brought with them deli culture: corned beef and pastrami sandwiches, rye bread, and sour dill pickles as well as bagels and lox. Irish immigrants escaping the potato famine as well as Poles and other eastern Europeans made their own contributions. In the wake of the Civil War there was a massive influx of former slaves to the North, bringing what is essentially Southern food; some of the best anywhere can be found in places such as Harlem.

Prominent immigrant groups adding to this incredibly eclectic culinary mix include Chinese, mostly from Canton, whose dishes are familiar and commonly eaten in Chinese restaurants by everyone. An enormous Hispanic community made up first of Puerto Ricans after the Spanish American War, followed by other Caribbean and Central American peoples as well as Mexicans, means that Latino cuisine is equally familiar to anyone living in this region. Although Americans in the mid-Atlantic states might not regularly cook dishes from more far-flung parts of the world, a thriving restaurant culture means that few people live far from an Indian or Thai restaurant, a Greek diner, a Japanese sushi bar, Spanish tapas bar, or any number of ethnic restaurants that have now become integral to the way everyone eats.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Nina and Will Lok-Segal live in Prospect Heights, a middle-class neighborhood in Brooklyn. She is a senior researcher for a nonprofit foundation. He is an editor for a large publishing firm. Their lifestyle and eating habits are typical of professionals living in a cosmopolitan city where food has become a major preoccupation, and trying new foods only requires a hop on the subway. They are also influenced by their backgrounds: Nina was born in Hong Kong, and Will's mother grew up in Paris.

Nina and Will usually eat breakfast at home because neither of them needs to be at work until 10 A.M., thereby avoiding the worst of rush hour into Manhattan. While Nina often prepares oatmeal from scratch or fixes a bowl of cold cereal with sliced fruit and soy milk, Will sticks to black coffee and dry multigrain toast. On weekends they take turns preparing more elaborate meals: Nina makes frittatas with vegetables or herbs, while Will has a sweet tooth and a light touch

with pancakes or French toast. Like many New Yorkers, the Lok-Segals either pack lunch (often leftovers) to eat at their desks or buy something at the many quick-service lunch places in midtown Manhattan. While Nina's favorite is a Korean buffet, Will is partial to the meatball sandwiches sold at a small Italian takeout shop. Very common are soup-and-salad chains and food trucks where people line up for ethnic specialties like halal chicken over rice, Indian *dosas,* and Belgian waffles. Will's office has a coffee bar stocked with cookies, chips, and other snack foods where employees graze whenever they are hungry or bored. Nina keeps a bag of pistachios and chocolate bars in her desk drawer, nibbling them along with the green tea she drinks throughout the day.

Dinner is eaten at 8:30 P.M. Either Nina or Will prepares something simple: a green salad, sautéed pork chops or a rotisserie chicken picked up on the way home, and rice. They have wine with dinner. On the weekends, especially if they are entertaining friends, dinner is more elaborate, an occasion to try out new recipes and fresh produce bought in Chinatown or at the Grand Army Plaza Greenmarket. On occasion they will also purchase cheese at Murray's or Dean & Deluca, or perhaps seafood at Citarella, which are among the most revered gourmet shops in the country. Dessert is either store-bought sorbet or fruit.

## Major Foodstuffs

Three major influences on New York City's food habits are its geographic location, its role as a port city, and its long history of immigration. The Dutch and other early settlers of New Amsterdam cultivated potatoes, cabbages, onions, and apples on land that is now Upper Manhattan and the Bronx. As they moved up the Hudson Valley, apples were an important crop: sliced, dried, and used for pies all winter long, and pressed for cider. Cows were raised for milk and as a source of meat. Chickens, ducks, and geese provided eggs and the occasional roast. Pigs provided fresh meat and bacon, as well as sausages and headcheese. Farms north, west, and east of New York, including Long Island's East End, provided fresh vegetables and fruits, and its shores were a source of oysters, cod, lobsters, and other fish and seafood. The borough of Queens was once the city's milk shed, ensuring a fresh and constant supply of milk.

Throughout its history, New York City has consumed the fruits of global trade. As a major port city, foods would pass through New York. Every technological innovation including refrigeration and steam engines brought new foods to the city. In the 1920s, a mere 12 percent of the produce consumed in the city was grown in New York State. After World War II, the number of farms within 200 miles of the city declined dramatically, as suburbs sprouted in the place of fields. In the 1950s, nearly 20 percent of the United States' food supply passed through New York State. Foods from every state in the nation and more than 30 countries were consumed on a regular basis.

Immigration has shaped and continues to shape New York City's food culture. Iconic foods include bagels (with a *schmear* of cream cheese) and pizza (thin crust). Knishes have been replaced with taco trucks, and sushi joints have become ubiquitous. Western European food practices continue to dominate; wheat products like bread, pasta, and cereals are consumed in large quantities. Corn is more likely to be consumed in processed foods than as tortillas, cornbread, or grits. Vegetables and fruits, particularly potatoes, onions, and apples, available at the city's farmers' markets, reflect both geographic constraints and people's tastes.

A drive toward more sustainable food practices is inspiring a resurgence of small-scale food processing and do-it-yourself classes being offered in butchering and sausage making. People are raising chickens and rabbits in backyards. Rooftop gardens are thriving as private as well as commercial enterprises. Though Mayor Bloomberg's otherwise-inspiring 2030 Plan for a sustainable future did not include food (nor did Robert Moses's and Jane Jacobs's competing visions), city agencies, nonprofits, and community organizations are responding with new policies, programs, and proposals for more local food production. East New York Farms and Value Added involve volunteers and schoolchildren in urban agriculture; Flatbush Food Coop is among several cooperatively owned and managed grocery

stores; Cornell Cooperative Extension trains aspiring farmers, many of whom are recent immigrants, and helps them find land to lease as well as markets where they sell their produce.

Water, sodas, and fruit juices are commonly served with meals. Children drink milk (or soy milk) in school, and at meals eaten at home as well. Energy drinks, vitamin waters, smoothies, and other fortified beverages are consumed on the go. Coffee, light and sweet, is bought from coffee carts, and Starbucks has its lines of devotees. Throughout upscale residential neighborhoods, cafés roast their own fair-trade beans. Beer is part of the city's heritage. When Germans and Czechs immigrated to New York in the mid-19th century, they brought with them a taste for lager-style beers. Breweries were established throughout Brooklyn; a combination of mass production, mass marketing, and labor strikes caused their decline in the 1950s. Brooklyn Brewery and Six Points Brewery are marking a comeback of local beer. Wine is an important part of New York's thriving restaurant culture. It is also served at home in households with European roots. Among the many residents with roots in South and Central America, beer and/or distilled liqueurs are more commonly consumed alcohols. Quality wines are produced in the Finger Lakes region in upstate New York, and on the North and South Forks of Long Island.

## Cooking

Cooking in New York and the mid-Atlantic region varies broadly, and it is difficult to generalize. In some households cooking is an ordinary part of the daily routine with many family members pitching in. Especially in less affluent homes, cooking may be a necessity to feed the family affordably, especially with the prevalence of fast food. In busy homes, cooking is still usually done by the mother of the family, though constraints of time and the general hectic pace of life, when both parents work and children have after-school commitments, can seriously curtail the frequency of home-cooked meals eaten together as a family.

During the early decades of the 20th century, immigrants lived in crowded tenements. Many depended on foods cooked outside the home. Today, many New Yorkers continue to depend on take-out foods. While some pick up an entire meal (Chinese food, pizza, fast food, or other convenience options), others combine prepared foods with something cooked at home. Microwaves and rice cookers are as commonly used to prepare foods as are more traditionally European techniques like sautéing or roasting. Grilling is popular, whether in city parks, on apartment balconies, or in backyards across Queens, or Staten Island. In the vast suburban sprawl of the megalopolis, the barbecue grill is an absolute necessity for every backyard, wealthy or more modest. It is here, and often only here, that men take charge, wielding spatula and fork, flipping burgers or steaks, ribs, wings, or perhaps something more adventuresome like fish.

Otherwise, the standard kitchen is much like elsewhere in the United States, although with perhaps more attention to style and detail and less to utility. An average family will own a full four- or six-burner range and oven, a capacious refrigerator that allows shopping once a week for groceries, and sometimes a large separate freezer as well. Especially in suburban households, the fridge can be the center of the entire home. There will be cavernous cabinets to hold an array of canned goods, boxed cereals, and snack foods. There will invariably be a dishwasher, and perhaps a stand mixer, food processor, coffeemaker, toaster, and a range of other gadgets large and small. The irony, of course, is that much of the food consumed is frozen or requires little preparation—perhaps only a few minutes in the microwave.

There is, however, a growing percentage of the population, men and women, that treats cooking as a leisure activity. Perhaps inspired by cooking magazines or cooking shows on television, they socialize with friends by cooking a meal at home, showing off their latest culinary experiments and sharing good wine. Such people are open to new cuisines, trying new ingredients and following the latest trends avidly. They may try their hand at a pad Thai one night, a ceviche the next, without any qualms about mixing and matching flavors in a kind of homemade fusion cuisine.

## Typical Meals

A typical breakfast consists of cold cereal with milk and fruit, toast with jam, or instant oatmeal, accompanied by coffee or tea and orange juice. People grab egg-and-cheese sandwiches at delis or McDonald's. Kids are sent to school with breakfast bars, toaster waffles, or other "grab-and-go" foods. On weekends, breakfast turns into brunch, and anything goes, from bagels and lox to diner-style platters of eggs, bacon, pancakes, and hashed browns. Waffles are served with whipped cream and fresh berries. Dim sum parlors attract large groups of all ethnicities. Whether savory or sweet, weekend breakfasts are occasions to indulge.

Lunch is usually a quick meal. For people working in offices, it means stepping out for half an hour, buying something in the vicinity, and eating in a nearby park, at a desk, or in an employee lunchroom. Sandwiches, whether "deli-style" piled high with cold cuts, lettuce, and mayo or European-style panini, are typical choices. Chains offering customized salads and soups are popular. Trucks and carts line the streets of business districts, offering a dizzying array of ethnic foods at good prices, attracting everyone from mail clerks to executives. Some people pack their lunch—sandwiches and a piece of fruit, or leftovers to be warmed up in the office microwave. The power lunch continues to exist for those with expense accounts—although the multicourse three-martini meal has been replaced with "express" options of single-course meals, often salads that include sliced steak or grilled shrimp, and lemonade or sparkling water.

At home, lunch is also a casual, quick affair consisting of sandwiches or leftovers. In addition to cold cuts, typical sandwiches include tuna and chicken salads, and the childhood classic, peanut butter and jelly. Chips or pretzels are often served as accompaniments, and a simple dessert like a cookie or piece of fruit completes the meal. Some cultural groups like Italian and African American families continue the tradition of a Sunday lunch as the main meal of the day.

Dinner is the main meal due to the organization of the working and school day. Whether eaten at home or in a restaurant, for many, dinner is the one hot meal of the day regardless of cultural or ethnic/national background. A typical dinner includes a portion of animal protein, whether meat or fish; a starch like potatoes or rice; and a vegetable. Stews and braises can be prepared ahead of time, with meat supplemented with root vegetables. These filling dishes are popular in the colder months. Summer means cold salads and grilled foods like burgers and sausages, corn on the cob, and watermelon. Pasta is a popular choice because it can be prepared cheaply and easily. Take-out foods ranging from pizza and fast food to entrées ordered at fine-dining establishments are a mainstay.

## Eating Out

Restaurant culture thrives in the cities dotting the mid-Atlantic coast. These range from a simple aluminum pushcart with Sabrett hot dogs for those who like to dine *al fresco* to Michelin-starred restaurants owned by celebrity chefs. In fact, the presence of the Food Network Studios in New York City means that many food television stars have restaurants here—Bobby Flay and Mario Batali, for example. Everything in between amounts to literally thousands of restaurants. In some neighborhoods you will find half a dozen on every block, with an expensive formal white-tablecloth establishment jockeying for space with a Greek diner, an Italian pizzeria, a small Chinese take-out place, a Korean convenience store, an upscale bistro, and a Salvadoran *pupuseria*. For a quick pick-me-up, there are also native establishments like Papaya King for a hot dog or juice, as well as fast-food chains like McDonald's, Burger King, and KFC. New Yorkers probably dine out more than any other people on earth, and it is said that you could eat out in a different spot every single day of your life. It is often joked that wealthy New Yorkers have trophy kitchens decked out with high-tech ovens and appliances that they never use. It is true that some people don't even have a working kitchen, as there is always food to be bought within a few steps. In small apartments, dishwashers are used as dry storage; shoes are shelved in cabinets.




A shop on the corner in Chinatown, New York. (Shutterstock)

Urbanites in all major cities of the mid-Atlantic, including Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia, are extremely sophisticated and particular about their restaurant choices. With so many options, they can afford to be choosy, and it is true that unless a restaurant is well rated (the ubiquitous democratic *Zagat Guide* is one measure), it is bound to fold. Restaurants, not surprisingly, turn over remarkably quickly, and only the best withstand the test of time, and even then not always, if one thinks of the legendary Lutece or Le Pavillon.

In New York one can find not only fine, expensive restaurants but also many that set culinary trends globally, whether it be in fusion cuisine, the latest science-inspired "molecular gastronomy" establishment, or merely the newest as yet undiscovered corner of the world. If it exists anywhere, it will be found in New York; in fact, some culinary traditions survive only here in exile, with the people themselves.

## Special Occasions

Foods consumed on special occasions often erase regional distinctions in favor of national traditions. For example, Thanksgiving is observed with foods that are now considered traditional throughout the United States: turkey, sweet potatoes, pumpkin pie, and cranberry relish. The stuffing reveals the region's British influence, incorporating chestnuts and celery. The many immigrants living in New York City adopt Thanksgiving, making it their own by adding Bengali spices to cranberry sauce or rubbing a turkey with jerk seasoning. Summer is all about ball games; hot dogs are consumed with lager-style beer. In Prospect Park, as well as the greenways lining the

Hudson River, informal soccer, softball, and volleyball games attract food vendors. When the New York Philharmonic plays its annual concerts in Central Park, thousands gather with friends to dine on blankets under the stars. On Super Bowl Sunday, everyone suspends their diets to nosh on chicken wings and nachos piled high with cheese, sour cream, and pickled jalapeños. St. Patrick's Day means corned beef and cabbage, and green bagels, in a town where everyone claims Irish, Jewish, and Italian heritage as part of their civic identity.

Like elsewhere, Christmas is celebrated by practically everyone, sometimes even non-Christians, as an excuse to exchange gifts and decorate a Christmas tree. Not surprisingly, a large Jewish population celebrates Passover with unleavened bread and fasts on Yom Kippur, as well as enjoying many other food-centered holidays. African Americans celebrate Kwanzaa, and devout Muslims fast during Ramadan. Uniquely, it is perhaps only in this region that one will find all these holidays side by side, sometimes within the same household when there are parents of mixed heritage. Schools will often be shut for a range of holidays for children of various faiths. Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and Labor Day are three-day weekends marking the start, middle, and end of summer. They are celebrated with picnics and barbecues.

## Diet and Health

New York City faces the same challenges as the rest of the United States: Obesity/overweight and diabetes are threatening the well-being of large percentages of the population. Obesity, diabetes, and other diet-related diseases are strongly correlated with class, race/ethnicity, and neighborhood. While middle- and upper-income people like Will and Nina live in neighborhoods with many food choices including large grocery stores, specialty stores, restaurants ranging from fast food to full-service, and two farmers' markets within walking distance of their home, too many New Yorkers live in neighborhoods described as "food deserts." Access to fresh, healthy foods is a challenge in these food deserts, and residents are consigned to paying high prices for low-quality foods. Often, they are dependent on bodegas and other small stores with limited selections. Not all vendors accept EBT (food stamps/electronic benefits), WIC coupons, and other forms of social supports, further limiting where people can shop. Compounded with long working hours (many low-income individuals work more than one job), and long routes to and from work, these factors mean shopping is difficult. Kitchens in public housing—let alone shelters and other temporary housing—are often in disrepair. Fast food offers quick satisfaction at a reasonable price—and long-term negative impacts on overall health. A number of recent government initiatives have been established to correct this situation, including federal funds that will help chain groceries build new stores in areas of the Bronx and Brooklyn that have low food access (a program piloted successfully in Philadelphia). GreenCarts is a Department of Health program that issues licenses to pushcart vendors who agree to sell produce in food deserts. Chain restaurants are required to post calorie counts in an effort to help consumers make more informed choices. Trans fats were banned several years ago, causing major food processors to adjust their recipes. The city sent advisors out to bakeries, restaurants, and local manufacturers to help them change their practices. Salt is the new target in an effort to lower rates of hypertension, especially prevalent among lower-income residents. While critics complain that Mayor Bloomberg is operating a "nanny state," diet-related diseases cost the city millions in health care and lost productivity every year. Without laws that force food processors to institute changes, it is very difficult to address these issues. A large city like New York has the market muscle to make this happen.

New York's Greenmarket program started in 1976 when a farmers' market opened at Union Square to provide farmers within a 200-mile radius of the city with a profitable outlet for their produce, and city residents with fresh fruits and vegetables. Today, Greenmarket operates nearly 50 markets, found in every borough of the city. There are more requests for markets than there are farmers to supply them. To encourage residents of lower-income neighborhoods to patronize the markets, many vendors have terminals

that accept EBT. Most markets are seasonal and are open only one day a week, but they provide an important source of local foods, and an opportunity for people to mingle and socialize in ways that supermarkets don't encourage. Seasons are marked with food. Strawberries, asparagus, and peas announce the end of a long winter. In July, people chat while shucking corn. Tomatoes invite careful prodding. As New Yorkers have developed more sophisticated palates, and as Greenmarkets have ranged into more diverse neighborhoods, basil and cucumbers are now side by side with Asian greens, wasabi sprouts, cilantro and culantro, and freshly jarred kimchi. Growing concerns about factory-farmed meat have created a market for lamb, chicken, beef, and pork. Customers can talk to producers, learning why some grow organically while others bypass certification and depend on their customers' trust.

Supermarkets vary greatly by neighborhood. Whole Foods, with its full range of grass-fed beef, organic chicken, line-caught fish, and beautifully displayed produce, cheeses, and coffees, locates in well-to-do neighborhoods with high foot traffic like Columbus Circle, Union Square, and Chelsea. Shopping at Whole Foods duplicates the experience of wandering a market, while offering prices on basic goods that are comparable to those in less-luxurious grocery stores. Trader Joe's has wide appeal for their relatively low-cost prepared foods and snacks. They, too, are found only in well-to-do neighborhoods. Fairway's original store is on the Upper West Side. They have since opened stores in Harlem and in Red Hook, Brooklyn. Here, shopping is a contact sport, with great prices on produce combined with gourmet goods and a full-service butcher and fishmonger. In these "better" neighborhoods, even the national chains like Pathmark are nicely appointed and offer a wide selection of products.

In low- and moderate-income neighborhoods, supermarkets are run-down, selling tired-looking produce and limited selections of meat and poultry. Shelves lined with processed foods reinforce the health and diet problems facing residents. It's no problem finding 20 kinds of sugary cereal and juiceless fruit punch, but it is highly unlikely that these stores will carry natural peanut butter or bulk grains. The tired argument is that healthy foods won't sell in lower-income neighborhoods, but studies find over and over that residents are well aware of the dangers of unhealthy choices for their community's health. Mobility is relative; in gentrifying neighborhoods, among the signs of change are people getting off the subways carrying bags of groceries from other, more affluent parts of the city. In Washington Heights, for example, the new professional classes shop at Fairway and West Side Market; long-time residents make do with the Associated with its shabby awning, rusty carts, and constant funk of spoiled meat. The prices are higher for most goods, except for Central American and Caribbean staples like plantains.

While New York City has not joined the mayor of Rome in declaring that access to healthy food is a civil right, many changes have been made to the school lunch, and breakfast, programs. Efforts have been made to reduce the total fats, salts, and sugars in school food and to increase total nutrients and fiber. Changes are incremental. Obstacles include lack of infrastructure (schools where cafeterias are designed to reheat, not cook, food), funding, and kids' tastes. Introducing a healthy option is pointless if it ends up in the trash. Nonetheless, the Department of Education is committed to introducing more cultural variety and more locally sourced foods. All apples purchased by the school system are now grown in New York State; local carrots will soon follow. Milk is now skim, not whole or chocolate, and soy milk is available for the many children of African and Asian descent who are lactose intolerant. For many lower-income children, the meals eaten at school (free or nearly free) are the only full meals they eat. Summer programs were introduced to fill in the gaps between school terms. Ensuring that these meals are nutritionally balanced and otherwise fulfilling is critical to long-term public health and to advancing justice through access to food.

*Babette Audant and Ken Albala*

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# United States: The Midwest

## Overview

The American Midwest comprises 12 states: Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and North Dakota. These states span the midcontinent from the western edge of the Allegheny Mountains on the east all the way to the high plains that abut the Rocky Mountains in the west. The Midwest is cut in two by the Mississippi, a river that drains all the waters from two-thirds of the continent, while the Great Lakes and the 49th parallel define the northern border and the Ohio River the southern boundary. The whole region encompasses 820,000 square miles and is occupied by 66 million inhabitants. Today, roughly 50 million people live in metropolitan areas and large towns, unlike the 1890s, when the farming population was much larger and farmers' food came directly from the land on which they lived.

Much of the Midwest is relatively flat prairie land but not entirely. It has been further subdivided into broad areas: the Great Lakes and Old Northwest, Ohio River and Trans-Mississippi River, and the Great Plains. Each subregion represents different landforms, natural resources, histories, ethnic origins, and dialects. This fact counters the common perception that the Midwest is nothing but a flat and endless plain with food to match. Many of the Midwestern states have more than one of these divisions within them, and that is important in considering local foodways.

Although home to major cities, such as Chicago, and heavy industrial production, agriculture lies behind the idea of the Midwest as America's food-producing heartland. Some of the most important agricultural-production technologies were invented in the Midwest, including the John Deere plow and the McCormick reaper. From the 1890s on, the region has been seen as filled with small towns and broad farmlands, occupied by people who are slow to adopt new cultural trends. For these reasons the Midwest is usually thought of as center of "normal" American culture. Food is an integral part of this image: The Midwest said to be the land of plain cooking, of casseroles and "white food," meaning mashed potatoes and cream sauces. In fact, Midwestern foodways represent a global food system with dishes and foods imported from the far corners of the world.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Steve and Brenda Wilson live in Saint Louis, Missouri, with their young son and daughter. They are interested in locally produced food and, on Saturday, go to the weekly farmers' market in Tower Grove, one of the 1,500 farmers' markets in the Midwest. They cannot fulfill all their week's food needs at the open-air market because it does not sell breakfast cereals, milk, cheap commonly eaten meats, flour, sugar, salt and pepper, canned soups and sauces, cooking oils, butter and margarine, juices, frozen products, snack foods, and imported fruits and vegetables, such as bananas. These will be purchased later, while pushing a large food cart, from the food aisles and cases in a local supermarket. The children have a lot to say about what cereals and snacks the family buys. At the farmers' market

the Wilsons can buy in-season, fresh sweet corn, lettuce and greens (such as kale and chard), green beans and fresh peas, tomatoes (including some old heirloom breeds), varieties of green and red peppers, different kinds of eggplants, potatoes, onions, garlic, carrots, rhubarb, melons, grapes, berries, pears, apples, peaches, and fresh herbs. Basil, tarragon, oregano, thyme, mint, rosemary, parsley, and cilantro (fresh coriander leaves) are popular and used in a number of dishes. All of these are sold directly by the farmers who grow them. In this market there are also animal farmers. Sustainably raised lamb, beef, pork, rabbit, sausages, chicken, and eggs straight from the farm, as well as cheeses, are all available for sale, and the Wilsons stock up on some of these, though the meats and produce are somewhat more expensive than supermarket food. This market also encourages freshly baked goods. Young women from a local Mennonite community, dressed in plain, long skirts and wearing small white kerchiefs, sell their homemade cakes, nut cakes and cookies, yeast breads, and quick breads. Other bakers have crusty Italian, French, and whole-grain breads.

From these ingredients the Wilsons will prepare daily breakfasts, lunches or dinners, and suppers. On Sunday they usually make a roast beef or chicken served with mashed potatoes, green beans, fresh bread and butter, and a freshly made fruit pie for dinner. On this day, they are buying ingredients to prepare a dish for a potluck dinner at a nearby history museum. Steve grew up in a town on the Illinois/Indiana border where corn chowder has been made for generations. It is a dish that mixes traditions from New England and the South in Midwestern corn country.



Corn chowder, a dish that mixes traditions from New England and the South, in Midwestern corn country. (Robyn Mackenzie | Dreamstime.com)

**Corn Chowder**

*Serves 6–8*

¼ lb bacon, chopped

8 tbsp butter

2 large potatoes, diced (about ¾ lb)

1 large carrot, sliced into rounds

1 small onion, chopped

4 ears fresh sweet corn, shucked and kernels cut from cob

Water to cover

4 tbsp flour

2 c milk

1 tsp salt, or to taste

Ground black pepper to taste

Place bacon in a deep pan over medium heat. Cook bacon until the fat melts but the bacon is not crispy. Add 4 tablespoons butter, and melt. Add potatoes, carrot, and onion, and sauté in butter and bacon until the vegetables are coated and onion begins to wilt. Add just enough water to cover, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a simmer, cover pan, and cook until potatoes are tender, 15–20 minutes. Meanwhile, melt 4 tablespoons butter in a separate saucepan. Whisk the flour into the butter until completely blended. Stir the milk into the butter-flour mixture until smooth. When the vegetables are done stir them with a whisk or fork until the potatoes break up into small lumps. Stir in the milk mixture, stirring well. When thickened and heated through, add salt and pepper to taste and stir well. Serve with corn muffins or cornbread.

## Major Foodstuffs

What people eat everyday is the result of environments, history, and technology. Although the Midwest

states are agricultural powerhouses, much of what they produce is not grown for local consumption. Iowa, for instance, is the number one grower of soybeans, Illinois number two, and Minnesota number three, but tofu is not a regular part of the Midwestern diet. Iowa and Illinois are the top producers of feed grains for farm animals, and Iowa is the nation's premier hog farmer. Most of this massive output is processed by large food manufacturers and sold in national and international markets. Before World War II (1945), farmers and people living in small towns were able to produce enough food in gardens and from truck farms to feed their own families during the year: Only some supplies such as flour and sugar needed to be purchased from stores. But today, with some local exceptions, food eaten every day by Midwesterners is bought in food stores and supermarkets, a lot of it coming from as far as 1,500–3,000 miles away.

Midwesterners consume between 1,500 and 1,900 pounds of food annually. Of this, about 35–40 percent comes from animal products, including both meats and dairy, and more beef (about 75 pounds per year) is eaten than in other parts of the country. Thirty percent of the diet is vegetables, but 30 percent of that is potatoes. Grains compose 13–14 percent of the average diet, most of them processed. Wheat is the most popular, made in the form of breads, sweet baked goods, and breakfast cereals. Corn is also widely used, but much of it is used in processed foods, including animal feeds, cornstarches, and corn syrups. Fats, oils, sugars, and sweeteners compose most of the remaining daily calories. Dried legumes such as navy, pinto, and black beans are a small (about 8 pounds per year) but growing food segment, in part due to a rising Hispanic population. The average per-person caloric intake is about the national average of 2,600–3,000, though Midwestern states are generally at the middle to lower end of the national overweight and obesity scale.

Meat is the center of almost all Midwestern meals, whether home cooked or in restaurants. Beef, poultry, pork, and some fish are common. Ground beef is the most widely used form, often as patties (hamburgers) or loose for chili and similar dishes, including a famous sandwich style in Iowa. Poultry zoomed in popularity in the last quarter of the 20th century because it costs less and is thought to be lower in fat. Chicken is used year-round, with breast meat the favored cut. Turkey is also widely available and a necessity at holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas. A great deal of the poultry consumed comes from Midwestern states, especially Indiana and Ohio. Pork has declined in competition with poultry, but bacon and ham are staples of people's tables, often at breakfast and for lunches. Iowa remains a major producer. Though the region is surrounded by great lakes and big rivers, freshwater fish is less widely eaten than imported seafood, especially shrimp, salmon, and canned tuna. Of freshwater fish types, catfish is popular in southern parts of the Midwest and among African Americans, while along Lakes Michigan and Superior, local whitefish is used in fish fries and fish boils (in northern Wisconsin).

Other meats include game animals such as duck, goose, turkey, venison, squirrel, and rabbit, which appear during hunting seasons, especially in rural areas of the Midwest. With almost a million deer taken during the fall hunting season, venison is more widespread than might be supposed.

Animal-based proteins also come from dairy products. Like other Americans, people in the Midwest love milk in liquid state, as cheeses, and in ice cream. The amount of milk drunk per person has declined by 30 percent since 1970, but cheese use has increased by 100 percent over the same period (10 pounds of milk make 1 pound of cheese). Wisconsin, the Dairy State, produces more cheese than any other state, and its citizens are above-average cheese eaters (hence the common insult for Wisconsinites, "Cheeseheads"). A considerable amount of cheese is not eaten out of hand but instead used in pizza and pasta dishes. Ice cream is a highly favored dessert, and states such as Indiana, Illinois, and Minnesota are major ice cream makers. Not a basic component of Midwestern diets, yogurt has nonetheless increased in usage to as much as 4 pounds per person per year, as compared to 15 pounds for ice cream.

In days when more Midwesterners lived on farms, most vegetables and fruits were grown locally. Green beans, cabbages, carrots, peas, bell peppers, tomatoes, lettuces, spinach, cucumbers, potatoes, onions,

parsnips, turnips, rutabagas, zucchini, squash, and pumpkins (Illinois is the number one pumpkin grower) were raised in gardens and fields and eaten regularly. What was not eaten fresh was canned at home for use over the winter. Potatoes, however, were the most popular tuber and remain so. Today, many more fresh vegetables are available in supermarkets, though few are grown nearby, except for those sold in local farmers' markets. Most of the same vegetables are consumed today as in the past with the addition of broccoli and cauliflower because of their high vitamin content and antioxidant qualities. Also, salad greens have become very popular, making for higher lettuce consumption than ever before. Instead of being home canned, a good portion of the vegetables eaten now are frozen, actually the best way to preserve their nutritional contents.

The Midwest enjoys abundant fruit production. Michigan is the sixth-largest fruit producer in the United States and the leading grower of sour cherries, which are used in pie fillings. Wisconsin is number one in cranberries, and until early in the 20th century southern Illinois led the nation in peach exports. Surprisingly, citrus fruits from Florida and California are the most popular fruits, most of them made into juices. Melons, peaches, pears, sweet cherries, and berries are frequently purchased, but more popular are bananas (imported) and apples. A good deal of apple consumption in the Midwest is in the form of processed juices, 33 percent higher than the rest of the country. Altogether fresh fruits and fruit juices make up only about 18 percent of the average diet.

Living in the midst of the nation's greatest producers of wheat and corn, Midwesterners ought to be great whole-grain eaters, but they are not. Most wheat and barley is milled and baked into breads, pastas, cakes, and other pastries. Wheats, including the red durums from the Great Plains, are processed, stripped of their main nutrients, and turned white, into the flour sold for home use. Where whole grains mainly appear is in breakfast cereals. Oats and cracked wheats are staple cooked hot cereals, while corn, wheat, barley, and flax are used in cold cereals. That is appropriate for the Midwest because the breakfast cereal industry was pioneered in Michigan, Ohio, and Illinois. Rice plays a smaller but important role in Midwestern cuisine, none of it grown in the region and almost all of it milled to make it white, thus removing its natural vitamins and fiber.

Some historical local foods are still used even in the modern industrial food system, many of them gathered from the wild. American persimmons, mostly used for preserves and pies, are collected from trees in southern Ohio and especially southern Indiana and Illinois. Pawpaws, also called custard apples, or Hoosier bananas in Indiana, are found across the Midwest. Their creamy pulp is also used in sweet desserts and drinks. Both fruits are the focus of local late-summer festivals. Mushroom gathering is a popular pastime. Morels and chanterelles found in Midwestern forests are highly prized and widely consumed in season. Wild rice, Minnesota's state grain, in its true natural state is harvested by canoe from small lakes and streams, often by Native Americans. Although now farmed for national distribution, the wild version is very local. Fish, such as bass, perch, buffalo, and bluegills, is caught locally and widely consumed. Turtles and frogs (the legs) are in the same category, though eaten by relatively few Midwesterners in recent years.

## Cooking

What people cook and how they cook it depends on income levels, availability of ingredients, and the cook's interest in good cooking. In times when the more people lived in rural areas and worked on farms, cooking was almost entirely in the hands of women. Farmwives and their daughters rose early in the morning to stoke fires in their wood- or coal-burning ovens and started cooking. These stoves usually had two ovens, one hot for baking, the other called a warming oven to keep cooked food hot. The stovetop had anywhere from two to four hot plates on which the cook could set pans and kettles. Because coffee was an essential beverage, kettles and coffeepots were kept on the stove the whole day through. Skillets were essential because Midwesterners, like all Americans, love fried food. Deeper pans were used for soups and stews and for cooking vegetables.

Inventories of kitchens from around 1900 show that many had dozens of cooking devices, ranging

from knives to cooking spoons and spatulas, different-sized strainers, mortars and pestles, whisks, mixing bowls, baking pans of various sizes, apple corers, cherry pitters, hand meat grinders, sausage stuffers, and many others. Since few foods were preprepared, as now, cooking was labor-intensive. For the midday farm meal, meat had be cut to size and roasted or baked; and when the meat was done, gravy was made from the drippings. Potatoes were peeled and boiled, and vegetables like green beans picked, trimmed, and also boiled. Fresh bread had been made beginning with early morning preparations. Desserts were usually pies, the crusts made with lard that had been rendered at home, the fruit fillings prepared by hand. Most recipes were not elaborate, except for cakes, and many of the dishes prepared in country kitchens remain as staples of Midwestern cooking.

For more than 100 years American cooking has trended toward easier preparation and faster cooking. Inventions such as the gas and electric stove, refrigerator, home freezer, food mixers, food processor, and, more recently, the microwave oven have saved a lot of time in the kitchen. To accommodate these new implements food companies created food products that were easy to use and also fit American tastes. Many of these companies are Midwestern, and the people who created the foods grew up with Midwestern foodways. For instance, a favorite dish, Kraft boxed macaroni and cheese dinner, was invented in Chicago in 1937 using powdered American cheese and pasta, butter, and milk. It is really a casserole that is a characteristically Midwestern dish.



A baked casserole with potato, sausage, onion, and cheese. (Teresa Kasprzycka | Dreamstime.com)

Modern-day cooking varies from person to person. For those who are keen on new food trends and fine dining, kitchens are equipped with the best stoves and many electric food-preparation devices. They also have the best ingredients including varieties of fresh herbs and spices. Some of these cooks make efforts to use locally sourced food products or at least foods that are organically grown, if not local. Although these innovative cooks are a significant part of the culinary scene, most kitchens and cooks are rather different, employing foods processed by industrial production techniques.

Modern stoves have the same functions as the old wood-burning ones: ovens for baking and roasting and cooktops for frying, sautéing, boiling, and steaming. Modern utensils are often made of heat-resistant plastics but serve the same functions as the old ones. Home cooking includes baked, roasted, or fried meats, but the rest of the meal might be prepared by heating pre-prepared dishes in a conventional or microwave oven. Casseroles, for instance, are often made with packaged or canned soup. Frozen foods are eaten in an average household six times each week, many of these heated by microwaves (the best way to preserve vitamin contents). These might be vegetables or the ever-popular pizza. Salads to accompany the meal often come from precut and washed salad mixes and dressings from bottled preparations. Desserts are one kind of dish that remains traditional. Fruit pies are a Midwestern specialty, and many are made at home. However, a good many might be made from store-bought pie crusts and canned fruit fillings. Cakes, too, are commonly made from cake mixes, mixed with an electric blender and baked in the oven. Or whole meals can be purchased premade from food stores. Roughly 50 percent of all Thanksgiving dinners are served from this source.

Though the basic foodstuffs of Midwestern cuisine seem homogeneous, there is diversity in its peoples and their foodways. Immigration and local environments make for distinctive regional and local foodways.

## Typical Meals

Native American peoples of what is now the Midwest used corn and gathered the same wild plants that people do now, wild rice and mushrooms, for example, but most modern foods came with later immigrants. The main English-speaking settlers followed two routes, the Ohio River in the south and northern trails. The southern areas of the Midwest tend to be hilly all the way from the Allegheny Mountains to the Missouri Ozarks. Settlers here came mainly from the American South and brought Southern, Appalachian foodways with them. Abraham Lincoln was one of them. In southern Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri, pioneer women cooked with corn more than other grains. Cornbread, johnnycakes, and hoecakes, all made from cornmeal, were cooked in skillets set over open fires, and later on in ovens. Wheat flour, usually mixed with butter or soured milk, was used to make biscuits. Meats were mainly pork, all raised, slaughtered, and processed by each family. All the family members participated in what was a major late-autumn or winter event in the farm year. Baked ham fried in home-rendered lard was a commonplace meal served with red-eye gravy (made from the pan drippings) and corn grits. Hunting, usually by the men in the family, also brought protein to the table. One of the most famous dishes is still burgoo, a stew made with squirrel and whatever other meats might have been available, all cooked up with vegetables in a big pot. Wild greens often accompanied meals. Desserts were usually fruit pies, the crusts made with lard, and sometimes the pies were fried in deep fat.

Modern food production has affected these old foodways. Lard, for example, has been largely replaced by vegetable shortening and margarine. But many of the same meal ingredients remain common in the southern, Ohio River, and Ozark regions. Grits and biscuits are still on breakfast tables, pork is more widely used than in other parts of the Midwest, and frying is king at home and in restaurants. Home cooks still make pies at home, and they are popular in restaurants throughout the Midwest. One specialty homemade treat is sugar pie, Indiana's official state pie, made of a simple pie crust, sugar, and cream.

English speakers, including Irish immigrants moving to the central and northern parts of the Midwest, came mainly from New York and New England. Their foods were based on beef, with some pork, and wheat, rather than the pork and corn common in the South. Roasted beef, stews, and fried steaks in various forms were the center of most meals along with potatoes, a cooked green vegetable, and gravy. Desserts were usually baked—pies, cakes, and lots of puddings. The main variation was chicken for Sunday dinner and, especially for Catholic families, fish on Fridays. Today, chicken is far more common on everyday dinner tables, but beef in various versions is still the dominant meat. Coleslaw, from a Dutch word for cabbage salad, was also a popular dish at home and in public settings, such as potluck meals and church socials. It is still made at home but is now mostly purchased from food stores. In the rural Midwest dinner was the main meal of the day, taken in the middle of the workday, at about noon. Supper was lighter, usually the dinner leftovers, served about 6 P.M. This word usage is still used in many parts of the Midwest, less so in cities, and early evening meals are still the rule.

A distinctive British food tradition came with miners from Cornwall from the middle of the 19th century. Working the tin, lead, copper, and iron mines in the hilly country of western Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula was hard work and needed hearty food. The women of mining families made pasties for the men to take to work. Pasties are turnovers made with meat and vegetables such as potatoes. Cornish pasties were then taken up by Finnish migrants, and these homemade savories remain as an identifier of regional food culture.

In the 1850s Germans began to arrive in the Midwest in large numbers and settled on farms and in cities. Although their own religions and dialects varied, their foods were similar. Sausages and beer are important elements of German food culture. Noodles and various potato preparations, along with vinegar-laced preparations such as sauerkraut and sauerbraten, are all part of German cuisine. So are several types of cakes and cookies. It was not unusual for wealthier people in cities and farm households to employ young German women as cooks, and in this

way, German foodways became part of Midwestern cuisine. Cities with large German populations—Milwaukee, Saint Louis, Chicago, and Detroit, among others—became famous for beer manufacturing. A light variety called pilsner became so popular that it is now what we think of as American beer. Beer is an important item in everyday American foodways. It is the most ubiquitous mildly alcoholic beverage, and few sporting events are held without it being served.

German food culture centers on sausages. Several of the many German types are now embedded in the Midwest. Bratwurst is a signature dish of Wisconsin: There is not a fair or ball game, picnic, or festival that does not feature bratwurst. These are often lightly boiled in beer, then grilled on an open fire, and finally served on a bun with German-based mustard and onions. The same holds for frankfurters (supposedly from Frankfurt in Germany) and wieners (Vienna sausages from Austria), which became hot dogs in the United States. Hot dogs are served in restaurants, at stands, and by street vendors. Chicago has distinctive hot dog styles as do Detroit and Cincinnati. Perhaps the most famous hot dogs of all come from a German-founded company in Chicago and Wisconsin, Oscar Mayer. Since the 1950s Oscar Mayer wieners have been eaten at home by children, an easily heated convenience food and an important part of Midwestern and American foodways.

One group of German speakers came to the Midwest in the decades around 1900 from Russia, where large numbers of them lived along a section of the Volga River. Settling in the Great Plains including Kansas and Nebraska, many lived on family farms, planting and harvesting the hard red wheat that they introduced to the Midwest. One dish they brought is called a *bierock* or *runza* and is virtually the state food of Nebraska. These are savory pastries, stuffed with cabbage and sometimes meat, that are traditionally baked at home as everyday food—eaten by the farm men in the fields—and for holidays. So popular are they that a chain of runza restaurants has spread across Nebraska.

Scandinavians from Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden immigrated in the 19th and early 20th centuries in large numbers. Minnesota, Wisconsin, parts of Michigan, and cities such as Chicago and Minneapolis acquired the food habits of these new settlers. Most of the food preparations were like those in the rest of the Midwest, heavy on meats and potatoes (potato sausage with white sauce is a classic homemade dish), with creamy sauces laced with lots of dill common. Several dishes remain as indicators of local culture and are still features of home cooking, especially on holidays. *Lefse,* a kind of thick bread, made with potatoes and cooked on a flat griddle, is one, and *limpa,* a rye bread made with cardamom, anise, citron peel, and some sugar, is another. Lutefisk is dried whitefish that has been soaked in water mixed with lye and then cooked. Almost no one except Norwegian Americans likes fish prepared this way, but that is what makes it culturally important. One dish that has translated to general Midwestern food culture is the Swedish pancake. Beginning about 100 years ago, this sweet pancake topped with berries and whipped cream was served in restaurants, and it has remained a popular breakfast dish, often after church services, ever since.

Eastern European foods and cooking have played a large role in Midwestern food culture. Czechs, Poles, Russians, and other Slavic-speaking people arrived with Ashkenazi (eastern European) Jews beginning in the last years of the 19th century. On farms across the Midwest and especially in the newly industrialized cities, American began to learn about Polish pierogi (Polish filled dumplings) and *paczki* (jam-filled doughnuts), Czech *kolache* (small pastries made with butter and filled with fruit), Jewish blintzes (thin pancakes rolled up with fruit or cheese fillings, served with sour cream), bagels, *biyalis* (a small, flat roll similar to a bagel but without a hole and topped with onion and poppy seeds), latkes (potato pancakes), and sausages of all kinds, including the (Jewish) all-beef hot dog. All of these can be found in Midwestern supermarkets, especially in cities where people of eastern European descent live. Pastries such as paczki and kolache are holiday treats often made in homes by several generations of women in the family: grandmothers, mothers, and daughters. They are a few of the foods that serve as family binders.

Italian immigrants have had the greatest impact on Midwestern foodways—and those in the United

States as a whole. Beginning around 1900, most came from the southern parts of Italy and Sicily, bringing a whole range of pastas, breads, vegetables dishes, and tomato-based sauces. Though most were poor laboring families, before too long they entered the food business. Small Italian restaurants and green grocers sprang up in Chicago and other main cities, and some dishes became part of Midwestern cuisine. Eggplant, zucchini, greater use of garlic than elsewhere, lettuce, tomato sauce, lasagna, spaghetti, and casseroles are everyday cooking in homes everywhere in the Midwest. Spaghetti and meatballs is an Italian American dish, unknown in the mother country but suited to hearty Midwestern home cooking. Surveys show that pasta of some kind, not counting macaroni and cheese, is served at home once or twice a week, and pizza appears more often than that. Pizza is another Italian dish that became Americanized. The Chicago version, a very heavy, cheese-loaded version called deep dish, has been served in restaurants since the late 1940s. It is one of the characteristic dishes of that city. The largest chain of pizza restaurants, Pizza Hut, was founded in Wichita, Kansas, in 1958. One very local traditional Italian food called *cudighi* is characteristic of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Invented for miners who worked in the Iron Mountain range in the 1930s by restaurateurs who came from northern Italy, this heavy, spiced pork patty sandwich can be made at home, but it is a common fast food for Yoopers, as the people there are known.

Two other important influences on Midwestern foods are African Americans and Latin Americans. In the early years of the 20th century and again just after World War II (post-1945), African Americans migrated from the Southern states to Midwestern cities in large numbers. In cities such as Chicago and Detroit some characteristic dishes came to be called soul food by restaurateurs in the 1960s. Southern fried chicken and fish, grits, greens, pork, biscuits, and certain cakes and pies are now staples in Midwestern cities, and ingredients are widely available in food markets. One important Southern food has crossed into general usage: barbecue. Around World War I, African Americans employed in the Kansas City, Missouri, region set up barbecue restaurants.



A backyard barbecue grill with pork meat on the slats and a bowl of homemade sauce on the side. (Eti Swinford | Dreamstime.com)

Today, Kansas City has dozens upon dozens of barbecue places and is world famous. Often made with a sweet, tomato or ketchup base, Midwestern barbecue has distinctive styles. It is made not only in restaurants but also at home, usually by men, as a type of backyard cooking or grilling. Weekends and holidays are the great days for such preparations, and often home-style barbecue cooks bring their creations to the many barbecue competitions held across the country.

People from various regions of Mexico entered the Midwest in the 1910s and settled to work in industrial towns and cities in small numbers. From the 1960s immigration increased exponentially not only in cities but also in the countryside, where more recent migrants work in agriculture. Many Mexican dishes have become Midwestern, eaten out or in the home. Tamale pies and taco casseroles are common home-cooked meals. Tacos and enchiladas eaten out of hand, loaded with Wisconsin cheddar cheese and not too spicy-hot tomato salsas, are regular fast-food dishes and are made at home. Often these come in ready-to-eat forms made by large food manufacturers. And there is hardly a sporting event that does not serve tortilla chips covered in a melted cheese-food product. From fine dining to small local restaurants run by newly immigrated families, Mexican food is now an important part of the region's foodways.

In many ways, Midwestern foodways are generically modern American with an increasingly global taste. But there are ongoing traditions of plain, hearty home cooking and regional dishes that set the Midwest apart from other parts of the United States.

## Eating Out

Eating out in the Midwest varies by locations, incomes, and taste. Public dining places range from expensive fine-dining restaurants run by celebrated chefs (Chicago is a world leader in these kinds of eating houses) to middle-income facilities, both locally owned and corporate places, such as Applebee's and Olive Garden, and fast-casual establishments, of which McDonald's, Big Boy, Culver's, and Pot Belly are some Midwest-based examples. In between are many ethnic restaurants, local diners, and quick fast-food places. Of the latter, quick food, the Midwest has types that are closely identified with their communities. Chicago hot dogs loaded with condiments, Detroit coney dogs covered in meat sauces, Iowa loose meat sandwiches (Maid-Rite is the best known), and Cincinnati chili are examples. Few people eat family dinners at these places, but all are very popular for lunchtime dining and midday snacking.

Ethnic restaurants are mainly found in urban areas. Once, this kind of dining was confined mainly to Italian, Greek, German, eastern European, and Chinese restaurants. Today, diners in almost any city can choose from a much wider variety of international places, from Mexican to African, varieties of Indian, and Southeast Asian, among the most common. Thai and Vietnamese restaurants are widespread, and in northern cities such as Minneapolis, Hmong cuisine is popular. Green, red, and *massaman* curries, *sate* (grilled meat on a skewer), spicy soups, papaya salads, *pho* (beef soup), and many noodle dishes are regularly consumed by Midwesterners. One savory noodle dish, pad Thai, is so popular that it has become Thai American.

In former days, before the national interstate highway system was fully established, many towns had their own local restaurants. Often, the food was sourced from the nearby countryside, especially during the growing and harvest seasons. Fried chicken, pot roasts, and meat loaf, with baked or mashed potatoes and some overcooked vegetable, followed by homemade fruit pies with cream, were favorites. Today, most of these kinds of eating places have been replaced by corporate chain outlets, whether burger or family sit-down eateries.

Two kinds of restaurants with local roots remain, both of ethnic origin. Many cities and towns in the Midwest have Greek-owned diners, often called "family restaurants." Diners such as these serve meals all through the day, with dishes ranging from pancakes, bacon, and eggs for breakfasts, to soups and sandwiches at lunchtime, to full-scale meals for dinner. A common joke is that "Grecian chicken" is the standard dish. These kinds of restaurants fill an important dining niche that was once occupied by several kinds of places, such as coffee shops, cafeterias, and locally owned small eateries.

A broad swath of the Midwest has been called "the chop suey belt." Chinese American restaurants number in the tens of thousands in the United States and make more money than the major hamburger chains. Hardly a small town in the Midwest is without one, and hardly a Midwesterner has never eaten chop suey and chow mein, sweet and sour pork or chicken, fried egg rolls and wontons, sweet and sour soup, and egg foo yong. In many respects, Chinese American dishes are as Midwestern as beef and potatoes.

## Special Occasions

Like all Americans, Midwesterners have plenty of holidays and festivals, all of them celebrated with the consumption of food in large quantities. Some celebrations are private, family affairs with meals, such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Passover. Others are both private and public, with family dinners and food served in public, examples being Eid al-Fitr (the end of the Muslim month of fasting), Asian New Year, and Easter. Other festivals are regular calendric events, such as the Fourth of July; state, county, and town fairs; and specific public food events, often called "Taste of ____." In most of them, Islamic fests excepted, alcoholic beverages are commonly served along with featured foods.

Thanksgiving is a uniquely American holiday and nowhere more revered than in the heartland from which so much of America's food comes. It is also an autumn harvest season fest. Roasted turkey is the centerpiece, usually stuffed with an herbed wheat or cornbread mixture, and accompanied by thick, fatty gravy made from the pan drippings. Served family style, meaning put in large bowls that are passed around the table, are mashed white or sweet potatoes, a green vegetable (particularly lightly boiled green beans), baked squash, cranberry sauce, bread rolls, and plenty of butter. There are also plenty of beverages. Desserts will usually be fruit pies, possibly mince pie, or a fruit cobbler, all served with ice cream. One variation of the standard table is the addition of macaroni in tomato sauce, or lasagna. Introduced by Italian immigrants around 1900, these dishes migrated to the African American and other communities to the point where Thanksgiving lasagna is not uncommon.

Virtually all of the foods at this table are the same as those on a Midwestern farm table a century ago. Potatoes, squash, green beans, cranberries, dairy products, fruits, and the turkey are all Midwestern products that can still be obtained fairly locally. If any single meal holds a Midwestern food identity, it is Thanksgiving.

Public fairs, the first held in Ohio in 1850, and food festivals are also occasions for plenty of eating in hearty Midwestern fashion. Fairs are often served by vendors who offer foods that can be found at similar events around the country: fried funnel cakes, doughnuts, hot dogs, hamburgers, and cotton candy, among many others. There are some special dishes that are either unique to one fair or another or characteristic of Midwestern food. Fried




A garish hot dog stand at a county fair in Ohio. (Dreamstime)

cheese curds, often breaded, remind us of Wisconsin, where they are a common snack dish; Indian tacos (fried bread filled with mildly spiced tomato sauce, ground hamburger, and shredded cheese) are Nebraska's and the Dakota's contributions to America's cuisine; and pork chops on a stick and roasted corn are examples from Iowa. Corn dogs (hot dogs coated in a cornmeal batter and deep-fried) are a specialty of the Illinois State Fair and are called Cozy Dogs named after a local restaurant that supposedly invented them (it did not). In Wisconsin, bratwurst is king, boiled in beer, then grilled on open charcoal fires, and served on a bun with grilled or fresh onions and German mustard. Apart from such sausages, ice creams, and candy, almost everything to be eaten at a Midwestern fair is deep-fried.

There are also many specialized festivals centered on regional foods. Mitchell, Indiana, and Taylorville, Illinois, among others, hold persimmon festivals in the fall of each year. This native American fruit is not commonly eaten today, but persimmon puddings and pies were staple dishes in early American cooking. Lake Snowden near Albany, Ohio is the scene of a pawpaw fest. A once-popular fruit, the pawpaw can be eaten fresh only for a short time and thus does not appear in supermarket produce aisles. Some food festivals are very large and cover varieties of foods. The world's largest is the Taste of Chicago, which draws more than 3.5 million visitors over a 10-day period in July. Foods, served mainly by the city's many ethnic restaurants, range from kebabs to sate, pizza, hummus, hot dogs, Italian beef, and, most famously, barbecues. So popular is this event that Midwestern cities such as Madison, Wisconsin; Cincinnati, Ohio; and many smaller towns and cities hold similar festivals with varieties of food that represent their own communities.

## Diet and Health

Ideas about diet and health among Midwesterners do not spring from religious tenets, with several small exceptions, but from modern science and common sense. This has not always been the case, since in the 19th and early 20th centuries folk medicine and folktales were often invoked to cure illness and promote physical health. One collection of folklore from the 1930s shows that some rural people believed that goiters (a painful swelling of the thyroid gland, usually from a lack of iodine in the diet) could be cured by hanging a warty frog around the victim's neck or by boiling a frog alive and rubbing the fat on the goiter. At the same time, many herbal medicines were concocted and used locally. Sassafras tea, for instance, was widely used as a healthful tonic after a long winter when "the blood thickened" and people wanted to cleanse their systems by purging themselves. Nonetheless, in the absence of scientific research, patent medicines were also widely used, most of them sold by "quack" (phony) medical practitioners who laced their potions with lots of high-percentage alcohol.

Diet has always played an important role in people's ideas about good health. Rural people looked forward to the first wild greens of the spring and ate them as "sallets." When the first cultivated lettuces appeared, they, too, were consumed as health foods. Similar ideas about the obvious connections between diet and health drove the earliest health reformers, the most famous being Sylvester Graham in the early 19th century. He believed that chemical additives to foods were harmful and so promoted eating wholegrain flours. His graham cracker was widely known, though nothing like the biscuit of the same name today. His ideas were taken up by the Kellogg brothers, whose sanitarium (literally, "healthy place") in Battle Creek, Michigan, became hugely popular. People who came to restore their health ate a special diet consisting of many vegetables and high-fiber foods. One of these was corn flakes, which the Kelloggs invented and one of the brothers marketed nationally. Thus began the breakfast cereal industry, many of whose products are still marketed as important to a healthy diet. Several of the major cereal producers remain as Midwest-based companies.

If eating a good breakfast is important to health, so are other dietary procedures and products. In the present day, people in the Midwest are as concerned about diet and health as they are in other parts of the country. Overweight to the point of obesity, high blood pressure, blood serum cholesterol as a danger to the heart, and cancers are among the chief worries. As a result, and despite the notion of Midwestern

food being filled with saturated fats, sugars, and high amounts of gluten, people have changed their diets in the last several decades. Fat and salt consumption has decreased, and leaner meats and fruits and vegetables are eaten in greater amounts than ever. Obesity levels and other health statistics in the Midwest are about in the middle range for American states—about 26 percent of the population. Life expectancy is also at the national average. This compares favorably with statistics from 1940 when the surgeon general of Illinois issued a report stating that the average life expectancy of an average male in the state was 60 years old, without hope of it ever getting better.

The single dietary factor leading to ill health in the Midwest is poverty. The urban poor's inability to find and pay for healthy foods (high-carbohydrate, high-fat, and high-salt foods are cheaper) is matched by the lack of money for similar foods among the rural poor. Obesity rates for such people in the Midwest are among the highest in the United States, ranging up to 36 percent. Obesity leads to many other health issues, from heart attacks to respiratory problems. Individuals know this, but their circumstances do not allow for healthier diets. As such, this is a major public health problem in America's agricultural heartland.

*Bruce Kraig*

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# United States: New England

## Overview

New England comprises six states in the northeastern corner of the United States: Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. The most densely populated New England state is Massachusetts, where more than 6 million of New England's 14.3 million residents live—about 810 per square mile. The most sparsely populated states are Maine, with a total population of 1.3 million (41 per square mile), and Vermont, where there are about 620,000 residents (67 per square mile). Because Massachusetts played a central historical role in the move for independence from Great Britain, has a large, dense population, and is home to New England's largest city, Boston, the state is often viewed as the focal point of New England and as emblematic of the Yankee personality: resourceful, independent, ingenious, and innovative.

The ancestral roots of New England frame its historic food traditions. From north to south the emphasis differs somewhat: Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine's roots are predominantly French Canadian, English, Irish, and German; Massachusetts's ancestors are Irish, Italian, French or French Canadian, and English; Rhode Island's are the same as Massachusetts but include Hispanic and Portuguese ancestry; and Connecticut has more Italian ancestry than its northern neighbors, followed by Irish, English, German, and French or French Canadian ancestry.

Although New England remains largely Caucasian, its historical food culture is overlaid by and enriched with food cultures introduced by modern immigrants. Blacks/African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, and Asians are growing populations in all the New England states. Massachusetts is home to many Central and South Americans as well, particularly Brazilians; Rhode Island has Liberian, Nigerian, and Ghanaian citizens; South Americans, Portuguese, and immigrants from former Soviet countries live in Connecticut. Supermarkets, grocery stores, and restaurants reflect this ethnic diversity.

New England has projected an energetic presence into American food culture and technology from its early days to modern times. The first cookbook authored by an American, *American Cookery,* was written by Amelia Simmons in 1796 and originally published in Hartford, Connecticut. In the 1960s, Massachusetts resident Julia Child brought French cooking into American homes with her book *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* and her public television cooking show, *The French Chef.* Many culinary tools were created in New England that embody the concept of Yankee ingenuity. For example, the first can opener was patented in 1858 by Ezra J. Warner of Waterbury, Connecticut. David Goodell of Antrim, New Hampshire, built a business on an improved apple parer that he invented in 1864. Turner Williams of Providence, Rhode Island, improved on the hand-operated egg beater by adding a second, interlocking beater in 1870, and his appliance became known as the Dover egg beater. Potato breeders in Vermont and Maine created hundreds of new potato varieties in the late 19th century. In the 1940s, following World War II, the home microwave oven was developed in Massachusetts as weapons manufacturer Raytheon looked to diversify its product portfolio. The Cuisinart food processor was invented

in 1973 by Greenwich, Connecticut, native Carl G. Sontheimer.

The development of speedy global trade in all kinds of foodstuffs has flattened the distinctiveness and seasonality of everyday New England cookery in a broad sense by making a wide range of foods available year-round—similar to what any American can purchase in any local supermarket. Traditional New England foods that were once consumed on a daily basis due to the limitations of the seasons and of supply, such as baked beans, boiled puddings, salt pork and salted fish, breads and puddings made of cornmeal and rye flour, molasses, and seasonal fruits and vegetables, are now foods that are eaten by choice rather than necessity and that form the region's culinary identity. Many native foodstuffs, dishes, and foodways distinguish New England from other regions in the United States. Festivals, tourism, holidays, and family traditions acknowledge, support, and celebrate regional, traditional, and seasonal foods such as blueberries, strawberries, cranberries, and apples; corn, squash, and beans; lobsters, clams, oysters, mussels, and cod; maple syrup; and cheddar cheese. The Thanksgiving feast is a keystone of American identity that is based on the colonial-period New England harvest festival.

## Food Culture Snapshot

In the 21st century, New Englanders spend more than half their food dollars, or about 10 percent of their net income, on meals prepared at home. They spend about 40 percent of their food dollars, or about 5 percent of their net income, on meals away from home.

Among foods purchased for home preparation, meats predominate, particularly poultry and beef. Following meats are fresh fruits and vegetables; cereals and bakery products; frozen prepared meals and other foods; canned and packaged soups; potato chips, nuts, and other snacks; condiments and seasonings, such as olives, pickles, relishes, sauces, and gravies; baking needs; other canned and packaged prepared foods, such as salads and desserts; and dairy products such as milk, cream, cheeses, sour cream, and buttermilk. Because of the time constraints imposed on families in which both parents are working, and even in single-person households where the priority is to spend less time in the kitchen and more time pursuing leisure activities, prepared meals are convenient, popular, and responsive to current trends and fashions in nutrition.

Like most Americans, New Englanders tend to do their shopping at supermarkets, and in urban areas they can shop online and have groceries delivered to their homes. Until the 1990s, independent grocers played a strong role alongside growing supermarket chains. But with the consolidation of supermarkets, independents and smaller grocers have a decreasing presence except in rural areas. In rural areas, independent grocers are more common.

As supermarkets penetrate a greater share of the market, at the same time New Englanders place increasing value on locally grown foods. Natural-foods supermarkets highlight organically grown, native, seasonal foods, as well as heirloom varieties of produce and breeds of poultry and livestock. Many shoppers seek organic produce, meat, poultry, baked goods, and dairy products at indoor and outdoor farmers' markets that operate year-round, fueled by a strong regional organization of organic farmers and gardeners. Supermarkets that recognize the growing consumer interest in local and organic foods also carry items from such producers. Smaller boutique markets emphasize locally grown or manufactured foods, from fruits and vegetables to breads and other baked goods, meats, poultry, cheeses, wines, beers, and soft drinks.

New Englanders have grown more health conscious in the 21st century and less physically active than their forebears. Dietary choices reflect the trend in the consumption of smaller quantities of meat and fats and greater quantities of fruits, vegetables, and grains than the preceding generations consumed. A typical breakfast might be fruit with dry cereal and milk or yogurt, or eggs and toast. A commuter might pick up a bagel with cream cheese or—on the heavier side—a breakfast sandwich with egg, ham or sausage, and cheese on the way to work. Coffee, tea, or citrus juice is commonly consumed with breakfast.

Lunches are light, perhaps prepared at home and brought to work or sent with children to school: a sandwich or soup, perhaps with a salad, accompanied by a soft drink, juice, or water. Dinners typically include a roast or broiled meat, a starch, vegetables or a salad,

and sometimes a dessert. Casseroles, pastas, and other one-dish meals are also common, often accompanied by a salad or vegetable. Prepared meals bought at a supermarket, either fresh or frozen, are also common fare. New Englanders tend to drink wine at home more than any other alcoholic beverage, and they enjoy tea and fruit juice as their primary nonalcoholic drinks.

## Major Foodstuffs

The geography of New England provides a rich landscape for growing and harvesting foodstuffs. With more than 6,000 miles of tidal shoreline and U.S. fishing rights that extend 200 miles from shore, its waters yield abundant fish and shellfish. The inland countryside offers an environment that supports both large- and small-scale farming as well as having the climate and soils necessary to produce the forage needed for dairy farming. Although the growing season is short, the income per farmed acre for all six New England states is among the top five regions in the country.

Colonial and Revolutionary New England was largely rural, and its economy was rooted in agriculture as a source of capital to support its developing economy. Growing urban populations in Boston and Salem, Massachusetts; Newport, Rhode Island; and Portsmouth, New Hampshire, provided markets for farm goods. The fish and shellfish industries played a large role in New England's economy as well as on its dining tables. The codfish was so abundant in colonial times that it became a symbol of economic prosperity in New England. A gilded cod carved of wood has graced the State House in Boston since 1784, and the cape of Massachusetts is known as Cape Cod.



Lobsters and clams steam over hot rocks at an annual clambake in Cape Cod, Massachusetts. (National Geographic | Getty Images)

Contemporary New England agriculture and fishing are minor players on the national level, but the significant crops, fish, and shellfish of the region form a large part of the New England cultural and culinary identity. Its major crops—those for which its states are among the top 10 in acres harvested nationally—include wild blueberries, cranberries, raspberries, strawberries, apples, pears, pumpkins and other squashes, and potatoes. It has the largest number of maple trees tapped for syrup in the United States and also maintains a large inventory of milk goats and milk cows. Maine is known for American lobster and is the location of the majority of American lobster landings in the United States. Oysters, soft-shell and hard-shell clams, mussels, shrimp, scallops, and crab come from New England waters, as well as cod, haddock, bass, flounder, tuna, halibut, and many other fishes. Local and seasonal delicacies such as New England eggs and poultry, smelts, Maine shrimp, fiddlehead ferns, and wild or farmed mushrooms tend to stay in the region.

Maple sap is processed into maple syrup in the spring and is strongly identified with Vermont. Cow, goat, and sheep milks are made into butter, cheese, ice cream, and other dairy products by dozens of local and regional dairy processors. Berries are sold fresh in their summer season locally, as well as canned, frozen, baked into pies and muffins, and processed into jams and jellies. The apple harvest begins in early fall, when young, fresh apples are at their peak of flavor. As fall progresses, apples become cider and hard cider, jelly, and pies. Pumpkins are sold fresh and also processed, canned, and made into pies. From May to October, many varieties of potatoes are sold fresh or processed into frozen French fries and other potato products; beans are baked with molasses and pork and canned or sold dried for home cooking. Most fish and shellfish are exported, but regional demand and local festivals that celebrate fishing and shellfishing,

such as the annual lobster festivals in Maine and New Hampshire, are helping to keep more of the catch local.

## Cooking

Classic New England cookery is known for being simple, spare, seasonally based, and not highly spiced. Everyday modern New England cooking is much the same. Modern refrigeration and preservation have reduced the need for emphasis on seasonality, but certain iconic New England dishes that are distinguished by their style of cookery remain ritual around the seasons. More ethnic influences are evident in some of the variations on classic New England dishes, particularly in southern New England.

New England kitchens typically differ from urban to suburban/rural in the amount of space available—urban kitchens tend to be smaller—but major appliances are the same for the most part. In some of the more rural kitchens, a wood-burning cookstove/oven may serve the triple purpose of cooking, heating the room, and heating water, in addition to an electric or gas stovetop and oven used solely for cooking. Suburban and rural kitchens, given the luxury of space, serve as a center of the household, where socializing and family activities other than cooking take place. Like most modern American kitchens, any New England kitchen will have a gas or electric stovetop and oven, a refrigerator, a sink, a dishwasher, and sometimes a garbage-disposal system in the sink. Microwave ovens, mixers, toasters and toaster ovens, food processors, slow cookers, and other small appliances are common.

Eating in modern homes can take place in both formal and informal rooms. Informal eating usually happens in the kitchen. When entertaining or having a special meal, a dining room that is separate from the kitchen is used. In smaller, urban apartments, often there is only one multipurpose dining area.

Cooking outdoors is very popular in New England in the summertime. Summer is the backdrop for the classic clambake or lobster bake that takes place on rocky shores, sandy beaches, or backyard grills. New Englanders were slow to adopt the clambake tradition from Native Americans, rejecting shellfish as "savage" food, but once they accepted the tradition, many variations cropped up. The basic menu comprises hard-shell or soft-shell clams, potatoes, onions, and corn, and it may include lobster and fish. Other additions reflect ethnic influences, such as *Saugys* in Rhode Island, which are veal-based wieners that are known for the "snap" of their natural casings; Italian sausage; linguica (Portuguese sausage); and, sometimes, tripe. Clambakes are most often community gatherings or celebrations—a favorite for Independence Day.

There are many ways to assemble a clambake. One method popular along the Maine coast, where the focus is more on lobsters but soft-shell clams are almost always included, is to build a fire on a rocky shore, in a U-shaped hollow in the rocks that is open on one end, and over which a thick metal sheet can be laid. When the metal is heated, rockweed is piled on top. Also known as bladder wrack, rockweed is an intertidal seaweed that holds a great deal of moisture and imparts a unique flavor to the bake. Live lobsters are laid down in the first layer, followed by a layer of rockweed, then soft-shell clams that have been placed in mesh bags, then another layer of rockweed, followed by corn on the cob. All is topped off with a final layer of rockweed and a sheet of wet canvas; then seawater is poured over the whole. A bakemaster watches over the bake, stokes the fire, and determines when the shellfish and corn are done. Eaten outdoors at tables covered with newspaper, the bake is often accompanied by hot rolls or bread and potatoes. Bowls of melted butter are set out for diners to dip lobster and clams into, and everyone eats with their hands, tossing the shells into common shell bowls. Blueberry pie, made with the tiny, sweet, wild blueberries that are native to Maine and served with vanilla ice cream, and strawberry shortcake, made with a biscuit-style shortcake and sugared native strawberries topped with whipped cream, are perennial favorites for dessert.

Fall and winter cookery features hearty one-pot meals, stews, and chowders, from the traditional Yankee pot roast or New England boiled dinner to fish or clam chowder or oyster stew. Scallops and tiny sweet Maine shrimp appear in the markets from December to February. A popular way to eat Maine

shrimp is to bake them whole in a hot oven until just done, separate the head and tail, and suck the shrimp meat from the tail. Another winter delicacy is smelt: small, silver fish with sweet white flesh. Fished through holes bored in the ice at the mouths of tidal rivers from December until March, often by local fishermen in small fishing shacks set up on the ice, the smelts are cleaned, coated in a mixture of flour, cornmeal, salt, and pepper, and skillet-fried. Smelts can be finger food or eaten with utensils, either plain or with a squeeze of lemon or dip of tartar sauce.

In the springtime, fiddlehead ferns appear in local markets, along with dandelion greens, rhubarb, and morel mushrooms. Fiddleheads, which are the young coiled heads of the ostrich fern, are blanched or steamed and then tossed with butter. A particularly delicious spring treat is to sauté the fiddleheads with the morels of the season or other mushrooms.

## Typical Meals

New England meal patterns follow the same sequence through the day as meals across the United States: breakfast, which is typically a light morning meal; lunch at midday, which again tends to be on the lighter side; and dinner, the main meal of the day and also the heaviest. People who do physically demanding work are likely to consume heavier breakfasts and lunches than people who work in a more sedentary environment.

Meat, potatoes, and a vegetable or vegetables have long characterized the typical New England main meal. Usually the three elements are cooked separately, as in the New England boiled dinner of corned beef, potatoes, carrots, and turnips. Sometimes they are cooked together, as in a Yankee pot roast.

**Yankee Pot Roast**

Season a 4-pound top sirloin roast generously with salt and pepper. Heat some oil, bacon drippings, or other fat in a large, heavy-bottomed saucepan, and brown the roast on all sides. Pour a quart of boiling water over it and cover closely. Simmer as gently as possible for 2 hours, or until the roast is tender. Add peeled onions, carrots, turnips, and potatoes, cut into large pieces. Cook till the vegetables are tender; then remove the meat and vegetables from the pan and thicken the cooking liquid with 2 tablespoons of flour mixed smoothly with a little cold water. If necessary add more water while the roast is cooking so that there will be enough sauce to cover the vegetables.

It is useful to look at a typical day's meals in the early 19th century to note both the departures in modern eating as well as some of the traces of meals and foodways from the past that are carried into the present. Compared to the meals of preindustrial New England, contemporary meals are smaller and simpler. For example, an early 19th-century farmer's breakfast during the working week might include meats, such as sausages, ham, souse (pickled pig's ears, snouts, cheeks, and feet), or fried pork, and eggs, or pork and apples with a milk gravy, served with boiled potatoes. Salt mackerel and shad might be soaked overnight and then boiled. Baked goods served could include johnnycake (cornmeal and water) or "rye and Indian" bread made from rye flour and cornmeal, and possibly pie.

In the 21st century, a weekend breakfast or brunch—a combination of breakfast and lunch—might be on the heavier side: a breakfast meat, eggs, toasted bread, biscuits or pancakes, and fish cakes. Brunch is more a meal to be enjoyed at leisure and for the pleasure of eating than a practical meal, and it recalls the abundance of a farm breakfast. A typical weekday breakfast would be lighter, more expedient, and pragmatic, as already described: fruit with dry cereal and milk or yogurt, or eggs and toast. A commuter might pick up a bagel with cream cheese or—on the heavier side—a breakfast sandwich with egg, ham or sausage, and cheese on the way to work.

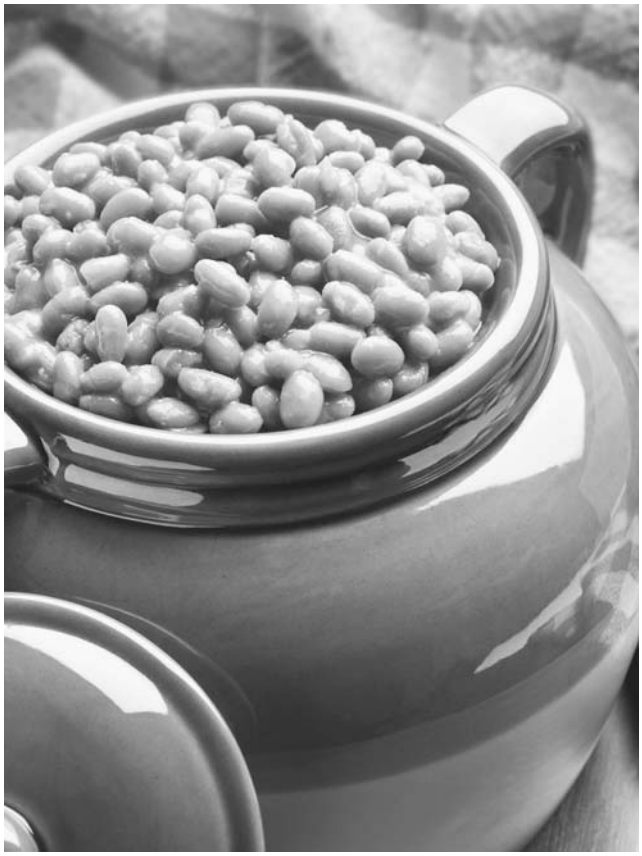
The 19th-century midday meal was known as dinner, and it was usually the big meal of the day and on Sundays could be a time for guests to visit and join in. The meal usually consisted of a roast, which was turned on a spit in front of the fire and could be tended by a child if necessary. Pies were frequent fare—baked in quantity in wintertime and frozen in a cold room, then thawed as needed for dinner.

Weekday dinners might consist of boiled corned beef and pork with a savory pudding and seasonal vegetables as well as cellared vegetables such as turnips, cabbage, pumpkins, and squashes.

Lunch is the modern New England midday meal. Like breakfast, it can be a bigger, more lavish affair on weekends as a brunch. During the workweek, it is normally a lighter meal consisting of a sandwich, a soup, or a salad, possibly composed of leftovers from the previous evening's meal, and perhaps a piece of fruit or other sweet for dessert.

Supper was the 19th-century evening meal, comprising the leftovers from dinner, along with such dishes as hasty pudding (made of cornmeal and water) with milk or molasses, brown bread and milk with stewed pumpkin, baked apples, berries when in season, pie, gingerbreads, and custards. Often, a pot of baked beans would be started on Saturday to eat the next day on the Sabbath.

Dinner is the modern evening meal and is the main meal of the day: a meat, a starch, and vegetables or a salad. Sunday dinner is usually the most elaborate of the week—a special roast meat or fowl—and for many the leftovers from Sunday become Monday's dinner. Dessert is not as common a coda to the evening meal as it once was and is often served only on special occasions. Baked beans, often called Boston baked beans because of their close identification with Boston, are still widely eaten today.



Baked Beans in a classic Boston Bean Pot. Beans are slow cooked in an oven with a variety of seasonings, some including onion, molasses, and sugar. (iStockPhoto)

**Boston Baked Beans**

The first published recipe for baked beans appeared in 1829 in *The Frugal Housewife,* by Lydia Maria Child, and called simply for a pound of pork to a quart of beans with a sprinkling of pepper and nothing more. The following is a more flavorful recipe for Boston baked beans.

Rinse and pick over 1 pound of great northern or white navy beans. Soak in cold water overnight, then place the beans and soaking liquid in a large cooking pot. Simmer the beans until the skins burst when you blow on them—15 minutes or longer. Then place the beans in an earthenware baked bean pot, leaving the liquid simmering on the stovetop. Press a whole, peeled onion into the beans. Score deeply a ¼-pound piece of salt pork, and press it into the beans over the onion. Mix together ½ cup molasses, 1 teaspoon dry mustard, and ½ teaspoon each of salt and ground black pepper. Pour over the beans, then pour in the simmering water, adding more if necessary to cover. Put the lid on the pot, and bake in a preheated 250°F oven for 5 hours or until the beans are tender and cooked through. Baked beans are traditionally served with brown bread.

## Eating Out

There is a long history of eating out in New England. The ordinaries, taverns, and public houses of the 17th–19th centuries are the earliest examples of Americans eating away from home in a setting other

than that of friends or family. Taverns were located on the owner's property, often next to the town's meetinghouse. In their earliest days they were meant to serve residents primarily, and then travelers. A typical tavern would provide food, drink, lodging, and space for horses, carts, and often livestock. The tavern or public house was a place of entertainment, social interaction, and business transactions for local residents, and a welcome stopping point for those bringing produce or livestock to market and for people traveling by stagecoach.

Early tavern fare was not known to be particularly good or abundant, but as the relationship of the tavern became more intertwined with the food trade, which was becoming more entwined with the alcohol trade, the food improved. Travelers could stop for a meal or a drink, or stay for lodging as well. Meals were served at communal tables and at appointed times. Dining rooms were separate from the taprooms where alcohol was served, and the better taverns served a breakfast that often included steaks, fish, eggs, cakes, and tea or coffee. Smaller taverns or country taverns might include pies, puddings, and cider at breakfast. Dinner was served in the afternoon and was a similar menu to breakfast. Supper was the evening meal, again with the table laid similarly to breakfast, but including cold fowl, ham, and other meats. Cider, ale, and distilled spirits, particularly rum, were served. As the urban landscape developed, taverns became hotels with a greater emphasis on finer dining and decor.

The American diner had its start in Providence, Rhode Island, in the early 1870s as a horse-drawn, mobile freight wagon that provided take-out sandwiches, pies, hot meals, and coffee outside the offices of the *Providence Journal* after restaurants had closed for the night. An entrepreneur in Worcester, Massachusetts, improved on the freight wagons by creating wagons with indoor seating and, later, indoor cooking that catered to late-night workers and public events. The improved diners added items such as baked beans, hamburgers, and clam chowder to their menus. By the early 20th century, public health and safety concerns necessitated that the mobile wagons become set in permanent locations, and by 1940 the classic stainless steel diner had been developed. Diners might serve New England fare, or, if situated in an ethnic neighborhood, the menu would reflect the local tastes. Many diners survive from their heyday, and they continue to be popular casual eating-out destinations today.

In modern New England, a large diversity of options exist for eating out, from diners, carryouts, and clam shacks to upscale restaurants serving traditional New England fare, restaurants serving modern interpretations of traditional dishes, and a large diversity of ethnic eateries, from the very informal to very upscale.

Though dining-out options are myriad, residents of the Northeast comprise the smallest market share of Americans who do eat out, and when they do, it is most likely to be for dinner at a full-service restaurant. Tourism fuels a healthy restaurant economy, and when visitors come to New England, they look for traditional New England fare, particularly seafood.

Informal clam shacks and lobster shacks abound along the coastal areas, where diners can enjoy a shore dinner of lobster, steamed soft-shell clams, and corn on the cob; deep-fried seafood of all kinds including scallops, shrimp, oysters, and particularly clams; stuffed clams or *stuffies,* which are large hard-shell clams (quahogs) that are chopped, mixed with breadcrumbs and herbs, and stuffed back into the shells and baked—a Rhode Island specialty that can also be embellished with chorizo for a Portuguese touch; or lobster rolls and crab rolls, in which the lobster or crabmeat is mixed with a little mayonnaise and served on a toasted New England–style hot dog bun. Chowders can be "clear" clam chowder, a Rhode Island specialty that is not enriched with cream, or creamy chowder, which is common from Massachusetts north. Chowders can also be tomato-based, seen most often south of the "chowder line" in Connecticut, where clear or creamy New England clam chowder becomes tomatoey Manhattan clam chowder. Shacks usually offer hard ice cream, soft-serve ice cream, and various kinds of ice cream drinks that are known variously as milk shakes (Connecticut), frappés (Maine, Massachusetts), or cabinets (Rhode Island). Frozen lemonade—a slushy lemon drink of Italian origin—and

coffee milk—milk with sweet coffee syrup—are popular treats in Rhode Island.

**Stuffies**

Scrub 12 live quahogs and rinse in cold water to remove grit. Bring a couple of inches of water to boil in a large pot, add the quahogs, and simmer covered for about 5 minutes, or until the clams open. Set clams aside to cool. Reserve the steaming liquid.

Finely mince a quarter of an onion, a stalk of celery, 2 cloves of garlic, and half a bell pepper. Sauté in olive oil with a big pinch of dried thyme until tender. Stir in 1½ to 2 cups of dried breadcrumbs and transfer to a large bowl.

Remove the quahog meat from the shells, and reserve the shells. Check for grit and dip into reserved steaming liquid to rinse if necessary. Chop roughly and add to vegetable and breadcrumb mixture, along with a handful of finely chopped parsley, the juice of half a lemon, a dash of Worcestershire sauce, and salt and pepper to taste. Mix thoroughly, adding 1 beaten egg and clam juice or strained steaming liquid as needed to moisten the mixture.

Heat oven to 425°F. Spoon the stuffing mixture into the shells and press it flat. Arrange the stuffed shells on a baking sheet, and bake for about 15 minutes until browned. Serve with lemon wedges.

Diner food often includes deep-fried fish and shellfish, but diners round out their offerings with other traditional New England foods such as pickled tripe, roast turkey with cranberry sauce and mashed potatoes, Yankee pot roast, and New England boiled dinner. Oyster stew, lobster stew and lobster bisque, and clam, fish, or corn chowder are also diner staples. Desserts run the traditional gamut, especially including pies of all kinds, which feature New England fruits and vegetables in season such as strawberries, rhubarb, blueberries, apples, raspberries, and pumpkin. Indian pudding, a dessert made of milk, cornmeal, and molasses that dates back to colonial times, is another popular item.

New England dishes are showcased in upscale settings as well. Locke-Ober restaurant in Boston, which has been in operation since the 1870s, offers such classics as lobster stew, lobster bisque, and clams casino. Clams casino—an elegant version of the stuffie composed of tiny cherrystone clamshells stuffed with a mixture of clam meat, breadcrumbs, bacon, onions, and bell peppers—was supposed to have been created in the early 20th century by the Little Casino in Narragansett, Rhode Island. Locke-Ober and many other restaurants throughout the six New England states use native New England ingredients and traditional recipes in innovative ways as well, sometimes putting a new spin on an older recipe or creating a recipe that folds a native ingredient, such as lobster, into a nonnative form, such as an Asian spring roll.

New England's native foodstuffs have often had a regional identity appended to them on menus or in markets that reflects a pride of place and skill in growing or manufacturing foods and food products. As the European concept of *terroir*—the influence of local growing conditions on the flavor of produce—has spread and combined with New England's pride in its products, native foodstuffs are increasingly and more specifically identified with their place of origin. Fish and shellfish are described in terms of where they are harvested, so diners or shoppers will often see "Point Judith" (Rhode Island) describing their calamari or "Duxbury" or "Wellfleet" (Massachusetts) or "Damariscotta River" (Maine) and dozens of other place-names describing their oysters. Produce of all kinds is often described by the name of the area where it was grown—for example, Roxbury Russet, Newton Pippin, and Rhode Island Greening apples. Cheeses are not simply varieties such as cheddar or chèvre, they are from specific dairies or creameries, often by one of the scores of licensed artisanal cheese makers in New England, particularly Vermont.

Besides traditional New England fare, there are many ethnic restaurants in New England, particularly in the southern states and more urban areas where immigrants are more concentrated. Italian, Portuguese, Caribbean, Brazilian, Mexican, Asian, African, and other ethnic eateries abound.

## Special Occasions

The iconic American holidays of Independence Day and Thanksgiving spring from New England history.

Many of the foods and rituals surrounding the celebration of these holidays are still in practice today.

A secular, patriotic, and publicly celebrated holiday, Independence Day, or the Fourth of July, does not have a set feast menu associated with it, though drinking alcoholic beverages has always been associated with the Fourth. Toward the beginning of the 19th century, some towns began to hold public dinners featuring seasonal foods following the public speeches, parades, music, and other events of the day, and before the fireworks that capped the celebration. Picnics became very popular in the mid-19th century, either at home and eaten outdoors or packed up to take to a pretty spot. Cold meats, pickles, cheese, olives, bread, and pies were popular packable fare for a Fourth of July picnic, much as they are today. Later in the 19th century, whole poached salmon served with peas and new potatoes, or lamb with peas, appeared on celebratory menus, as did roast pig, clambakes, and chowders. Salmon, peas, and potatoes are the most iconic of New England Independence Day feasts.

The modern Thanksgiving celebration is based, at least in spirit, on a "harvest home" feast that was held on the occasion of bringing the last of the harvest home. The popular belief is that the first Thanksgiving occurred at Plymouth in 1621. The association is thanks to the efforts of Sarah Josepha Hale, who was the editor of *Godey's Ladies' Book.* Hale campaigned for many years to have Thanksgiving declared a national holiday and finally succeeded in 1863 when she persuaded President Abraham Lincoln to proclaim the last Thursday of November as a day of thanks. In 1865 she wrote and published an editorial in *Godey's* that connected the events at Plymouth in 1621 with the first Thanksgiving holiday, and with it she captured the popular imagination.



Thanksgiving dinner placed on table. (Corel)

The basic Thanksgiving menu that Americans cook up in their homes each November is composed of foods that are considered native to America, and are also native to New England. Roast turkey is the main course, and it is such a strong symbol that vegetarian substitutes made of tofu or wheat gluten are shaped to look like a turkey. Stuffing, often with oysters or chestnuts; cranberry sauce or relish; potatoes, usually mashed and served with gravy; and pumpkin, apple, or mincemeat pie for dessert are the classic elements of a modern Thanksgiving feast.

In the springtime, Vermont, Maine, and New Hampshire have sugaring-off parties to celebrate the end of maple syrup season. The centerpiece of the party is sugar on snow, maple syrup that is boiled to 230 degrees and poured in thin ribbons over bowls of snow, where it firms to a caramel-like consistency. The intensely sweet maple candy is served with sour pickles, which can be eaten alternately with the candy to cut through its sweetness. Raised doughnuts are traditionally served alongside.

In southern New England, saint's day feasts are held from June to October and feature Italian American food that is associated with immigrants from various regions of Italy. One feast of note is the Fisherman's Feast in Boston, established in the early 20th century. Sicilian fishermen pay respect to Madonna del Soccoroso (Our Lady of Help) and bless the fishing waters. The streets are filled with people, music, and vendors selling Italian goods and souvenirs as well as Italian sausages, calamari, pizza, pasta, and other Italian and Italian American treats.

## Diet and Health

Research has established that a lack of physical activity coupled with unhealthy eating patterns contributes to obesity and a number of chronic diseases, including some cancers, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes. Compared with people who consume a diet with only small amounts of fruits and vegetables, those who eat more generous amounts as part

of a healthful diet are likely to have reduced risk of chronic diseases.

Americans in general have been growing heavier over the last several decades, which can be viewed in part as a trend related to living in an affluent and well-nourished society. Changes in technology have allowed a more sedentary lifestyle; in most families, both parents usually work, and the proliferation of fast food and other convenience foods, which tend to be high in fat and simple carbohydrates, has also contributed to the increasing size of the American waistline.

Compared with other Americans, New England residents are among the least obese; relatively few have a body mass index, or BMI, of greater than 30. Obesity trends upward from south to north. New Englanders struggle more with overweight—a body mass index of 25–29.9. Here, the trend is reversed from north to south, with more overweight people in southern New England. The total population who are either overweight or obese is about 60 percent. Finally, about 40 percent of New Englanders are neither underweight nor overweight.

The optimal diet for maintaining good health, as established by governmental and independent studies, includes at least five servings of vegetables and fruits per day. While only about 30 percent of Americans report consuming the recommended amount, the New England states are in the top 20 of those who do so. Exercise is also a key component of good health. About 20 percent of New Englanders are considered to be at risk for health problems due to a lack of physical activity.

In recent years, medical practice in the United States is placing a greater emphasis on treating disease by prescribing lifestyle changes in diet and exercise as an adjunct to medication and other therapies. Complementary and alternative medicines are becoming more integrated into traditional medical practice. Such medicines and therapies include homeopathy and herbal medicines, mind-body balancing practices (such as yoga, meditation, or tai chi classes), acupuncture, massage and relaxation techniques, and energy healing therapies. The National Institute of Health created the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine in 1999 to advance research on such therapies and make authoritative information available to the public.

*Meg Ragland*

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# United States: The Pacific Northwest

## Overview

The Pacific Northwest is the North American geographic region along the northeastern edge of the Pacific Ocean. It is predominantly limited to the states of Washington and Oregon in the United States and the province of British Columbia in Canada, though it often includes Idaho, western Montana, southeastern Alaska, and northern California. This region's major metropolitan areas consist of Vancouver, British Columbia; Seattle, Washington; and Portland, Oregon, and the region's total population is approximately 16 million people. Many people from the region refer to it as "Cascadia"; in fact, talk of secession has been taking place in the region for nearly as long as Washington and Oregon have been part of the United States. Today, the region is still strongly identified with political liberalism and radicalism, though this is primarily concentrated in urban areas; most of the rural areas in the region are politically conservative.

Located along the Pacific Ocean, the Pacific Northwest is highly representative of America's so-called melting pot of cultures, and this is highly evident in the variety of ethnic cuisines commonly available throughout the region. Though the majority of the regional population is comprised of Caucasians of European descent, Latinos and Asians (immigrant and naturalized) are the second and third most populous. Of the provinces of Canada, British Columbia has the highest proportion of visible minorities, comprising 24.8 percent of the total population. Vancouver, British Columbia, has the second-largest Chinatown district in North America (after San Francisco, California), and 45 percent of all Japanese living in Canada live in British Columbia—more than in any other Canadian province. People of Asian origin also dominate foreign immigration to Washington. Commensurate with the situation in other regions of the United States, Latinos comprise the majority of immigrants to Oregon and the second-highest proportion of immigrants in Washington, representing the majority of the agricultural workforce in the Pacific Northwest.

Indigenous peoples (the aboriginal peoples of Canada, American Indians, and Alaska Natives) also make up a central part of the Pacific Northwest's cultural identity, though their populations in the region are only slightly higher than national averages. Alaska purports to have the region's highest proportion of indigenous people, with approximately 20 percent of Alaskans identifying themselves as American Indian or Alaska Native. Many Pacific Northwest indigenous people strongly advocate upholding their ancestral hunting and fishing rights in order to observe tradition as well as for subsistence.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Matt and Sarah Roberts are a married couple in their early thirties. They're originally from the Midwestern United States but moved to Portland, Oregon, after graduate school to find work and live in a region that was more representative of their active, environmentally conscious lifestyle. Matt works at a large software company, and Sarah works for an environmental engineering firm. Their lifestyle and diets are typical of so-called DINK (dual-income, no kids) couples. They live in an older house in a neighborhood approximately

10 to 15 minutes from downtown and have a small backyard where they grow a few vegetables and have an old apple tree that was probably planted sometime in the 1920s. Rosemary grows well in the Mediterranean climate of the Pacific Northwest, and like many homes in the area, the Roberts have a large shrub of it in their front yard.

Instead of making large shopping trips to stock up on groceries, they usually make daily or near-daily shopping trips to their neighborhood grocery store, health-food store, or farmers' market, if the weather is nice. These trips are often made on the way home from work, to pick up ingredients to prepare that night's dinner.

The Roberts try to shop sustainably whenever possible—for them, this means buying primarily locally produced, organically grown meats and produce. Conversely, they make occasional visits to one of the Asian supermarkets that are common in their neighborhood. Imported Asian produce and packaged products are readily available in Pacific Northwest urban centers, thanks to the large number of immigrants from all over Asia. Many of these Asian products, such as tofu, miso, and a variety of Asian vegetables, are produced locally.

Sarah, like many young North American women, watches her caloric intake and leans toward a low-fat diet. She sometimes skips breakfast but tries to at least have a piece of wheat toast with peanut butter and a cup of green tea before she runs out the door to catch a bus to work. She usually brings lunch from home (often last night's leftovers) so she can have something healthy and save money. Matt usually opts to buy breakfast from some coffee shop near his workplace—usually a bagel or English muffin sandwich with scrambled egg and ham for breakfast (with a latte), and he will usually buy a burrito, a slice of pizza, or maybe some Vietnamese beef noodle soup for lunch. Dinner, at around 8 P.M., is often eaten in front of the television. Tonight's dinner will be wild-caught Alaska salmon fillets with rosemary-roasted baby potatoes and a green salad with some sliced apples on top. Sarah enjoys a glass or two of wine with dinner, and Matt usually has a microbrewed beer (in warmer weather he might opt for a domestic brew such as Pabst Blue Ribbon).

## Major Foodstuffs

### *Seafood*

Fisheries are a major economy in the Pacific Northwest, and this is reflected in the abundance of locally available seafood including wild-caught Pacific cod, albacore tuna, sole, Alaskan halibut, Dungeness and Alaskan king crab, pink shrimp and spot prawns, and more than 25 varieties of oysters raised in commercial beds in the chilly bays and sounds of Washington and British Columbia. But no other fish is more central to the cultural and regional identity of the Pacific Northwest than the salmon (*Oncorhynchus* spp.): Chinook, coho, and sockeye salmon and steelhead trout (a close relative of salmon) are the region's most important fish species, being generally available to commercial and/or recreational anglers during most of the year. Due to a variety of factors, populations of wild salmon have been on the decline for years, warranting the protection of some species under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. This decline has recently led to restrictions on commercial fishing in the Pacific Northwest.

### *Agriculture*

Agriculture and viticulture are also important Pacific Northwest economies. The majority of North America's pomes and stone fruits (specifically sweet cherries) are produced in the Pacific Northwest,



Fresh grilled sockeye salmon steak dinner with asparagus and lemon wedges. (Sally Scott | Dreamstime.com)

particularly in Washington's Yakima Valley. The region's volcanic soils and mild, maritime climate are also ideal for growing berries and grapes. Berries in the *Vaccinium* genus such as huckleberries, cranberries, and blueberries thrive considerably in the deep, acidic soils of the region, though raspberries, blackberries, currants, gooseberries, and kiwi berries (a small, hairless variety of kiwi) are all commercially grown in the Northwest as well.

Hazelnuts (colloquially called *filberts*) are another regionally specific agricultural product. Only Turkey produces more hazelnuts than the Pacific Northwest, though Oregon produces vastly more than Washington or British Columbia (approximately 23,000 tons per year, compared to 100 tons in Washington and 360 tons in British Columbia).

### *Potent Potables*

Oregon's Willamette Valley and Washington's Yakima Valley are second only to Germany in world production of hops, and this is reflected in the production and consumption of microbrewed beers in the Northwest. Since the 1980s, more than 360 microbreweries (breweries that produce fewer than 20,000 barrels per year) and brewpubs have become established in Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia.

Viticulture is a somewhat recent agricultural development in the region, taking off in the 1990s; however, the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia, Yakima and Walla Walla counties in Washington, and Yamhill County in Oregon are now considered to be comparable to grape-growing regions of France and Italy for their *terroir*. Enology and viticulture are highly commercially viable in the region because of economies of scale, with the region's wineries being typically small and family owned, compared to other major wine-producing regions such as California's Napa Valley.

More recently, connoisseurs of hard alcohol have followed suit, and artisanal distilleries have begun to comprise a niche market in the Pacific Northwest—of the approximately 100 distilleries in the United States, 20 are microdistilleries located in Oregon, producing fragrant gins, vodkas, and eaux-de-vie (literally, "water of life"; fruit brandy), all from locally produced ingredients. One Oregon microdistillery even produces an *eau-de-vie poire* with a small pear grown inside the bottle.

### *Dairies and Creameries*

The Willamette Valley in northwestern Oregon is known as the "grass seed capital of the world." While most grass seeds are neither fit nor intended for human consumption, this achievement does point to the fact that the Pacific Northwest is good at growing grass, which is a preferred food of dairy-producing livestock (cows, sheep, and goats). As a result, the region is home to more than 80 artisanal creameries as well as several large-scale commercial dairies. Many independent cheese makers in the region rival the highest-quality European creameries.

### *Wild Foods*

In addition to fishing, hunting is a popular pastime in the Pacific Northwest, and the region supports large populations of big game such as deer and elk (also antelope, moose, and bear, though these are hunted less frequently); upland birds such as turkey, grouse, quail, pheasant, partridge, and ptarmigan; and waterfowl including several species of ducks and geese. Though some hunters in the region participate for sport and keep trophies of their game, the majority are subsistence hunters and eat what they kill (trophy hunters are generally tourists to the region and are treated with disdain by locals). Many hunters utilize the numerous small-scale meat processors located throughout the region to butcher large game and convert meat scraps into sausage.

Gathering wild foods, particularly mushrooms and berries, is another hobby that has been growing in popularity over the past several years. The Pacific Northwest provides excellent habitat for expansive thickets of several species of wild huckleberries and an abundance of choice edible mushrooms such as chanterelles, boletes (known in Italy as porcini or in France as cèpe), oyster mushrooms, chicken-of-the-woods (a variety of *maitake*), cauliflower mushroom, white "Oregon" truffles, and matsutake. Recreational

and commercial mushroom hunters tend to return to favorite spots year after year, the locations of which are often closely guarded (sometimes with firearms). Stories of mushroom hunters shooting their own family members during disputes over prime picking territories are common, but national forests and private properties closer to residential areas tend to be relatively safe for casual pickers.

## Cooking

Like in most regions of North America, home cooking in the Pacific Northwest is typically performed by women, though men still comprise the majority of cooks and chefs in commercial kitchens. Most Pacific Northwesterners learn to cook from their mothers or other elder women in the family. Nearly all households come equipped with a standard four-burner electric or gas range, electric oven, and refrigerator/freezer. The majority of households also have an electric toaster and a microwave oven, though many health-conscious people in the region avoid using microwaves due to concerns that microwaves destroy the nutritional content of foods (these concerns have yet to be substantiated by scientific evidence).

Many households also equip themselves with electric slow cookers. These appliances allow busy people to safely and conveniently cook time-consuming foods like tougher cuts of meat and stews on a countertop without supervision (e.g., while away at work). Other small electric appliances such as toaster ovens, electric blenders, and food processors are also fairly common.

Sautéing in vegetable or olive oil and baking/roasting are two of the most commonly employed cooking techniques, likely due to their ease and relatively low health impacts. Vegetable fats tend to be preferred over animal fats for general cooking purposes.

Most households in the Pacific Northwest also have a means of outdoor cooking, such as a propane or charcoal grill. When weather permits, many people in this region prefer to cook outdoors and frequently have social gatherings centered around the cooking and consumption of foods. These gatherings are often erroneously called barbecues. Unlike the more regionally significant true barbecue of the southern United States, wherein proteins (generally large cuts of pork or beef) are slow-cooked for several hours (or even days) over indirect heat at low temperatures, Pacific Northwest "barbecues" consist of grilled foods that are generally prepared fairly quickly over direct heat and may include more vegetarian-friendly options such as hot dogs and burgers made from soy protein, fish fillets, and skewered vegetables.

One technique that is intrinsic to the Pacific Northwest is cooking fish, typically salmon, on a plank of cedar or alder wood over a direct heat source such as a flame or coals. This cookery method was adopted from indigenous people of the region, and wood planks specifically made for grilling salmon are readily available in the region. Smoking fish and meat for flavor and as a means of food preservation is still a fairly common practice in the Pacific Northwest, especially among recreational anglers. This has been particularly true since the advent of small electric, gas, and charcoal smokers and smoker-grills intended for home use.

Many younger people in the Northwest draw culinary inspiration from foreign cultures and are somewhat more adventurous with flavor than their parents were, preferring to prepare their foods with fresh rather than canned or frozen ingredients, and they tend to use more fresh herbs, garlic, chilies, and flavored oils and vinegars. It is also common to see younger home cooks prepare vegetarian or vegan versions of foods typically associated with a high amount of animal fats and proteins, such as making Southern-style biscuits and gravy using soy sausage and almond milk instead of pork sausage and cow milk for the gravy, or a Reuben sandwich with tempeh (a fermented soybean cake) instead of corned beef.

## Typical Meals

Families tend to eat meals together, sometimes at the dinner table in the kitchen or dining room, but often in the living room or family room, seated in front of the television. Breakfast and dinner are usually eaten at home, but lunch is almost always eaten away from home (at school or at the workplace), at least on weekdays.

As in much of the United States and Canada, most people in the Pacific Northwest tend to eat fast breakfasts before school or work, such as cold breakfast cereals with milk; store-bought frozen waffles reheated in the toaster and served with a sweet topping such as maple syrup, nut butter, or a fruit spread; oatmeal with a bit of nuts or dried fruit; or a cup of yogurt that contains fruit. Toast and eggs are another common quick breakfast.

Among working people, weekdays in the Pacific Northwest often start with a cup of coffee and a bagel or pastry from a neighborhood coffee shop (though many people skip eating breakfast and opt only for coffee). The Pacific Northwest is the birthplace of Starbucks, and espresso and coffee drinks have been building in popularity in the region since the 1990s. Now, nearly every town in the Northwest has at least one place that serves espresso drinks—even rural gas stations have instant latte machines.




A busy Starbucks store in Seattle, Washington. (StockPhotoPro)

Preferred lunchtime fare in the Pacific Northwest is not particularly distinct from lunch foods across the United States and Canada. Women are more likely than men to bring lunch from home, often leftover dinner from the previous night. Many large companies in the region are sited on campuses that include employee cafeterias where restaurant-style foods are prepared by experienced cooks.

Most children eat a lunch that was prepared by one of their parents and brought from home, though many children instead eat lunch foods that were purchased in their school cafeterias. Children from low-income households may qualify for free lunches that are provided by their schools; these are the same lunches that are served to the rest of the student body, but they are offered at no cost to the child's family. Some public school districts also offer free breakfast to children from low-income families.

Dinners usually consist of a protein (meat or fish), a starch (pasta, rice, or potato), and a vegetable. This can be as simple as roasted chicken with mashed potatoes and green beans or as elaborate as coffee-rubbed venison tenderloin with polenta and wild mushrooms, depending on the cook's interest and skill in cooking. Sometimes these components are combined into a hearty soup or stew and served with a bread product such as a biscuit (a chemically leavened quick bread) or a dinner roll (a yeast-leavened bread). Soups, stews, and chowders are considered comfort food in the Northwest and are favored during the cooler, rainy months between October and April.

### Thai-Spiced Salmon Chowder

This chowder combines the best of the Pacific Northwest: local salmon and Southeast Asian spices. Corn's sweetness pairs wonderfully with salmon.

*Serves 4–6*

#### Ingredients

2 tbsp butter

1 tsp olive oil

2 oz salt pork (or 2 slices bacon)

1 celery rib, diced

½ jalapeño, seeded and minced

½ c red onion, diced

¾–1 lb waxy potatoes (such as Yukon gold), diced

1 c frozen corn

1 can creamed corn

1 c coconut milk

3½ c fish stock (or chicken stock)

2 bay leaves

½ tsp grated fresh galangal (or ginger )

3 star anise pods

2 tbsp basil chiffonade

8 oz coho salmon fillet, skinned and deboned

Salt and pepper to taste

Garnish: arugula chiffonade or chopped cilantro

In a large, heavy-bottomed pot, melt the butter over medium-high heat. Add the olive oil to prevent the butter from browning, and add the salt pork. Let the pork render for a minute, then add the celery, jalapeño, and onion (mirepoix). Toss in a pinch of salt so the mirepoix sweats (avoid browning the mirepoix).

Add the potatoes and frozen corn, and stir to coat with the buttery pork fat. Add the creamed corn, coconut milk and stock, the bay leaves, the galangal, and the star anise. Simmer over medium low until the potatoes are tender, approximately 20 minutes.

When the potatoes are nice and tender, turn off the heat and remove the bay leaves and star anise. Slice the salmon into bite-sized pieces and add to the soup with the basil. The latent heat from the soup will cook the salmon.

*Pairs well with a peppery, slightly acidic Pacific Northwest Pinot Gris.*

## Eating Out

Breakfast and brunch establishments are highly popular in the Pacific Northwest. These are typically inexpensive neighborhood restaurants that also serve lunch and dinner, but they include some higher-end prix fixe restaurants that serve sophisticated weekend brunch items. Waits for a table at popular breakfast spots may exceed an hour on Saturday or Sunday. Typical brunch offerings consist of a scramble (eggs scrambled with vegetables and/or meat), home fries (fried or roasted cubed potatoes), and a piece of toast. This will typically be served with locally roasted coffee. Many people in the region also enjoy a breakfast cocktail during weekend brunch, such a screwdriver (orange juice with vodka), a Bloody Mary (tomato juice with vodka and a dash of horseradish and Worcestershire sauce, garnished with a rib of celery or pickled vegetables), or a mimosa (orange juice with champagne or Prosecco).

Recently Portland, Oregon, has received some notoriety for its populations of food carts. Food carts are a popular alternative to indoor dining establishments, and they tend to be clustered in parking lots in neighborhoods or streets that receive ample foot traffic. Food carts usually specialize in one type of cuisine, including Kazakh, Czech, Lebanese, Indian, Japanese, Vietnamese, Thai, and Mexican, though some are more generalist (e.g., "Mediterranean"). Some carts specialize in one type of food, such as barbecue, hot dogs, crepes, handheld pies, waffles, or Belgian-style *frites* (thin French fries). Neighborhood carts are often open very late to cater to crowds spilling out of closing bars, whereas the majority of the food carts located in the downtown area are frequented by lunch crowds and close after lunch.

Asian restaurants are widely available and usually provide diners with a substantial meal for little money—Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, and Indian restaurants are all common in the Pacific Northwest. In Vancouver, British Columbia, alone, there are more than 130 Japanese *sushi-ya* (sushi restaurants) and *izakaya* (restaurants serving small plates of grilled foods like *yakitori* and *robata*) that are tucked into every nook and cranny, providing diners with an experience reminiscent of wandering the streets of Tokyo. Vietnamese beef noodle soup (*pho*) houses are abundant in the Pacific Northwest, serving fragrant bowls of star anise–

spiked beef broth with thinly sliced beef and rice noodles. Adventurous eaters can usually order more traditional ingredients such as beef tendon or tripe. Authentic Hong Kong–style Chinese restaurants are also widespread, offering freshly roasted duck or pork, fried *yi mein* (thin wheat noodles, colored yellow with lye water), and seafood hotpots, in addition to traditional Cantonese dim sum.

The Pacific Northwest is also well known for its fine-dining establishments, though not all of them are necessarily expensive. These restaurants tend to be staffed with young, often heavily tattooed chefs who have their own style of cooking, though many rely on the implementation of European techniques with local, seasonal ingredients. An appetizer such as French-style pork pâté (made with local pork) served with house-pickled baby heirloom vegetables is an example of this marriage between technique and product and is commonly featured on menus. Most fine-dining and higher-quality casual establishments, even if not inherently French, also feature a salad of roasted beets with (local or French) bleu cheese, the ever-popular steak frites as an entrée, and a *pot de crème* (a chilled custard) or seasonal fruit dessert. Fresh seafood, if featured on the menu, tends to be obtained from local waters, and restaurants specializing in seafood dishes are fairly common.



A tattooed chef puts the finishing touches on a dish in a Portland restaurant, Oregon. (Richard Ross | Getty Images)

## Special Occasions

Major holidays and events such Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Eve, birthdays, and weddings are celebrated in the Pacific Northwest much in the way they are celebrated elsewhere in the United States and Canada. Meals on holidays and other special occasions are typically casual gatherings of family and friends.

Canadian Thanksgiving is celebrated on the second Monday in October, whereas American Thanksgiving is observed on the third Thursday of November. There are not really any components of the Thanksgiving feast that are specific to the Pacific Northwest; the meal typically focuses on roasted turkey served with cranberry sauce and a variety of side dishes that traditionally consist of mashed potatoes with gravy, stuffing (cubed bread cooked with onions, celery, and poultry broth, with variations in ingredients occurring among households, such as the use of oysters, cornbread, dried fruits, or nuts), green bean casserole (green beans baked with cream of mushroom soup or a béchamel sauce and topped with fried onions), and candied yams (technically a sweet potato, baked with butter and brown sugar, and often topped with marshmallows). Vegetarian households may prepare a product called tofurkey, which is a soy-based, savory loaf that bears little resemblance to turkey. Dessert traditionally consists of pumpkin pie, and an additional fruit pie might be served as well.

The Pacific Northwest does not have any particular meal or foods associated with New Year's Eve. Like elsewhere in the United States and Canada, the event is often celebrated with champagne or another sparkling white wine (or apple cider), with a toast to the new year being traditionally conducted at the stroke of midnight.

Canada Day (Canada) and Independence Day (United States) are national holidays observed on July 1 and July 4, respectively. Being summertime holidays, these are typically celebrated with outdoor parties—backyard cookouts and camping excursions are both common. Foods typically consumed during these holidays include grilled chicken (with or without barbecue sauce), hamburgers, hot dogs or sausages, corn on the cob, potato or macaroni

salad (usually with a mayonnaise-based dressing), baked beans, and watermelon. Cold beer is often consumed in copious amounts during these holidays. The foods typically eaten during these holidays are similar to those eaten at American parties that celebrate sporting events.

Birthdays and weddings are typically associated with cake. A birthday cake may be homemade or purchased at a bakery or grocery store and is usually one or two layers of cake with frosting. If the cake is for a child, a dusting of colorful sugar sprinkles, toy figures, or other accoutrements may decorate the cake. One candle representing each year the honoree has been alive is another traditional topping; the birthday boy or girl then attempts to blow out the candles, and tradition speaks of a wish being granted if all candles are extinguished with one breath.

Wedding cakes tend to be much more elaborate, consisting of multiple tiers of (usually white) cake with buttercream icing or fondant and decorated according to the bride and groom's preferences and the season during which the wedding is being held (floral themes are common, though an autumn wedding may include colorful leaves as part of the decor). In the Pacific Northwest, this tradition is typically observed in the same way as in other parts of the United States and Canada, though whimsical alternatives to a cake may include a cupcake "tree" (a selection of cupcakes arranged on a tiered platter) or doughnuts arranged in a pyramid. One Portland, Oregon, doughnut shop caters weddings and allows wedding ceremonies to be conducted in their bakery. In addition to the traditional wedding cake, many weddings include a groom's cake. The groom's cake is usually a smaller, informal cake that is decorated in a way that represents the groom's interests or personality. Groom's cakes are usually a flavor other than vanilla.

Though Christmas is a Christian holiday, it is widely celebrated by non-Christians in the Pacific Northwest. At Christmastime, homemade cookies and candies are typically prepared and exchanged among friends and family members. Christmas dinners are granted a little more creative license than Thanksgiving, with no specific protein being symbolic of the holiday. Some households prepare another roasted turkey, while others serve a pork roast or roast beef. Side dishes vary as well. Coconut cream pie and desserts with a peppermint and chocolate component are fairly representative of American and Canadian Christmas celebrations.

Hanukkah, like most Jewish holidays, has symbolic foods that are traditionally eaten in observance of the holiday; Hanukkah's food is latkes. Latkes are fried potato pancakes that are often served with sour cream and/or applesauce. Children may be given *gelt,* which are thin chocolate wafers wrapped in gold foil to resemble coins. Dinner will often focus on a beef brisket. A traditional Hanukkah dessert, particularly among Sephardic Jews, is *sufganiot* (a raised donut dusted with powdered sugar).

Easter dinner is traditionally a ham, though lamb may be served instead (the lamb is viewed in Christianity as a symbol of Christ). Eggs are also symbolic of Easter, though this predates Christianity as a pagan fertility symbol. Hard-boiled eggs are colored with food-grade dyes and then hidden by adults for children to hunt for and place in a basket lined with plastic grass. These eggs can then be eaten as a snack or breakfast following Easter. Egg-shaped candies are also traditional gifts to children during the Easter celebration, along with chocolate bunnies (another remnant of pagan fertility celebrations).

The Passover seder is a ritual feast that has six symbolic components: The *maror* and *chazeret* are bitter herbs, symbolizing the bitterness and harshness of the slavery that the Jews endured in ancient Egypt. The maror is usually grated horseradish, and chazeret is usually a lettuce leaf. *Charoset* represents the mortar used by the Jewish slaves to build the storehouses of Egypt and is usually comprised of a blend of chopped nuts, apples, and sweet spices. *Karpas* is another vegetable (usually parsley, though celery or potato is sometimes used) that is dipped in saltwater or vinegar to symbolize the tears shed during slavery. *Beitzah,* a roasted egg, is a traditional symbol of the festival sacrifice (or may be interpreted as a symbol of mourning the loss of the Temple of Jerusalem). *Z'roa* is a roasted lamb shank bone that acts as an additional symbol of the Passover sacrifice.

Traditional seder dinners usually include gefilte fish (cakes of chopped whitefish), matzo ball soup, and brisket or veal, though modern households often prepare different versions of these dishes.

## Diet and Health

The Pacific Northwestern diet is comparable to that in the rest of the United States and Canada, though it leans toward slightly healthier choices. The Pacific Northwest has a high proportion of vegetarians and vegans compared with elsewhere in the United States and Canada. Its major urban centers (Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver) are considered to be the top three vegetarian-friendly cities in North America according to surveys by the nonprofit organization People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). Vegetarians and vegans in the Pacific Northwest tend to simply eat meatless versions of the same foods that omnivores eat or meat substitutes that are usually made of soy or textured vegetable protein (TVP). They also tend to rely more heavily on Asian cuisines, deriving much of their protein intake from tofu (soybean curd originally from China but now widespread across Asia), tempeh (fermented soy or grain cakes from Indonesia), and seitan (solid wheat gluten from China, Japan, and Vietnam). Many vegetarians add nutritional supplements to their foods as seasonings—Bragg Liquid Aminos (a salty-tasting source of 16 amino acids that resembles tamari or soy sauce) and nutritional yeast flakes (a source of B-complex vitamins that is often used for flavoring cheese substitutes) are in nearly every vegetarian kitchen in the Pacific Northwest.

Ecologically conscientious or so-called green lifestyles are common in the Pacific Northwest, and this is reflected in the dietary choices that are made



People shopping for farm-fresh produce, including peaches and plums, sold by a local farmer in Eugene, Oregon. (Lee Snider | Dreamstime.com)

by many of its residents. Organically grown produce and free-range, organic meats are readily available at most mainstream grocery stores, and specialty stores that provide a wide selection of locally grown meats and produce are relatively common, even in smaller cities. Many heirloom varieties of vegetables and fruits are grown and sold in the region, and these are more available and affordable than in other parts of the United States or Canada. Many of the region's restaurants have received accolades for taking advantage of the Pacific Northwest's bounty by showcasing local flora and fauna on their menus. Some restaurants even have their own farms.

Farmers' markets are another successful means of closing the gap between farm and table, in that the people who grow or raise the foods can sell directly to the consumer. Most neighborhoods or districts in each urban center have a farmers' market (usually open one day per week), and even smaller urban areas (especially college towns like Eugene, Oregon, and Olympia, Washington) tend to have at least one farmers' market. Community-supported agriculture, or CSAs, enable individuals or families to purchase a yearly share of a local farm's seasonal produce (sometimes delivered directly to their homes), while simultaneously providing income to small, organic farmers.

*Heather Arndt-Anderson*

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# United States: The South

## Overview

The American South, a cultural and political region of the United States, is loosely defined as the 11 states of the former Confederacy. They are historically linked by the devastating shared experience of defeat in the American Civil War in which they defended chattel slavery, followed by decades of poverty. The South, larger geographically than Germany and France combined, and home to a population of roughly 100 million Americans, is considered as having one of the most vibrant of American cuisines.

Five states border the Atlantic Ocean: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida; four others stretch westward from Florida, on the Gulf of Mexico: Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. Two other states, Tennessee and Arkansas, connect on opposite sides of the Mississippi River and stretch westward from Virginia to Texas. The region also includes the southern parts of the border states to the north that still allowed slavery when the Civil War began, stretching westward from Delaware across Maryland, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Missouri. (These border states remained in the Union, with West Virginia—a mountainous area with few slaves—separating from Virginia over the issue of secession and becoming a new state in 1863.)

The mass migration of several million African Americans (the black diaspora) during and after the post–Civil War period of Reconstruction created large pockets of Southern cultural infusion, including the blues, jazz, and food, in Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Los Angeles, New York City, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere. The migration accelerated after World War II and the early years of the civil rights movement.

Many nationalities converged over time into the American South already inhabited by Native Americans: Spaniards and French arrived beginning in the 16th century, later moving into Louisiana, where they became known as Creoles, a designation ultimately including Caribbean free persons of color. In the 17th century, the English settled in Virginia and South Carolina, followed by Scots, Scots-Irish, Irish, and Welsh. French Huguenots took advantage of John Locke's declaration of religious freedom to settle in Charleston, joining sons of Barbadian planters, capitalist-minded Quakers, Jews, and German Lutherans.

African slaves of many tribal groups and nations were shipped across the Atlantic, especially from Senegal. French Acadians settled in Louisiana after great tribulation. Diverse groups of Germans settled in concentrated areas, as did smaller numbers of Italians and Greeks. Small groups of Chinese were brought over to work building the canals of Augusta, Georgia, and as laborers in the Mississippi delta.

The latest influx of primarily white inhabitants began with the advent of air-conditioning. The civil rights movement was the catalyst for the South's full reunion with the rest of America—sometimes referred to as the Second Reconstruction, with both white and black in-migration; much of the latter returning natives were lured by family ties and the opening of new job opportunities. Late 20th-century additions include Latinos, primarily from Mexico

and Central America, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans. Each of these nationalities brought with them their cultural and food heritage, melding primarily African and European cuisines shared by blacks and whites.

The South is frequently referred to as the Bible Belt of the United States, as religion has always had a strong influence. Overwhelmingly Protestant, ranging from High Episcopalians to the dominant Baptists, Methodists, and a host of fundamentalist groups, it includes expanding Catholic and Jewish populations as well as Amish and even Baha'i. Little religious prejudice still exists, in part due to numbers of interfaith marriages. (Greeks and Jews were accepted by whites on the basis of skin color.) In more recent years the Muslim (including Nation of Islam) population has slowly expanded, with its incumbent dietary restrictions and often little-noticed morgues in larger cities.

African Americans tend to be concentrated among African Methodist Episcopal (AME), American Baptist, and other historically black congregations. Although many white and black congregations are technically integrated, it is often said that Sunday is the most segregated day of the week. Religious institutions frequently provide extensive social activity and child care, as well as providing a meal after the service. African American communities are known for their church food, with such delicacies as fried chicken and sweet fruit pies, providing a refuge from de facto segregation, but in both white and black congregations volunteer and home cooking is being replaced by church kitchen staffs.

The region's late 20th-century in-migration has muted the level of religiosity of the South, but religion continues to play a more significant role than elsewhere in America in shaping political and social attitudes.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Betty Sue and Ryan Bradley live in Atlanta, Georgia, part of the middle class returning from the suburbs to live in central cities after their children are grown. Betty Sue is a pharmacist, and Ryan is an attorney. The Bradleys' lifestyle and foodways are typical of college-educated Southerners. Their food interests are broad, including foods of many nationalities. The only meals where they eat together are evenings and weekends. The average Southerner eats three meals a day and several snacks.

The Bradleys rise at 6:30 each weekday, with Ryan going for a two-mile run. Betty Sue prepares a breakfast tray holding Diet Coca-Cola; cereal with raisins, pecans, and bananas; and commercial fresh Florida orange juice, returning to bed to eat. Ryan makes a weekly refrigerator batch of low-fat yogurt, canned pineapple, raisins, pecans, wheat germ, and oatmeal, eating a bowl of it each day along with a sliced banana, a glass of orange juice, and coffee brewed from freshly ground beans. He eats while briefly watching the news before work.

Midmorning, at work, Betty Sue sips a caffeinated Diet Coke and eats a snack of peanut butter crackers; Ryan drinks his third cup of coffee, accompanied by an oatmeal cookie or a doughnut. For lunch, Betty Sue eats in a small restaurant, ordering a Caesar salad topped with ham followed by a dessert of fried beignets sprinkled with powdered sugar. (For her grandparents this was the major meal of the day and was called dinner.) Ryan meets a client for a lunch of curried chicken with sautéed turnip greens, rice, and a wedge of caramel cake for dessert. This traditional cake is light and has a caramelized icing. Both Betty Sue's and Ryan's desserts are typical Southern indulgences that busy people rarely fix at home.

Midafternoon, each will eat a sweet or a piece of fruit. After work they have a glass of wine and a snack of cheese straws (baked from cheese, flour, and butter) or celery filled with pimento cheese (a mixture of pureed pimento peppers, mayonnaise, garlic, and onions.)

At 7 P.M., the Bradleys cook dinner (formerly called supper) together. Betty Sue tosses a salad of fresh arugula, basil, thyme, lemon balm, or mint from their garden with dried cherries, a slice or two of Parmigiano Reggiano cheese, and a sliced pear, covered in a vinaigrette dressing of sherry vinegar and olive oil. Ryan grills a fresh-caught Carolina red snapper. Betty Sue cooks rice, which she grew up eating daily, and steams a green vegetable. This main meal of their day is cooked and eaten within 45 minutes, before they each turn to their computers for work and relaxation.

Their children are college students studying away from home at Southern colleges. One is eating fried chicken while drinking a highly caffeinated, sugared soda. The other is eating fried local farm-raised catfish, hush puppies (fried balls of a cornmeal mixture), and coleslaw. Even with their eclectic, international diet chosen from the broad array of foodstuffs of the world, historically Southern food still resonates with the Bradleys and their children.

Although the Bradleys' day is sprinkled with reminiscences of Southern meals, it is very different from what either Betty Sue or Ryan ate while growing up. Both their mothers cooked a substantial breakfast each morning of biscuits, eggs, sautéed ham with red-eye gravy, and grits (cornmeal mush). Lunch, consisting of an apple or banana and a peanut butter sandwich taken to school in a lunch box or paper bag, was washed down with sweetened iced tea, called sweet tea to differentiate it from unsweetened tea, or chocolate milk from a carton. Dinner was eaten with the entire family sitting down at the table in the formal dining room. It might have consisted of rice, macaroni (traditionally spaghetti is called macaroni), or potatoes; a green vegetable; pork chops; and canned fruit on top of iceberg lettuce topped by commercial mayonnaise, followed by pudding for dessert.

The Bradleys are in marked contrast to the many that remain mired in extreme poverty in the South. This includes both blacks and whites, with the blacks proportionally more disadvantaged than whites. Poverty affects their dietary habits considerably, with more reliance on heavily salted, fat-laden processed foods due to their need to work one or more jobs, leaving less time for grocery shopping and cooking.

## Major Foodstuffs

The American South's major foodstuffs vary according to the geography, weather, soil content, and primary origin of its immigrants. The early English colonists brought cattle, chickens, and pigs; curries and spices; and wheat, oats, and other grains, along with root vegetables and beans. Africans, through ship captains and others, brought peas, okra, melons, eggplants, *benne* (sesame) seeds, and rice. Indigenous foods included beans, squash (including pumpkins), *poke "salat"* or pokeweed (supplemented by English and African greens), muscadine and other wild grapes, plums, wild game, and seafood. Tomatoes from Central and South America were early arrivals.

Growing seasons vary from two or three in the lower South to one in mountainous areas. Until World War II, the South was predominantly agrarian. Many homes had a milk cow and chickens. This was due in part to the lack of refrigeration, which made food highly perishable, and was a way for the family to save money. Milk was left overnight to thicken and sour (*clabber*) before being churned into butter. Buttermilk, the residual liquid, was used as a tenderizer for soaking chicken, in cooking (the combination of buttermilk and baking powder caused a higher rise in baked goods), and as a beverage.

The primary breads are cornbread and biscuits. The rise of commercial baking powder in the mid- to late 19th century enabled Southerners to cook quick breads such as biscuits and cornbread, which require less time in a hot kitchen than yeast breads, which were reserved for special occasions. By the end of the 19th century, low-gluten soft-wheat flour was milled from winter wheat, producing delicate, airy cakes, pies, and cheese straws, with baking (originally adapted from English cookbooks) considered an art. Coconuts brought in as ballast for incoming ships gave rise to coconut cake as well as the coconut industry. Pastries include pecan, lemon, lime, and fruit pies.

**Food Processor Biscuits**

2½ c self-rising flour

½ c shortening or lard, frozen

¾–1 c milk or buttermilk

¼–⅓ c melted butter

¼ c all-purpose flour for shaping

Preheat the oven to 500°F. Add 2 cups of the flour to a food processor using the steel or pastry blade. Cut one half of the shortening into ¼-inch cubes; cut the second half into ½-inch cubes and refrigerate. Add the cold ¼-inch cubes to the food processor. Pulse one or two times until it is like cornmeal;

add the remainder of the shortening and process until pea sized. Add the ¾ cup of milk. Pulse 2 or 3 times until the shortening is cut in and the milk is incorporated, looking a bit like cottage cheese. The mixture should loosely cling to a finger. Add more flour or milk as needed. Lightly flour a work surface. Pat dough to ¼ inch thick. Fold in half. Pat out again. Fold again. Repeat two more times. Pat out ¼ inch thick. Brush half the dough with the melted butter. Fold the dough over to make it 4 inches thick. Dip a 2-inch round metal cutter into the flour. Cut out rounds in the dough, starting at the outside, avoiding the fold. Move biscuits to a greased sided cookie sheet or iron skillet next to each other. Bake for 10–12 minutes on the second rack of the oven.

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**Ham Biscuits**

5 dozen baked biscuits, each the size of a 50-cent piece (see previous recipe)

¾ c butter, softened

1 small onion, finely chopped

2 tbsp poppy seeds

2–3 tsp Dijon mustard

1 lb shaved ham

Split the baked biscuits. Mix together the butter, onion, poppy seeds, and mustard. Spread the bottom halves of the biscuits with the mixture. Top with the shaved ham. Replace the top halves of the biscuits. Arrange the biscuits in a basket or on a platter and serve immediately, or store the finished biscuits, tightly covered in foil, in the refrigerator for up to 2 days. To freeze, wrap the biscuits in foil, then place in a freezer bag. To reheat, defrost in the refrigerator overnight. Reheat biscuits from the refrigerator in the tightly wrapped foil until heated through.

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Rice, prevalent in the lower coastal South, had a symbiotic relationship with slavery. Slaves from rice-growing areas of Africa had the skill, knowledge, and ability to grow rice. Hurricanes and other disasters did away with rice as a primary crop in the Carolinas by the beginning of the 19th century, although it continued to be eaten there. The primary Southern rice-growing states into the 21st century were Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Texas.

Corn was of extraordinary value in the South. Whether as cornbread dunked in clabber (soured milk), freshly boiled and buttered off the cob, scraped to be "creamed" in a frying pan, or fried as fritters, corn, coupled with pork, provided sustenance all year. Grits, cornmeal, and corn flour are integral by-products of ground corn. Grits are increasingly served as a dinner starch rather than at breakfast. Whole-kernel corn hominy, primarily sold canned, is rarely eaten anymore.

Louisiana developed two unique cuisines, distinct from other Southern food. The Cajun cuisine, a form of country cooking created by French Acadians, is broad and flavorful. The "holy trinity" (onions, celery, and bell pepper) and "the pope" (garlic) are its base. Its bursts of spiciness derive from the need to use what was available, from crawfish to sassafras. Creole cuisine is New Orleans city food, a sophisticated, rich mélange of Spanish, French, Italian, and African foods. The major Louisianan thickeners are roux, primarily made from slowly browning flour with vegetable oil; filé powder (ground sassafras); and okra. Hot pepper sauces, both homemade and commercial, provide an important condiment all over the South. The semi-isolated Gullahs (also known as Geechees) of Georgia and South Carolina barrier islands also have a specific cuisine, which includes many soul food dishes.

African foodstuffs brought to the South, most likely by ship captains, are beloved among the broad expanse of Southerners, without regard to color and income. The South is unlike cultures where the elite reject peasant food such as peas and beans. The legacy of poverty suffered by both races after the Civil War combined with the presence of black cooks (first as slaves, then as servants) in white middle-class homes until the late 1960s melded both cooking styles and methods of cooking with available local ingredients. Cooks had "toting" privileges, allowing them to bring excess food home, reinforcing the shared cuisine. Each race brought something to the table, one teaching baking, the other rendering lard or frying.

Race-based superior social status for whites, who could not be mistaken for black, allowed both cultures to eat the same comforting and filling foods, which have been called soul food for the last quarter century. *Chitlins* (pork intestines) were used by both blacks and whites in rural regions but have fallen in disfavor, due to the need for arduous cleaning and cooking. There are still festivals celebrating them (boiled or fried) as well as grits, peanut, oyster, shrimp, and other food festivals.

Numerous varieties of peas, descended primarily from the wild African cowpea, *Vigna unguiculata* and other species, were imported, including pigeon peas, field peas, black-eyed peas, butter peas, Crowder, zipper, leather britches, and lady peas. This was due in large part to President Thomas Jefferson's interest in them. After their original importance in feeding African slaves familiar food, they have been embraced throughout Southern food culture, with greater variety than is seen elsewhere in the United States. They are an inexpensive, important source of nutrition often combined with seasoning meat, rice, and/or hot cornbread.

The peanut (which grows under the soil and is not a nut at all) has become a significant Southern financial and nutritional asset, with worldwide dietary influence. Southerners are as likely as other Americans to eat peanut butter sandwiches and salted peanuts. Only in the South, however, do people savor freshly harvested peanuts boiled in the shell. Soybeans are a cash crop, rotated with crops such as rice and cotton, as they supplement the soil. Pole beans, a long, wide bean with a thick string, were the dominant bean until the late 20th century when smaller runner and half runner beans came into use. Other green vegetables include butter beans, broccoli (a favorite of President George Washington), brussels sprouts, cabbage, celery, asparagus, and fennel.

Turnip and collard greens remain an important source of nutrients, especially among low-income residents. The heat of the kitchen and traditional African one-pot cooking encouraged cooking tough greens and pole beans slowly on the back of the stove with a slice of smoked pork and a hot pepper. Young greens are now sautéed, braised, or even used in salads, but there is still a great affection at all income levels for the older style, eaten with cornbread, particularly when there is a nip in the air. The broth (called *pot likker*) adds nutritional value and warmth.

Root vegetables, such as turnips, carrots, Jerusalem artichokes (sunchokes), sweet potatoes, and Irish potatoes, are boiled, sautéed, baked, mashed, or grilled. Vidalia, Georgia, and Texas have developed *terroir* providing for specialty onions, sweet enough to eat out of hand. Pecans are plentiful, grown commercially primarily in Georgia, South Carolina, and Texas. Peaches are the principal stone fruit, with abundant apples, blueberries, figs, strawberries, cantaloupes and watermelons, and various plums, as well as Florida's Valencia oranges, limes, lemons, tomatoes, mangoes, other tropical fruits, and avocados. Kitchen gardens of tomatoes, beans, squash, root vegetables, and herbs have never gone out of favor.

Blue crabs, eaten from the shell or as soft shells, range from Maryland down the Atlantic coast to the Gulf of Mexico. The three varieties of shrimp change with temperature, depth, and latitude. Their flavor varies with the marshes, bayous, and waterways where they feed. Oysters, farm-raised mussels, and clams from many coves add to the available shellfish, as does the Florida snow crab. A wide array of round and flat fish include sea bass, sea trout, grouper, flounder, and varieties of snapper. Sturgeon is nearly extinct after once being plentiful. Inland lakes, ponds, and streams provide the indigenous catfish,



Platter of fried fish, cole slaw, hush puppies, and french fries. (Danny Hooks | Dreamstime)

wild and farmed. Freshwater trout, stocked by state agencies, may be found along with indigenous bass and crappie. Catfish and crawfish are both wild and farmed.

Chicken, pork, and beef remain the prevalent meats. Each part of the region has developed its own process for preserving pork, usually smoked and salted, with Virginia's the most renowned. Country ham is served thin, like an Italian prosciutto, cut into half-inch to one-inch slices for sautéing, or soaked, boiled, and then glazed in the oven.

Historically, the use of meat depended on class and income, with agrarian and less fortunate families using meat primarily as a condiment during the week and eating chicken or roasts only on Sundays. Cheaper cuts of pork, such as fat back, belly fat, hog jowls, neck, and so on, called "seasoning meats," were utilized to season vegetables and provide protein. Game is a hobby food, with quails and pigeons commercially farm-raised.

Sugarcane and sorghum developed the Southern sweet tooth—a proclivity toward sugary desserts. Sorghum "molasses" syrup was prominent from the Civil War through World War II, when less expensive refined sugars became available. Cold, carbonated, caffeinated beverages, including Coca-Cola and Dr. Pepper, found wide acceptance in the South long before becoming international. The home cook might make custards, peanut brittle, pralines, benne seed wafers, or toffee as a treat. Sweetened condensed milk was used for fudge and caramelized for a sauce, caramel being a relished flavor, as in caramel cake.

Bourbon, a whiskey that started illegally as corn moonshine, has long been an accepted part of the Southern table, whether for marinating meat, making bourbon balls for dessert, or being served with "branch water" (fresh stream water), Coca-Cola, or muddled mint, ice, and sugar in a silver mint julep cup. Kentucky whiskey is now made from a sour-mash distilled product of corn, rye, barley, and fresh limestone spring water.

In Texas, only the eastern part of the state remains oriented toward Southern food; western Texas is oriented toward Southwestern and Mexican food. Tortillas, guacamole, and salsas had become part of the Southern diet by the late 1980s, with Mexican and Hispanic food gaining in the following decades. Florida maintains a Southern cuisine in the areas close to Georgia; below that is a more Hispanic style, frequently called "Miami cuisine."

## Cooking

Home cooking constantly evolves as more women have begun working. Outside cooks have disappeared in the middle-class home. Cooking duties fall primarily to women, but men are increasingly helpful. The average family shops for food once a week, with perhaps a stop for fresh milk, fruit, or a specialty item.

Grocery shopping in the South has altered significantly. A half century ago, home deliveries were made by grocery stores, and dairies, bakeries, and local neighborhood markets were found within walking distance. Today's urban large chain grocery stores and supermarkets are not easily accessible for the poor, requiring transportation. These stores sell a vast array of easily heated frozen and prepared foods; frozen and fresh fruits and vegetables; mixes for cakes, pies, biscuits, and breads; one-pot dinners; and other convenience foods. Many poultry or meat products are premarinated and sold in easily cooked, boneless cuts.

Distribution of locally grown products has expanded through local farmers' markets and acceptance by some grocery stores. Typical homes have a stovetop with four burners, an oven, a microwave, and a refrigerator with a freezer and ice maker, as well as a hot/cold-water sink. A dishwasher is found in most middle-class homes. The disadvantaged utilize electric hot plates, portable ovens, a sink with inadequate hot water, and a secondhand refrigerator.

Braising, boiling, steaming, roasting, and sautéing are the prevalent methods of cooking. Virtually no deep-frying occurs in the middle-class home. The iron skillet is associated with Southern cooking even if not used to the same degree as nonstick pans. Baking pans, saucepans, and frying pans, along with a variety of knives, measuring cups, teaspoons, tablespoons, and wooden spoons, remain. Measures are taken with measuring cups (in ounces) and measuring spoons (the largest, a tablespoon, is equal to three teaspoons). Nearly every home has a grill, whether

outside or built into the stove, grill pans, or small electric grills. Men typically do the outdoor grilling.

Typical home evening meals include fresh or frozen vegetables, a starch, and a meat, with an occasional meatless pasta or rice meal. Everything is served at one time rather than in courses. Soups, both commercially prepared and fresh, are frequently served as an entrée rather than a starting dish, perhaps with a salad and crackers, biscuits, cornbread, or yeast rolls, for lunch or dinner.

## Typical Meals

Three meals a day is the norm, with morning and afternoon snacks and, after dinner, chips, cookies, and/or ice cream while watching television before bedtime. Cereals for breakfast, skim milk, sandwiches, and low-calorie salad dressings are daily norms, with few elaborate breakfasts at home. The occasional Sunday breakfast with fried eggs, featherlight biscuits or hotcakes, and country ham sautéed in a frying pan with its pan (red-eye) gravy poured over hot grits is a treat.

The goal of most home cooks is to prepare and serve the dinner meal in 45 minutes, preferably less. Families try to eat together, but middle-class children have many activities, making shared mealtimes difficult. Chicken breasts are a favorite meat because of the ease of preparation. Boneless or marinated legs and thighs are a distant alternative. Other quick-cooking favorites are pork tenderloins and scaloppini, shrimp pilaf, crawfish, ground beef, steaks, and an occasional stir-fry. The amount of deep-frying has decreased considerably in the last 40 years. Coastal areas eat much more seafood, and mountain and inland people have eaten more freshwater or frozen fish until the last 25 years, as transportation has improved.

Meals are eaten with knife, fork, and spoon, and paper or cloth napkins are used. Food is served either from the stove or family style in serving bowls where individuals serve themselves. Homemade desserts are rare during the week, with the exception of cake or brownies from a mix. Many families batch-cook on weekends, preparing stews, roasts, gumbos, chicken and dumplings (made from biscuit dough or pasta) or other soup meals, meat loaves and other items made from ground beef, macaroni and cheese, or roasted chicken or chicken parts that will provide several meals. "Scratch" baking is usually done on the weekends.



A typical country breakfast made up of grits and biscuits. (iStockPhoto)

During the week commercial loaf bread, cornbread, or freezer-to-oven biscuits are eaten with meals. Once every week or two, pizza, a Chinese meal, barbecue, or fried chicken might be purchased (or delivered) to eat at home. Cooked rotisserie chickens from the grocery store are used as they are, or the cooked meat is incorporated into other dishes such as soups, stews, and salads.

## Eating Out

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed racial discrimination at restaurants and interstate accommodations, was pivotal in changing the South's social structure. Prior to this time, by state law or custom,

white-only restaurants predominated, whether lunch counters at the Woolworth's dime store serving tuna salad sandwiches or Continental restaurants with escargot. Clubs were segregated.

African Americans had separate facilities and clubs. After integration, previously black-only barbecues and soul food restaurants reached a new national appeal, with black Southern music forms such as jazz and the blues paving the way for increasing social interaction. The opening up of social accommodations not only broke social barriers, especially among young adults, but also created stronger recognition of the biracial heritage of Southern food. The act also outlawed employment discrimination. With blacks and whites beginning to work together as equals in the workplace they not only sat together at restaurants but also engaged in lively conversation and recognized the commonality of their food.

Money earned by blacks employed in previously white-only jobs resulted in a larger market for goods and services, and African Americans supplied an experienced workforce for a growing economy in the 20th century's final 30 years, helping to fuel eating out for blacks and whites in the new fast-food restaurants. The enhanced economic growth, together with black withdrawal from domestic work, led to more whites eating out. This opened the way for development of a new and lighter Southern cuisine, using local products and classic European cooking techniques.

Every sizable Southern city historically had at least one popular Greek restaurant. Chain and other diners, such as Waffle Houses at interstate highway exits, are highly patronized, most serving grits all day long as a breakfast or side dish. Bistro and fine-dining restaurants have multiplied, stressing fresh local ingredients and fresh-caught seafood as well as making their own charcuteries. "Family" restaurants provide inexpensive choices, allowing each member of a family to order his or her preferred meal. Southern ingredients are cooked in new as well as traditional ways. Fried seafood restaurants, even in coastal areas, frequently import seafood and sell it cheaply. Buffet restaurants are primarily Southern and economical.

Barbecue is one of the most beloved foods. Barbecue restaurants, whether primarily carryout or sit down, are known for their specialty ingredients. On the East Coast, shredded pork barbecue is the norm; moving westward toward Tennessee, ribs become more popular. Further west, barbecues are most often beef.

## Special Occasions

Barbecues are prominent on the Fourth of July, Independence Day. Ideally, a whole pig is cooked in a pit, called a "six-pack pit" as it takes two men one six-pack of beer to dig the pit. The butterflied pig, wired to a rack, cooks slowly all night over an open fire, swabbed with local versions of sauce. After much of the meat and crispy skin have been removed and chopped, eaters vie for any leftover meat clinging to the bones. It is served with coleslaw, potato salad, Brunswick stew, and white bread. Homemade cakes are set out on a large table, along with peach ice cream ready to go on top.

Wedding receptions historically serve cheese straws; crustless cucumber, chicken salad, or pimento cheese sandwiches; and tiny ham biscuits. The low country adds hot shrimp and grits. When a death occurs, neighbors, friends, and family bring covered dishes as they would to a church picnic, and the food is left accessible for whoever drops by, with a preponderance of hams, fried chicken, and cakes. After the funeral food is frequently served at the place of worship.

Coastal families may grill or bake whole snapper or other ocean fish for Thanksgiving, or serve an oyster stuffing in roast turkey, while other areas add ham to the table. A wide range of vegetables is available in bowls on the table. At Christmas, Latino communities serve *lechón de Navidad,* a pit-roasted pig stuffed with sour oranges, garlic, lemons, and rosemary. Coastal communities serve oyster stew on Christmas Eve, with other communities serving sliced ham or turkey. Cured hams make their appearance during Christmas and New Year's Eve, with less-salty processed hams taking more of a modern role.

Black-eyed peas are eaten on New Year's Eve, usually combined with rice and called *hoppin' John,* as a

sign of good luck, in part because, when the Union soldiers foraged Southern gardens and foodstuffs during the Civil War, they spurned the peas that helped keep Southerners alive, both black and white. Traditionally, cooked turnips or collard greens foretell "green backs" (dollars) all year long.

Mardi Gras is elaborately celebrated in Louisiana. Kings cake, which has a tiny baby (once a piece of jewelry) inserted as a surprise, is a ritual. The main Easter meal is served midafternoon, a throwback to when dinner was served at three o'clock or later in the afternoon in high society such as in Charleston. Ham (rather than fresh lamb), asparagus, fresh local lettuces for salads, and a daffodil or other cake are served.

## Diet and Health

The American South has the highest rate of obesity in the United States. Despite much talk about curtailing sugar, salt, and fat, the South's middle class complicates this by dietary inconsistency, spurning low-fat seasoning meat such as smoked neck in vegetables and instead cooking bacon with brown sugar or adding sugar-laden products to a barbecue sauce. Hidden calories in condiments such as tomato sauce and prepared foods are frequently ignored, as are visible calories in starchy vegetables such as baked potatoes with sour cream.

Although the rising obesity among the poor is attributed to unhealthy home cooking—frying a pork chop, for instance, or seasoning meat in the vegetables—snacking and frequent eating in fast-food restaurants with more calories in less-filling foods are more likely the culprit. Fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as meat lower in fat, are expensive out of season. Small neighborhood grocery stores accommodating the poor tend to be more expensive or have been supplanted by stores attached to gasoline stations, which offer high-carbohydrate snacks and canned products high in salt. Food stamps have the possibility for improved nutrition and can now be used where fresh products are available, such as farmers' markets. Fad diets abound. Yet those with access to fresh food find that eating all things in moderation not only is pleasing but also, in the long run, is healthier and reduces obesity.

*Nathalie Dupree*

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# United States: The Southwest

## Overview

The U.S. Southwest comprises the states of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah, including some parts of Texas. This region mainly comprises the Colorado Plateau, ranging between 5,000 and 8,000 feet in elevation, separated by deep canyons. In southern Arizona, the terrain drops from 2,000 feet down to the arid Arizona-Sonora Desert. As well, in northwestern Utah, the plateaus drop down into the Great Basin Desert. In short, this region is marked by both some of the hottest areas in the United States and some of the coldest.

Prehistorically, the Southwest was settled by different groups of ancestral Native Americans. The Puebloan peoples primarily concentrated in the Four Corners region and along New Mexico's Rio Grande River, supported through the practice of small-scale agriculture. Puebloan peoples subsisted on a combination of three basic foods: corn, beans, and squash. Other groups, such as the more nomadic Navajo (the Diné), Apache, and Utes, maintained a hunting and gathering lifeway, exploiting the animal and plant resources available in both the mountain and desert regions of Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico. In 1598, the first Spanish and Mexican settlers traveled from Mexico City to establish the Spanish towns of Albuquerque and Santa Fe, settling in northern New Mexico. The Spaniards brought with them European fruits, vegetables, and grains, including wheat, orchard fruits, grapes, and other Old World grains. As well, they introduced domesticated animals, including cattle, horses, sheep, goats, and pigs. Early Spanish and Mexican expansion into Texas gave rise to the Tejano culture and ancestral traditions that characterize South Texas. As a result, South Texas shares common foods and food traditions with the Mexican ranching families of New Mexico and southern Arizona.

By the early 1800s, Anglo traders and explorers established contacts in the Southwest, and following the Mexican-American War in 1846, Mexico ceded all lands between Texas and the Pacific Ocean to the United States. Anglo settlers and ranchers brought with them the tradition of cattle ranching and small-scale dryland farming. Incorporating regional food traditions, Anglo settlers also introduced new foods and cooking methods that came to characterize a recognized "cowboy" cuisine. While cowboy cuisine may characterize what is more commonly recognized as a Western cuisine, these peoples and their foodways comprise both historical and modern components of the food culture of the Southwest. West Texas shares the ranching tradition that marks the regions of eastern New Mexico and Arizona, a lifeway that gave rise to cowboy cuisine.

During the early 20th century, many Mexicans temporarily immigrated to the Southwest under the Bracero Program, and since the end of this program, Mexican immigrants have continued to settle in the U.S. Southwest, bringing with them new cultural practices, regional variations in Spanish language, and different foodways. This influence is expressed more in the foodways of southern Arizona and New Mexico.

Many Americans associate Southwestern cuisine with Mexican food, grouping together a set of intraregional foodways that mark cultural and ethnic differences within the Southwest. The food cultures

of the Southwest more accurately reflect the history of the region, bringing together Native Americans, Spanish and Mexican settlers, Anglo ranchers, and, more recently, Mexican national immigrants. In general, Southwestern food cuisine reflects a fusion of different cultural groups and their respective foodways. It is characterized by extensive use of beef and pork, chili, pinto beans, rice, and corn.

Yet, within the region, important differences persist. While the rest of the United States may group these different intraregional cuisines together, no discussion sparks more fervor than those surrounding the use of certain spices, chilies, and/or beans. Southwestern cuisine in Arizona is influenced by indigenous foodways, Anglo ranching cuisine, and Sonoran food traditions. New Mexican cuisine is much simpler than Mexican cuisine, grounded in the combination of beef, green chili, potatoes, and/or corn. In contrast with Tejanos, New Mexicans cook with a basic combination of onion, garlic, and small amounts of oregano, not using cumin or jalapeño chilies to the degree that their eastern neighbors do. Tex-Mex is consumed in the areas of western and southern Texas, reflecting the culinary adaptations of Mexican American immigrants. Tex-Mex cuisine is marked by extensive use of beef, pinto beans, cheese, red chili, and cumin in the red chili sauces. Tex-Mex cooks may opt for the shortcut chili gravy, that is, canned red chili or enchilada sauce, to season their dishes. In the Southwest, how one prepares "Southwestern" cuisine represents an important marker of ethnic identity, both reinforcing solidarity within a group and marking distinctive boundaries between others.

**Green Chili Sauce**

**Ingredients**

½ c vegetable oil
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 c onion, minced
1 tbsp flour
2 c chicken broth
2 c diced green chili (hot, preferably)
Salt to taste

Sauté garlic and onion in oil in saucepan. Blend in flour. Add broth and green chili. Bring to a boil and simmer, stirring frequently, for 5–8 minutes.

**Green Chili Enchiladas**

*Serves 2*

**Ingredients**

6 corn tortillas
2 tbsp vegetable oil
1 clove garlic
2 c green chili sauce (previous recipe)
1 tbsp flour
2 c grated cheddar or Monterey Jack cheese
¼ c minced onion

Heat the tortillas on a griddle, and keep warm under a kitchen towel. Heat the garlic in the oil, then discard garlic. Blend flour into the oil. Stir in green chili sauce, and heat thoroughly. If mixture is too thick, add water or chicken broth. Add salt to taste. Layer tortillas with sauce, minced onion, and cheese on ovenproof plates. Sprinkle cheese on top. Place in oven to allow cheese to melt. For an authentic New Mexican touch, place a fried egg on top.

## Food Culture Snapshot

In her village in northern New Mexico, Doña Manuela Luján rises early on the morning of Christmas Eve, noticing that the snow has continued to fall all night and now covers the neighboring mountains. Despite the cold and continuing snowfall, she hurriedly carries dry wood outside to her adobe oven, her *horno,* located in the patio behind her home. She checks on the red chili tamales she prepared yesterday, carefully stacked on the back porch where they froze overnight.

Once she starts the fire in the outdoor oven, she returns to her kitchen to make the bread from the dough she left rising the night before. She divides the dough into two parts, one part for the bread and one part for the traditional sweet rolls, the *molletes.* She shapes the bread dough into loaves, leaving them to rise in the

pans. Turning to the sweet rolls, she separately beats eggs, sugar, aniseed, and lard to create a mixture added to the bread dough. Kneading the sweet dough, she carefully shapes the rolls, cutting a cross in the center of each roll. From the sacks of dried corn, she scoops lime-treated hominy into a boiling pot of water, leaving it to cook.

While the bread and sweet rolls bake outside in the horno, Doña Manuela turns her attention to the *bizcochitos,* anise-flavored sugar cookies traditionally made for Christmas. Starting with sugar, Doña Manuela beats fresh pig lard into the sugar, whipping the mixture to incorporate air until it approaches the consistency of whipped cream. Adding a pinch of aniseed, she then adds a mixture of whole wheat flour, salt, and baking powder. After shaping the bizcochitos by hand, she places them in the gas stove to bake, now turning to make the empanadas, which are meat pastries. She mixes the filling from cooked meat, cooked dried apples, cinnamon, ground cloves, ginger, molasses, and raisins. Leaving the mixture to cook on the stove, Doña Manuela rolls out the pastry dough, cutting the rounds for the empanadas.

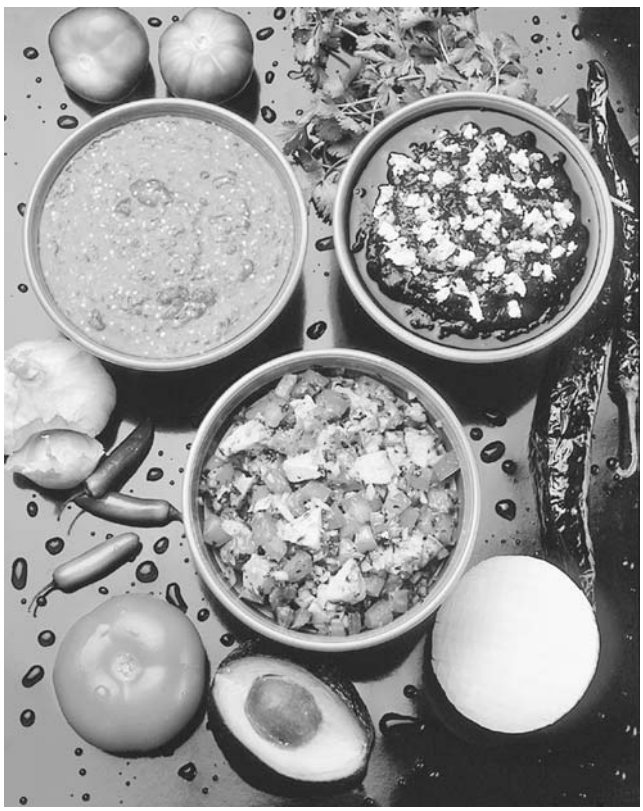
As the sun disappears below the horizon, she hears children singing as they process through the village. Stopping at her door, they sing a hymn, recreating the tradition of the *posadas,* in which Joseph and Mary searched for lodging in Bethlehem. She invites the children in to share in the molletes, bizcochitos, and sweet rolls, all representing traditional symbols of Christmas gifts.

After the children leave, Doña Manuela goes to her storeroom to take dried red chili pods from the strands that hang in storage. She removes the stems and seeds, washing the pods; she then adds the chili, oregano, salt, garlic, and onion to the *posole* stew. Bringing the frozen tamales in from the back porch, Doña Manuela stacks them carefully in the tamale cooker, leaving them to steam. Bundling her coat and scarf around her to protect against the winter cold, she hurries to the church for Christmas Eve midnight mass. Gathering around the bonfires outside the church, friends and family greet each other, wishing each other happiness for the season. Later, following mass, the family and extended kin return for an early Christmas breakfast of empanaditas, posole, and tamales.

## Major Foodstuffs

For many Americans, Southwestern cuisine is characterized by some combination of corn, beans, chili, and/or meat. Within this complex of foods, the intraregional variation in cuisines is constructed by different combinations of similar ingredients. For the Southwesterner, these apparently subtle differences in types of beans, or the method of preparing chili, for example, represent important markers that distinguish intraregional cuisines. These seemingly slight differences in ingredients are neither minor nor trivial. As some Mexican cooks in southern New Mexico will say, "Ahora es cuando el chile verde le ha de dar el sabor al caldo" (Now is when the green chili gives the flavor to the soup).

Corn historically represented the most important food throughout the Southwest. For Native Americans, corn has comprised the dietary staple and provided the central ingredient in many regional dishes.



Some typical sauces from the Southwest, including green chile, guacamole, and mole. (Dreamstime)

The domestication of maize occurred in the highland regions of Mexico and Guatemala in prehistoric times, and indigenous farmers first brought domesticated maize varieties into the Rio Grande Valley in about 700 A.D. Corn's important role in Native American agriculture and foodways thus led to its incorporation into important religious rituals, creation narratives, and ancestral legends. For Native Americans in the Southwest, corn came to be sacred, a symbolic representation of their ancestral mother and the essence of culture itself. Prayers are offered to the corn, in order to ensure the plant's maturity and productivity. Once harvested, corn is used in different forms in traditional ceremonies, including the plant, the seed, and the corn pollen.

Across the Southwest, five different varieties of corn predominate: blue, white, red, yellow, and speckled. Blue, red, and speckled corn are more commonly associated with the foodways of the Puebloan peoples, including both the Rio Grande Pueblos and the Western Pueblos, including Hopi and Zuni. Blue corn is traditionally used in baking, stews, and traditional breads, such as the Hopi *piki*. Red corn is used stews and parched corn, while speckled corn is used in a range of baked goods.

When the Spaniards arrived in New Mexico, they brought European foods with them, but they also incorporated corn into their diet, reflecting both the influences from Mexico and shared foodways with indigenous peoples. Corn was incorporated into some of the most traditional Hispanic dishes of the region, including the hominy used in posole and *chicos,* which are small dried kernels of corn, used in stews in northern New Mexico. Unlike Mexican cooks to the south, neither Spanish settlers in New Mexico nor Mexican settlers in Arizona or Texas used corn in tortillas, preferring flour tortillas to accompany meals.

Beans were first domesticated in Mesoamerica, and indigenous farmers spread the common pinto bean throughout the Southwest in prehistoric times. Pinto beans are commonly used throughout different regional cuisines of the Southwest, readily adopted by Spanish and Anglo settlers. Among different Native American groups, a wide variety of beans, including white, blue, red, yellow, and multicolored ones, were used through the prehistoric and historic periods, although their use has declined in modern times. In the Arizona desert, the Tohono O'odham used the tepary bean, known for its drought tolerance. In more recent times, Arizona chefs and food activists have incorporated tepary beans into regional dishes in an effort to revive consumption of indigenous beans. As well, in prehistoric and historic times, the Tohono O'odham of the Arizona desert, the Mescalero Apache of New Mexico, and different Native American groups in Texas gathered wild mesquite beans for consumption. In Hopi and Rio Grande Pueblo dishes, beans are often combined with corn or squashes in the same dish to construct simple vegetable stews.

In their migrations from the Mexican interior, Spanish and Mexican settlers brought with them the acquired taste for pinto beans. In northern New Mexican cuisine, both the pinto bean and the *bolita,* a round, light brown bean, are used interchangeably in preparing beans, while the pinto bean is more commonly used throughout Arizona and Texas. Across Mexican and Mexican American cuisines in the Southwest, pinto beans are usually prepared separately; that is, they accompany the main dish. Thus, the chili with beans first prepared by the historic chili queens on the downtown plaza of San Antonio represented a historic creation, a culinary strategy to stretch a meat-based dish. In addition, Spanish and Mexican settlers in the Southwest brought with them the beans and pulses of the Old World, in particular, garbanzo beans and lentils. In the cuisines, these foods are now more often associated with dishes consumed during the Lenten period, when devout Catholics abstain from eating meat.

Chili peppers of the *Capsicum* genus are widely used throughout the Southwest, although the different varieties characterize regional diversity. In southern Arizona and northern Sonora, chiltepins, small wild chili peppers, are found in the protected transition zone between the desert and mountain ranges. These extremely hot, small red chilies were used by indigenous populations to add flavor and spice to vegetable dishes. In addition to using chilies as a food spice, Native American women put the hot chili pepper powder on their nipples to initiate weaning in their toddlers. In modern times, chiltepins may be

dried, crushed, and then sprinkled judiciously over soups and stews. Reflecting a history of Mexican migration from Sonora, Arizonan cuisine more often includes the use of milder Mexican chilies, such the Mexican poblano and dried ancho.

In New Mexico, the Anaheim chili is used, a long, varied, narrow chili, used both as a fresh green chili and, once ripened, as a dry red chili. Green chilies are traditionally roasted, to peel off the outer skin and leave the meaty flesh. Green chili sauces are simple, comprised primarily of green chili. In contrast, red chili sauces may be made from either fresh chili, dried red chili, or dried chili that has been ground to a powder. In either case, the cook will often add thickeners, such as flour, and other spices, including ground cumin and/or oregano, to the final sauce. In Texas, jalapeño chilies are more often used in dishes and stews, reflecting culinary influences from Mexican immigrants.

Of the domesticated vegetables, squash represented the most important food in the Native American diet. Along the Rio Grande and in northern Arizona, Native American farmers grew primarily winter squash, such as varieties of pumpkins, acorn, cushaw, and gourd squashes. These squashes were grown for their edible seeds and fruits, as well as to be used as tools and containers. When the Spaniards arrived, they brought with them the summer squashes, also known as *calabacitas,* which were commonly used in the stews and sautéed dishes of Mexican cuisine. As well, Spaniards introduced new vegetables and fruits, such as tomatoes, melons, and cantaloupes, which were quickly incorporated into Native American foodways.

In addition to domesticated plants, wild-gathered plants also contributed important foods to the Native American diet. In the Arizona desert, the Tohono O'odham harvested juice from the saguaro cactus and gathered fruits from the prickly pear and cholla cactus. In cooler climates at higher altitudes, Native Americans of northern Arizona and northern New Mexico seasonally gathered wild greens, such as lamb's-quarter, mustard, wild mint, purslane, and wild onions. When the Spaniards arrived, they often incorporated these greens, known also as *verdolagas* or *quelites,* into stews and vegetable dishes.

During the prehistoric period, Native Americans acquired meat through hunting, incorporating small amounts of wild game and small animals into their diet. Grounded in indigenous beliefs in animal spirits, Native American hunters ceremonially sought the permission of animal spirits before killing animals. The meat of large game, such as elk or bison, was usually dried into a jerky, while smaller animals, such as jackrabbits or cottontails rabbits, were normally used in stews or grilled. Wild birds and fish also represented an occasional protein source in indigenous diets.

With the arrival of the Spaniards and Anglos, European food plants and animals also became part of the Southwestern foodways. Old World domesticated animals were integrated into Southwestern foodways, including, in particular, sheep, cattle, goats, and pigs. As the Diné adopted a subsistence pattern of herding sheep, lamb, or mutton, became a more common meat item in their stews and other dishes.

In dishes that include meat, beef is most common across the Southwest in general, but preparation methods vary significantly by region. In the Arizona desert, the Tohono O'odham traditionally dried meat in the sun, producing a dried meat flesh that required no refrigeration. Adopted by American soldiers and trappers, this product became beef jerky; for the Mexicans, the dried beef became *carne seca,* or dried beef.

## Cooking

Throughout the Southwest, the most common cooking methods include sautéing, deep-frying, and stewing, that is, stovetop methods that reflect ancestral traditions of cooking over an open fire. Sautéing normally begins by gently frying some combination of onion, garlic, chili, and/or herbs in oil, to which vegetables or meat are then added for longer, gentler cooking. Different flavors in the sauces are thus created by different combinations of standard food ingredients.

As a cooking method, deep-frying was introduced in historic times and is more commonly used in the preparation of snack foods, such as fry bread or

sopaipillas, or Mexican foods more commonly recognized as snack foods in Mexico, such as *taquitos,* more commonly known as rolled tacos throughout the Southwest, or chiles rellenos.

Stewing is a cooking method that draws on the tradition of Mexican *caldillos,* combining red or green chili with meat and, often, some combination of vegetables. Prepared through long hours of stovetop simmering, these dishes served to both stretch meat among many family members and use vegetables seasonally available from household gardens. In the Southwest, stews are traditionally seasoned simply, usually based on an initial sauté of onion, garlic, and chili.

In general, baking is not a preferred method of preparing most food dishes. Baking is specifically limited to the preparation of breads, cookies, or empanadas, foods that are often associated with special occasions or feast days. The Spaniards first introduced the earthen oven, the horno, to the Pueblo Indians during the colonial period. The horno is located outside the residence, and Puebloan peoples will often place one to four hornos together, so that bakers may work together in preparing bread for community feasts. In Hispanic households, baking empanadas or cookies, in particular, bizcochitos, often marked the beginning of the Christmas season.

## Typical Meals

Historically in the region, most farming and ranching households would consume three to five meals a day, with the main meal at midday. In modern times, most people eat three meals a day, with dinner in the evening being the main meal of the day. The following are examples of typical meals in middle-class families in seven different regions of the Southwest.

In the Arizona-Sonoran household, a traditional dinner might center on *machaca,* a meat stew made of reconstituted dried beef jerky, stewed with mild chilies and tomatoes until the meat is soft and shreds easily. The meat's smoky flavor is enhanced by marinating it in garlic and citrus juices, followed by hours of sun-drying. Accompanying this stew would be huge white flour tortillas found only in Sonora and Arizona, often measuring up to 16 inches across. More recently, Arizonans have become accustomed to the infamous chimichanga, a burrito comprised of a flour tortilla wrapped around machaca and then deep-fried. Various restaurants in border towns, including Tucson and Nogales, all claim to have invented the chimi, as it is affectionately known in Arizona.

In a traditional Tohono O'odham household, the dinner meal of vegetable stew would include tepary beans, similar to pinto beans, and a particular O'odham squash, both adapted to desert climates. Accompanied by a juice or fruit ade made of prickly pear cactus, these foods are characteristically low glycemic, thus metabolizing slowly in the body and controlling blood sugar levels.

Southern New Mexican regional cuisine has been more heavily influenced by Mexico. Thus, a typical dinner meal would include red chili enchiladas, usually including chunks of beef or pork, often topped with grated cheese. These enchiladas would be prepared in a casserole-style baking dish and then baked in the oven. As a main dish, enchiladas would be accompanied by refried pinto beans and Mexican-style rice. The rice is prepared by first sautéing it in vegetable oil before it is cooked in chicken broth combined with a blend of tomatoes, garlic, and onion. The sautéing gives the prepared rice a bite that distinguishes the rice from the soupier Tex-Mex rice.

In northern New Mexico, Hispanic families might partake of green chili stew for dinner, a thick stew comprised of chopped, roasted green chili, cubed meat (either beef or pork), and small chunks of potatoes. In more rural and traditional households, this stew might contain chicos, small dried corn kernels, harvested from a traditional, small-kerneled corn still grown throughout northern New Mexico. Accompanying the green chili stew would be white flour tortillas, warmed on the griddle and served folded beneath the bowl. For dessert, under special circumstances, families might have sopaipillas, a small square of fried bread, hot and puffy, with honey drizzled over it.

Among the Rio Grande Pueblos of northern New Mexico, including also the more western Pueblos, such as Zuni or Hopi, dinner might include a meat-based stew of either beef or mutton, which would



Texas-style chili con carne, now recognized as the official dish of Texas. (Dreamstime)

contain vegetables such as corn and squash. In general, vegetable and meat stews in Native American communities are milder, not including the spices and chili that characterize stews in Mexican or Mexican American households.

In West Texas, a rural family might sit down to a beef stew, also known as chuckwagon stew, or chili con carne, made with ground beef, tomatoes, red chili powder, and beans, accompanied by sourdough biscuits. In South Texas, dinner might consist of Texas-style chili con carne, now recognized as the official dish of Texas. In this region of the Southwest, chili is a stew of small pieces of beef, cooked in a broth of red chili. The red chili pods are boiled, peeled, chopped, and then liquefied in a broth. Lazy cooks may prepare the red broth with chili powder, but true chili aficionados can recognize the difference readily. Historically, in San Antonio, pinto beans were added to the chili as a means of stretching the stew. In the late 1800s, Mexican American women, known as the "chili queens," traditionally prepared chili stew in San Antonio's downtown plaza in the evenings. Patrons would gather to sup on red chili stew and large flour tortillas, entertained as well by strolling mariachi musicians. In 1937, the San Antonio health department imposed new sanitary regulations on the chili stalls, effectively shutting them down permanently.

## Eating Out

Historically, dining out was never common throughout the Southwest. During the 1800s, for travelers and traders throughout the West, small establishments offered lodging and sustenance for nonlocals. Some of the earliest restaurants in Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas were originally established as stage stops along major routes from the East to California. In modern times, restaurants are evaluated by a discerning clientele, critiqued for the freshness of their tortillas, the heat of the chili, and the flavor of the salsas. Loyalties to different establishments are deep-seated and earnest, reflecting a discernment of taste developed through many years of savoring homemade and locally prepared food. While fast-food "Mexican" establishments abound, locals continue to patronize traditional, locally owned restaurants. However, across the board, local Southwestern restaurants are characterized by reasonably priced food.

For many Southwesterners, Santa Fe, New Mexico, represents a foreign world, populated by movie stars, artists, visiting dignitaries, and wealthy tourists. Although Santa Fe is recognized as one of culinary capitals of the world, most regional residents find little connection between the foodways of their ancestral heritage and Santa Fe's nouvelle cuisine. Grounded in the creative combination of traditional Southwestern ingredients and standards from other cuisines, Santa Fe dinners are both a delight for the eye and an experience in unique and unusual flavor combinations. While taking relatives visiting from outside the Southwest to Santa Fe, a visiting Southwesterner might partake of foie gras flavored with figs and chili and honey-grilled giant shrimp, followed by a main dish of peppered elk tenderloin.

Snack foods have been commonly consumed in the Southwest since prehistoric times. Among Native Americans, grains and seeds provided the basis of foods that could be carried over long distances. In historic times, foods such as pumpkin seeds, roasted piñon (pine) nuts, parched corn, and dried desert fruits have become more commonly recognized as snack foods.

Among Mexican and Mexican American populations in southern Arizona, southern New Mexico, and South Texas, snack foods draw on the rich heritage of Mexican cuisine. Tortilla-based food items, such as gorditas, taquitos, and chimichangas, among others, are widely available at evening food stands, at take-out establishments, and, as fresh processed items, in every grocery store. Most famous is the traditional burrito, a large flour tortilla wrapped around ingredients including either chopped meat flavored with red chili or mashed refried pinto beans accompanied by grated cheese. Popular folk legend attributes the burrito's creation to taco vendors during the Mexican Revolution in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, located across the U.S.-Mexican border from El Paso, Texas, who offered "wrapped" snacks to urban patrons. Along this border region, including southern New Mexico and West Texas, burritos may comprise a wide range of different kinds of meat, including shredded beef (*deshebrada*), pork with mole, beef stomach, tripe, and/or tongue.




A man at a traditional Native American fry bread food stall at the Gourd Show in Arizona. (StockPhotoPro)

## Special Occasions

In this region, special foods are served both for community or family feast celebrations and for public consumption, reflecting the long tradition of tourism in the Southwest. Within the Native American community, during feast days, the meals are served in common dishes, with guests and family coming and going, eating and visiting, as they arrive. Some Native American communities allow tourists to come and watch their traditional celebrations; other communities may ban outsiders. In cases where outsiders are allowed, feast foods, such as stews, snack foods, or special breads, may be available for purchase; in other cases, residents may invite visitors into their homes, serving them foods in compliance with their ancestral traditions. Some of the most important feast breads include piki bread and fry bread.

Piki is a tissue-thin corn wafer that is unique to the northern Pueblos. Traditionally made throughout the northern Pueblos, it is more common among the Hopi, although piki is undergoing a renaissance in specific Pueblos, in particular, Tesuque and San Ildefono. Piki may be made from blue, red, or yellow corn, depending on personal preference and the specific ceremony. Piki batter is comprised of a mixture of water, finely ground cornmeal, and small amounts of chamisa ash. The ash imparts the traditional grayish-blue color that distinguishes traditional piki. Pueblo women cook piki on traditional

piki stones, which are large, smooth, flat stones that have been passed down from mother to daughter for generations. The stone is heated by a prepared fire underneath. Once it reaches sizzling, the woman quickly spreads a paper-thin layer of piki batter, moving her hand quickly over the batter to smooth out lumps while at the same time avoiding burning her hand. The batter is laid on in overlapping strips, resulting in a thin paperlike wafer. The first piki is fed to the fire, as an offering, and subsequent piki sheets are either rolled or gently folded before they harden. Piki is traditionally offered to friends and family during the summer Katchina dances.

Fry bread is often served at public feast days both in the New Mexico Pueblos and on the Navajo reservation. It is a flat dough made of wheat flour, leavened with yeast or baking powder, and then deep-fried in oil, shortening, or lard. Fry bread was created during the 1880s by Native Americans from the rations (lard, flour, salt, baking powder, and powdered milk) distributed by the U.S. government. Once symbolically a starvation food product, it has since come to be a "traditional" food. Fry bread is now associated with Native American powwows, feast days, and public events. Traditionally, fry bread is served with honey or powdered sugar as a sweet. In other instances, the fry bread may be slit open and then pinto beans, ground beef, grated cheese, and/or shredded lettuce are inserted, thus transforming it into what is known as an Indian or Navajo taco. In more recent years, fry bread has come to represent a controversial symbol of the impact of processed, high-fat foods on Native American diets, and some nutritionists allege fry bread plays a role in Native American obesity and high incidence of type 2 diabetes.

**Fry Bread**

*Makes 6–8 large fry breads*

**Ingredients**

3 c all-purpose flour

1 tbsp baking powder

1 tsp salt

1¼ c warm water

Extra flour for processing

Vegetable oil for frying, or lard (traditional)

Blend the flour with the baking powder and salt in a mixing bowl. Make a well in the center of the flour mixture, and pour in the warm water. Mix the flour and water with a wooden spoon. Take the dough from the bowl, and mix gently with hands on a board until dough is thoroughly mixed. Excessive kneading will make a heavy fry bread. Form into a ball. Cover dough with a kitchen towel, and let rest for 10 minutes. Place dough on a cutting board, and cut dough into 6–8 pieces. Shape and pat each piece into a disk 5–7 inches in diameter.

Place vegetable oil or lard in deep, heavy pan. Oil should be a minimum of 1 inch deep. Heat oil to about 350°F. Place formed dough gently in oil, and press down on dough as it fries so the top is submerged in the hot oil. Don't overcrowd pan. Fry until some browning occurs, approximately 2–3 minutes, then flip and fry other side. Bread is done when surface is dry to the touch and smooth.

Among Southwestern Hispanics, ceremonial foods are most often associated with important Catholic feast days throughout the liturgical calendar, including Christmas, Lent, Easter, and All Saints' Day, more recently recognized as the Día de los Muertos. These feast foods are traditionally served to extended family and friends, although they may also be available for visiting tourists.

For Christmas, both posole and tamales are traditional feast foods. Posole is a thick stew made with pork, red chili, onions, garlic, and hominy corn. In some areas of northern New Mexico, particularly among the Pueblos, a "green" or "white" posole may be more common, containing the same stew ingredients already listed except the red chili.

Tamales are made from a thick masa, that is, cornmeal dough, blended with rich pork lard to the consistency of whipped cream. Throughout most of the Southwest, tamales contain meat, usually pork, and red chili. Pre-Christmas festivities often begin with the *tamalada,* the tamale-making party, in which

family and friends join as a group to make the tamales. Tamale making is labor-intensive, requiring hours of careful hand labor to construct and roll the tamales. In addition to red pork chili tamales, sweet tamales, made with a filling of brown sugar, walnuts, raisins, and spices, such as nutmeg, cinnamon, and/or ginger, may be prepared for Christmas. As well, for many Mexican immigrant and Mexican American households, tamales with dark chocolate mole are traditionally served on Christmas Eve, accompanied by hot chocolate.

## Diet and Health

For many Americans, Southwestern foodways are more commonly conceptualized as a cuisine marked by the heavy use of chili, fat, and meat. In modern times, health experts have watched with alarm the increased rates of obesity and type 2 diabetes among minority populations, including both Native Americans and Latinos, in the U.S. Southwest. Pointing to the traditional foodways as a culprit, public health specialists and dieticians have proposed radical changes in traditional diets, in an attempt to head off a future health disaster. Other experts call for a more judicious analysis of the foodways of the Southwest, often citing the healthier aspects of an earlier, more traditional diet based on vegetables, complex carbohydrates, little animal fat, and no processed foods. For these food activists, drawing on the ancestral heritage of Native American, Hispanic, and Anglo frontier foodways represents an opportunity to improve diets while at the same time allowing ancestral foods to play important roles in conserving cultural heritage.

*Lois Stanford*

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# Venezuela

## Overview

The continent of South America hosts four major landscape types, from the Andean heights to the Amazonian basin, from vast central grasslands to coastal regions bordering three different oceans. Venezuela, occupying the continent's northeastern perch with 1,740 miles of Caribbean coastline, includes all four of them. And just as these landscapes differ geographically, each contributes its own particular elements to the cultural stew that is modern-day Venezuelan cuisine, including native plants, local economies, and regional traditions.

The Andean range, traveling up the continent's west coast, makes a gentle turn to the east in Colombia, then spills into the sea along Venezuela's north coast. With it comes some of the most sophisticated of pre-Columbian traditions such as terraced farming, drying as a technique of food preservation, and that all-important Andean vegetable, the potato. At the southern tip of the southernmost state, 70,000 square miles of Amazonian river basin lap across the Brazilian border into the least populated region in the country. Here, small Indian tribes hunt, fish, and farm cassava as their primary foodstuff just as their ancestors did.

The Orinoco, the second-largest river on the continent, with the third-largest water volume in the world, fertilizes vast grasslands, or *llanos,* as it travels across the country from east to west. Here, *llaneros* herd the cattle descended from those brought by the Spaniards, turning beef into an essential element of the Venezuelan diet. Finally, coastal cultures are often closer in lifestyle and food traditions to those of the Caribbean islands than to those in the country's inland areas.

Today, corn and beans remain all important, and cassava, or yucca as it is called here, is still a major ingredient. Venezuelan food culture and cuisine blend these with a hint of Africa and a powerful dose of Spain to produce its *cocina criolla.*

## Food Culture Snapshot

Maria Reyes, who lives in Caracas, is thinking of the evening meal as she studies the empty pantry shelf where the bag of *masarepa* used to sit. She had better take immediate action, or there will be no arepas for dinner. The Venezuelan equivalent of tortillas, these pillow-like rounds are an absolute necessity. A trip to the market is in order. While she is out, she might as well pick up a week's worth of supplies.

In busy Caracas, the nearby supermarket is the best place to fill up on bulk products, but Maria is a good bargainer and can get better prices on meat and produce at the traditional market down the street. Here she can compare quality, and, in a worldly city like Caracas, the riotous displays of food connect her to the countryside far more than the grocery stores or fancy food shops.

Before she proceeds to the produce stalls, she stops to replenish her all-important supply of black beans, so important in Venezuelan cuisine that they are popularly known as *criollo caviar.* She loads up on onions, garlic, tomatoes, and bell peppers to make a week's worth of *sofrito,* a sauté, soup, or stew base. A package of presoaked cassava goes into her basket along with a

bunch of plantains and a couple of pounds of potatoes. She grabs several bunches of cilantro, then thoughtfully selects the freshest vegetables she can find. The spinach, green beans, and eggplant all look good.

Maria visits the meat vendors to pick out both pork and beef. Pork is the family's favorite, but beef stays good and cheap thanks to local production in the llanos. She moves to a cheese stall to pick out some soft native cheese for breakfast arepas. Nearby are the fruit stalls piled high with mangoes, papayas, cherimoyas, soursops, and guavas. She selects a few of each, adds some avocados for *guasacaca,* the Venezuelan equivalent of guacamole, and, with a basket filled to bursting, heads toward home, a week's menu already worked out in her head.

## Major Foodstuffs

Strong as the influence of Spain has been on the way Venezuelans eat, it is more visible in the cities than the countryside, among the wealthy than the poor, and during holidays and special events than every day. Imported ingredients such as olives, capers, wine, and spices signal the Spanish influence and are found mostly in the cities and at holiday times. Wheat, also a Spanish gift, plays a similar role since its flour is more expensive than corn products, though wheat breads are very popular.

Corn and beans still form the backbone of the rural diet and remain central to urban foodways as well. Arepas, made from processed corn flour, still accompany almost every meal, and fresh corn kernels along with local cheese are often mixed into wheat flour to make *cachapas,* a favorite pancake. Whole corncob chunks are incorporated into hearty stews, or *sancochos.*

Except in the llanos, country dwellers eat less meat than city dwellers do, and, because pigs are easy to raise at home, the meat is more likely to be pork than beef. Llaneros, like the gauchos of Argentina, herd their cattle freely over the grasslands and continue the tradition of slaughtering an entire cow to roast over a fire. Meanwhile, the diet of the Amazon remains relatively unchanged from pre-Hispanic times.



Cachapas, which are corn dough patties filled with cheese. This is a popular food item in Columbia and Venezuela. (iStockPhoto)

## Cooking

At the time of the Spanish conquest in the early 16th century, most of Venezuela's population was organized into disparate farming communities subsisting on corn, yucca, beans, and vegetables. Meals were eaten twice a day. Cooking was done by roasting, grilling, or boiling. There were no fats, and, except for the occasional treat of honey, sweets were unheard of. The rivers and oceans supplied fish, while hunters supplemented the diet with game.

While the diet may have been simple, its preparation was not. Sophisticated technology allowed cooks to keep their communities alive and healthy. They soaked, cooked, and fermented yucca to eliminate its bitter toxins. They softened corn by soaking it in wood-ash-suffused water, then ground it to make flour. In the process, they liberated otherwise-unavailable nutrients from corn, which, when com-

bined with beans, provided their people with an adequate supply of protein.

The Spaniards not only introduced new ingredients and improved cooking implements but also brought an entirely new technology. Frying in olive oil had been an important cooking method in Spain, but olive trees did not grow well in the New World. Instead, they turned to lard. They brought a means of enhancing flavor by sautéing onions, garlic, and leeks until soft to make a sofrito before adding other ingredients to the pot. In a perfect example of the Columbian Exchange, the New World added tomatoes and peppers to the sofrito, which today flavors Venezuela's favorite dishes.

## Typical Meals

Meals are usually taken twice a day in the countryside and three times in the cities. Though an increase in the pace of life has driven the urban lunch from the home to the workplace, breakfast and dinner remain relatively unchanged. Breakfast is based on bread, which can be made with wheat or, more commonly, corn flour. Arepas are a favorite, often pulled open and filled with a runny cheese somewhat like crème fraiche.

Dinner is the biggest meal of the day, a time when families gather together to enjoy several courses. Soups are usually part of the menu, and, though beans may dominate in rural meals, they are rarely absent on the tables of the wealthy. Rice is extremely popular as well. But Venezuelans love meat, poultry, and seafood, so those who can afford it usually include it in the evening meal.



A woman preparing arepas, typical corn fritters of Venezuela. (StockPhotoPro)

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***Arepas***

The classic bread of Venezuela is made with precooked white corn flour called masarepa, *harina precocida,* or *masa al instante*. It is not masa harina or tortilla flour. Look for it in Latin American stores under the brand name Harina P.A.N.

2 c masarepa

1 tsp salt

2 c water (approximate)

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Whisk together arepa flour with salt in a large bowl. Stir in water to make a relatively stiff dough. If mixture doesn't blend properly, add water in small increments. Let dough stand for 5 minutes, then form into balls and flatten into cakes 3 inches across and a half-inch thick.

Cook on a lightly greased griddle over moderate heat for 5 minutes to a side. Place on baking sheets, and bake for 20 to 30 minutes, turning occasionally. Fully cooked arepas sound hollow when tapped gently.

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***Pabellon Criollo con Caraotas Negras* (Beef with Black Beans and Plantains)**

Considered Venezuela's national dish, *pabellon* is truly a Creole concoction. It is always served with black beans. White rice, cooked with a simple sofrito of onions and garlic, is also essential.

*Serves 6*

**For the Beef**

1½ lb flank or skirt steak, cut to fit in a large saucepan

3 onions, one cut into large chunks, two chopped

Beef broth to cover

3 tbsp olive oil

3 cloves garlic, minced

1 red bell pepper, seeded and chopped

1 lb fresh or canned tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and chopped

1 tsp salt

Black pepper to taste

**For the Beans**

2 c black beans

3 tbsp olive oil

1 onion, chopped

1 red bell pepper, seeded and chopped

4 cloves garlic, smashed and chopped

1 tsp cumin

1 tsp ground sugar

Salt, pepper, and sugar to taste

**For the Plantain**

1 ripe plantain or 2 underripe bananas

2 tbsp olive oil

Place the meat and onion chunks into a large saucepan and cover with beef broth. Bring to a boil over medium heat and simmer, covered, until the meat is tender, 1½ to 2 hours. Allow to cool, remove cooled meat from stock, and shred finely. Strain stock and set aside.

Heat 3 tablespoons of oil over medium heat, add shredded meat, and brown, stirring lightly. Reduce heat to medium and stir in onions, garlic, bell pepper, tomatoes, salt, and pepper. Cook, uncovered, about 20 minutes, moistening with stock if necessary to create a dense sauce. Adjust salt and pepper.

Wash and pick over the beans. Cover with cold water and soak from 4 hours to overnight. Add enough water to cover the beans by 1 inch, bring to a boil, and simmer, covered, checking periodically, until they are tender, about 2 hours. Stir more frequently toward the end to keep beans from sticking to the pot.

In a skillet, heat 3 tablespoons oil and sauté onion and bell pepper until soft. Add garlic, cumin, and sugar, and sauté partly covered over low heat for 30 minutes. Add to the beans, cook briefly to blend flavors, and then add salt, pepper, and sugar to taste.

Just before serving, peel plantain or bananas, cut into 3 pieces, and slice each lengthways. Fry in the 2 tablespoons remaining oil over low heat, 3 minutes to a side. Arrange the beef, beans, and rice on a large platter garnished with plantain.

## Eating Out

While urban workers are likely to bring lunch from home, fast food is available to anyone looking for an inexpensive meal. This doesn't just mean McDonald's, though the U.S. chains are well-enough entrenched. Venezuelans today boast their own fast-food joint, the *arepera.* The country's ancient bread is split open and the doughy inner portion torn out. Then it is stuffed with all manner of beans, meats, cheeses, or stews to make *arepas rellenas.* Vendors produce them in huge quantities, wrap them in napkins, and sell them on paper plates.

Restaurants began to appear in Venezuela in the 19th century and are now well established, from unpretentious *luncherías* to fine-dining places. Many are owned by descendants of foreigners, particularly Italians, but just about any cuisine can be found in the cities, from Chinese to Indian to French.

## Special Occasions

Most dining out in Venezuela is reserved for special occasions. Birthdays, engagements, anniversaries, and weddings may be celebrated at restaurants, but important holidays, community achievements, and saint's days are recognized at home. None of these is more important than Christmas and Easter.

Christmas, in addition to churchgoing, is a time for gathering and feasting with the family, usually at the home of the senior member. The pièce de résistance may be a stuffed turkey or glazed ham that looks as if it came straight off an American table, but the plate of *hallacas* beside it is all Venezuelan. Similar to Mexican tamales, these cornmeal dumplings are stuffed with sautéed meat, wrapped in banana leaves rather than corn husks, and boiled rather



Hallacas, cornmeal dumplings stuffed with sautéed meat, wrapped in banana leaves, and boiled are traditional Christmas food in Venezuela. (iStockPhoto)

than steamed. They are essential to any Christmas meal.

While many take Holy Week, or Semana Santa, as an opportunity for a vacation, others observe it quite seriously. Residents of South America add to the repertoire of accepted Lenten dishes to include amphibians, reptiles, and water-dwelling mammals. Venezuelans particularly relish the meat of the semi-aquatic capybara, the world's largest rodent, to the point where poaching is common and there is some fear that the population may be threatened.

## Diet and Health

Early Spanish commentators noted the glowing good health of South America's indigenous peoples, including those of Venezuela. They talked of strong, healthy stature, shining hair, and gleaming teeth, properties soon to disappear with the deadly onslaught of foreign germs, slavery, and, as even 16th-century commentators suggested, the Spanish diet. Like all conquerors, the Spanish imported as much of their own diet as possible. In addition to new vegetables, herbs, and wheat, they brought farm animals, fat, sugar, and the expectation of three meals a day. They taught the local population to fry their foods in lard.

In terms of flavors and technology, the Spanish contribution merged with indigenous ingredients and techniques and gave birth to cocina criolla, something greater than the sum of its parts. But today the cuisines of Venezuela and other Latin American countries are much higher in fat and sugar than those of the pre-Hispanic period. Frying is widely used. Sugary sodas are as popular as fruit juices. Those with enough money now confront the evils of the Western diet. At the same time, class distinctions leave some people with too little money to buy meats, fats, and sweets in any large quantity and others with too little to eat at all. Only in the last decade have Venezuelans connected the dots between overconsumption of animal fats and ill health. Within recent years, the use of lard has declined while vegetable oils have rallied, hopefully a first step in a healthier direction.

*Nancy G. Freeman*

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# About the Editor and Contributors

**Ken Albala,** Editor, is professor of history at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California. He also teaches in the gastronomy program at Boston University. Albala is the author of many books, including *Eating Right in the Renaissance* (University of California Press, 2002), *Food in Early Modern Europe* (Greenwood Press, 2003), *Cooking in Europe 1250–1650* (Greenwood Press, 2005), *The Banquet: Dining in the Great Courts of Late Renaissance Europe* (University of Illinois Press, 2007), *Beans: A History* (Berg Publishers, 2007; winner of the 2008 International Association of Culinary Professionals Jane Grigson Award), and *Pancake* (Reaktion Press, 2008). He has co-edited two works, *The Business of Food* and *Human Cuisine.* He is also editor of three food series with 29 volumes in print, including the Food Cultures Around the World series for Greenwood Press. Albala is also co-editor of the journal *Food Culture and Society*. He is currently researching a history of theological controversies surrounding fasting in the Reformation Era and is editing two collected volumes of essays, one on the Renaissance and the other entitled *The Lord's Supper.* He has also coauthored a cookbook for Penguin/Perigee entitled *The Lost Art of Real Cooking,* which was released in July 2010.

**Julia Abramson** has visited France on a regular basis for more than 25 years to study, research, travel, and eat. She has published essays on aspects of food culture from vegetable carving to gastronomic writing and is the author of the book *Food Culture in France.* Abramson teaches French literature and culture and food studies at the University of Oklahoma, Norman.

**M. Shahrim Al-Karim** is a senior lecturer of food service and hospitality management at the Universiti Putra Malaysia. His research interests include food and culture, culinary tourism, food habits, and consumer behavior. He received a BS in hotel and restaurant management from New York University; an MBA from Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia; and a PhD in hospitality and tourism from Oklahoma State University, United States.

**E. N. Anderson** is professor emeritus of the Department of Anthropology, University of California, Riverside.

**Laura P. Appell-Warren** holds a doctorate in psychological anthropology from Harvard University. Her primary focus of research has been the study of

personhood; however, she has also studied the effects of social change on children's play. She has done research among the Bulusu' of East Kalimantan, Indonesia, and among the Rungus Momogon, a Dusunic-speaking peoples, of Sabah, Malyasia. In addition, she has traveled widely throughout Arctic Canada. She is the editor of *The Iban Diaries of Monica Freeman 1949–1951: Including Ethnographic Drawings, Sketches, Paintings, Photographs and Letters* and is author of the forthcoming volume entitled *Personhood: An Examination of the History and Use of an Anthropological Concept.* In addition to her current research on cradleboard use among Native North Americans, she is a teacher of anthropology at St. Mark's School in Southborough, Massachusetts.

**Heather Arndt-Anderson** is a Portland, Oregon, native who draws culinary inspiration from many world cuisines but prefers cooking from her own backyard. She is a part-time natural resources consultant and a full-time radical homemaker; in her (rare) spare time she writes the food blog *Voodoo & Sauce.*

**Michael Ashkenazi** is a scholar, writer, and consultant who has been researching and writing about Japanese food since 1990. In addition to books and articles on Japanese society, including its food culture, he has written numerous scholarly and professional articles and papers on various subjects including theoretical and methodological issues in anthropology, organized violence, space exploration, migration, religion and ritual, resettling ex-combatants, and small arms. He has taught at higher-education institutions in Japan, Canada, Israel, and the United Kingdom, directing graduate and undergraduate students. He is currently senior researcher and project leader at the Bonn International Center for Conversion in Germany, with responsibility for the areas of small arms and reintegration of ex-combatants. He has conducted field research in East and Southeast Asia, East and West Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.

**Babette Audant** went to Prague after college, where she quickly gave up teaching English in order to cook at a classical French restaurant. After graduating from the Culinary Institute of America, she worked as a chef in New York City for eight years, working at Rainbow Room, Beacon Bar & Grill, and other top-rated restaurants. She is a lecturer at City University of New York Kingsborough's Department of Tourism and Hospitality, and a doctoral candidate in geography at the City University of New York Graduate Center. Her research focuses on public markets and food policy in New York City.

**Gabriela Villagran Backman,** MA (English and Hispanic literature), was born in Sweden and raised in Mexico and the United States; she currently lives in Stockholm, Sweden. She is an independent researcher, interested in food studies, cultural heritage, writing cookbooks, red wine, and the Internet.

**Carolyn Bánfalvi** is a writer based in Budapest. She is the author of *Food Wine Budapest* (Little Bookroom) and *The Food and Wine Lover's Guide to Hungary: With Budapest Restaurants and Trips to the Wine Country* (Park Kiado). She contributes to numerous international food and travel publications and leads food and wine tours through Taste Hungary, her culinary tour company.

**Peter Barrett** is a painter who writes a food blog and is also the Food & Drink writer for *Chronogram Magazine* in New York's Hudson Valley.

**Cynthia D. Bertelsen** is an independent culinary scholar, nutritionist, freelance food writer, and food columnist. She lived in Haiti for three years and worked on a food-consumption study for a farming-systems project in Jacmel, Haiti. She writes a food history blog, *Gherkins & Tomatoes,* found at http://gherkinstomatoes.com.

**Megan K. Blake** is a senior lecturer in geography at the University of Sheffield. She has published research that examines the intersections between place and social practices. While her previous work focused on entrepreneurship and innovation, her recent work has examined food practices and family life.

**Janet Boileau** is a culinary historian who holds a master of arts degree in gastronomy from Le Cordon Bleu Paris and a doctorate in history from the University of Adelaide.

**Andrea Broomfield** is associate professor of English at Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kansas, and author of *Food and Cooking in Victorian England: A History.*

**Cynthia Clampitt** is a culinary historian, world traveler, and award-winning author. In 2010, she was elected to the Society of Women Geographers.

**Neil L. Coletta** is assistant director of food, wine, and the arts and lecturer in the MLA in gastronomy program at Boston University. His current research includes food and aesthetics and experimental pedagogy in the field of food studies.

**Paul Crask** is a travel writer and the author of two travel guides: *Dominica* (2008) and *Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique* (2009).

**Christine Crawford-Oppenheimer** is the information services librarian and archivist at the Culinary Institute of America. She grew up in Ras Tanura, Saudi Arabia.

**Anita Verna Crofts** is on the faculty at the University of Washington's Department of Communication, where she serves as an associate director of the master of communication in digital media program. In addition, she holds an appointment at the University of Washington's Department of Global Health, where she collaborates with partner institutions in Sudan, Namibia, and India on trainings that address leadership, management, and policy development, with her contributions targeted at the concept of storytelling as a leadership and evidence tool. Anita is an intrepid chowhound and publishes on gastroethnographic topics related to the intersection of food and identity. She hosts the blog *Sneeze!* at her Web site www.pepperforthebeast.com.

**Liza Debevec** is a research fellow at the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovene Academy of sciences and arts in Ljubljana, Slovenia. She has a PhD in social anthropology from the University of St. Andrews, United Kingdom. Her research

interests are West Africa and Burkina Faso, food studies, Islam, gender, identity, and practice of everyday life.

**Jonathan Deutsch** is associate professor of culinary arts at Kingsborough Community College, City University of New York, and Public Health, City University of New York Graduate Center. He is the author or editor of five books including, with Sarah Billingsley, *Culinary Improvisation* (Pearson, 2010) and, with Annie Hauck-Lawson, *Gastropolis: Food and New York City* (Columbia University Press, 2009).

**Deborah Duchon** is a nutritional anthropologist in Atlanta, Georgia.

**Nathalie Dupree** is the author of 10 cookbooks, many of which are about the American South, for which she has won two James Beard Awards. She has hosted over 300 television shows on the Public Broadcasting Service, The Food Network, and TLC. She lives with her husband, Jack Bass, who has authored 9 books about the American South and helped with her contribution to *Food Cultures of the World.*

**Pamela Elder** has worked in food public relations and online culinary education and is a freelance writer in the San Francisco Bay area.

**Rachel Finn** is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in various print and online publications. She is the founder and director of Roots Cuisine, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the foodways of the African diaspora around the globe.

**Richard Foss** has been a food writer and culinary historian since 1986, when he started as a restaurant critic for the *Los Angeles Reader*. His book on the history of rum is slated for publication in 2011, to be followed by a book on the history of beachside dining in Los Angeles. He is also a science fiction and fantasy author, an instructor in culinary history and Elizabethan theater at the University of California, Los Angeles, Extension, and is on the board of the Culinary Historians of Southern California.

**Nancy G. Freeman** is a food writer and art historian living in Berkeley, California, with a passion for food history. She has written about cuisines ranging from Ethiopia to the Philippines to the American South.

**Ramin Ganeshram** is a veteran journalist and professional chef trained at the Institute of Culinary Education in New York City, where she has also worked as a recreational chef instructor. Ganeshram also holds a master's degree in journalism from Columbia University. For eight years she worked as a feature writer/stringer for the *New York Times* regional sections, and she spent another eight years as a food columnist and feature writer for *Newsday*. She is the author of *Sweet Hands: Island Cooking from Trinidad and Tobago* (Hippocrene NY, 2006; 2nd expanded edition, 2010) and *Stir It Up* (Scholastic, 2011). In addition to contributing to a variety of food publications including *Saveur, Gourmet, Bon Appetit,* and epicurious.com, Ganeshram has written articles on food, culture, and travel for *Islands* (as contributing editor), *National Geographic Traveler,*

*Forbes Traveler, Forbes Four Seasons,* and many others. Currently, Ganeshram teaches food writing for New York University's School of Continuing Professional Studies.

**Hanna Garth** is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles. She is currently working on a dissertation on household food practices in Santiago de Cuba. Previously, she has conducted research on food culture, health, and nutrition in Cuba, Chile, and the Philippines.

**Mary Gee** is a medical sociology doctoral student at the University of California, San Francisco. Her current research interests include herbalism and Asian and Asian American foodways, especially with regards to multigenerational differences. Since 1995, she has actively worked with local and national eating disorders research and policy and advocacy organizations as well as for a program evaluation research consulting firm.

**Che Ann Abdul Ghani** holds a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in linguistics. She has a keen interest in studying language and language use in gastronomy. She is currently attached to the English Department at Universiti Putra Malaysia. Her research interests range from the use of language in context (pragmatics) to language use in multidisciplinary areas, namely, disciplines related to the social sciences. She also carries out work in translation and editing.

**Maja Godina-Golija** is research adviser at the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, Scientific Research Centre of Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

**Annie Goldberg** is a graduate student studying gastronomy at Boston University.

**Darra Goldstein** is Frances Christopher Oakley Third Century Professor of Russian at Williams College and the founding editor-in-chief of *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture.*

**Keiko Goto,** PhD, is associate professor at the Department of Nutrition and Food Sciences, California State University, Chico. Dr. Goto has more than 15 years of work experience in the field of nutrition and has worked as a practitioner and researcher in various developing countries. Dr. Goto's current research areas include food and culture, child and adolescent nutrition, sustainable food systems, and international nutrition.

**Carla Guerrón Montero** is a cultural and applied anthropologist trained in Latin America and the United States. She is currently associate professor of anthropology in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Delaware. Dr. Guerrón Montero's areas of expertise include gender, ethnicity, and identity; processes of globalization/nationalism, and particularly tourism; and social justice and human rights.

**Mary Gunderson** calls her practice paleocuisineology, where food and cooking bring cultures alive. Through many media, including the sites HistoryCooks.com

and MaryGunderson.com, she writes and speaks about South and North American food history and contemporary creative living and wellness. She wrote and published the award-winning book *The Food Journal of Lewis and Clark: Recipes for an Expedition* (History Cooks, 2003) and has authored six food-history books for kids.

**Liora Gvion** is a senior lecturer at the Kibbutzim College of Education and also teaches at the Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Environment at the Institute of Biochemistry, Food Science and Nutrition Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

**Cherie Y. Hamilton** is a cookbook author and specialist on the food cultures and cuisines of the Portuguese-speaking countries in Europe, South America, Africa, and Asia.

**Jessica B. Harris** teaches English at Queens College/City University of New York and is director of the Institute for the Study of Culinary Cultures at Dillard University.

**Melanie Haupt** is a doctoral candidate in English at the University of Texas at Austin. Her dissertation, "Starting from Scratch: Reading Women's Cooking Communities," explores women's use of cookbooks and recipes in the formation and reification of real and virtual communities.

**Ursula Heinzelmann** is an independent scholar and culinary historian, twice awarded the prestigious Sophie Coe Prize. A trained chef, sommelier, and ex-restaurateur, she now works as a freelance wine and food writer and journalist based in Berlin, Germany.

**Jennifer Hostetter** is an independent food consultant specializing in writing, research, and editing. She has degrees in history and culinary arts and holds a master's degree in food culture and communications from the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Italy. She also served as editorial assistant for this encyclopedia.

**Kelila Jaffe** is a doctoral candidate in the Food Studies Program at New York University. Originally from Sonoma, California, and the daughter of a professional chef, she has pursued anthropological and archaeological foodways research since her entry into academia. She received a BA with distinction in anthropology from the University of Pennsylvania, before attending the University of Auckland, where she earned an MA with honors in anthropology, concentrating in archaeology. Her research interests include past foodways, domestication, and zooarchaeology, and she has conducted fieldwork in Fiji, New Zealand, and Hawaii.

**Zilkia Janer** is associate professor of global studies at Hofstra University in New York. She is the author of *Puerto Rican Nation-Building Literature: Impossible Romance* (2005) and *Latino Food Culture* (2008).

**Brelyn Johnson** is a graduate of the master's program in food studies at New York University.

**Kate Johnston** is currently based in Italy, where she is an independent cultural food researcher and writer and a daily ethnographer of people's food habits. She

has a degree in anthropology from Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia, and a recent master's degree in food culture and communication from the University of Gastronomic Sciences, Italy. She was also editorial assistant for this encyclopedia.

**Desiree Koh** was born and raised in Singapore. A writer focusing on travel, hospitality, sports, fitness, business, and, of course, food, Koh's explorations across the globe always begin at the market, as she believes that the sight, scent, and savoring of native produce and cuisine are the key to the city's heart. The first and only female in Major League Eating's Asia debut, Koh retired from competition to better focus on each nibble and sip of fine, hopefully slow food.

**Bruce Kraig** is emeritus professor of history at Roosevelt University in Chicago and adjunct faculty at the Culinary School of Kendall College, Chicago. He has published and edited widely in the field of American and world food history. Kraig is also the founding president of the Culinary Historians of Chicago and the Greater Midwest Foodways Alliance.

**R. J. Krajewski** is the research services librarian at Simmons College, where among other things he facilitates discovery of food-culture research, especially through the lens of race, class, and gender. His own engagement with food is seasonally and locally rooted, starting in his own small, urban homestead, much like his Polish and German ancestors.

**Erin Laverty** is a freelance food writer and researcher based in Brooklyn, New York. She holds a master's degree in food studies from New York University.

**Robert A. Leonard** has a PhD in theoretical linguistics from Columbia. He studies the way people create and communicate meaning, including through food. He was born in Brooklyn and trained as a cook and *panaderia-reposteria* manager in the Caribbean; his doctoral studies led him to eight years of fieldwork in language, culture, and food in Africa and Southeast Asia. In the arts, as an undergraduate he cofounded and led the rock group Sha Na Na and with them opened for their friend Jimi Hendrix at the Woodstock Festival. Leonard is probably one of a very few people who have worked with both the Grateful Dead and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which in recent years recruited him to teach the emerging science of forensic linguistics at Quantico.

**Jane Levi** is an independent consultant and writer based in London, England. She is currently working on her PhD at the London Consortium, examining food in utopias, funded by her work on post-trade financial policy in the City of London.

**Yrsa Lindqvist** is a European ethnologist working as the leading archivist at the Folk Culture Archive in Helsinki. Her research about food and eating habits in the late 1990s, combined with earlier collections at the archive, resulted in 2009 in the publication *Mat, Måltid, Minne. Hundraår av finlandssvensk matkulur.* The book analyzes the changes in housekeeping and attitudes toward food. She has also contributed to other publications focusing on identity questions and has worked as a junior researcher at the Academy of Finland.

**William G. Lockwood** is professor emeritus of cultural anthropology at the University of Michigan. His central interest is ethnicity and interethnic relations. He has conducted long-term field research in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Croatian community in Austria and also among Roma and with a variety of ethnic groups in America, including Arabs, Finns, and Bosnians. He has long held a special interest in how food functions in ethnic group maintenance and in reflecting intra- and intergroup relations.

**Yvonne R. Lockwood** is curator emeritus of folklife at the Michigan State University Museum. Her formal training is in folklore, history, and Slavic languages and literatures. Research in Bosnia, Austria, and the United States, especially the Great Lakes region, has resulted in numerous publications, exhibitions, festival presentations, and workshops focused on her primary interests of foodways and ethnic traditions.

**Janet Long-Solís,** an anthropologist and archaeologist, is a research associate at the Institute of Historical Research at the National University of Mexico. She has published several books and articles on the chili pepper, the history of Mexican food, and the exchange of food products between Europe and the Americas in the 16th century.

**Kristina Lupp** has a background in professional cooking and has worked in Toronto and Florence. She is currently pursuing a master of arts in gastronomy at the University of Adelaide.

**Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire** is a lecturer in culinary arts in the Dublin Institute of Technology. Máirtín is well known as a chef, culinary historian, food writer, broadcaster, and ballad singer. He lives in Dublin with his wife and two daughters. He was the first Irish chef to be awarded a PhD, for his oral history of Dublin restaurants.

**Glenn R. Mack** is a food historian with extensive culinary training in Uzbekistan, Russia, Italy, and the United States. He cofounded the Culinary Academy of Austin and the Historic Foodways Group of Austin and currently serves as president of Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts Atlanta.

**Andrea MacRae** is a lecturer in the Le Cordon Bleu Graduate Program in Gastronomy at the University of Adelaide, Australia.

**Giorgos Maltezakis** earned his PhD in anthropology with research in cooperation with the Institute Studiorium Humanitatis of the Ljubljana Graduate School of the Humanities. His dissertation was on consumerism, the global market, and food, which was an ethnographic approach to the perception of food in Greece and Slovenia.

**Bertie Mandelblatt** is assistant professor at the University of Toronto, cross-appointed to the departments of Historical Studies and Geography. Her research concerns the early-modern French Atlantic, with a focus on commodity exchanges at the local and global scales: Her two current projects are the history

of food provisioning in the Franco-Caribbean and the transatlantic circulation of French rum and molasses, both in the 17th and 18th centuries.

**Marty Martindale** is a freelance writer living in Largo, Florida.

**Laura Mason** is a writer and food historian with a special interest in local, regional, and traditional foods in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. Her career has explored many dimensions of food and food production, including cooking for a living, unraveling the history of sugar confectionery, and trying to work out how many traditional and typically British foods relate to culture and landscape. Her publications include *Taste of Britain* (with Catherine Brown; HarperCollins, 2006), *The Food Culture of Great Britain* (Greenwood, 2004), and *The National Trust Farmhouse Cookbook* (National Trust, 2009).

**Anton Masterovoy** is a PhD candidate at the Graduate Center, City University of New York. He is working on his dissertation, titled "Eating Soviet: Food and Culture in USSR, 1917–1991."

**Anne Engammare McBride,** a Swiss native, food writer, and editor, is the director of the Experimental Cuisine Collective and a food studies PhD candidate at New York University. Her most recent book is *Culinary Careers: How to Get Your Dream Job in Food,* coauthored with Rick Smilow.

**Michael R. McDonald** is associate professor of anthropology at Florida Gulf Coast University. He is the author of *Food Culture in Central America*.

**Naomi M. McPherson** is associate professor of cultural anthropology and graduate program coordinator at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan Campus. Since 1981, she has accumulated over three years of field research with the Bariai of West New Britain, Papua New Guinea.

**Katrina Meynink** is an Australia-based freelance food writer and researcher. She has a master's degree in gastronomy through Le Cordon Bleu and the University of Adelaide under a scholarship from the James Beard Foundation. She is currently completing her first cookbook.

**Barbara J. Michael** is a sociocultural anthropologist whose research focuses on social organization, economics, decision making, and gender. Her geographic focus is on the Middle East and East Africa, where she has done research with the pastoral nomadic Hawazma Baggara and on traditional medicine in Yemen and is working on a video about men's cafes as a social institution. She teaches anthropology at the University of North Carolina Wilmington and has also worked as a consultant for several United Nations agencies.

**Diana Mincyte** is a fellow at the Rachel Carson Center at the Ludwig Maximilian University-Munich and visiting assistant professor in the Department of Advertising at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Mincyte examines topics at the interface of food, the environment, risk society, and global inequalities. Her book investigates raw-milk politics in the European Union to consider the production risk society and its institutions in post-Socialist states.

**Rebecca Moore** is a doctoral student studying the history of biotechnology at the University of Toronto in Ontario, Canada.

**Nawal Nasrallah,** a native of Iraq, was a professor of English and comparative literature at the universities of Baghdad and Mosul until 1990. As an independent scholar, she wrote the award-winning *Delights from the Garden of Eden: A Cookbook and a History of the Iraqi Cuisine* and *Annals of the Caliphs' Kitchens* (an English translation of Ibn Sayyar al-Warraq's 10th-century Baghdadi cookbook).

**Henry Notaker** graduated from the University of Oslo with a degree in literature and worked for many years as a foreign correspondent and host of arts and letters shows on Norwegian national television. He has written several books about food history, and with *Food Culture in Scandinavia* he won the Gourmand World Cookbook Award for best culinary history in 2009. His last book is a bibliography of early-modern culinary literature, *Printed Cookbooks in Europe 1470–1700.* He is a member of the editorial board of the journal *Food and History.*

**Kelly O'Leary** is a graduate student at Boston University in gastronomy and food studies and executive chef at the Bayridge University Residence and Cultural Center.

**Fabio Parasecoli** is associate professor and coordinator of food studies at the New School in New York City. He is author of *Food Culture in Italy* (2004) and *Bite Me: Food and Popular Culture* (2008).

**Susan Ji-Young Park** is the program director and head of curriculum development at École de Cuisine Pasadena (www.ecolecuisine.com); project leader for Green Algeria, a national environmental initiative; and a writer for LAWEEKLY'S Squid Ink. She has written curriculum for cooking classes at Los Angeles Unified School District, Sur La Table, Whole Foods Market, Central Market, and Le Cordon Bleu North America. She and her husband, Chef Farid Zadi, have co-written recipes for *Gourmet Magazine* and the *Los Angeles Times*. The couple are currently writing several cookbooks on North African, French, and Korean cuisines.

**Rosemary Parkinson** is author of *Culinaria: The Caribbean, Nyam Jamaica,* and *Barbados Bu'n-Bu'n,* and she contributes culinary travel stories to Caribbean magazines.

**Charles Perry** majored in Middle East languages at Princeton University, the University of California, Berkeley, and the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies, Shimlan, Lebanon. From 1968 to 1976 he was a copy editor and staff writer at *Rolling Stone* magazine in San Francisco, before leaving to work as a freelance writer specializing in food. From 1990 to 2008, he was a staff writer in the food section of the *Los Angeles Times*. He has published widely on the history of Middle Eastern food and was a major contributor to the *Oxford Companion to Food* (1999).

**Irina Petrosian** is a native of Armenia and a professional journalist who has written for Russian, Armenian, and U.S.-based newspapers. She is the coauthor of

*Armenian Food: Fact, Fiction, and Folklore* and holds degrees in journalism from Moscow State University and Indiana University.

**Suzanne Piscopo** is a nutrition, family, and consumer studies lecturer at the University of Malta in Malta. She is mainly involved in the training of home economics and primary-level teachers, as well as in nutrition and consumer-education projects in different settings. Suzanne is a registered public health nutritionist, and her research interests focus on socioecological determinants of food intake, nutrition interventions, and health promotion. She has also written a series of short stories for children about food. Suzanne enjoys teaching and learning about the history and culture of food and is known to creatively experiment with the ingredients at hand when cooking the evening meal together with her husband, Michael.

**Theresa Preston-Werner** is an advanced graduate student in anthropology at Northwestern University.

**Meg Ragland** is a culinary history researcher and librarian. She lives in Boston, Massachusetts.

**Carol Selva Rajah** is an award-winning chef and food writer currently based in Sydney, Australia. She has written 10 cookbooks on Malaysian and Southeast Asian cuisine. Her book *The Food of India* won the gold award for the Best Hardcover Recipe Book at the prestigious Jacob's Creek World Food Media Awards.

**Birgit Ricquier** is pursuing a PhD in linguistics at the Université Libre de Bruxelles and the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium, with a fellowship from the Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique (FNRS). The topic of her PhD project is "A Comparative Linguistic Approach to the History of Culinary Practice in Bantu-Speaking Africa." She has spent several months in central Africa, including one month in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a member of the Boyekoli Ebale Congo 2010 Expedition and two months of research focused on food cultures in Congo.

**Amy Riolo** is an award-winning author, lecturer, cooking instructor, and consultant. She is the author of *Arabian Delights: Recipes and Princely Entertaining Ideas from the Arabian Peninsula, Nile Style: Egyptian Cuisine and Culture,* and *The Mediterranean Diabetes Cookbook.* Amy has lived, worked, and traveled extensively through Egypt and enjoys fusing cuisine, culture, and history into all aspects of her work. Please see www.amyriolo.com, www.baltimoreegypt.org, and diningwithdiplomats.blogspot.com for more information and further reading.

**Owen Roberts** is a journalist, communications instructor, and director of research communications for the University of Guelph in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. He holds a doctorate of education from Texas Tech University and Texas A&M University.

**Fiona Ross** is a gastrodetective whose headquarters is the Bodleian Library in Oxford, United Kingdom. She spends her time there investigating the eating foibles of the famous and infamous. Her cookery book *Dining with Destiny* is the

result: When you want to know what Lenin lunched on or what JFK ate by the poolside, *Dining with Destiny* has the answer.

**Signe Rousseau** (née Hansen) is Danish by birth but a long-term resident of southern Africa and is a researcher and part-time lecturer at the University of Cape Town. Following an MA in the Department of English and a PhD (on food media and celebrity chefs) in the Centre for Film and Media Studies, she now teaches critical literacy and professional communication in the School of Management Studies (Faculty of Commerce).

**Kathleen Ryan** is a consulting scholar in the African Section of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia. She has carried out research in Kenya since 1990, when she began a study of Maasai cattle herders in Kajiado District.

**Helen Saberi** was Alan Davidson's principal assistant in the completion of the *Oxford Companion to Food.* She is the author of *Noshe Djan: Afghan Food and Cookery;* coauthor of *Trifle* with Alan Davidson; and coauthor of *The Road to Vindaloo* with David Burnett; her latest book is *Tea: A Global History.*

**Cari Sánchez** holds a master of arts in gastronomy from the University of Adelaide/Le Cordon Bleu in South Australia. Her dissertation explores the global spread of the Argentine *asado*. She currently lives in Jacksonville, Florida, where she writes the food and travel blog *viCARIous* and is the marketing manager for a craft brewery.

**Peter Scholliers** teaches history at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and is currently head of the research group "Social and Cultural Food Studies" (FOST). He studies the history of food in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. He co-edits the journal *Food and History* and is involved in various ways in the Institut Européen d'Histoire et des Cultures de l'Alimentation (Tours, France). Recently, he published *Food Culture in Belgium* (Greenwood, 2008). More information can be found at http://www.vub.ac.be/FOST/fost_in_english/.

**Colleen Taylor Sen** is the author of *Food Culture in India; Curry: A Global History; Pakoras, Paneer, Pappadums: A Guide to Indian Restaurant Menus,* and many articles on the food of the Indian Subcontinent. She is a regular participant in the Oxford Food Symposium.

**Roger Serunyigo** was born and lives in Kampala, Uganda. He graduated from Makerere University with a degree in urban and regional planning, has worked in telecommunications, and is now a professional basketball player for the Uganda National Team. He also coaches a women's basketball team (The Magic Stormers).

**Dorette Snover** is a chef and author. Influenced by French heritage and the food traditions of the Pennsylvania Dutch country, Chef Snover teaches exploration of the world via a culinary map at her school, C'est si Bon! in Chapel Hill. While the stock simmers, she is writing a novel about a French bread apprentice.

**Celia Sorhaindo** is a freelance photographer and writer. She was the editor of the 2008 and 2009 *Dominica Food and Drink Guide* magazine and content manager for the Dominica section of the magazine *Caribbean Homes & Lifestyle*.

**Lyra Spang** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Anthropology and the Food Studies Program at Indiana University. She has written about food, sex, and symbolism; the role of place in defining organic; and the importance of social relationships in small-scale food business in Belize. She grew up on a farm in southern Belize and is a proud promoter of that country's unique and diverse culinary heritage.

**Lois Stanford** is an agricultural anthropologist in the Department of Anthropology at New Mexico State University. In her research, she has examined the globalization of food systems both in Mexico and in the U.S. Southwest. Her current research focuses on the critical role of food heritage and plant conservation in constructing and maintaining traditional foodways and cultural identity in New Mexico. In collaboration with local food groups, she is currently developing a community food assessment project in the Mesilla Valley in southern New Mexico.

**Aliza Stark** is a senior faculty member at the Agriculture, Food, and Environment Institute of Biochemistry, Food Science, and Nutrition at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

**Maria "Ging" Gutierrez Steinberg** is a marketing manager for a New York City–based specialty food company and a food writer. She has a master's degree in food studies from New York University and is a graduate of Le Cordon Bleu. Her articles have appeared in various publications in Asia and the United States.

**Anita Stewart** is a cookbook author and Canadian culinary activist from Elora, Ontario, Canada.

**Emily Stone** has written about Guatemalan cuisine in the *Radcliffe Culinary Times,* and she is at work on a nonfiction book about chocolate in Central America. She currently teaches journalism and creative writing at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, China.

**Asele Surina** is a Russian native and former journalist who now works as a translator and interpreter. Since 1999 she has worked at the Institute of Classical Archaeology at the University of Texas on joint projects with an archaeological museum in Crimea, Ukraine.

**Aylin Öney Tan** is an architect by training and studied conservation of historic structures in Turkey, Italy, and the United Kingdom. Eventually, her passion for food and travel led her to write on food. Since 2003, she has had a weekly food column in *Cumhuriyet,* a prestigious national daily, and contributes to various food magazines. She was a jury member of the Slow Food Award 2000–2003, with her nominees receiving awards. She contributes to the Terra Madre and Presidia projects as the leader of the Ankara Convivium. She won the Sophie Coe Award on food history in 2008 for her article "Poppy: Potent yet Frail," presented

previously at the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery where she's become a regular presenter. Currently, she is the curator of the Culinary Culture Section of Princess Islands' City Museum. She is happy to unite her expertise in archaeology and art history from her previous career with her unbounded interest in food culture.

**Nicole Tarulevicz** teaches at the School of Asian Languages and Studies at the University of Tasmania.

**Karen Lau Taylor** is a freelance food writer and consultant whose food curriculum vitae includes a master's degree in food studies from New York University, an advanced certificate from the Wine and Spirits Education Trust, and a gig as pastry cook at a five-star hotel after completing L'Academie de Cuisine's pastry arts program. She is working toward a master's degree in public health while she continues to write, teach, test recipes, eat, and drink from her home in Alexandria, Virginia.

**Thy Tran** is trained as a professional chef. She established Wandering Spoon to provide cooking classes, culinary consultation, and educational programming for culinary academies and nonprofit organizations throughout Northern California. Currently, she is a chef instructor at the International Culinary Schools at the Art Institute of California–San Francisco and Tante Marie's. She is also the founder and director of the Asian Culinary Forum. She co-authored The Essentials of Asian Cooking, Taste of the World, and the award-winning guide, *Kitchen Companion*.

**Leena Trivedi-Grenier** is a Bay-area food writer, cooking teacher, and social media consultant. Her writings have appeared in *The Business of Food: Encyclopedia of the Food and Drink Industry, Culinary Trends* magazine, and the *Cultural Arts Resources for Teachers and Students* newsletter and will be featured in several upcoming titles by Greenwood Press. She also runs a food/travel/gastronomy blog called *Leena Eats This Blog* (www.leenaeats.com).

**Karin Vaneker** graduated from the AKI Academy of Visual Arts in Enschede, the Netherlands. She later attended Sint-Lukas Hoger Instituut voor Schone Kunsten in Brussels, Belgium. She has written for numerous Dutch newspapers and magazines, specializing in trends and the cultural and other histories of ingredients and cuisines, and has published several books. Furthermore, Vaneker has worked for museums and curated an exhibition about New World taro (L. *Xanthosoma* spp.). At present she is researching its potential in domestic cuisines and gastronomy.

**Penny Van Esterik** is professor of anthropology at York University, Toronto, where she teaches nutritional anthropology, advocacy anthropology, and feminist theory. She does fieldwork in Southeast Asia and has developed materials on breast-feeding and women's work and infant and young child feeding.

**Richard Wilk** is professor of anthropology and gender studies at Indiana University, where he directs the Food Studies Program. With a PhD in anthropology from the University of Arizona, he has taught at the University of California,

Berkeley; University of California, Santa Cruz; New Mexico State University; and University College London and has held fellowships at Gothenburg University and the University of London. His publications include more than 125 papers and book chapters, a textbook in economic anthropology, and several edited volumes. His most recent books are *Home Cooking in the Global Village* (Berg Publishers), *Off the Edge: Experiments in Cultural Analysis* (with Orvar Lofgren; Museum Tusculanum Press), *Fast Food/Slow Food* (Altamira Press), and *Time, Consumption, and Everyday Life* (with Elizabeth Shove and Frank Trentmann; Berg Publishers).

**Chelsie Yount** is a PhD student of anthropology at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. She lived in Senegal in 2005 and again in 2008, when performing ethnographic research for her master's thesis at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, on the topic of Senegalese food and eating habits.

**Marcia Zoladz** is a cook, food writer, and food-history researcher with her own Web site, Cozinha da Marcia (Marcia's Kitchen; www.cozinhadamarcia.com.br). She is a regular participant and contributor at the Oxford Symposium on Food and History and has published three books in Brazil, Germany, and Holland—*Cozinha Portuguesa* (Portuguese cooking), *Muito Prazer* (Easy recipes), and *Brigadeiros e Bolinhas* (Sweet and savory Brazilian finger foods).

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# Food Cultures of the World Encyclopedia

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# Food Cultures of the World Encyclopedia

## ASIA AND OCEANIA

**Volume 3**

KEN ALBALA, EDITOR

GREENWOOD

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# List of Abbreviations

c = cup
fl oz = fluid ounce
gal = gallon
in. = inch
lb = pound
mL = milliliter
oz = ounce
pt = pint
qt = quart
tbsp = tablespoon
tsp = teaspoon

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# Preface

This encyclopedia is the culmination of nearly a decade's work on the *Food Culture around the World* series. As that project expanded to 20 volumes, we realized that many peoples and places, fascinating and important in their own right, had not been covered. Considering that the cultural study of food has become more sophisticated and comprehensive over the past decade, that food has become a legitimate academic topic in curricula at every level of education, and that we seem to become more obsessed with food every day, we recognized that we simply could not leave out much of the planet. The only way to satisfy this growing demand is the set you see before you, which includes material covered in the series plus new articles that span the globe. We have gathered food scholars from around the world—people whose passion and expertise have given them deep insight into the ingredients, cooking methods, and ways of eating and thinking about food in their respective countries.

A number of questions regarding breadth and depth naturally arose in planning this work, particularly about the level of analysis for each article. Could we do justice to the vast array of distinct cuisines on earth? Could we include regional coverage for well-recognized food cultures? That is, rather than the nation-state as the criterion for inclusion, why not add Alsace, Provence, and Burgundy with France, or Sichuan, Hunan, and Canton with China? It became apparent that we would need another 20 volumes or risk very brisk, superficial coverage and that as arbitrary as the construction of nation-states has been historically, in particular the way minority cultures have tended to be obscured, the best way to organize this encyclopedia was by nation. Regional variations and minority groups can, of course, be discussed within the framework of nation-based articles. On the other hand, some groups frankly demanded separate entries—those who stood out as unique and distinct from the majority culture in which they happen politically to be included, or in some cases those people who either transcend national boundaries or even those very small places, whose great diversity demanded separate coverage as truly different from the culture around them. Thus we include the Basques separate from Spain and France, and the Hmong. We have not, however, included every single people merely on the basis of national status. This should not be taken to suggest that these cultures are unimportant but merely that many places share a common culture with those around them, though divided by national borders. In such cases we have provided cross-references. This seemed a preferable solution to suffering repetitiveness or unmanageable size.

The format for each entry also raised many questions. "Eating Out," for example, is simply not relevant in some places on earth. Would forcing each article into a common structure ultimately do injustice to the uniqueness of each culture? In the end it seemed that the ability to conduct cross-cultural analysis proved one of the most valuable assets of this set, so that one could easily compare what's for lunch in Brazil or Brunei. Moreover, tracing the various global currents of influence has been made possible since a shared set of parameters places each article on a common footing. We can trace, for example, the culinary influence of various peoples as they spread around the world. In this respect this work is unique. There are several excellent food encyclopedias on the market, all of which cover individual ingredients, topical themes, cooking methods, and sometimes recipes. None, however, treats individual food cultures as discrete units of analysis, and for students hoping to find an in-depth but succinct description of places, or for those hoping to compare a single food topic across cultures, this is the only source to which they can turn. We anticipate that this work will be invaluable for students, scholars, food writers, as well as that indomitable horde popularly known as foodies.

The other major question in designing this encyclopedia was how to define what exactly constitutes a *food culture*. This term should be distinguished from *cuisine,* which refers only to the cooking, serving, and appreciation of food. Naturally we include this within each entry and in doing so have taken the broadest possible definition of the term *cuisine*. That is, if a people cooks and recognizes a common set of recipes and discusses them with a common vocabulary, then it should be deemed a cuisine. Thus there is no place on earth without a cuisine. A nation, continent, region, and even a small group may share a common cuisine. This encyclopedia, however, covers much more. It explores the social context of consumption, the shared values and symbolic meanings that inform food choices, and the rituals and daily routine—indeed everything that constitutes a food culture. Thus we include religion, health, mealtimes, and special occasions, as well as the way certain foods confer status or have meanings beyond simple sensory gratification. Nor have we neglected the gastronomic angle, as recipes are an essential expression of what people think is good to eat, and their popularity is the outcome of decisions made at every level of society, from the farmer who grows food, and the environment and material resources that make it possible, to the government policy that promotes certain ingredients, to the retailers who market them, to the technologies by which they are transformed, and to the individual preference of family members at the level of the household. To this end we have added food culture snapshots to each entry, which puts a human face on the broader topics under discussion.

As with the series that preceded this encyclopedia, our aim is to present the panoply of human experience through the lens of food in an effort to better understand and appreciate our differences. We will find remarkably common experiences among us, especially as the world increasingly falls under the sway of corporate multinational food industries, but we will also find deep, profound, and persistent distinctions, ones that should and must be preserved because they are essential to who were are and how we define ourselves. These are differences

that should not be effaced nor lost as our tastes become increasingly cosmopolitan. I hope that in reading these articles you find, like me, that the world is a marvelously diverse place and what people eat tells us about them in such an immediate and palpable way that in a certain sense you feel you know the people at some level. This, of course, is the first step toward understanding, appreciating, and living with each other peacefully on this small lump of turf we call earth.

*Ken Albala*
*University of the Pacific*

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# Aboriginal Australians

## Overview

The Commonwealth of Australia is an island country located between the Indian and South Pacific Oceans. It is comprised of the continental mainland, the island of Tasmania, and several smaller surrounding islands. Consisting of six states, Australia is the world's sixth-largest country, just slightly smaller than the continental United States. The continent was inhabited by Aboriginal settlers from Southeast Asia up to 60,000 years ago. The British took possession of the country in the late 18th century and turned it into a prison colony for their criminals, and Australia officially became a country in 1901.

The majority of the country's population is concentrated along the southeastern and eastern coasts. The central region is sparsely populated because of its dry, desert environment. As a whole, the country receives very little rainfall and struggles to manage its limited freshwater resources. The country boasts more than 21 million citizens, with indigenous Australians making up only 1 percent of the population, just over 500,000 people.

Indigenous Australians are defined as those whose ancestors lived on the continent and its neighboring islands before British colonists began to arrive in the 17th century. The Northern Territory has the highest proportion of Aboriginal Australians among its population, and the state of Victoria has the lowest. The percentage of Aboriginal Australians living in remote areas of Australia is just slightly lower than for Aboriginal Australians who dwell in or near urban settings.

Aboriginal Australians' diets vary by location. Generally, the closer a family lives to an urban center, the more processed, Western-style foods they consume. The farther a family lives from a city, the more likely they are to supplement the processed, Western foods they consume with traditional foods and cooking methods.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Jack and Ann Smith are Aboriginal Australians who live with their two children, Nicole and Jonah, and Jack's unemployed brother, Mark, in a modest neighborhood in Walkerville, South Australia, a suburb northeast of the city of Adelaide. A few years back, Jack and Ann moved their family closer to the city from the bush, or the desert region where the nomadic Aboriginal populations traditionally lived. In Walkerville, Jack works as a mechanic, and Ann has a job as a housekeeper. Still, they struggle to pay the bills and buy groceries every month because they make nearly 50 percent less than the average nonindigenous Australian family does. This lower-class lifestyle affects their diet, which incorporates many processed, fatty Western foods and very few traditional foods and cooking methods. However, processed foods are not new to the Aboriginal Australian diet; since the late 18th century, in the bush, nearly everyone has relied on government rations of processed food to survive as European settlement killed off more and more natural food sources. The only difference now is that there is a much larger selection to choose from.

For daily breakfasts, Ann makes sure to stock up on plenty of fresh fruit for a family favorite, fruit salad with cream and sugar, which Jack eats before heading to work at 6 A.M. She also stocks up on cream, as the rest

of the family loves it on top of cereal with fruit juice when they wake up at 7 A.M. for school. Mark, Jack's brother, typically gets the children ready for school so Ann can leave for work at 6:30 A.M. He spends the rest of his day doing chores around the house for the family to help contribute.

Most of the family eats lunch out during the day. Jack and Ann often buy meat pies from convenience stores during work around noon, and the children purchase chicken nuggets and toasted cheese sandwiches from their school cafeteria. The children also drink off-brand sodas with fruit flavors like passion fruit and mango or their favorite juice, Ribena, which is made from black currants. Mark is the only one who eats lunch at home, and he typically makes himself a *snag on the dag,* which is a pork sausage that is quickly grilled and served in a piece of white sandwich bread with barbecue sauce.

At dinnertime, Nicole and Jonah beg their mother to cook frozen French fries sprinkled with chicken salt, which is chicken-flavored salt. Ann gets out preformed frozen hamburger patties that she throws on the family grill and a bag of frozen mixed vegetables that she heats in the microwave. For a treat, especially on the weekends, Ann uses all-purpose flour and butter to make *quandong* crumble from the country's wild native peach.

---

**Quandong Crumble**

**Filling**

1 c dried quandongs, rehydrated in water overnight

1 c peeled, chopped apple

½ c water

¾ c sugar

1 tbsp fresh lemon juice

1 tbsp cornstarch or arrowroot

**Crumble Topping**

½ stick cold butter (2 oz), chopped into cubes

1⅓ c flour

¼ c rolled oats

3 tbsp sugar

½ tsp ground cinnamon

Preheat oven to 400°F. To make the crumble topping, put all of the crumble ingredients in a bowl and work them with your fingers until pea-sized bits of butter are integrated with the rest of the ingredients. Place quandong, apple, water, sugar, lemon juice, and cornstarch in a baking pan and toss to thoroughly combine. Sprinkle crumble on top of filling and bake for 45 minutes, or until filling is bubbling and thickened and crumble is browned.

Since leaving the bush three years ago, the Smith family has experienced many changes in their eating habits and cooking methods. While he was growing up in the outback, Jack's mother would grab one of the chooks (chickens) they raised in their backyard and slaughter it before dinner. When Jack brought home a live chook recently, both of his children cried for hours after the slaughter. The older Smiths miss the days when a few hours of hunting would yield a kangaroo; these days, money is the only currency that will buy them meat. A special meal used to mean freshly caught echidna (porcupine) cooked in a ground oven and johnnycakes (a campfire flatbread) shared with several other families, but today, a special monthly treat is an intimate meal with the immediate family at the local Mackas (McDonald's) for burgers, fries, and Happy Meals.

---

## Major Foodstuffs

Aboriginal Australians have the oldest living culinary tradition in the world. They are believed to have entered northern Australia 40,000–60,000 years ago. From there, Aboriginal families and clans spread across the country, each adapting to wildly different climates and environments, from humid rain forests to achingly dry deserts, from sunny coastlines to snowy mountaintops. Due to such an assortment of climates and settings, it is difficult to generalize about early Aboriginal cuisine.

However, a few commonalities were shared by almost all Aboriginal clans before the Europeans settled in Australia in the year 1788. Early Aboriginal clans were hunter-gatherers who moved frequently based on food supplies. Their diet consisted of over 1,000 different plants and a variety of wild animals. It was largely vegetarian with the occasional infusion of meat and had a heavy focus on grains. Women and children gathered plants (nuts, tubers, seeds, and fruit), caught small animals, and fished, which accounted for a majority of the clan's diet. Men were responsible for hunting large and small animals, including kangaroos, emus, wild birds, bandicoots (mouse-sized marsupials), and turtles.

Variations existed based on region, with desert clans dining on *witchetty* grubs (moth larvae) and flying foxes (bats) and coastal clans serving shellfish, stingrays, and oysters. To catch their meals, they would use spears, sharpened animal bones, nets, or whatever they could fashion or use from their surroundings. Almost all Aboriginal communities made some form of flatbread on their campfires, commonly known as damper. To make most dampers, they would gather seeds, dry them, and then grind them when they needed flour. The result was much heartier than the wheat-flour damper of today and was also very nourishing.

After European settlement, foodstuffs available to Aboriginal Australians changed drastically, altering their basic diet. As land was cleared for more settlement, crops, and livestock, more wild Australian plant and animal foods were destroyed or displaced, affecting the availability of traditional Aboriginal food sources. To account for this gap in their natural diet, the government assisted Aboriginals with rations of processed, Western, high-fat foods, which still account for a majority of their food today. Traditional foods and cooking methods are still used but only by those families living remotely and only as a supplement to the high-calorie, low-nutrient processed food they regularly eat.

## Cooking

Traditional Aboriginal Australian cooking was viewed by Europeans as simple, but it was very time- and labor-intensive and required many skills from the clan cook. These abilities included adapting to different weather and environments, getting creative when tools or new cooking methods were needed, knowing which kind of wood works with which sort of food, and so on. Some plants and fruits were edible in their raw state, but several required cooking in hot ashes or soaking in water to improve digestibility or to leach out toxins in the food. For instance, *munja* seeds, or kernels from the cycad palm, were great for drying and grinding into flour, but fresh munja contains a poisonous acid. Aboriginals would cut the seed into thin slices with a sharpened kangaroo-bone blade and dry the pieces. When they needed flour, they would soak the pieces in water until the acid was released and then grind them into flour for bread making. This and other traditional cooking methods were passed down to their children through songs, along with an oral history of their culture.

Their cooking equipment and methods were quite rudimentary and yet sophisticated; they could steam and smoke food in an earth oven or char it in an ash oven, grill it over hot ashes, bake it in hot ashes (parching), or roast it on hot coals (mainly reserved for small animals and seafood). For example, to cook damper or other flatbreads, a cook would build a large fire, scrape aside the hot coals, set the dough in the center of the fire, and then top the dough with hot coals and ashes to bake.

To cook a kangaroo, they would build a ground oven by digging a shallow hole and starting a wood fire in it. Stones would be placed on top of the fire, and when the fire burned down and the stones were hot, soaked branches were placed on top. The branches would start steaming, and then the meat would be placed on top and covered with more hot stones, wet leaves, and paper bark to make an airtight seal until the meat was cooked. Cooking equipment had to be light, portable, and made from the land, like *coolamons* (vessels) made from bark or tree gnarls.

For the modern, remote-living Aboriginal family, some aspects of their modern cookery reflect traditional as well as Western cooking methods, like using the Western methods of boiling and frying over a traditional open fire. How remote a particular

Aboriginal community is will determine what sort of cooking equipment is available. Many remote areas have no running water or electricity. If a family is lucky enough to have a kerosene-run refrigerator, it breaks often, or funds are too short to run it all the time. A camp might have a small propane cooktop, but typically Aboriginals rely on cooking over an open campfire or use ready-made convenience foods that require little to no cooking, purchased from a station store or a monthly mail truck. After European settlement, certain cooking equipment was introduced into remote Aboriginal communities to make open-fire cooking easier, like shovels for handling fires and making damper and cast iron or steel camp ovens (a three-legged pot with a lid that acts as an oven when placed into hot coals).

**Damper Bread**

**Ingredients**

1 c self-rising flour

Dash of salt

1 tbsp sugar

½ tsp baking soda

½ tbsp butter

½ c milk

Mix the flour with the salt, sugar, and baking soda, then rub the butter into the flour until you get pea-sized bits. Stir in milk until the mix forms into a dough. Shape into small biscuits, and bake in a 400°F oven for 15 minutes, or until bread is fully browned.

Billy cans are pots used to boil water or brew tea over open fires, and nearly every family has a coveted billy can. Aboriginals supplement processed foods by hunting and gathering native foods whenever possible, and adapting native cooking to Western cooking equipment and methods. A common sight that blends the Western and Aboriginal worlds is a campfire pot boiling a leg of kangaroo with the paw curled over the edge of the pot.

Several organizations and individuals are striving to preserve Aboriginal Australian culinary heritage. Professional chef and Aboriginal Australian Mark Olive works in remote indigenous communities, organizing workshops to reclaim traditional Aboriginal cooking methods and educating kids about these traditions as well as nutrition. Modern, non-remote-living Aboriginal families use even fewer traditional cooking methods and recipes than their remote-living brothers. The most common cooking methods involve using a microwave, a stovetop or basic oven, and the occasional barbecue grill. Since these families have easier access to a wide range of processed food and tend to own a refrigerator or freezer, frozen or premade foods like fish sticks and sausage rolls are popular. This means that instead of cooking food, only reheating is needed. While this average family tends to have better living conditions than those living in more remote locations (electricity and running water are much more common), housing and cooking equipment tend to be modest and are often in need of repair.

If a traditional Aboriginal recipe is made, the main ingredients are almost always replaced with available Western ingredients, and Western cooking methods are used; it is often for celebration or reminiscence, rather than a daily or religious sustenance. For example, a traditional Aboriginal stew might contain kangaroo or emu meat and be cooked on an open fire, but today, they might use corned beef, a preserved meat that was served at the station camps because it required no refrigeration, and a stovetop. Many modern Aboriginal families still rely on corned beef for a large quantity of their meat supply, not because of poor refrigeration but rather because these are the traditions they remember.

## Typical Meals

For remote-living Aboriginal Australians, breakfast starts with leftover food from the day before. During mid- to late afternoon, they eat dinner, which consists of vegetables, grains, and occasionally meat or fish depending on the community's location and is typically prepared at the main camp. Throughout the day, they also consume snacks au naturel, eaten

fresh while hunting and gathering, typically berries, nuts, insects, and plants.

Traditional Aboriginal eating habits are still factored into some modern, remote-living Aboriginal communities, which include taboos and eating order. Meat is a rare treat and carefully split up among the community based on rank. Men are favored, with the hunter giving away choice bits to his relatives, who might pass some down to the women. Offal, which is really prized, goes to the elders. The hunter may invoke a traditional law called "The Vow," where he is allowed to lay claim to a choice piece of offal, and if anyone else in the tribe eats it, they will have broken the law. Other taboos include various foods that are forbidden to be eaten based on circumstances, particularly around menstruating women and girls, and boys around the age of initiation. For example, young boys about to undergo initiation are forbidden to eat wallaby (a small relative of the kangaroo) and two kinds of bandicoot because they have been known to turn black beards brown, an unfavorable color.

Urban-living Aboriginal Australians' typical meals are most similar to a Western diet. Breakfast is often cereal with cream or whole milk, toast with Vegemite (a yeast-based spread), or a bigger fried English breakfast of sausage, tomatoes, mushrooms, fried eggs, and toast. Lunch can be fast food or something convenient and prepackaged, like meat pies and sausage rolls with tomato sauce that can be bought at gas stations and convenience stores.

Dinner is made up of cheap meats (pork, lamb, beef, and chicken are common), cooked simply—either grilled, fried (breaded meat cutlets is a popular dish), boiled, or baked—or it can consist of frozen, premade food like a frozen pizza or shepherd's pie. A few times a month, a typical family treats themselves to a meal at a fast-food restaurant.

## Eating Out

Regardless of where they live, many Aboriginal Australians are classified as lower class or impoverished, so the opportunity to dine out does not come often. For remote-living Aboriginals, restaurants are few and far between in the bush, so dining out often involves picking up premade food from a local store.

For urban-dwelling Aboriginal Australians, there are certainly more opportunities to dine out, as proximity to an urban center typically means there are more restaurants, and fast-food restaurants are a popular choice. McDonald's is widely popular across Australia, as are other U.S. fast-food companies like KFC, Subway, and Burger King. Even so, an outing to a fast-food restaurant is a special occasion, because families are often large and money is scarce.

Restaurants that serve traditional Aboriginal Australian food do not really exist in Australia, and if they do, they often go out of business because the general population does not dine on native Australian ingredients or traditional Aboriginal Australian cuisine. For example, professional Aboriginal chef Mark Olive opened an indigenous Australian restaurant called The Midden in Sydney in 1996, but the restaurant lasted for only 18 months as there was not enough interest in it. Plenty of non-Aboriginal Australian chefs are using native ingredients in their cuisine but not to create Aboriginal Australian food. A lamb meat pie flavored with native lemon verbena and wattleseed (an Australian acacia) would be a good example of how chefs are utilizing native ingredients within popular European dishes. The use of native foods in restaurants is currently a trend, and often these restaurants charge far beyond an average Aboriginal's dining budget and the native population is not able to enjoy the food.

## Special Occasions

Special occasions like cultural ceremonies traditionally drew together a large group of Aboriginals, so there was a great need to hold such occasions near an abundant source of food. This means many ceremonial foods were linked with seasonal abundance. For instance, spring and summer in the mountains in the states of Victoria and New South Wales yield large quantities of *bogong* moths, so ceremonies that take place during that time often occurred in the mountains so there would be a plentiful food

source for the group. The moths were simply roasted and eaten whole.

Although they do not perform ceremonies nearly as frequently as their ancestors did, modern remote-living Aboriginal Australians still perform ceremonies whenever possible and try to use traditional recipes and ingredients whenever possible. For example, for the Kunapipi (Fertility Mother) ceremonies, a hearty damper is made from munja seeds; it can be stored for months before the ceremony to save time and energy. Urban Aboriginal Australians do participate in such ceremonies and foods but not nearly as often.

## Diet and Health

The diet of the average Aboriginal Australian family has been modified drastically over the past 200 years; a brief history of this change is warranted to understand the modern Aboriginal Australian diet. Traditional Aboriginal Australian cuisine was based on the belief that people should live in harmony with their environment instead of damaging it, as well as a practice of seasonal eating. As hunter-gatherers, they would travel around based on the season and available food supply, and as a result, they often ate fresher food, which is healthier than processed food. This also helped prevent them from completely depleting a food supply in a single area, as they constantly moved to find new food sources. Through trial and error, they discovered foods that hurt their bodies and foods that increased their health, and they passed this knowledge down to younger generations through songs and stories.

The Europeans settled in the country in the late 18th century and took ownership of the land because they assumed it was *terra nullius,* a legal term that means "owned by no one." Aboriginal Australian clans were displaced or killed as Europeans spread out for settlements and to raise herds and grow crops. Life as hunter-gatherers taught Aboriginals to adapt to new environments, and they coped by hunting the herds and cooking them using traditional methods, as well as hunting newly introduced vermin like rabbits that were killing off native animals.

Shortly after European settlement, the newly formed government started handing out rations of Western food to displaced Aboriginal Australians, and they quickly became dependent on the handouts. Other Aboriginals were sent to work at pastoral stations where they received similar rations in exchange for work—foods they had never tried such as corned beef, flour, sugar, and tea. At this point, Aboriginal diets depended largely on how well the station stores were stocked. If the station store manager wasn't empathetic to the Aboriginals, the store would lack healthy, nutritious food, which negatively affected Aboriginal health, as the foods available were low in calcium and vitamins. They shifted from a mainly vegetarian diet to a meat-focused diet because rations rarely had fruit, vegetables, and dairy, due to poor transportation methods and a lack of refrigeration.

Families were separated, and from the late 18th through the late 19th century, Australian federal and state governments removed Aboriginal children from their homes and placed them into European Australian households, which made it difficult to pass on the oral culture and culinary traditions of their people. However, this did not eliminate Aboriginal Australian culinary culture completely; some remote-living Aboriginals adapted by finding time to hunt and gather traditional *bush tucker* (Aboriginal food) on the weekends, and when work on the stations would slow down, many would go on a walkabout, or a spiritual walk into the bush to live off the land, rebuild their health and strength, and share Aboriginal traditions.

In the late 1960s Aboriginal civil rights were finally recognized, and government control over where they lived and moved was taken away. Many Aboriginal Australian workers were let go from their station jobs and forced to live in fringe camps and be on welfare, which only further cemented their dependence on processed foods that were cheap and easily available in local stores. There was also a decline in gathering bush tucker, which was exacerbated by the ongoing clearing of land for more settlement areas.

From the 1960s until the present, Aboriginal clans and families have taken various paths that have

ultimately led them to one of two destinations: living in a rural, remote Aboriginal community, often close to the outback, or moving closer to cities and towns and attempting to assimilate even more into Western society. Those who created their own remote Aboriginal communities still rely on station stores or monthly mail trucks for their food supplies. Canned fruit, powdered milk, rice, and canned meat are staples in a modern remote Aboriginal diet. But ever-adaptive, remote-living Aboriginals have combined parts of Western culture with their traditional culture, supplementing processed foods with Aboriginal foods and cooking methods whenever possible. Many families adapt popular recipes from other ethnic cuisines to their native food supply and cooking methods, and curried *gulah,* or spaghetti and kangaroo meatballs, is commonly found in modern Aboriginal campsites. Bush plum pudding is another common recipe found in campsites during the holidays, an Aboriginal take on the popular British Christmas dish.

Those Aboriginal families who chose to live closer to Western society had better exposure to food sources in the form of grocery stores, which meant direct access to fresh fruit, vegetables, and dairy. But meat and sugar still play a significant role in their diet, just as they did at the pastoral stations. Even though Aboriginals living in a nonremote area can now self-select their diet for the first time in 100 years, they still cling to their learned pastoral station diets because that is what they know. Fast-food outlets are also finding their way into the average modern nonremote Aboriginal diet. Almost all of these communities (remote and nonremote) are lower class or impoverished, so food supplies vary based on the money a family or community can generate at any given time.

An interesting twist in the history of Aboriginal Australian cuisine is the native-foods industry of Australia. Created in the 1970s, the native-foods industry comprises indigenous Australian foods such as fruits, spices, nuts, and herbs, commercially manufactured for restaurants and gourmet stores. A positive side of the Australian native-foods industry is that it utilizes Aboriginal cultural heritage and provides Aboriginals with jobs. However, most native foods are so high priced that neither remote nor nonremote Aboriginal families can afford to work them into their regular diets.

Due to the westernization of their diets to varying degrees, both remote-living and urban-dwelling Aboriginal Australians have a number of serious health concerns, including obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and alcohol and drug abuse. As of 2005, 57 percent of Aboriginal Australians were overweight or obese regardless of whether they lived in a city or the bush. They are 1.2 times more likely to be overweight or obese compared with their nonindigenous counterparts.

Studies show that Aboriginal Australian babies are fully nourished by their mother's milk, but with so much processed food in their environment, they inevitably gain excess weight and become unhealthy when they move on to solid foods. Exercise is another large factor in why so many Aboriginals are overweight, as more than 70 percent of remote and nonremote Aboriginal Australians do little to no exercise. Diet and exercise are also contributors to the large number of Aboriginals suffering from cardiovascular disease and high blood pressure.

One group trying to make a difference in Aboriginal Australian health is the Fred Hollows Foundation, which has been collaborating with indigenous women in the Northern Territory to create a cookbook for indigenous Australians that can be used in remote communities and can help alleviate poor health due to diet. Aboriginal Australians' increased rate of obesity has led to an excessive occurrence of type 2 diabetes in the Aboriginal Australian community, making them four times more likely to develop diabetes than the nonindigenous Australian community. The first Aboriginal Australian case of diabetes occurred in 1923, but before that, there was no history of metabolic conditions among this community, as most hunter-gatherer Aboriginals were in good physical condition and their diet was healthy. After a group of diabetic Aboriginal Australians returned to a traditional lifestyle and cuisine, studies found that their health improved and their diabetes symptoms either lessened or disappeared. Alcohol is another factor in poor Aboriginal health, specifically in diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Studies

have shown that although Aboriginals are less apt to drink alcohol than nonindigenous Australians, they are more prone to drink dangerous amounts of alcohol when they do imbibe. Between 2000 and 2004, injuries or diseases related to alcohol use led to the deaths of 1,145 Aboriginal Australians, with the median age of death around 35 years of age.

*Leena Trivedi-Grenier*

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# Afghanistan

## Overview

Afghanistan is a landlocked, mountainous country situated at the crossroads of four major cultural areas: the Middle East, Central Asia, the Indian Subcontinent, and the Far East. It is bordered by Iran in the west, Pakistan in the south and east, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan in the north, and China in the far northeast. Afghanistan was also a major crossroad on the ancient Silk Road that linked East and West and played a vital role in the exchange of ideas, religions, foods, and plants.

Afghanistan has had a turbulent history, which continues to the present day. Because of its geographic position Afghanistan has been invaded many times by armies from different places, each bringing its own influences on the culture. After a brief period of relative stability under King Zahir Shah (r. 1933–1973), since the late 1970s Afghanistan has suffered continuous conflict and war. The Russians invaded in 1980. After they left, the 1990s saw a brutal civil war and the rise of the Taliban. In 2001 the U.S.-led invasion toppled the Taliban, but the war against them continues.

Afghanistan, which became an Islamic Republic in 2001, has an estimated population of between 28 and 33 million. The population is made up of a number of ethnic groups, the main ones being Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Aimak, Turkmen, and Baloch. While the majority (99%) of Afghans are Muslims, there are also small pockets of Hindus and Sikhs, and there used to be a small community of Jews. Afghanistan has been a melting pot for a large number of cultures and traditions over the centuries, and the cuisine reflects its internal diversity and the tastes and flavors of its neighbors.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Homayoun and Shakila live in a two-bedroom apartment in southwestern Kabul. Shakila works as a housekeeper for an Afghan engineer, and their apartment is attached to his house in the same compound. Her husband, Homayoun, is a chauffeur for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul. They have five children, two boys and three girls, ranging from 7 to 16 years of age.

Their lifestyle is typical of an upper-working-class family in Afghanistan. Their day begins early in the morning. Shakila sends one of her children to the local bakery to buy bread (nan) for the family. With the bread they drink tea sweetened with sugar and perhaps some milk added. On special occasions they might have butter, yogurt, honey, or jam to go with the bread.

In the morning Shakila goes to the local bazaar to buy the ingredients for the main midday meal and the evening meal. The menu will be decided by what seasonal vegetables and fruits are available. She may buy meat (usually lamb) for the main dish. In winter and early spring vegetables and fruits are very limited, but onions, carrots, potatoes, cucumbers, oranges (including sour oranges), lemons, and bananas are usually available. In summer and autumn there is much more variety as eggplant, tomatoes, beans, okra, grapes, melons, watermelons, peaches, pears, apples, quinces, pomegranates, and plums come into season. In the bazaar Shakila may also buy dairy products and eggs if

needed and also stock up on basic ingredients such as rice, flour, pulses, cooking oil, sugar, and tea.

Shakila tries to vary the main midday meal. Sometimes she makes a meat and vegetable soup to be eaten with nan or a rice dish, either plain white rice served with a meat or vegetable *qorma* (braised dish with yogurt and ground nuts), or a pilau (rice dish) cooked with meat or perhaps a sticky rice dish with lentils or beans called *shola*. For a change she may make *aush,* a noodle soup–like dish with beans and yogurt and flavored with mint.

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***Aush***

Afghans often prepare this dish to help cure colds. They add plenty of garlic and lots of red pepper as they say it helps clear the head and chest. Afghans usually make their own noodles. The noodle dough is rolled out very thin, then rolled up tight and cut into fine strips with a sharp knife. The noodles are then tossed in a little flour and allowed to dry on a board. Dried noodles or ready-made fresh spaghetti, as in this recipe, can be substituted although the cooking time may vary. Canned chickpeas and kidney beans may also be substituted.

2 oz dry chickpeas

2 oz dry red kidney beans

8 oz fresh spaghetti or tagliatelle

2 c strained yogurt

Salt

Red pepper, according to taste

1 tbsp dried mint

**For the Minced Meat**

6 tbsp vegetable oil

2 medium onions, finely chopped

1 lb minced beef or lamb

½ c tomato juice (or water)

1 tsp ground coriander

Salt and pepper

Soak the chickpeas and beans in 4 cups water overnight.

Put the chickpeas and beans into a large pan with the water in which they were soaked and add ½ cup water. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and boil gently until cooked, adding extra water if necessary. Cooking time will vary according to the freshness of the pulses.

While the pulses are cooking, prepare the meat. Heat the oil in a pan over medium to high heat. Add the chopped onions, and fry over medium heat, stirring continuously until they are reddish-brown. Turn up the heat, add the meat, and stir well. Fry until brown. Add the tomato juice (or water), and bring to a boil. Add the coriander and salt and pepper to taste. Stir again, then turn down the heat and simmer for about half an hour or until the meat is cooked and the sauce is thick. Add extra water if the sauce becomes too dry.

When the meat and pulses are cooked, bring to a boil 3½ cups water in a large pan. Add salt and the noodles, and boil gently for about 10 minutes. Add the chickpeas, beans, strained yogurt, and some or all of the liquid from the chickpeas and beans, depending on how thick you want the soup. Add the dried mint, salt, and red pepper, and mix well. More water can be added if required. Leave on low heat for about 10 minutes or so to let the flavors blend. Serve the soup and top with a little of the meat. The remaining meat is served separately to be added to the top of each individual portion of aush.

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The evening meal, usually eaten at around 6 or 7 P.M., generally consists of leftovers from lunch with the addition of a snack such as fried potatoes or *boulanee* (fried leek- or potato-filled pastries). Nan is served with every meal, and tea is drunk throughout the day and after every meal. When Shakila has unexpected guests, which happens quite frequently, she sends the children out to buy biscuits from the local bakery and perhaps some sweets, such as *noql* (sugared almonds). These are served with tea. For special occasions Shakila will make more elaborate food such as a pilau or the meat-filled dumpling-like steamed dish called *mantu* or the leek-filled boiled pasta *ashak*. She also likes to make a crisp sweet fried pastry called

*goash-e-feel,* which means "elephant's ears." Fresh fruit is served after the meal.

## Major Foodstuffs

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world, and many years of war and political instability have taken their toll, leaving the country in ruins and dependent on foreign aid. It is a land of contrasts, with vast areas of scorching, parched deserts; high, cold, inaccessible mountain regions; and extensive green valleys and plains. Generally the summers are hot and dry, and the winters are cold with heavy snowfalls, especially in the mountains. It is from the snow-capped mountains that water is available for irrigation. The plains and valleys are very fertile as long as there is water. With the diversity of its terrain and climate Afghanistan can produce a wide variety of foodstuffs.

Agriculture is the main source of income. Cereals such as wheat, corn, and barley are the chief staple crops. They are ground into flour and made into different kinds of breads and noodle-type dishes. A small amount of rice, another staple, is grown on the terraces of the Hindu Kush in the north and in the Jalalabad area in the southeast, although much has to be imported.

Vegetables, fruits, and nuts are cultivated extensively, and many are exported. Afghanistan is famous for its numerous varieties of grapes, from which green and red raisins are produced, and for its melons and watermelons. Other fruits include pomegranates, plums, mulberries, quinces, cherries, apricots, nectarines, apples, and pears. Bananas, lemons, and oranges grow in the subtropical region of Jalalabad. Vegetables include onions, potatoes, tomatoes, eggplant, *gandana* (a kind of allium similar to Chinese chives), spring onions (scallions), green beans, okra, cabbage, cauliflower, radishes, and numerous kinds of pumpkins, squashes, gourds, and zucchini. Nuts also play an important role in the Afghan diet. Walnuts, pistachios, pine nuts, and almonds are all used in cooking—in pastries, pilaus, and desserts—but they are also eaten on their own as snacks, often salted and mixed with dried fruits such as raisins and served with tea.

Afghans add spices and herbs to their food for flavor and fragrance; the results are neither too spicy nor too bland. Some spices are imported, but many herbs are grown locally. Saffron, although expensive, is the preferred spice for flavoring and coloring rice dishes and desserts. It is grown in Afghanistan, and its cultivation is being encouraged to try to persuade farmers to switch from growing poppies, which are processed into opium and are thus an enormous cash crop. Similarly, farmers are being encouraged to cultivate more quinces and pomegranates for export. Other popular spices include aniseed, cardamom, cassia and cinnamon, chilies, cloves, coriander, cumin, dill, fenugreek, ginger, nigella, black and red pepper, poppy seeds, sesame seeds, and turmeric. Asafetida, which grows profusely in the north of Afghanistan, is not used much in Afghan cooking but is an important crop, as much of it is exported to India. Herbs such as cilantro, dill, and mint are used extensively in cooking, especially in soups and stews. Garlic is also widely used. Other flavorings include rose water, especially for desserts. Roses grow abundantly in Afghanistan, and distilling rose water is a cottage industry.

Industry in Afghanistan is based on agriculture and pastoral raw materials. The major industrial crops are cotton, tobacco, madder, castor beans, and sugar. Sugar beets are grown in the north, and sugarcane is grown near Jalalabad in the southeast. *Nabot* (crystallized sugar) is a popular energy-boosting snack, especially with children. *Gur* (unrefined sugar) is used as a sweetener.

Lamb, which comes from the fat-tailed sheep, is the preferred meat, but beef, veal, goat, water buffalo, horse, and camel are also eaten. Chicken, which used to be a luxury and not always available, is liked, and today many chickens are imported (often frozen) from Iran, Pakistan, and India and are plentiful in the cities. Since Afghanistan is a Muslim country, pork is not eaten. Game meats such as quail, pigeon, duck, and partridge are eaten when available. All parts of animals are eaten including the heads, feet, and testicles. A sausage made from boiled horse meat using the innards as a casing is made and eaten by Uzbeks and Kirghiz in northern Afghanistan.

Fish is not a regular part of the Afghan diet even though many of the rivers and lakes teem with fish: brown trout, rainbow trout, *sheer mahi* (milkfish), catfish called *mahi laqa,* and carp (which were introduced to the Darunta Dam near Jalalabad with Chinese assistance in 1967). In winter some sea fish is imported from Pakistan.

Traditionally Afghans cooked with what is called *roghan-e-dumbah,* a fat rendered from the tail of the fat-tailed sheep, and *roghan-e-zard,* a clarified butter. Cottonseed oil is produced in Kunduz in the north and is used for cooking. Nowadays, much of the cooking medium is in the form of ghee (clarified butter) and vegetable oils, which are imported.

Dairy products play an important role in the Afghan diet, especially in the high mountainous areas where fresh vegetables and fruits are not readily available. Milk comes from cows, water buffalo, sheep, and goats. Most of the milk is made into butter (*maska*), cheese (*panir*), or yogurt (*mast*), which can be kept for longer periods. When the yogurt is strained, the remaining curds are called *chaka.* Chaka is often salted, dried, and formed into round balls that harden and resemble gray pebbles; these are called *quroot.* For use in cooking the quroot is reconstituted in water in a special bowl with a rough bottom surface, called a *taghora qurooti. Qymaq* is another milk product; it is a close relation to the *kaymak* of the Middle East and is similar to clotted cream. Milk is rarely drunk, but a refreshing drink called *dogh* (yogurt mixed with water and mint) is sometimes made.

Tea, green or black, is drunk copiously throughout the day and is always served after a meal. It is not usually drunk with milk except sometimes for breakfast, but it is often sweetened with sugar and flavored with cardamom. An Afghan custom is to have a first cup of tea with sugar followed by one without. Many people soak sugar cubes called *qand* in their tea and hold them in their mouths as they sip the tea. Affluent Afghans will serve fruit juices, sherbets, or bottled soft drinks, such as Coca-Cola and Fanta, with meals for guests. Bottled water (locally produced or imported) has recently become readily available in the bazaars.

## Cooking

Many Afghans live in extended families, and this means that a large amount of food must be prepared each day. The shopping used to be the responsibility of the men, but recently women and children have taken on this role. The preparation and cooking of the food, which are very labor-intensive, are normally done by the female members of the household, the most senior woman usually being in charge with her female relatives helping. Affluent families have cooks, usually male, and for big parties and special occasions professional male cooks are hired.

The traditional Afghan kitchen is very basic. Few people have electric ovens, even in the cities. Cooking is done over wood or charcoal fires or in more recent times on burners fueled by bottled gas. Some large families may have a clay oven (tandoor) for baking bread. Refrigerators are also rare. Food is kept cool and fresh during the hot summer months in a range of clay pots and containers. In many households, especially in rural areas, there is no running water. All washing up is done outside, using water from a well. Sophisticated kitchen equipment such as electric mixers or grinders is practically nonexistent. Most Afghans do, however, have a range of pans (*dayg*) in different sizes, some quite large for cooking pilaus. The *awang* (mortar and pestle) is an essential piece of equipment for crushing garlic, onions, herbs, and spices, and all Afghan homes own one. Many Afghan families grind their own spice mixture called *char masala,* which is used mainly to flavor pilaus. The choice of spices varies, but the four most common ones are cassia (or cinnamon), cloves, cumin, and black cardamom seeds. Most families have a rolling pin for rolling out the dough for their pasta and noodle dishes. Affluent Afghans may have a pasta-making machine.

Afghans rarely measure out their ingredients. Recipes and techniques tend to be passed down from mother to daughter and are learned through practice and experience. Most kitchens do, however, have a range of pots with handles, called *malaqa,* which are used as measuring aids, and ordinary cups, glasses, and spoons are also used for measuring.

Food tends to be cooked slowly and for a longer time, especially meat dishes, as meat can be quite tough and this method of cooking helps brings out all the flavors of the ingredients. Some Afghans own a pressure cooker, which shortens the cooking time considerably.

Nan forms the basis of the diet of all Afghans, and it usually accompanies every meal to scoop up food or soak up juices. The word *nan* actually means "food" in Afghanistan. First thing in the morning the dough for the bread will be made. It is leavened with a fermented starter prepared from a small lump of dough from the previous day. Bread is left to rise before being baked in the tandoor or taken to the local bakery to be baked. A tandoor is a clay oven built into the ground that is capable of reaching temperatures far higher than an ordinary domestic oven does. The bread is cooked by slapping the dough onto the hot sides of the tandoor. When ready it is deftly removed using a hook or a stick. Breads are also cooked on a *tawah,* a curved, circular cast iron plate that is heated over a fire before the bread is slapped onto it and cooked on both sides. The plate is portable, and this method is especially used by the nomads. Bread cooked on a tawah is unleavened and known as chapati or *nan-e-tawagi.*

Noodle dishes are popular and resemble many of the noodle dishes found along the Silk Road. They are all made in the home, with some of the more complicated versions made only for special occasions, including mantu, which is closely related to the *man t'ou* of China and the *manti* of Turkey. Ashak, a leek-filled pasta, resembles Italian ravioli. Aush is the basic noodle dish, served much like a soup. *Lakhchak* is similar to lasagna.

Two types of rice are used in cooking: long grain and short grain. The long-grain variety is used for pilaus and *chalau.* Chalau is plain white rice that is served with a vegetable or meat dish. Pilaus are more elaborate and are cooked with meat and meat juices. They are colored by using browned onions, spinach, caramelized sugar, saffron, or turmeric. Very often vegetables, such as carrots, or fruits and nuts, such as orange peel, apricots, raisins, almonds, and pistachios, are used as a garnish.



Ashak, a leek-filled boiled pasta often served at special occasions. (Shutterstock)

Two methods are used for cooking long-grain rice. In the *dampokht* method the rice is boiled in just enough liquid for the cooking. With the *sof* method the rice is first parboiled in a large amount of salted water and then drained. Oil, spices, and a little more liquid (water or stock) are added, and the rice is finished off in an oven or on top of the stove or fire.

The basic short-grain rice dish is called *bata,* where the rice is cooked with plenty of water and a little oil until soft and sticky. It is served with a vegetable or meat qorma. Shola, another sticky white rice dish, is cooked in a similar way but can be savory or sweet. The savory version is cooked with meat and pulses. Sweet versions are often flavored with cardamom and rose water and studded with flaked almonds and pistachios. *Ketcheree quroot* (similar to the *kitchri* of India) is another version that is made with the addition of mung beans and served with a meat qorma and quroot.

Onions play an important role in Afghan cookery. Both white and red onions are used, but red ones are preferred as they give a thicker sauce and richer flavor. Onions are sometimes fried until very brown and soft, almost caramelized, before being ground for adding to soups, qormas, and pilaus to give flavor and color.

The Afghan housewife makes full use of fruits and vegetables in season and dries them or makes

preserves, chutneys, and pickles. Pickles (*turshi*) are made from lemons, carrots, eggplants, and mixed vegetables. Apricots, peaches, cherries, bell peppers, cilantro, and mint are made into chutneys (*chutni*). Meat is also dried, especially in mountainous or remote regions where fresh meat is not always available in the winter months. *Landi* is a special type of dried meat. A fat sheep is slaughtered at the end of autumn and the wool is sheared off, leaving the skin with a thick layer of fat underneath. The whole carcass is then hung to dry. To make *gosht-e-qagh* (dried meat) the meat is cut into large chunks that are scored and rubbed with salt. The meat is then hung up in a warm, shady place to dry and let the juices drip out. After the process is repeated, the meat is hung in a cool place until needed.



Mantu, a traditional noodle dumpling often served as a part of *iftar.* (Imagevillage | Dreamstime.com)

## Typical Meals

Although many people in Afghanistan are desperately poor and their diet and meals are generally very basic, most eat three meals a day: breakfast, a midday meal, and an evening meal. Breakfast is bread, sometimes in the form of *nan-e-roghani,* which is nan with oil added to the dough before baking. This is served with sweet tea, sometimes with milk added; for those who can afford it, the bread may be accompanied by cheese, qymaq (cream), honey, or jam. The midday meal usually consists of a main dish such as soup, noodles, or a rice dish, all accompanied by bread. Bread soaked in soup is the most common staple food of poor people. Bread is also eaten with grapes when in season. Another simple and traditional dish is *qurooti.* Quroot (dried yogurt) is reconstituted in water, and garlic, salt, and pepper are added. The mixture is boiled and eaten with bread with dried mint sprinkled on top. The evening meal is similar and often includes leftovers. Snacks such as *khagina* (a kind of omelet similar to frittatas and Spanish tortillas) are sometimes made for a quick lunch. Other popular snacks include fried savory pastries called boulanee stuffed with gandana or mashed potato. Desserts are a luxury and usually made only for special occasions.

The traditional mode of eating in Afghanistan is on the floor. Everyone sits on cushions around a large cloth or thin mat called a *disterkhan.* It is often the custom to share food communally. Three or four people share one large platter of rice with smaller side dishes of a meat qorma, kebabs, and a vegetable dish, perhaps spinach or okra, or a *burani* (see the following) made with eggplant or potatoes. A salad might be an accompaniment, as well as chutneys and pickles, to add piquancy to the meal. Nan is passed around for diners to tear off a piece.

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***Burani Bonjon***

2–3 large eggplants

Vegetable oil for frying

1 medium onion, finely chopped

2 medium tomatoes, thinly sliced

1 green bell pepper, finely sliced in rings (optional)

Salt

¼–½ tsp red pepper

1–2 c strained yogurt

2 cloves garlic, peeled and crushed

2 tsp dried mint

Peel the eggplants, and slice them into rounds about ¼–½ inch thick.

Heat plenty of vegetable oil in a frying pan (eggplant soaks up a lot of oil), and fry as many slices of the eggplant as possible in one layer. Fry on both sides

until brown. Remove from the pan, and drain on absorbent kitchen paper. Repeat with the remaining eggplant, adding more oil as necessary.

Fry the chopped onions in a little oil until reddish-brown. Arrange the eggplant, sliced tomatoes, and sliced pepper in layers in the frying pan, sprinkling each layer with some fried onion and a little salt and a little red pepper. Spoon over 2–3 tablespoons of water, cover the pan with a lid, and simmer over low heat for about 20 to 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, combine the strained yogurt, the crushed garlic, a little salt, and the dried mint. Put half of the strained yogurt onto a warm serving dish. Carefully remove the eggplant from the pan with a spatula, and arrange it on the yogurt. Dot the rest of the yogurt over the eggplant, and sprinkle over any remaining sauce (but not the oil) from the eggplant on top. Serve immediately with freshly baked nan or with chalau.

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The traditional way of eating for most Afghans is with the right hand. Rice is formed, using the fingers, into small balls, which are popped into the mouth. Nan or chapati is also used to scoop up small portions of food. Even soup is eaten with the hands. Bread is broken into pieces and added to the soup to soak up the juices. Spoons may be used for eating desserts and yogurt. More affluent Afghans do use Western-style plates and cutlery.

All the dishes are served at the same time. Although there is no formal sequence of courses, generally all the savory dishes are eaten first. If there is a dessert such as *firni* (a rice or corn-flour milk pudding), it will be eaten as a final course. Fresh fruit is usually served after the meal. The meal ends with tea (green or black), usually without milk or sugar and often flavored with cardamom to aid digestion.

## Eating Out

Afghans rarely eat in restaurants, although there are some that serve traditional Afghan food to locals. Most restaurants in major cities cater to foreigners or well-to-do Afghans. With the arrival of many foreign troops and aid workers since 2001, a great variety of restaurants opened in Kabul, including Chinese, Mexican, Thai, and French. Many have closed recently due to the deterioration of security. Street foods, *chaikhana* (teahouses, sometimes called *samovar*), and kebab stalls are, however, very popular with Afghans.

Street vendors, called *tabang wala,* sell a variety of tasty foods for people wanting a quick snack. A *tabang* is a large, flat, round wooden tray on which the vendor carries his wares and then stakes his claim to a particular street corner or patch. He may roast corn over charcoal or fry leek-filled pastries called boulanee. Passersby stop to taste his *shour nakhod* (salty chickpeas), red kidney beans, and boiled, sliced potatoes, all doused with a mint and vinegar dressing and served with brightly colored chutneys such as hot red pepper or tangy green cilantro. Other favorite street snacks are samosas and *pakaura* (vegetable or potato fritters). The passersby can quench their thirst with *kishmish ab* (red or green raisins soaked in water). In recent years the old-style tabang wala has been disappearing, and most of the street vendors today have a kind of mobile kiosk on wheels.

More permanent stalls in the bazaar sell *faluda* (a kind of vermicelli dessert), into which are added crushed ice and a custard made with milk and sugar thickened with salep (orchid bulb) and flavored with rose water and chopped pistachios; or *sheer yakh* (ice cream) can be added to the faluda instead. In winter fried fish is served with *jelabi* (a fried funnel cake–like sweet soaked in syrup) or a thick and hearty porridge of whole wheat and ground meat served with oil and sugar called *haleem. Kishmish panir* (cheese with red raisins), displayed on a colorful bed of vine leaves, is a popular street food in springtime.

The samovar, or chaikhana, are places where men can meet and chat over endless cups of tea served from a constantly boiling samovar in which the tea is made. Some are very basic and serve only tea. Others provide customers with a variety of refreshments and food, including the traditional but simple soup called *sherwa-e-chainaki* (teapot soup). Lamb, onions, split peas, fresh cilantro, salt, and pepper are put into a teapot, covered with water,




Military bases in Afghanistan are becoming more and more comfortable as is evidenced by this restaurant in Kabul. (Pavel Burian | Dreamstime.com)

and then left to simmer slowly among burning embers raked from either the charcoal brazier used for grilling kebabs or the fire of the boiling samovar.

Many chaikhana have kebab stalls attached. Kebabs are one of the main street foods all over Afghanistan. The kebabs are usually made from small cubes of lamb interspersed on the skewers with fat called *dumba* from the fat-tailed sheep and grilled over charcoal. The kebabs are placed on nan, *lawausha* (a larger but thinner type of nan), or chapati and often served with a salad of sliced onions and tomatoes with cilantro. For added flavor the kebabs are sprinkled with crushed dried sour grapes called *ghora,* salt, red pepper, and lemon if available. Other kebabs include *kofta* (minced meat), *shinwari* (lamb chops), and the specialty of lamb's testicles, considered by many to be an aphrodisiac. A specialty of Jalalabad is the fried *chappli* kebab, which is fiery hot and consists of minced meat, lots of gandana (Chinese chives), *noash piaz* (scallions), cilantro, and green chilies. *Chappli* means "sandal," and this kebab is named thus because of its resemblance to the sole of a sandal.

## Special Occasions

Afghanistan is a Muslim country, and religion plays a very important part in the way of life. Afghans observe all religious days and festivals, which are based on the lunar calendar. Fasting is one of the five pillars of Islam, and during the holy month of Ramadan (Ramazan), Muslims refrain from taking any food or water between dawn and dusk. The fast is broken every day at sunset. This is called *iftar.* Afghans at first take a sip of water, and some will take a pinch of salt, but others eat a date. After this a large meal is served. It is ironic that during this month of fasting special and elaborate meals are prepared: soup; pasta or noodle dishes such as ashak or mantu; rice dishes in the form of chalau (plain white rice) and pilau; meat qormas; vegetable dishes; and pickles and chutneys. All this is

followed by lots of fresh fruit and the inevitable tea. Before sunrise and after morning prayers, another much lighter meal will be eaten, usually consisting of bread and tea with perhaps some eggs, cheese, qymaq, or preserves.

The two most important religious festivals are Eid al-Fitr (also called Eid-e-Ramazan) which marks the end of Ramadan (Ramazan) and Eid al-Adha (known in Afghanistan as Eid-e-Qorban), which marks the end of the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. At each Eid people visit their relatives to drink tea and eat nuts and sweets. Often special sweets and pastries are prepared: *halwa-e-swanak* (a kind of nut brittle), *sheer payra* (a rich milky sweet with nuts), goash-e-feel (literally, "elephant's ear"; sweet fried pastries, so called because of their shape and size). At Eid al-Adha many families sacrifice a lamb or calf. The meat is distributed among the poor, relatives, and neighbors.

Afghans celebrate their New Year (called Nauroz) on March 21, which is the first day of spring. Nauroz has its origins long before Islam, in the time of Zoroaster (founder of the Zoroastrian faith in Persia, ca. 18th–10th century B.C.). Special foods are prepared. *Samanak* is an ancient and traditional dish for the New Year. About 15 to 20 days before the New Year, wheat is planted in flowerpots, and the green shoots of the wheat are made into a sweet pudding. Other traditional dishes include *haft miwa,* a compote that traditionally contains seven different kinds of fruit and nuts (*haft* means "seven," *miwa,* "fruit"), and *kulcha Naurozee,* a biscuit made with rice flour. It is also the custom to prepare white and green foods at Nauroz such as *sabzi chalau* (white rice with spinach) and chicken.

New Year is also the time when Afghans like to go on picnics, which can be quite elaborate affairs. While the women prepare a feast of rice dishes, qormas, and salads and the men are in charge of making kebabs, children play and fly their kites. Bread and fruit are often purchased on the way.

The custom of *Nazr,* a kind of thanksgiving, is also observed at New Year. Sweet rice dishes called *shola-e-shireen* or *shola-e-zard* are prepared and distributed among the poor. Another dish often prepared for Nazr is *halwa,* made with either wheat flour, semolina, or rice flour, flavored with rose water and studded with pistachios and almonds.

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***Shola-e-Zard***

This dish is particularly associated with the 10th day of Muharram (the lunar month of mourning, the 10th day being the anniversary of the massacre of Hazrat-e-Hussein, grandson of Muhammad, and 72 members of his family), when it is traditionally served with *sharbat-e-rayhan* (a sweet drink flavored with basil seed).

1 c short-grain rice
1–1½ c sugar, according to taste
¼ tsp saffron
1 tbsp chopped or flaked pistachios
1 tbsp chopped or flaked almonds
1 tbsp rose water
½ tsp ground cardamom

Soak the rice in water, well covered, for a couple of hours or longer.

Boil approximately 7 cups of water, and add the rice. The water should come up to about 4 inches above the rice. Simmer the rice in the water slowly, stirring occasionally, until the rice dissolves and becomes like jelly. This can take 1 to 2 hours, or perhaps even longer. Add the sugar, saffron, chopped pistachios and almonds, rose water, and ground cardamom. Turn down the heat to very low, and cook for another half an hour.

Pour the warm shola onto a large serving dish, and leave to set in a cool place for a couple of hours.

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Afghans will find any excuse to have a party. Births, circumcisions, engagements, and weddings are celebrated in style, and many special foods are prepared. The birth of a child, especially the first male child, is a big occasion, and many guests come to congratulate the family. Lots of food is prepared. Special "hot" and nourishing foods are prepared for the mother to give her strength: *humach* (a flour-based soup), *leetee* (a flour-based dessert), *kachee*

(a kind of halwa), aush (a noodle soup with plenty of garlic), and *shola-e-holba* (a sweet sticky rice dish flavored with fenugreek). On the 40th day after the birth a rich, sweet bread called *roht* is baked.

Engagements and weddings are festive occasions. Engagements are called *shirnee khoree,* which literally means "sweet eating." Traditionally the family of the groom brings sweets, goash-e-feel, and other gifts such as clothes and jewelry to the bride's family. The bride's family in return prepares and organizes the food for the party. Often special kitchens are set up in order to cope with the vast amounts of food to be prepared: pilaus, qormas, kebabs such as *shami* kebab or *do piaza* (usually shrimp or chicken stewed with lots of onions), ashak, mantu, boulanee, and lots of sweet dishes such as firni, *maughoot* (cornstarch pudding), shola-e-shireen, sheer payra, and sweet pastries such as *baqlava* and the elaborate fried pastry called *qatlama.* A special tea called *qymaq chai* is often served. It is made with green tea, but by a process of aeration and the addition of bicarbonate of soda the tea turns dark red. Milk is added (and sugar too), and it becomes a purply pink color. It has a strong, rich taste. Qymaq (a kind of clotted cream) is floated on the top. Sugared almonds called noql are served with the tea.

### *Qabili Pilau*

This pilau is probably the best known of all the rice dishes of Afghanistan and could almost be described as the national dish. It is a popular main dish and



Jamila Sharifi, the groom-to-be's mother, throws candy over the heads of bride-to-be Najilla Ahmadi and groom-to-be Dawood Sharifi to wish them all the best during their engagement party in Kabul, Afghanistan, 2002. (Getty Images)

is nearly always served as one of the rice dishes prepared for guests. There are, of course, many variations, as families have their own special way of making it. But common to all versions is the use of carrots and raisins. It can be made with lamb or chicken, the spices may vary, and other garnishes may be added such as lightly fried almonds and pistachios. This recipe is an Uzbek version.

1 lb (2½ c) long-grain rice, preferably basmati
6 tbsp vegetable oil
2 medium onions, finely chopped
2 lb lamb on the bone or 1 chicken, cut up
2 large carrots
4 oz raisins
2 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp black pepper
Salt

Rinse the rice several times until the water remains clear, then leave it to soak in fresh water for at least half an hour.

Heat the oil in a heatproof casserole over medium to high heat, and add the chopped onions. Fry until golden brown and soft. Add the meat (if lamb, trimmed of excess fat), and fry until well browned. Then add enough water to cover the meat, and salt, bring to a boil, turn down the heat, and cook gently until the meat is tender.

While the meat is cooking, wash, peel, and cut up the carrots into julienne strips. When the meat is done and you are ready to cook the rice, place the carrots and the raisins on top of the meat, and sprinkle with 1 teaspoon each of cumin and black pepper and some salt.

Drain the rice, place it on top of the carrots and raisins, and add enough water to cover it by about ½ inch. Add the second teaspoon of cumin and a little salt, bring to a boil, turn down the heat, cover, and boil gently for about 10 to 12 minutes until the rice is tender and the water has been absorbed.

Place the casserole, which should have a tight-fitting lid, in a preheated oven at 300°F for about 45 minutes. Or you can finish the cooking by leaving it over on very low heat on top of the stove for the same length of time.

To serve, mound the rice, meat, carrots, and raisins in a large dish.

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Similar dishes are prepared for weddings except they are even more elaborate and more food is prepared as there will be a larger number of guests. *Abrayshum kebab* (*abrayshum* meaning "silk") is an unusual sweet often made for festive occasions such as weddings. It is made with egg in such a way that the egg forms "silken" threads, which are then rolled up like a kebab and sprinkled with syrup and ground pistachios. But perhaps the most traditional food served at weddings is *molida,* sometimes called *changali.* This special powdery sweetmeat made from flour, oil, sugar, and butter and flavored with cardamom and rose water is tasted by the bride and groom as they sit on their wedding throne during the ceremony. The groom first feeds his bride a teaspoon, then she in turn feeds him. Then the molida is served to the wedding guests. Sugared almonds (noql), symbolizing fruitfulness and prosperity, and other sweets, symbolizing happiness, are then showered over the newlyweds. For funerals it is tradition to serve halwa to the mourners.



Rice pilau being cooked over an open fire. (Maxim Tupikov | Dreamstime.com)

## Diet and Health

Although much liked by Afghans, meat is expensive and sometimes eaten only once or twice a week. However, the bread is very nutritious, and when supplemented with soups, pulses. and vegetables it provides enough protein, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals for a fairly healthy diet. Desserts and sweets are a luxury, but fruits abound in summer and autumn. Afghan tastes favor a large amount of fat or oil in their cooking. Indeed, this is a sort of status symbol. Many Afghans, especially those now living in the West, have reduced their use of oil or fat and are much more conscious about a healthy diet.

Many people in Afghanistan still adhere in everyday life to the ancient Persian concept of *sardi/garmi,* literally "cold/hot." Like yin-yang in China, it is a system for classifying foods for the purpose of dietary health. In general people believe that eating "hot" foods can alleviate "cold" illnesses such as the common cold. "Cold" foods are prescribed to reduce fevers or hot tempers. "Hot" and "cold" here refer to the properties of the food, not the temperature. While there are some differences of opinion as to just what foods can be classified as hot or cold, there is a definite pattern. Hot foods are rich, warm in aroma, sweet, and high in calories and carbohydrates, whereas cold foods are generally characterized by acidity or blandness, have a high water content, and are low in calories. In Afghanistan hot foods include sugar and honey, fats and oils, wheat flour and chickpea flour, dried fruits, nuts, garlic and onions, fish, meat, eggs, and most spices such as chilies, fenugreek, ginger, turmeric, and saffron. Cold foods include rose water, milk and yogurt, chicken, rice, some pulses (such as lentils and kidney beans), fresh fruits (such as melons, grapes, pears, apples, and lemons) and vegetables (especially spinach, cucumbers, and lettuce), and most herbs (such as cilantro and dill). Both spices and herbs are valued by Afghans for their medicinal properties, and many are used to aid digestion or help cure and alleviate other illnesses.

*Helen Saberi*

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# Australia

## Overview

The only country in the world to encompass an entire continent, Australia is about the size of the continental United States and is home to primarily Mediterranean and tropical climates. With some of the oldest and most stable geology in the world, Australia's environment is characterized by enormous deserts with a few uplifted but eroded mountain ranges and a wetter tropical north. Australia was settled over 40,000 years ago by people presumed to have arrived over land bridges and through short sea voyages from Asia. They likely brought with them some foods and food-preparation techniques, but the first Australian cuisine was forged largely from native animals and vegetation. In more recent times the British claimed and colonized the continent starting in the late 18th century. The new settlers brought with them many nonindigenous crops and animals that would require transportation, transplantation, and adaptation to local conditions. They also opened the continent to settlement by migrants from throughout the world, all bringing their own ideas about food preparation and in many cases stock they intended to cultivate in their new home.

The current population is around 22 million people, of whom more than 6 million are migrants, who come from over 200 countries.[1] With such a diverse and multicultural background, Australian cuisine is elusive to define. Australians themselves take great pleasure in arguing about whether or not it exists, where it comes from, and who gets to decide its parameters. Food is more than a dinner conversation in Australia. Australians idealize their farming heritage, have a long history of cooking shows on television and cooking books on their shelves, and are in the midst of a boom in foodie culture, making heroes and rock stars out of local chefs and farmers. But still no one can definitively say what Australian cuisine actually is. The slippery nature of food and eating in Australia, and the debate itself, probably is the essence of Australian food culture.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Ingrid and Christian are a typical middle-class couple in their mid-thirties. He is a software engineer and she is a psychologist, and they both hold full-time jobs. His father migrated from Holland, and three of her grandparents came to Australia from Great Britain. They just bought a house in the hills overlooking the city of Adelaide where they have lived all their lives, minus a few years here and there working or traveling overseas.

Typically, breakfast consists of a bowl of *muesli* (granola) with yogurt or toast spread with butter and Vegemite. Christian drinks espresso coffee (never instant or percolated), and Ingrid drinks tea with milk and sugar before they go to work. Australians are equally in love with tea and coffee, though the older generations and Asian Australians tend toward tea. For lunch they either bring sandwiches from home or buy a sandwich from the take-out shops in the food courts near their respective workplaces. Ingrid eats at her desk while continuing to work on most days. In the evenings they usually eat together, as Australians tend to eat in nuclear families.

On Saturdays, they shop for food. Ingrid prefers to do this together so that Christian can buy what he needs for the one night a week he is responsible for cooking. They put their stylish shopping trolley in the car and go to the Adelaide Central Markets in the middle of the city: a large warehouse of small food stalls filled with fresh fruit and vegetables, meats, and grocery items. On the fringes of the markets are breakfast places where they meet with friends for a bite to eat before shopping. Just outside the markets are the "eat streets" of Adelaide, giving the accurate impression that this quarter of the city is all about food.

Ingrid and Christian get their fresh fruit and vegetables as well as bread, cheese, olives, prepared dips, muslie, pasta, and rice from bulk bins. Christian goes to a seafood shop next to the stalls to talk to the staff about the freshest fish to buy for the curry he is making this week. He got the recipe online and thinks it approximates the one he ate on their last visit to Thailand. He also picks up some sausages for the barbecue they are attending that afternoon. Ingrid goes to the Asian grocery stall to get lemongrass and galangal for a *laksa* (noodle soup) she is making and on the way picks up a frozen lasagna at a little Italian-themed stall and pre-prepared roast at the German butcher's stall, both of which she can just throw in the oven on a weeknight. On the way home they stop at the supermarket to get their canned goods, jars of everyday items like vegemite, black tea, milk, and anything frozen.

While Ingrid does most of the cooking, Christian would never say it was her role, and he is the assistant cook on most nights. Preparing a meal is time for couples, the core of the household, to catch up on the events of the day and is usually timed for a 7 P.M. meal. The meal could be a stir-fry, a pasta casserole, or a recipe from any ethnic cuisine they have come across in their travels, seen on television, or heard about from friends. It usually contains meat, although Australia is home to an increasing number of vegetarians and a meat-free meal in a week is not unusual. Dinner is the biggest meal of the day unless there is a barbecue on the weekend, where a late lunch bleeds into the dinner hour.

Ingrid and Christian also aim to make healthy meals, which they define as low fat and low salt with a good balance of the major food groups in accordance with the dietary advice advertisements on television or discussed in the local media's food and lifestyle section. They gave up on meat pies and fish and chips down at the local take-out place years ago when the extra pounds started to show. Still, when they get take-out food (about once a week) or go out to eat (also about once a week), health is sacrificed for good taste and interesting cuisine at any number of Indian, Thai, Italian, Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, Greek, Argentinean, or modern Australian restaurants in their multicultural city. While Christian's and Ingrid's parents cooked more traditional fare while they were growing up, Ingrid now swaps recipes with her mother-in-law as changing cuisine is a stable feature of Australian foodways.

## Major Foodstuffs

From a British colonial perspective, in the late 18th and 19th centuries, Australia was vast, water poor in the habitable south, and very far away from home. Indigenous food and cuisines developed by Aboriginal inhabitants were barely acceptable to colonists and thought a poor cousin to British fare. Some native meats such as kangaroo, wallaby, and possum could be cut and cooked into recognizable dishes, but more exotic fare such as banyan nuts, mountain pepper, and macadamia nuts was relegated to curiosities or used in recipes as substitutes for better-known ingredients. Even today the legacy of substitution exists. For example, the *quandong* (*Santalum acuminatum*), a member of the sandalwood family, is commonly referred to as the desert peach. Quandongs are not related to and do not look like nor taste overwhelmingly similar to the stone fruit in the genus *Prunus.* While migrants investigated the suitability of native plants and animals as food, they did not consider native plants and animals as an existing and functional system of food, nor did they consider Aboriginal cuisine fit for consumption. Even today "bush food" is viewed primarily as a provider of exotic ingredients to be incorporated into European or Asian dishes, rather than as a complete cuisine in and of itself. Instead, early colonists and migrants continued to bring British ideas about food and quickly rooted both plant and

animal stock based on those ideas into Australian soils and culture. One of the first developments in Australian cuisine centered on how to transplant a British diet into what was viewed as a Mediterranean climate, both for the uses of the colonists and for export back to Britain.

With an abundance of land (much of it poor quality), a shortage of labor, and the need to aggregate production to make international exporting a viable business, Australians encouraged the development of large-scale commodity-production facilities for European food and agricultural goods. While this did not change what Australians ate, it did impact how much they ate. For example, one of the more successful industries in colonial Australia was grazing. As Michael Symons has detailed in *One Continuous Picnic,* the lack of a peasantry coupled with the high status afforded meat consumption in European dietary thinking encouraged the development of a prestigious and lucrative cattle and sheep industry. The success of the rangelands and the ensuing availability of inexpensive meat allowed even laborers to eat more meat than the typical British diet.[2] In the mid-19th century, the available meat supply allowed for 9.5 pounds (4.3 kilograms) of meat per person per week in New South Wales, slightly less than the government-set standard rations of 9.9–12.1 pounds (4.5–5.5 kilograms) per person. Records indicate that the working-class diet in Britain in the same period contained only 0.5–2 pounds (0.23–0.90 kilograms) of meat per person per week.[3] The transplantation of ideas about the importance and prestige of meat coupled with its abundance translated into changes in diet, and Australians typically ate meat with every meal.

Early Australians also planted familiar grains, fruits, and vegetables from their predominantly British diet. The wheat farms established throughout New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, and eventually Western Australia entrenched a culture of dryland farming and ensured bread became the staple carbohydrate. The late 19th-century development of irrigation infrastructure throughout the Murray-Darling Basin allowed Australians to reliably establish water-dependent crops and pasturelands for dairying. This irrigation infrastructure largely exists today though it is overtaxed and is the cause of many of the environmental and freshwater-access problems Australians face. Dairying, for example, used about 1.5 billion gallons (5.4 gigaliters) of irrigation water per 1,000 hectares (2,471 acres) of land in the 2000–2001 agricultural year, which is a relatively high amount of water, given that vegetables used over 1 billion gallons (4.37 gigaliters) and wheat is farmed without irrigation. Furthermore, almost 480,000 hectares (1,186,000 acres), or 18 percent, of all irrigated land is dedicated to dairy farming.[4] All this is produced for essentially a luxury European suite of products: milk and various cheeses. The persistence of "thirsty" luxury foods such as dairy, stone fruits, and wine grapes in a water-poor country demonstrates the cultural persistence of maintaining a largely European foodscape in Australia.

While in southern Australia farmers were able to find or create suitable climates for European-style agriculture, the subtropical weather is more suited to traditional Southeast Asian fare and farming techniques. Early farmers persisted with largely European crops, limiting their initial range north and their success. However, two crops in the subtropics stood out as appropriate for the Australian domestic and export markets: sugarcane and bananas. Their consumption as part of a European food pattern was either well established or, in the case of bananas, rapidly becoming so. Even with these notable exceptions there is no doubt that the short heritage of Australian settlement shaped the Australian landscape into a European-styled foodscape. This development in the face of a very non-European environment and climatic conditions is a testament to the strength and creative adaptation of the tastemakers of colonial Australia. The notion of an Australian-shaped landscape, as opposed to one of wild native food, is central to Australian notions about eating "Australian," and therefore the maintenance of the existing local foodscape is central to notions of Australian cuisine.

## Cooking

Many Australian critics have called what Australians did with this largely industrial and commodity-based

foodscape "uninspiring." In her study of colonial Australian cookbooks, Barbara Santich noted that while Australian cookbooks adapted recipes to Australian conditions and native foodstuffs, they were still based on techniques from the home country, so much so that even the few bush foods used were incorporated into English recipes and not constructed as native cuisine.[5] According to Symons, this British cuisine translated into roughly a meal starting with soup, followed by a centerpiece of meat and two vegetables, and ending with a pudding, pie, or cake dessert until well into the 1950s.[6] Further research by Deborah Lupton suggests that this meal pattern persists in rural Australia even today.[7] Pork pies, lamb roasts, puddings, and sponge cakes are all familiar hallmarks shared with British cuisine. In addition, a few distinctly Australian dishes from the period are still widely enjoyed today, such as damper, a yeastless bread made over a campfire; pavlova, a meringue-based dessert; Lamingtons, small sponge cakes coated with chocolate and coconut; and ANZAC biscuits, hard sweet oatmeal biscuits (i.e., cookies) designed to store and ship well in packages.[8] There are also some Australian dishes such as the carpetbag steak (steak stuffed with oysters) and the kangaroo steamer (steamed kangaroo meat) that have fallen out of fashion.[9] Overall, the food industry and the cuisines promoted in cookbooks and periodicals during the first half of the 20th century emphasized adaptation to British fare with necessary concessions to the hotter climate of the continent. By the 1950s there was not yet a great divergence from British cuisine just as there was no great divergence from British culture.

**Carpetbag Steak**

Carpetbag steaks were last popular in Australia in the 1950s, but they are making a comeback as an authentic Australian creation and a dish that takes advantage of Australia's high-quality beef and seafood. The following recipe is per person.

1 thick scotch fillet (rib eye) steak

3–4 fresh shucked oysters

1 tsp Worcestershire sauce

Salt and pepper to taste

Butter to taste

Cut a pocket along the side of the steak about ¾ of the way into the steak. Season the fresh oysters with the Worcestershire sauce, salt, and pepper. Stuff the seasoned oysters into the steak, and secure with skewers or toothpicks that have been soaked in water. Grill the steak on a barbecue, basting with the butter, to each individual's preferences and serve.

In the mid-20th century, Australia began to contend with its geographic position as part of Asia but also as a continent with unique weather patterns and soil. This was coupled with the dismantling of policies designed to keep Australia "British" in a backhanded recognition that it was in fact not British. With the ending of World War II, Australia began once again to take in large numbers of migrants. While most of them were European, a significant number of them were not British but rather from Italian, Greek, and other southern European communities with their own entrenched ideas about what constituted a good meal. In his oral history *Wogfood,* John Newton details the challenges Mediterranean migrants faced in a new Mediterranean climate with a British food heritage.[10] He details the initial resistance and even racism associated with introducing elements of a new (and climatically appropriate) cuisine to predominantly British Australia. Thankfully, the new migrants persisted and contributed to the agricultural landscape and skills as well as the cuisine. Italian, Greek, and other Mediterranean produce and cuisines are ubiquitous in modern Australia. In fact, a perusal of current menus suggests that the prestige of Italian food, dish names, and techniques largely surpasses that of the traditional French high-brow influence in Australian restaurants inherited from the English.[11]

In the 1970s the Whitlam government began to officially dismantle the White Australia policy of immigration and assimilation in favor of an official

policy of multiculturalism, which included a large intake of Southeast Asian migrants.[12] This had a tremendous impact on Australian cuisine and supplied Australia with new opportunities to adapt, adopt, and mould Australian cuisine from the enduring British food legacy. According to Cherry Ripe in *Goodbye Culinary Cringe,* these changes were coupled with an increase in acceptance and exploration of international cuisine as Australians started to travel and embrace their geographic location.[13] Furthermore, improved supply chains resulting from increased traffic with Asia and technological improvements in storage and transport have consistently brought more of the world's food products to Australia, allowing Australians to take culinary advantage of changes in political attitudes.

Since the 1970s Australians have done nothing but add to the variety in their shopping baskets. The post–World War II European migrants moved out of their home kitchens and into restaurants and cookbook production. With the opening of Australia's doors to Asian migration and travel, an influx of migrants enhanced the small but firmly entrenched Chinese community established during the 19th-century gold rush. Chinese Australian fusion cuisine, found even in small country towns, has been augmented by more ethnically accurate Chinese food. Indian cuisine can be increasingly found outside metropolitan areas, and the sophistication of urban Indian restaurants is rising as customers want to know "What *kind* of Indian food, from *where*?" As Australians have made Bali and Thailand tropical holiday destinations, a plethora of Indonesian, Malaysian, and Thai restaurants, cooking classes, and cookbooks have found success with Australian palates. *Nasi goreng* (Indonesian fried rice), laksa soups, and the jungle curries of northern Thailand are all at home on Australian urban eat streets and increasingly in the kitchens of middle-class Anglo-Australians, where you will also find a full set of family chopsticks in the cutlery drawer. Some of this variety has been driven by the natural impulses that drive all urban centers. These globalizing trends influence Australia more than other countries as over three-quarters of the population lives in urban areas.[14] Urbanity may set the pace of innovation and acceptance of culinary multiculturalism in all countries, but it also largely defines the Australian population.

The cuisines of new Asian migrants still face some challenges. Not only is the foodscape still firmly established as European, but the geography, climate, and sparse population often hinder the availability of the required primary produce. While Australians might crave jungle curries, Vietnamese cold rolls, and other delicacies and they might be able to find newly migrated Australians to teach them how to construct these dishes, they cannot always find the *pac chi farang* and mint varieties needed to recreate them. Australian farmers have at long last started to grow subtropical Asian fruits and vegetables in the environmentally appropriate north and to expand the production of an Asian food base throughout Australia.[15] While many of these enterprises have Asian export markets in their sights, they also increasingly supply the domestic markets in specialty shops and sections alongside heritage tomatoes and specialty cheeses.

Though the variety of foods grown in the countryside is increasing, the food still has to get into the city. In many places the near duopoly of the two major grocery chains, Coles and Woolworths, hampers access to new and local foodstuffs due to their national supply-chain policies. However, most Australian cities have retained a market somewhere in the city limits. These markets, such as the Queen Victoria Markets in Melbourne, Paddy's Haymarket in Sydney, and the Central Markets in Adelaide, still cater to small stallholders and maintain a mix of primary produce, butcher, and *provedore* stalls (grocery purveyors). Though far from genuine farmers' markets, they provide an outlet for niche ingredients and imported specialties and a rallying point for food exploration. In addition, since the 1990s many outlying periurban areas have developed genuine farmers' markets aimed at increasing the variety of foodstuffs available to the public. For the most part these markets cater to urban or periurban customers who value the surrounding countryside and ideas about fresh, local, and pampered healthy food that they associate with it.

## Typical Meals

Today, Australian kitchens are constructed along the same general lines as most modern European-influenced kitchens found all over the world. The kitchen will typically also contain cookbooks and magazines reflecting both Australian and ethnic foods. While many Australian cooks learned how to cook from their mothers, they are also aware of the explosion of culinary possibilities that were not contemplated a generation ago. The Australian media promote the contemplation of Australian cuisine. Cooking shows have been avidly watched for at least 40 years; a variety of Australian food magazines such as *Delicious, Epicure, Food and Wine, Gourmet Traveller,* and *Sumptuous* enjoy a wide readership; and there has been an explosion in Australian cooking books over the past 20 years. Alongside the expected set of pots and pans, Australian cooks are also familiar with woks, *tagines,* bamboo steamers, and a multitude of other cooking implements gathered from cuisines around the world. The refrigerator tends to privilege fresh over frozen foods, and most Australians shop weekly for their produce. The pantry will have a wide variety of spices and spice mixes gathered in attempts to master various dishes, but it will also inevitably contain some Australian staple favorites: vegemite, a yeast-based salty spread for toast; Milo, a chocolate powder for milk; and some variety of Arnott's biscuits (cookies) to serve with tea or coffee when guests arrive. If guests are very lucky, they might even be treated to a Tim Tam, an iconic chocolate-covered layered biscuit (again, a kind of cookie).

With both parents working in many families, the idealized Australian family meal is less of a common reality than in times past. While breakfast and lunch can be eaten on the run, out with friends, or as the increasingly popular "deskfast" (the meal you eat at your desk while working), dinner is at least discussed as something nuclear families should strive to have together. The patterns for such a meal are rooted in the old British ideal of a first course of soup, a second course of a meat centerpiece with two cooked vegetables, and a third course of pudding (the Australian sticky date pudding if you are lucky) or cake for dessert. While most Anglo-Australians would agree that this is a "proper" meal achievable only on occasional Saturday or Sunday nights, actual main meals are much more varied. To save time, most are served as single plates and take advantage of the faster preparation and cooking times of pasta dishes, stir-fries, and curries. Anything that fits within a family's time constraints can be found on the dining room table without a set pattern of consciously borrowed cuisines.

Even with the variety in Australian cooking, there are elements of rigid structure. For example, nearly every household in Australia has, effectively, a second kitchen. At a minimum it consists of an old brick incinerator retrofitted with a grill, a rickety table next to it, and an *esky* (a cooler) to keep the beer and sausages cold. At best, a quick perusal of backyard-renovation shows reveals that the ideal "other kitchen" is just off the back porch, complete with the latest gas barbecue, a spit for a leg of lamb, and a wok burner installed next to an outdoor sink and an electric bar fridge. This is an Australian man's kitchen, and while the women of the household can contribute salads and the occasional marinade, any woman found outdoors publicly cooking with fire leaves herself open to criticism and often replacement at the grill. Australian cookbooks, magazines, and advertising consistently discuss how men can improve their barbecuing techniques, such as selecting cuts of meat, better-quality sausages, and better cooking techniques as well as beer matching. These discussions are often mirrored around the grill as men, beer in hand, cook meat with fire.

The Australian barbecue is perhaps the most common and formally constituted meal. At its heart, it must contain sausages, bread on which to put the sausages, fried onions and tomato sauce as accompaniments, and beer. The sausages by no means have to be of good quality or "fancy," and the bread is expected to be sliced white bread. The meat is simply grilled and the onion fried on the hotplate of the barbecue. The beer only has to be cold. This simple and consistent barbecue formula can be found at any school fete, most voting booths, and many hardware stores on any given weekend. In backyards across Australia, the "sausage sizzle"

forms the background of more elaborate barbecues to which the attending guests might add lamb or pork chops, cuts of beef and kangaroo, and chicken for the ladies. In general, salads are communal, but guests are expected to bring their own meat and drinks and to share any surplus with the host and others. Meat is put on the barbecue in shifts, usually organized by the host or a recognized master of the grill, and people are responsible for cooking the meat they brought and distributing it if necessary. A barbecue is more a type of party with its own rules of etiquette than it is a method of cooking.



An Australian meat pie topped with a special sauce. (Shutterstock)

## Eating Out

At the turn of the 20th century Australia had about 20,000 restaurants and 20,000 take-out and fast-food outlets.[16] Australians eat one in every five meals outside their homes. This is split fairly evenly between takeout or fast food and restaurant dining.[17] Eating out is ubiquitous but not yet a national pastime nor the main source of food for most Australians. When they do eat out, Australians tend to eat ethnic, as in non–British-Australian, cuisine. In a 2009 survey of 1,500 consumers, most respondents nominated their preferred restaurants as Chinese, Italian, and Thai, whereas only 13 percent of respondents named Australian or British restaurants as favorite choices.[18] While much of this ethnic food has been altered to fit Western expectations for portion size, proportions of meat to starch, cuts of meats, and vegetables and variety of ingredients, the stated preference itself demonstrates not just an acceptance but a seeking of international cuisines.

Despite stated preferences, there are still places Australians nostalgically reflect on a distinctively Australian meal. Regardless of the level of high-brow sophistication in tastes, any Australian will be able to identify the best pub counter meal in their neighborhood. Australian pubs usually have restaurants, but they also serve a fairly standard menu of easy-to-prepare fast meals in the bar, commonly referred to as counter meals. Traditionally these are eaten while standing up or sitting on a stool propped against the main bar. A typical counter-meal menu includes chicken or veal schnitzels, meat pies, burgers, and battered and fried fish, all served with thick fried chips and a suggestion of a green salad. Today, particularly in the cities, many pubs have become gentrified, and their menus have had a yuppie overhaul. If you scratch the surface, you can still see the great Aussie counter meal peeking through, even if you are eating Coopers ale-battered barramundi fillets with thickly sliced Tasmanian potato chips (fries) with a rocket (arugula) and pear side salad in the new beer garden of the local microbrewery.

## Special Occasions

With regard to traditional British holidays, Australians have had to make many concessions to their hemisphere. Christmas is in the middle of summer in Australia. Increasingly, Santa wears board shorts, gives the reindeer a break, and is transported around by a koala and a kangaroo driving a red *ute* (truck). This makes sense to Australian children. Likewise, Australians are letting go of British traditions involving hot stoves and large baked birds in favor of an outdoor setting involving seafood and barbecues, as this makes sense to Australian cooks. The main meal of the Christmas holiday is typically a late lunch on December 25, served outside to take advantage of good weather. Cold hams; barbecued meat; crustaceans such as native lobsters,

freshwater yabbies, or Moreton bay bugs; and a ring of giant prawns (never called shrimp) are hallmarks of Christmas lunch. Several British traditions that do not involve hot stoves have also survived, such as Christmas toffee date puddings and a plethora of traditional English boiled sweets. Across Australia, the idealized Christmas meal is an extended family summer picnic.

Meals at Easter generally follow a less elaborate version of the Christmas model. However, the treatment of Easter gifts has an increasingly Australian ring to it. One challenge facing Australian parents is reconciling the Easter bunny with the status of feral rabbits as a plague on the Australian landscape, decimating populations of native animals as well as crops. An increasingly popular solution to this problem has been to substitute the chocolate Easter bunnies available throughout the Western world with a chocolate bilby, a small, rabbit-like, endangered Australian animal. Easter also entails the exchange of large chocolate eggs, where the size of the chocolate egg is what really matters. Odd for a country so in love with British boiled lollies, Easter is almost exclusively about the chocolate. Even the traditional hot cross buns are now available in chocolate chip varieties.

Australia also has its own secular holidays, and while both Australia Day and the Queen's Birthday holiday are more associated with fireworks than meals, ANZAC Day, a memorial day for war veterans on April 25, does have a meal associated with the celebrations. After gathering around flagpoles throughout the country, Australians participate in a dawn service and then retire to a local park for an outdoor community breakfast, which is usually cooked and organized as a fund-raiser for local community groups and veterans organizations. The meal is striking in that it is the only time Australians tend to break the pattern of celebrating occasions with an outdoor leisurely midafternoon lunch.

## Diet and Health

At the turn of the century, 60 percent of Australians age 25 and over were overweight, and 21 percent were obese.[19] Both adult and childhood obesity continue to be a growing concern in Australia. As in most Western countries, Australians seem to be suffering from what Australian thinker and author Clive Hamilton has diagnosed as "affluenza" and the overindulgences associated with an office-bound, consumption-based lifestyle.[20] Whether Australians blame the influx of American fast-food chains over the last 30 years, the long heritage of a starchy, meat-filled British diet, or the abundance of homegrown meat pies and take-out fish and chip shops more suited to an earlier, more active era, they are looking for solutions among the varied cuisines around them. Almost since settlement, Australians have discussed the merits of following a Mediterranean diet in their largely Mediterranean climate, as a matter of health. These discussions continue today. Added to them are recognitions of the health benefits Asian and other cuisines have to offer. Australians are doing what they have always done to answer the perceived health crisis: They are looking across the world for solutions they can cook at home, casting off what does not fit and wrangling what does into patterns of cooking that work in a "she'll be right" functional, fast-moving, and avidly discussed Australian cuisine.

*Andrea MacRae*

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# Bangladesh

## Overview

The People's Republic of Bangladesh, located between Burma and India on the Bay of Bengal, has an area of 55,599 square miles (144,000 square kilometers) and a population of 142 million, making it the world's eighth-largest country in terms of population. The climate is tropical. Around 80 percent of the landmass is on the fertile alluvial lowland called the Bangladesh Plain, which receives heavy rainfalls during the monsoon season.

The territory that now constitutes Bangladesh was under the rule of various Islamic rulers, including the Moguls, from 1201 until 1757, when it passed into British rule. From then until 1947, the year in which India gained its independence from Britain, the territory was part of the Indian province of Bengal. In 1947, the region became East Pakistan, a part of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. East Pakistan gained its independence from Pakistan in 1971 and became an independent country. The capital of Bangladesh, Dhaka, has a population of over 12 million people and is by far the largest city. The language is called Bengali.

Culturally and gastronomically, Bangladesh has much in common with the Indian state of West Bengal. The main difference is religion; whereas West Bengal is predominantly Hindu, around 85 percent of the inhabitants of Bangladesh are Muslim, 15 percent are Hindu, and 1 percent practice Buddhism or a tribal religion. Thus, most Bangladeshis follow Islamic food practices, which forbid the consumption of pork and alcohol. Only a small proportion of Bengali Hindus are vegetarian.

The country is extremely poor, with a per-capita gross domestic product of around US$600, and is predominantly agricultural. However, the cuisine of the affluent is one of most delicious on the subcontinent. For centuries, Bengal was a province the Mogul Empire, and the emperor's representatives, called nawabs, sought to emulate the rulers' lavish lifestyles and their sumptuous cuisine, which featured meat, cream, and aromatic spices and flavorings such as cardamom, cloves, and cinnamon. They found it unpalatable to eat rice without first frying it and perfected rich pilaus and *biryanis* (rice baked with meat and aromatic spices) laden with ghee (clarified butter) and decorated with nuts and dried fruits.

A uniquely Bangladeshi dish is *rezala,* made by slowly cooking pieces of goat or lamb with yogurt, milk, spices, and green chilies. It is often eaten with *Dhaka parota,* a large, round bread with 50 or 60 flaky layers and a crisp golden outside. Today, these dishes are mainly served at weddings and other feasts.

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**_Rezala_ (White Lamb Curry)**

2 lb goat or lamb meat, cut into 1-in. cubes
1 finely chopped onion
2 tbsp finely chopped ginger
1 tsp finely chopped garlic
3 whole green cardamom pods
2 2-in. pieces of cinnamon
2 cloves
½ c yogurt

1 tsp sugar

1½ tsp salt

½ c ghee (clarified butter)

Pinch of saffron, dissolved in ½ c warm milk

5–10 green chilies (to taste), split lengthwise with the seeds removed

Combine all the ingredients in a large pot, mix well, cover, and cook on low heat for half an hour. Stir the meat well, cover again, and continue to simmer until the moisture has evaporated and the ghee has separated from the meat. Add the milk with the saffron, and pour over the meat. Add the chilies, and cook over low heat for another half hour or until the meat is tender. Serve with rice pilau.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Fazrul and Aysha Chaudhry are a middle-class couple living in Dhaka. Fazrul is a civil servant, and Aysha is a housewife. They have two children, Rashid (age 12) and Amina (age 14). The family starts its day with a bowl of *cheera,* flattened rice, served with sugar, fruits, yogurt, or milk, or sometimes a bowl of Western cereal and toast. Fazrul has lunch at his office canteen, while the children have lunch at school. Around 5 P.M. the family has an afternoon cup of tea with snacks and sweets. Sometimes friends and relatives drop in to visit. Dinner is typically eaten at 9 P.M. and includes rice, dal (stewed lentils), two vegetable dishes, and a meat or fish curry.

## Major Foodstuffs

The main crop of Bangladesh is rice, and it is the staple of the diet. Instead of asking "Have you had lunch (or dinner)?" a Bengali speaker asks, "Bhat kheiicho?" (Have you eaten rice?). The development of new hybrids under the green revolution greatly increased rice production in Bangladesh. Average annual consumption is around 350 pounds (175 kilograms) per person. Most rice is parboiled before use. The most common way of preparing rice at home is by boiling it in water with no added flavoring, a preparation called *bhat.* On more important occasions, rice is fried in ghee and cooked with spices, nuts, meat, and vegetables. The second dietary staple is wheat, which is grown in the western parts of the country. Consumption averages about 46 pounds (21 kilograms) per person. Wheat is ground into flour and made into breads.

The rich soil of Bangladesh produces a multitude of edible plants. Vegetables include eggplant, cabbage, cauliflower, beans, many kinds of gourds and squash, chilies, okra, amaranth, sweet potatoes, spinach, carrots, plantains, onions, radishes, and water lilies. All parts of the plant are eaten, including the leaves, roots, stems, flowers, and stalks. Potatoes, grown in the winter, account for more than 55 percent of all vegetable production and are widely eaten as a vegetable rather than a staple. Bangladeshis are said to be the world's second-largest potato eaters after the Irish. Sugarcane is widely cultivated and consumed.

Unlike in India, where lentils are a dietary staple, Bangladeshis eat relatively small amounts of lentils, about 9 pounds (4 kilograms) per person per year, compared with about 25 pounds (11 kilograms) in India. One reason may be the lower incidence of vegetarianism and the availability of protein in fish. The most commonly eaten lentils are *masur dal,* or red lentils.

Bangladesh abounds with a large variety of tropical and subtropical fruits. The most widely cultivated are mangoes, jackfruit, pineapple, bananas, lychee, citrus fruits, guavas, papayas, custard apples, sapodillas, coconuts, tamarinds, melons, watermelons, pomegranates, palmyras (a relative of the coconut whose small fruits are gelatinous when immature), plums, rose apples, and Indian jujubes (something like a date). Many fruits with no equivalents in the West grow wild in the jungle, among them the *latkan,* monkey jack, durian, rattan, river ebony, *garcinia,* water coconut, and wild date palm.

An important source of protein is fish, which is abundant in rivers, canals, floodplains, ponds, and lakes and in the Bay of Bengal. Both West Bengalis and Bangladeshis are famous for their love of fish: According to a proverb, *maacher bhate bangali,* which means "Bengali = fish + rice." Bangladeshis consume an average of about 25 pounds



Exotic fruits and vegetables on display at a market in Bangladesh. (iStockPhoto)

(11 kilograms) a year of seafood and 20 pounds (9 kilograms) of freshwater fish. Sea fish are generally considered less desirable than freshwater fish, especially those caught in rivers. Exceptions are pomfret and *bekti* (a delicate codlike fish), shrimp, and prawns. The most highly prized fish is *hilsa,* the national fish of Bangladesh. Related to the shad, it is a sea fish that swims upriver to spawn. It is very oily and bony and must be eaten with great care, using one's fingers. Other popular fish are *rui* (buffalo) and *magur* (catfish), which are pond dwellers; koi; "the climbing perch"; *chital* (featherback fish); groupers; croakers; and grey mullet. Dried fish is eaten mainly in coastal regions.

Because meat is expensive, consumption is very low (about 8 pounds, or 3.5 kilograms per year); meat is eaten by most Bangladeshis only on special occasions. The most common meats are beef, water buffalo, goat, and chicken. The establishment of large poultry farms has increased the availability of chickens and eggs.

Dairy products are an important source of protein. Around two-thirds of all the milk consumed in Bangladesh comes from goats, which are raised by the rural poor, especially women. Yogurt (*dahi*) is widely used as a marinade for meat, served as a side dish, or churned to produce butter. Cow milk and sugar are the main ingredients in Bangladeshi sweets.

Bangladesh is a major producer and exporter of chilies. Other spices grown in the country are ginger, garlic, turmeric, red pepper, and coriander.

## Cooking

Kitchens in Bangladesh are simple by Western standards. Most cooking is done on top of a simple burner. The traditional stove is a small clay oven with a hole for inserting fuel and knobs on the top to hold the pot. Traditional fuels are charcoal, twigs, and dried cow patties. Today, middle-class households use a small cooktop with two burners fueled by bottled gas (propane). Sautéing and deep-frying are done in a wok-shaped pot made of stainless steel or cast iron, called a *karai.* A heavy, flat iron griddle with a wooden handle, called a *tawa,* is used for roasting spices and sautéing breads.

Spices can be dry-roasted and ground into a powder. Powdered or whole spices may be sautéed and added to a dish at the end of the cooking process to add flavor. For vegetables and dals, Bangladeshis use a spice mixture called *panch phoron* (five spices), a mixture of equal parts of fennel seed, *radhuni* (also known as celery seeds), nigella (*N. sativa,* sometimes called black cumin or onion seed), fenugreek, and cumin seeds. Panch phoron is typically added at the end of the cooking by frying it in oil or ghee and adding it to the dish. Spices can also be ground into a wet paste with onions, garlic, ginger, yogurt, coconut milk, or some other liquid that serves as the basis of a gravy, especially for meat dishes.

Pickling, an ancient technique, is essential in a country with a hot climate. It is a way of preserving fruits, vegetables, meat, or fish by impregnating them with acid, which discourages the growth of most microbes. In the coastal regions of Bangladesh, drying fish or salting them and sealing them in earthenware pots is a common practice.

## Typical Meals

People in rural areas often start the day with *panta bhat,* boiled rice that is soaked overnight in water so that it becomes slightly fermented and is then mixed with salt and chilies. Other breakfast staples are

*moori* (puffed rice), cheera (flattened rice), and *khoi* (popped rice), eaten with milk or yogurt and seasonal fruits. Middle-class city dwellers may have a breakfast of Western-style cereal or toast and eggs.

Traditionally, lunch was the main meal of the day, taken between 1 and 2 P.M. Before the days of outside employment, the entire family ate together, but today the breadwinner eats outside the home. A typical lunch centers around rice, supplemented by dal, vegetables, and, for those who can afford it, fish. Vegetable preparations include *bhorta* (boiled vegetables mashed and flavored with mustard oil and spices) and *bhati* (sautéed or fried vegetables). Fish can be fried; simmered in a thin, watery gravy (*jhol*); cooked with large amounts of onions (*dopijaji*); fried crisp; or made into a spicy chili-flavored dish called a *jhal.* Sweet chutneys, made from mango or tomatoes, and hot and sour pickles are standard accompaniments.

Because it is expensive, meat is not a common everyday dish even among the affluent. Meat is often eaten with a bread called *lucchhis,* made with a dough of white flour, oil, and water that is rolled into disks that are then deep-fried until they puff into spheres. A meal ends with yogurt, either plain or sweetened with sugar.

Throughout the Indian Subcontinent people take an afternoon meal called tea, and the Bangladeshis are no exception. Taken around 5 P.M., this consists of cups of black tea served with salty snacks and sweets. Sweets are one of the glories of Bengali/Bangladeshi cuisine and are distributed to friends and families on the occasion of births, engagements, weddings, success in examinations, and religious festivals. A traditional homemade sweet is *pantua,* deep-fried sausage-shaped rolls made of semolina, milk, ghee, and sugar syrup. Today, most people purchase sweets from sweet shops, some of them dating back to the 19th century. Bengali sweets are typically made from *chhanna*—the curd produced by separating milk with a sour substance (a technique that may have been introduced by the Portuguese in the 16th century). It is heated with sugar and ghee and flavored with cardamom powder, rose water, nuts, or orange rind. The apogee of the Bengali sweetmaker's art is *sandesh,* small fudgelike delicacies made by pressing the dough into pretty molds shaped like flowers, fruits, or shells. There are more than 100 varieties of sandesh, with poetic names such as *pranahara* (losing one's heart), which is a specialty of Dhaka. Dinner is typically eaten very late, around 9 P.M. or even later, and is a smaller version of lunch. The standard drink taken with meals is water.



A selection of traditional Bengali sweets, including jamun and mawa. (iStockPhoto)

The meals of Hindu Bangladeshis are similar. One difference is that a meal typically begins with a bitter dish, such as *shukto,* made with diced bitter gourd, white radish, potatoes, beans, and other vegetables.

## Eating Out

The subcontinent did not have a restaurant culture in the past; eating meals outside the house was a necessity rather than a luxury or source of pleasure.

However, from ancient times people bought savory items from stalls and street vendors, including *shingara* (deep-fried pastry shells filled with vegetables or meat), kebabs, curries, and salty snacks. Today, in Dhaka and other large towns, restaurants serve Thai, Italian, and Chinese food as well as American-style burgers and sandwiches. Sweet shops are ubiquitous in Bangladeshi towns, many serving local specialties.

## Special Occasions

Meat is central to the feasts and festivals of Muslim Bangladeshis. The most important holiday is Eid al-Fitr, which ends the fasting month of Ramadan. Goats or cows are sacrificed, and elaborate dishes are prepared and served to friends and family and to the poor.

Hindu Bangladeshis celebrate Durga Puja in the autumn by building statues of the goddess. On the final day, Bijoya Dashami, people visit each other and bring sweets, including sandesh, *rosgollas* (cheese dumplings in syrup), pantua, *patishapta* (sweet stuffed crepes), and *malpoas* (fritters in syrup).

***Malpoa***

3 c sugar, divided

2 c water

1 c flour

¾ c milk

1 tsp fennel or anise seeds

1 c clarified butter or vegetable oil

Make a thin syrup with 2 cups sugar and the water. Set aside.

Mix the flour and remaining sugar, and then add the milk to make a smooth, thick batter. Add the fennel.

Heat the ghee or oil in a shallow pan, and pour 1 tablespoon of batter into the fat. Fry on both sides until brown. Remove with a slotted spoon, and dip into the syrup.

Chill and serve cold.

All communities celebrate the harvesting of new rice at community festivals. Typical dishes include *payesh,* a rice pudding made with *gur* (a gritty brown sugar made by boiling down sugarcane juice); a potato dish called *alur dam* with lucchhis; a dal made with yellow split peas and coconut; and sweets.

Bangladeshi weddings are lavish affairs to which hundreds or even thousands of guests are invited. The wedding banquet features as many meat dishes as the bride's family can afford. Traditionally it includes at least one biryani, *korma*/*qorma* (meat cooked in a fragrant yogurt gravy), rezala (meat slow-cooked in a piquant white gravy), Dhaka parota, *navrattan* (mixed vegetables), *shami* kebab (patties made of ground meat and chickpeas), fish curry or fried fish, yogurt and cucumber salad, bread, and many desserts, including rice pudding (*kheer*) in clay pots, *gulab jaman* (chhanna balls in a sugar syrup), *ras malai* (chhanna balls in a cream sauce), wedding cake, and tea.

## Diet and Health

In addition to Western medicine, the traditional Ayurvedic and Unani systems are widely practiced in Bangladesh, especially at the primary health care level. An estimated 70 to 75 percent of people in the country still use traditional medicine to manage their health problems.

Ayurveda, the ancient Indian school of medicine, had its roots in the region. Ayurveda is holistic: It treats the entire individual, including one's mental, emotional, and physical makeup, not just the symptoms. Ayurveda also strongly emphasizes the link between health and diet. The goal of eating is to increase desirable qualities, reduce negative qualities, and introduce previously absent qualities.

Unani, the Muslim system of medicine, is offered by 4,000 qualified and professionally trained physicians, called *hakims*. Unani medicine is based on the humoral theory of Greek medicine, which assumes the presence of four humors in the body: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. Every person is born with a unique humoral constitution, which represents his healthy state and determines his personality. When the amounts of the humors

are changed and thrown out of balance with each other, it leads to disease. Restoring the quality and balance of humors is the goal of treatment, and diet plays a role in this. Certain foods are prescribed for certain ailments.

*Colleen Taylor Sen*

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# Brunei

## Overview

A tiny jewel perched on the tip of Sarawak, Brunei became a force to contend with when oil was discovered around 1929. From ancient times it has always been regarded as one of the more progressive countries in the area, much spoken about by seafarers and sought after by colonials including Spain and Portugal, especially during the golden age of Sultan Bolkiah, head of the longest-running hereditary monarchy in the world, when Brunei ruled all of Sumatra, Borneo, and the southern islands of the Philippines. Brunei then stood alone as a proud monarchy. Only through James Brooke's subtle approach as Raja Brooke of Sarawak were the British colonials able to force a series of treaties on the royal house that, in typical colonial maneuvers, left Brunei as it stands today: two elongated slivers of land separated by a tract of Sarawak.

The present Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah, a graduate of the Sandhurst military academy with close ties to British royalty, rules the country with absolute power and has kept the peace as his father did, while laying the foundations for independent rule from the British. The sultan is simultaneously ruler, prime minister, and minister for defense in a country that stresses the importance of Malay culture, Islam, and the monarchy in Darussalam, which means "Abode of Peace."

Of the population of 389,000, 68 percent are Brunei-Muslim, practicing a brand of Islamic fundamentalism. There is no income tax for anyone, including the 29 percent Chinese and 3 percent expatriates working in government and in the private sector, who enjoy generous pensions with many handouts from the government such as free overseas education, lifetime guaranteed jobs, and occasional cash bonuses when oil prices soar. Islam plays an overall decisive role in the country, today more than ever before.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Mohamed Shafar and Noor Azna are a middle-class couple living in a government-subsidized townhouse in a suburb close to Bandar Sari Begawan, or BSB. Shafar, a teacher of information technology, and Azna, a dental nurse, both work in the city. They are saving for a deposit for a house of their own. As government employees they have the added advantage of interest-free loans.

After the 5 A.M. call to prayer, breakfast is a meal of toast and fried eggs splashed with some soy sauce, washed down with black coffee. Shafar and Azna travel together to work and on the way pick up a light lunch of rice or noodles from hawker stalls close to Shafar's office. Today it is a banana leaf–wrapped packet of *nasi lemak,* coconut rice with spiced whitebait *ikan bilis* sambal (a sauce made of the tiny fish) and slices of fresh cucumber. Azna prefers a simple *gado-gado,* a fresh vegetable salad with crisp pineapple, cucumber, and tofu cubes drizzled with a light peanut sauce.

Dinner is curried fish, tofu served with a spicy shrimp paste (*belacan*) sauce, and a stir-fry of mixed vegetables, served after evening prayers at about 7:30 P.M. Dinner plates are set on batik placemats with glasses of water on the side. There is no cutlery

except for the serving spoons at each dish. While dining privately at home, people eat with their fingers or with chopsticks.

## Major Foodstuffs

Although Brunei is self-sufficient in poultry and egg production, Chinese greens, and some seafood, almost 80 percent of Brunei's food is imported from Malaysia and Indonesia. Australia and the United States supply frozen and fresh halal beef and lamb, as well as most other goods including fresh ultra-pasteurized milk in cartons and canned evaporated milk.

Pork, deemed *haram* (forbidden) for the Muslim market, is imported for the non-Muslims as pig rearing is banned here. Pork is clearly labeled and separated from halal meats in local markets and supermarkets with cold-storage facilities. The sale of alcohol is banned, although expatriates and non-Muslim residents are allowed restricted amounts when entering Brunei. Duty-free liquor is available on Labuan Island, Malaysia, a short boat ride from the capital, BSB.

A broad variety of foods is available to cater for the varied peoples living here. Food is available from the less expensive wet markets, where water is sprayed regularly to keep greens fresh for daily shoppers. Malay vegetable stalls specialize in fern shoots, small-leaved greens, lotus stems, spinach, varieties of sweet potatoes, and local herbs, especially the Vietnamese mint, galangal (*lengkuas*), lemongrass (*serai*), pink torch ginger (*bunga kantan*), kaffir lime leaves called *daun limau perut,* sweet potato leaves, various types of basil, banana flowers, the aromatic *pandan* (pandanus) leaf, and stacks of banana leaves, the aluminum foil of the East, used for wrapping and cooking. Shrimp paste is sold in cakes and packed in banana leaves to keep it fresh.

Asian greens are plentiful: Chinese bok choy, *kai lan* (Chinese broccoli) and *kang kong* (water convolvulus), long beans, green golf ball–sized eggplants, and green bitter melons are popular, as are garlic chives, onions, garlic, and spring onions. Here tofu products are also found, close to salted radishes, fresh bean sprouts, and noodles, including broad flat rice noodles and yellow wheat noodles. Coconut halves are freshly grated and pressed into coconut milk that is sold in plastic bags, where in a few minutes the heavier cream separates from the milky fluid.



*Nasi lemak,* the most popular food in Brunei that can be served during breakfast, lunch, dinner, and as a snack. (Hooelse | Dreamstime.com)

During the April fruit season, a mad profusion of exotic fruits are available: The strong smelling durians, mangosteens, green and yellow mangoes, pomelo and other citrus, watermelons, longans, and rambutans will satisfy every palate. On the main roads, seasonal stalls are piled high with rambutans, durians, and mangosteens to attract the shoppers in passing traffic. These fruits have short shelf lives and have to be disposed of quickly.

Seafood is the preferred protein, eaten at least three times a week. At the fishmongers, customers find snapper, mackerel, small red-spotted whiting, black and white pomfret, *kembong,* anchovies dried into ikan bilis, and shoals of prawns sitting amid shaved ice next to crates of blue swimmers and live mud crabs.

A halal section with meat on hooks and fresh poultry is slightly less expensive than the chilled meats at the cold-storage supermarkets. Spice stores specialize in curry powders and pastes, tamarinds, and dried prawns as well as flours—local sago flour from the sago-palm core and glutinous rice, wheat, and tapioca flours—and wines, cooking oils, and Chinese vinegars.

## Cooking

The food eaten in Brunei is similar to the food of Malaysia as the inhabitants of these places are basically the same people eating a blend of food influenced by Indian and Chinese traders who traveled through from the 11th century on and who married their styles with local herbs and Malay cooking using woks brought with them. Although the food is intricate to prepare, the kitchens are basic, with cupboards for storage and counters. A gas burner with two or three rings, a coconut scraper stool with a protruding goose-necked scraper with prongs for scraping coconut halves, and a granite mortar and pestle for grinding herbs seem sufficient. A sharp Chinese cleaver tackles the slicing and chopping, done on a large chopping board from a tree trunk. Garlic, onions, and chilies are dry-roasted and then pounded before being added to meat and fish. Vegetables are stir-fried, sautéed, or stewed in soups or sometimes mashed into pureed sambals with chili, ginger, and garlic. Tamarind sours a curry without any tartness, and tofu is used by Chinese and Malays especially as its health-promoting properties are known and respected.

Malay cooking is spicy, reflecting Indian and Arab styles with tasty sambals, curries, and elaborate rice, meat, and vegetable dishes with a Mogul bent, while Chinese meals are sauce based. Various methods of cooking are used: stir-frying, stewing, steaming, and boiling. There are few salad dishes. Rice or noodles forms the main meal, and these are eaten twice, even three times a day, with a small quantity of meat or fish, which is sliced thinly and tossed with vegetables or served on its own.

## Typical Meals

Meals are eaten with the fingers of the right hand, managed by pinching off pieces of fish or meat and mixing them with some curry sauce, some vegetables, and a small amount of rice. The thumb acts as a shovel. The palm of the hand should remain clean. Everything is sliced into small pieces for holding small portions for eating.

Bruneians are used to eating smaller portions of meat or fish cooked with vegetables. In most of Asia, the main carbohydrate (in this case, rice) is served on a dining table along with three or more vegetable dishes. Etiquette decrees that one never takes a second helping unless invited by the hostess.

Typical meals may be fried rice cooked with fresh prawns and Chinese vegetables with a chili stir-fry base or rice noodles called *mee-hoon,* chock-full of dried prawns, mushrooms, and leafy greens. Tofu or tempeh (fermented soybeans) is often added for texture. Chicken rice steamed in chicken stock is served with a sweet chili sauce. Indian roti with a soupy lentil and vegetable curry is commonly served at lunchtime. Malay dishes are stronger flavored with lemongrass, galangal, and chili. A good example is the *laksa,* a soupy curried coconut soup flavored with lemongrass, galangal, and chili. In contrast, Chinese meals are less spicy. Steamed prawns and fish with slivers of ginger are popular, as well as chicken wings steeped in wine, beef slivers cooked in a black bean sauce, and *yong tofu* (tofu puffs stuffed with fish paste served in a rich brothy soup).

Malay festive dishes include slow-cooked beef *rendang* cooked in 12 spices. Fried fish and prawn sambals are served in spicy sauces. Chicken *satay* (strips of meat on a skewer) is typical of the region. When entertaining guests, noodle dishes are served in Chinese bowls with chopsticks, but when a rice meal is served, forks and spoons are laid with paper

napkins. Knives, traditionally considered a sign of aggression, are never placed on the table.

**Prawn Sambal**

2 lemongrass bulbs, finely chopped
4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
2 red onions (to yield 1 c chopped)
1 tbsp dried prawns, soaked in hot water
1 tbsp chili paste or Indonesian *sambal oelek*
¼ c vegetable oil
1½ c coconut milk
1 lb peeled green shrimp
Salt, sugar, and fresh lime juice to taste
Garnish of cilantro leaves

Collect all the chopped ingredients, and pound roughly in a mortar and pestle with the dried prawns and the chili paste.

Heat the oil in a wok, and add the blended mixture. Stir until the aromas are fragrant and to prevent sticking at the bottom of wok. Add the coconut milk, mix, and simmer to reduce mixture to a thick pouring consistency, then add the shrimp and allow to cook for 3 to 4 minutes until shrimp turn pink. Season with salt, sugar, and fresh lime juice, and garnish with cilantro leaves.

## Eating Out

Restaurants attached to the hotel chains serve high-quality halal meals and a tantalizing mix of local and foreign steaks and pasta dishes everywhere. Malay and Chinese restaurants and coffeehouses are available for those who want to enjoy a meal cooked outside the home. Asians prefer to eat at small stalls and take-out cafés that serve a variety of cuisines. They are normally found in the busy parts of the city. Often a family with pajama-clad children in tow can be seen at a late-night market, enjoying a "past-bedtime" bowl of piping hot fish congee (rice porridge). It is also possible to sample Brunei's official dish, the *ambuyat,* a starchy sago flour boiled into a thick pasty mush, eaten with a two-pronged bamboo sticks called *chanda* and accompanied with many spicy sambal dips to flavor the pottage.

People snack at any time of day, buying from many portable stalls that move to serve commuting office workers throughout the day. Here, cakes and noodles are available 24/7, and even a unique version of cappuccino: coffee *kopi tarik,* sweetened with condensed milk, then frothed by pouring from a distance. This is served in a plastic bag threaded through with the ubiquitous pink raffia as a handle.

## Special Occasions

Ramadan is the most important Muslim festival. It is a month of fasting, the end of which (Eid al-Fitr) is celebrated with a general open-house invitation to friends and colleagues, who come to pay their respects to the family. Clothed in their best, Muslim families in silken *kain songket* cloth sarongs and batik shirts invite their guests to a heavily laden buffet table laden with celebratory food including rendang, saffron or biryani rice, and glutinous rice coconut cakes. No alcohol is served, but fresh lime barley or commercial fizzy drinks like Coke or orange crush are an acceptable alternative to tea.

Children greet their elders by bowing low, hands held to their hearts, addressing them as aunt or uncle, a custom that defers to elders in the community. To call an adult by his common name would be an unpardonable offence. Shoes are left on the doorstep Brunei-style, where one can be fully dressed without shoes.

Chinese New Year, celebrated similarly by Chinese the world over, begins with a New Year's Eve dinner where ancestors are remembered and "lucky" dishes—including prawns for happiness and fish with black moss fungus—portend good luck for the New Year. Firecrackers are lit to dispel bad luck, and children receive lucky red packets of money.

## Diet and Health

The spices and herbs used in Brunei, Malaysia, and Indonesia have been used for centuries for their health-giving properties, long before people started using them in cooking. Spices like turmeric,

cinnamon, ginger juice, the Asian pennywort or *gotu kola,* and asafetida are now being seriously researched to determine their healing properties as the locals have used them for centuries with positive results. Brunei is also a well-informed country, where health authorities remind the people of health issues, such as the dangers of the cholesterol in coconut milk, and encourage active exercise classes. In BSB, the capital city, many gymnasiums offer affordable exercise classes to encourage the younger office workers to keep trim. Brunei has its fair share of joggers and Hash House Harriers, as in any part of the world, but unless the sedentary lifestyle gets to them, balanced meals with large helpings of vegetables will continue to be advantageous to health.

*Carol Selva Rajah*

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# Cambodia

## Overview

Cambodia shares many culinary traditions with the neighboring countries of Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and Indonesia. This reflects the power of the Khmer Empire in the 9th to 15th centuries, spreading the influence of this Indianized kingdom beyond the borders of present-day Cambodia. The royal tradition of palace food centered in the temple complex of Angkor Wat had a profound influence on Thai palace food. Thai and Khmer palace cooking share the elaborate flavoring pastes based on herbs and spices that enrich their curries, soups, and stews. Cambodian dishes are likely to contain more aromatic spices such as cardamom, star anise, cloves, and nutmeg, common in the islands, along with lemongrass, ginger, galangal, coriander, and wild lime leaves. Most dishes make less use of the fiery hot chilies that dominate Thai cooking.

The Khmer in Cambodia make up about 90 percent of the population. Theravada Buddhism is the dominant religion in Cambodia, although in the war years under the Khmer Rouge, religious practice was forbidden and culinary skills all but disappeared, as the country faced a constant state of near starvation.

The Mekong River and its delta in southern Vietnam is the longest river in Southeast Asia, forming boundaries and bounty for communities living in southern China, Thailand, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The Mekong and its tributaries create rich alluvial soils ideally suited for wet-rice agriculture. The Khmer built their earliest civilizations around the Mekong River and the freshwater lake, Tonle Sap. The great Tonle Sap represents the largest reserve of freshwater fish in the world in the rainy season. This is reflected in the fish dishes that accompany most Cambodian meals today.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Nary and Chayim owned a rice mill in the town of Siem Riep, near the famous site of Angkor Wat. As successful entrepreneurs of Chinese and Cambodian ancestry, they had made a comfortable life for themselves and their four grown children. Their rice for daily meals came from their own land, worked by their children's families. The daughters knew how to make the side dishes of grilled fish, soups, and stir-fried vegetables they consumed from ingredients grown on their own land. In the 1960s and early 1970s, they would drive into Phnom Penh several times a year to visit the family of Nary's brother, who worked for the government in the diplomatic corps. When he was not overseas, he set a European table and had his wife and servant prepare French dishes for his dinner every night, including French bread and French wine with his meals. Nary enjoyed these occasional meals, but Chayim missed the richly flavored fish curries his family prepared at home.

After 1975, when the Khmer Rouge took over the country, Nary's brother and his family were executed, and Chayim disappeared. Nary and her children were separated and sent to work camps, where they barely survived; somehow, they survived the starvation rations and heavy workload. Eating only a few grains of rice and insects, Nary made it through the war years and now lives in a more modest style in her daughter's

home in a village near Siem Riep. Here, she teaches her grandchildren how to make the dishes she remembers from her childhood—grilled fish, soups delicately flavored with lemongrass, and steamed cakes.

## Major Foodstuffs

Cambodians prefer long-grain nonglutinous rice as their main staple. Rituals accompany the skilled technical practices of rice production, ritual work that must be accomplished for a good harvest. These important rice rituals were probably established to support the complex irrigation systems that flourished during the powerful Khmer Empire. Irrigated wet rice varieties are the most productive but rely on canals, irrigation systems, terracing, and other labor-intensive techniques to produce large yields. These were not maintained under the Khmer Rouge leadership, who knew little about the day-to-day work of rice farming.

Fish and fermented fish products are also critically important to Cambodian diets. Freshwater fish, sea fish, and shellfish are the major sources of protein for most meals. The Mekong River has supplied people from Cambodia with a steady supply of river fish for centuries. Snakehead, snapper, catfish, and mackerel are popular fish in the country. In Cambodia, the Tonle Sap (Great Lake) supplies a large variety of freshwater fish for much of the population especially during the rainy season. In November, when the waters of the Tonle Sap crest and begin to run backward, freshwater fish are scooped up in quantity. Cambodians process this fish in a variety of ways, including making a preserved fermented fish product, *prahok,* in order to make full use of the seasonal surplus all year long. The fish and shellfish are also sun-dried and salted.

Vegetables such as green beans, bamboo shoots, squash, eggplant, and wild and cultivated greens are served in soups; stir-fried with onions, garlic, meat, or fish; or served raw or lightly steamed with fermented fish products as dipping sauces. They are key ingredients in dry and wet curries. Eggplants come in a wide variety of forms, from long green or purple plants used for grilling or stir-fries to tiny bitter pealike plants flavoring curries. Other popular vegetables include banana blossoms, bitter melons, lotus, bok choy, rapini, napa cabbage, sweet potatoes, and green onions or scallions. Chinese chives and bean sprouts (from soy and mung beans) garnish a wide variety of side dishes. Cambodians enjoy a wide range of tropical fruits and include preserved lemons in many savory dishes. They honor the durian as the king of fruit and the mangosteen as the queen, and they enjoy fruit as a snack or with salted fish and rice as part of a simple meal.

## Cooking

In the decades after World War II, it was common for urban middle-class and elite households in Cambodia to have servants, including cooks who were trained to prepare French dishes; children from these households may never have learned to cook and would have to learn Cambodian recipes from cookbooks as adults. The disruption of war and famine in the 1970s and 1980s further eroded the transmission of traditional knowledge of Cambodian cooking. Cambodians who fled the country as refugees may have carried with them treasured family recipes and cooking techniques.

Cambodian meals include steamed rice with a number of accompanying side dishes. Many side dishes are grilled or stir-fried, but some specialties such as chicken or fish *amok* (with a thick coconut sauce) are steamed. Curries and wet or dry stews are cooked with aromatic flavoring pastes. Many ingredients such as chilies, garlic, and shallots are dry-roasted before cooking to intensify their flavors. Sesame seeds mixed with salt and black pepper can be dry-roasted and ground, with or without dried chilies, to enhance dishes served with rice. Lemongrass and galangal can be added to the mixture. In Cambodia, stir-frying is usually the last step in preparing a dish to go with rice. Vegetables are washed and dried, cut evenly, and cooked quickly over high heat in small amounts of oil with meat, fish, and seasonings, as in this simple but tasty dish:

### Cambodian Pork and Eggplant Stir-Fry

This simple eggplant stir-fry could be made with other vegetables as well.

3 eggplants

2 tbsp oil

5 cloves garlic, coarsely chopped

½ lb ground pork

2 tbsp fish sauce

1 tbsp sugar

Ground black pepper

Small bunch of garlic chive blossoms, cut in 2-in. lengths

Prick eggplant and grill or roast for 40 minutes until soft. When cool, peel and mash the flesh. Stir-fry garlic in oil until golden, and add pork. Add fish sauce, sugar, and pepper. Add eggplant and chives, stir-frying until well mixed, and serve with rice.

## Typical Meals

In the capital city and major towns, a wider range of meal options including baguettes and noodles are available from food vendors for breakfast and snacks. Most rural Cambodians eat rice with side dishes for all meals. A special stew or thick soup made for an evening meal might be heated up and eaten for breakfast with rice the next morning.

Cambodian meals are served all at once, rather than in courses, unless the meal contains French-style dishes, in which case the European pattern of courses is followed. Cambodian meals do not usually begin with appetizers. The Western category of appetizer might better be understood as the food to go with drinks, often snack foods purchased from street vendors—or side dishes without rice. When there are several side dishes, it is appropriate



A typical meal found in Cambodia from a popular restaurant. (Anyee | Dreamstime.com)

to take a small amount from one side dish at a time rather than pile a selection of all side dishes on a plate of rice at once. The latter is considered both rude and foolish, as mixing the side dishes makes it difficult to appreciate the taste contrasts and to personalize mouthfuls. Dry and wet condiments are placed directly on rice or on the side of the plate.

Accompanying most Cambodian meals is a sauce or paste made from fermented fish or shellfish. Fish sauce is also a crucial ingredient in most Khmer dishes. A thicker form of fermented fish, called prahok in Khmer, is served as a dish with rice, often accompanied by raw or lightly steamed vegetables. Fermented catfish or snakehead fish provides the distinctive salty taste in Khmer dishes. Fermented fish products can be served alone as a condiment or made into more complex sauces by adding a number of herbs and spices.

**Caramelized Fish**

This technique of caramelizing fish is also popular in Vietnamese cooking; the caramelizing process probably has its origin in French techniques.

1 trout, cleaned and filleted

3 tbsp sugar

1 tbsp water plus 1 c water

2 cloves garlic, chopped

1 tbsp fish sauce

Black pepper

3 green onions, chopped

Cut fish into strips and set aside. Make a caramel sauce by browning 1 tablespoon sugar in 1 tablespoon water in a skillet. When it is brown, slowly add 1 cup water and stir until it is an even brown color. Add chopped garlic, the remaining sugar, and fish sauce, along with the fish steaks. Simmer, and turn the fish when it is cooked on one side and the sauce thickens. Remove from heat, and garnish with black pepper and green onions. Serve with rice.

## Eating Out

While French restaurants once flourished in the towns and cities of Cambodia, the years of war reduced their numbers, and they do a good business only in the capital of Phnom Penh, where visitors have the cash to eat out on a regular basis. However, street foods have returned to the towns and cities in the form of vendors close to central markets and small noodle shops. Night markets in the capital sell foods like chicken, beef, or pork *satay* (thin strips of meat on a skewer), sausages, fried bananas, glutinous rice cakes, grilled squid, baguette sandwiches, fried or fresh spring rolls, salty or sweet fried doughnuts, and rice porridge.

Fried or grilled meats, sausages, and deep-fried snacks including insects such as crickets and grasshoppers may be offered at small drinking shops frequented mostly by men. As the economy recovers, more lakeside, riverside, and seaside restaurants feature regional specialties of fried, smoked, grilled, or salted fish.

## Special Occasions

Cambodians celebrate life-cycle events such as births, weddings, and funerals as well as the round of Buddhist holidays that fit with the agricultural cycle. New Year's celebrations in April are always occasions for festive meals. Grilled fish with special relishes is popular on such occasions, as well as grilled packets of glutinous rice with coconut milk and bananas wrapped in banana leaves.

The Khmer Rouge disrupted the cycle of Buddhist rituals that used to be integrated into the rural agricultural cycle. Where temples are flourishing, rural and urban households cook rice at dawn for distribution to monks on their early-morning alms rounds. This means that boiled rice is available for family breakfasts. The best dishes the family can afford are prepared for the monks early in the morning; later, the family and neighbors can enjoy the rest of the dishes for their breakfast meal. Some families prepare special food for the monks only on the days when religious services are held in the community temples of Cambodia.

## Diet and Health

There are few food cultures more ideally suited to human health than the Cambodian diet based on rice, fish, fresh vegetables, and fruit. However, the war years disrupted the development of the once-famous Cambodian cuisine associated with the ancient Khmer Empire.

Cambodia faces severe problems with malnutrition, with many communities and households eating less than the minimal calories recommended. Most of the available calories come from rice. The World Food Program estimates that a third of the population is undernourished. The infant mortality rate of 98 deaths per 1,000 live births is dropping, as is the under-five mortality rate (143 per 1,000). But malnutrition remains a significant problem in the country. International assistance has focused on immunizations, food supplements in schools, and vitamin A supplementation. Few households use iodized salt, which means that iodine deficiency and goiter are still common.

When Cambodians fled their country as refugees, escaping war and the repressive regime of the Khmer Rouge, healers known as Khru Khmer offered a variety of traditional medical services in the refugee camps, including massage and herbal therapies.

*Penny Van Esterik*

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# Central Asia

## Overview

Central Asia, including the province of Xinjiang in China, is a massive territory, more than half the size of the United States. The newly independent states of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan are situated east of the Caspian Sea, west of China, south of Russia, and north of Afghanistan and Iran. (A fifth state, Kazakhstan, just to the north, is covered in a separate article.) Central Asia is generally regarded as a vast, imprecise zone, simultaneously connecting and dividing the continents of Europe and Asia. Turkic and Iranian peoples are the dominant cultural groups of the region.

Far from the moderating influence of oceans, the main geographic features of the region are steppe, desert, and mountains. Most of the land is desert in Uzbekistan (two-thirds), Xinjiang (two-thirds), and Turkmenistan (four-fifths), in addition to semiarid plains. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are mountainous regions; towering ranges from 16,000 to 26,000 feet radiating out from the Pamirs form the border separating Central Asia from India and China.

For Central Asian non-nomadic (sedentary) society, the vibrant culture of Iran was the primary creative inspiration, with later Arabic and Chinese contributions. Most recently, 150 years of Russian control in the Soviet era have considerably altered the foodways. The varied Central Asian cuisine also forms the foundation of cookery in modern-day Turkey. The mountains, steppes, and deserts divided people into two lifestyles—scattered settlements in river valleys and along oases on the one hand, and nomadic pastoralists on the other. The swath of territory along the Silk Road—the network of exchange routes linking Asia and Europe—forms the heart of Central Asia, more specifically Uzbekistan, with its fabled cities of Samarqand and Bukhara.

Central Asian cuisine is as elusive as identifying the boundaries of the area itself. From Xian (the starting point for the Silk Road in China) to Istanbul on the threshold of Europe, the variety of dishes gradually diverges from one region to the next. Yet the similarities are more striking than the differences. Hospitality—symbolized in the *dastarkhan* (a Turkic word for "tablecloth," or "great spread")—is foremost among the common culinary cultural traits. More like a bountiful holiday table setting, dastarkhan refers to the prolific assortment of prepared dishes laid out for an honored guest.

The ancient Eastern hospitality, the ritual of the dastarkhan, flatbread, lamb, and cumin unite this area and its immense collection of traditions and produce, as well as setting Central Asian cuisine apart from Chinese, Indian, and European fare. Central Asia has been home to countless ethnic groups and kingdoms throughout the ages. While the new nations of Central Asia attempt to draw ethnic and cultural distinctions between themselves and their close neighbors, the region is a fascinating mix of Mongol, Turkic, and Iranian ancestry. Today, Central Asia is home to almost 80 million people. Turkic ethnic groups dominate post-Soviet Central Asian demographics, accounting for almost 65 percent of the population. Tajiks of Iranian extraction, Russians, and others make up the remaining ethnic groups.

Of all the Central Asian political units, Uzbekistan remains among the most distinctive in dress, language, culture, traditions, and customs. This contributes to a well-defined concept of identity in the post-Soviet world, due in part to the enormous Uzbek population and centuries of sedentary life. The Turkmen and Kyrgyz nomads were forcibly settled and collectivized by the Soviets—their culture, in essence, confined to unfamiliar apartment walls.

Central Asian nomadic groups keep sheep and goats as well. Cattle and camels are also herded, even though most cattle could barely survive the winters without fodder. The main source of protein in the nomadic diet is milk products, especially kumiss, yogurt, *ayran* (yogurt mixed with water), and *qurt* (or *qurut;* air-dried cheese).

In terms of culinary cultures, it is possible to divide the region into multiple categories: nomadic or urban, highland or lowland, and Mongol, Turkic, or Iranian. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan represent the subsistence nomadic diet based on meat and dairy products. The settled Turks—Uzbeks and Uighurs (from western China)—form another Central Asian tradition. Their core cuisine includes pilafs, kebabs, noodles, stews, tandoori breads (flatbreads cooked on the side wall of a cylindrical clay oven), and savory pastries. The Eastern philosophy of harmony and balance permeates the cuisine, underlying the preventative and medicinal qualities of food. The third culinary group is Iranian, encompassing Tajikistan and southern Uzbekistan, extending into parts of northern Pakistan and India. Rice dishes, stewed vegetables, extensive spices, and lavish sweets mark this cuisine. Despite attempts at classification and definition of all the varied features or regional variations, the uniformity of lifestyle, customs, and history produces a singular identifiable culinary culture.

## Food Culture Snapshot

The Abdurakhmanov family lives in a downtown two-bedroom apartment in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. Gulmira is an accountant, and Ramiz is a dentist. Aziza is their nine-year-old daughter, and Surat is their five-year-old son. The family gathers on the weekends for meals at the grandmother's house, which contains a traditional gardened courtyard and detached kitchen. On Fridays, they prepare Central Asian pilaf with rice, mutton or beef, chickpeas, onions, and carrots. The other favorite outdoor meal is shish kebabs (*shashlyk*) of lamb, beef, or chicken.

Central Asian cuisine is extremely labor-intensive, requiring long preparation and cooking times. Therefore, it is quite common for the Abdurakhmanova to eat modestly throughout the week and make a special effort when guests come over or for the Friday meal. Ramiz, like most Muslim men, visits the mosque to participate in community worship on Fridays, and that evening is considered their family time at home or with the extended family at grandmother's house. She is fortunate enough to have a modest three-bedroom home with a courtyard. They take their weekend morning and evening meals outside in the shade. A raised square platform or dais with a low table in the center is the main place for enjoying family meals. In the heat of summer, it is fairly common to eat bread, fruit, and tea all day to stave off hunger and have only one large meal a day.

Their essential staples in the household are rice, flour, mutton, beef, onions, carrots, potatoes, tomatoes, and cucumbers. For a one-week period, the Abdurakhmanovs buy roughly 8 pounds of potatoes, 4 pounds of tomatoes, 4 pounds of cucumbers, 3 pounds of rice, 2 pounds of pasta, 2 pounds of flour, 2 pounds of carrots, 2 pounds of meat, 1.5 pounds of sugar, 1 pound of onions, 1 pound of bell peppers, 1.5 quarts of oil, and a dozen eggs. In autumn they add pumpkin and fruits.

For breakfast, the family eats buckwheat kasha (from the Russian influence) or rice porridge with milk and sugar. The weekly repertoire of dishes made by Gulmira includes pilaf and the pasta dishes of *manti, chuchvara,* and *khanum.* Manti are large steamed dumplings with a mutton and onion filling. Chuchvara are smaller boiled dumplings with a similar filling to that of manti. Khanum is also a steamed noodle roll with a mutton or pumpkin filling. Gulmira also regularly makes *samsa* (savory pastries) and soup. Other starch staples include store-bought flatbread, fried homemade flatbread (*gilmindi*), and spaghetti noodles. Green

tea is consumed all day long, usually with bread or sweet biscuits.

## Major Foodstuffs

The rich, mildly seasoned, and celebratory qualities of Central Asian cookery reflect the nomadic, Eastern, and Islamic customs of the region. The high courtly style of Persian cuisine, famous for its perfumed rice dishes and fat-tailed sheep, heavily influenced the regal cities of Samarqand, Bukhara, and Merv. Central Asian cuisine also incorporates the distinguished cooking methods of China with its reliance on woks and steaming. Grilled meats, yogurt, and stuffed vegetables are similar to those found in the Middle East. Rice pilaf, shashlyk, noodle dishes, flatbreads, and *halva* are among the most recognizable dishes. Dishes that may seem unusual to the Westerner include green turnip salads, pumpkin or mung bean stews, horse sausage, and hearty kebabs of liver and sheep fat. The Russians introduced beets, potatoes, and vodka, and the modern era brought pizza, beer, and ice cream sandwiches.

Grains form the dietary basis for most Central Asians; those that are grown in significant quantities are wheat, rice, millet, and barley. Millet is brewed into a beerlike drink called *boza* in Kyrgyzstan. Alfalfa, oats, barley, and sorghum are grown mainly for fodder. Chickpeas (*nokhat*) and mung beans (*mosh*) are the standard legumes found in soups and rice dishes. The most common use of grain is in the form of wheat flour for breads. Rice and noodles are the other starchy mainstays. Flatbread (*non*) is present at every meal. Non was traditionally made at home, although now it is increasingly sold at markets or communal bakeries. The standard non is simply a mixture of wheat flour, water, yeast, and salt. The dough ferments and proofs overnight, then is baked in a tandoor before dawn. European-style dark and white wheat-bread loaves have become common in urban areas through Russian influence.

Rice pilaf (*palov*) is the flagship of Central Asian cookery. In its most basic form, it is a dish with rice, meat, onions, and carrots. However, it has a much greater cultural significance. Pilaf is intimately bound to hospitality, community, and identity. Pilaf provides nourishment as well as a glimpse into the Central Asian psyche. For Central Asians, pilaf signifies hospitality, celebration, and solemnity, and it is a weekly ritual.

From the earliest times, a paste of flour and water has formed the basis for many meals. Turkic nomads have added dough to their dishes for centuries. *Sutli atala* is an Uzbek milk soup thickened with flour, while a similar dish in Tajikistan is called *atolai kochi. Manpar* are small bits of pinched dough, or sometimes small, square noodles, in a meat soup. The varieties of noodles and filled dumplings make Central Asian cuisine especially diverse. *Laghman* is a thick noodle dish served with a soup or dry with meat, peppers, tomatoes, and onions.

Chuchvara in Uzbek, or *tushbera* in Tajik, are the Central Asian version of Russian *pelmeni* (ravioli-like dumplings), filled with meat and onions. A special spring treat is *koq chuchvara,* a filling made with any mixture of greens available—sorrel, spinach, mint, cilantro, dill, basil, thyme, parsley, celeriac, garlic, green onion, arugula, or shepherd's purse—and topped with yogurt.

The savory meat pastries in Central Asia are similar to those found in Russia, which is not surprising since many have the same source and the same name. A Kazan Tatar dish, *belishi* (Russian *belyashi*), is a fried dough with a mincemeat and onion filling similar to *chebureki,* a dish eaten throughout the former Soviet Union. Central Asians also use the tandoor to make triangular or round samsa



Samsa is being baked in a tandoor, the traditional Central Asian oven. (Monsteranimal | Dreamstime.com)

(Uzbek) or *sambusa* (Tajik) with the standard mutton and onion filling.

The Central Asians remain true to their pastoral heritage as manifested in their sizable livestock herds. The principal products from cattle, sheep, and goats are dairy products, leather, meat, and wool. Central Asia is renowned for the vibrancy of its fermented dairy products. The region can claim kumiss, fermented mare's milk, among its best-known contributions to world cuisine.

Some yogurt is made with naturally occurring bacteria, while other yogurts are made by adding a bacterial culture to fresh cow, ewe, goat, or even camel milk. *Katyk* is made by heating milk and then allowing it to sour naturally. Both yogurt and katyk are served as an appetizer and used frequently as a garnish in soups and stews. Ayran is a salty mix of yogurt and water, especially refreshing in the summer.

The primary sources of protein in Central Asia are mutton, beef, poultry, and eggs. Goat and camel meat are less common. Pork is usually raised and eaten by Slavs, Koreans, and Germans who live in the area. Mutton is the most important meat, and unless otherwise specified, almost all recipes and menus that list meat denote mutton. Throughout Central Asia fat-tailed sheep are esteemed for their meat, fat, milk, and wool.

Meat is most commonly served as kebabs made from beef, mutton, liver, mincemeat, and chicken. It is also found in pilaf, soups (*shorpo, shurva, sorpa*), stews (*kovorma*), and salads. Horse meat and horse sausage are consumed mainly in Kyrgyzstan. *Chuchuk* or *kazy,* sausage made from horse meat, is considered a delicacy.

In regard to state vegetable production, all four Central Asian countries grow huge quantities of tomatoes and potatoes. Almost all produce is locally grown, and the bazaars have a tremendous selection of fruits, vegetables, and nuts. The chief vegetables are tomatoes, peppers, onions, cucumbers, and eggplant. Some kinds of vegetables that are virtually unknown outside Central Asia include green radishes (*turp*), yellow carrots (actually a type of turnip), and dozens of pumpkin and squash varieties. Pumpkin is found in stews, samsa, and manti. Vegetables most often are grilled or stewed. A salad made from fresh tomato, onion, and hot pepper (*achik-chichuk*) is enjoyed throughout the warm months, and turp salad accompanies the main dish in the winter. Among the legumes, chickpeas and mung beans are the most prevalent.

Hundreds of varieties make melons the principal fruit export, famous throughout the region for their unique flavor. Fruit, fresh or dried, is eaten throughout the day for between-meal snacks. Grapes, too, are generally eaten fresh since Islam discourages the production of wine. The superiority of Central Asian fruit has been hailed over the ages. Early travelers to Central Asia, western China, and Iran never failed to mention the selection of luscious melons. Grapes, apples, quinces, and melons compose the largest fruit crops of the region. The spring is eagerly awaited for all the new plants, herbs, vegetables, and fruits that begin to appear. The fresh, young grape leaves are stuffed with a rice and meat mixture in a fashion almost identical to that found in Middle Eastern cuisine.

Apricots, strawberries, cherries, figs, and peaches are other fruits that appear in the early warm months. Toward the end of the summer, the fruit



Dressed in traditional Central Asian attire, a vendor of locally grown melons poses at his stand in the marketplace of Samarkand in present-day Uzbekistan, 1911. (Sergei Mikhailovich Prokudin-Gorskii Collection | Library of Congress)

orchards bloom with apples, quinces, persimmons, and pears. The final growing season produces the legendary melons, as well as pomegranates, lemons, and mandarins. Pomegranate seeds are mixed into salads, and one effortless dish combines only onions and pomegranate seeds. Citrons, similar to lemons, are native to Central Asia and have a thick, aromatic rind.

Central Asian cuisine is characteristically mild, but piquant sauces, garlicky relishes, and even whole peppers are added for punch in some regions, especially in the Fergana Valley. Rendered sheep fat is the general cooking oil, often mixed with cottonseed oil. Cottonseed oil has a strong and distinctive taste, and Central Asians bring it to the smoking point before adding the food, in the belief that the heat purifies the oil and seasons the wok. Vegetable oils are becoming more popular, but olive oil and butter are not traditional cooking fats. The main seasoning comes from black cumin, red and black pepper, barberries, coriander, and sesame seeds. The Uzbek cumin (*zera*) is smaller, darker, and more pungent than the seeds found in the West. Barberries are an acidic fruit, gathered in the autumn from an ornamental shrub. They contain vitamin C and, used in moderation, impart a tartness to any pilaf or stew. Cilantro (*kinza*) and parsley are the primary herbs, although dill, celeriac, and a pungent basil are broadly available.

Green tea (*koq chai*) reigns as the main beverage in Central Asia. It is the drink of hospitality, of leisure, and of health. Countless cups are consumed throughout the day. Green tea is served at every meal, and it is always the right time for a cup of tea. Central Asians prefer to drink it straight, but sugar is customarily offered to guests.

Dessert in general is another European borrowing. Sweet dishes are, however, part of teatime. An addictive mixture of walnuts and raisins is a frequent offering with tea. Endless varieties of halva, fruits, and confections—including sugar-coated almonds and crystallized sugar (*novvot*)—also make an appearance at teatime. Dried fruit is combined with honey, walnuts, pistachios, or almonds into many dessert recipes. In Uzbekistan, *chakchak* is fried dough fingers coated with honey, and *urama* is fried spiraled strips of dough dusted with powdered sugar. *Boorsok* are unsweetened triangular pieces of leavened, deep-fried dough that are served with tea in Kyrgyzstan.

## Cooking

Today's food-production and cooking techniques differ little from those employed by the ancients. Wives, mothers, grandmothers, and other women of the household spend a considerable portion of their day shopping for and preparing meals at home. There are few women in the workforce, and those who work are also expected to prepare the family meals. Women are responsible for all of the cooking except on those occasions when the men want to demonstrate their proficiency with the flame. Nomadic women make most of the dairy products, although the men sometimes help milk the horses. Central Asians cook over open flames in *qazans* (wok-shaped cauldrons) for deep-fat frying, frying, stewing, and simmering. Street vendors and home cooks still grill kebabs in braziers over glowing coals, make bread and samsa in tandoor ovens, and make dumplings (manti) in a bamboo or aluminum steamer (*qasqan*). The brazier, or grill, for cooking shashlyk is called a *mangal.* The preparation of Central Asian dishes resembles in many respects Chinese methods of cutting, cooking, and seasoning foods. All vegetables are cut according to strict traditional guidelines—shredded, diced, sliced, and so forth—depending on the dish. For the main courses, meat and vegetables are also fried before stewing (for pilaf or *shavlya*—a meat and rice porridge) or boiling (for stock for *laghman*—noodles). Among widely used dishware are *kasa* (a deep plate) and *piala* (a handleless teacup), round and oval serving platters, china teapots, and trays, as well as ceramic and wooden dishes.

In nomad cookery, the amount of equipment is minimal because it must be transported from location to location to follow the grazing herds. Furthermore, there is no luxury of electricity or running water. The iron qazan is the most indispensable cookware, used for cooking pilaf, soups, and even bread. If the qazan is shallow, it may be turned over

a flame to create a convex cooking surface to produce flatbreads among other things. Many parts of the sheep and goat—especially the cleaned, emptied stomach—are used for holding milk products or producing cheese. The main dairy products are milk, yogurt, ayran, kumiss, butter, and qurt made from the milk of sheep, goats, yaks, and even camels. Large (up to 10 gallons), sealable aluminum storage cans are one modern convenience the nomads have adopted for storing liquids or oil.

Considering the region's history of borrowing, adopting, and contributing elements of culture, the foodways and culinary arts of Central Asia are bound to flourish if their esteemed traditions of hospitality keep pace with the introduction of new foodstuffs. In the short time since independence, Central Asians have fostered a new national consciousness, developed a distinct identity, and cooked up increasingly distinct culinary boundaries through the savvy use of national cuisine.

## Typical Meals

The four countries of Central Asia have populations that exhibit a mix of urbanized, Sovietized, nomadic, Russian, Turkic, and Iranian cultures and influences. While the apartment kitchen epitomizes Russian daily meals, the open flame sets Central Asian food apart. Fire is the preferred method of cooking for the region's staples of pilaf, kebabs, samsa, and flatbreads. Increased contact with the outside world pushes some Central Asians to adapt their eating habits and mealtimes to conform to world patterns. Restaurant culture, European convenience foods, imported Turkish and Iranian dishes, and inexpensive Chinese cookware and equipment have all contributed to the changing foodways.

For the sake of simplicity, meals in Central Asia may be crudely divided into two groups—urban and rural. The meals of the city or apartment dweller have taken on many Russified elements, such as the number and timing of meals. The rural group, including the remaining nomads of Kyrgyzstan, has experienced a tremendous change of lifestyle but generally maintains much of the basic foodways of its forefathers. Three meals a day are standard for both nomads and city dwellers, with every meal including tea and flatbread (non). For breakfast, fresh cheese or honey may be added, but the meal is normally light. Lunch, usually a soup, may be taken at home, or a quick snack can be bought from street vendors.

The largest meal is usually eaten in the evening. The meal customarily starts with a prayer. After the prayer, diners make a passing gesture across their eyes with two hands as if they are washing their face. The men are expected to break and distribute the flatbread. Tea is first offered to everyone who passes a threshold in Central Asia, and a whole subset of customs exists surrounding the preparation, presentation, and consumption of tea. Green tea is predominant and the drink of hospitality. Black tea is preferred in Russian regions. Green tea is generally served straight, but sugar, milk, salt, or even butter may be added depending on individual preference. An entire portion of the cuisine—samsas, bread, halva, and various fried foods—is dedicated solely to teatime.

The nomads of Central Asia live in portable felt dwellings called yurts. The nomadic evening meal, as in antiquity, is the most substantial and often consists of mutton or beef. The traditional Kyrgyz dinner table is low and round and covered with a cloth. It is usually positioned near the center of the yurt. Diners sit around the table on decorative felts topped with long, narrow mattresses or pillows for comfort. The place of honor is reserved for the elderly, guests, or the head of the family. The daughter-in-law sits near the tea urn and serves the guests. These customs are still preserved, especially in rural areas. The visitor is first served kumiss (mare's milk) or ayran (yogurt and water). Kyrgyz prefer green tea (koq chai) during the summer. It is served in the morning, before and after lunch, and in the evening with fresh milk. *Aktagan* is one type of Kyrgyz tea drink, made with milk, butter, sour cream, and salt. Turkmen consume large quantities of meat, cereals, grains, dairy products, legumes, and fruit. Bread makes up a significant portion of the diet, especially in the rural areas. Their traditional bread is *chorek,* a tandoori flatbread.

Uzbeks normally have three or four meals a day—breakfast, lunch, afternoon snack, and dinner.




Selling bread at the Russian bazaar in Turkmenistan. (Travel-images.com)

Traditionally, freshly made green tea is served at the beginning and end of every breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Baked goods, sweets, and tea (sometimes with milk or cream) are served for breakfast. It is fairly common for the Tajiks, Turkmen, and Uzbeks to have a dining room that is devoid of furniture, with only a brightly colored wool carpet hanging on the wall. The tablecloth, or dastarkhan, is laid out on the floor or on low tables, and everyone eats on pillows surrounding the tablecloth. For both lunch and dinner, flatbreads, sweets, and fruits are served first, with tea. Then a hot dish is served, and fresh fruit follows as dessert. Desserts are generally the tea adjuncts—raisins and nuts, lightly sweetened cookies, multiple variations of halva, fruits, and confections. Pastries and layer cakes are a European addition. The Uzbek winter diet traditionally consists of vegetables, dried fruits, and preserves to provide the necessary vitamins throughout the season. Hearty noodle or pasta-type dishes are common chilly-weather fare. Nuts (walnuts, peanuts, pistachios, and almonds) and honey are eaten separately or used in sweets and desserts. Even in the middle of winter, melons, apples, pomegranates, pumpkins, and other products of the fall harvest are available in the market, almost up until the spring harvest.

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***Bairam Palovi* (Uzbek Wedding Pilaf)**

3 lb mutton or beef

4½ c vegetable oil

5 onions, sliced

2 lb carrots, cut in matchstick strips

2½ qt water

1 c chickpeas, canned

¾ c raisins

Salt, black pepper, cumin, coriander, turmeric, and barberries to taste

5 c rice

Cut meat in pieces, and sear in hot oil. Add sliced onions. After a few minutes put in carrot strips and mix. Add water, chickpeas, raisins, salt, and spices; simmer for 25–30 minutes. Add rice and additional water as needed to rise to ½ inch above the rice. Cook, uncovered, until water evaporates. Cover and cook on low heat 30–40 minutes or until meat is tender and rice is fully steamed. Stir mixture, remove the meat, and cut into small uniform-sized pieces. Serve rice in a mound on a large platter topped with the meat pieces.

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## Eating Out

Central Asian cuisine, if it has a reputation at all beyond the borders of the former Soviet Union, is considered a poor cousin to Turkish food. Anyone who has traveled to the area has undoubtedly experienced Soviet-era service and low-quality dishes in the few restaurants operating before the five Central Asian states became independent. The restaurants presented a very meager imitation of the diverse local cuisine. Scratching only the surface may give the impression that the region offers little more than pilaf, shashlyk, and a few miscellaneous noodle dishes. Nothing could be further from the truth, reinforcing the argument that restaurants are a poor source for judging a nation's culinary culture.

Central Asia has a rich tradition of hospitality, expressed through food in its teahouses and caravansaries along the Silk Road for over a millennium. A caravansary is a way station that provided shelter for trade caravans, a hostel and a place for nourishment for road-weary travelers and their camels. The Silk Road attracted merchants moving east and west laden with goods for exchange and sale from the 2nd century A.D. until the

15th century A.D. In Central Asia, all the roads converged, bringing the area into contact with Chinese, Indian, Persian, Slavic, and Middle Eastern traders and cultural influences. The teahouse (*chaikhana*), based on similar establishments in China, remains to this day a social institution where a community or neighborhood gathers over green tea and traditional Central Asian dishes of pilaf, shashlyk, and noodle soup (laghman). The chaikhana is the foundation of Central Asian culinary culture, especially in Uzbekistan. Always shaded, preferably situated near a cool stream, the chaikhana is a gathering place for social interaction and fraternity. Robed men congregate around low tables, centered on bedlike platforms adorned with local carpets, to enjoy a meal and endless cups of green tea. In addition to providing nourishment, shade, fellowship, and relaxation during the sweltering summer months, the chaikhana helped preserve many aspects of Central Asian heritage and cultural identity, which were obscured by 150 years of Russification. Almost every neighborhood has a mosque and a community teahouse, both influential social institutions. The chaikhana functions as a quiet retreat, a social center, a sacred place, a restaurant, and a men's club. The village or community elders gather here to share news, discuss business, make decisions, and comment on family and cultural matters.

The restaurant culture in a Western sense has still not firmly taken hold in the region, mainly due to a strong and preferred tradition of domestic cookery. Because Central Asian cuisine is so labor-intensive and the distribution system is heavily regulated by the state, it has yet to become profitable to open a great number of new restaurants featuring local cuisine. Furthermore, for Western tastes, Central Asian cuisine tends to be too heavy in the use of oil and animal fat. More important, foods prepared




Men sitting at a dais, a low table (*Khiva*), in Uzbekistan. (Travel-images.com)

in commercial kitchens for sizable groups can in no way compare to the outdoor cookery of pilaf made in large woks over open flames, shashlyk smoked over coals, and samsas (savory pastries) baked in tandoor ovens.

In general, restaurant dishes have been artificially assigned to courses of the Russian model: hot and cold appetizers (*zakuski*), a first course (*pervoe*) or soup (*sup*), a main course (*vtoroe*), and dessert. Sometimes the diner is simply told the final amount of the bill; other times a sum total is scribbled on a notepad. Only recently have restaurants begun to present an itemized check. Appetizers generally consist of caviar, samsa, horse meat, tongue, assorted fish, spicy Korean vegetable salads, and seasonal fruit. The primary soups are laghman (mutton, vegetables, and thick noodles), *shurpa* (with potatoes instead of noodles), manpar (pasta bits like thick noodles), and borscht. Pilaf, shashlyk, cutlets, and manti (mutton- or pumpkin-filled dumplings) are the usual main course. Tea and coffee are served at the end. Pilaf, manti, and kebabs are available on almost every other street corner throughout Central Asia.

## Special Occasions

Ramadan (Ramazan) is the most renowned Muslim holiday, a monthlong ceremony of prayer, fasting, and charity occurring in the ninth month of the year. No food or drink is allowed during daylight hours. All foods, however, are permitted from sunset to sunrise. The Quran dictates to "eat and drink until the black and white thread can be discerned at dawn." Ramadan (Uraza in Uzbek) is a working holiday, but work schedules may be seriously disrupted or altered.

In Uzbekistan, the largest festival and holiday is Eid al-Adha (also called Qurban-Hait or Qurban Bayram), eagerly awaited all year. Eid al-Adha occurs 70 days after Ramadan, to celebrate God's mercy in providing the sacrificial lamb. The holiday has special importance for the pilgrims performing the hajj, or journey to Mecca.

Nauruz Bayram is the ancient, pre-Islamic holiday celebrating the coming of spring on March 21, the vernal equinox. Although sometimes called the Muslim New Year, it has no basis in Islam. Nauruz has its origins in an Iranian folk holiday with roots in Zoroastrianism. Traditional dishes in Uzbekistan include *koq samsa,* koq chuchvara, *halim, nishalda,* and *sumalak. Koq* means "green" in Uzbek, and the savory pastries and small ravioli-like dumplings are made with all the spring greens that abound in the mountain valleys. Wheat porridge (halim) is made from boiled meat and wheat grains, seasoned with ground black pepper and cinnamon. Nishalda, a meringue flavored with licorice root, is also popular during Ramadan. Sumalak is a bread made of sprouted wheat.

### *Koq Chuchvara* (Uzbek Green Dumplings)

**Dough**

4 c flour

1 egg, hard-boiled and chopped

1 c water

1 tsp salt

**Filling**

1½ lb mixed greens and herbs: sorrel, spinach, mint, cilantro, dill, basil, thyme, parsley, celeriac, garlic, green onion, arugula, shepherd's purse

12 oz onions, finely diced

1 egg, hard-boiled and chopped

4 oz butter or animal fat

Black pepper and salt to taste

Chop the herbs, and combine well with onions, boiled egg, butter, and seasonings. Make a stiff dough out of the flour, salt, egg, and water; let stand for 30–40 minutes. Roll out dough 1/12 inch thick and cut into 2-inch × 2-inch squares. Place a touch of filling in the center, fold dough corner to corner, and pinch edges—completely enclosing filling. Boil in salted water until they float, no more than 4 minutes.

Serve in broth or drained with yogurt or sour cream; sprinkle with black pepper.

The Central Asian republics continue to celebrate the Soviet holidays of New Year's Day, International Women's Day, May 1, and May 9. May 1 was known as the International Day of Workers' Solidarity, only recently officially renamed Spring and Labor Day. The Celebration of Victory Day in World War II is marked on May 9, the day of Soviet triumph over Nazi Germany in 1945. They have also added Nauruz, Islamic holidays, independence days, constitution days, and a handful of nation-building holidays. Some of the older seasonal celebrations in Uzbekistan and Central Asia, directly related to food and survival, are experiencing a cultural revival: Erga urug kadash (planting festival), Khosil bairami (harvest holiday), Mekhrjon (bounty of nature celebration), Uzum saili (grape day), and Kovun saili (melon day). These days are marked with feasts, folk songs, and prayers.

Weddings in Central Asia may follow some Russian/Soviet traditions, but every cultural group has its own unique way of celebrating this special day. Families with nomadic roots, living in Western-style dwellings, may erect yurts to celebrate weddings and funerals. In Uzbekistan, prior to the wedding, representatives from the groom's family visit the bride's house to formally ask for her hand. The event is culminated in a ritual called *non sindirish* (breaking of bread). The date of the wedding is agreed upon. At the end of the evening, the bride's family presents each representative with a dastarkhan, two flatbreads, and sweets, as well as gifts for the groom's family. The party continues at the groom's house, where the presents are examined and the treats enjoyed. The couple is now considered to be engaged. On the day of the wedding two pilafs are cooked: one at the groom's house and one at the bride's house. The typical Uzbek wedding pilaf contains rice, mutton, chickpeas, raisins, onions, carrots, barberries, cumin, and turmeric for a golden color. Tajik wedding pilaf is very sweet—with sugar, dried fruit, and orange peel—to ensure a sweet life for the couple. The bride ceremoniously leaves her house for the groom's house, and the main party continues there.

In Central Asia, a pilaf ritual takes place on three main occasions: the wedding day, the 20th day after a death, and the one-year anniversary of a death. It involves not only relatives and friends but the entire neighborhood (*mahalla*). On the eve of the event, a carrot-cutting (*sabzi tugrar*) party takes place, usually with a concert (for weddings only) and a feast, during which the roles for the next day are assigned by the elders. The pilaf is cooked just before dawn so it is ready by the time the morning prayer is over. Wedding and funeral feasts are prepared and served by men only. Folk music calls the neighborhood to the table. The ritual begins with bread and tea, and then pilaf is served. Each platter is to be shared by two guests. Once guests are finished with the food, they leave and their places are taken by new arrivals.

## Diet and Health

In Central Asia, food is not only treated as a source of nourishment and fuel but also valued for its preventative and curative role. Specific nutritional problems include the lack of affordability of certain healthful and essential food items, the suspect quality of some foodstuffs, and the absence of public awareness of what constitutes a healthful and balanced diet.

Vitamin A and C deficiencies are common in Kyrgyzstan because the people eat fewer fruits and vegetables than do Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Turkmen. One concern in Tajikistan is the prevalence of thyroid deficiencies due to a lack of iron in the diet. Turkmen depend heavily on bread for calories, with only seasonal consumption of vegetables and fruit, resulting in a deficiency of protein and fat. Overall per-capita food consumption in Uzbekistan actually increased between 1992 and 1996, except for milk products. Uzbek consumption of meat increased, while bread intake has remained relatively stable since 1992.

Central Asians loosely maintained a diet based on the ancient Greek humoral practices as propagated by the Muslim philosopher ibn Sina (born near Bukhara in Uzbekistan) in the 11th century. This theory holds that the body has four humors (blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm) that determine health and disease. The humors were, in turn, associated with the four elements: air, fire, earth, and

water, which were neatly paired with the qualities hot, cold, dry, and moist. According to that theory, a proper and evenly balanced combination of humors characterized the health of the body and mind; an imbalance resulted in disease. Combining local wisdom with traditional Chinese thought, Central Asians consider foods to have either "hot" or "cold" as well as "dry" or "moist" qualities in regard to both medicinal and nutritive functions. The inextricable relationship between diet and health forms the basis for the humoral theory of medicine, which still holds considerable sway in individual food choices in the region. The layperson in Central Asia can still classify most foodstuffs as having hot or cold properties.

The major health-related problems in Central Asia are low life expectancy, cardiovascular disease, high rates of tobacco and alcohol use, and general nutritional deficiencies. These, combined with diets high in fat and low in antioxidants, mean that the conditions for cardiovascular disease are ripe. Central Asians consume well below the recommended average daily calories for the European region. Acute malnutrition among children remains high, resulting in disorders caused by lack of micronutrients such as iron and iodine. Carbohydrates in the form of bread and potatoes make up a larger part of the diet than in the past as the consumption of fats, milk products, fish, and eggs has declined. Still, the saturated fatty acids of animal fat make up a large portion of total calorie intake. According to recent reports by the World Health Organization, the Central Asian republics, while still in need of improvement, experienced some positive health results since the early 1990s. The Kyrgyz appear to have the best relative health in the region. In general, they eat a more healthful diet, smoke less, and are less frequent drinkers. Muslims in Central Asia, according to recent research, were significantly less likely to drink frequently or smoke.

*Glenn R. Mack*

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# China

## Overview

The People's Republic of China is the largest country in the world in terms of population, with 1,320 million people; it is the second largest in area, at 3,696,100 square miles. Taiwan, an island (and some neighboring small islands) that is generally considered to be legally a part of China, is a de facto independent country with 23 million people on 14,000 square miles. In addition, Chinese food and culture have followed Chinese emigrants all over the world, especially to Southeast Asia, where Chinese food has profoundly affected local foodways.

China stretches from the Pacific Ocean to the vast deserts of Central Asia, and from the tropics to the latitude of southern Canada. It is the most geographically varied country in the world, with tropical rain forests, high mountain tundras, waterless deserts, dry dusty plains, and vast riverine landscapes now dominated by rice. Critically important is the monsoon climate, which brings summer rain and winter drought. Rain is very heavy in the far south and southeast, diminishing steadily toward the northwest and far west. China is a major biodiversity center; western China has the most diverse fauna and flora of any temperate region in the world. China is still an agricultural country first and foremost, with extremely varied farming and livestock herding. All this means that Chinese agriculture and foodways can be extremely diverse.

The historic core area of China, the "18 provinces," extends from the southern border to just north of Beijing, the capital. This core can be ecologically divided into north, east, south, and west. Over recent centuries China has added the northeast (Manchuria), Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang (Chinese Central Asia), and the vast mountain area of Tibet.

China's population is largely Han, a group that has at least eight major languages and thousands of local dialects. The national language, Putonghua, is called Mandarin in most Western literature; closely related are Cantonese, Shanghainese, and other local languages. China has 56 recognized minority groups, each with its own language (or group of related languages) that may be distantly related or quite unrelated to the Chinese language family. The largest minority is the Zhuang, speaking a language very close to Thai. Other minorities include Tibetans, Mongols, Tungus, Koreans, and Turkic speakers including the Uighurs. Each minority has its own food culture.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Wu Zilian and his wife, Ni Guifei, are farmers in southern China. (Surnames come first, and women traditionally do not change their names at marriage.) They consider themselves traditional in foodways but have adapted somewhat to changing times.

They need to get to the fields by 7 A.M. and get their son off to school, so breakfast is early; they eat *ju* (congee), which is rice boiled down to thin porridge, with some peanuts, pickled vegetables, and small dried fish and soy sauce mixed in. From the shop next door they buy *yutiao,* strips of dough fried like doughnuts or churros but usually unsweetened. Sometimes they dunk these in the congee or in warm soy milk. With all this they have hot tea; they are still glad to be able to buy decent-quality tea. They recall the

old days where there was only hot water or, somewhat more recently, a dark brew made from old leaves and twigs.

They work hard in the fields till noon, then stop for a fairly substantial lunch of soup noodles and stir-fried greens. After taking it easy during the heat of the day, they finish up several projects and head home by 5 P.M. Ni Guifei goes to her small refrigerator, a prized possession, and gets out a piece of fish and a small bit of pork. She then turns on the small gas stove—another prized possession; she was raised breaking up firewood to burn in a clay bucket. She puts on a large pot of rice. On top of it goes the fish, in a small metal bowl, with ginger, slivered green onions, and a bit of oil over it; the fish will steam in the vapor coming up from the boiling rice. She slices the pork fine and stir-fries it with garlic, pickled soybeans, and assorted vegetables picked from the garden. There is still plenty of tea in the pot. Dessert is fruit from a neighbor family's orchard; they grow oranges, tangerines, and peaches.

This is the daily round, but over the last 15 years they have gradually added cookies, crackers, cheap candy, and store-bought white bread, first as rare luxuries, then as increasingly common snacks. Now, some mornings they eat bread and store-bought spread of some sort for breakfast. They drink sodas regularly, and Wu has a beer or two whenever there is a special occasion.

Such occasions are more common than they used to be, and they involve the whole family—and, usually, some friends and neighbors—eating stewed chicken and duck, roast pork, highly spiced vegetable dishes, and a number of sweets. Bean curd (tofu), once inevitable at such events, is getting rare; people say it is too low class for modern times. The couple says that people aren't as healthy as they used to be, but their son is old enough to have his own opinions and prefers the new ways.

Their neighbor's son, Wang Xifeng, lives a very different life indeed. He went to the city many years ago and prospered in manufacturing. He lives in a large house near Shanghai, with all the modern Euro-American conveniences, from a full kitchen to a flat-screen television. He still eats rice, but many of his calories now come from oil, meat, sugar, and wine, frequently consumed during the course of splendid business lunches and dinners. If he eats vegetables, they are the finest tender young sprouts. He is fully familiar with foreign foods, from McDonald's hamburgers to French wine and Indian curry. Lately, he has taken to eating white bread and jam for breakfast, instead of congee.

## Major Foodstuffs

China is famous for rice, which indeed is by far the most common food, but the north and west of the country are not good rice land. They therefore depended until recently on wheat, maize, and several species of millet. Today, rice is grown much farther north than of old, and it is sold everywhere, making it much more important in these other regions. Conversely, wheat is also more common and available, and it has increasingly gained ground against rice in the south and east. Western foods like crackers and white bread have made wheat much more visible in the food system. Maize, disliked because of its perceived low nutritional value and poor fit with Chinese cooking methods, has become an animal food. Other grains, being less productive, have almost disappeared.

The classic divide between wheat and rice split China in half at the Yangtze River (or a bit north of it). South of the Yangtze Valley, rice dominated; north of it, wheat ruled; in the valley itself, people grew rice in summer and wheat in winter and had plenty of both. Rice now grows as far north as southern Manchuria, thanks to development of ever more quick-growing varieties.

China's major protein source until recently was the soybean, a native of northern China. Soybeans require processing to be nutritionally very valuable, and traditionally they were turned into soy sauce, fermented pastes, pickled beans, and bean curd. Bean curd is made by grinding the beans, boiling the resulting meal, and precipitating the protein, letting the oil and starch go off with the water. The bean curd is thus a highly concentrated protein food. However, in recent decades, China has self-consciously tried to raise consumption of meat, and this has come at the expense of lower-status bean

curd. Today, not only is the soybean largely an animal food, but China's production of soybeans is dropping, as urbanization wipes out farmland and more productive grain and vegetables take over what is left. China now imports soybeans from Brazil and elsewhere.

Today, the main protein source is pork; China has two-thirds of the world's pigs. Fish are important and are largely produced by aquaculture (fish farming); China invented aquaculture about 2,500 years ago. China's marine and river fisheries have been decimated by pollution and overfishing, and they no longer supply what they once did. As elsewhere in the world, chicken production has rapidly increased through battery production in huge industrial farms. Ducks are locally common. Beef is not a traditional food but is available. Sheep are common and often dominant in the north and west, especially Xinjiang and Tibet. Camels, donkeys, yaks, horses, goats, and all sorts of game animals and wildlife have been pressed into service for meat.

With the exception of nomadic herders in Inner Mongolia, Tibet, and remote parts of Xinjiang, Chinese peoples very rarely ate dairy products until recently. Today, yogurt, milk, and cheese are available, primarily in cities, but are still somewhat unusual as foods. Virtually no one in China, not even the nomadic herders, can digest lactose (milk sugar) except in early childhood, but using fermented milk products like yogurt overcomes this problem; the real reasons for lack of dairying were lack of pastureland and the settled people's traditional rivalries with the herders.

The universal, dominant, and culturally very important vegetables are Chinese cabbage greens, which come in countless forms, from Beijing celery cabbage to the tender mustard greens of the south. Some are coarse and cheap, and some are exceedingly delicate and expensive. Improvements in farming and in available varieties have led to rapid expansion of the other popular vegetables, including many kinds of beans, peas, squash, onions, garlic, chives, carrots, huge Chinese radishes, cucumbers, and many others. Beans and peas are often grown for the young sprouts, which are among the favorite foods. The Chinese love vegetables, often above all other foods. After 1600, the Spanish, Portuguese, and later Dutch and English brought New World foods to East Asia, and thus the Chinese acquired and enthusiastically adopted maize, tomatoes, white and sweet potatoes, peanuts, chili peppers, and many other foods. More recently, they have borrowed still more, and few indeed are the foods that cannot be found in China today. One might even find *k'anistel* (*Pouteria campechiana Baehni*), a rare fruit domesticated and grown by the Maya of Mexico, in Taiwanese markets (under the name "heavenly peach").

More usual and traditional fruits include many native to China that are now known worldwide: oranges, tangerines, peaches (native all across Central Asia), plums, jujubes ("Chinese dates"), melons, and others. Apricots abound in the west. Closely related is the native Chinese flowering apricot or *mei* (*Prunus mume; mume* is the Japanese name), perversely miscalled "plum" in most translations. Its small, sour fruits are used in pickles, sauces, and salt preserves and as such have gone worldwide in recent decades. Among nonnative fruits, first and foremost is the watermelon, which came from Africa via Central Asia in the medieval period. It is another true favorite food, being not only sweet but also a source of delightfully cooling and refreshing liquid on a hot summer day (and Chinese summers are scorching).

Nuts are combined with fruit in the category *guo;* they include walnuts, pine nuts, almonds, and others. Some are largely medicinal. Pine nuts are recognized as healthful and are supposed to contribute to long life. Apricot kernels (ground up), *torreya* nuts, and acorns treat respiratory irritation. Foxnuts (the seeds of a water lily) are thought to cool and clean the body. Lotus seeds are both healthful and good fortune, since the lotus is sacred in Buddhism and the Chinese word for lotus, *lian,* sounds like a word for "abundance." The underwater stems of the lotus (sold as "lotus roots" in markets), when boiled, produce sticky threads, so that when a stem is broken and the pieces are pulled apart they remain connected by the sticky threads; at Chinese weddings, there is a tradition for someone to break a lotus stem and pull, saying something like "no matter how much this couple is apart, they will always stick

together." This sort of use of foods as metaphors is universal in Chinese culture, and it is hard to imagine a Chinese wedding or Chinese New Year celebration without lotuses and many other foods that call forth wordplay.

Oil has been crushed from seeds for over 2,000 years. In early times the commonest was from Chinese cabbage seeds (very close to modern canola oil). More recently, soybeans, peanuts, maize, and other foods have come into service. Sesame oil is used for its fine flavor.

Spicing is light but pervasive. The characteristic flavor mix, the real "signature spice" of Chinese food, is soy sauce, ginger, garlic, Chinese "wine," white pepper (made from young black peppercorns by removing the skin), Sichuan pepper (a different species than black pepper), fermented soybeans or soybean paste, and chili peppers. Only the first three of these are really universal; the others are common and widespread. Chilies vary with the area; they are almost unknown in the north and far west but so heavily used in Hunan and Sichuan that dishes there are often unbearably hot to the uninitiated. (Sichuanese restaurants outside the homeland generally tone this down many notches.)

The famous Chinese drink is tea, but it came to China from the area of northern Burma and northeastern India in the early Middle Ages and spread slowly. Not until around 1100 was it listed as a necessity, and it was actually quite rare except among fairly affluent households until the 20th century. Ordinary people made do with hot water—everyone realized that unboiled water was unsafe—as well as fruit juices and soy milk. Commonest of all, however, was soup, which used to be found at almost every meal because it provided the necessary liquid. Banquets in hot, sweaty southeastern China often included three different soups.

Chinese "wine" made from rice is technically a beer or ale, but it is stronger than beer and not carbonated, so it seems more like a true wine. The Chinese have been distilling for over 1,000 years (possibly 2,000 years) and probably invented distillation, and they thus have a range of drinks similar to whiskey and vodka, with names like *maotai* (fermented from sorghum) and *sanshu* ("triple-distilled").

Finally, China was a great center of fermentation technology. Soy products were the most varied and important ferments, but alcoholic drinks, pickles, fermented teas, preserved grains, meats and sausages, yogurts, and countless other products made use of a vast variety of yeasts, beneficial bacteria, and similar microorganisms. These not only preserved the food but also made it more digestible and provided necessary nutrients, including vitamin $B_{12}$, often otherwise absent from Chinese diets.

## Cooking

Chinese cooking is a cooking of scarcity. Until recent decades, not only food but also fuel, oil, water, and even time for cooking were all scarce and often expensive. Thus, techniques that use a great deal of fuel and take a long time, like baking, are relatively uncommon.

China's famous and distinctive cooking method is stir-frying (*chao*): cutting ingredients into small pieces and stirring them in extremely hot oil for a brief period. The oil is heated, sometimes until it catches fire, before the food is put in—the flavorings first, then the main items. This method saves both oil and fuel; the cooking is almost instantaneous. Experts will cut the ingredients in such a way that surface area is maximized, for example, by thin slicing. This speeds the cooking even more. Sparing of meat is often done by using a few small cubes of highly flavorful ham or cured pork in a large dish of vegetables.

However, by far the commonest cooking method is boiling. Rice has to be boiled, and so does millet (a former staple). Wheat is usually eaten in the form of boiled noodles; these and related soup-with-starch dishes like won ton (*huntun,* soup with dumplings) are almost a religion in much of eastern China. The Chinese have had noodles for thousands of years. Soups, stews, ordinary and medicinal teas, and whole boiled chickens and ducks join the list of boiled foods.

The third most common method of cooking is steaming. It is economical not only because little plates of food can be steamed on top of boiling rice but also because steamers full of little dishes can

be stacked over pans of boiling water, so that large amounts of small food items can be steamed very quickly and simply. Almost unique to Chinese cooking are steamed buns: wheat bread buns, leavened with various kinds of baking powders and steamed rather than baked. These are staple foods in much of the north. They can be solid dough (*mantou*), or they can be stuffed with meat, sweet paste, or vegetables (*baozi*). If the filling is wrapped in thin dough instead of leavened bread, the result is *jiaozi* or something similar such as *xiaomi* (the *siu mai* of Cantonese restaurants). Fish is very often steamed, as are even small plates of meat. Deep-frying is rare but widespread, especially for dumplings of many sorts.

## Typical Meals

Breakfast was traditionally congee or some other grain porridge, with savory additions. In the north it often involved steamed buns. A more substantial breakfast, often later in the day, consists of *dianxin*—the Cantonese pronunciation *tim sam* gives us the "dim sum" of Cantonese restaurants. *Dianxin* means "to dot the heart," equivalent to "to hit the spot" in English. These are rich snacks—typically steamed but very often baked or fried, so that they are more expensive and a great deal higher in calories than most Chinese food. They were traditionally the food of workers who needed a lot of calories quickly; they had no time to eat a whole big bowl of congee but had to eat enough to sustain backbreaking labor for a full day. Now, dim sum are the great moneymakers of many a Chinese restaurant, and their high levels of calories, fat, and carbohydrates contribute to the rise in problems with rich food.

Lunch on a nonworking day is often a main meal eaten around 1 P.M., but working all day away from home is no new thing in China, and thus the tendency has always been to have a bowl of soup noodles (*mian*), a plate of fried noodles (*chaomian*) with vegetables and a bit of meat, a plate of rice with a cheap topping, a large wrapped dumpling, or something else that is quick, easy, and cheap. The quick-noodle lunch has now gone worldwide, thanks not only to Chinese technology but also to elaborations such as Japanese ramen and Vietnamese *pho.*



Several bamboo steamers and plates of dim sum. (Shoutforhumanity | Dreamstime.com)

The main meal is eaten as soon as people finish work and return home in a very hungry condition. It almost invariably involves a major grain base (*fan*) with several side dishes (*cai;* literally, "vegetables") to use as toppings. Cantonese has a distinctive word, *sung,* for dishes used as toppings for rice. Fan is so essential that the usual way of saying "to eat" is *chi fan,* "to eat fan," and the standard greeting around mealtime is "Have you eaten fan yet?" Chinese people generally do not feel that they have eaten unless they have had a good solid bowl of this starch staple. After a banquet without rice they will often seek out a bowl of it, saying that they "haven't eaten yet."

In most of China, the grain is now rice, but remote parts of the north and west may still use wheat dumplings or other foods. Boiled millet, sorghum, sweet potatoes, and other lower-rated staples are now

largely a memory. A typical family dinner involves enough rice to give everyone a couple of 12-ounce bowls or more, with a dish of fish or meat, a dish of greens, and a dish of some other vegetable or a vegetable with meat. Small nibbles may come before dinner and some fruit after, but appetizer courses and real desserts are strictly for banquet occasions.

Snacks, known as *xiaochi* ("small eats"), are extremely frequent. Children especially need them after school and at other critical moments. In addition to the more serious and expensive dianxin, small eats can be crackers, cookies, small baked tarts, nuts, seeds, fruit, sodas, and indeed almost anything small and easy to carry, up to and including yet another bowl of noodles.

Chinese cuisine is classically divided into five regional variations, following the classic division of the world into the four directions and the center. No one has ever defined the "central" cuisine very well, but the four directions certainly have their marked differences.

The north is the realm of wheat, sheep, Beijing or celery cabbage, and hearty meals where vinegar and other sour flavors are often pronounced. The range of vegetables was traditionally rather small, but diverse grains were available. Lately, rice has become common, replacing most of the minor grains.

The east centers on the Yangtze Delta and is characterized by complex dishes that are often oily or sweet. The river and sea afforded an enormous quantity and variety of seafood until recently; now, long-distance fisheries have to supply the demand. The hot climate makes stews and soups desirable, to replace liquid lost in perspiration. Tea was popular and the subject of connoisseurship.

The west is China's land of spices, with chili peppers and the Sichuan pepper dominant. Hunan and Sichuan in particular are the home of a fiery cuisine. River fish are common, but food tends to run to mountain specialties, including pork, bamboo shoots, mushrooms, and deciduous fruits and nuts.



Farmers tend to the rice harvest in southern China. (Corel)

The south is the most complex area, with many subtraditions. Classic gourmet cooking is centered on Guangzhou and more recently on nearby Hong Kong. This is the most rice-dependent region of China; rice yields three harvests a year and traditionally supplied fully 90 percent of calories. Otherwise, fish, pork, duck, chicken, and an enormous variety of vegetables dominate.

Within these regions, different provinces and even counties have their own foods. Yunnan in China's far southwest has its own dishes and produces the best hams in China if not in all Asia. The Chaozhou (Teochiu) region in Guangdong Province has a very distinctive cuisine that makes much use of goose, duck, crab, taro (a root crop), and sweet pastes and sauces. Chinese are highly aware of regional cuisines and specialties. For centuries or even millennia, travelers have brought back "local country products" from the regions they visited, as gifts to the home folk. (This custom has spread to Japan, where it has become a vital social function.)

China's minorities all have their own cuisines. The Mongols and their neighbors in the north and west depend heavily on sheep and consume yogurt and kumiss (fermented mare's milk). "Mongolian barbecue" is not really a Mongolian dish; it was created in Beijing in the early 20th century. The Turkic and other settled peoples of Xinjiang traditionally live on Persian-style bread, rice pilaf (with fruit, carrots, and lamb cooked with the rice), roast lamb, noodles with boiled lamb, and fruit, especially grapes and melons—they produce the best melons in China, if not in the world. Tibetan everyday food includes butter, tea, roasted barley meal, and dairy products such as yogurt; festive food involves dumplings (*momo,* similar to jiaozi), meat stews, and noodle dishes. The Yi of the Liang Mountains in Sichuan traditionally depended heavily on buckwheat pancakes but now are switching to rice. The southern border peoples such as the Thai-speaking groups depend on rice and vegetables, with the usual range of meats when affordable.

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**Stir-Fried Greens**

1 tbsp oil

2 cloves garlic, minced

½ in. ginger, minced fine (optional)

2 lb greens, usually one of the following: bok choy, baby bok choy, *gailaan* ("Chinese broccoli"), mustard greens, spinach, or turnip greens (any greens will do)

Soy sauce to taste

Heat the oil over a very hot flame. Add the garlic and ginger. Fry till the garlic begins to brown. Meanwhile, coarsely chop the greens, if needed; small leaves like spinach do not need to be chopped. Add to hot oil, and stir rapidly till wilted. Add ¼ cup water, turn down to a very low flame, and leave to cook for about 15 minutes, stirring occasionally and checking to prevent sticking and burning. The cooking time depends on how tender the greens are, so check them often—when they are tender, add a dash of best-quality soy sauce, stir, and then serve immediately; overcooking ruins them.

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**Sweet and Sour Fish**

Everyone knows sweet and sour pork, but the dish was originally made with fish and was more refined than the usual modern forms.

1 whole cleaned fish (1½ lb), with firm white flesh (rockfish, sea bass, or the like)

5 c cooking oil

1 tbsp garlic, chopped

**Marinade**

1 tbsp Chinese "wine"

2 green onions, chopped fine

½ in. fresh ginger, scraped, crushed, or chopped fine so as to present maximum surface area

Salt to taste

**Sauce**

1 package hawthorn-paste tablets (available at Chinese markets)

2 tbsp brown or white sugar

2–3 tbsp clear rice vinegar

2 tbsp soy sauce

¼ tsp sesame oil

Salt to taste

½ tsp cornstarch to thicken (lotus rhizome starch is more traditional, and better, but hard to find)

**Optional**

Chopped pickled Chinese leeks (*rakkyo;* available from Asian markets)

Pine nuts, roasted or fried

Green pepper, pineapple, and so forth (modern cooks add these, but they are not traditional)

Marinate the fish in the marinade for 20 minutes. Deep-fry in the oil for about 10 minutes. Take out and drain.

Stir-fry the garlic in just a little oil (1 tablespoon) and then add the sauce ingredients, including the Chinese leeks if you can find them. Cook till thick (ca. 5 minutes). Pour over the fish, and serve. Decorate with pine nuts, if desired.

The red color and unique sweet-sour flavor originally came from the hawthorn paste. Almost no one uses it now, but it is worth trying. Modern cooks use a bit of tomato sauce, or just food coloring, to get the red color of the hawthorn paste.

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**Red-Cooked Pork**

Red-cooked pork is a favorite slow-cooked dish, best in winter when one needs the heat and calories.

2 tbsp cooking oil

3 cloves garlic, minced fine

3 lb pork in chunks about 1 to 2 in. square

6 c water

6 tbsp soy sauce

3 tbsp Chinese "wine"

1 tbsp sugar

1 star anise star

1 cinnamon stick (Chinese "cinnamon," actually cassia, if you can find it)

Dried tangerine peel (known as *gu pi,* "very old skin," in Chinese markets), about 2 square in., in pieces

3 green onions, slivered

About 1 in. ginger, crushed or minced fine

Heat the oil in a large stewpot (cast iron is good) till very hot. Stir-fry the garlic, then add the pork and brown quickly. Then add the rest of the ingredients, and simmer for 3 hours till the sauce cooks down and thickens somewhat.

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## Eating Out

For centuries, China has had an astonishing number and variety of eating-out options. Until recently, every busy street was lined with small stalls that provided quick snacks of dumplings, noodles, or fruit. Street-stall cooking could get quite elaborate, as in old Hong Kong or the Chinese neighborhoods of Singapore. Some street stalls became more famous than almost any restaurant. Contrary to travel-book myth, street-stall food was usually extremely good and thoroughly safe, being cooked fresh and on the spot.

Restaurants vary from tiny lunchrooms to the vast "wine palaces" and "wine towers" that have become familiar worldwide in recent years. Quality does not vary with price or size, and the best food is often found in a tiny one-room place or street stall



A food vendor at the night market in China.

that specializes in a single dish and has perfected it. Gourmets know that X has the best wonton, Y the best duck, and Z the best mustard greens. A significant amount of conversation concerns such matters, not only in China itself but as far away as Sydney's Chinatown and California's San Gabriel Valley. This lore is often written down, and books from the early medieval centuries on have preserved names and addresses.

## Special Occasions

Any important event is celebrated with a banquet. This is literally a sacred tradition; it traces back to ancient times, when gods, spirits, and deceased ancestors had to be entertained with sacrifice rites. The divine beings usually ate only the spirit of the food; the living shared the feast by eating the material parts. China's great culinary tradition developed at least in part through the need to entertain the divinities with the finest that could possibly be provided. In ordinary life, business deals, family rites of passage, and any fortunate occasion must be celebrated with a good dinner. More spectacular are weddings, 60th birthdays (when a full cycle of the Chinese calendar has been completed), and major holidays.

For banquets, all economy is thrown to the winds. This is the time for whole roast pigs, whole boiled ducks and geese, baked buns, great quantities of fat meat, and the most expensive vegetables. Quantities of expensive spices, fine wine, sugar in various forms, and other choice flavorings bring out the best in these items. The goal is to lavish attention on the guests, to satisfy them and make them as comfortable as possible. This is investment, not loss; the guests will reciprocate, either with a return invitation or with help in business or other matters. With increasing affluence in the last few decades, banqueting has gotten somewhat out of hand. It is often seen as a drain on the economy. It invites corruption; favors asked in return for an invitation can be shady ones. Worst, it has doomed the reputation of Chinese cuisine as one of the world's healthiest. Following the rise of banquets has come a rise in heart disease, diabetes, and other conditions that can be brought on by chronic overindulgence in rich foods.

The Chinese New Year begins (theoretically, at least) on the second new moon after the winter solstice. Lunar months are counted from this date, 30 days to the month. New Year is the major festival of the year. Foods that bring luck (like the lotus seeds) are eaten, as well as roast pork and any other luxuries that a family can afford. After that, there was a traditional period of three days before a fire could be lit, and people had to live on leftovers from the New Year feast. This is no longer observed by most households.

Every month brings festivals of one sort or another, and many have traditional foods. The Dragon Boat Festival, the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, is celebrated with *zongzi,* dumplings of sticky rice, meat, and spices wrapped in leaves and steamed. The Midautumn Festival, celebrating the autumn new moon on the 15th day of the eighth month, requires moon cakes. These are round wheat cakes stuffed with sugar, seeds, and other ingredients. They became particularly popular after the future Ming Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang supposedly stuffed moon cakes with messages calling for revolution, in his successful rebellion against the Mongols in 1368. This legend assumes that the Mongols did not share the Chinese tradition and so did not buy the moon cakes. Today, more edible stuffings dominate. Most are fatty and cholesterol-laden, but a recent movement has promoted more healthful moon cakes.

## Diet and Health

The traditional Chinese diet of roughly milled or whole grains, vegetables, and bean curd was extremely healthy. Diabetes, heart disease, and other conditions that can be caused or made worse by food were almost unknown. A major study found that traditional Chinese almost never had these conditions, or even high blood pressure or high blood cholesterol. The only problem with the diet was getting enough to eat, but that was a major one before modern agriculture, transportation, and storage. Probably most deaths in China before 1970 were due to malnutrition or starvation, or were caused by parasites and diseases carried by polluted water and sometimes by foods themselves. Locally, some

cancers were caused or made worse by poorly preserved or poorly cooked foods, or by local minerals that got into food.

Chinese medicine has always focused on food, for the very good reason that malnutrition and starvation were the commonest killers throughout most of China's history. The first recourse in illness is eating the diet considered appropriate. Given this reality, it is not surprising that Chinese nutritional science reached a high level at quite early times. Medical texts more than 2,000 years old preserve nutritional lore, though of rather varying quality. Early medical books record successful nutritional therapies for beriberi (vitamin $B_1$ deficiency), acute diarrhea, and general debility, as well as pointing out that pine nuts are notably more conducive to long life than a primarily grain diet. (The pine nuts are high in protein and minerals lacking in grains.) The books advise a balance between yang (the hot, dry, sunny aspect of nature, dominant in males) and yin (the cool, moist, shady aspect, dominant in females). Flavors, staple grains, and other medical influences were classified in fives, the five flavors being sweet, sour, salt, bitter, and rank (possibly an early anticipation of the discovery of the umami flavor in modern times).

Basic to Chinese medicine is the concept of *qi* (pronounced "chee"), literally "air" or "breath" but expanded to include the vital spirits thought to animate and nourish the body. A good flow of qi is necessary to health. Deficiency or blockage causes disease or makes it worse. So does imbalance between yang and yin (types of qi) or between any other forms of qi. Much (perhaps, theoretically, all) Chinese medical treatment involves getting the qi back in order, as well as more direct symptomatic treatment.

The Greek school of medicine that traces back to Hippocrates (fifth century B.C.) and was perfected by Galen (ca. 129–210 A.D.) reached China fairly early from the Near East and fused with Chinese concepts; the fusion process appears in sixth- and seventh-century medical texts. Galen's concern with hot, cool, dry, and wet naturally fused with the yang/yin concept and complemented the fivefold classification system.



Herbs used in Chinese traditional medicine sit on a prescription. (Hyhoon1210 | Dreamstime.com)

Foods continued to be classified in all these ways, climaxing in the great herbal *Bencao Gangmu* by Li Shizhen (ca. 1593 A.D.). However, ordinary people found the heating/cooling, yang/yin dimension much more salient and useful than the others. Today, traditional Chinese still think in these terms. Heating foods are, most obviously, those that provide the most calories (literal heat energy for the body). These are fatty foods, very sweet foods, baked foods, strong alcohol, and the like. One can also understand why foods that cause burning sensations, like chili, black pepper, and ginger, are "heating." Also catalogued among the hot foods are those with "hot" colors: red beans or brown sugar. Cooling foods are those that are very low in calories (like most vegetables), those that feel "cooling" in the sense of being astringent and puckery, and those that are very

watery—getting wet chills you, and drinking cold water cools you down, so watery foods are thought to be cooling. Also cooling are things that are cold colors (green or icy white, for example), especially if they look like ice (for example, rock sugar, white radishes). The perfect balance point is cooked rice, and anything similar to it—white potatoes, white-fleshed fish, soup noodles—is also considered to be at the balanced or temperate point.

The more heating foods tend to be served in winter, when people need the calories, and also at feasts, which are "hot" occasions (consider the English phrase "a hot time"). The more cooling foods go best in summer. This is especially true of foods like watermelon and cucumber that are genuinely cooling. They stay cool during the day and in prerefrigeration times were about the only things that did in China's blistering summers.

On the whole, this system kept people healthy. The classic "hot" condition was scurvy, which seems like burning. It involves redness, rash, sores, infections, constipation, and other things that seem like the result of too much heat. It was cured by eating cooling foods, notably vegetables. It is actually caused by a lack of vitamin C, which abounds in Chinese vegetables, so these foods really did cure it. Conversely, the commonest "cold" conditions were anemia (iron deficiency) and tuberculosis; they involve pallor, weakness, and often a low body temperature. Anemia is cured, and tuberculosis can be alleviated, by eating strengthening foods seen as "warming," notably red meat and organ meats. Empirically, the Chinese found that things like pig liver and wild duck meat—particularly rich sources of iron—were especially effective. Some attention was paid to drying and wetting foods, but they remained minor in the system.

Far more important was the purely Chinese concept, over 2,000 years old and probably much older, of *bupin,* "supplementing foods." These are foods that are high in protein and minerals but low in fats and carbohydrates, and thus easy to digest while extremely nourishing. They are particularly recommended for women who have just given birth, for anyone convalescing from major injury or sickness, and for elders who want to stay as hale as possible. They were originally things like pork, pig liver, duck, and game meats generally. At some point Chinese doctors found that certain odd items like tendons, mushrooms, sea cucumbers, and similar sea life worked well, and they generalized to assume that anything similar to these was a bupin. Moreover, it was logical to suppose that the odder an item looked, the more it might help, because there was a belief that odd appearance showed an abundance of qi. Thus, odd-seeming items like edible bird's nests (the nests of a tropical swift that secretes a proteinaceous substance), ancient misshapen fungi, and weird-looking or rare animals (turtles, raccoons, or dogs, for example) are considered bupin. In recent years this has proved a disaster for the species in question. Traditional conservation and management measures, very effective in many cases, have been abandoned, and overhunting is wiping out everything even remotely bupin. Perhaps the biggest irony is that none of these oddities works any better than—or, indeed, as well as—the traditional red meat and pork liver. People rarely eat bupin unless they feel the need, and modern medicine is replacing the more exotic ones.

The bupin belief grades into a belief in the magical power of some powerful animals like tigers and stags. Air-breathing catfish, which can live out of water and are very difficult to kill, are cooked as a cancer remedy, in hopes that they will transfer their tenacity of life to the patient. Another important belief is the idea that some foods are cleansing (*jing*). These are largely herbal remedies that, when taken in medicinal tea, make the body feel refreshed, cooled, and harmonized. So far, very little research has investigated their actual effects on the system. They do not "clean one out" in the sense of purgatives and emetics—both well known to the Chinese and considered a wholly separate matter.

An example of successful nutritional therapy that is being discovered worldwide is the Chinese wolfthorn plant, *gouqi* in Chinese (*Lycium chinense*). This common shrub has edible but tasteless leaves and small berries that are similar to and closely related to small tomatoes. The leaves and berries have the distinction of being among the richest in vitamins and minerals of any common food. They are

thus grown for tonic use, typically in stews of pork, pork liver, Chinese wine, ginger, black vinegar, and other nutritious and strengthening items. These stews are fed to women who have just given birth and to convalescents. A significant percentage of Chinese living today owe their lives to them. The berries, dried, were always a staple of Chinese medicine stores. Recently they have appeared in markets worldwide. From America to Australia, one can now buy a pound bag of goji berries at the corner store, at least if the corner store has much selection of dried fruit. Another nutraceutical that has gone worldwide is wormwood (*Artemisia* spp.). It is used in China to kill intestinal worms and other parasites, including the organisms that cause malaria. One active ingredient, artemisinin, is now the drug of choice for malaria in much of the world.

*E. N. Anderson*

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# Hmong

## Overview

The Hmong are members of an ancient tribe that existed in relative obscurity for thousands of years. There has never been a Hmong nation-state. According to Hmong oral tradition (there was no written language before the 20th century), the Hmong were originally Mongolians, great horsemen who were separated from the main Mongol population by years of skirmishes with the Chinese and the subsequent building of the Great Wall. Chinese manuscripts from as early as 2700 B.C. bear out the claim, specifically naming the Miao, as the group is known in China, as one of the tribes that were considered a threat to the dominant Han Chinese.

Contemporary Hmong are, indeed, excellent horsemen and blacksmiths and are known for their skill at animal husbandry. Although the legend of the Hmong having been separated from the Mongolians has traditionally been met with skepticism, mitochondrial DNA studies demonstrate that the Hmong are, genetically, more closely related to the Mongol populations north of China than to other peoples living closer to Hmong villages.

Over centuries, as the Han Chinese population grew both in size and power, the Hmong were forced south and east into ever more marginal territories. They eventually retreated to a mountainous area in the southern part of China, with significant spillover into the region that would eventually become North Vietnam, Laos, and Burma. In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, the Hmong of Laos fled to the United States, Canada, France, and Australia, continuing a nearly 3,000-year diaspora.

Although they are separated in time and space, Hmong people in all these different places maintain their identity as Hmong, as opposed to the nationality of the country in which they happen to reside. Hmong culture and identity transcend everything else, which is why the Hmong people have resisted assimilation for thousands of years. Hmong culture is complicated. It requires commitment and energy to keep speaking an outnumbered language, to maintain a belief system that is out of the mainstream, and to stay true to clan rules even when they are in conflict with the dominant society. Only a truly remarkable culture could sustain the hardship and pressures that the Hmong have endured and yet remain intact.

There are an estimated nine million Hmong in China, the homeland. Although this may seem like a large population, it is a drop in the bucket. The overall population of China is 1.29 billion. The Hmong population is spread out among eight provinces in southern China, but about four million live in the Guizhou Province.

In Laos, there are only about 400,000 Hmong left, compared to more than one million prior to the Vietnam War. They are stubborn survivors of war and genocide, still clinging to a hardscrabble life as subsistence farmers who hardly grow enough food to keep themselves alive. Their only cash crop is opium, which is legal under a special agreement with the Laotian government.

In the United States, there are about 200,000 Hmong, all refugees from Laos and their descendants. The largest population center is in California, with Fresno as the main metropolitan area in




Va Vang (left) walks with the shopping cart as her sister Bao Lee (right) leads the way while they buy groceries at Costco in Fresno, California. The Vangs are among thousands of Hmong refugees who fled Laos for Thailand 30 years ago and now reside in the United States. (Getty Images)

the state. This article concentrates on the Hmong refugees now living in the United States.

## Food Culture Snapshot

The Xiong family lives in a house in a working-class neighborhood in Fresno, California. The household is composed of a husband and wife, the husband's mother, and five of their six children, ranging in age from 26 to 10 years old. The 26-year-old son is married, and his wife and baby also live in the home, where they have converted the garage into their private space. A 20-year-old married daughter lives with her husband's family under similar conditions, only a few blocks away. The husband, wife, and mother-in-law came to California in the late 1970s as refugees from Laos. The children were all born in America. Everyone in the family who is old enough to hold a job does so. Because of their lack of education and poor English skills, both husband and wife hold low-paying, blue-collar jobs. Their working-age children make as much money as their parents and add their earnings to the household budget. There is a high value placed on education, and the dining room has been converted into a study hall, with a computer and study desks. The family eats in the living room, with some members sitting at the table and others on the couch. In the modest kitchen, there is a dinette set to seat another three to four diners.

On Saturday morning, everyone in the house piles into the minivan for the weekly outing to the farmers' market. There, they can buy fresh vegetables from Hmong farmers who live in the vicinity, such as Chinese long beans, oriental eggplant, bok choy, bitter

melon, daikon, lemongrass, black nightshade, Hmong cucumbers, and *opo* (a type of bottle gourd). They also pick up some glutinous rice, a few live chickens, and freshly caught fish. One of the benefits of living in an ethnic enclave the size of Fresno, especially in Fresno County, where there are approximately 2,000 Hmong/Lao family farms, is that fresh vegetables are available in season. There is even a Hmong American extension agent stationed in the county, who helps farmers adjust crops that originated in the tropical rain forest to the arid conditions of central California. The family is able to purchase most of the foods it prefers at the farmers' market during most of the year. There is also a network of small Hmong-owned markets and convenience stores in the area, as well as a few large Asian supermarkets.

While at the farmers' market, individuals in the family purchase ready-made food. Some choose breakfast burritos, while others get hot dogs. One of the interesting things about Hmong culture is that the adherence to "being Hmong" does not extend to food. These are people who have learned over the past 3,000 years to accept whatever food is available, sort of a "when in Rome, do as the Romans do" attitude about food.

Once home, the girls and women go to the kitchen to start cooking dinner while the boys and men work on projects around the house. Most cooking chores are traditionally the work of women, although men do much of the heavy work, such as hunting, fishing, slaughtering large domestic animals (such as pigs), pressing the juice out of sugarcane, and making rice beer.

## Major Foodstuffs

The Hmong have never developed a sophisticated cuisine. Food is a simple thing in this complex culture, and the Hmong have always been quite willing to adopt the foods of the dominant culture. There are a few constants, however. The staple food, and the basis for all meals, is rice. In fact, the Hmong phrase for "Let's eat" is *peb noj mov*—literally, "Let us eat rice." There are many types of rice, chosen for special occasions, based on budget, or by personal preference. Families consume so much rice that they purchase three to four 25-pound sacks of rice at a time. One favored variety is jasmine rice, which has a nutty flavor. The favorite rice for desserts and special occasions is glutinous rice, which is usually referred to as sticky rice, because it is sticky enough to roll into small balls.

The best food is, simply, whatever is freshest. When Hmong refugees first came to the United States, they were unfamiliar with the concept of refrigeration. They were used to harvesting fresh food every day for immediate use, with the exception of rice. The refugees found the very idea of shopping only once a week or so and keeping the food in the refrigerator to be disgusting. The idea of buying meat and then freezing it to be thawed and cooked later was unacceptable to them.

Hmong refugees will eat many sources of protein: fish, pork, beef, chicken, venison, and other wild game. Hunting and fishing are favored activities for both men and women. Pork is the highest-status meat. In Laos, it was reserved for special occasions, but the convenience of purchasing smaller amounts at the supermarket has resulted in pork being eaten for everyday meals. Chicken and fish are probably the most commonly eaten protein sources, partly because chickens are also used ceremonially, for healing and other shamanic rituals. Fish is free and can be caught for same-day consumption, which is highly valued. It can also be bought fresh at the Asian supermarkets and farmers' markets.

Fruits and vegetables are important foods but not as important as meat. The Hmong eat a wide variety of vegetables, many of which have already been listed. They don't limit themselves strictly to vegetables from Southeast Asia and are willing to try any new fruit or vegetable. Favorite fruits include mangoes, peaches, pineapple, bananas, and papaya. The primary carbohydrate is rice. Sweets are not part of the traditional diet, except for the occasional sticky rice cakes sweetened with sugarcane juice. This has changed since moving to the United States, and both children and adults consume sweets and soft drinks.

## Cooking

The traditional way to cook rice is to first soak it, then rinse it, then steam it, then rinse it again, and

then steam it again. It is a long process but results in very fluffy grains of rice that do not stick together. More westernized Hmong women, who hold jobs outside the home, use a rice cooker for convenience, although they admit the rice is not as fluffy.

There are two main cooking methods: boiling and stir-frying. In Laos, most families cooked all their meals in one cooking pot, or crucible, hung over a fire. Since moving to the United States, cooks have become comfortable with American cooking methods, and many cooks find the process of stir-frying several dishes for each meal to be efficient and satisfying for serving their typically large families.

## Typical Meals

The basic meal consists of rice in a large bowl in the center of the table, surrounded by smaller side dishes. Most of the side dishes are vegetable dishes. One or two dishes contain meat, when available. The preferred meat for most meals is pork, with chicken a close second. Chicken is also important for healing rituals. Families in Asia eat from the same dishes, dipping in with chopsticks, forks, spoons, or fingers. Families that have moved to the Western world are more apt to have adopted the concept of separate dishes for each family member and guest, with serving utensils for reaching into the communal pot. The dishes may be boiled or stir-fried.

A good meal begins with soup. It may be as simple as "rice soup," which is simply the leftover water from the second steaming of rice. Rice soup is commonly eaten when food is in short supply or as a medicine for sick individuals. It is considered plain but nutritious. Another type of soup is "sour soup," which can be eaten as is or form the basis for other recipes. Sour soup is a fermented dish that is unique to the Hmong and gives the food a distinctive flavor. Every family has a crock or jar that is used exclusively for sour soup. It should be kept on hand as a pantry staple.

**Sour Soup**

Mince a collection of vegetables, such as cabbage, carrots, leeks, and radishes together, and place them in a large crock or jar. Mix in glutinous rice flour, pepper, and salty water. Cover the jar, and set aside for several days.

Here is a recipe for a popular main course:

***Zeub Nfsuab* (Boiled Pork and Mustard Greens)**

8 c water

2 lb pork shoulder

1¾ lb mustard greens

Bring water to a boil in a large saucepan. Add pork, and reduce heat to low. Cover and simmer gently until meat is fork-tender, about 1½ hours. Remove meat, trim fat carefully, and cut meat into bite-size pieces. Let the broth cool, then skim fat, reserving ¾ cup for use in other recipes.

Wash greens and cut into 2-inch pieces, removing coarse stems. (Stems may be saved for pickling, if desired.)

Put ¾ cup of defatted meat broth in a pan. Add greens and pork, and simmer until greens are wilted, 5 to 10 minutes.

Hmong foods tend to be heavily spiced with Thai peppers, lemongrass, garlic, green onions, ginger, mint, fish sauce, pickled vegetables, and a variety of other herbs and spices. There is a preference for sour flavors, as evidenced by sour soup, but sourness is not the only flavor. Foods can also be spicy, sweet, pungent, and/or salty. Pickled vegetables are another notable item, because it is another possible link to Mongolia. Although cucumbers and pickling date back about 4,000 years, to ancient India, they were quickly adopted by the Tatars of Mongolia.

Alcoholic beverages are popular with men, but women usually limit their drinking to special occasions—when they sometimes drink heavily. One popular drink is made, not surprisingly, with fermented rice. It has a flavor similar to beer. This drink is called sweet rice—usually said with a knowing grin.

## Eating Out

There is a running joke in the Hmong refugee community that there are no Hmong restaurants, a reference to the spartan quality of the cuisine. It's almost true. There is a significant number of Hmong-owned restaurants, but they are usually presented as Chinese restaurants, with classic "Chinese" dishes, such as chop suey. Some Hmong dishes are usually on the menu as well, but they are hidden among the Chinese dishes. There are also about three openly Hmong restaurants in the United States. One is in Fresno.

When Hmong refugees go out to eat, they are usually not interested in eating Hmong food. In fact, there is no distinctive preference, although Vietnamese restaurants are favorites. Otherwise, the typical "when in Rome" attitude prevails, and restaurants are chosen based on convenience, price, and other factors, such as the chance to see and be seen by other people in the community. Hmong refugees enjoy trying the foods of other cultures and, besides Vietnamese restaurants, will happily frequent Mexican restaurants, mainstream American family restaurants, Chinese restaurants, and the ethnic restaurants that have been opened by the chefs of other ethnic groups. Hmong refugees and Latinos live in the same neighborhoods and get along quite well. The Hmong have adopted many Latino foods, such as tortillas, churros, and jicama. Hmong foods are beginning to enter the mainstream, with the opening of a small number of restaurants in Minneapolis, the Central Valley in California, and Chicago. These restaurants offer some Hmong dishes along with Vietnamese, Thai, or even Philippine cuisines.

## Special Occasions

The most important celebration of the year is the Hmong New Year, which takes place after the harvest in the autumn. Traditionally, it lasts 10 days. In the United States, it has been changed from a 10-day event to a full season, lasting approximately from Halloween to New Year's Day. For example, the Fresno Hmong New Year is generally held between December 26 and January 1. The Atlanta Hmong New Year is held on Thanksgiving weekend. The Seattle Hmong New Year is typically held the first weekend of November. This allows people an opportunity to visit New Year celebrations in several cities over the course of a season.

Hmong New Year is a joyous occasion. In the traditional religion, which is a combination of animism and ancestor worship, it is also a time for important rituals. The rituals that are done to appease the ancestors and release the souls of the dead are done in the home. There are also thousands of Hmong who have converted to Christianity. They also hold smaller family get-togethers in the New Year tradition but are more apt to sing gospel music than to sacrifice a chicken to the ancestors. Nonetheless, most of the celebration of the New Year is done in huge parties where literally everyone in the community comes together for singing, dancing, eating, and mixing.

The food of the Hmong New Year season is best described as "abundant" and is served from buffet tables that are crowded with all kinds of foods, either brought potluck-style or purchased from a caterer. One traditional treat is the sticky rice cake, which is made by sweetening glutinous, or sticky, rice with sugarcane syrup and forming it into a bite-size patty. The patty is wrapped in a banana leaf and roasted, making a pleasantly browned confection. Another popular treat is rice beer, which the adults in the crowd enjoy thoroughly.

The Hmong New Year has changed, however, and in the United States it reflects the American lifestyle. It celebrates ancient traditions, but it is also influenced by the American and Western concepts. Feasting is one of the traditional aspects of the Hmong New Year that continues to this day, except that some of the food and other customs are different from in Laos. For example, there are both private and public aspects to the celebration. Families entertain out-of-town guests and invite friends over for dinner in the private celebrations. This is the time to slaughter the New Year's pig, or *npua tsiab,* which has been raised for this specific purpose. In urban areas, it is difficult to raise and slaughter the npua tsiab, which is one of the reasons that so many Hmong families have moved to rural areas.



Bao Lee (left) helps her sister Va Vang kill chickens for a special Hmong New Year feast on December 12, 2004, in Fresno, California. (Paula Bronstein | Getty Images)

Both Christians and followers of the old religion mix freely in the public celebration. At the public celebration, there is, increasingly, paid entertainment instead of long-winded renditions of folktales and recitations of traditional poetry. While many of the women still wear traditional clothing, the men are more likely to wear Western-style business suits. Business is conducted at the party, politicians shake hands and kiss babies, and community groups set up booths and pass out flyers.

The food at the Hmong American New Year represents adaptation to life in multicultural America. There might be a range of food, from fried chicken and noodle soup to ice cream and donuts. There might also be tacos, churros, Thai and Chinese foods, green papaya salad, and Lao *khao poun* mixed in with the Hmong smoked pork and sticky rice cakes.

The Hmong in China hold two special, food-related holidays. The first is Chixin Jie, the New Rice Tasting Festival, in July. This festival celebrates the rice harvest. To express gratitude to the spirits, the newly harvested rice is steamed and eaten with newly harvested vegetables and freshly caught fish. Some of the rice is also made into wine for the festival. The theme is freshness, which relates directly to the high value placed on fresh foods.

The other festival is called the Sister Rice Festival, sometimes referred to as the "First Valentine's Day." This festival, a celebration of spring and an annual mating ritual, is based on the folktale of the seven sisters. The sisters in the story were lonely, because there were no marriageable men on their mountain. On a neighboring mountain, separated by a river, there were seven lonely brothers. The

bearded god, Zhang Guolao, who carried a tubular bamboo drum, took pity on them. He instructed the girls to dye glutinous rice into colors, using flowers and leaves of mountain plants. The dyed rice was then rolled into balls containing meat or fish. The god then brought the brothers across the river, where the sisters presented them with small bamboo baskets filled with the colored rice balls. And they lived happily ever after.

In modern-day China, the Sister Rice Festival is a colorful reenactment of the folktale. Single women still go into the hills to collect flowers and leaves to dye small balls of sticky rice. They sometimes insert highly symbolic gifts into the colored rice balls, which are arranged in small bamboo baskets. When suitors come to call, they take these love tokens as messages from their intended mate. For example, a small bamboo fishhook means, quite literally, "Let's hook up and get married quickly."

## Diet and Health

Food and diet, health and disease, are controversial topics within the Hmong refugee community. Some of the older people try to maintain a traditional diet, but so much has changed that it seems impossible. For example, pork, once reserved for special occasions, is abundant, but it does not taste the same. Refrigeration, so much a part of American life, changes the flavors of food. The need to go out and work for wages results in very different time issues than when living in a village and supporting oneself by raising one's own food.

In some ways, traditional Hmong food customs, such as the emphasis on freshness and plenty of vegetables, help keep the group healthy. But others, such as a perceived value in being fat (a sign of plenty) and the uncritical acceptance of other foods, have the opposite effect. The Hmong in America are suffering from diseases that they did not know existed 30 years ago, and not everyone agrees on the reasons.

One of the more positive traditional practices is the tender custom of caring for a woman during the first month after the delivery of a baby. During this time, the mother is considered vulnerable and must eat a special diet for protection and to regain her strength. The diet is made up of boiled chicken with special, healing herbs. She is not allowed to work during that month, and rest is required. It is best for the husband's mother to cook and care for her daughter-in-law for the first month after delivery, which is a nice benefit for young women who, otherwise, must serve their mothers-in-law. The women say that the diet is monotonous but important. A public health study conducted by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) showed that maternal and child deaths among Hmong refugees were surprisingly low.

One negative result of the access to an abundance of food in the United States is a high rate of obesity and diabetes. In Laos, food was sometimes in short supply. There was never a surplus of food, and people adjusted to living on a low-calorie, low-fat, plant-based diet. In that environment, a fat baby was a healthy baby. When the Hmong moved to the United States, they delighted in how easy it was to have fat babies and fat children. Some of the adults also became overweight, and a high rate of diabetes, previously unknown, is the outcome. Diabetes educators find that it is difficult to work with Hmong patients, because their cultural beliefs are in conflict with Western medicine. A study in Minnesota found that Hmong refugees with diabetes do not accept that it is caused by food. Rather, they see it as a result of their refugee experience, of the loss that they have suffered. In their belief system, they are "out of balance here."

Hmong American children have learned about hot dogs, hamburgers, tacos, pizza, and other Western-style foods through their school lunch programs, and they often demand those foods at home, resulting in an especially high intake of foods that are high in calories and low in nutrients. The best efforts of nutrition educators sometimes are stymied by cultural differences. For example, one public health office took care to hire a registered dietitian with a master's degree, who was Hmong and from the local community, in an earnest effort to improve the diet and health status in the area. It looked like a win-win situation, with a culturally appropriate yet scientifically trained care provider. The dietitian did

her best, concentrating on prenatal health, diabetes, weight control, and heart disease, but her advice fell on deaf ears among her clientele. The reason: She came from a low-ranking clan.

There is a high level of mistrust toward American doctors. Western medicine is cold and intrusive in comparison with the more familiar shaman. Even individuals who have converted to Christianity tend to fear and avoid American doctors. To make things more difficult, there are only 13 last names, one for each clan. There is a limited number of first names as well, resulting in many people having the same name. This causes confusion at pharmacies and health clinics, resulting in treatments and prescriptions being confused on a semiregular basis. In one example, a man with kidney problems went to see his doctor. The doctor gave him an appropriate prescription, but the pharmacist got his prescription switched with that of another man with the same name. As a result, the man suffered kidney failure. His doctor suggested dialysis, but there was a rumor circulating among the Hmong that dialysis was just a way for the doctors to collect blood that they wanted to drink. The myth of the vampire doctor started during the Vietnam War and has never really gone away. The man refused treatment until he was so weak that his American friends just picked him up and carried him to the emergency room. When his wife was notified, she came to the hospital and screamed at their American friends that the doctors just wanted to kill her husband, until a nurse, who also happened to be Hmong, managed to calm her down. In this case, the man recovered, but every time a Hmong person dies in the hospital it helps perpetuate the myth of the vampire doctor.



A group of local Hmong farmers proudly display their crop of dikons near Fresno, California. (Andy Sacks | Getty Images)

There is a higher rate of kidney stones and kidney failure in the Hmong population than in the general population. The reasons are unclear, but one possible cause is high protein intake combined with low water intake. It is also possible that there is a genetic enzymatic imbalance that is widespread in this small population, similar to the tendency, in some families, to develop gout due to a genetic tendency to build up uric acid in the system. Even so, the problem might be alleviated by eating less protein and drinking more water.

Most Hmong people who now live in the United States have adjusted the traditional diet to Western standards. For example, they will keep frozen meat in the home freezer, although they still prefer meats and fish that are as fresh as possible. The preference for fresh fruits and vegetables remains, however, and those foods are to be found at Hmong-owned booths at local farmers' markets, as well as from Hmong people who have moved to rural areas where they can farm. However, most Hmong homemakers still cook rice with every meal and prefer the flavor of pork to beef, flavored with traditional spices such as coriander, lemongrass, and monosodium glutamate.

*Deborah Duchon*

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# Hong Kong

## Overview

Food is so intimately woven into the fabric of Hong Kong's society that it is part of the standard greeting when one encounters family, friends, and acquaintances. Hong Kong is a gourmet's paradise where one can eat, and eat well, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The choices range from some of the best street food in Asia to haute fusion cuisine at the restaurants of world-famous chefs.

Hong Kong, which means "fragrant harbor" in Cantonese, after the incense that used to perfume the island, was once just a small fishing village. The deep natural harbor and its location as the gateway to southern China ensured its destiny as a busy entrepôt, but it has suffered a tumultuous history in the last two centuries. After the Chinese lost the Opium War, Hong Kong was ceded to the British and in 1842 became a Crown Colony. After the Chinese lost the Second Opium War, the Kowloon Peninsula south of Boundary Street was also ceded to Britain. In 1898, faced with an increasing French influence in southern China and worried about the colony's security, Britain obtained a 99-year lease of Lantau Island and the adjacent northern lands, which became known as the New Territories. These three agreements formed the territory that is collectively known today as Hong Kong. The territory was briefly occupied by the Japanese during World War II and in the last century has experienced waves of immigration, first from mainland Chinese fleeing the newly established Communist government, and then a steady flow of Indian and Pakistani entrepreneurs, Vietnamese refugees in the 1980s and 1990s and, since its return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, internal migration from the mainland. Under its period of British rule, Hong Kong became a thriving port that attracted tradespeople, immigrants, refugees, Commonwealth expatriates, and others from all over the world. Throughout the territory's transformation, the dominant culture (and population, which is 95% Han Chinese) has remained unmistakably rooted in Chinese practices, traditions, and preferences, but its complicated history can be clearly observed in Hong Kong's rich and eclectic food culture.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Wendy and David Chan live in a modest but high-rise apartment close to the bustling shops, restaurants, and businesses of Mong Kok. Wendy and David were born and raised in Hong Kong, although David was educated abroad. David works in the family's import-export business. Wendy also works there part-time while raising their two boys. The Chans employ a maid to help with household chores and cooking but also eat out frequently. Their lifestyle and foodways are typical of well-educated, bilingual, and well-traveled middle-class Hong Kongers. Their background has influenced their diet, which embraces foodstuffs from both East and West.

David usually gets up at 7 A.M. and goes straight to work. He picks up a hot breakfast along the way, which usually consists of a bowl of rice porridge (congee) with scallions, preserved duck eggs called *pei dan,* and lean pork. Sometimes he stops by a storefront and buys a small package of *ju cheong fun*—rolled rice crepes that are doused in soy or hoisin sauce, sprinkled with

sesame and scallions, and dressed with peanut sauce. This he takes back to work and eats at his desk. An occasional coffee drinker, David might also purchase a small eight-ounce cup of coffee with sugar to perk him up. Meanwhile, Wendy prepares breakfast at home for herself and the boys. The boys favor cold cereal with milk and buttered toast. Other times Wendy will ask their Filipina domestic helper, Josephine, to pick up something from the bakery the night before. This is usually an assortment that includes sweet and savory options: soft glazed rolls with ham and egg sandwiched in between; glazed buns stuffed with roast pork (*cha siu bao*); sweet buns with a cookie-like crumble top and custard filling, known as pineapple buns for how the crumble resembles a pineapple; light, sweet rolls split in half, filled with sweetened whipped cream, and sprinkled with toasted coconut (*lai yeo bao*); or plain semihard rolls known as *ju tsai bao,* or "piggie rolls," which are eaten with butter and jam.

The boys buy what they wish for lunch at the school cafeteria. The cafeteria offers ham and cheese sandwiches, curried soup noodles, or stir-fried rice or noodles. If they are really hungry, they might buy a *fan hup,* or "rice box," which contains a meat of choice, a vegetable, and a sauce, all over a large helping of rice. Wendy and David also eat out for lunch and usually choose to go to the large food court in the basement of their office building to get a quick "set meal" of a soup, a rice, a vegetable, and a meat for a modest price.

At around 4 P.M. someone in David and Wendy's office is sent downstairs for an afternoon tea break. The designated courier takes orders from everyone and returns shortly with an assortment of *lai cha* (strong hot tea usually sweetened with condensed milk), coffee, and a few colorful bubble tea drinks (tea, coffee, or juice-based beverages with large brown tapioca pearls mixed in). The boys, meanwhile, have been let out of school and head to the nearby 7-Eleven with their friends to buy drinks and processed snack foods such as BBQ potato chips, shrimp crackers, Japanese candies, or ice creams. They might also stop at one of the hawker stalls (street vendors) near their school. Some favorites include curried fish balls (fish paste formed into Ping-Pong ball–sized balls) on skewers, waffles slathered with peanut butter and margarine folded inside paper bags, and fried stinky (fermented) tofu served with sweet hoisin sauce.

Dinner is the most important meal of the day for a busy family like the Chans because it is when everyone sits together to share a meal and their day. As Wendy is at work in the afternoon, it is Josephine's job to visit the local market when it opens at 10 A.M. That way, the family ensures they have the best selection of meat, fish, and produce.

## Major Foodstuffs

Hong Kong is often described as a crossroads of East and West, which translates into the foods available for purchase as well. The region's proximity to other Southeast Asian neighbors, long history of attracting visitors, and continued role as a major trading port have meant that Hong Kongers today have developed a wide-ranging palate that demands foodstuffs from all over the world. Land is at a premium, the cost of living is high, and labor is expensive, so the territory must import most of its food in any case. Chinese cuisine, and especially the regional preferences of neighboring Canton, is the one that maintains the strongest influence, however, and this is reflected in the major foods that are consumed in Hong Kong.

Located just north of the Tropic of Cancer, Hong Kong is subject to the annual monsoons that irrigate the rice paddies of Southeast Asia. Rice is thus the preferred staple in Hong Kong, with noodles of all types also consumed regularly. Rice paddies used to be a common sight in Hong Kong, but rapid urbanization and an exploding population have changed this. Rice must now be imported, with fragrant jasmine rice from Thailand preferred above other types.

Like other cuisines at cultural crossroads, the geography of Hong Kong has played an important part in its food culture. Seafood, whether captured from the South China Sea at its doorstep or imported from far away, is beloved by all Hong Kongers. Hong Kong seafood markets are exhilarating sights to behold, with what seems to be every edible creature piled, dumped, stacked, and laid out to satisfy every possible craving. Aside from a

huge variety of fish—frozen, swimming in tanks, or simply gasping for air on wet tarps laid out on the pavement—there is every size and shape of clams, mussels, oysters, crabs, lobster, shrimp, crayfish, sea urchins, sea eels, and more. Some of the more spectacular specimens in markets are huge, almost lobster-like mantis shrimp, long-bladed razor clams, prehistoric-looking rockfish, pricey abalone, and the unmistakably phallic-looking geoduck clam. The Cantonese also love frogs, which can be found in the "wet" seafood section of markets. These are piled into small wire cages, from which they are removed and skinned and gutted upon request.

Walk through any of Hong Kong's markets, and the variety of fruits for sale year-round is equally stunning. Fruit is flown in daily from the rest of Southeast Asia, China, Australia, New Zealand, North and South America, and beyond. Hong Kongers adore fruit and usually end their meals with it. Apples, oranges, and grapes are popular, as are tropical fruits such as the impressive jackfruit, with its long (some up to four feet!), hard, spiky body; the gorgeous pink and green dragon fruit with its white flesh and black, kiwilike seeds; the succulent Cantonese lychee and longans that have inspired classic poems; the neat purple billiard ball–like mangosteens; crisp-juicy Asian pears; fragrant papayas; honeyed Thai mangoes; and more.

Hong Kongers, like their mainland cousins, are enthusiastic vegetable eaters. No meal is considered complete without a vegetable dish. Chinese broccoli (*gai lan*), mustard greens, napa cabbage, and bok choy and its more svelte relative *choy sum* are some of the most popular leafy greens. Chinese eggplant,



A large variety of fish and seafood on display at a vendor's shop at the popular Nelson Road outdoor market in Hong Kong's Kowloon district. (Lee Snider | Dreamstime.com)

white Chinese turnips, starchy taro root, and lotus root are commonly seen on Hong Kong menus and may be fried, boiled, steamed, sautéed, braised, and so on. Additionally, while technically not a vegetable, mushrooms of all kinds are embraced, with the meaty oyster mushroom fetching premium prices whether dried or fresh.

Soybean products are omnipresent in Hong Kong markets and menus. Soy milk, known as *dou tseung,* is popular beverage that is consumed either hot or cold and can be purchased from small cafés or in bottles from stores. Tofu in its many forms is used in soups, stews, braises, stir-fries, and desserts. Fresh and dried tofu "skin," which forms on the surface of soy milk as it is boiled, is used to add textural interest to vegetarian dishes and soups. Perhaps its most interesting use is in Buddhist vegetarian cuisine, where the skins can be used to imitate duck or chicken, both texturally and visually. Soybeans themselves are not commonly eaten whole, except perhaps as a bar snack or at Japanese restaurants.

## Cooking

Preparation of meals in Hong Kong relies on the same set of equipment and techniques as on the Chinese mainland. Chinese cooking does not involve a lot of specialized equipment, but the most basic kitchen will have three items: a wok, a meat cleaver, and a heavy cutting board. The wok is the workhorse of the Hong Kong kitchen and is used for everything from steaming to braising, stir-frying to deep-frying. The best woks are made of cast iron, and the 14-inch diameter size is sufficient for the average household. A large meat cleaver, usually made of carbon or stainless steel and with a wooden handle, is also standard in every Chinese kitchen. While it may appear unwieldy, the Chinese cleaver is extremely versatile and can accomplish cutting tasks that range from a fine mince to chopping bones. As the cleaver is a weighty knife, it is necessary to have a heavy and stable cutting board. Traditional boards were made from round wood taken from a slice of a single tree trunk and were so large that they should be more accurately described as blocks. Modern boards are made of a dense, heavy-duty rubber or plastic material that is not as thick but can still meet the downward chop of a cleaver into bone without bouncing off the counter.

Hong Kong kitchens tend to be tiny, which limits the number of appliances that can be crammed into them. Refrigerators are diminutive and simple compared to the high-tech behemoths found in North American kitchens, which means that daily grocery shopping is a must for anyone who eats at home regularly. Since open markets are available in every neighborhood, though, shopping is not the same kind of chore in Hong Kong as it would be in North America's car-centric society. Fresh food items tend to be purchased in open markets, while dry goods, processed or frozen foods, and household goods are purchased in supermarkets. Most shopping is done on the way home from work, or if the household employs a maid, she (maids are almost always female) will do the shopping during the workday. Microwaves are not ubiquitous as they tend to take up a lot of room, and those who have them tend to limit their use to reheating, rather than cooking, food. Households without microwaves reheat food the old-fashioned way by steaming it in a wok or giving it a quick stir in a pot. Actual stoves are not available in every household; many contain cooktops with single or double burners that stand on top of the counter and may be hooked up to a gas tank that must be exchanged regularly. Set-in cooktops will be attached to a gas supply line. Chinese home cooking does not feature many roasted or baked dishes; that, combined with the lack of space, means that ovens are not common either. Even households that do have kitchens large enough for a proper stove and oven rarely use them unless there is an interest in preparing Western dishes or in baking.

One appliance that is universal, however, is the rice cooker. Rice being an important staple, having the rice cooker can help free up a burner, which is especially important if there is only one burner. The rice cooker can cook large amounts of rice at once without requiring any attention. As a bonus, small dishes of food can be steam-cooked by placing them directly on top of the rice while it is cooking, saving space and energy. The food also flavors or perfumes the rice in the process.

In terms of technique, stir-frying is perhaps the best-known Chinese cooking method. To stir-fry, a small amount of oil is placed in a wok over high heat. Evenly cut pieces of meat and/or vegetables are then placed in the wok and quickly tossed together. The high heat and the round-bottomed shape of the wok allow heat to conduct quickly and evenly over a large surface area, resulting in a very quick method of cooking that seals in flavors and nutrients. This was particularly desirable in the days when firewood still had to be collected as it was an energy-efficient way of preparing food.

Steaming is popular and is a simple, healthy method of preparation that brings out the true flavors of the food. The setup for steaming usually involves placing a small stainless steel wire rack at the bottom of a wok and filling the wok with boiling water up to the height of the rack. A plate of the food to be steamed is then lowered gently onto the rack and a cover placed over the wok until the dish is done.

Other important techniques include clay pot cooking, braising, double steaming, and slow-simmered soups. All of these techniques belong to the larger body of Chinese cooking methods as well but are an integral part of how Hong Kongers cook. Clay pot cooking is exactly that—food is cooked in earthen pots whose interiors are typically glazed black, with a small sturdy handle to one side and a matching lid. These are especially suitable for long braises because of the material's ability to conduct and retain heat evenly, minimizing burning. One popular use for clay pots is in preparing *bo tsai fan,* or clay pot rice. Rice and water are measured into the pot, with seasoned meat and vegetables settled on top to cook with the rice. It is a literal one-pot meal, with the pot acting as an attractive serving bowl as well. Braising differs from Western braising only in the choice of ingredients for the liquid, with soy sauce being a common base flavoring. Double steaming is a method usually reserved for preparing expensive delicacies such as shark's-fin or bird's nest soups. Ingredients are placed inside a ceramic jar with water, this is in turn placed inside another container, and the whole contraption is gently steamed for several hours. This technique minimizes the loss of moisture while cooking and so is considered ideal when there is a need to preserve the nutritional and medicinal benefits of expensive ingredients. Double steaming is often used when making *tong sui,* Cantonese dessert soups that incorporate herbal medicines and are consumed for their nourishing and beautifying benefits.



Traditional soup found in Hong Kong made with meat, vegetables, and noodles. (Shutterstock)

Soups, both savory and sweet, hold a special place in Hong Kong food culture. Similarities can be drawn between the healthful, comfort-food qualities of chicken noodle soup and the body of Cantonese-style slow-simmered soup recipes (*lo foh tong*) that Hong Kongers draw on. The Chinese herbs that are present in almost every recipe create soups that are believed to counteract everything from overwork and poor diet to post-pregnancy health problems and asthma and are the ultimate expression of caring when prepared for family and friends.

## Typical Meals

Most meals consumed at home are primarily Cantonese influenced, reflecting Hong Kong's geography and the majority Cantonese population. Chinese home meals are eaten communally, with all the dishes placed at the center of the table and everyone taking small portions to go with their individual portions of rice throughout the meal. Thus, when eating at home, there are no courses because

everything is placed on the table at once. At formal banquets there will be courses, but they, too, are placed in the center of a large table, albeit at intervals. The dishes remain on the table until they are empty, so by the end of a banquet all 9, 12, or 13 courses may be present in the middle of the table.

The basic structure of a meal is predicated on the belief that a healthy, balanced meal consists, at a bare minimum, of a meat dish, a vegetable dish, and a soup, or *leung sung yat tong,* meaning "two side dishes and one soup." This is, of course, in addition to jasmine rice. If guests are expected, dinner will be much more elaborate, with at least one seafood dish, usually steamed fish, and some roasted meats such as barbecued pork (*cha siu*), crispy-skinned roasted suckling pig, honey-lacquered roast duck, roast pigeon, or soy-braised chicken, purchased from special roasted-meat vendors.

The vegetable is usually the simplest dish, with a dark leafy green such as bok choy or choy sum quickly boiled and served with a dressing of oyster sauce or stir-fried with garlic. The meat dish might feature modest home-style dishes such as sliced beef stir-fried with onion, sweet and sour pork with bell peppers and pineapple, or steamed chicken with mushrooms and ginger.

Seafood is a little more expensive, so a family may have fresh fish less often. Salted fish and shrimp are usually used as condiments as part of a larger dish, although sometimes salted or dried fish and cuttlefish will be steamed and eaten plain. Hong Kongers prefer to purchase fish as fresh as possible. Still swimming is best, and a fresh fish is a must if guests will be present. The fish, gutted and descaled but with head and tail still intact, is typically steamed in the wok with ginger, scallions, and soy sauce and doused with hot oil to bring out the flavors.

Depending on what kind of soup is being prepared, ingredients such as dried nuts, seeds, or roots; fresh or dried fish; fresh or preserved vegetables; and/or meat may be included. Fresh fruit is usually eaten for dessert, and as noted earlier, the average Hong Kong fruit bowl may contain anything from apples and oranges to lychees, durians, and mangosteens.

## Eating Out

Eating out is also a very important part of the local food culture. Tiny apartments and long workdays (most people work a half day on Saturday and even schools require morning attendance) mean that Hong Kongers have little space or time to socialize. Restaurants provide much-needed social spaces in this inescapably cramped city.

Hong Kong's food culture, like that in other Southeast Asian cities, begins on its streets. Street-food vendors, known as hawkers, can be found on the streets and in the markets throughout the territory. Most require some sort of vending license, although some operate illegally and take their chances with the authorities, leading to desperate scrambles whenever a uniform happens along. Common foods sold are chestnuts roasted in giant woks of hot coals; stinky tofu (which can be smelled a block away); *boot tsai go*, which are small, sweet steamed puddings studded with mung beans or adzuki red beans; and mock shark's-fin soup, made of similar flavoring ingredients but with vermicelli replacing the strands of cooked shark's fin. Waffles—both the familiar square-holed variety and the "little chicken egg" type known as *gai dan tsai*—are very popular with children. Both are made from waffle batter. Gai dan tsai is cooked in an iron with little half-moon indentations that result in the "egg" look and is eaten plain, pulled apart piece by piece. Regular waffles are smeared with peanut butter and/or butter. Dragon beard candy—finely pulled sugar rolled around bits of crushed peanut, toasted sesame, white sugar, and coconut that resembles silk cocoons—was a typical hawker treat but is now a rare sight. Pulling sugar into gossamer strands takes practice and skill, but this dying art can no longer command a living wage.

*Dai pai dong* are beloved institutions and an important part of the local food culture. These informal, affordable outdoor eateries usually consist of rickety plastic or cheap metal tables and chairs set on the pavement. The kitchen doles out simple Cantonese favorites such as congee, soups, noodles, and stir-fries, as well as small snacks such as *jung,* the Chinese tamale-like dumpling. The menu is usually

in Chinese. Open early in the morning through the wee hours, dai pai dong are frequented for every meal of the day.

As Hong Kong is a city that never sleeps, it seems inevitable that there is a proper mealtime—the fourth in a standard day—to sustain those who keep going long after the sun sets. *Siu yeh* (both characters mean "night") is the term used for a small meal taken late at night, after dinner has already been eaten. It is usually eaten with friends after an evening out or a long night at work. Larger and more formal restaurants tend to close after 10 or 11 P.M., so more casual Hong Kong–style cafés, hawker stands, or dai pai dong are the usual venues for siu yeh.

There are several categories of cafés in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong–style ones, known as *cha chaan teng* (literally, "tea diner"), serve casual Cantonese dishes similar to what is available at dai pai dong, with the addition of "Western" items such as steak, pork cutlets, ramen noodles or macaroni with Spam and a fried egg, plain buttered toast, or French toast. In Hong Kong French toast is two slices of deep-fried bread with peanut butter in between, served with English golden syrup and margarine. These cafés also serve a variety of classic Hong Kong beverages such as iced lemon water with simple syrup, hot or cold malted drinks sweetened with condensed milk, and "fleecies"—red bean ices made of sweetened red beans with condensed milk and ice or topped with ice cream. Casual, cheap, and ubiquitous, cafés are popular for a quick, casual meal or snack.



A typical dai pai dong, or street restaurant, in Hong Kong. (Shutterstock)

More upscale Western-style cafés in Hong Kong serve only *sai chan,* or Western cuisine. Dishes on the menu here are derived from no specific Western country but are adjusted for local tastes, earning this style of cooking the nickname "soy sauce cuisine." Most will offer a three-course set meal consisting of a soup, a main course, and a dessert. Clam chowder, cream of asparagus, borscht, and minestrone are popular options for the soup course, while wok-fried spaghetti with meat sauce or sizzling iron plates of steak are the usual main-course options. Dessert usually consists of a scoop of ice cream, mango pudding, or Jell-O.

Although there are international fast-food chains, Hong Kong also has its indigenous category of fast-food establishments. The two largest chains are Café de Coral and Fairwood. Diners order and pay up front at the cashier and then take their receipt and a tray to a cafeteria-style line to claim their meals. Well-lit, consistent, and inexpensive, these places also offer items similar to those at cha chaan teng and set-meal deals that can include home-style slow-simmered soups.

Large banquet/seafood restaurants sit at the top of the pecking order in local cuisine. *Yum cha,* meaning literally to "drink tea," is served in the mornings. It is a beloved activity on weekends, when entire extended families get together around a table to enjoy dish after dish of small bites known as dim sum. Classic dim sum include *ha gao,* steamed shrimp dumplings; *siu mai,* steamed pork dumplings; cha siu bao, barbecue roast pork buns; and *daan tat,* custard egg tarts. Weekday mornings in these large restaurants belong to Hong Kong's senior citizens, who start their days lingering over a bamboo steamer or three of dim sum, a pot of black tea, and a newspaper. Most choose a favorite restaurant and become familiar with the servers and fellow patrons, and it becomes an important part of their daily social routine. In the evenings, the restaurants' kitchens cater to wedding banquets and dinner parties, serving more elaborate items not usually made at home such as abalone with mushroom, winter melon soup

with the hollowed-out melon serving as the tureen, lobster, shark's-fin soup, and roasted meats.

**Mock Shark's-Fin Soup**

This popular street snack is also easy and inexpensive to make at home. All ingredients can be found in well-stocked Asian groceries. Be careful not to overcook the vermicelli or overthicken the soup; it will become gummy.

*Serves 4*

6 oz lean pork butt, trimmed

8 c chicken stock

2 tbsp ginger, julienned

½ oz dried snow ear fungus, rehydrated and shredded

6–8 shiitake mushrooms, fresh or dried and rehydrated, julienned

7 tbsp water chestnut starch

8 tbsp cold water

2 tbsp oyster sauce

2 tbsp dark soy sauce

Sesame oil and white pepper, to taste

2 packages dried vermicelli, rehydrated in cold water and cut into about 2-in. sections

2 eggs, beaten

Red rice vinegar and extra julienned ginger, to serve

1. Rinse and dry the pork. Blanch pork in boiling water for 5 minutes. Rinse, drain, and place in pot with chicken stock and simmer for half an hour, skimming off any foam that rises to the surface.

2. Remove pork from stock. Reserve stock, and set pork aside to cool, and then pull the meat apart with a fork.

3. Heat a little oil in a wok, and sauté ginger, snow ear fungus, and mushrooms until soft and fragrant. Add reserved stock, and bring to a boil.

4. Meanwhile, dissolve water chestnut starch in the water and set aside.

5. To the wok, add oyster sauce, soy sauce, sesame oil, and white pepper, to taste. Thicken the soup with water chestnut solution to desired consistency. Stir in vermicelli. Bring to a boil, and pour in beaten eggs, stirring quickly to create thin strands of cooked egg.

6. Serve hot with red rice vinegar, ginger, salt, and white pepper on the side.

Japanese sushi and noodles, Thai cuisine, Vietnamese soups, Korean barbecue, and French haute cuisine are the top cuisines favored by Hong Kongers, although chances are good that one can find at least one option for even the most esoteric cuisine. Fusion cuisine is very trendy and one of the more expensive dining options in Hong Kong, with the restaurants themselves often located within luxury hotels.

Hong Kong is a city prone to trends of all kinds. Food trends are no exception. Sometimes these trends may begin in other Asian cities, as was the case with Portuguese egg tarts, little puff pastry shells filled with egg custard. Originally from neighboring Macau, they first became a huge sensation in Taiwan and Singapore in the 1990s. The craze soon caught on in Hong Kong as well, where people lined up for hours in front of bakeries that couldn't turn them out fast enough. Other crazes have followed since with foods such as Japanese-style cheesecake (so light and moist as to be compared to the lightest pound cakes), Taiwanese bubble tea, and "crunch" cake (an angel food cake–like base with a light layer of frosting, topped with crunchy meringues).

## Special Occasions

Banquet halls are where Hong Kongers celebrate their life events. In a society where face and status are important, the bigger the event is, the better one looks. In a city where people don't like to host dinner parties because of lack of space, the expansive banquet halls are a necessity.

Births are celebrated by hosting a *mun yuet jau,* or "full-month banquet," so named because it is held when the child reaches one month of age. This custom arose because communities were used

to experiencing high infant mortality rates. Babies would not be named or formally welcomed into the family until this time, when they had survived the most dangerous period of their lives. Close friends and family are invited to the typically nine-course banquet, which ends with a noodle dish (the length symbolizes longevity), red-dyed hard-boiled eggs, and slices of red-dyed ginger. Nutritious eggs and the warming properties of ginger are both believed to help women recover from childbirth, while red is the color of happiness, luck, and prosperity. In the old days, red eggs were sent to friends and family to announce the birth. Birthday banquets are usually reserved for those aged 60 and older, when people get together to celebrate the person's health and longevity and to pay their respects to an elder. Long egg noodles are served at the end of these banquets, too, along with *sau bao* (long-life buns), steamed little white buns stuffed with sweet lotus seed paste and painted with a rosy flush to resemble peaches, another symbol of longevity. Children's birthdays are marked with cakes from one of the Western-style bakeries; the cakes are filled with fresh fruit and iced with whipped cream.

There are no particular foods associated with funerals; however, it is customary for the bereaved family to host a *gai wai jau,* or a "stomach-easing banquet," for those who attended the funeral. This meal, held to celebrate the deceased's journey to heaven, is vegetarian and traditionally consists of only five courses—much shorter than the minimum nine of happier occasions.

Weddings are the most elaborate celebrations of all. Prior to the event, the bride's family is expected to distribute *loh poh beng,* "wife cakes," to those invited. These heavy little cakes are filled with winter melon or almond paste and are encased in pastry made flaky with pork lard. They used to serve as the wedding announcements and invitations, but in hectic Hong Kong, the preferred method is to enclose "cake cards" with the red-and-gold wedding invitations. These cards are later redeemed at the bakery that issued them for whatever the recipient desires. The wedding banquet itself is an opportunity for the family to put on a show of prosperity and wealth, so the larger the event, and the longer and more expensive the menu, the better. During the meal, the wedding party goes from table to table to personally toast all their guests and thank them for coming. Bottles of champagne, scotch, and cognac are placed at each table for this express purpose.

## Diet and Health

To Hong Kongers, food is never eaten just for the sake of filling the belly. Every food is believed to possess innate qualities that can ultimately affect the natural balance of a body's system. When poor diet, stress, and other hazards of 21st-century life throw the body out of balance, Hong Kongers rely on food as medicine to put them back on track. This understanding is grounded in the Taoist principle of yin-yang. There is no positive without a negative, no light without dark, no male without female. This is true of everything in nature, including food, and only when all elements are present in equal amounts can balance and harmony be achieved. Thus, every food is ascribed a property—hot or cold, damp or dry, nourishing or neutral—and when eaten will have a corresponding effect on the body.

The structure of the basic Chinese meal is based on this idea, and ingredients are combined in recipes according to their properties. For example, bok choy on its own is very cooling and not suitable for someone with a cold or weak constitution. Cooking bok choy with ginger, which is a warming food, counterbalances this property. This is most evident is in Cantonese soup recipes where complex combinations of ingredients are simmered slowly together to create tonics that are curative or prophylactic, as the case may be. Ingredients may be purchased in markets and at special herbalist shops where Chinese doctors are available to listen to patients' pulses and prescribe brews tailored to individual needs. The shops are distinguishable by the cases of dried food items that line the walls and entrances, as well as by their unique smell—briny and musty, with an undertone of bitter medicine.

Hong Kong being a busy town, there is a fast-food option for those too busy to eat right and make their own soups—herbal tea shops. They are recognizable by large copper-colored urns with taps

dispensing a variety of brews. The urns are usually placed near the front of the shop, with bowls of tea already poured and available to passersby for a quick fix. If one chooses to enter and sit, a larger menu of soups and teas is available to treat everything from fatigue to poor digestion, and others claim beauty benefits. A subtype of these shops sells the popular—and expensive—turtle pudding. Made from turtle shell and a mixture of Chinese herbs, this black, mild-tasting pudding is believed to flush toxins from the body.

*Karen Lau Taylor*

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# India

## Overview

The Republic of India occupies most of the landmass called the Indian Subcontinent or South Asia, which also includes the republics of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka and the independent kingdoms of Nepal and Bhutan. India is a federal republic consisting of 29 states and six union territories. India is the world's seventh-largest country in area and, with more than a billion people, is second only to China in population. Some Indian states are larger than most countries and have distinctive languages, ethnicities, cultures, and cuisines.

Religion and geography play a key role in determining what Indians eat. More than 80 percent of the population is Hindu, but 13.5 percent—138 million—are Muslims, making India the world's second-largest Muslim country after Indonesia. The population also includes 24 million Christians, 19 million Sikhs, 8 million Buddhists, 4 million Jains, and small communities of Parsis (Zoroastrians), animists, and other religious groups. While it is a common belief that Indians are overwhelmingly vegetarian, in reality only 30 percent of the population has never eaten meat. However, because meat is expensive, most people are de facto vegetarians who eat meat and fish rarely. On average, Indians get 92 percent of their calories from vegetable products, including 70 percent from cereals, and just 8 percent from animal products (meat, dairy products, and eggs). Very few Indians are vegans.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Robin and Anu Das live in an affluent neighborhood of South Delhi. Robin, a Bengali originally from Calcutta, is a freelance documentary film director; his wife, Anu, a Punjabi from Amritsar, is a freelance writer who helps Robin with his work. Their lifestyle and foodways are typical of middle-class cosmopolitan urbanites whose diet includes dishes from different parts of India as well as the West.

Robin and Anu start their day at 9 A.M. with *dalia,* a porridge made from cracked wheat, or perhaps a bowl of oatmeal or cold cereal, together with toast, a piece of fruit, and a cup of tea. For the Dases, as for many Indians, lunch is the largest meal of the day. It generally includes fried or stewed fish (reflecting Robin's Bengali origins), dal (boiled spiced lentils), one or two fried or boiled vegetable dishes, and rice. Around 5 P.M. the Dases have an afternoon snack of tea and biscuits (cookies). If guests drop by, they will purchase Indian sweets, European pastries, and fried snacks from a bakery. Dinner is around 9 P.M. Roast chicken, cooked Western style without any spices, or a roast of mutton, is served instead of fish, together with Indian or Western-style breads, boiled vegetables, dal, and fruit for dessert.

With globalization, things are changing rapidly in India. According to Anu, people are much more health conscious than in the past, so that meals are much smaller than the multicourse meals their parents enjoyed and butter and oil consumption is reduced. Even a decade ago, shopping would take several hours since it meant visiting a number of outdoor markets and small shops—one for fish, another for meat, a third for vegetables, and a fourth for dry goods like rice and flour. Today, people do one-stop shopping at supermarkets that carry not only all these items but also once-exotic "foreign" vegetables (such as broccoli, bell peppers, and asparagus), frozen foods, cold meats,

other prepared foods, and even imported goods such as olive oil and Italian pasta. Robin and Anu also eat out much more than their parents did, both in restaurants serving Thai, Italian, and Indian regional cuisines and in fast-food outlets.

## Major Foodstuffs

India is a predominantly rural country, and most Indian food is still produced regionally or locally. Only 2 percent of India's agricultural output is processed, so most meals are made from scratch. India has an enormous diversity of climates, soils, and weather systems. The states of Punjab and Haryana, called the breadbasket of India, are wheat producers. The northeastern states of Bengal and Assam to the east produce two, and sometimes three, crops of rice each year. Much of western India (Rajasthan, part of Gujarat) consists of barren deserts where only millets, sorghum, and other "coarse grains" grow. Consequently, in northern India, the dietary staple is wheat, ground into flour and made into bread, whereas in the east and south, the staple is rice. Indians prefer rice varieties with long, slender grains that retain their shape when cooked. The best known is basmati.

Another dietary staple are legumes—lentils (there are more than 50 commercial varieties), peas, chickpeas, and beans. In Hindi, both the raw ingredients and the boiled dish made from them are called dal. Almost all Indians eat dal every day. The combination of grains and lentils provides most of the amino acids our bodies need to stay healthy.

Minerals and trace elements are provided by vegetables. Potatoes, tomatoes, green peppers, winter squash, corn, okra, and other popular vegetables were brought by the Portuguese from the Western Hemisphere and Africa beginning in the late 15th century in the so-called Columbian Exchange. During their 300-year rule, the British introduced cabbages, cauliflower, lettuce, carrots, green beans, and navy beans.

Indigenous vegetables include bitter melons (*karela*); many varieties of squash and gourds, including the bottle gourd (*lauki* or *lau*), ash gourd, (*petha kaddu*), a small green gourd (*parwal*), and snake gourd (*chichinda*); eggplant (*brinjal* or *baingun*); long green beans (*seema*); white radishes (*mooli*); and various kinds of leafy greens, collectively called *saag.*

Milk and its products are an important source of protein. In North India milk is drunk by itself or boiled with tea and spices to make *chai.* Milk solids are pressed and cut into cubes to make *paneer,* a mild cheese that is a meat substitute in vegetarian dishes. Yogurt (*dahi*) is widely used as a marinade for meat, served as a side dish, or churned to produce butter. Because butter is perishable, it is made into clarified butter, called ghee, by cooking it over low heat until all the water has evaporated. Ghee is the preferred cooking medium in India, but oils made from mustard seeds, sesame seeds, peanuts, coconut, corn, and sunflower seeds are also used in different parts of the country.

The most distinctive feature of Indian cuisine is the addition of spices and seasonings to most dishes. The most widely used are turmeric, cloves, coriander, cumin, black pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, ginger, fenugreek, nutmeg, poppy seeds, saffron, mustard seeds, and, of course, chilies. Although Indian food has the reputation of being hot, in reality both the degree of hotness, which comes from chilies and pepper, and the spices that are used depend on the dish and regional and individual preferences. For example, mustard seeds and fenugreek are standard in South Indian vegetarian dishes, while highly aromatic spices such as cloves, cardamom, nutmeg, and cinnamon are essential ingredients in North Indian meat and rice dishes. Onions and garlic, sautéed in oil, are the starting point for many dishes but are avoided by some Hindus.

India is a fruit lover's paradise. Virtually all the fruits and berries cultivated in temperate climates grow in the cooler parts of the country, including peaches, plums, apricots, mulberries, strawberries, and apples. Most tropical and semitropical fruits flourish there, including bananas, mangoes, citrus fruits, jackfruit, papayas, guavas, sapodillas, custard apples, and pineapples.

Sugarcane cultivation and sugar refining are native to India. The stems are crushed to extract the juice, which is boiled down to make solid brown



Vendor of dried fruit in New Delhi, India. (Shutterstock)

sugar, called *gur* or jaggery. It is combined with milk products to make many Indian sweets.

Hindus and Sikhs avoid eating beef, since the cow is highly valued for its many contributions, and cow slaughter is banned in most parts of the country. The most popular meats are mutton, a word used for the flesh of both goats and sheep, and chicken. The meat of pigs is forbidden to Muslims and is generally avoided by non-Muslims as well.

Fish is a dietary staple in certain regions. Bengalis prefer freshwater fish from rivers and ponds. Popular varieties include *hilsa* (which is a kind of shad), carp, catfish, the perchlike *bekti,* pomfret, and kingfish. In Kerala, sea fish are widely eaten, including varieties of sardines, mackerel, pomfret, seer, squid, and prawns. Shrimp (called prawns in Indian English) are considered a delicacy, and several varieties are caught in Indian waters.

Water is served with meals. Milk and buttermilk are popular drinks in northern and western India, including *lassi,* yogurt mixed with water and spices. Bottled soft drinks are popular among the young. Tea boiled with milk and spices is popular in North India, while coffee is mainly grown and consumed in the south.

## Cooking

Preparing Indian food is very labor-intensive. In an Indian joint family, where several generations live in one household, the senior woman supervises the food preparation, aided by her daughters and daughters-in-law. Affluent families have cooks.

Indian kitchens are simple by Western standards. Most cooking is done on top of a simple burner. The traditional stove, a *chula,* is a small U-shaped clay oven with a hole for inserting fuel and knobs on the top to hold the pot. Traditional fuels are charcoal, twigs, and dried cow patties. Today, middle-class households use a small cooktop with two burners fueled by bottled gas (propane).

Sautéing and deep-frying are done in a wok-shaped pot made of stainless steel or cast iron, called a *kadhai.* Many households own a pressure cooker, which considerably shortens the time needed to cook curries. A heavy, flat iron griddle with a wooden handle, called a *tawa,* is used for roasting spices and grilling and sautéing breads.

In North India, spices, onions, garlic, and herbs are crushed using a small rolling pin on a stone slab. In South India, a mortar and pestle are more commonly used. Modern cooks use electric grinders and blenders. Spices and flavorings are often ground early in the morning for the day's meals. Whole spices are kept in a spice box next to the stove.

Spices can be dry-roasted and ground into a powder, called *garam masala,* or "warm seasonings." This is stored in airtight bottles. A few pinches are added to a dish just before serving. Ready-made garam masalas are sold commercially and are sometimes called curry powder. Powdered or whole spices may be sautéed and added to a dish at the end of the cooking process to add flavor. Spices can also be ground into a wet paste with onions, garlic, ginger, yogurt, coconut milk, or some other liquid and used to make a gravy.

A uniquely Indian technique is called *bhuna.* After frying spices, garlic, onions, ginger, and perhaps tomatoes in a little oil, the cook sautés pieces of meat, fish, or vegetables in the mixture and then adds small amounts of water, yogurt, or other liquid a little at a time, stirring constantly. Other common techniques are sautéing and deep-frying. Since most households do not have ovens, roasted and grilled foods, such as kebabs (pieces of meat impaled on a stick and grilled over hot coals or in a tandoor, a large clay oven), are purchased outside.

Pickling, an ancient Indian technique, is essential in a country with a hot climate. It is a way of preserving fruits, vegetables, meat, or fish by impregnating them with acid, which discourages the growth of most microbes.

## Typical Meals

Describing a typical Indian meal is difficult in view of the region's great regional, religious, and social diversity. However, there are certain commonalities. Most Indians who can afford it eat four meals a day: two main meals—lunch and dinner—and two supplementary meals—breakfast and a light snack in the late afternoon, sometimes called tea or *tiffin.*

Rural people start the day with a hearty breakfast or early lunch to prepare for the day's labor. In cities, most people enjoy a light breakfast, followed by a large lunch either at home or at the office or school, a light afternoon tea when family members return home from work or school, and a dinner eaten at 8:30, 9:00, or even later. In southern India, breakfast is the main meal of the day.

Traditionally, Indians sat on the floor for meals, sometimes on a carpet or raised stool. The food is prepared for each meal and served hot. Breads are always cooked on the spot and slid onto each diner's plate. The traditional plate is a *thali,* a circular metal tray with raised edges. Liquid dishes and yogurt are served in little metal bowls, called *kathoris.* In South India, banana leaves are used. Today, many families use Western-style plates and utensils, especially in cities.

The time-honored way of eating is with the fingers of the right hand. If bread is part of the meal, the diner breaks off a piece, uses it to scoop up a small portion of the food, and pops it into his mouth. For rice or vegetables, the tips of the fingers are used to form a little ball of food. A diner never touches the food or plate of another person.

Indian meals do not normally have a sequence of courses. Everything arrives more or less at once, although certain dishes may be served together. An Indian meal is centered around a cereal—wheat, rice, or some other grain. The second main component is lentils, generally served as a spiced souplike dish called dal. Generally, thick dals are eaten with bread, and thinner, more watery dals with rice. Relatively small amounts of meat, fish, and vegetables are added to enhance the taste and qualities of the main grain. Additional flavors come from yogurt; sweet and sour fruit and vegetable chutneys; sweet, sour, or pungent pickles; and salads. Sometimes seasonal fruit is served at the end of a meal. In many parts of India a meal ends with buttermilk or yogurt as an aid to digestion.

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***Dal Makhani***

The thick, rich dals of the northern states of Punjab and Haryana are famous all over the subcontinent. They are made from black gram beans (often called black lentils though botanically unrelated to the true lentil), chickpeas, black-eyed peas, or kidney beans simmered for a long time over a slow fire until they become thick and then flavored with spices and cream. *Dal makhani* has been called India's favorite lentil dish.

$^2/_3$ c *urad* dal (whole black gram beans)

3 tbsp red kidney beans

1-in. piece of ginger or 3 tsp ready-made ginger paste

4 cloves garlic or 3 tsp garlic paste

4 tomatoes, pureed in a food processor or blender

1 tsp chili powder

4 tbsp ghee (clarified butter) or oil

½ c cream

Wash the beans and soak overnight. If ready-made ginger and garlic paste are not available, grind the ginger and garlic together with a little water to make a paste. Drain the water from the beans, and place in a large pot with 6 cups fresh water. Add salt, half the garlic and ginger paste, and 1 tablespoon ghee, and simmer until the beans are cooked. Mash lightly. Remove from the fire. Heat the remaining ghee and cook the tomatoes, chili powder, and the rest of the ginger and garlic paste until the ghee separates from the mixture. Add the mixture to the

cooked beans, and cook over low heat for 20–25 minutes, mashing occasionally with a spoon against the side of the pot. Add the cream, and cook for 15–20 minutes more.

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Within this basic framework there are wide variations depending on religion, region, social class, and affluence. For the very poor, a meal means a handful of boiled rice with chilies or vegetable peels, or roasted chickpea flour mixed with salt and green chilies. According to a recent survey, 35 percent of respondents said that at least once in the past year they or someone in their family did not have two square meals a day.

Less than a third of Indians are vegetarians, although the regional proportion varies from 2–3 percent in the states of Kerala and West Bengal to 45 percent in Gujarat and 62 percent in Haryana and Rajasthan. Because a vegetarian diet is associated with spiritual serenity, meat is avoided by swamis, yogis, and their followers. Some people also avoid garlic and onions for the same reason. Almost all Hindus and Sikhs avoid beef. Pork and alcohol are forbidden to Muslims, and although pigs are not explicitly proscribed for Hindus, many avoid pork as well. However, even people who are not vegetarians eat very little meat by Western standards; meat is a condiment, a flavoring of the starch, rather than the focal point of a meal.

The following are examples of typical meals in middle-class families in three regions of India. The food of Punjab and Haryana, rich agricultural states in northern India, is simple, robust, and closely linked to the land. In rural areas, the day may start with a hearty breakfast of sautéed bread called *parathas,* sometimes stuffed with potatoes, cauliflower, or grated radish. Sometimes breakfast is supplemented with *halwa,* a dish of grated vegetables cooked in butter and sugar syrup.

Lunch and dinner consist of bread and butter, dal, yogurt, a vegetable dish, and, for nonvegetarians, a chicken or mutton currylike dish. Paneer is combined with peas and other vegetables in curries or grilled on sticks. Spicing is straightforward, featuring coriander, cumin seeds, and red chilies. Rice is served mainly on special occasions. The region is renowned for its thick, rich dals flavored with spices and cream.

In Gujarat in western India, breakfast is served around 7 A.M. and includes tea with wheat or millet bread; *papri* (crisp little squares made from chickpea flour); or puffed rice. For lunch, Gujaratis eat flatbreads called *rotla* and *rotli* lightly sautéed on a griddle and traditionally made from millet or sorghum flour. Other dishes are a sautéed vegetable or vegetable stew, followed by plain boiled rice and dal or *kadhi,* a spicy yogurt curry thickened with chickpea flour. Gujaratis always add a pinch of sugar to dishes and may serve milk- or lentil-based sweets as part of the meal itself. Dinner, typically served at 8:00–8:30 P.M., is smaller than lunch. Sometimes it features a thick bread called *bakri* and a vegetable or a one-dish meal, such as *khichri,* a dish of boiled rice, lentils, and vegetables and nuts.

In southern India, the core cereal is rice. Breakfast is an important meal for Hindus and typically features *idlis* (soft, steamed, disk-shaped cakes) or *dosas* (flat, round, crispy crepes lightly sautéed in oil). The doughs are made by grinding rice, black lentils, and water into a paste. The standard accompaniments are *sambar*—a spicy lentil soup that sometimes includes vegetables—and coconut chutney. The standard breakfast drink is strong filtered coffee mixed with milk. Another popular breakfast dish is *uppuma,* a semolina porridge with tomatoes and onions.

Lunch features boiled white rice, accompanied by two or three seasonal vegetables (potatoes, plantains, eggplants, cabbage) sautéed with mustard seeds, fenugreek, and red chilies in a little oil or cooked in a gravy; a thin, very hot lentil soup called *rasam;* pickles; perhaps a salad of cucumber or bean sprouts; and mango or other fruit in season. A meal always ends with yogurt mixed with rice. Dinner is similar to lunch but generally simpler, and the dishes do not repeat those served at lunch. Often dinner includes *pappadums,* crispy lentil wafers.

Hyderabad, the capital of Andhra Pradesh, has a large Muslim population. A breakfast in a middle-class Muslim household might include parathas served with fried eggs, an omelet, or minced meat

and/or sautéed potatoes. Lunch could feature bread or rice, a meat dish (beef or mutton) made with a gravy, dal, and yogurt. Dinner would be similar to lunch with the inclusion of a vegetable. On special occasions, *pulao* or *biryani* (richly spiced rice dishes with vegetables or meat) might be served.

## Eating Out

Until the middle of the 20th century, India did not have a restaurant culture. Eating out was tolerated as a necessity rather than valued as a luxury or a new experience. Concerns about pollution prevented many Indians from eating in public places. Cooking and entertaining at home were facilitated by the presence of many women in a joint family and, for the wealthy, abundant servants.

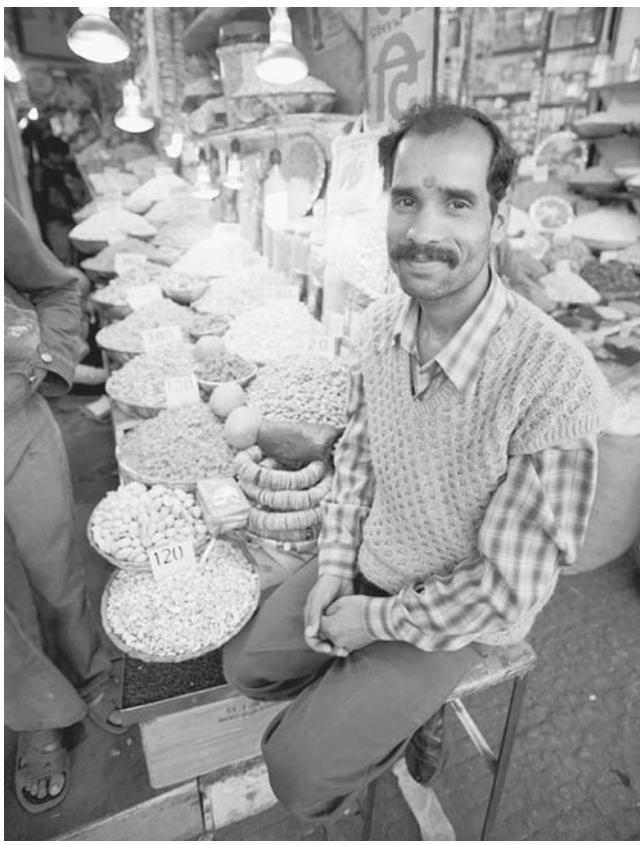
There were exceptions. Large temples have always had kitchens that prepared vegetarian meals for pilgrims, and some became famous for their food, especially the temples at Udupi in Karnataka. In the 19th century, the temples' cooks started migrating to other parts of India where they opened small vegetarian restaurants; today, some South Indian restaurants have the word *Udupi* (sometimes spelled Udipi) in their names. In the mid-1930s K. K. Rao opened Woodlands Restaurant in Madras to serve this food in a more elegant setting. One of its specialties was an enormous yard-wide, paper-thin dosa, today a popular restaurant dish.

The first Indian restaurant in the modern sense was Delhi's Moti Mahal, opened in 1947 by Kundan Lal Gujral, a Hindu refugee from Pakistan. He invented tandoori chicken—chicken marinated in spiced yogurt and roasted in a tandoor, a large clay oven. Moti Mahal also served kebabs (meat on skewers that is grilled in the tandoor), butter chicken (tandoori chicken in a tomato sauce), and tandoor-roasted breads, called nan. Moti Mahal spawned many imitators, including the Kwality and Gaylord chains, whose menu expanded to include so-called Moghlai dishes—rich meat-based dishes—and Punjabi dishes.

Chinese restaurants are very popular in India and have their roots in Calcutta's Chinatown. Standard dishes include chicken corn soup, chili chicken, sweet and sour pork or lamb served in a dark red, very spicy sauce, and noodles.

Indians love to snack, and every town and village has many roadside vendors and shops selling samosas (small pastries filled with vegetables or meat), meat and vegetable patties, kebabs (meat grilled on skewers), and other savory items. Mumbai is famous for its crunchy spicy snacks, such as *bhelpuri,* a mix of crispy noodles, puffed rice, tomato, onion, boiled potatoes, coriander, and tamarind chutney. Kolkata is known for its sweet shops.

Today, people are discarding their old taboos, and India's rapidly growing middle class has the money, time, and desire to eat out at trendy restaurants that serve Thai, Italian, and Indian regional cuisines as well as at fast-food chains. McDonald's, Pizza Hut, Dominos, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and other Western fast-food chains have outlets throughout the subcontinent and have adapted their dishes to local



Snack vendor at the Amber Palace Courtyard, Jaipur, India. (Corel)

tastes and customs, with such dishes as McAloo Tikka, a vegetarian fried potato patty, and chicken curry–topped pizza. Spending on restaurant meals doubled in the past decade to five billion dollars a year and is expected to double again in five years.

## Special Occasions

India has been called the land of feasts, fasts, and festivals. All groups celebrate seasonal and harvest festivals, religious holidays, and life transitions, such as weddings, births, and deaths, by eating certain foods, avoiding them (fasting), or sometimes both.

On festival days, large Hindu temples prepare elaborate vegetarian feasts featuring hundreds of dishes. Hindu deities have favorite foods, usually sweets, which are offered to them during ceremonies in the temple and are afterward distributed to worshippers. For example, the festival Janmashtami, observed in the early autumn, commemorates the birth of Lord Krishna, who as a child loved milk, ghee, and yogurt. Thus, devotees celebrate this day by eating *bhog kheer,* a rich rice pudding, or *shrikand,* a thickish pudding made from strained yogurt, sugar, and cardamom. Ganesh Chaturthi celebrates the birthday of the elephant-headed god Ganesh, who is always depicted holding a *modaka*—a steamed rice dumpling filled with coconut, sugar, milk solids, and dried nuts. On this day, devotees eat and serve modakas along with another of Ganesh's favorite foods—*laddoos,* fried balls made from flour, ghee, sugar, and nuts, raisins, or sesame seeds.

The most colorful Hindu festival, Holi, is celebrated on the day of the full moon in March. Special foods include sweets, snacks, and a mildly intoxicating milk drink called *thandai.* The Indian equivalent of Christmas is Diwali, the Festival of Lights, which celebrates Lord Rama's return to his kingdom after 14 years in exile. Because this symbolizes the victory of good over evil and light over darkness, little lamps are lit everywhere and people exchange lantern-shaped sweets.

In Punjab, the harvest festival Lohri is marked by eating *s*heaves of roasted corn from the new harvest as well as laddoos and other sweets. South Indians observe the harvest festival Pongal by eating a dish of that name made by boiling rice in milk with jaggery, cashew nuts, ghee, and coconut.

***Laddoos***

One of the most popular Indian sweets often associated with Hindu festivals, laddoos are balls made of chickpea, rice, or wheat flour; ghee; sugar or jaggery; and other ingredients, such as nuts, raisins, and sesame seeds. Often they are made from little drops of fried chickpea-flour batter that are soaked in sugar syrup and shaped into balls. The following recipe is easy to make.

1 c chickpea flour

$^1/_3$ c ghee or melted butter

1 c ground jaggery or powdered sugar

½ tsp ground cardamom (purchased as powder or made by grinding a few green cardamom pods, shells and all)

2 tbsp chopped almonds, cashew nuts, and/or raisins

Sift the chickpea flour. Heat the ghee over high heat until it starts to smoke, then lower the heat to medium and add the flour. Stir it well until the flour starts to turn brown and releases a fragrant aroma. Remove from the heat, add the sugar, and mix well. When it cools down slightly, add the cardamom powder and nuts, mix well, and form into small balls around 1½ inches in diameter using your greased palms. Set aside to harden.

Many Hindus fast, either individually or communally, as a form of worship, a petition to a god for a favor, an instrument of self-discipline, a means of attaining spiritual merit, or a form of physical cleansing. Some people always fast on certain days of the month. Fasting can mean total abstention from food and water or a restricted vegetarian diet.

Fasting is one of the five pillars of Islam. During the month of Ramadan, Muslims avoid taking any food or water between dawn and dusk. The fast is broken every day at sunset with a sip of water, dates, and perhaps a little fruit, a custom called *iftar.* This is followed by a large meal featuring

meat dishes such as biryanis, a richly spiced meat and rice dish, and *haleem,* a sticky stew of pounded meat and grains. The end of Ramadan, called Eid al-Fitr, is celebrated with great fanfare. People visit the mosque, give food and alms to the poor, and prepare special sweet dishes, such as *sewian,* a vermicelli pudding, and *sheer korma,* a sweet pudding made from vermicelli, milk, saffron, sugar, spices, and ghee.

Indians of all communities devote much energy and wealth to arranging and celebrating their children's marriages. Many prewedding rituals involve offering food to prospective in-laws. The amount and quality of the food served at wedding meals are symbolic of a family's prestige. The traditional wedding banquet was prepared by caterers and held in a large tent. Guests sat in long rows with banana leaves in front of them, while teams of servers ladled food onto the leaves. Today, however, wealthy and even middle-class people hold wedding receptions in large hotels, where the food is served buffet style and people sit on chairs and at tables.

When there is a death in a Hindu family, all eating and cooking activities stop until the body is cremated. A household's normal food patterns are suspended for 10 to 13 days, depending on the community, and many restrictions are observed, such as taking only one meal a day, eating only vegetarian food, and eliminating spices. When the mourning period ends, a lavish feast is held for family and friends. Hindu widows traditionally become vegetarian and in the old days were expected to lead very austere lives.

## Diet and Health

"You are what you eat" is a central tenet of Indian medical and philosophical systems. The best known of these is Ayurveda (which means "science of life" in Sanskrit), the ancient indigenous Indian system of medicine that is enjoying a vogue in the West. In Ayurvedic theory, all existence is made up of five elements: earth, water, fire, air, and ether (or space). They in turn manifest themselves in three *doshas* that govern all human biological, psychological, and physiological functions. The doshas determine personality and disposition as well as basic constitutions. But they keep the body and mind healthy only as long as they can maintain their flow and balance. When the doshas are underproduced or overproduced, disease can result.

An important method of controlling doshas is proper eating. According to the legendary physician Charaka (b. 300 B.C.), "Without proper diet, medicines are of no use; with a proper diet, medicines are unnecessary." After evaluating their patients' conditions, Ayurvedic physicians prescribe certain foods to restore the flow and balance.

Moreover, food should be "alive" in order to give life to the eater. Raw food is more alive than cooked food. Leftovers should be heated up as soon as possible or, ideally, avoided altogether. Spices should be ground freshly for each use. Ayurveda is not vegetarian; in fact, meat, especially venison, is even recommended for certain ailments, as is wine.

Once a disease has developed, it is treated by an appropriate diet recommended by the physician. This regimen always begins with fasting, "the first and most important of all medicines." Once the acute stage of the disease has passed, the patient is given appropriate medicines derived from plants and herbs. Some of these ancient remedies were later adapted by Greek and Western medicine, such as reserpine, extracted from *Wauwolfia serpentina,* which is still prescribed for reducing blood pressure.

A parallel, although distinct, attitude to food is found in yoga, which is not just a series of physical



Herbs commonly used in the practice of Ayurveda. (Shutterstock)

postures but a profound philosophy of life aimed at the development of a balance between body and mind in order to reunite the individual self with the Absolute. People who aspire to spiritual advancement are supposed to eat vegetarian *sattvic* foods that render the mind pure and calm—fresh fruits and vegetables, wheat, rice, cow milk, cucumber, green vegetables, nuts, and clarified butter—and avoid onion and garlic as well as meat. *Rajasic* foods, recommended for warriors, stimulate energy and creativity but also passion and aggressiveness. They include fish, chilies, wild game, goat, eggs, coffee and tea, white sugar, and spices. *Tamasic* foods fill the mind with anger, darkness, confusion, and inertia and are to be avoided. They include meat, leftovers, fast foods, fried foods and processed foods, tobacco, alcohol, and drugs.

In yet another classification that is more a part of folk medicine, all foods are classified as either "hot" or "cold" and are to be eaten or avoided depending on the time of year, an individual's constitution and state of health, and other factors. However, there is no consistency or logic in the way foods are classified as hot or cold, and there are wide regional variations. For example, most lentils are considered cold foods in western India but hot foods in the north.

Muslims practice their own system of medicine, called Unani, which is based on the humoral theory of Greek medicine that assumes the presence of four humors in the body that determine physical health and temperament. Digestion plays a central role, and minor and even some major ailments can be prevented by eating certain foods and eating in a proper manner. People are also advised to eat foods that have the opposite quality to their temperament.

*Colleen Taylor Sen*

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# Indonesia

## Overview

Indonesia is located in Southeast Asia and shares land borders with Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, and East Timor. Indonesia is the world's fourth most populous nation, consisting of 240.3 million people with more than 250 ethnic groups. There are more than 17,500 islands, 6,000 of which are inhabited. Main islands include Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan (shared with Malaysia and Brunei), New Guinea (shared with Papua New Guinea), and Sulawesi. Other, smaller islands include Bali, Lombok, Sumbawa, and the Maluku Islands (the Moluccas).

Indonesia's religions include Islam (86.1%), Protestantism (5.7%), Catholicism (3%), and Hinduism (1.8%). Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, and Hinduism are the five religions officially recognized by the Indonesian government. Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world. The spread of Islam was influenced by increased trade links between Southeast Asia and the Muslim world. This increase was further generated by emerging demand for spices in late-medieval Europe. Java and Sumatra became regions where Islam was dominant by the end of the 16th century.

Many ethnic groups largely influenced the creation of unique regional food cultures in the country. Since the Srivijaya kingdom, an ancient Malay kingdom on the island of Sumatra, started trading with China in the seventh century, Indonesia has been an important trade region for its abundant natural resources. The Indian merchants brought with them the Hindu and Buddhist religions as well as dried spices such as cardamom, cumin, and caraway. Chinese traders and immigrants contributed soybeans, noodles, and the technique of stir-frying, while Arab traders introduced kebabs and Arabian spices such as dill and fennel. Meanwhile, Europeans, including the Dutch, Portuguese, and Spanish, fought each other for control of the Spice Islands of Maluku. Spanish and Portuguese traders brought produce from the New World before the Dutch finally colonized Indonesia for three and a half centuries. During that time, the colonists imported potatoes, cabbage, cauliflower, carrots, string beans, and corn in order to have food habits relatively similar to those in their home countries. The Japanese invasion during World War II ended Dutch rule of Indonesia, and two days after the surrender of Japan in August 1945, the Indonesian declaration of independence was proclaimed by Sukarno and Hatta, who were appointed president and vice president.

Indonesia has an incredible diversity of ethnicities, religions, and natural resources in its over 782,000 square miles (about 2 million square kilometers). *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), the official national motto, can be applied to the description of the modern Indonesian food culture. Even within a single province, many distinctive food cultures exist. Today, Indonesian food culture continues to influence the cuisine of its neighboring countries such as Malaysia and Singapore.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Muhammad and Ani, a young Minangkabau couple, live in Jakarta Selatan (South Jakarta). They are originally from Sumatera Barat (West Sumatra) and are devout

Muslims. Muhammad owns a small business, and Ani helps in his business. Muhammad and Ani attempt to preserve their traditional Minangkabau food culture while living in Jakarta. In the Minangkabau culture, people have three meals a day, and food is normally prepared in midday to be consumed as lunch, dinner on that day, and breakfast the following morning. Ingredients are purchased in a local market near their house. The main ingredients of Minangkabau food include rice, fish, coconut, and chili peppers. With Muhammad's middle-class income, they can also afford to purchase beef and chicken for their meat dishes. They never eat pork, which is a *haram* (unlawful) food for Muslims.

Around 7:30 A.M., they have breakfast, which consists of fried banana with boiled glutinous rice and grated coconut. Muhammad loves to sip *teh-telur,* a mixture of raw egg and Sumatran tea they brought from their hometown. Lunch is the most important meal in the day for Muhammad and Ani. The core component of their lunch is rice. Ani spends a couple of hours to make hot and delicious *rendang,* a traditional Minangkabau meat dish made of beef cooked in a generous amount of coconut milk and spices such as ginger, galangal, turmeric leaf, lemongrass, and red chilies. *Kangkung* (water spinach) boiled with coconut milk is also served as a side dish.

The durian season has started, and Muhammad and Ani enjoy durian as a midafternoon snack and feel slightly nostalgic. Durian trees were right next to their house when they grew up in West Sumatra. Now Ani goes to a local market to get fresh durians. The durian is a huge fruit with a fearsome spiked shell. Inside it is yellowish and creamy with an aroma that is reminiscent of stinky cheese or feces, but it is nonetheless delicious.

Around 6:30 P.M. guests, originally from East Java, arrive in their house and enjoy rendang, tempeh (fermented soybeans), and kangkung. When Ani was in West Sumatra, she never cooked tempeh, which is originally from Java. Now, in Jakarta, Ani frequently enjoys tempeh as a relatively inexpensive and nutritious protein source. Papaya and rambutan (a spiked fruit similar to the lychee), another favorite fruit of Indonesians, are purchased in a local market and served at the dinner table. Muhammad, Ani, and their guests talk about a new Chinese restaurant located inside a shopping mall in Kuningan, a fast-growing district in Jakarta's Golden Triangle. Because of globalization, Chinese foods have become very popular in Jakarta. Historically, Chinese brought soy sauce, soybean cake, Chinese vegetables, and stir-frying ingredients and techniques, contributing to the present Indonesian cuisine. Today, middle-class Indonesians in urban areas, such as Muhammad and Ani, experience both authentic Chinese foods at fancy restaurants and delicious street foods of Chinese origin at *warung* (food-hawker stalls).

## Major Foodstuffs

Indonesia has a huge diversity of ethnicities, religions, and natural resources. About 6,000 species of plants are used in local traditional foods.

### *Rice*

Indonesia is one of the world's leading rice producers. Just as in other Asian countries, rice is also a main staple food throughout the country, with more than 440 pounds (200 kilograms) per person consumed each year. Rice is perceived to be essential for survival, to be easy to store and cook, and to give strength during pregnancy and delivery. In Bahasa Indonesia, the official national language of Indonesia, there are four different words for rice: *Padi* is rice on the stalks, while *gabah* is unhulled rice that is separated from the stalks. When it is hulled, it is then called *beras.* Finally, *nasi* is the cooked end product. Also, the word for cooked rice (*nasi*) is synonymous with the word for a meal. There are two common types of rice consumed in Indonesia: *nasi putih* (long-grain white rice), which is served as a plain cooked rice, and *nasi ketan* (glutinous rice), which is used for making cakes and snacks. During harsh times, cassava, which is perceived to be of lower quality than rice in some parts of the country, is substituted for rice. Interestingly, when the price of rice increased during the economic crisis of 1997, rice consumption increased.

### *Other Starches*

Sago (a starch that accumulates in the pith of the sago palm stem), corn, and cassava are also con-



Boy working at a rice paddy, Bali, Indonesia. (Corel)

sumed as carbohydrate-rich foods in some parts of the country. Sago and corn are commonly consumed in the eastern part of the country, such as in Papua, Maluku, and Sulawesi. Cassava and sweet potatoes became important staple foods in Maluku and Papua. *Kerupuk,* cassava chips, are popular and consumed as a side dish or snack in Indonesia.

### *Animal Proteins*

Islam precludes the use of pork in many parts of the country. The main animal meats consumed by Muslims include beef, chicken, and goat. The Hindu Balinese consume pork, including *babi guling* (roasted suckling pig), and avoid beef. *Sate* (kebabs) is a common meat dish, including Indonesian sweet and sour beef sate with peanut sauce (*sate daging sapi manis pedas sambal kacang*). *Sate kambing* (goat sate) and *sate ayam* (chicken sate) are also popular. A chicken soup with noodles, called *soto ayam,* is a popular soup in the country. Each household has its own recipe that has been passed down from generation to generation.

Indonesia is also known as a maritime country. Its national fish consumption was 57 pounds (26 kilograms) per capita in 2008 according to the *Jakarta Post*. Fish and shellfish, including shrimp, mussels, crab, and squid, are often prepared with abundant seasonings such as coconut, tamarind, chili peppers, and herbs.

### *Plant Sources*

Nuts and pulses, especially soybeans, are important protein sources for many Indonesians. In addition to *tafu* (tofu), which is originally from other Asian countries, tempeh, a fermented soybean cake using *Rhizopus* molds as a starter, is uniquely Indonesian. The use of a fermentation processing technique may be attributed to the adaptation of tofu to

the tropical climate of the country. Originally from Java, tempeh became popular throughout the nation in the 20th century. Peanuts, originally from South America, have become an important part of the Indonesian cuisine. Peanuts are used for sauces for sate, *gado-gado* (a vegetable salad with peanut sauce), and other traditional Indonesian dishes.

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***Gado-Gado***

***Sambal Kacang* (Peanut Sauce)**

1 c roasted peanuts

3 large cloves garlic, chopped

4 shallots, chopped

1 tsp shrimp paste

Salt to taste

2 tbsp peanut or vegetable oil

1 tsp red chili powder

1 tsp brown sugar

1 tbsp soy sauce

2 c water

1 tbsp lemon juice

1. Grind the roasted peanuts into a fine powder using a coffee grinder.

2. Blend the garlic, shallots, shrimp paste, and salt in a food processor to make a paste. Heat the oil in a medium-sized nonstick frying pan. Fry the blended paste in the oil for 3 minutes on medium heat. Be careful not to burn the paste.

3. Add the chili powder, brown sugar, soy sauce, and water to the paste. Bring the mix to a boil, then add the ground peanuts. Simmer about 20 minutes or until the sauce becomes thick. Stir occasionally.

4. Add lemon juice just before use.

**Vegetables**

1 c cauliflower florets

1 medium carrot, peeled and thinly sliced

1 c cabbage, shredded

1 c snow peas

1 c bean sprouts

**Garnish**

4 lettuce leaves

A few sprigs of watercress

2 medium potatoes, boiled in their skins, then peeled and sliced

½ cucumber, thinly sliced

4 eggs, hard-boiled

4 green onions, sliced diagonally

Bring about 2½ quarts of water to a boil. Place the cauliflower and carrots in the boiling water, and boil about 2 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, remove them and place in a colander. Rinse under cold water until cool.

Repeat the procedure with the cabbage, snow peas, and bean sprouts, but let them stay in the boiling water for just 30 seconds. Drain well.

To serve, arrange the lettuce and watercress around the edge of a serving dish. Then place the vegetables in the middle of the dish. Arrange the boiled eggs, sliced potatoes, and sliced cucumber on top.

Drizzle the warm sambal kacang over the top, and sprinkle with the green onion.

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Indonesians enjoy a variety of unique tropical fruits such as durians, mangosteens, rambutans, passion fruit, jackfruit (often eaten young), and tamarinds. Other tropical fruits consumed in many parts of the world, such as mangoes, papayas, and bananas, are also popular in Indonesia. The durian, native to Indonesia, is called the "king of fruits." Locals enjoy eating fresh durians that have been ripened on the tree. The flavor of durian may be unfamiliar to most people who are not from Southeast Asia, but locals enjoy the flavor of the durian very much, and even some tourists fall in love with it. The exotic and complex odor of the durian comes from different sulfur and ester compounds.

Many fruits are cooked or used for juice in Indonesia. *Pisang goreng,* Indonesian banana fritters, is a popular snack across the nation. Soursop, called *sirsak,* is used to make fresh juice. Avocado "juice" with chocolate syrup (*jus apulkat*) is another popular drink unique to Indonesia, more like a smoothie

since an avocado cannot be juiced. Passion fruit syrup, called *sirup markisa,* is a specialty in Medan, North Sumatra.

Many types of vegetables are also consumed in Indonesia. Vegetables and spices in Indonesia are closely associated with the country's immigrant history. The Dutch introduced cabbage, cauliflower, carrots, string beans, and potatoes to Indonesia. Chinese traders brought mustard greens, mung beans, and Chinese cabbage. Kangkung (water spinach) is a popular aquatic green and has a pleasant flavor and texture.

Many spices and herbs are also used throughout the country. The Indonesian islands of Maluku, also called the Spice Islands, contributed to the introduction of native spices to Indonesian cuisine—of the greatest culinary world importance are cloves from Ternate and Tidore and nutmeg from Ambon (Amboyna). India also brought cumin, coriander, ginger, and caraway to the country. Dill and fennel came with Arab traders. Today, common spices and herbs include turmeric, cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon, ginger, galangal, lemongrass, *salam* leaves (also called Indonesian bay leaf), and lemon leaves.

Finally, coconut is an important staple food in many parts of Indonesia and is extensively used for meat and vegetable dishes, desserts, and street foods. The extensive use of coconut milk is especially found in Minangkabau cuisine (in West Sumatra), as well as in Minahasan (in North Sulawesi) cuisine. It is a great lubricator and provides oil, flavor, and texture when it is thickened.



Traditional Indonesian soup made with rice and coconut milk, *lontong opor.* (Willy Setiadi | Dreamstime.com)

### *Beverages*

Indonesia is famous for its high-quality coffee. It is currently the fourth-largest coffee producer, following Brazil, Vietnam, and Colombia. Coffee beans have mainly been grown on the islands of Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi since the 17th century when the first coffee plantations of arabica were established under Dutch rule. Today, Indonesia produces mainly robusta coffee, around 80 percent of its total output. At the same time, the international market is dominated by arabica coffee, accounting for 70 percent of global demand.

*Kopi luwak* is a coffee product unique to Indonesia. Kopi luwak is made from coffee berries that are eaten by, and pass through, the digestive tract of the Asian civet cat and are then extracted from its excrement. Recent research has demonstrated that the animal's digestion process makes the coffee beans harder, more brittle, and darker in color than the same type of bean that hasn't been eaten. Because producing kopi luwak is a very labor-intensive process, kopi luwak is very expensive, ranging from $100 to $600 per pound, and is exported to the United States, Japan, and Europe.

## Cooking

Each island and region has its own culinary characteristics. The people of Java, on the one hand, are known for their generous use of sugar in their cooking. On the other hand, the Sumatrans usually enjoy extremely hot foods. In general, common methods for preparing food across the islands include frying, grilling, simmering, steaming, and stewing, often with coconut milk. *Oseng-oseng* and *tumis* (cooking in small amounts of cooking oil and water) and *sayur bening* (cooking in water with added refined sugar) are also common cooking methods used in Indonesia.

While many Indonesians living in Jakarta may have access to ready-made processed foods, many

who live in rural areas still cook everyday meals in a traditional way. Many Indonesians use firewood for cooking, and few own a refrigerator. A gender difference in food preparation exists in Indonesia. Women in general cook everyday meals. In Minangkabau, men prepare beef dishes for special occasions. At the same time, the head chefs in all Minang restaurants are men.

Rice is an important part of the Indonesian meal. Rice is steamed and commonly served with other side dishes. Besides plain rice, nasi goreng is a popular fried rice in Indonesia. Rice, especially glutinous rice, is also used to make traditional cakes and snacks.

Vegetables are often steamed, fried, or boiled. They are also eaten raw. Gado-gado is a popular Javanese vegetable salad with peanut sauce. Herbs and spices are cooked to make *sambal,* a condiment popular in Indonesia and other Asian countries. *Sambal ulak* (spiced chili paste) is made of red chilies, onions, garlic, sugar, lime peel, oil, and salt. *Sambal rerasi* is a popular shrimp paste used for many Indonesian dishes. Sambal is used for meat, fish, and vegetable dishes. It is also added to fruits to make a spicy fruit salad called *rujak.*

Coconut provides oil, flavor, and texture when it is thickened. It is extensively used in some parts of the country, such as Minangkabau. Fish and meat are cooked with coconut milk and spices. Rendang is a great example of a meat dish cooked with a generous amount of coconut, herbs, and spices. Minced meat is cooked with herbs and spices and is simmered gradually on low heat until the coconut milk is reduced. In Java, people enjoy cooking meat and vegetables in a *wajan* (wok) with a generous amount of coconut milk and spices.

## Typical Meals

It is difficult to describe a typical meal in Indonesia, which has such great diversity of regional cuisines. The meal patterns also vary across the country. For example, while patterns of three mealtimes a day are common among the Minangkabau people, two main meals are found in rural West Java. Breakfast is an important meal for most Indonesians. Rice is a major food item for breakfast in most parts of the country and is served in different forms. One of the popular dishes served for breakfast is *lontong sayur,* which consists of cooked vegetables in coconut milk with rice cake. *Lontong* is an Indonesian rice cake. The vegetables and fruits used for lontong sayur include chayote (*labu siam*), long beans, young jackfruit, green papaya, and carrots. *Bubur* (porridge), especially *bubur ayam* (chicken porridge), is another popular breakfast item. Indonesians also enjoy nasi goreng, an Indonesian fried rice, and *nasi pecel,* a Javanese rice dish served with cooked vegetables and peanut sauce, for breakfast.

Lunch is the most important meal of the day for many Indonesians. The core component of their lunch is steamed rice. Indonesians eat steamed rice with a meat, chicken, fish, egg, goat, or soybean dish, as well as with vegetables, soup, and sambal. These main dishes vary across the nation. Pork dishes, such as babi guling (roast suckling pig), are consumed in Bali. In Maluku and Papua, where sago palm, cassava, and sweet potatoes are the staple foods, *papeda* (thick sago porridge) is a popular dish consumed with fish. An Indonesian supper is lighter than lunch, and something leftover from lunch is often consumed for supper.

Snacks are consumed between the two large meals in the morning or afternoon. Or the same foods eaten as snacks can also be served after a meal as dessert. In urban areas, snacks are more varied and consumed more often than in rural villages. *Pisang goreng* (banana fritters), *tape ketan* (fermented sticky rice), *tape telor* (fermented cassava), and *klepon* (rice cake with grated coconut) are some popular snacks.

## Eating Out

Eating out at a restaurant is still not very common among Indonesians. However, just like other Asian countries, Indonesia is proud of its variety of street foods for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and light snacks, which are sold by street vendors or at a warung (a local food stall), the social center of villages and towns in Indonesia. In big cities, in addition to local foods, many traditional dishes from various

regions across the nation are served at warung. The types of street or warung food offered vary across the islands, but there are some universal street foods found throughout the country. *Bakso,* or meatballs, one of the most popular street foods in Indonesia, are usually served in a soup bowl with noodles, fried *wan ton,* vegetables, and condiments. *Soto* (soup) and sate (kebabs) are other popular street foods that demonstrate a regional variation. For example, *banjar soto,* from South Kalimantan, is spiced with lemongrass and sour, hot sambal, accompanied with potato cakes, whereas *Bandung soto* is a clear beef soup with daikon pieces.

It has been argued that the Javanese cuisine has dominated because thousands of Javanese migrate to other regions every year and often make a living by selling foods. Hence, soto ayam, *sate madura* (chicken on skewers), and *mie bakso* (meatball soup) are found at warung outside the island of Java.

When it comes to more formal restaurants, both locals and tourists enjoy *nasi Padang* restaurants, which serve a Minang cuisine that originates from West Sumatra. They are famous for their spicy food and their unique way of serving and "recycling" the food. Padang restaurants can be found throughout the country. In a nasi Padang restaurant, dozens of small dishes filled with spicy and flavorful foods are displayed on the table. These foods include dishes such as *gulai ikan* (fish curry), *sambal cumi* (squid in spicy sauce), fried tempeh, soto Padang (crispy beef in spicy soup), and sate Padang (a Padang-style *satay* with a yellow sauce). The best-known Padang dish is *rendang sapi,* a spicy beef stew with coconut milk. Customers have many dishes to choose from and pay only for the dishes that they have eaten.

Due to globalization, locals in urban areas have started to enjoy eating out at a restaurant much more often than before. Numerous American fast-food chains and expensive Japanese restaurants are now found in big cities such as Jakarta. Chinese restaurants, whether sophisticated ones at five-star hotels and at huge multistory office buildings or modest noodle parlors, are perhaps one of the most popular non-Indonesian restaurants in Indonesia. Food hawkers also serve Chinese foods at a modest price. Chop suey, fried noodles, noodle soup, and rice porridge are just a few examples of delicious Chinese foods sold by hawkers.

## Special Occasions

There are plenty of holidays related to religion in Indonesia. Ramadan (Puasa) is the most important time of the year for Muslims in Indonesia. After fasting from dawn to dusk, people get together with their families and friends and enjoy delicacies for breaking the fast, or *buka puasa,* at the Ramadan bazaar or at home. After a monthlong observance of fasting, Muslims in Indonesia celebrate Eid al-Fitr (called *Lebaran* or *Hari Raya Puasa*) with special dishes such as *ketupat* (blocks of rice cooked in coconut leaves), rendang, and *dodol* (a sweet toffee made of glutinous rice, coconut milk, and sugar).

Bali, the most popular island for tourists in Indonesia, is home to the largest Indonesian Hindu population. Because of that, the Balinese Hindu elaborately celebrate Hari Raya Nyepi, the Hindu New Year. It is a day of silence, fasting, and meditation for many people in Bali, and tourists are not allowed to leave their hotel on that day. On New Year's Eve, food is prepared for the following day (particularly homemade pastries and sweetmeats), when Hindus refrain from all activities, including food preparation. Streets are deserted.

Selamatan is a special occasion unique to Indonesia. It is not a religious feast. Rather, it is a way of expressing family and neighborhood solidarity before a significant event. *Selamatan* means thanksgiving, blessing, and grace. Following the prayer, *nasi tumpeng,* a cone-shaped mountain of steamed yellow or white rice, is sliced at the top and served. White rice is cooked in coconut, and the yellow rice is colored with turmeric, a popular spice in Indonesia.

Every year, Indonesians celebrate Hari Proklamasi Kemerdekaan (Independence Day) on August 17. It is a fun event for children. *Krupuk* (shrimp chips)-eating contests and other events for children take place. Women make nasi tumpeng surrounded by various foods such as *sayur urap* (spicy vegetable salads), roasted chicken, coconut beef, *bergedel*



Traditional Indonesian rice dish called *nasi tumpeng.* (Deepta Sateesh | Dreamstime)

(potato patties), salt fish, and dried tempeh to celebrate this important day for every Indonesian.

## Diet and Health

While there are approximately 2.56 physicians per 1,000 people in the United States, the physician/patient ratio is much lower in Indonesia, only 0.13 physicians per 1,000 people, according to 2006 statistics. People, especially rural women in Indonesia, primarily rely on home remedies to prevent and treat illness within the family. *Dukun* (traditional healers) also play an important role in the traditional medicine system.

*Jamu* is a traditional herbal medicine commonly consumed by Indonesians. Different types of jamu are used to maintain physical fitness, as well as to cure certain kinds of illness. Jamu has been sold in the form of powders, creams, pills, and capsules, and its market has expanded to outside of the country. The ingredients include ginger, cinnamon, turmeric, galangal, papaya leaf, and guava leaves and flowers.

Research has shown that some pregnant women consume *jamu cabe puyang,* which reduces tiredness; bitter jamu (*jamu pahitan*), which increases appetite; and *jamu sawanan,* which prevents disease. However, some women avoid the use of jamu during pregnancy to avoid possible side effects, including the contamination of the amniotic fluid.

Similar to other developing countries, Indonesia is experiencing a nutrition transition, which is characterized by rapid changes in dietary habits, as well as a double burden of disease, in which noncommunicable diseases are becoming more prevalent while infectious diseases remain undefeated. Indonesia's leading causes of death have shifted from infectious diseases to more chronic diseases, especially cardiovascular disease. In 2002, cardiovascular disease was the leading cause of death, accounting for 22 percent of all mortality. Infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and lower respiratory infections remain major causes of death in Indonesia. Diarrheal diseases and pneumonia are still leading causes of death among children under five. In general, there has been a rapid increase in consumption of meat, eggs, milk, and processed foods, while the consumption of cereal products has decreased.

There has also been a nutrition transition for indigenous people, who used to be foragers. For example, the Punan people who reside in Kalimantan have drastically changed their dietary habits through globalization and urbanization. They used to consume sago palm, their staple food, along with berries, wild boars, and other wild animals. Nowadays, the consumption of fat and processed foods has increased, and overweight has become an issue among periurban Punan women.

Micronutrient deficiencies, called "hidden hunger," remain a public health issue among certain populations. A recent study suggests that nonpregnant women are at greater risk of clinical vitamin

A deficiency, such as night blindness, in families that spend more on rice and less on animal and plant-based foods. Prevention of iodine deficiency continues to be a challenge in the country, where fortification of salt with iodine has not always been successful in some areas of the country. Moreover, the recent food price increase has affected the nutritional status of people in Indonesia. The cost of staple soybean-based products such as tofu and tempeh rose by about 50 percent in 2008. Child malnutrition, including hidden hunger, is on the rise.

Although fat consumption has increased slightly, there is a movement to maintain the traditional diet in Indonesia rather than adopting highly processed global or fast foods. A recent study of contemporary Minangkabau food culture in West Sumatra suggests that their traditional use of coconut may encourage the consumption of fish and vegetables, and, therefore, a well-balanced diet.

*Keiko Goto*

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# Japan

## Overview

Japan is a group of over 3,600 islands that is 2,174 miles (3,500 kilometers) long, roughly the area of California but without its expanse of habitable terrain. Steep mountains cover over 80 percent of the four main islands of (from north to south) Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu. Surrounded on all sides by the sea or the mountains, the Japanese naturally look to these sources for their food and lyrically refer to food as the delights of the seas and the mountains (*umi no sachi, yama no sachi*). Hokkaido as well as northern and western Honshu have a cold temperate climate with heavy snowfall for over half of the year, beginning as early as October and melting only in April. The rest of Honshu and Shikoku have a cool temperate climate, while southern Kyushu and the Okinawan islands have subtropical to tropical climates. The four seasons are regular and clearly defined. Monsoon rains occur between May and July. There is also a clear set of seasons in the seas around Japan: Certain species of fish appear at regular intervals and are best eaten at particular times.

Close to 100 percent of the population is ethnically Japanese. There are well-established historical minorities: Ainu, Koreans, Chinese, and Ryukyuans. Recent immigrants—from Brazil, Southeast Asia, and Europe and North America—have also added to the mix. Japanese religion is a blend of Buddhism and a native polytheistic religion called Shinto. Both emphasize purity, naturalness, and simplicity in daily life, and this philosophy has had a major effect on food-preparation practices and preferences, including, notably, less consumption of meat and milk products. Over 90 percent of the population is urban (until the start of the 20th century, some 80 percent were rural), and only about 5 percent of the population engages in full-time farming.

The modern Japanese family is small: usually one or two children. Most families live in what, by American standards, are very cramped quarters: three rooms, one or two serving for living, studying, and sleeping and one combination dining-kitchen area. The living zone is usually floored in fine woven straw mats (*tatami*) and is converted to a sleeping zone at night by folding any furniture away and bringing out sleeping quilts (*futon*) from built-in storage closets. The dining-kitchen area and one room often have Western-style furniture: a dining table, chairs, and armchairs. The traditional style of living "on the floor" is being superseded by more Western-type (though still Japanese-sized) accommodations and furnishings.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Ken and Chie Tanaka live in a middle-class neighborhood of Tokyo. Their apartment is in a 10-story building that is part of a huge apartment complex near the terminal of a city feeder line of the railway. The complex includes a large shopping precinct (*shôten-gai*) with a large department store and several supermarkets, along with a covered market selling everything from food to electronics. Ken works in an office in downtown Tokyo and commutes for an hour daily. Chie works part-time in a nearby small business. Their only child, Matsu, is seven years old and attends

primary school. Their lifestyle is typical of most blue- and white-collar salaried workers.

They start their weekdays around 7 A.M., with breakfast consisting of bread or toast, jams, a fried egg, and a small sausage, along with coffee for the adults. Matsu gets orange juice and cold cereal. On Sundays Chie sometimes cooks a Japanese-style breakfast of grilled salted salmon slices, crisp nori seaweed, fresh rice, miso soup, and fermented beans (*natto*), the last of which Chie, who is from western Japan, does not partake of.

They each eat lunch at work or school. Matsu has a lunch that Chie prepared according to school guidelines: a small fried cutlet, a seaweed roll, a small mound of pickles, a piece of fruit, and a candy bar. Most of these she buys ready-made from the supermarket, which offers a wide range of these side dishes for children and adults. The food is placed in half of a small lunch box, and she fills the compartment in the other half with cooked rice. Chie prepares a similar though larger lunch box for herself on some days. On others she and her coworkers order bowls of noodles from a neighborhood shop. Ken usually leaves work for about half an hour at lunchtime. He goes to one of the eateries around the office. He pays for a set meal of grilled fish or meat, rice, pickles, and soup and receives a token in exchange. The waiter accepts the token and brings the meal, and after a quick meal, Ken heads back to the office.

Chie shops on the way home from work, splitting purchases between the neighborhood supermarket and the small shops and stalls in the market. For exotics and special occasions she may shop in the basement supermarket of the large department store, where prices are higher but there is a large range of luxury foods, including tropical fruits and specialties from Japan's provinces.

The family tries to eat dinner together, but Ken often works late. Dinner may be cooked rice, grilled or cooked fish or meat, soup, cooked vegetables and pickles, and a sweet for dessert, sometimes from a ready-made pack. It may also be Western foods such as spaghetti or pizza, or a Japanese variation of curry called *kareraisu,* which Matsu adores.

On weekends the family tries to eat together and often goes out to one of the specialty restaurants in the shopping precinct. Sometimes they simply order out at one or another of their favorite neighborhood restaurants: noodles in soup or sushi. They also do more serious shopping for food on the weekend: Like many families they have a large freezer compartment designed to accept the standardized ready-made meals they buy from the supermarket once a month. Heavy items such as 22-pound (10-kilogram) bags of rice and plastic barrels of miso and pickles will be delivered by neighborhood shops. Chie had signed up for a fresh produce delivery service, which provided vegetables and mushrooms from named farmers, but rising costs have forced her to terminate this.

## Major Foodstuffs

Traditionally, the three major sources of calories in Japan were rice (the most highly prized food), vegetables (either cooked or pickled), and fish (either fresh, pickled, dried, or made into fish sauce). The staple is still rice cooked without any flavoring. Rice is sometimes prepared as fried rice (that is, after cooking, small pieces of vegetables, fish, or meat are added) or as sushi rice (slightly vinegared and either formed into a ball with a topping or tossed with bits of fish and vegetables into a sort of salad), or it is cooked with beans, taro, or some other vegetable. Special varieties of rice with a very high starch content are steamed and pounded into a gluey, doughy consistency called *mochi,* which is a requirement for many kinds of rituals. The proportion of rice in the modern meal has declined throughout Japan as foreign foods have proliferated. Households with older people probably still eat rice three times a day. Younger people tend to have rice once, perhaps twice a day.

Japanese eat a large number and variety of noodles. Japanese-style noodles, made of wheat or buckwheat, are eaten in soup or with dipping sauces, hot or cold. The choice of meat, seafood, or vegetable toppings is vast. Italian-style pasta is widely eaten. Wheat-based Chinese-style noodles (*râmen*) are highly popular in soup or stir-fried. Popular garnishes include slices of flavored bamboo shoots, fresh bean sprouts, and thin slices of roast pork.




Ameyoko market in Ueno District in Tokyo, Japan. Ameyoko, once an entertainment district for U.S. Marines, now an exotic, classic Asian market. (Shutterstock)

Variations include fermented soybean paste (miso) flavoring and a seafood garnish. Bread is commonly eaten for breakfast instead of rice, and as a snack. Bakeries make a variety of rolls and buns, both plain and with fancy fillings ranging from cheese and curry to melon and green-tea flavors.

Soybeans were an important source of protein in premodern periods and are still an important food component. Green soybean pods (edamame) are cooked and eaten as a snack, but most of the crop goes to produce three important ingredients: soy sauce (shoyu), tofu, and miso. Soy sauce is used to flavor food during cooking and as a table condiment. Plain tofu is an element in a variety of dishes. Small cubes garnish *misoshiru* soup and many other dishes as well. Tofu is so plastic that a great many dishes incorporate some form of tofu, which can fool the eye, and even the tongue, into believing it is meat or some kind of vegetable. Tofu also comes in the form of deep-fried cakes called *abura age,* which may be filled with meat or vegetables. Soybean milk can be gently simmered to form a film on its surface called *yuba,* used to wrap various fillings; the resulting roll is simmered in flavored broth or added to stews. Eastern Japan also favors a fermented-soybean dish called natto (beans suspended in a sticky paste), which is mixed with freshly beaten raw egg and soy sauce and poured over steaming hot rice.

Partly as a result of the adoption of Buddhism by the Japanese people in the seventh century A.D. and partly as a result of ecological considerations, the Japanese have evolved a complex and rich repertoire of purely vegetarian dishes in which a wide array of roots, fruits, seeds, leaves, bulbs, and other parts of plants are used in imaginative ways. There

are many methods to prepare, cook, pickle, and serve vegetables: Various forms of pickling, light simmering in broth, and quick poaching are the most common.

The brassicas—cabbages, radishes, and turnips—are probably the most commonly used. Other familiar vegetables are bean sprouts, carrots, onions, squashes, and Japanese leeks. More exotic and relatively less well known are chrysanthemum flowers and leaves, *konnyaku* (devil's-tongue root), taro, burdock root, yams, and Japanese angelica. Over the centuries, native vegetables have been augmented by imports that have become naturalized to become intrinsic parts of Japanese cuisine: Small purple eggplants, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, and sweet and chili peppers have been adopted, as well as young flax plants, potatoes, and European cabbage. Japanese farmers have domesticated many varieties of mushrooms, and fungi constitute a major agricultural crop. Ten varieties are widely cultivated commercially, and some are known outside Japan. Perhaps the most well known is the brown, thick-fleshed shiitake, widely available all year round, fresh or dried. It is a component of soups and stews, is grilled and eaten on its own, and serves as a garnish for other foods. *Shimeji, enokitake* (enoki), *hiratake,* tree ears, *nameko, maitake,* and button mushrooms are also common. Supplementing the cultivated fungi are those collected from the wild. The most notable of all Japanese fungi is the pine mushroom (matsutake; *Armillaria edodes*), avowedly the most delicious and aromatic of all. This fungus has only recently been successfully raised commercially. Choice matsutake are the Japanese counterpart of the European truffle.

The Japanese love fruit, and, in fact, the word used today for cakes and candy was, early in history, used for fruit. Perhaps the most beloved fruit is the mandarin orange (*mikan*), and large orchards cover many of the temperate areas in Japan. There are also several unique varieties of grapes, from the tiny-berried, intensely sweet Delaware to choice plum-sized seedless varieties. Apples, persimmons, Asian pears (*nashi*), watermelons, melons, strawberries, and exotic fruits, such as loquats, are common and have been eaten by the Japanese for centuries. Continuous agricultural improvement has resulted in new varieties such as Mutsu and Fuji apples, crisp 20th-century Asian pears, the supersized seedless Pione grape, and, a gift-giving novelty, conveniently cubic watermelons.

Fruits are sold in small mounds or baskets by greengrocers, and it is as small mounds of four or more fruit that they are offered to the deities at temples and shrines. Imported fruits are highly prized, ranging from bananas, mangoes, and pineapples from Central America and Southeast Asia to exotic fruits such as mangosteens and lychees.

## Cooking

Day-to-day cooking is usually done by housewives. Magazines, cooking clubs, and many television shows offer clues for variety and nutrition, which is very important since multigenerational households are rare. Japanese eat out a great deal, so the other major figure in food is the professional chef. Professional chefs come in many types, specializations, and even grades (like many Japanese arts, chef schools award graded ranks to their trainees). There are schools of traditional cooking, and a high-quality chef is usually able to trace his lineage from pupil to student for many generations.

Most kitchens have relatively modest cooking arrangements. Refrigerators are generally small by U.S. standards, and working surfaces are very limited. Cooking is done on a countertop gas range. Built-in ovens are rare, though houses and apartments built in the past 30 years often have built-in ranges and ovens, and larger refrigerators are becoming more common. Countertop labor-saving devices, including ovens, mochi makers, bread machines, and yogurt makers, have proliferated. Japanese kitchens include a large variety of knives. Rectangular knives with very thin blades are used for slicing and peeling vegetables. Thicker triangular blades are used for meat and fish. The edges of these tend to be beveled on one side only, which allows a better control of the cut. Most kitchens will have at least one vegetable knife and two of the triangular blades: a

short one for smaller fish and cuts, a long one for long, smooth slicing of items such as sashimi. Long chopsticks for cooking—stirring, whipping eggs, frying—and shorter ones for eating at the table are the most common implements.

To preserve the natural flavors of foods and their colors, and to present them visually in the best possible way, Japanese food often requires extensive preprocessing before cooking actually starts. Cuts have been developed to suit the characteristics of each type of vegetable and the cooking requirements for each dish. Many dishes require that a vegetable or fish be cut in a specific way to encourage even transmission of heat, ensure uniform distribution of flavor, and showcase natural textures. For example, an asymmetric and diagonal cut (*rangiri*) made by rolling a vegetable during cutting will create more facets than achieved by static square cutting, thereby exposing more of the vegetable to the hot cooking liquid. Each type of fish has its own special needs, and the good cook will be equipped with a series of very sharp knives and will need a great deal of practice to get the cut perfect: Cutting fish for sushi is quite different from cutting fish for grilling, for instance. Because of the importance of cutting, a chef is usually titled *itamae* (behind the counter), meaning the one responsible for the actual slicing of fish into its components. Since the eighth century, imperial chefs, and specialist chefs at some Shinto shrines in Kyoto, still carry out an annual ritual of slicing fish, using nothing but a pair of large chopsticks and a sharp knife.

Simmering and quick poaching are used, notably for vegetables. Fish can be served raw as sashimi or sushi. Smaller whole fish may be grilled, poached, or stewed. Meat is stir-fried, deep-fried in batter, or grilled. Chicken is often cut into small pieces and grilled on small skewers (yakitori). Long oven baking is rare.

Japanese cooks use relatively few spices. Mountain-ash berry, dried Japanese lime zest, sweet liquor (mirin), and soy sauce are often used for Japanese-style food. Western food is flavored with the full range of imported spices, though Japanese tend to prefer foods that are less aggressively seasoned.

Stews are well represented. Many are flavored with miso. They may contain meat, vegetables, fish, and mushrooms, in many combinations. Sumo wrestlers live on a diet of *chanko-nabe* stew, which includes all of the above plus mochi and liberal splashings of sake, to put on bulk.

## Typical Meals

Typical meals in Japan can be categorized as rice-centered meals (most household meals), no-rice meals (which equate often to snacks), and rice-peripheral meals (which equate to feasts). Daily home meals often (almost always in the recent past) consisted of plain cooked rice, soup, and side dishes including fish, pickles, vegetables, and sometimes meat. Nowadays, fewer Japanese eat rice at every meal. Eating out includes snacks such as noodles or confectionary. Festive meals, often eaten at special restaurants, include many side dishes but almost always end with a bowl of rice and a bowl of soup.

Breakfast in Japanese households may be Western or Japanese style. Japanese-style breakfasts are more time-consuming and are more and more confined to weekends and nonworking days. Most households, particularly those with younger couples and couples with children, eat a Western-style breakfast. Children have corn flakes or some other cereal, milk, fruit, and yogurt. Adults tend to have toast and butter, eggs (fried, scrambled, or in an omelet), and slices of vegetables such as tomato or cucumber. There is also usually a slice or two of ham or a few small sausages. Adults drink coffee and store-bought orange juice, and the children have milk.

Japanese-style breakfasts are more complex: Steamed white rice, a bowl of misoshiru soup, and pickles, usually either giant radish (*takuan*), pickled plum (*umeboshi*), or short-pickled cabbage, form the centerpieces of the meal. Sheets of dried laver (nori) cut into standard one-inch by three-inch strips are used to wrap rice and awaken the taste buds. Commonly, a Japanese-style breakfast will also include

a slice of salted grilled salmon (or some other fish) and a raw egg, which is beaten in a small bowl and poured on the hot rice. In eastern but not western Japan, a popular breakfast dish is fermented beans (natto), which are mixed with either the soup or the rice. Preparing all the little side dishes is time-consuming, and, unsurprisingly, most busy housewives, who might have to go to work themselves, prefer preparing quicker Western-style breakfasts.

The midday meal in most Japanese households is lighter than the evening meal, and more diffuse, since most household members are at work or at school. For the stay-at-homes it might mean little more than a bowl of noodles or some other light meal. Midday meals thus fall into three different types. People at home will usually eat a light meal of some sort. People at work will either bring a boxed lunch or eat at the company canteen, if there is one, or at a nearby restaurant, usually one that caters to working people and sells set lunches: salt-grilled fish, fried fish or meat, and stir-fried vegetables with rice and soup.

The main meal for most Japanese is the evening meal. The composition of such a meal varies of course according to taste, but it will almost always contain, or conclude with, plain rice. This is also likely to be an event where etiquette is preserved and where the entire family eats together, although many commuters arrive home too late to join their family at meals on weeknights.

A huge variety of box lunches (*obentô*) are available in Japanese cuisine, and they are popular for people working away from home, whether at work or traveling for leisure, as well as for special occasions. They consist of a plastic box divided into many irregular compartments, each with a few morsels of one food type. One compartment almost always contains rice, often with a pickled plum inserted to preserve freshness. Many box-lunch ingredients can be bought ready-made from department stores and supermarkets. The simplest of box lunches—*oigiri*—is little more than a ball of vinegared rice surrounding a piece of pickle or dried bonito shavings, sold in plastic containers at all supermarkets and convenience stores. More complex ones served at homes or restaurants can have many compartments, and even several stacked boxes. They are nominally intended for people who are in a hurry or are traveling. The stations of interurban trains usually have station boxed meals (*ekiben*) for sale, which are hugely popular.

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***Kamo/Niku Namban Soba* (Duck or Beef and Noodle Soup)**

4 servings of soba (buckwheat noodles) or *udon* (thick wheat noodles)

2 breasts of duck or ¼ lb beef per person, cut into 1-in. x 2-in. fillets and then very thinly sliced

1 leek, sliced into ¼-in. rounds

4 c dashi stock

1 tsp grated ginger

6 c water for the noodles, plus 1 c water

4 large Asian soup bowls

Grill the duck (if using) skin side up until the skin is golden brown. The meat of the duck will be uncooked.

Remove from the grill, and slice across the duck breast into slices about ¼ inch thick.

Warm the dashi to a mild simmer. Slide in the duck or beef, the leek, and the ginger. Keep on a very slow simmer, but do not allow it to boil.

While the duck is grilling, boil 6 cups of water in a pot. When boiling, put in the noodles. Allow water to return to a boil. Pour in an additional cup of water (and a bit more if necessary) so that the boiling subsides. As soon as the water starts boiling again, remove from the heat, drain the noodles, and divide them among the four bowls. Ladle in a measure of stock, the leeks, and finally the meat on top of the noodles. Serve immediately.

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## Eating Out

Japanese sociologists argue that the Japanese eat out a great deal because Japanese houses are small and not suited for entertaining. Whatever the cause, Japanese do like to eat out a lot and there is a bewildering array of choices. Eating-out establishments range from carts and traditional Japanese-style

restaurants (with or without geisha entertainment provided by women in formal traditional dress), through snack bars of various descriptions, to restaurants that combine foreign ideas with Japanese tastes.

Carts selling street foods are particularly common around train stations, where there are many potential customers. Street foods include *takoyaki* (chopped octopus puff-balls), *taiyaki* (waffles in the shape of a *tai* fish filled with sweet bean jam), and *manju* (Chinese steamed buns stuffed with a mixture of meat, bamboo shoots, and leeks or with sweet beans). A typical after-hours pick-me-up for tired roisterers is *oden,* a stew of brown tubes of fish paste (*chikuwa*), sweet potato and white potato slices, bundles of tied kelp (kombu), peeled boiled eggs, white and pink half-moon slices of fish paste (*kamaboko*), yuba (a skimmed soy-milk solid) tied with bow knots of dried gourd, small taro tubers (*satoimo*), and devil's foot root jelly (*konnyaku*). This is consumed with mustard and washed down with beer or sweet potato liquor (*sochu* or *shochu*—which can also be distilled from barley or rice).

There is a wide range of other foods that are more often eaten out than in. Many of these are best eaten at a counter, where the counterperson can serve morsels, sometimes one by one, and gauge the customer's satisfaction. Such foods include fresh or pickled fish on mouthfuls of vinegared rice (sushi), which comes in two varieties: Edo (Tokyo) style, made of fresh fish sliced to order and placed on rice balls, or in rolls or cones, and Osaka style, made of pickled fish and rice compressed in square molds. Sashimi are choice cuts of fresh fish. Tempura is another food best eaten at a counter, consisting of morsels of vegetables, fish, and seafood deep-fried in a light batter. This is served with a sauce of stock (dashi), grated radish, grated ginger, and light soy sauce.

Fish and other foods can be consumed in specialist *robatayaki-ya,* where diners sit around sand pits filled with glowing charcoal. Robatayaki-ya provide different grilled foods, as the taste and expertise of the cook and the demands of the customers dictate. *Yakitoriya* specialize in providing chicken bits on skewers, somewhat like the shish kebab of the Middle East. Yakitoriya are common, perhaps because the investment is small: a narrow charcoal grill, just wide enough for standard bamboo skewers, some cuts of chicken, and a refrigerator full of chilled beer, and voila! yakitori. Grill bars come in a wide variety of styles to fit any purse. Smaller shops have a more limited choice of tidbits, but the small size offers an opportunity to talk with the owner as he grills the food. Larger places have much wider menus, and new types of grilled meats and other food are added all the time. For vegetarians there is a wide array of vegetables: shiitake mushrooms, asparagus, leeks, or cubes of tofu topped with a spread of thick tea- or miso-flavored paste and then grilled (*dengaku*).



A sushi chef making sushi at a restaurant in Japan. (Shutterstock)

Shared-pot restaurants serve one-pot dishes that are notable for their conviviality. Ceramic *donabe* and cast iron *tetsunabe* are deep-bellied, covered pots used for cooking soupy stews, of which the most common version is *shabu-shabu* (roughly "swirly" or "swish"). A quantity of stock is heated, then placed in the pot over a tabletop burner. When the liquid is roiling , fish and meat are added. Each diner takes out tidbits and dips them in a dipping sauce—Japanese lime and soy sauce is very common—before conveying them to the mouth. As the stock absorbs the meaty flavor, vegetables—Chinese cabbage, shiitake mushrooms, enokitake mushrooms, sliced leeks, carrots, chrysanthemum leaves, bean sprouts, or any vegetable that will cook quickly in liquid—are added and consumed. Finally, once the soup is fully flavored, thick udon noodles, which absorb flavor well, are added and consumed as well. Sukiyaki is supposed to have originated as a quick cooking method for farmers or soldiers out in the field, who used a hoe blade as a makeshift grill. Today, it is cooked using a special cast iron, flat-bottomed pot in which thin strips of beef are cooked in sweet rice liquor (mirin), lime juice, and soy liquid and eaten dipped in beaten raw egg. The sauce is thinned with sake, and then vegetables and bean gelatin noodles (*harusame*) are added.

Japanese enjoy both Japanese (*wagashi*) and Western (*yôgashi*) confections. Japanese confections are based largely on two major ingredients. Mochi is glutinous rice that is made by steaming and then pounding sticky rice into a thick paste somewhat like chewing gum. Very similar to marzipan in Europe, mochi is very plastic: It accepts and blends flavors and colors and can be shaped into anything from lifelike peaches to little statues of dogs. Cooked beans are sweetened and serve as a common filling, and sometimes coating, for mochi



Restaurant, Tokyo, Japan. (Corel)

confections. Other sweets are made of jellies from seaweed and translucent bean noodles. Wagashi are almost universally served with green tea, often in *kisaten* (tea shops) dedicated to the purpose.

Western confectionary covers the entire range of types and geographic locations, from delicate petit fours, through the entire range of Austrian, Italian, and German cream cakes and cheesecakes, to American fruit pies. These are either made at home or, more commonly, bought in one of the many Western-style bakeries and confectionaries found in every Japanese town.

Feasts, or banquets, punctuate and are part of most social life. The standard meal consisting of rice, soup, and side dishes can also be expanded into a full banquet or feast in which the entire corpus of cooking styles available to the Japanese cook can be brought into play. Obviously such banquets are indulged in only on special occasions, and they are very rarely undertaken at home. A banquet starts with an appetizer of small delicate tidbits (*zensai*) followed by a clear soup (*suimono*) intended to awaken the appetite, and possibly some sashimi: The delicate flavor of fresh raw fish is best appreciated when one is not completely hungry but before the taste of other foods dulls the palate.

The central dishes of a banquet come in a fixed order. A grilled dish (*yakimono*) starts the process. This is followed by a soft steamed dish (*mushimono*), which contrasts with the stronger flavors of the grilled food, and then a dish of vegetables or fish simmered in stock (*nimono*). Softer foods are followed with a crisp, fried item (*agemono*), and the oil is subsequently cut and the mouth freshened by vegetables or fish dressed in vinegar sauce (*sunomono*). The banquet then concludes with a rice dish, usually plain steamed white rice but sometimes rice with included materials: beans, chestnuts, or flavoring (*gohanmono*), which is accompanied by a heavier soup, usually misoshiru, and pickles (*tsukemono*). Finally, most modern banquets conclude with a sweet (*okashi*) and green tea.

The most refined form of dining—*kaiseki*—is that surrounding the tea ceremony. The practice of ritually drinking tea was originally imported from China, where it is still practiced today. But the Japanese, partly under the influence of Buddhism, made this ritual their own. Kaiseki cooking, strongly influenced by Buddhism, eschews meat to a large degree and encourages the use of delicate morsels of food that would complement the bitter-blandness of tea, as well as the refined atmosphere of the tea ritual itself. Nature enters into the kaiseki by minute attention to the types of plates used as well as the types of foods, which are to fit each season. Brightly colored plates and bowls are used in summer, and more somber colors in winter. In the fall, there are various evocations of the season such as decorations of red maple leaves, flying geese, or chrysanthemums, which flower in October. Spring utensils feature plum blossoms or some fresh greenery. There are even differences in the shape of utensils: Summer bowls and dishes tend to be airy, open mouthed, and often flat. Winter dishes tend to be solider, with thick vertical walls, and often lidded. A full kaiseki banquet is likely to have one or more dishes for each of the categories of Japanese cooking. Unsurprisingly, a full tea ceremony and banquet can take up an entire day.

Western-style fine-dining establishments have proliferated throughout Japan, which boasts numerous Michelin-starred restaurants as well.

## Special Occasions

The Japanese enjoy and practice a variety of rituals, festivals, and holidays. In addition to traditional festivities that are related, at some level, to the divine, Japan as a nation also celebrates a number of purely civil holidays. At the core of every festive day in Japan is the concept of sharing food—often in the form of a full feast but, at a minimum, a sharing of rice or even a bite of seaweed, and wine, with the deities (*kami*) or ancestors (*hotoke*). As a consequence, few Japanese festivals do not include food, whether formally presented at a shrine or temple ritual, eaten at home with family or friends, and perhaps a visiting deity, or consumed from one or more of the street stalls that populate every festival.

New Year (*oshôgatsu;* December 31–January 3) is both a national and religious holiday, the most

important of the year. Most businesses close for a few days. On the eve of the New Year (December 31), shrines and temples hold special services, and many people dressed in kimono visit a favorite shrine and temple, particularly at midnight, when the temple bells toll out the 108 Buddhist sins. This is the time to consume special New Year foods (*oseichi*), to decorate the entrances of homes with cut green bamboo poles wrapped in straw rope and decorated with pine branches and oranges (*kado matsu*), and to visit friends and family. New Year food is traditionally packed in special three-tiered square lacquered box trays (*jûbako*) decorated with an indication of the season: pine needles or branches, plum blossoms, and bamboo leaves, all indicating the approach of spring and the turn of the year. The foods themselves refer to the season as well, whether through a well-placed pun on the name (kombu [kelp] = *yorokobu* [felicitations]) or by their color or shape. Red, green, white, and gold colors predominate. For example, slices of red and white fish paste (kamaboko) might be alternated in a checkerboard pattern. Pink cooked whole prawns might be placed next to erect, hollowed-out spears of cucumber filled with brilliant reddish-orange fresh salmon roe. Mandarin oranges, whose plentiful seeds hint at fecundity, might be filled with brilliant gold-colored jelly. Lotus root, chicken breast fillets, and taro bulbs or burdock roots are fried a golden color or glazed with golden sauce and added to the trays. The arrangements of these boxes are so delicate and pleasing to the eye that many households keep the traditional three (sometimes four) box trays for display only, bringing in piled plates for actual consumption. Many of the individual foods are extremely time-consuming to make. Threading boiled golden gingko nuts individually on a pine needle, or cutting carrot slices into the shape of a plum blossom, requires a great deal of time and skill. So, in modern Japan, one can purchase either an entire tray or the more finicky preparations from the many supermarkets and particularly from the elite department stores.

Perhaps the single most important food of the New Year is *ozoñi.* This New Year's soup is based on the finest *ichibandashi* (stock made from shaved bonito and kombu), often flavored with a strip of decoratively cut Japanese lime whose intense aroma fills the bowl. Besides the stock, the single most common ingredient in ozoñi is pounded and roasted rice cake.



Japanese ozoñi, a traditional soup served for New Year's celebrations. (Shutterstock)

Other national festival days include the Doll Festival (Hinamatsuri) during which parents of girls set out the *hina-ningyo* dolls, which portray an ancient imperial court, complete with emperor and empress, ladies-in-waiting, ministers, and musicians. Young girls entertain one another with drinks of *amazake* (a sweet, slightly fermented drink made of rice gruel), colored rice cakes, and red rice cooked with beans. One month after Hinamatsuri is the boys' turn. During the Boy's Festival (Tangonosekku) people eat rice dumplings

(*chimaki dango*) of special rich rice wrapped in a bamboo leaf in the shape of a demon's horn, and also steamed and pounded-rice cakes wrapped in oak leaves called *kashiwa mochi.* During spring, office parties, families, and friends will have formal blossom-viewing picnics (*hanami*). Seasonal foods, including cakes in cherry-blossom shape, can be bought from many shops and are consumed under the blossoming trees. Many Japanese families celebrate Obon, the day of the dead, by a visit to the family graves, where the favorite foods of the recently departed are offered on the graves.

Life-cycle events—birth, adulthood, marriage, death, and a number of others—are celebrated in Japan and characterized by specific foods whose shape, coloration, or associations recalls the event. For example, families moving to a new neighborhood will often offer their neighbors—the three houses opposite and one on either side (*mukai sangen, ryodonari*), as the Japanese saying has it—packets of noodles (or tickets for a free meal at the neighboring noodle shop). *Soba* means both noodles and neighbors, and by offering the gift they are asking to become members of the local community. Special ritual foods may be offered to children on their third month, and to adults upon reaching their 60th birthday.

**Red and White Salad**

¼ c dashi stock

¼ c rice vinegar

1 tbsp sugar

½ daikon radish, peeled (use the upper half of the radish)

carrots, peeled, roughly the same quantity as the radish

2-in. piece of kombu (kelp), soaked in cool water for 15 minutes (the dry kombu will expand into a large leathery sheet)

Make the sweet vinegar the day before: Warm the dashi. Add the vinegar, then dissolve the sugar in the liquid. Allow to cool.

The next day, with a sharp, thin vegetable knife, cut the radish into a four-sided prism shape. Slice the prism into ¼-inch slices. Cut each slice into ¼-inch strips. Cut the carrots the same way.

Place the vegetables in a bowl, salt thoroughly, then knead with the hands for about 5 minutes. Allow to rest for a few minutes, then squeeze handfuls of the vegetables gently over a colander, and discard all liquid. Place the squeezed vegetables into a clean bowl.

While radish and carrots are resting, drain the kombu and slice it into thin strips. Combine all the vegetables.

Add one-third of the sweet vinegar. Mix by hand, then lightly squeeze handfuls of the vegetables over a colander once again. Discard the liquid. Return the vegetables to a clean bowl (glass is ideal).

Add the rest of the vinegar to the vegetables. Add the kombu. Mix all ingredients by hand, then allow to rest overnight before serving as side dish or salad.

## Diet and Health

Most Japanese recognize that the key to healthy life can be found in two things: exercise and diet. The Japanese diet as a whole is apparently, with some reservations, extremely healthy. Scientific evidence is emerging that certain foods—kombu and nori, tea, shiitake mushrooms—have health benefits above and beyond their caloric value. The evidence is clear, if nothing else, in the actuarial tables. Notwithstanding the stresses of living in modern Japan, the Japanese consistently come at the head of the life-expectancy tables. Some of the features of Japanese cuisine that have a positive effect on health include the following:

**A high proportion of vegetables in the diet:** Traditional side dishes are largely based on lightly cooked vegetables: blanching, light steaming, and quick cooking in preference to heavy frying or long stewing. Thus, both caloric value and vitamins are maintained, and more roughage persists in the diet.

**Low fat consumption:** On the whole Japanese prefer to simmer or grill foods. Deep-frying, though available, is only one of a range of food-preparation methods.

**High fish consumption:** Japanese have traditionally consumed fatty fish, leading to an increase in high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol and a decrease in low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol. Seaweed—lavers, kelps, and true seaweed—which Japanese consume on a regular basis, has beneficial properties, apparently including anticarcinogenic abilities.

**Freshness:** The Japanese insistence, on the whole, on consuming fresh food, or at least food that has come as quickly as possible from the producer to the consumer (problems of hygiene and modern mass production aside), probably has beneficial aspects as well.

**Small servings:** Small portions, and lengthy service of desirable meals, have meant that the diner has the time, the emotional resources, and the leisure to savor each morsel and to digest food properly. Japanese meals, consisting of many small portions, ensure that the digestive process is not being put under stress.

**Health-promoting foods:** There seems to be substantial evidence of active health promotion by foods as diverse as tea, kelp (kombu), and shiitake mushrooms, among others. Tea—green (unfermented), oolong (semifermented and smoked), and black (fermented) types—is regularly consumed by most Japanese: Tea is available at work and school breaks, packed for travelers, and as a part of most meals. There are also strong claims by Japanese scientists that consumption of kelp, both cooked and fresh, may help in suppressing absorption of cancer-inducing chemicals. *Katsuobushi* (dried fermented skipjack tuna) flakes (from which dashi, the stock that is heavily used in Japanese cooking, is brewed) have the property of reducing blood pressure, and some studies have shown that the flakes themselves contain amino acids that act to suppress high blood pressure.

In contrast, there are some negative effects of the Japanese diet. These include the following:

**High salt levels:** Since salt pickles are a major component of the Japanese diet, along with miso, which is brewed with salt, high rates of stomach cancer and high blood pressure are recurring problems in Japan. The Japanese government has taken those findings seriously and has run several campaigns to reduce salt consumption.

**Industrial food:** Since the end of World War II, the Japanese populace has been affected by a series of problems such as outbreaks of *E. coli,* contaminated milk, and overconsumption of sugar, which have been traced to industrial processes in food manufacturing. Food manufacture is pervasive, and many Japanese households consume large proportions of ready-made meals and industrially produced food. An indication of the extent of factory-processed food is the Japanese government's authorization of the production of purely artificial food bars. Made by biochemists from chemicals and fermentation, they yield full nutritional value with very little taste.

**Refined foodstuffs:** Until well into the modern era, few Japanese families ate refined white rice as a staple. The process of polishing the rice removes the husk and the germ, which together provide vitamins and protein available only in brown rice. White rice was a desirable commodity, not necessarily an item of daily consumption. White rice is now commonly available, and refined foods such as fish paste (kamaboko), from which much of the vitamins have been removed, are eaten very frequently.

**Sugar:** The Japanese have become addicted to sugar, and the consumption of sweets in Japan, notably among children, has increased. High consumption of many sweet foods and candies available to Japanese children has contributed to poor dentition among Japanese as they become adults and has also encouraged obesity, which is currently becoming a problem among Japanese children.

*Michael Ashkenazi*

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# Kazakhstan

## Overview

The Republic of Kazakhstan is the ninth-largest country in the world by landmass, about the same size as western Europe or Texas, but it is only the 62nd most populated, containing nearly 15.5 million people, about 60 percent of whom live in cities. North to south it stretches from the western Siberian plains to the Central Asian desert and the edge of the Silk Road; east to west it stretches from the Altai Mountains to the Volga. A landlocked country bordering two landlocked seas—the Caspian and the Aral—it neighbors China to its east, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan to the south, and Russia to the north and west.

Historically, the Kazakhs are a nomadic people, a mixture of Turkic and Mongol tribes who migrated to the area in the 13th century. Russia conquered part of Kazakhstan in the 18th century and the remainder in the 19th, and it became a Soviet republic in 1936. The Soviet Union's "virgin lands" project in the 1950s and 1960s had the twin effects of causing extensive immigration from Russia and other Soviet republics and of bringing to an end much of the traditional nomadic living and farming practices of the previous centuries. Among these Soviet immigrants were workers for the local industries and prisoners of the gulag, much of which was located in the steppes of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan gained its independence in 1991, and many of the immigrant communities returned home. Today, although the country prides itself on accommodating 120 nationalities, the population is predominantly a mixture of native Kazakhs (approximately 55%) and Russians (approximately 30%), with Uzbeks, Tartars, and Ukrainians the next-largest groups. Russian and Kazakh are the official languages. About 44 percent practice the Russian Orthodox religion, and 47 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. All of these populations have had their own influence on the food of the nation.

Kazakhstan's economy outstrips all of the other Central Asian states combined. Rich in natural minerals (it is said that almost every element in the periodic table can be found in Kazakhstan), it has a particular wealth of deposits of petroleum, natural gas, coal, copper, iron ore, lead, zinc, bauxite, gold, and uranium. It retains a strong relationship with Russia, and ever since independence has leased 2,316 square miles (6,000 square kilometers) of land around the Baikonur Cosmodrome to Russia for continued use in its space program. Its main agricultural products are grain—largely spring wheat—and livestock—sheep, horses, and cattle—although its continental climate means that it also has good conditions for growing a wide variety of fruits and vegetables in summer. Generally speaking, Kazakhstan is a nation of meat eaters, with between 30 and 50 percent of daily calories coming from meat and 50 percent from starches.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Sholpan and Talgat live in an apartment in central Almaty, with their young daughter and baby son. A little over a year ago, when his mother died, Talgat's father came to live with the family. As the youngest son, Talgat is responsible for his parents and his sisters when the need arises. Both Sholpan and Talgat are middle-class

urban professionals who work full-time, and they have regular help from an older woman, Gulfiya, who comes into their home to assist with cooking, cleaning, and child care.

Although both adults work, it is Sholpan's responsibility to take care of the family home and to shop for and prepare their meals. Home cooking is an essential component of their family life, extending even to the traditional fruit compotes or cordials that are always in a bottle in the fridge should anyone be thirsty. Talgat's favorite is made from dried apples and barberries simmered in water over a low flame, with the addition of raspberries in summer and dried apricots or raisins in winter.

Staple foods that are usually in the larder include fresh and preserved meats in the form of sausages and smoked meats, rice, eggs, wheat flour, ready-made breads and biscuits, and pickled fish, as well as a wide variety of fruits and vegetables in season. Nuts and dried fruits from the region are another important staple.

Sholpan and Talgat are typical of others in their social group in thinking that fruits and vegetables purchased from a supermarket are simply not fresh. The vast majority of fresh produce is still bought in outdoor or farmers' markets, which are centrally located, or from street vendors who bring their produce of the day into town to sell. Dried fruits and nuts are also best from the market. The impressive new supermarkets tend to be used for bulk purchases—or by the many foreigners working in the larger cities.

## Major Foodstuffs

Traditionally, the most important foods for Kazakhs were meat and dairy, and these continue to play a prominent role on Kazakh tables. Sheep, horse, and camel are the traditional meats, and beef is popular. Wild goat is still relatively commonly consumed in rural areas, though the population of *saiga,* or long-nosed antelope, which used to be a staple, has dropped to the extent that it is now protected. Poultry is less frequently consumed than red meat but is becoming increasingly popular, especially chicken and duck. Meat is bled at slaughter, and the animal's head faces west in keeping with halal practice (Mecca is west of Kazakhstan). Camels are slaughtered on their knees, presumably since the animals are so tall. A carcass is usually divided into 12 pieces, each of which has a traditional owner when the meat is served: the head and pelvic bone for guests, kinsmen, and the elderly; the liver and tail fat to all of the in-laws; the breast/brisket for the son- or daughter-in-law; the anklebone for the son-in-law; the rump for a friend; the large intestine for the herdsman; the heart, fat, and cervical vertebrae for the girls; and the kidneys and neck vertebrae (and the ears from the head) for the children.

Horse is an especially important meat. In fact, everything about horses is redolent of Kazakhstan, and there are few more uplifting sights than a herd of horses galloping together across the steppe. Superb horsemen, Kazakhs breed different herds of horses to work, milk, and eat. Horseflesh is often the main meat in traditional Kazakh dishes, and it is also made into a wide array of sausages and preserved meats, each with a different flavor, texture, and balance. Horses raised for eating are encouraged to develop extensive deposits of fat, as this is particularly prized, especially the yellow fat from mountain-fed horses (lowland horses are leaner, and their fat is whiter). On the whole, the fattier the sausage the better. One sausage type, *kazy,* is made from the long strips of meat and fat from the ribs, seasoned with garlic, salt, and pepper and threaded in large, long, whole pieces into the guts. The meat and fat for *shuzhuk* is chopped before being seasoned with salt, pepper, and garlic and stuffed into guts. *Karta* is made from the thickest part of the rectum, which is washed carefully so as not to break up the fat that surrounds it and is then even more carefully turned inside out so that the fat is encased inside. Whole preserved meats include *zhal,* the oblong accumulation of fat from underneath the horse's mane, which is cut off with a thin piece of flesh and then salted, and *zhaya,* which is the salted upper muscular layer of the hip with up to 4 inches (10 centimeters) of fat. *Sur-yet* may be made of any part of the horse's flesh cut into in a piece of between 1 and 2 pounds (0.5 and 1 kilogram) and salted. All of these will be either dried or smoked, and all are boiled for up to two hours before use.

Sheep are an important meat source, and fattiness is also prized in this meat. The sheep are bred to have particularly fat rears, and this fat, as well as fat from the tail, is an important ingredient in many dishes as well as being eaten in its own right. The most expensive *shashlyk,* or kebabs, are those with the most fat included. Mutton is also preserved in sausages such as *kyimai,* a blood sausage, and *ulpershek,* made of the heart, aorta, and fat. No part of the animal is wasted. Children collect the knuckle and anklebones to play a throwing game called *asikya*—historically, this was also used to help them learn how to count. Men may be given one of these bones on their wedding day to symbolize hope for a son.

Although it borders two inland seas (the Caspian and Aral), Kazakhstan is landlocked, so as much freshwater as sea fish is consumed. Sturgeon, carp, and pike perch are particularly common, the former eaten for both its meat and its eggs—caviar. Sturgeon and carp are farmed, and in recent years programs have been put in place to try to repopulate the Aral Sea with Aral and Syr Darya sturgeon. As result of Russian and other northern European influence (especially German), salmon is eaten, and pickled fish in many forms is common, usually herring.

Milk from cows, mares, and camels is consumed in the form of milk, yogurt, cream, and cheeses, all of which may be fresh, soured, or fermented. In the countryside, beestings (the first milk after the birth of a calf), or *uyz,* are commonly consumed either boiled and drunk as a warm liquid or boiled, cooled, solidified, and eaten in slices. Fresh milk is usually drunk boiled and is sometimes added to black tea. Slightly fermented milk drinks are traditional, especially kumiss made from mare's milk, *shabat* from camel milk, and *airan* from cow milk. Slightly yogurty and sour, sometimes with a slight fizz, these drinks are refreshing and nourishing and a typical start to a meal or offering to a guest. Both kumiss and shabat are highly recommended for their health-giving properties, renowned for being good for the digestion and the liver, and even a cure for tuberculosis. Boiled soured milk from cows and mares is often strained and formed into small balls that are left to dry in the sun. The resulting *kurt* is eaten as a snack alone or with tea, or diluted in broth or porridge.

Fresh fruit in season is plentiful and prized. In summer, there is a profusion of raspberries and currants of every color, peaches, apricots, melons, and watermelons. Many of these are dried for use in winter, too, the local dried fruits being supplemented by a vast array of imported dried fruits from southern neighbors, especially Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. The sheer variety of differently prepared dried raisins, apricots, cherries, and plums from multiple fruit varieties make Kazakh markets a jeweler's shop of glowing color. Autumn is one of the more important fresh fruit seasons, for Kazakhstan is famous as the birthplace of the apple. Most apples eaten in the world today originate from its wild *Malus sieversii,* and the old capital, Almaty, is named for the apple—*Alma-ata* means "father of apples." Although many of the ancient orchards have been lost since independence, apples remain an important crop. Ranging from the highly scented and enormous Aport apple, which can be as large as a baby's head and will grow only on the land around Almaty, to the tiny wild crab apple, they are eaten fresh, dried, or made into brandy.

Alongside displays of dried fruits one finds an equally astonishing array of nuts, grown locally and imported. Almonds of every size, walnuts, cashews, pistachios, and even nutty little apricot kernels are sold in markets everywhere and served as snacks at home. A wide variety of honeys are also sold for consumption and for health. Unlike its Silk Road neighbors, however, Kazakhstan does not have a huge market in spices and herbs. In its markets, meat, dairy products, dried fruits and nuts, and fresh fruit and vegetables predominate. In summer, a profusion of the sweetest tomatoes are on sale; all year, onions, cabbage, seasonal greens, and fresh herbs, especially parsley and cilantro, are available. The influence of several immigrant communities can be found in the most commonly consumed salads: Russian beetroot salad and spicy Korean carrot salad.

With 70 percent of its agricultural land under cultivation, Kazakhstan is the sixth most important global wheat exporter, and wheat is grown in great

quantities for the internal markets as well as for export. Wheat flour is consumed as bread, pasta, or noodles and is the key ingredient in the casing for different types of dumplings and pies. Bread is an important staple food, and there are numerous local breads, many of them the round, flattish, leavened loaves called *non* or *nan* with a distinct raised edge and attractive center decorated with a stamped pattern. Despite the name, these breads are not the same as the flat, unleavened Indian nan. Nan may be plain (*taba nan*), or it can include some fried onions rolled into the outer rim, or have sesame or nigella seeds strewn on the surface, or have a little tail fat added. Highly decorated smaller versions of this loaf, called *damdy nan,* are often served in restaurants. This type of loaf may also be enriched with egg to make *salma nan.* Egg-enriched puffy fried breads, or *baursak,* are very popular, and these, too, may be either simply savory or sweetened with sugar (*yespe baursak*) or, for a more complex preparation, have curds added and be boiled before frying (*domalak baursak*). Many of the dumplings that Kazakhs love to eat are made with leavened dough: *Samsa* are stuffed with meat, rice, and onion, shaped into half-moons, and baked; *belyashes* are shaped into small rolls, stuffed with meat or fish and onion, and fried; and *cheburek* are made in rounds, stuffed with meat and onions with the edges pinched together, and fried. Russian dumplings, *perogi* or *pelmeniy,* are also popular. *Manti* are more Chinese in style, made with a thinner, unleavened, wheat-based dough and steamed. *Gutap* dough is also unleavened but enriched with butter, the filling is rich in egg and herbs, and the square fritters are deep-fried. Many of these may be served with a sour cream sauce.

Rice is another important starch grown in the country and the basis for one of the national dishes, *plov.*



Bread sellers in Shymkent, Kazakhstan. (Travel-images.com)

***Plov***

This is a classic of Kazakh cuisine. Although it is clearly related to the typical rice dishes or pilafs common throughout Central Asia, plov has its own particular characteristics. Carrots are the main flavoring agent, and it rarely contains dried fruits (unheard of in most of its cousins). It is much less highly seasoned than other similar rice dishes from along the Silk Road. Typically, any meat can be used, though red meats are preferred. Lamb, including the fat from the tail, is the most common option, though some restaurants offer horse, and beef is popular with many families making it at home.

14 oz medium-grain white rice

2.2 lb lamb or beef, chopped into small cubes

3 tbsp sunflower or corn oil

2 pinches ground coriander

1 medium onion, peeled and sliced

2.2 lb carrots, cut into strips

2 tbsp ground mixed spices (cumin, coriander, cinnamon)

3½ c water

6 cloves garlic, peeled

Wash the rice until the water runs clear, and soak it in water. Heat the oil on high heat, and fry the lamb or beef until very well cooked, about 30 minutes, adding a couple pinches of ground coriander to reduce the smell of the meat. Add the onion, and fry for 2 minutes, then add the carrots and the spice mix. Fry for about 20 minutes until the carrots begin to caramelize. Turn down the heat to low, and add the water and a teaspoon of salt. Turn the heat to high, cover with a lid, and bring to a boil. Add the garlic and then the rice, which should be pushed gently under the surface of the liquid but not stirred. Replace the lid. Cook for 20 minutes, until the water is absorbed and the rice is cooked. Tip out onto a large dish, and serve with a tomato and onion salad.

Every meal ends with something sweet. Chocolate- or vanilla-flavored light sponge cakes, sandwiched together with jam, covered in sweetened cream, and brightly iced, are commonly bought at bakeries and served as desserts or with tea. Local factories produce a vast array of brightly wrapped boiled sweets in fruit, nut, and chocolate flavors. There is a thriving chocolate-making industry, and locals take rightful pride in the quality of the beautifully wrapped bars.

## Cooking

Preparing Kazakh food is fairly labor-intensive. Although dishes tend to be composed of relatively few ingredients, meals are composed of multiple dishes, so a lot of chopping and mixing is required. In most households cooking is a female occupation, the responsibility of the senior woman in the house, aided by her daughters or daughters-in-law as required.

Middle-class Kazakh kitchens are somewhat simpler than Western kitchens. The room itself tends to be small, and the main piece of equipment is a domestic stove with an oven and surface burners (either electric or gas). The majority of cooking is done on the burners, and in many lower-middle-class households the oven is put to use as an additional storage area for pots and pans rather than as a means of cooking. Poorer households without these facilities continue to use the traditional dried-cow-dung fire. Some rural households have a clay oven in their backyard, used for baking bread and meats, but this type of oven is traditionally Uzbek, not Kazakh. The Kazakh "oven" is a more temporary affair made of two large, heavy metal pans of similar size, one used as a lid for the other, buried in the cow-dung fire. Grilling is done over charcoal outside.

Deep-frying and sautéing are done in large, deep frying pans; boiled dishes, especially meat-based stews, are made in large cast iron or steel saucepans, or *kazans.* Dumplings are steamed in large multilayered pans called *kaskans.* Narrow rolling pins or a large broom handle are used to roll out bread or pasta dough. Handleless china cups or soup bowls, called *pialas,* are used for measuring volumes of about 1 cup (200 grams) dry and 8.5 fluid ounces (250 milliliters) of liquid ingredients. Spices are

bought ready-ground, and often ready-mixed, from the market, so milling and crushing are not usually done at home.

## Typical Meals

Most Kazakhs in urban and rural areas eat three meals a day, the largest of which is dinner. All meals are accompanied by tea, either black or green. Black tea may have milk added. Breakfast is usually eaten at home; it consists of tea and either bread with jam, honey, or cheese, plus hard-boiled or scrambled eggs, or a thin porridge with sweet toppings of jam or raisins. Some savory items are interchangeably consumed as either breakfast or lunch foods: breads stuffed with chopped eggs and greens or cabbage, or pancakes spread with a thin layer of minced lamb and rolled. Lunch is light and often eaten outside the home—perhaps manti or samsa, or soup (*sorpa*), or Korean-style salad bought from a street vendor or small restaurant. In many offices, people will bring in leftover food from home to eat at lunchtime.

Hospitality is a critical part of Kazakh life, and dinner tends to be an important time for this. The dining table in most homes is always set with two three-tiered plates of dried fruits, nuts, and sweets, ready for any guest who happens to visit. A typical meal for guests might start with savory baursak, little hollow doughnut-like fried puffed breads, and some salads—perhaps *sveyko nay,* made of grated beetroot and finely minced garlic; *mimosa,* or crab salad, made of chopped crab, hard-boiled eggs, rice, cucumbers, and sweet corn with a dill dressing; and a tomato and onion salad with garlic, this last one essential if plov, the Kazakh pilaf, is on the menu. Plov is traditionally made with horse or fat mutton, but many families prefer their plov made with beef. A soup of some kind, either fish or meat broth, will probably be served along with the meal. Every dish is placed on the table, and guests are exhorted to help themselves before the family begins eating. Mainly homemade up to this point, the meal may turn to purchased items for dessert. Along with tea with hot milk there will be a profusion of sweetmeats: dried fruits and nuts; fresh fruit (watermelon, raspberries, pomegranates, according to season); fruit jams, eaten by the teaspoonful; and cake, perhaps *midovi,* a honey cake with cream. Any cookies or chocolates brought by the guests will also be served.

## Eating Out

Kazakh cities have numerous restaurants, and eating out is a popular pastime, with large groups meeting for business or social entertainment. In the summer, many restaurants have large open-air seating areas with live music to encourage parties to stay and enjoy the hospitality—and order more food. Many restaurants offer typical foods of the region, in particular Kazakh, Uzbek, or Georgian dishes. Although some of these restaurants specialize in a particular cuisine, many of them offer a broader range of dishes from the region.

Other Asian restaurants are also popular, especially Korean and Chinese, and there are a few Indian and Thai restaurants in the major cities. In many cases local ingredients are used to prepare classic dishes on these menus. The meat wrapped and steamed in a banana leaf in a Kazakh Thai restaurant is as likely to be horse meat as chicken.

Snacking is extremely popular, and many of the local foods lend themselves to the quick street-food treatment. Several of the favorite meat and vegetable dumplings, in particular manti and samsa, are readily available in markets, on the street, and in small, fast restaurants that let you drop in for a quick bite. One is also never too far from an open-air grill that has been wheeled into position in a park or on a street corner and is loaded with shashlyk, which are then served with bread, sliced onion and tomato, and a spicy sauce. Typical Western fast food is also available, and the local McBurger chain is a popular choice, but local foods seem to remain the preferred option for most snacking outside the home.

## Special Occasions

The traditional Kazakh feast is known as the *dastarkhan,* which is literally the word for the tablecloth on which food would be laid out but is better translated here as a festive table. The dastarkhan

is an expression of the importance of sharing generous hospitality with family, friends, and guests. Based on the nomadic tradition of the early Kazakh peoples, it has sheep as its centerpiece. Before the feast begins, the table is decorated with the snacks always laid out on a Kazakh table: dried fruits, nuts, and sweets. Guests are offered kumiss, fermented mare's milk; shabat, fermented camel milk; or airan, liquid yogurt, to drink. The small, puffy fried breads called baursak are served. The rest of the meal is focused on the meat, starting with the sheep's head. Traditionally this is presented to the most senior person at the table, who carves it and serves the other guests according to their status. Older people and children are taken particular care of—the children usually get the ears. *Beshbarmek* follows. This is a dish of boiled meat, in this case mutton or lamb, served in whole pieces on the bone on a dish of broad noodles and stewed onions. The meat is again served to the guests according to the most suitable part for them (pelvic bone or leg for elderly guests of honor, the cervical vertebrae to the girls), and each person has a soup bowl of the broth that the meat and pasta were cooked in, known as sorpa, which is served in small soup bowls called pialas. Black or green tea is served.

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***Beshbarmek***

This dish is simple and filling. With the use of good ingredients and a healthy appetite, it is quite delicious. The same recipe can be used with any red meat: horse, beef, or mutton, depending on availability and preference. Horse will produce the leanest result, mutton the fattiest. Many families and restaurants prefer it made with mutton.

1 large, fat piece of mutton on the bone (approximately 4 lb)

4 onions

Salt

Pepper (optional)

1 egg

1 c water

4½ c white flour

Place the meat, a little salt, and one peeled whole onion in a large saucepan, cover with water, bring to a boil, and simmer until cooked—approximately 2 hours—frequently skimming off any scum that rises to the surface.

About an hour into the cooking of the meat, slice the remaining 3 onions thinly. Skim some fat and bouillon from the meat pan, and place into a smaller saucepan. Add the sliced onions, bring to a boil, and simmer gently until the onions are soft but not disintegrating. Season with salt and a little pepper if desired.

Now make the pasta. Beat together the egg and water with 1½ pinches salt in a large bowl. Gradually add the flour, and mix together with your hands, kneading firmly and scraping the dough from the sides of the bowl as you go. Keep adding flour and kneading until the mixture doesn't stick to the sides of the bowl any more—approximately 4–5 minutes. Tip out onto a large, clean work surface, and roll and knead it hard into a springy ball. Return to the bowl, cover, and let rest for 15 minutes. Flour the work surface. Cut the dough into 4 pieces, sprinkle each piece liberally with flour, and knead each for about a minute. Form 4 neat balls, pressing each one flat and allowing it to bounce up again. Then, take one ball at a time and press it flat with the knuckles, turning over and over in flour, and finally roll out through the lasagna setting of a pasta machine. Cut the pieces into long rectangles. Remove the cooked meat from the pan, and boil the pasta pieces in the broth until cooked, approximately 4 minutes.

To serve, place a generous layer of boiled sliced onions on a large dish. Cover with the pasta and then the rest of the onions. Place the meat on top, and take the dish to the table where the guests can help themselves. The broth should be served alongside in individual soup bowls, and the entire dish is eaten with a spoon.

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Nauryz, the spring equinox at the end of March, is another important celebration, whether marked at home in the city or back in the family village. Of course, the sharing of food plays a crucial role.

Traditionally, every household makes its *nauryz koje,* a thin, savory porridge made with seven ingredients: ground wheat, water, tail fat and the pelvic bone from a sheep, pieces of kazy (horse-meat sausage), garlic, and salt. Neighbors invite one another to their houses to taste some. It's also a time for sweets: *tary*/*tara,* or dried wheat fried in tail fat with honey and served with hot milk, and *chak-chak,* a kind of extra-small baursak drenched in honey and sugar that has been boiled to the hard ball stage, perhaps decorated with walnuts or raisins.

Islam has influenced the traditional feasts of the Uighur and Dungan communities (groups of Turkic and Chinese origin). Shek Beru is held just before Ramadan; traditionally, a sheep is slaughtered and shared with neighbors, with a particular focus on sharing with the elderly and the poor. After the fast, Oraza Ait is a period of feasting and celebration in which traditionally one would visit 40 houses to taste food and share hospitality over a period of about three days. On the day of Oraza Ait itself, children visit the mosque to eat a special fat pancake called *kokidi* that is prepared for them.

To mark a year since a significant death, for example, that of a parent, many families will follow the old Kazakh tradition of *as beru,* a special meal to celebrate the person's life and the end of mourning. In many families the meal must include baursak, as the smell of the frying as the breads puff up in the hot oil is supposed to reach the spirit in heaven.

## Diet and Health

As in other former Soviet states, life expectancy in Kazakhstan improved during President Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaign of the mid-1980s; fell sharply beginning in 1992; and then began to improve again after 1997. Compared to other newly independent states, its infant and maternal mortality rates remain relatively high, as are its rates for cancer (especially lung cancer, in line with rising tobacco use) and infectious and parasitic diseases such as tuberculosis and hepatitis. The rate of cardiovascular disease in Kazakhstan is higher than in the rest of the region, due to the high rate of consumption of saturated fatty acids and salt. Male life expectancy, at 59 years, is 11 years lower than that for females.

In common with other Central Asian countries, the core thinking on diet and health is based on the Galenic humoral theories popularized in the region by ibn Sina's *Canon of Medicine* in the 11th century. Many Kazakh dietary beliefs continue to center on helping to digest the large amounts of saturated fat in the diet. Green tea, sweets, fresh herbs, and fruit all help with the digestion of protein. Green tea also provides valuable antioxidants and vitamins that are helpful in balancing the animal-product-heavy diet. Nonetheless, vitamins A and C are found to be lacking in many people's diets.

*Jane Levi*

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# Korea

## Overview

The Korean War (1950–1953), which was both a civil war and a proxy war for China, Russia, the United States, and the United Nations, who were involved in a larger cold war, ceased in a stalemate. An armistice was signed, and two distinct political nations were formed on the tiny Korean Peninsula in northeastern Asia.

North Korea (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) is a Socialist state with a single-party dictatorship. The country has been extremely isolated since the end of the war. South Korea (the Republic of Korea) is noted for its rapid transition from an agrarian society to an industrialized country with a large and stable middle class.

North and South Koreans are ethnically and linguistically homogeneous. Regional dialect variations are relatively minor, and all are mutually intelligible. On the surface, the peninsula appears to have enjoyed relative peace for thousands of years; dramatic foreign invasions, although significant, have not punctuated Korean history as frequently as in many other parts of the world. However, the peninsula is located at a crossroads for northeastern Asia, and much of Korean history is about the resistance to incursions by larger or more aggressive neighbors: Chinese, Japanese, Russians, Mongols, and Manchurians.

During Korea's Chosun dynasty (1392–1910), Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who had recently unified Japan, demanded Korean assistance to attack China. Korea refused. In 1592, an army of 150,000 Japanese troops invaded the peninsula. Internal resistance, with aid from Chinese troops, quickly ended the invasion in 1593. The Japanese returned in 1597 but were again expelled by the Koreans and Chinese in 1598.

The Ming dynasty of China, which had been able to send massive numbers of troops to Korea in the 1590s, declined rapidly from internal disorder. The Manchu, a non-Chinese people from just north of Korea, ruled China beginning in 1644. The Manchus invaded Korea in 1627, and Korea negotiated a tributary relationship with the Manchu (Qing) dynasty. Manchu people had a long history of territorial disputes with Koreans, as well as a shared dynasty, the Parhae Kingdom (719–926).

The Meiji government of Japan (1868–1912) adopted Western expansionist philosophies and once again attacked China and Korea. The First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) was fought over control of Korea; the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) was fought over control of Manchuria and Korea. Japan defeated both China and Russia, and Korea became a Japanese protectorate in 1905. In 1910, representatives of both governments signed the Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty, and the emperor of Korea ceded sovereignty to the emperor of Japan. In contemporary Korea, the treaty is referred to as a coerced—and hence null—treaty; the day it was signed is popularly referred to as the "national day of shame."

Although Japanese occupation ended in 1945, Korea continued to dispute the legality of the treaty. In 1965, representatives from both countries signed the Treaty of Basic Relations, which also included a clause nullifying the previous treaty. This may seem like splitting hairs, but Korean identity is rooted in the idea of having successfully maintained cultural

autonomy throughout its history as a tiny country surrounded by cultures who all developed formidable military capacity at one time or another. This stubborn sense of uniqueness permeates the culture, including cultural identity related to food.

Late Chosun-era reformers began incorporating Western ideas of progressive histories and Social Darwinism. Between 1905 and 1910, Korean scholars raced with competing Japanese colonial historiographies and textbooks to create a national narrative, *minjok.* Minjok as "people-family" became minjok as "race-nation" to forge a collective history of Koreans bound to a nation-state. The first leaders of North and South Korea came of age within this zeitgeist. Minjok forked into two distinct paths: North Korea's *juche* (self-reliance) policies and South Korea's continued use of minjok to fuel the country's remarkably rapid transition to modernity.

In 1948, Syngman Rhee became the first president of the Republic of Korea with U.S. support. He was born into a *yangban* (landed gentry or aristocratic) family and received the requisite classical Korean neo-Confucian education of all socially elite men. He learned English at a Methodist school and earned degrees from Harvard and Princeton. Rhee was actively anti-Communist and perceived as invested in maintaining status-quo power structures.

Kim Il Sung led North Korea from its founding until his death in 1994. He was raised in a religious Protestant household of modest means. His family moved to Manchuria (present-day northern China) during the Japanese occupation. There, Kim joined various anti–Japanese occupation and Communist organizations. Apparently, he rejected the traditional Korean feudal system at an early age. He returned to Korea in 1945 with a Soviet-backed army, gained peasant support, and quickly organized a domestic army. In 1948 Kim Il Sung became the leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea with Russian support.

Both the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea claimed to be the only legitimate government for the entire peninsula. Larger cold war issues aside, the internal problems on the peninsula had to do with the extreme socioeconomic stratification under the traditional feudal system. Wealth, status, and power were in the hands of just a few, while the vast majority of the population were peasants or indentured servants. The lower classes had almost no opportunity for upward mobility based on a heredity system of wealth and title perpetuation.

The political upheavals and economic changes of the 20th century created a significant Korean diaspora. For the first time in history, a people that had coterminous ethnic and linguistic borders for thousands of years began scattering around the world. Currently there are about seven million Koreans living outside of the peninsula. The largest populations are in China, Japan, the United States, and the former Soviet-bloc countries, with smaller populations in the Middle East, Latin America, Australia, and Europe. Everywhere Koreans went they took kimchi, the culturally iconic food for all Koreans.

Korea has a subarctic climate with four distinct seasons: spring, summer, autumn, and winter. Autumn and spring are temperate. The contrast between summer and winter is the most striking. Summers are hot and humid from maritime winds. In the winter, cold, dry air from the Mongolian plains creates below-freezing temperatures. When Korea was a preindustrialized, agrarian country, kimchi was the primary way of preserving vegetables for consumption during the bitter cold winter months.

Korean cuisine is both a reaction to the tyranny of geography and climate and an ingenious use of the same factors. Long before refrigeration and industrial foods, Koreans had to figure out how to keep foods from spoiling rapidly during the summer and how to store foods for the barren winter months. Salt from the sea was plentiful, so pickling was the answer to both.

Commercial production of kimchi began in the 1960s. South Korea instigated an international trade dispute with Japan when *kimuchi* (the Japanese pronunciation of kimchi) was proposed as an official food of the Atlanta Olympic games. At the same time Japanese manufacturers of kimuchi were increasing their share of international markets for kimchi. Kimchi received official certification from the CODEX Alimentarius Commission in 2001, giving Korea control over international standards



A plate of pickled cabbage, or kimchi, beside a traditional pickling jar from Korea. (Shutterstock)

and guidelines, a moment that was hailed as a cultural victory.

The Kimchi Museum in Seoul lists about 200 historical and contemporary kimchi recipes, made from various vegetables and seasonings. However, the most ubiquitous type is made with salted napa cabbage seasoned with red pepper flakes, chives, garlic, and salted fish. It is basically a spicy and garlicky sauerkraut: salted cabbage transformed through a process of lactofermentation into a more nutritious and digestible food with an extended shelf life.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Kyoung-Mi Choe and Jung-Ho Baek moved to a suburb of Seoul after they decided to raise a family. Seoul has a population of over 10 million residents; even the suburbs are densely populated. Real estate is very tightly utilized, and kitchens tend to be small. Kyoung-Mi and her husband, Jung-Ho, were born in Seoul, but their parents are from southern provinces. Kyoung-Mi works as a pharmacist and Jung-Ho as a software developer. Their lifestyle and diet are representative of educated urbanites living in Seoul and include dishes from different regions of Korea as well as Western foods.

They begin their day at 6:30 A.M. with a breakfast consisting of the three most basic components of a Korean meal: boiled short-grain rice, kimchi, and soup. They both eat lunch with coworkers at around noon. Kyoung-Mi's boss orders Chinese takeout for the entire staff. Jung-Ho eats fast food for lunch with his coworkers. He has a McDonald's *bulgogi* burger; the patty is seasoned with a Korean barbecue marinade. Dinner is the largest meal of the day. The main components are rice, napa cabbage kimchi, and a soup of *dwenjang* (a miso-type bean paste). The remainder of the *banchan* (side dishes) are purchased from various vendors or at the supermarket.

Kyoung-Mi and Jung-Ho purchase the bulk of their household staples at a megamarket such as Carrefour or Costco. The rest of their pantry items are purchased at *shijang* (open-air markets), minimarkets, and specialty stores. Most of Seoul is comprised of mixed-use commercial and residential neighborhoods; even in suburban areas, stores are densely packed within and around large apartment complexes. Side streets with single-family homes are dotted with minimarkets, small specialty stores, and mom-and-pop restaurants. Seoul's public transportation is extensive, fast, and consistent. Shopping and eating out are very convenient, and delivery services are extensive.

## Major Foodstuffs

During the Chosun dynasty, Korea was divided into eight provinces. Natural borders of mountains and waterways separated the provinces. Before modern transportation, travel between provinces and throughout the peninsula was difficult. Provincial styles of cooking developed based on local climates and available resources. Each province became known for different styles of kimchi and specialty dishes.

Traditionally, the most important kimchi making was done in late autumn. *Kimjang* was a culinary event, a process that involved many family members over a two- to three-day period, when enough kimchi was made to last from late autumn until early spring. For three to five months of the year, kimchi was the primary source of vegetables for agrarians. As winter continued, food scarcity and rationing became predictably problematic. A portion of the kimchi was stored in outdoor freezers, essentially a hole in the ground, to extend its shelf life and ensure a steady supply of food in late winter.

In South Korea, Kimjang is no longer a necessity and has become more a symbolic preparation event. Industrialized agriculture, government policies, and trade agreements have obliterated food-security issues. The country enjoys a year-round supply of fresh vegetables and foods from imported sources and domestic farms that utilize greenhouse technology during winter. Small kimchi refrigerators with adjustable temperature settings are used to store kimchi throughout the year.

North Korea accomplished temporary food self-sufficiency by industrialization of its agricultural system and through price-controlled trade with the Soviet Union. However, there were always reports of food rationing, with Pyongyang, the capital, receiving preferential provisions. While other Communist countries adapted to reforms, Kim Il Sung stubbornly adhered to his self-reliance policies. The country has had widely reported food-security issues since the early 1990s. The famines of 1995 were initiated by natural disasters and then worsened with the collapse of the Soviet Union. During the remainder of the decade, the country was plagued with repeated famines. Food insecurity and famine conditions persist to this day.

The traditional Korean diet is based on cereals and vegetables, with the bulk of protein coming from soy products, seafood, and sea vegetables. Historically, cooking oil and animal fats were extremely scarce, so Korean cooking makes very little use of frying. In South Korea, consumption of animal proteins increased dramatically with economic growth. From 1980 to 2003, per-capita consumption of beef, pork, and chicken increased from 25 pounds to almost 70 pounds per year. Dairy consumption increased by 2,450 percent from 1969 to 1987.

Rice is the staff of life in Korea. The word *bap* (cooked rice) is synonymous with food. Boiled short-grain rice is eaten everyday, at almost every meal, unless noodles are served. Rice and kimchi are the two most basic components of a Korean meal. Sweet rice is used in a limited number of savory dishes. It is more commonly ground into flour and used for rice cakes.

Common vegetables include radishes, napa cabbage, peppers, carrots, onions, burdock, mushrooms, squash, gourds, potatoes, lotus root, bamboo shoots, bellflower roots, leeks, watercress, *rocambole* (a type of garlic), shepherd's purse (a green related to mustard), and chives. Common fruits are Asian pears, apples, tangerines, persimmons, *yuja* (Asian citrus), Concord grapes, and melons.

Soybeans are an important component of the diet. Fresh beans are eaten as a snack; soybean sprouts are eaten in saladlike preparations or in soups. *Dubu* (tofu or bean curd) is eaten cold or fried, used as filler for meat stuffing, and added to soups and stews. Toasted and ground soybean flour is sprinkled on rice cakes or mixed with water and drunk as a cold beverage.

Soybeans are also used to make the three essential sauces of Korean cooking: *kanjang, dwenjang,* and *kochujang* ( *jang* means "sauce"). Traditionally the sauces were made once a year in a series of related processes. Dwenjang and kanjang are made first. Blocks of *meju* (fermented soybeans) are covered with water, salt, and malt syrup. A few jujubes (also known as red or Chinese dates) and whole red peppers are added for seasoning. Oak charcoal is added to the mixture for color. After two months of curing, the meju will have crumbled and softened to become dwenjang (fermented bean paste, similar to miso). The liquid that is strained off is kanjang, or soy sauce. Kochujang, a red pepper paste, is made last, since it contains soy sauce.

It is hard to imagine Korean cooking without red chili peppers. However, these are a relatively new introduction with two possible routes of entry:

Koreans who met Portuguese Jesuits in Beijing during the 16th century, or a Dutch shipwreck on the island of Cheju-do in the mid-17th century. During the Chosun dynasty, accounts documented new vegetables and fruits from foreign lands including pumpkins, sweet potatoes, white gourds, apples, watermelons, and the chili pepper. Before the introduction of red chili peppers, cockscomb flower (*Celosia cristata*), safflower, and violet mustard were used to tint foods red. The most common type of pepper in Korea is a long finger-type variety. It is used fresh or dried in powder, flakes, or shredded into fine threads.

Mung beans are another important legume. Mung bean sprouts are prepared the same way as soybean sprouts. Sweetened mung beans are used in rice cake preparations. Ground beans are used to make pancakes, and the starch is used to make cellophane noodles. Wheat flour is used for savory crepes, pancakes, noodles, dumplings, and batters.

Seafood is abundant in Korea. Preservation techniques include brining, salting, and drying. Tiny salted fish and tiny shrimp are used in kimchi sauces. Dried anchovies, kelp, and other seaweed are common home-cooking items. Roasted laver is ubiquitous. Fish is usually salted and fried or added to stews.

Water or roasted barley tea is served with meals. Sweet or carbonated drinks are not taken with Korean meals. Teas include five-grain, citrus, persimmon leaf, ginger, ginseng, green, and wild sesame. *Sikhye* is a lightly fermented rice drink.



Red peppers on display in a market in South Korea, Busan Jagalchi Street. (Firststar | Dreamstime.com)

## Cooking

Kanjang, dwenjang, and kochujang are the three basic sauces of Korean cooking. Basic seasonings include garlic, green onions, red pepper flakes, fresh ginger, toasted sesame seeds, toasted sesame oil, and rice wine vinegar. Sweeteners include sugar, honey, malt barley, and malt syrup. White beef stock and sun-dried anchovy or kelp broth are the most common foundations for soups and stocks. Home cooks often use bouillon granules as a shortcut.

Contemporary cooking evolved from agrarian kitchens. Until the early 1970s, many households still used charcoal-fueled stoves, and poorer families often struggled with fuel shortages, especially during the winter. Large cylinders of charcoal were burned in an *agungi* (firebox) built into a stone table. One agungi heated at least two burners. The stone tables retained ambient heat and functioned to keep prepared foods warm before they were served.

The fireboxes also functioned to heat adjoining rooms, which were built slightly higher than the kitchen on raised masonry frames covered with clay. Agungi had vents in the back that were opened on chilly days. Smoke from the firebox was directed through flues underneath the rooms. The flues were insulated with layers of organic materials: shale, straw, stone, and clay. A vertical chimney at the other end of the house provided a draft. *Ondol* (underfloor heating systems) are still very popular in Korea. High-tech versions are utilized in homes, spas, and hotels.

Modern Korean kitchens are tiny by North American standards. They have gas-fueled stoves with at least four burners. Oven cooking is virtually unknown outside of European-style bakeries. Refrigerators are also very small by North American standards. Traditional rice pots are made from cast iron; some are made from stone for specialty dishes. Almost all households have electric rice cookers with different heat settings for cooking rice

and then keeping it warm. Rice is always served piping hot.

Soups and stews are served boiling hot. Basic soups or stews are made daily. Soybean-sprout, spinach, and seaweed *guk* (soup) are commonly prepared at home. Dwenjang, the fermented soybean paste, is a reliable source of protein and is used to flavor soups and stews. Dwenjang *chigae* (stew) is a convenient way to use leftover vegetables, beef, or fish cakes.

Pickled vegetables are served cold. Most households specialize in just a few kimchi preparations. *Baechu* kimchi (napa cabbage kimchi), *ggakdugi* kimchi (pickled daikon radish kimchi), and cucumber kimchi are probably the ones most commonly prepared at home. Other vegetable preparations are served at room temperature or slightly chilled. Besides pickling, vegetables are also blanched and lightly dressed with sesame oil, toasted sesame seeds, and minced garlic. Salad-type kimchi preparations are becoming increasingly common. Tender, uncooked greens are dressed in a kimchi vinaigrette of red pepper flakes, garlic, rice wine vinegar, toasted sesame oil, and sugar.

Since vegetables are a major component of the Korean diet, a great deal of emphasis is placed on precise vegetable preparations. Texture and color are of paramount importance. Each component of *japchae,* a dish of cellophane noodles tossed with a mixture of vegetables, is cooked individually even though all the ingredients are tossed together before plating: Spinach is blanched, then sautéed. Carrots are cut into matchsticks and sautéed until just tender but still a bit crunchy. Onions are thinly sliced and cooked until translucent. Mushrooms are lightly cooked, just enough to release their juices. Everything is seasoned with salt, toasted sesame oil, and garlic.

Koreans love fruit and tend to take great care in its presentation. Fruit is eaten as a snack and almost automatically offered to guests. Carefully peeled and neatly cut platters of fruit are served for dessert on special occasions. Otherwise, Koreans do not eat dessert of any kind on a regular basis. There is a cultural tendency to dislike very sweet foods. The Korean language has several words for gradations of sweetness; a light, natural sweetness is considered the most pleasing.

## Typical Meals

Since industrialization, South Koreans, especially women, have been abandoning the agrarian life in droves. The population of the greater Seoul region is 24.5 million, about half the total population of South Korea. Extensive transportation systems throughout the country have made domestic travel very accessible. The country's smaller cities, such as the port city of Pusan and Taejon, have fewer Western food options. Eating habits tend to differ more according to generation than by region. Younger Koreans tend to eat more white bread, beef, and sugar. Older Koreans tend to remain faithful to rice, kimchi, and soup as the trinity of the Korean meal.

Korean cuisine has been extensively cataloged and documented in historical texts, museums, cultural organizations, and cookbooks. The royal court of the Chosun dynasty delighted in gathering regional specialties. Today, regional tourist centers heavily promote local agriculture and dishes. South Korea is dotted with living museums, called folk villages, where visitors get glimpses of daily life in rural villages as they existed 50 to 100 years ago. Regardless of industrialization, Korean people are not in danger of losing their food culture.

Traditionally, Koreans sit on the floor for meals, usually on cushions. Many families now have Western-style tables. Food is eaten with steel or silver chopsticks and spoons. Rice is the focal point of the meal, kimchi is a constant companion, and at least one soup is eaten every day. Korean meals prepared at home expand on these basic components to include additional side dishes. Restaurant food varies widely. South Korea is a very entrepreneurial country, and new dishes and styles of eating are created frequently.

Koreans tend to be early risers. Breakfast is eaten before work, anytime between 5:30 and 7 A.M. Breakfast tends to be a simple but hearty meal of rice, kimchi, and soup. Koreans do not have separate breakfast foods. Younger Koreans might have some

bread purchased at a European-style bakery for breakfast.

Eating out for lunch is common and can be very inexpensive. Street food, food stalls, small snack shops, fast food, and food courts tend to be popular with students and young people, who are more likely to have noodles or bread for lunch than older Koreans. *Kimbap* (rice and vegetables wrapped in seaweed), *ddukbokki* (rice cakes and fish cakes in a spicy chili sauce), instant ramen, sandwiches, and burgers are common lunch items for students.

The Korean table is communal; all side dishes are shared. Koreans are very social eaters and love eating with family, friends, or coworkers. It's very common to go out for lunch and dinner with coworkers. Since Koreans also have a strong work ethic, lunch tends to be a bit rushed, and restaurants serve orders at astonishing speed. Again, there are no separate foods for lunch per se. Lunch meals tend to be lighter than dinner, but many of the same foods are served.

Dinner is the biggest meal of the day and is eaten at a more relaxed pace. Family mealtime is still honored. Unlike at lunch, rice is a must for dinner. Soups or stews tend to be heavier or more extravagant than those served for breakfast. Larger portions of protein are usually served, such as panfried fish, short ribs braised in soy sauce, barbecued beef, or barbecued pork marinated in chili sauce. More kimchi and vegetable dishes are also served.

Koreans cook a variety of dishes at the table. *Chongol,* one-pot stews of meat, poultry, or seafood and vegetables, with noodles sometimes added, are cooked in electric casseroles. Barbecue is cooked on aluminum grills or stone griddles over portable propane burners.

## Eating Out

Dining-out options are ample, almost all Korean food or Koreanized food. The Chinese are the largest minority group in Korea. For most of Korea's history, the peninsula did not share a border with China. Chinese began moving into the frontier between Manchuria and Korea in the 19th century, and some Chinese immigrated to Korea. Chinese restaurants were the first non-Korean dining options in the country. Common and special occasions are still punctuated with meals at Chinese restaurants.

Seafood and soybean products such as dubu (tofu) are the most common source of protein. Raw-seafood restaurants serve sashimi and sushi in the traditional Korean manner or in the Japanese style. Koreans who were educated abroad introduced Americanized sushi. Korean *hwe* (raw fish) is served with a vinegar-chili condiment (*cho kochujang*) and salad greens for wrapping (*ssam*).

Korea was never colonized by a Western power, nor does it have a history of Western immigration. European influences in food were filtered through Japan, where the British introduced curry. Packaged curry sauce is a mixture of spices, mostly turmeric, in a solidified suspension of oil and flour. The Portuguese introduced breaded cutlets (*tonkatsu*) and croquettes to Japan. Curry and tonkatsu are popular light meals in Korea. Croquettes are purchased at Korean-European fusion bakeries and eaten as snacks.

American influences entered Korea during the Korean War and continued with the U.S. military presence in South Korea. (South Korea is dotted with more than two dozen U.S. military installations.) American influences were limited to products such as instant coffee, powdered milk, Spam, and hard liquor until the industrialization process reached the level of globalization.

During Japanese occupation, British and American missionaries taught English in schools, and Korean elites began sending their children abroad for higher education. Middle-class Koreans view English-language acquisition as a marketable skill and American education as a window into modernity, necessary to be active participants in globalization. Koreans who had left for educational and economic opportunities in other countries began returning to take advantage of a growing domestic economy hungry for foreign products. Domestic and foreign corporations began responding to an increasing demand for convenience foods and international flavors. Processed foods and American-style fast food began rapidly proliferating. Ketchup, mayonnaise, bottled dressing, canned tuna, and sausages are now fairly common ingredients.

Snacks are purchased from sidewalk vendors or at food courts. *Pochang matcha* (outdoor food stalls) specialize in a specific dish or a small group of related dishes, which can be eaten on the spot or more commonly as takeout. In the evening tented pochang matcha serve as casual drinking spots.

Korea has an extensive drinking culture; *anju,* food eaten with drinks, includes almost all variations from light snacks to elaborate platters. Mom-and-pop businesses serve *soju* (grain alcohol) and *makuli* (unfiltered rice wine) with dried squid. *Hofs* (pubs) serve beer and fried chicken. Western-style restaurants and clubs serve wine, cocktails, and hard liquor with expensive platters of anju. Male-dominated corporate drinking is usually conducted in restaurants with private rooms. Traditional holidays and special occasions include ceremonial drinking.

Restaurants are highly specialized. Noodle shops serve specific noodles. *Kalguksu* (literally, "knife noodles," or noodles cut with a knife) are thick, soft wheat noodles served in meat or seafood stock with onions and sliced beef or shellfish. *Nengymyun* (literally meaning "cold noodles"), a North Korean cold buckwheat noodle dish, is a traditional winter dish that is now a summertime favorite. Restaurants serving *chajang-myun* (Chinese noodles in black bean sauce) often have front-window stations to show hand-pulled noodles being made.

Korean barbecue restaurants use lump charcoal or gas-fired grills built into tabletops. A few places still use large charcoal cylinders that are brought to the table in portable grills. Diners are served banchan (small shared dishes) and rice, as well as marinated beef, pork, or poultry that is cooked at the table. Marinades are based on either soy sauce or chili paste, to which garlic, sugar, and toasted sesame oil are added. Chili-paste marinades usually include rice wine vinegar.




A food market in the Dongmyo district of Seoul, South Korea. (Sebastian Czapnik | Dreamstime.com)

Ssam, a style of eating, is not limited to raw seafood. Grilled meat or steamed pork belly is wrapped in lettuce leaves with slivers of raw garlic and thinly sliced raw green peppers, and served with *ssamjang,* literally, "wrap sauce."

Koreans eat soup almost every day with breakfast, lunch, or dinner. White beef stock, anchovy broth, or dried seaweed broth serves as the basis for light soups or noodle broths. Restaurants don't just serve soup; they serve specific types of *tang,* meat- or poultry-based soups. *Samgyetang,* game hens stuffed with sweet rice and cooked in a stock of ginseng, jujubes, and garlic, is considered a medicinal food. Ginseng is valued for its purported health benefits.

*Bibimbap* literally means "mixed rice." Many restaurants serve this dish, but restaurants that specialize in it tend to offer more elaborate versions. *Dolsot bibimbap* is almost exclusively a restaurant dish. It is served in a hot stone pot (*dolsot*) that creates a delicious crust at the bottom of the bowl.

On weekends, younger Koreans frequently go bar and restaurant hopping, with predinner drinks at a club, an appetizer at a trendy restaurant, and a main course at another restaurant, followed by a night of drinking and partying.

*Hanjeongsik* is a multicourse meal based on royal and aristocratic ways of eating. Contemporary interpretations are often presented as tourist attractions; dishes can vary widely, but the general idea is to serve a dozen or two regional preparations that also represent a range of ingredients and cooking methods. A meal might begin with a cold appetizer and abalone *juk* (rice porridge), followed by one or more of the following dishes: braised beef, grilled whole fish, *sinseollo* (hot pot made with meatballs, mushrooms, and vegetables), *chongol* (casserole-type hot pots), *gulchupan* (nine varieties of vegetables served with minicrepes and dipping sauces), marinated raw blue crab, cold seafood salads, stuffed mussels, steamed clams, crispy fried whole prawns, raw seafood plates, seaweed salad, stuffed peppers, battered and fried vegetables, and savory crepes. Various soups, kimchis, and salad-type preparations fill in the courses. Desserts include sweet-rice punch, cinnamon persimmon punch, or *omija* tea (five-flavored tea), fresh and dried fruit, and a selection of rice cakes and Korean cookies.



Bibimbap. (Courtesy of the Korea Tourism Organization)

## Special Occasions

Shamanism (known in Korea as Muism; the shaman is called a *mudang*) is the oldest religion in Korea, and a shaman might be consulted regarding marital or financial decisions, as an intercessor with the gods. Missionaries from Central Asia and China introduced Buddhism to Korea in the fourth century during the Three Kingdoms period of the Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla dynasties; it became the official religion of all three states. The tradition continued when the three kingdoms were unified as the Koryo dynasty (917–935). The Chosun dynasty (1392–1910) adhered to the sociopolitical tenets of Korean neo-Confucianism and took a policy of tolerating Buddhism and relegating shamanism to rural areas. Figures vary widely, but it is estimated that approximately half of all Koreans who profess religious affiliation are Buddhists; the other half are Christians. Shamanism has declined rapidly during the past few decades.

Catholic missionaries first arrived in the 17th century. Koreans living in Manchuria first met Protestant missionaries from Scotland in 1884. Presbyterian Reverend John Ross helped translate the first Korean-language version of the Bible. In the

1880s, Methodists and Presbyterians from America came to Korea and worked as teachers and doctors. Medical missionaries helped build Korea's first Western hospital. The majority of Christians are Protestant, 70 percent of whom are Presbyterian. Christmas foods include barbecued *kalbi* (ribs), cellophane noodles with mixed vegetables, savory crepes, battered and fried vegetables, special pickles, and beef soup and rice.

Buddha's birthday is the most important holiday for Korean Buddhists. Weeklong festivities include lighting strings of colorful lanterns, lantern parades, and eating special foods. Many temples provide tea and *sanchae bibimbap,* rice mixed with wild greens.

Major cultural holidays shared by all Koreans include the lunar New Year (*seollal*) and harvest moon festival (*chuseok*). Dumpling and rice cake soup is the traditional New Year's dish. *Songpyeon* are crescent-shaped rice cakes that represent the moon for the harvest moon festival. Regional stuffing variations include pumpkin, chestnut paste, sesame seeds, and acorns. Five-colored songpyeon are a specialty of Seoul. Ingredients such as cinnamon powder, strawberry syrup, and gardenia seeds are used to tint the dough. White, pink, green, brown, and yellow represent the harmony of nature. In Pyongyang they make clam-shaped songpyeon. The ability to make aesthetically pleasing songpyeon is an auspicious sign of beautiful babies to come, especially lovely daughters.

Many families with a deceased parent or parents integrate memorial services into seollal and chuseok. These services are typically held at the eldest son's home. *Charye,* a ritualized system of presenting and consuming food, includes symbolic and seasonal dishes. The foods are placed on the table in a specific order following an east–west orientation. A variety of whole fruits is a must, as are ceremonial wine, rice cakes and cookies, whole fish, and seasonal vegetable dishes. Fresh vegetables are sliced, dipped in batter, and panfried to make *jun.* Vegetables are also chosen for color; spinach, mung bean sprouts, and fern brake (a kind of fiddlehead) are blanched and lightly seasoned. Kimchi is served freshly prepared, never fermented. Some families include whole dried cuttlefish and whole chicken. Dried fruits include persimmon, jujubes, and apricots. At the head of the table are bowls of rice and rice cake soup; at the opposite end on a smaller table is the ceremonial wine.

*Baekil* is celebrated to mark the first 100 days of a baby's life. A variety of symbolic rice cakes are served, such as songpyeon for a healthy mind and white rice cakes for purity and longevity. For first-birthday celebrations, babies are dressed in *tolbok,* traditional clothes made of silk tied with a long silk belt representing longevity. A ceremonial table is prepared with the child at the head of the table. Towers of rice cakes and mounds of fresh whole fruit are served with soup and rice. Various objects including a book, needle and thread, and a ruler are placed in front of the child; whichever one he or she grabs first is considered a sign of the life to come. Books represent a scholarly life, a toy weapon represents warriorship, and thread represents longevity. Neighbors and friends give 24-carat gold rings. Children's Day is celebrated on May 5. Children are given presents, taken on field trips, given their favorite treats, and generally doted on.

South Korean wedding ceremonies have changed dramatically over the past few decades and continue to evolve and adapt to changing social structures. Contemporary weddings typically incorporate elements of Korean and Western-style ceremonies in varying degrees. Many couples have their *hanbok* (traditional clothes) custom made, as they will be worn again on traditional holidays. Western-style dresses and tuxedoes are available for rent at bridal shops. Wedding halls cater to both markets with turnkey packages. Noodles are served to represent hopes for a long and happy life together.

## Diet and Health

Taoism was introduced into Korea in the seventh century. The first Taoist temple was built in the 12th century and was occupied by 11 Korean Taoist monks. However, Taoism never developed into an organization of believers or as a distinct branch of thought on the peninsula. Evidence indicates that elements of Taoism were integrated into shamanism and Buddhism. The national flag of South

Korea has the yin-yang symbol in the center and an I Ching trigram at each corner.

Traditional Korean medicine, *hanbang,* is based on the concepts of *chi, eum-yang* (yin and yang), and the five elements: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. Concepts borrowed from Taoism were translated into Korean ethnomedicine and continue to evolve. Hanbang has a long contiguous history on the peninsula going back thousands of years.

Historically, hanbang had support from various royal dynasties and continued support from postwar governments. Aspects of it permeate Korean culture and persist even in diaspora societies, including among foreign-born Koreans, regardless of educational level and understanding of modern medicine. It is not considered an alternative medicine. Koreans tend to use hanbang remedies for preventative care, for strengthening the immune system, and for detoxification, general weakness, or chronic conditions, while they use Western medicine for acute problems. There is a cultural tendency toward syncretism; the two approaches are viewed as complementary, not contradictory. Hanbang also places importance on proper eating habits. Orally ingested remedies are not just in the form of herbal teas and tonics; food is also medicine.

Modernization has only made hanbang even more popular. It was always a part of Korean spa culture with hot herbal dips, aromatherapy rooms, and salt-bed treatments. More recently, hanbang herbs have been integrated into toiletries and expensive skin-care products. Marketing campaigns incorporate themes of nostalgia as the "natural approach of our ancestors."

Buddhism influenced virtually every aspect of Korean culture. Wonhyo (617–686), a Buddhist monk and great scholar, took Buddhism out of the exclusive realm of the ruling elites and aristocracy. He chose to travel the countryside, spreading Buddhism as penance after siring a son with a Silla princess. Pure-land Buddhism and meditative Buddhism had the greatest impact on Korean religious beliefs. Chinese Ch'an Buddhism was introduced into Korea in the seventh century, where it became interpreted as Son; almost 500 years later it would become Zen in Japan. Son Buddhism is the dominant form of Buddhism in Korea today.

Mahayana monks developed strictly vegetarian temple food. Temple cooking utilizes vegetables and herbs harvested in the mountains. This aspect of temple cooking probably influenced the Korean tendency to make kimchi out of virtually any vegetable. "Hot" vegetables such as garlic, green onion, rocambole (a kind of garlic), and leeks are not used. Temple kimchis do not include salted or fermented fish. The main seasonings are salt, soy sauce, red chili powder, ginger, and sesame seeds. Pine nuts and perilla leaves are used as thickeners. Some temples are renowned for specific types of kimchi.

*Susan Ji-Young Park*

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# Lao People's Democratic Republic

## Overview

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), a landlocked country in Southeast Asia, is classified as a low-income food-deficit country. After decades of war, including fighting for independence from French colonial control and surviving the bombing inflicted by the American secret war, the country remains food insecure. The Communist Pathet Lao took over the country in 1975, ending the royal rule and feudal governance. The persistent poverty is reflected in the nutritional status of its population, with nearly half its children under five underweight, and many stunted and wasted. The government has been struggling to improve food security in the country.

The ethnic Lao in the Lao PDR represent 68 percent of the population. In addition, the Lao government recognizes 65 distinct ethnic groups but stresses "unity in diversity" among all ethnic groups. Ethnic minorities such as the Akha and Hmong cross national borders, while other groups occupy marginal lands such as dense upland forests. Most ethnic minorities are adapted to upland mountain ecologies. Theravada Buddhism is the dominant religion of the Lao in the Lao PDR; however, the Pathet Lao discouraged religious practice, and only recently have young men returned to the practice of being ordained as monks in their local temples.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Khamla and Manivong live in a small village close to the old royal capital of Luang Prabang. They own a small farm and work it with Manivong's brother. They have four school-age children, three girls and one boy, but Manivong remembers her son who died at six months of age. Each morning, they steam glutinous rice, and they generally eat two rice meals a day, at dawn and dusk. Their children carry sticky rice in a basket along with some leftover fish with them to school to eat at midday. Their son watches for frogs and lizards he can capture and grill for lunch, but if his sisters see him, he must bring all the food home to share with the family. Like other families in their village, they might sit down in the evening to a basket of steamed sticky rice; a bowl of *padek* (fermented fish paste); a plate of fresh greens including cilantro, mint, basil, watercress, lettuce, and wild greens from the forest with a chili-based dipping sauce; and a pot of fish soup with bamboo shoots.

The rice comes from their own fields, along with beans and garlic that Manivong tends in their household garden. Most days, they are able to catch small fish at the edge of their fields. They gather bamboo shoots and mushrooms in the forest, where Manivong knows the location of wild foods. Manivong has been trying to teach her daughters how to recognize wild forest foods and process them to remove the toxins, but her daughters don't like the taste of wild foods and want to be taken into Luang Prabang where they can eat more refined foods and even French baguettes.

## Major Foodstuffs

The Lao PDR is primarily agricultural. The key marker of the collective identity of lowland Lao

is the use of glutinous or sticky rice as their daily staple. More recent arrivals to the Lao PDR such as the Yao and Hmong prefer to use nonglutinous rice. The Lao appreciate the qualities of glutinous rice and believe that glutinous rice is more nutritious and more aromatic than any other kind of rice. Rice adapts to local conditions, and rice surveys in the country have found over 3,000 distinct rice varieties, most of them glutinous. Glutinous rice is generally hardier and survives drought, salinity, and floods better than its nonglutinous relatives. Most glutinous rice is consumed close to its place of production. It is eaten by hand; a ball is formed by hand with a thumb-size indentation and then is used to scoop up some sauce or side dish.

In the forests of the Lao PDR, wild yams, cassava, and taro are collected by women who know where to find them and how to process them to remove poisons, if necessary, by soaking, cooking, and drying the roots. They also collect mushrooms, bamboo products, wild greens, and herbs. Greens, vegetables, and aromatic herbs are available from household gardens and collected from forests; they are particularly valued for their freshness and texture. Recent development projects on home gardens in rural areas have dramatically increased the amount of fresh vegetables available to households. Wild greens and herbs are often available free or at very low cost to rural households. Vegetables are used in soups and in quick stir-fries.

Fish and fermented fish products are important parts of Lao diets. The Mekong River supplies people from the Lao PDR with an abundant supply of river fish. The favorite, the giant Mekong catfish, whose properties have reached mythical proportions, is near extinction. Lao make use of fermented fish products made in the household to suit the taste of family members. Accompanying most rice



An old woman in ethnic clothing works in a rice paddy. (Shutterstock)

meals is a sauce or paste made from fermented fish or shellfish. The salted, dried fish are pounded and packed with toasted rice and rice husks in ceramic jars for a month or more. Rice husks along with salt break down the fish, and special ceramic jars absorb the odor. Fish products that are fermented become "cooked" and are no longer considered "raw." In its thicker form, called padek, fermented fish is served as a dish with rice. Many poor households may have only padek to eat with rice.

Roasted glutinous rice powder adds texture and taste to Lao dishes. It is made by dry-roasting glutinous rice in a dry pan until brown and fragrant. It is then cooled and ground to a powder. It can be stored for several weeks.

## Cooking

Cooking for the Lao means to prepare food for consumption, not just to apply heat. Thus fermenting, sun-drying, and preparing raw dishes are important parts of the cooking process. Lao meals require the freshest possible ingredients, prepared simply by steaming, boiling, or grilling. Grilling of meats is most often done by men. However, everyday food preparation and cooking of rice are usually done by women and young girls.

Fermenting is one of the most important food-processing techniques in the Lao PDR. Fermented fish products are processed in rural households or purchased ready prepared at the market in towns and cities where modern neighbors might not appreciate the smell emitted by jars of fermenting fish. Other items such as bamboo shoots and bean curd can be fermented as well. Often, the water used for washing rice or the initial cooking of rice is used in the fermenting process. Sun-drying is another useful food-processing technique in communities without refrigeration. Vegetables can be sun-dried, as well as beef, water buffalo, and leftover glutinous rice. Vegetables may also be salted or pickled in vinegar to form the basis for sour salads or side dishes.

Glutinous rice must be soaked in water for several hours or overnight before it is steamed in a conical bamboo steamer. The cooked rice is then turned out, patted with a paddle or wooden spoon to remove lumps, and packed in rice baskets until ready to eat.

Soups are boiled and vary from the simplest flavored water to more complex fish broths. Grilling food over wood or charcoal has a long tradition in the Lao PDR. Grilled vegetables also add texture to many different recipes. When the cooking is done over an open fire, children emulate the technique by grilling frogs, fish, and insects over small fires. A variety of wrapped foods (*mok*) are roasted on hot embers. Fish and chicken pieces are easily turned on a grill when they are wedged between strips of split bamboo. The following Lao version of barbecued chicken traveled from the Lao PDR through northeastern Thailand into the specialty shops of Bangkok and around the world.



Gai yang being sold at an open air market in Laos. (Shutterstock)

***Gai Yang* (Lao-Style Barbecue Chicken)**

1 chicken, split open (or use legs and thighs)

**Marinade**

1 stalk lemongrass, sliced

3 tbsp coriander roots, minced

Pinch salt

1 tbsp fish sauce

2 tsp white pepper

5 cloves garlic

(Coconut milk to moisten paste if necessary)

Grind marinade ingredients in a small food processor. Rub into the chicken pieces, and marinate at least 3 hours or overnight in the refrigerator. Grill until bottom side is brown; turn over and grill until juices run clear. Serve with steamed glutinous rice and papaya salad.

## Typical Meals

In rural and urban communities, glutinous rice with side dishes of soup, vegetables, and fresh or fermented fish may be prepared for breakfast, with the leftover dishes and rice eaten at noon and evening meals. Towns and cities provide the opportunity to purchase fresh baguettes, which are consumed with relishes for breakfast or snacks. Fruit is also a common snack, often dipped in a mixture of sugar, salt, and dried chilies. When rural children take a basket of glutinous rice to school for a midday meal, they may pick up edible leaves, herbs, insects, fish, or frogs to go with their rice.

Most rural meals are served and consumed on woven floor mats or at low bamboo tables. Lao households and restaurants provide places for hand washing, since they use small balls of sticky rice as scoops for side dishes. Leaves, herbs, and greens can also be used as wrappers to carry food to the mouth. Side dishes are served all at once with baskets of sticky rice. *Jeaw,* the Lao version of a hot chili sauce, accompanies most meals. It is common for people to offer the best pieces from a side dish to others at the table. A choice piece of fish or meat, for example, might be picked up and placed on the plate of a favored relative or guest.

The best-known Lao dish is *laap,* a spicy minced fish or meat dish served primarily on festive occasions in villages but widely available in restaurants in the country and overseas. This dish condenses many significant contrasts; real men eat *laap dip* (raw laap), while women and those concerned about the health risks associated with eating raw meat prefer *laap suk,* or cooked laap. The following version is cooked lightly, but it could be modified for other taste preferences.

***Beef Laap***

1 lb lean ground beef

1 green onion, finely chopped

2 chilies, chopped

1-in. piece galangal, finely chopped

2 stalks lemongrass, finely chopped

1 tbsp fish sauce

2 tbsp lime juice

1½ tbsp roasted rice powder

½ c chopped mint

½ c chopped cilantro

Cook beef lightly in a nonstick pan, and let cool. Mix with all other ingredients. Adjust seasonings to taste, and serve on a bed of lettuce with extra cilantro and mint.

A legacy of French colonialism, baguettes have made their way into Lao meals at breakfast and in the form of baguette sandwiches that blend French and Vietnamese food items. In the cities and towns of the Lao PDR, these baguettes replace rice-based meals.

## Eating Out

In a country that is food insecure like the Lao PDR, one might not expect great restaurants. But in cities like Vientiane and Luang Prabang wonderful

French restaurants are to be found, with Lao chefs trained in the French culinary arts. Restaurants are relatively new and cater to the newly developed tourist market in the country. Young tourists are often attracted to eating sticky rice with their hands. But Lao cuisine is not as well known as Thai or Vietnamese. Lao cuisine is often considered crude and rustic compared with Thai or Vietnamese cuisine. Lao cuisine is harder to replicate in overseas restaurants because of its reliance on aromatic and bitter herbs that are rarely imported or grown outside of the country. Many greens and herbs are wild forest foods gathered by villagers and consumed immediately.

In all areas of the Lao PDR, noodle or rice soup is available at small stands, served with platters of fresh vegetables and greens to be eaten on the side or submerged in the hot soup. Fried grasshoppers sold in street stalls in Lao towns provide protein for poor rural migrants and get rid of pesky grasshoppers that could damage crops.

## Special Occasions

Lao people love parties and share food generously on any occasion. When people recover from an illness, move away, or change status, their souls may wander and need to be called back through a *sukhwan* ritual to entice their souls to reside firmly in their bodies, held in place with strings tied around their wrists. Spirit souls are attracted back through these household and community rituals, centered around a treelike structure draped with white strings, surrounded by dishes of cooked rice, boiled eggs, fruit, and whiskey. Following the ritual blessings, food and drink are shared among all participants.

Theravada Buddhist rituals of food sharing were discouraged by the Pathet Lao but are reemerging in many towns. Transplanting rice in particular is marked by ritual; during transplanting, the spirits of the rice fields are fed and honored with blessings. Community-wide feasts of merit are held in the uplands of the Lao PDR, when a buffalo might be sacrificed. In the uplands, people give feasts to gain political and spiritual potency. Fermented rice liquor plays a key role in many Lao celebrations, as consumption of alcohol creates links between the living and the dead, humans and spirits, and guests and hosts.

## Diet and Health

Years of war reduced the formerly self-sufficient country to conditions that threatened the diet and health of much of the population. The Lao PDR is now a food-insecure country with high malnutrition rates. Insufficient food consumption, in addition to infection and poor health, is the primary cause of malnutrition. Poor diets can also contribute to other problems such as iron deficiency, vitamin A deficiency (resulting in night blindness), and iodine deficiency (resulting in goiter), a common problem in some regions of the country.

The Lao government, along with United Nations partners, is working toward reducing the high infant and under-five mortality rates, as well as maternal mortality rates and malnutrition. The national prevalence of critical food poverty was around 18 percent, indicating that nearly one in five people did not have enough income to buy the food necessary to meet their daily minimum energy requirements. The upland peoples depend more on natural resources than food purchases, but their wild food sources are increasingly threatened as forests are eroded.

Communities depend on traditional herbal medicines, since few people outside of cities have access to primary health care. Herbal medicines are part of health-maintenance systems, not simply treatments for specific diseases. Herbal medicines can be taken orally in alcohol, water, or rice water; swallowed in pill form; or rubbed on the body. They can also be used for a steam "sauna." Herbal saunas are particularly popular with women. Most striking is the number of products used in each concoction; common ingredients include chilies, red ginger, sesame oil, cottonseed, opium, bark, leaves, roots, and ground snail shells. Spirit doctors and shamans practice in some minority communities.

*Penny Van Esterik*

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# Macau

## Overview

Macau (also spelled Macao) and its two associated islands of Coloane and Taipa is a tiny enclave located at the mouth of the Pearl River Estuary. Originally a small village populated by southern Chinese fisherman, Macau is the site of the earliest—and longest—European settlement in Asia. Portuguese merchants were the first to stop in Macau, which happened to be located on their Asian trade route, halfway between Japan and Melaka. The Chinese, being highly suspicious of foreigners, at first granted them only the right to drop anchor. Eventually they grew to tolerate the Portuguese traders who brought silver from Japan and were so eager to purchase Chinese silks, ceramics, and tea. Over four centuries, the Portuguese gradually extended their presence to erecting onshore storage for their warehouses and later establishing a permanent settlement and self-administration rights. Ultimately the Chinese lost all control of the enclave after the Opium War, when Macau was formally ceded to the Portuguese.

Macau was returned to China in 1999, but 500 years of exposure to Portuguese ways left an indelible impression on all aspects of life. Today, the local population is 95 percent Chinese, mostly of Cantonese or Fujianese descent, with Portuguese (both expatriates and local-born), as well as those of mixed Chinese Portuguese descent—the Macanese—making up the remainder. A contemporary visitor to Macau looking to experience the cuisine would find that most restaurants offer either Cantonese or Portuguese cuisine, with a small minority offering international alternatives such as Thai, Japanese, French, and fusion. Few restaurants serve only Macanese cuisine, and until recently Macanese dishes were usually found in Chinese or Portuguese restaurants as part of the larger menu or were prepared in private homes. This is perhaps reflective of the tiny Macanese demographic. Traditional Macanese recipes were thus prepared by only a small number of people, mostly female homemakers who tended to guard their recipes jealously. This has raised concerns that Macanese food culture is in danger of disappearing. The 1999 handover, however, has caused many local and expatriate Macanese to reexamine their unique identity, and happily this has resulted in a resurgent interest in Macanese foodways.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Evelyn and Rick Lopes are a middle-class Macanese couple. Evelyn, who speaks both Cantonese and English, is of Chinese descent, but her family has lived in Macau for generations and consider themselves to be *ngo mun yan,* or "Macau people." Her husband, Rick, is of mixed Portuguese-Chinese descent. His primary languages are Cantonese and English, although he knows a smattering of Portuguese as well. Both work in one of the large casinos, Evelyn in marketing and Rick as security. Their food habits are typical of the local population's, which are very similar to those of Hong Kong. Breakfast either is a quick meal of toast and coffee at home or is eaten in one of the many *cha chaan teng* cafés before work. Ham and macaroni in chicken broth, preserved mustard greens with minced pork in soup noodles, or pineapple buns (sweet rolls with a cracked cookie-like crust on top) sliced and

filled with a wedge of butter are typical choices. Rick eats lunch at the casino cafeteria, but Evelyn packs a hot thermos full of rice and leftovers from the night before. This may contain a chicken curry and some boiled green vegetables, *minchi* (a dish of ground meat and potatoes dish), or some salted fish. If she does not bring her lunch, she might go back to the cha chaan teng to order three-treasures rice (a selection of three different roasted meats over rice with some Chinese broccoli), *ma kai yau* (a local dish of fried potatoes with *bacalhau*—salted preserved fish), or fried fish croquettes. Similar to their neighbors in Hong Kong, dinner usually consists of rice, a soup, and two to three dishes that include vegetables and meat. If Rick is working late, he might go out after his shift for an additional meal of *siu yeh* with his friends. Favorite foods at this time include a sweet egg tea made with medicinal herbs, *cha cha* (pronounced *tsa tsa;* a Malaysian dessert of shaved coconut, taro, cream, sugar, and coconut milk), or long fried dough sticks called *yeow tsa gwai,* dunked in plain white congee (rice porridge).

There are only three "fresh" markets in Macau, and these are open twice a day—once in the morning at around 10 A.M. and again at 5 P.M., to catch office workers on their way home. Most Macanese will shop for their staples in these markets almost daily; freshness of ingredients is valued, and, in any case, homes and kitchens are small, limiting the amount of bulk purchases that can be made. There are well-stocked supermarkets in Macau, but these are frequented more for household items, frozen foods, snacks, and imported foods. There are generational differences in shopping preferences, too—the younger generation will do more shopping in supermarkets, while the older generation will purchase almost all their foods in the open markets and traditional specialty stores.

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***Minchi***

Pronounced "meen tse" in Cantonese, this is probably a corruption of the English word *minced.* Minchi is a homey dish that does not usually appear on restaurant menus, but every Macanese family nonetheless has their own unique recipe for making it. The general formula consists of minced meat sautéed with fried diced potatoes and onions, flavored with soy sauce. Worcestershire sauce and molasses also appear in some versions—a reminder of the influence the British had on some groups of Macanese. The dish is quite salty, which makes it an ideal accompaniment over a mound of white rice. Minchi may also be topped with a fried egg, a flourish often assumed to derive from the Portuguese habit of topping steak with a fried egg. Combining meat with a variety of vegetables makes this an inexpensive, quick, and balanced one-pot meal (except for the rice, of course, which cooks in a rice cooker while this dish is prepared).

3 tbsp olive oil
2 medium russet potatoes, diced
3 cloves garlic, smashed and minced
1 onion, chopped into small dice
1 bay leaf
1 c fresh or frozen peas
1 lb minced pork, not too lean (at most 80% lean)
2 tsp sugar
1½ tbsp light soy sauce
3 tbsp dark soy sauce
1 tsp salt
2 tsp white pepper
½ tsp sesame oil

1. Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in a wok or frying pan until shimmering. Sauté potatoes until golden and beginning to crisp at edges. Set aside.
2. Heat second tablespoon of olive oil in pan. Add garlic and sauté until fragrant, being careful not to burn it. Add onion and bay leaf, and stir-fry 3–4 minutes, then add peas. Continue to cook until onion is translucent and peas are tender. Set aside.
3. Place minced pork in a bowl. Add sugar, both soy sauces, salt, white pepper, and sesame oil.
4. Heat third tablespoon of oil. Add minced pork and stir-fry over high heat, alternately pressing down flat with a spatula and "slicing" the pork with the edge of the spatula to break down the meat into small bits, about 5 minutes.

5. Return onion, bay leaf, and peas to pan with pork, and continue to cook another 3–4 minutes, and taste. The minchi should be quite salty as it will be accompanying plain white rice, which can be sweet. Add more light and/or dark soy sauce as necessary.

6. Serve over white rice, with fried potatoes if desired.

## Major Foodstuffs

The Macanese pantry is an edible lineup representing Portugal's colonial empire. When viewed together one might wonder how such an eclectic mix of ingredients could ever work together. In fact, they do so spectacularly, composing what has been referred to as the original East–West fusion cuisine.

As one of the most densely populated places in the world, Macau does not have a lot of arable land so food must be imported, mainly via Hong Kong and southern China. The foodstuffs may not originate from Hong Kong and China, but those places have a much more robust infrastructure (airports, container terminals, warehouses, etc.), and it is easier for little Macau to leverage these resources rather than build its own.

Dark and light soy sauces, Shaoxing rice wine for cooking, and *lap cheong* (sweet pork sausages) make up the local contingent of ingredients, while olive oil and olives, *morcela* (Portuguese blood sausage), bacalhau (salt-preserved codfish), and milk are the Portuguese contributions. Southeast Asian staples such as coconut milk, cinnamon, bay leaf, turmeric, curry mixes, bird's-eye chilies, saffron, tamarind, and fragrant jasmine rice round out the team to add depth and complexity to Macanese recipes.

*Balichão* is perhaps the most defining ingredient in Macanese cuisine. Usually described as a fermented fish sauce, it is actually made of shrimp, unlike the Vietnamese or Thai fish sauces that are often suggested as substitutions. Those are made from anchovies. The name is believed to be derived from Malaysian *balachan,* a krill-based paste that is sold in blocks, and balichão is believed to be the precursor of the very pungent Cantonese shrimp paste.



Bacalhau, a type of fish, cooked in Portuguese style. (Tim Martin | Dreamstime.com)

Balichão is used to flavor soups and stews, stir-fries, and casseroles. Sadly, there are few balichão producers today, and those who remain tend to be elderly. Since it may be difficult to purchase authentic balichão, fish sauces may be used or cooks may prepare their own.

## Cooking

As in neighboring Hong Kong, basic cooking equipment found in every kitchen includes a rice cooker, Chinese cleaver, wok, and chopping block. Macanese households are more likely to use ovens than their Chinese counterparts to prepare Portuguese-style dishes such as casseroles, roasts, baked desserts, and such. Kitchens and homes are still very small, though, so not every household has a full stove and oven. Chinese households vastly outnumber Macanese ones in any case, which means that

the cooking habits for most of Macau's population are similar to those of Hong Kong households.

## Typical Meals

Macau is a complicated hybrid of so many cultures absorbed over time that food historians have had difficulty identifying what recipes should be considered "typical" or "traditional" to Macau. How dishes are prepared can vary according to preferences, identity, and economic status. For example, Portuguese Chinese cuisine was fused in Portuguese or mixed Portuguese-Chinese households that would hire Chinese cooks to prepare their daily meals. When certain ingredients were too expensive or not available, these cooks would find local substitutes. They would also prepare specialties from their home regions for their employers, resulting in a very eclectic combination of dishes at the table. In Chinese households on Macau the picture would have been very different. The food budget might not have been as large, and the preference might have been to prepare Chinese cuisine from inexpensive local ingredients. Later, when groups of Cristang (people of mixed Portuguese-Melakan heritage, a result of Portuguese settlement in the 16th century) migrated to Macau, they brought with them their foodways as well, which were in turn influenced by the Portuguese, Indians, Malays, and others. These differences have created a variety of possible Macanese culinary norms that have been passed along in families and communities. Additionally, truly Macanese households—those of mixed Portuguese-Chinese descent—are in the extreme minority. All these factors make it difficult to describe a typical meal in Macau.

Generally speaking, most Macanese tend to eat just one or two Macanese dishes a day. A Macanese meal at home today may include one Macanese dish—a meat-based casserole or curry, accompanied by several dishes that are more readily considered Chinese, such as a slow-simmered soup or simply cooked vegetables, and rice.

Contrary to what might be expected, collections of Macanese recipes contain few that seem to be of Chinese origin. However, there are also relatively few Macanese recipes for preparing vegetables. Green salads are popular instead and stand out in stark contrast to the usual Chinese abhorrence of raw vegetables. Otherwise, cooked vegetables are usually prepared in the simple Cantonese style by boiling and dressing them with oyster sauce or stir-frying them with garlic.

There is a well-established wine culture in Macau that is unusual for an Asian city. The earliest merchants and missionaries brought casks of wine and spirits with them. Over time locals grew to enjoy glasses of *vinho verde* (light green–tinted white wine) with their meals as well, which, incidentally, pairs well with the seafood-rich Macanese cuisine. Today, wine is preferred over soft drinks at the dinner table and is available at even the most humble hole-in-the-wall café. Indeed, Macau imports the best selection of Portuguese wines anywhere in the world outside of Portugal.

## Eating Out

Macanese cuisine has a reputation for being tasty but not elegant, and the enclave is often considered Mediterranean-like in its pace. These characteristics are reflected by the fact that locals generally favor smaller, less formal dining establishments, such as cha chaan teng (literally, "tea diner"), noodle shops, or small mom-and-pop restaurants, and these types of restaurants make up the majority in Macau. There are international fast-food chains in Macau, but only a handful.

Surprisingly, there used to be few authentic Portuguese restaurants in the enclave. In the mid-1980s this began to change, and now there are a variety of well-respected Portuguese restaurants on Macau that have been written up in guidebooks and are a draw for gourmets and tourists alike.

The waterfront in Macau has seen quite a transformation in the early years of this century, with large and impressive new casinos being built on reclaimed land. It used to be that there were only a couple of restaurants located in the old casinos. They catered to tourists, day-trippers from Hong Kong trying their luck upstairs, and diners looking for a nostalgic experience. The food was mediocre,



Luxury casino and restaurant on the waterfront in Macau. (Leung Cho Pan | Dreamstime.com)

and by the late 1990s the once-grand decor—all-red carpeting, brass railings, large staircases, and crystal chandeliers—was just loud and shabby. With the arrival of the new casinos there are other options now, but food habits are hard to change, and the locals rarely visit casinos for their restaurants.

## Special Occasions

The Macanese preference for laid-back, informal dining extends to special occasions. Birthdays, new years, and other events are best celebrated by having a feast known as *cha gorda* (literally, "fat tea") at home with the extended family. Cha gorda is the quintessential Macanese meal, a smorgasbord of favorite foods held at home and never at a restaurant. Roasted meats, soups, curries, rice, potatoes, bread, desserts, and a hot-pot dish of pig's feet and sausage known as *tacho*—all are piled onto a groaning table to feed the extended family and friends who are invited over.

Some favorite Macanese dishes at a cha gorda are Portuguese curried chicken (which paradoxically cannot be found in Portugal), African chicken, curried crab, and *vaca estufada* (braised beef loin). These are also occasions where a more expensive or time-consuming dish such as duck *bafassa* (*bafa* means "to simmer," and *assar,* "to roast"—the duck is first simmered in a vinegar-based mixture, then roasted) might make an appearance.

## Diet and Health

Macanese cuisine, while heavily Portuguese in nature and not very vegetable-centric, includes many more vegetables in its repertoire than Portuguese cuisine does. This is probably due to influence from Chinese foodways, in which vegetables play a key role in maintenance of a healthy diet. Indeed, no meal is considered complete unless accompanied by at least one vegetable-centric dish. The local Chinese in turn have taken a cue from the Portuguese table and embraced olive oil in their cooking for its healthful properties.

Cholesterol might be a concern for those who consume Macanese specialties on a regular basis.

Lard is still a popular choice for cooking and pastry making. Local desserts such as Portuguese egg tarts (the pastry shell is best made with lard), flans, and custards are derived from Portuguese recipes, which tend to rely on egg yolks. The Macanese love their seafood, and seafood in general can be high in cholesterol, but crab—which is the featured ingredient in Macau's famous curried crab dish—is also picked clean of its greenish hepatopancreas (commonly referred to as the "mustard"). The mustard is considered a delicacy, but toxins such as mercury can accumulate here if the crab is raised in polluted waters and therefore it should be consumed with caution.

One of the more unhealthy Macanese dietary habits—the heavy consumption of carbohydrates—can be considered a curious side effect of being influenced by so many cuisines. Minchi, for example, is a popular home-style dish of minced meat with fried diced potatoes that is eaten over rice, often served with a side of bread.

In terms of how the general Macanese population eats, whether Chinese, Portuguese, Macanese, or expatriate, Macau has its share of dietary concerns arising from the increased consumption of processed, junk, and fast foods. Local public health authorities are trying to raise awareness of the risks associated with overconsumption of these foods and promote healthier alternatives.

*Karen Lau Taylor*

**Further Reading**

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# Malaysia

## Overview

Malaysia, a country located in Southeast Asia, is surrounded by the South China Sea in the east and the Strait of Melaka in the west. This country consists of two parts, East Malaysia and West Malaysia. East Malaysia is made up of two states called Sabah and Sarawak, which are located on the island of Borneo. It faces the South China Sea and is bordered by the Philippine archipelago in the north. The more populated and more advanced part is West Malaysia, where the capital city, Kuala Lumpur, is located. West Malaysia, or Peninsular Malaysia, also shares a border with Thailand in the north and Singapore in the south.

The country gained its independence from the British in 1957. Before that Malaysia was colonized by several world powers for many decades, namely, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the English, and the Japanese. However, after World War II, the colonizers relinquished their power to the local people. Now, after 52 years of independence, Malaysia has developed from a commodity-based economy to an industrial one and is slowly progressing toward a service economy. By 2020, Malaysia is expected to reach the status of a fully developed country.

Much of Malaysia's current economic and political system was influenced by the British. For example, Malaysia's parliament was adopted from the English parliamentary system. Additionally, the education system, from primary school to higher levels, also was typically based on the British educational system.

The country's population is reaching 30 million people. It includes Malay as the majority of the population, followed by Chinese and Indians. Malaysia also has many indigenous tribes in Peninsular and East Malaysia, mainly found in rural and rain forest parts of the country. Today, these people still practice their traditional lifestyles; however, they have begun to adopt modern lifestyles while still maintaining their roots. The government is striving to provide better housing, medical care, and education for these groups. These days most of them have basic access to education and lifestyles that will reduce their dependence on local resources.

## Food Culture Snapshot

In the rural village of Mersing, Johor, a married couple named Mustapha Omar and Fatimah Ramli own several acres of paddy fields and live next to one. Mustapha works as a farmer, growing paddy and some vegetables for personal consumption. His wife is a full-time housekeeper. She usually performs household chores and sometimes helps Mustapha during the harvesting season. They have five children, who live in different cities in Malaysia. Normally, Mustapha wakes up very early in the morning to pray and then prepares himself for the paddy fields. His wife also wakes up as early as 5:30 A.M. to prepare breakfast for her husband. It will be a heavy breakfast to make sure that her husband will have enough energy to perform his work. Sometimes she will cook *nasi lemak* (coconut steamed rice) served with fried or hard-boiled eggs, *sambal ikan bilis* (a hot and spicy sauce made from chilies cooked with anchovies), nuts, cucumbers, and sometimes fried chicken or fish as accompaniments. Besides nasi lemak, other breakfast items in her repertoire are *nasi goreng* (fried rice), *mee goreng* (fried noodles),

*lontong* (compressed rice cakes in a stew of coconut and vegetables), *roti jala* (a lacy pancake, served with chicken curry), *roti canai* (a flaky thin bread), and some *kueh-mueh* (traditional cakes) like *popia* (spring rolls) and doughnuts. Hot coffee or hot tea is served during breakfast.

Mustapha eats breakfast at 6:30 so he can be at the paddy field by 7 A.M. He will return home at 12:30 P.M. for lunch. His wife will prepare a simple lunch for him that she cooks by herself. She will pick some vegetables such as bird's-eye chili, eggplant, and okra from her backyard and use them in her daily cooking. She and her husband plant herbs and vegetables in the garden. She usually cooks plain white rice with several dishes. The structure of the lunch includes steamed white rice with fish, chicken, or meat stew; stir-fried vegetables; *sambal belachan* (chili pounded with shrimp paste); and fried salted fish. She buys fresh produce and other ingredients from a nearby wet market. Some of the dishes that she normally prepares are *ikan masak asam pedas* (fish cooked with tamarind) and sambal or hot chili paste cooked with lots of onion and seafood or chicken. Besides that, she prepares *nangka masak lemak* (young jackfruit cooked in coconut milk and turmeric), *daging masak kicap* (beef cooked in soy sauce), and *kangkung masak belachan* (stir-fried water convolvulus—a kind of bindweed vine). Coconut milk is added to many dishes, especially in preparing stews and desserts. All of the dishes are usually consumed with *ulam* (local culinary herbs that are eaten fresh) and sambal belachan. At lunch, they normally drink plain water or homemade pandanus syrup (pandanus is a screw pine, also called *kewra*). In the afternoon, she will prepare *cucur* (onion fritters), *pengat pisang* (sweet banana porridge dessert), or *bubur pulut hitam* (black glutinous rice porridge), which are accompanied by hot tea or coffee during teatime. Sometimes, she will get some fried bananas from the stall nearby. Both of them will have their dinner at 8 P.M. Usually, she will reheat the leftovers from lunch and sometimes will cook a vegetable dish. By 10 P.M. both of them are already in bed.

## Major Foodstuffs

Rice is the staple diet in this country for all peoples, of Malay, Chinese, or Indian origin. Rice is typically served at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Besides rice, noodles also are very important in the Malaysian diet. Normally, Malaysians will have three meals a day. Noodles are prepared in various methods such as noodle soup or curry noodles, which are stir-fried according to Malay, Chinese, or Indian styles. It is very unique in Malaysia that foods such as nasi lemak (steamed coconut rice) are served throughout the day, from breakfast to supper, and are savored by Malaysians from different races. Similarly, different types of noodles also can be served throughout the whole day. Noodles are flavored with different ingredients such as chicken, curry, seafood, and vegetables.

Another important food item in Malaysia is roti canai (flaky thin bread), known as *paratha* in India. This particular dish was introduced by the Indians in Malaysia, who brought this flaky bread when they immigrated from Chennai, India, about 70 to 80 years ago. However, this bread has become one of the most popular foods, served at breakfast or any time of the day. Different types of roti canai have different types of fillings, which include onions, eggs, sardines, and bananas. Many authentic Malay dishes are served during breakfast; some of them are *soto ayam* (chicken soup served with compressed rice), lontong (a spicy stew of coconut and vegetables with compressed rice and condiments), *mee rebus* (curried noodles), and varieties of local *kueh* (sweets). Sometimes, in the village, onion and anchovy fritters are freshly made at home. Since



*Nasi lemak,* a traditional Malaysian spicy rice dish. (Shutterstock)

Malaysia is also home to many different species of bananas, not surprisingly banana fritters are sold at stalls by the roadside or at some restaurants. Banana fritters are also another favorite, served during the day, especially at breakfast and teatime. Other types of fritters such as sweet potato and yam are also well known. *Cha kueh* (Chinese deep-fried bread) is popular among Malaysians.

Typical Malaysian cakes include savories and sweets. Examples of savories are curry puffs (a savory pastry filled with curried potatoes and chicken), *pulut panggang* (glutinous rice wrapped in banana leaves and stuffed with spicy coconut and dried shrimp), fried spring rolls, a lacy pancake served with chicken curry, *kueh badak* (sweet potatoes filled with a spicy coconut filling), and *murtabak* (chicken- or meat-filled layered bread). Sweet cakes are made from rice flour, glutinous rice flour, or whole glutinous rice. Examples are *seri muka* (glutinous rice topped with pandanus custards), *kosui* (a brown sugar custard served with freshly grated coconut), *kueh lapis* (steamed layered red and white cake made from glutinous rice flour and coconut milk flavored with rose syrup), and *kueh koci* (glutinous rice stuffed with sweet coconut and wrapped in banana leaf). All these local cakes have been adopted by other races in the country; the method of making them remains the same, but the color and presentation of the cake could be based on individual style.

## Cooking

Typical Malaysian cooking styles are divided into three major ethnicities: Malay, Chinese, and Indian. Malay cooking styles are typically influenced by the neighboring countries; for example, the northern states are mainly influenced by Thai cuisines. The cooking styles there resemble foods from the southern part of Thailand. The flavor of the food is dominated by sweet, sour, and salty flavors, which are the major flavors in Thai food.

In Penang, the food reflects a combination of Malay and Indian influences. A lot of curries and Indian cooking originated from the southern part of India. Indian traders who came to Malaysia brought their food culture. Marriages between Indians and local women also contributed to enriching the flavor and style of the local food. Penang is well known for its hawker (street) foods ranging from simple appetizers, snacks, and main dishes to succulent desserts. Popular food items include *nasi kandar* (rice served with various curry dishes), *mee goreng mamak* (fried noodles Indian style), and *cendol* (pandanus dessert with coconut milk). When eating nasi kandar, one picks dishes from a wide selection of items. The price of the food depends on what you pick at the food counter.

The Chinese settlers have also greatly influenced the cuisine. Various Chinese dishes such as *char kuay teow* (stir-fried flat noodles) and *lee chee kang* (sweet soup served with dried fruits and black fungus) have become national favorites among all Malaysians. Nyonya food was derived from the marriage of Chinese dishes and local dishes. The food is mostly enriched with coconut milk, local spices, and Chinese ingredients. Cooking methods for Nyonya dishes vary from stir-frying to stewing to steaming. *Kari kapitan* (chicken curry), *terong belachan* (stir-fried eggplant and shrimp paste), and *itik tim* (duck soup) are some of the dishes that can be found in Nyonya restaurants.

States in the middle region such as Perak and Pahang are mostly influenced by Chinese traders. The Chinese foods from these states are known to be the best because they are heavily populated by Chinese. This provides a wide range of Chinese cuisines since there are more Chinese settlements here. Perak offers some of the greatest *pan mee* (hand-kneaded noodles, cooked and served to the customer in a hot frying pan), while Pahang offers many varieties of noodles such as *wan tan mee* (noodles served in soup with prawn dumplings) and *loh mee* (fresh thick yellow noodles cooked with thick soy sauce, egg, prawns, and chicken).

For those states in the southern part, the Malay cooking is influenced by the various Indonesian ethnicities, for example, Minangkabau, Bugis, and Javanese. All these people were traders, and they traveled to Malaysia and finally settled there. They brought with them their cultures and lifestyles, which determine the daily food culture. Basically, Minangkabau food is popular in Negeri Sembilan. Coconut is used in most of the main dishes. For example, beef or chicken *rendang* (spicy beef or

chicken simmered in coconut milk) is the most popular food during major celebrations. The meat is cooked with coconut milk, spices, and other fresh ingredients and stewed for several hours. A delicate and full-flavored dish is produced, and this is eaten with steamed white rice or rice pilaf, accompanied by other dishes.

Food influenced by the Bugis can be found in the state of Johor, which is located at the southern tip of Malaysia. The food in Johor is a blend of Middle Eastern, Indonesian, and traditional Malay food. The ancestors of the people here originated from the Arab countries and several parts of Indonesia. The food as such is flavored by various spices and ingredients that produce a unique flavor. For example, the famous *biryani* rice (mixed with meats and vegetables) is an influence of Arabs and Indian settlers. Several dishes brought by the Indonesians in the past have become local traditional dishes, such as lontong. Although these dishes have been influenced by other cultures, the flavor of these foods is unique and authentically represents the cuisine of Malaysia. The taste of these foods in Indonesia or India is totally different, and they have become truly Malaysian dishes.

In East Malaysia, cooking is made up of indigenous dishes that vary according to ethnic group. These states are heavily populated by indigenous peoples such as the Dayak, Tekun, Iban, Temiang, and Umai, who reside in many interior parts of Sarawak. Some of the local dishes that are well known in Sarawak are *midin, nasi aruk, linut,* and *bubur pedas.* Midin is a kind of fern that is typically stir-fried with plenty of garlic. It is usually served with white rice along with other dishes. Nasi aruk is Sarawakian fried rice, which is similar to the fried rice found on the peninsula. The ingredients are anchovies, garlic, onion, and egg. Linut is a finger food made of sago flour that is fried in deep oil and dipped into chili sauce. It is usually served with tea or coffee. Finally, bubur pedas is the Sarawak version of savory porridge, which is usually cooked in the fasting month of Ramadan. Its main ingredients are turmeric, lemongrass, galangal, chili, ginger, coconut, and shallots, which are boiled with the rice.



Spices, such as curry, are popular in Malaysian cooking. (Shutterstock)

As for Sabah, which has an equally large number of ethnic groups that settled in the interior of the state, the largest known groups are the Murut and the Dusun. Their cuisine predominates compared to the lesser-known groups. Among the frequently served dishes are *jaruk, hinava tongii,* and *bambangan.* Jaruk is a dish made by packing chunks of uncooked wild boar or river fish into a wide bamboo tube together with salt and cooked rice. The bamboo tube is filled with leaves, and the contents are fermented for months and are normally served in small portions with rice or tapioca starch. Hinava tongii is a type of pickled Spanish mackerel (*ikan tenggiri*). It is a delicious combination of fresh fish, red chilies, shredded ginger, and sliced shallots, drenched in a lot of lime juice, which "cooks" the fish. Also incorporated into the dish is the grated seed of several mangoes found in Sabah, called the *bambangan.* It is a perfect complement for white rice. Bambangan is a variety of mango that is not eaten as fruit but rather as a pickle or cooked with fish to provide a distinctive flavor.

Dishes from both Sabah and Sarawak are commonly found in homes and during festivals nowadays. Many restaurants are serving fewer ethnic foods and opting for more popular dishes that have already been mentioned (Chinese, Malay, and Indian cuisines) and Western foods.

Malay cooking methods comprise frying, sautéing, steaming, stewing, and boiling. Frying usually

is used to cook fish, chicken, and snacks such as *keropok lekor* (fish crackers). Sautéing is used to cook vegetable dishes. Most of the time herbs and spices are sautéed until aromatic to produce well-flavored dishes. Steaming is used to prepare traditional steamed cakes and desserts such as kueh koci (glutinous rice with coconut wrapped in banana leaf), *kueh talam beras* (steamed rice cake), kueh lapis (layered steamed cake), and *seri muka* (steamed glutinous rice topped with egg custard). Stewing is mainly used to prepare soups and rendang, an authentic hot and spicy dish that can be made from various types of meats such as chicken, beef, mutton, and seafood. It can also be made from certain types of vegetables. The most popular rendang is made from beef, cooked with fresh and dried spices, coconut milk, and chili and stewed for four to five hours. It is served with white rice or compressed rice during major celebrations. There are many varieties of rendang originating from different areas in Malaysia. The color of the dish also varies from dark brown and dark green to red, depending on the types of ingredients being used.

Malay cooking does not really require an extensive array of cooking utensils. The traditional utensils are the mortar and pestle, *kuali* (wok), pot, steamer, and coconut grater. In certain celebrations such as at wedding ceremonies, meals are prepared in a big wok known as a *kawah* and large pots that can fit the meat from a whole cow. Additionally, other utensils used together with the kawah are long wooden spatulas or stainless steel ladles. In the past, most ingredients were pounded manually; however, today, machines are used to grind the ingredients for everyday cooking. However, some families are still using the traditional methods because they give a better flavor to the food.

## Typical Meals

Malaysian cuisine is known for its unique range of flavors and culinary styles that provide an endless gastronomic adventure. Malay food is known for being hot and spicy. It contains rich flavors from many herbs and spices like galangal (*lengkuas*), turmeric (*kunyit*), kaffir lime leaves, torch ginger (*bunga kantan*), and screw-pine leaves (pandanus leaves). Typical food items for Malay cuisine are nasi lemak, *satay* (skewered strips of meat), beef rendang, mutton soup, *karipap* (a small flaky pie of curried chicken), roti canai, *teh tarik* ("pulled" tea with condensed milk; i.e., it is poured back and forth between two glasses), and *air bandung* (rose-flavored milk). There is no distinct difference between the eating cultures of rural and urban Malays. The only difference is in the eating style because some Malays eat with their hands and some eat with a fork and spoon. The former mix the rice with curry, meats, or vegetables with their fingers and scoop the food into their mouths. Most Malays in the cities eat with forks and spoons as this is more convenient because they do not have to wash their hands before and after eating.

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**Beef Rendang**

This is one of the most popular dishes in Malaysia. It can be made from other meats such as chicken and mutton. However, the most popular are beef and chicken rendang. It has to be simmered for several hours until it becomes thick and well flavored.

**Ingredients**

2.2 lb beef, preferably top side—stew meat or round, cubed

15 shallots, ground

5 garlic cloves, ground

1 in. fresh ginger, ground

½ in. fresh turmeric root, ground

3 tbsp ground dried chili

3 stalks lemongrass, thinly sliced

A handful of kaffir lime leaves

2 tbsp ground coriander

½ tbsp ground black pepper

4 c coconut milk

Salt to taste

Mix all ingredients except the coconut milk with the meat, and place the mixture in a saucepan. Bring to a boil, and simmer for 30 to 45 minutes. Stir occasionally until the meat and the other ingredients are thoroughly cooked. Add the coconut milk, and stir for another 15 to 20 minutes. Lower the heat and stir continuously to prevent from sticking. Season with salt. Remove from the heat, and serve with steamed white rice.

Chinese cuisines consist of a variety of cooking styles like Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka, and Szechuan. Normally, Chinese cuisines are mild in flavor, but Chinese dishes in Malaysia are slightly spicier due to the influences of Malay and Indian food cultures. Chinese cuisines often use garlic and ginger to enhance the flavor of dishes. Typical meals for Chinese cuisines are dim sum, *bak kut teh* (meat bone tea), char kuay teow, Hainanese chicken rice, chili crab, wan tan mee (noodles and pork), and fried *mee hoon* (fried rice noodles). Usually Chinese in rural places have their meals at stalls or hawkers, while Chinese in the city have their meals at restaurants.

Indian cuisines can be divided into two types: northern and southern cuisines. Bread is always the main item for both North and South Indian cuisines. Typical dishes for Indians in Malaysia are *nan* (leavened bread with poppy seeds), paratha (flaky bread flavored with ghee), chapati (wheat-flour pancakes), *putu mayam* (Indian steamed noodles, normally as a snack or for breakfast), mutton curry, *thosai* (sourdough flatbread), *rasam* (Indian soup, prepared with tamarind juice, pepper, and other spices), and *raita* (Indian yogurt containing spices like curry leaves, onion, and dry chilies). Spices are the heart and soul of Indian cooking. They use spices in their food and rice and even in drinks. There is not much difference in food culture between rural and city areas. Many Indian restaurants or Mamak stalls (*Mamak* refers to Tamil Muslims from India) stalls can be found everywhere.

Nowadays, Malaysians' eating habits in cities have been influenced by Western food habits. People living in big cities are always in a hurry compared to people living in the rural areas. There is one common phenomenon among the Malay, Chinese, and Indian food cultures in the cities. They spend more on eating out compared to rural citizens because urban life is more hectic and challenging than rural life. Therefore, they try to save time by having meals outside the home. In contrast, rural life is more peaceful and less hectic, and this allows rural people to prepare home-cooked meals.

## Eating Out

In Malaysia, eating out is becoming more popular. This is due to smaller family sizes, so that parents feel that it is not worth it to cook. Most Chinese families choose Chinese restaurants to dine in. Sometimes, Chinese families will eat out when there is a special occasion such as family member's birthday or anniversary. During this time, they will probably choose Western restaurants because the ambiance is better than in Chinese restaurants, which are always very noisy. Another place for Malaysians to eat out is the *pasar malam* (night market), *pasar tani* (farmers' market), and outdoor stalls.

Malays tend to eat at home more or to love home-cooked food, but sometimes for special occasions or ceremonies, Malays prefer dining at restaurants, hotels, fast-food restaurants, coffee-concept restaurants, food stalls, and Mamak restaurants serving Indian food and local delicacies. This habit actually varies according to the age range. For example, teenagers and students prefer to dine at fast-food and Mamak restaurants due to their financial constraints. During the month of fasting, Malays will go to the Ramadan bazaar to buy their food for breaking the fast. Chinese and Indians will also go to Ramadan bazaar to savor traditional Malay food. Nowadays, in a Malay family, working parents will just buy *nasi campur* (rice served with several dishes) at lunch for their children and will perhaps take their children to a local restaurant for dinner. Working people in Malaysia prefer having "economical" rice for lunch. This is a plate of rice served with a variety of vegetables and meats. The price is calculated according to the amount and the type of food chosen.



Street vendor offers a dazzling variety of delicious Indian foods on Lebuh Penang in the Little India district of Georgetown on Penang Island, Malaysia. (Lee Snider | Dreamstime.com)

## Special Occasions

Eid al-Fitr (Hari Raya Aidilfitri) is the biggest celebration in the country. Muslims from around the world celebrate this event. After successfully going through the fasting period in the month of Ramadan, Muslims feast. Normally, many types of authentic and traditional dishes will be prepared. Throughout the country, maintaining an open house is very popular during this time; people visit from house to house. Another important celebration observed by Muslims in Malaysia is Eid al-Adha (Hari Raya Aidil Adha, also known as Hari Raya Korban or Hari Raya Haji). Normally, it is celebrated two months after Eid al-Fitr, usually on the 10th day of Zulhijah, the 12th month of the Muslim calendar, which marks the end of the hajj pilgrimage period (about two weeks), and hence it is sometimes called Hari Raya Haji (festival of the pilgrimage). Eid al-Adha also commemorates the sacrifices made by the prophet Abraham (hence the word *korban,* which means sacrifice), who fully accepted the command from Allah to sacrifice his own son when Allah tested him. Eid al-Adha is celebrated among family members only, and it is mainly observed for just two to three days. Popular dishes during these two celebrations are rendang, curries, *ketupat* (rice wrapped in coconut leaves and boiled for several hours), *lemang* (glutinous rice cooked in bamboo), and other dishes. Some of these dishes are quite similar to those served during Eid al-Fitr, and different regions in Malaysia will prepare different types of food during the celebration.

The Chinese in Malaysia celebrate festivals that are similar to those in China. The festivals include Chinese New Year, Chap Go Meh (the last day of

the Chinese New Year), the Moon Cake Festival, the Dumpling Festival, and also the Hungry Ghost Festival. The biggest celebration for Chinese is the Chinese New Year. Chinese New Year is the first day in the lunar calendar. On the Chinese New Year's Eve, Chinese will have their reunion dinner whereby the whole family will have their meal together and all the foods prepared have their own meaning so that the family will have a good beginning for the next year. For example, the chicken must be presented with a head, tail, and feet to symbolize completeness so that the family members will do their jobs with a good beginning and perfect results; fish is served but should not be finished during the meal so that the family will always have some savings at the end of the year. During Chinese New Year, *nian gao,* a sweet steamed sticky rice pudding, is served, and it means wishes for the children to grow well. The *fa gao* cake is made from wheat flour and is a symbol of prosperity.

The Chinese Moon Cake Festival falls on the 15th day of the eighth month in the Chinese lunar calendar. It can be considered as a historical festival rather than a religious festival, since it marks the successful rebellion against the Mongol rulers during the 14th century in China. The Mongols had established the Yuan dynasty, which was very oppressive. During that time, the Mongols did not eat moon cakes, so they were used as a medium for the Ming revolutionaries to distribute letters secretly in the conspiracy to overthrow the Mongolian rulers. This idea was conceived by Zhu Yuan Zhang and his advisor Liu Bo Wen, who circulated a rumor that a fatal plague was spreading and the only way to prevent it was to eat moon cakes. Then, this prompted quick distribution of moon cakes with a hidden secret message coordinating the Han Chinese revolt on the 15th day of the eighth lunar month. Besides hiding the message in the filling, the other method was printing the message on the surface of the moon cakes as a simple puzzle or mosaic. To read the encrypted message, each of the four moon cakes packed together had to be cut into four parts and the total 16 pieces of moon cake then had to be fixed together in such a pattern that the secret message could be read. The moon cakes were then eaten to destroy the message.

During this festival, foods that are often consumed are moon cakes, tea, and *pamelo* (or pomelo, a kind of citrus). Since moon cakes are considered a sweet dish, they are usually consumed with tea to revive the taste buds. Traditionally, the filling of the moon cakes includes lotus seed paste, sweet bean paste, jujube paste, taro paste, and five kernels from among the following: walnuts, pumpkin seeds, watermelon seeds, peanuts, sesame, or almonds. Nowadays, there is more variety in the filling, such as cream cheese, ginseng, bird's nests, chicken floss (shredded dried chicken), tiramisu, green tea, durian, chocolate, coffee, and others.

Malaysian Indians celebrate many occasions throughout the year. The three biggest festivals are Deepavali, Thaipusam, and Thaiponggol. During these festivals, a lot of different foodstuffs are served. Deepavali, or the Festival of Lights, is celebrated by Indians in Malaysia around late October and November. On the morning of Deepavali, Indians will light their homes with oil lamps. This custom is practiced to thank the gods for bringing happiness, health, and wealth into their life. Two to three weeks before the festivals, most Indians will be busy preparing for the big celebration. Indians clean their houses before the festival, and buying new clothes and accessories is necessary in their culture. During Deepavali, a variety of scrumptious food can be found in Indian homes. Popular sweets in Indian families are *muruku* (also called *chakkali*), *halwa* (made from flour, oil, and some nuts), *burfi* (made from condensed milk and sugar), *athirasam* (a sweet made by mixing flour, sugar, jaggery, and spices and then frying it before it is served), and *laddu* (made from flour and formed into a ball shape, also called *nei urundai*).

Hindus love eating spicy food and indulge in favorites like mutton curry, prawn sambal, and fish-head curry. During Deepavali, Indian homes normally serve sweet *pongal* (cooked rice mixed with cashew nuts and ghee) when praying. Sweet pongal symbolizes planting new crops and thanking the gods for all the prosperity in the previous year. A

typical Deepavali spread includes Indian foods such as rice and curries for the main course; savory snacks such as muruku, made of rice flour; and sweet coconut candy. *Gulab jamun* is also one of the special foods served. It is made with milk, cream, and ghee and is then rolled into balls and fried.

During Thaipusam, buttermilk and free meals, or *annathanam,* are served to devotees who throng the temples. Only vegetarian food is served during this festival. Additionally, at the Thaiponggol celebration, freshly harvested rice is cooked in a new pot outside the home with milk and sugar at dawn. As the rice boils over, the members of the family often shout "pongalo pongal," and then all family members have their vegetarian breakfast.

Besides the three major festivals, weddings are also a big celebration for Indians where a lot of foodstuffs are served to the guests. The types of food prepared are steamed white rice, biryani rice, tomato rice, sambal roasted chicken, lamb *korma* (stewed with yogurt), vegetable curry, cabbage *pakora* (deep-fried cabbage with chickpea flour), mango *pacheri* (in sweet and sour sauce), and the like. Drinks such as mango *lassi* (a mango and yogurt drink) and syrup are also served. Vegetarian foods are also served at weddings.

## Diet and Health

Malaysian cooking uses numerous local herbs and spices. These herbs have been used for generations, and they contribute to a healthier diet. For example, kaffir lime leaves provide a refreshing taste that is crucial in many local dishes such as soups, curries, and stews. This leaf can act as a digestive aid and cleanses the blood while helping to maintain healthy teeth and gums. Turmeric root is also another important ingredient in food preparation. It has been used for preparing special dishes such as rendang, *gulai lemak* (beef and coconut stew), and *pais ikan* (fish cooked in banana leaves) to provide an exotic taste to the food. Like the root, the leaf also has many health benefits like aiding digestion, fighting bacteria, and cleansing the system. Another important leaf in Malaysian cooking is *daun kesum,* used in making *laksa* (a noodle soup using fish as the base for the soup). At some places in Malaysia, daun kesum is referred to as *daun laksa* or *laksa* leaves. Daun kesum is a member of the mint family. And, finally, screw-pine leaves are long, narrow, dark green leaves from the screw pine, or pandanus tree. The leaves have a sweet perfume and flavor and are often used in Southeast Asian cooking to flavor rice, puddings, and other desserts. The green color from the leaves is extracted and used as a natural food coloring.

The Chinese in Malaysia use a lot of garlic in their cooking. It can be used to treat high cholesterol, parasites, respiratory problems, poor digestion, and low energy. Studies have found that eating garlic regularly helps lower blood pressure, controls blood sugar and blood cholesterol, and boosts the immune system. It has also been found to reduce the risk of esophageal, stomach, and colon cancer.

In Indian cooking, they use a lot of spices that have medical properties and are good for health. Mostly dried herbs such as cumin, coriander, cinnamon, aniseed, and curry leaves are used. The different cooking styles and ingredients used reflect the demographic variation in the land of origin, which is mainly divided into the northern and southern regions. In addition, Indian cuisines are also influenced by religious beliefs as many dishes are meant to be served to the gods.

*M. Shahrim Al-Karim and Che Ann Abdul Ghani*

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# Māori

## Overview

Aotearoa, or New Zealand, is an island nation located in the southwestern Pacific Ocean, separated from Australia by the Tasman Sea. Aotearoa is usually taken to means "land of the long white cloud" in Māori, the language of Aotearoa's indigenous inhabitants. Aotearoa consists of two large islands, Te Ika A Maui in the north and Te Waipounamu, sometimes called Te Waka A Maui, in the south, as well as numerous small coastal islands. Māori legends claim that Aotearoa was originally inhabited by the mythical Moriori, but there is no archaeological evidence for the existence of the Moriori of Aotearoa. The Moriori of Aotearoa should not be confused with the Moriori of Rekohu, known as the Chatham Islands in English and Wharekauri in Māori, who were very much real until relatively recently. It is generally accepted that the Māori initially settled in Aotearoa over 1,000 years ago.

Aotearoa was largely isolated until Western contact in 1642. The Treaty of Waitangi, still a controversial document, was signed in 1840, at which point the British claimed Aotearoa for the Crown. Aotearoa experienced a great influx of immigrants, while disease and warfare took a toll on the Māori population. Only 15 percent of New Zealanders now identify themselves as Māori. Māori culture has, however, experienced a revival and is a source of national character and pride. Māori food, although not as common as it once was, is still eaten today. *Kai,* or food, is central to Māori life.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Rachel Rawiri lives in Grey Lynn, a suburb of Auckland, Aotearoa's largest city, located on Te Ika A Maui. She is a postgraduate student at the University of Auckland and lives in an apartment she shares with two other students. Rachel is of mixed Māori, Scottish, and English ancestry but identifies herself as Māori. Although Rachel is originally from Wellington, she is a member of the Ngāpuhi iwi of Northland. Like many Māori, Rachel's family moved to an urban area for the better economic opportunities it offered.

Rachel's eating and shopping habits mirror those of mainstream New Zealand. She does most of her food shopping at one of the large supermarkets located near her home, and occasionally picks up items at convenience stores, known as dairies. Rachel's student allowance keeps her on a tight budget. She will occasionally visit a greengrocer or a discount butcher shop to cut costs. Rachel does not cook frequently, and cutting back on grocery expenses allows her to eat out more often. Rachel prefers convenience foods to prepare at home, such as canned baked beans, bread, cold cereal, and packaged pasta.

Rachel almost always eats a simple breakfast at home. Lunch is eaten either at home or at the university, where Rachel picks up something inexpensive from a cafeteria or nearby café. Likewise, dinner is sometimes eaten in the home but is often purchased from a restaurant, café, take-out shop, or pub. She rarely eats dinner alone, usually sharing the meal with her roommates or friends from the university. Rachel's

eating habits mirror those of most university students in New Zealand. Distinctly Māori foods are rarely consumed, although special family occasions will sometimes feature traditional Māori fare.

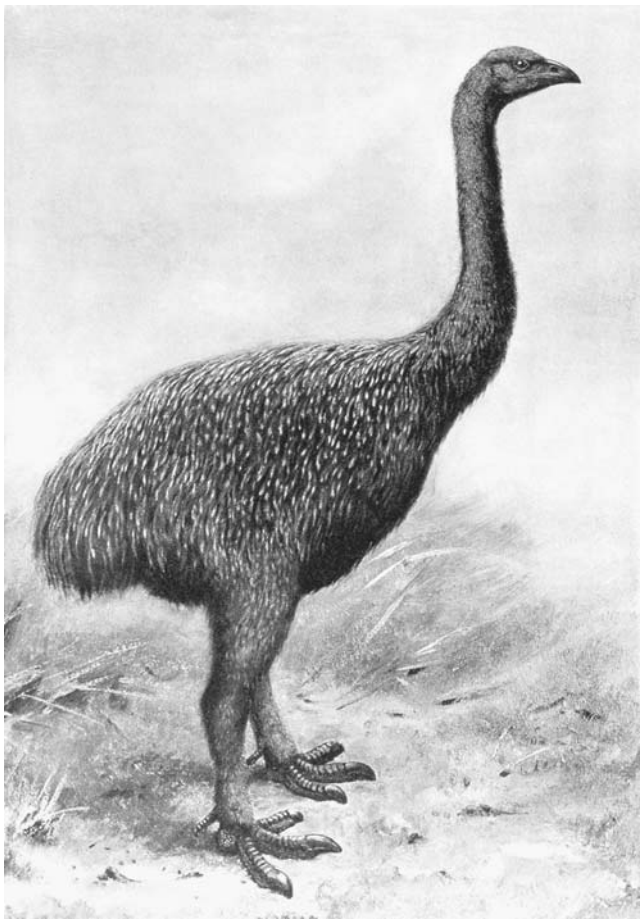
## Major Foodstuffs

Polynesian voyagers carried a suite of domesticated plants and animals with them throughout the Pacific to ensure successful settlements. Many of these plants were of tropical origin and poorly suited to Aotearoa's temperate climate. Agriculture was more important in Aotearoa's warmer northern reaches, while hunting and gathering were prominent in the south. Māori everywhere, however, relied largely on the forest and sea for daily subsistence.

The only introduced animals to survive were the *kuri,* the Māori dog, and the *kiore,* the Polynesian rat. Both animals were important sources of meat and supplemented the protein provided through hunting and fishing native game. Kuri were kept among Māori society, while kiore lived in the wild and were hunted and trapped when desired, like indigenous food animals. Aotearoa's only native mammals are bats. With a lack of large game animals Māori hunting focused on birds and aquatic resources.

Aotearoa has been home to thousands of bird species, many of which were endemic. Some of these have played, and in some cases continue to play, a significant role in the Māori diet. Moa, gigantic flightless birds, once inhabited Aotearoa and provided early Māori with large amounts of meat. These docile birds were quickly hunted to extinction. Kiwi, small flightless birds revered by the Māori, were also eaten in the past. Kiwi, which have become a national emblem of New Zealand, are now endangered and under federal protection. This is due largely to the introduction of dogs and cats from Europe. Like the kiwi, many of the native birds that the Māori once relied on are now endangered and are no longer considered suitable for food. Once exception is the *tītī,* a type of petrel commonly called muttonbird for its lamblike flavor. Tītī chicks are harvested from April 1 to May 31 by the Rakiura Māori, who have maintained gathering rights for the Tītī Islands. Tītī, either fresh or preserved in fat, can be found for sale in specialty shops throughout New Zealand and are considered a special treat.

Seafood, including fish and shellfish, made up a large portion of the traditional Māori diet, and it is still extremely popular and widely available in New Zealand today. Snapper was the dominant catch in the north, whereas red cod was the most commonly consumed fish in the south. Both fishes are commercially fished today, and snapper is now New Zealand's most popular fish. Many of the shellfish varieties the Māori consumed prior to contact have fallen out of use today, but others not only are popular with Māori but have also been adopted into New Zealand's national cuisine. *Kōura,* known commonly as crayfish in New Zealand and rock lobster



The Moa bird, from W. Rothschild's *Extinct Birds* published in 1907. (Getty Images)

abroad, has become an expensive luxury food. Green-lipped mussels, *pipi* (a type of small clam), and *tuangi* (commonly known as cockles) are inexpensive in New Zealand but are exported at higher prices as luxury items. There are a number of shellfishes that are still collected for consumption but are rarely available for purchase. *Tuatua,* a larger clam, and *pūpū,* an aquatic snail, are still gathered by hand. *Kina,* a local variety of sea urchin, are very popular in Māori communities and are gaining in popularity with the general population. As demand has increased, so has the price. *Pāua,* the black-footed abalone, has also gained favor outside of the Māori communities, and they are commonly offered in fritter form at fish and chip shops. Bluff oysters and small rock oysters, which were part of the traditional Māori diet, are now widespread favorites throughout New Zealand and beyond. Seaweeds, such as *karengo,* provided important nutrients and held ceremonial importance. Freshwater foods also hold a place of prominence in the Māori diet. Freshwater eels, called *tuna* but known by a number of Māori names according to color and skin types, can be found dried, smoked, and live in many fish markets today. They are popular steamed, roasted, and especially grilled. Whitebait are the juveniles of the *īnanga, kōaro,* and *kōkopu* fishes. These delicate fish are collected seasonally in screens or nets and can be found at supermarkets and fish shops, but prices are exorbitant. Once making up a large part of the Māori diet, fish and shellfish are now relegated to the category of special-occasion foods because of their high price tags.

Other once-common foods have become less popular for other reasons. *Huhu* is a type of native beetle whose large, whitish larva, called a grub, is still sometimes eaten as a delicacy. Once a common snack for some Māori, huhu are now enjoyed only by those who are more traditional or more adventurous. The European aversion to bug eating has become widespread in Aotearoa, where most people consider eating bugs disgusting.

Some of the traditional Māori plant foods have remained popular, while others have declined or disappeared altogether. It is believed that prior to contact *aruhe,* the bracken fern, was an important staple food. The rhizomes of the plant were pounded, separating the inedible fiber from the starch, which was made into versatile cakes. Although aruhe itself is not especially palatable, it could be sweetened or flavored and served alongside nearly anything. The practice of eating aruhe has largely been abandoned in favor of introduced starches. Other fern foods, however, have remained more popular. The young fern shoots, called *koru* or fiddleheads, of a variety of ferns were commonly eaten. Koru have a delicate flavor and pleasing texture, commonly being likened to young asparagus. The koru of the *kiokio* and *pikopiko* are still enjoyed today, when in season, and are sometimes showcased on fine-dining menus.

Taro, *kūmara* (sweet potatoes in English), and *uwhi* (a type of small yam) were brought to Aotearoa by Polynesian settlers. Taro, a tropical plant, was established only in the northern reaches of Te Ika A Maui, while the more rugged uwhi did slightly better. Kūmara had the largest range and quickly became the most important cultivated food. The importance of kūmara can be seen in Māori religion and ceremonial life. Kūmara is associated with Rongo, the god of peace, and the kūmara-planting cycle dictated much of the Māori year.

Māori potatoes are another important source of starch. Although there are traditions that claim potatoes were present in precontact Aotearoa, it is generally accepted that early contact with European explorers resulted in the introduction of the potato, a South American cultivar. Nevertheless, the potato, which is well adapted to New Zealand's cool climate, quickly became one of the Māori's most important food sources. Adapting Māori cultivation to potatoes was easy, as they are produced in much the same way as kūmara. Because they were an outside food source, potatoes were also considered *noa,* meaning unlike kūmara there were no religious restrictions on their production. Māori potatoes range in size and color but tend to be small, thin-skinned, and pinkish, purplish, or swirled. They more closely resemble a number of South American varieties than they do their European counterparts, which is most likely due to their early introduction, as potatoes were not well established in Europe at that time.

Potatoes have become a major component of the wider New Zealand diet, following the modern British tradition. Māori potato consumption has paralleled this, and they are widely available today. Their lovely coloring and waxy texture have earned them a place at many gourmet shops and restaurants. *Rewena paraoa* is a sourdough potato bread specific to the Māori, known in English as Māori bread. Rewena paraoa is commonly served alongside many modern Māori dishes, such as boil-up, or *hāngi.*

## Cooking

Traditional Māori cooking methods include fire roasting, hot stone grilling, and steam roasting in a *hāngi.* In addition to cooking, there is also a tradition of eating many seafoods, such as kina and pūpū, raw. Modern Western cooking implements and techniques have replaced traditional cooking styles with the exceptions of the hāngi and fire roasting, which are still sometimes done at beaches or while camping. Hāngi are underground ovens, similar to the Hawaiian *imu* or Fijian *lovo.* Parcels of food are placed in a hole with hot rocks from a wood fire and then covered with earth to steam roast for several hours before being dug up and enjoyed. Fish, pork, lamb, chicken, potatoes, corn, pumpkins, kūmara, onions, carrots, stuffing, and cabbage are all common hāngi foods. Hāngi are traditionally prepared by men, although women may prepare some of the foods that will be cooked in the hāngi. Because hāngi is labor-intensive, it is now often reserved for celebrations and special occasions, although it is now sometimes offered for purchase at cultural festivals and outdoor markets. Hāngi is also offered as part of a package at some Māori cultural showcases, where traditional Māori song and dance are performed for tourists. Many of these outfits have built permanent hāngi out of concrete or brick, resulting in a significant loss of flavor.

## Typical Meals

Māori meal patterns are generally the same as those of mainstream New Zealand. There are, however, a number of Māori meals that are eaten regularly in addition to the famous hāngi. One of the most common is called boil-up. Boil-up is a dish made from pork bones and watercress or *puha,* sometimes known as prickly sow thistle, boiled together with various vegetables to make a hearty soup. The pork bones are often smoked. Vegetables added to boil-up often include carrots, kūmara, potatoes, and pieces of pumpkin. Boil-up is often served with rewena bread or doughboys, which are large flour-and-water dumplings. There are also a number of Māori sweet dishes. *Kaanga piro* or *kanga wai,* commonly known as rotten corn, is a dish made from fermented maize. A basket of corn is placed in running water, such as a stream, or in a barrel of water that is changed daily, and allowed to ferment. This produces a sweet but strong-smelling mush that can then be eaten or made into other dishes, such as rotten corn custard. Kūmara is also featured in many sweet dishes, such as *roroi.* Roroi is a pudding made from grated kūmara and sugar, which is then steamed or baked.

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***Roroi Kūmara***

5 kūmara (sweet potatoes), peeled and grated

¼ c brown sugar

¼ c sugar

2 tbsp butter, melted

1 kūmara (sweet potato), sliced

Mix grated kūmara, brown sugar, sugar, and melted butter in a bowl. Place in a lightly greased baking dish and cover with sliced kūmara. Cover with aluminum foil, and bake at 350°F for 1 hour. Serve warm or cold with whipped cream.

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**Boil-Up**

5 lb meaty pork bones

10 potatoes, halved

3 kūmara, quartered

1 small pumpkin, seeded and cut into pieces

2 large onions, quartered

1 large bunch watercress (or puha), cleaned and trimmed

Salt to taste

Pepper to taste

Place the pork bones in a large pot, and cover with water. Bring to a boil, and allow to simmer for 2 hours, adding more water as needed. Add the potatoes, kūmara, pumpkin, and onion, and simmer for 20 minutes. Add the watercress, and simmer for an additional 15 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste. Serve hot with fresh bread.

## Eating Out

Although most Māori do eat out, Māori food is not commonly found in restaurants. Māori foods, especially hāngi and rewena paraoa, are offered at cultural festivals and outdoor markets. Māori food is also offered at cultural showcases, as already mentioned, and many *marae,* Māori meeting grounds, take pride in offering Māori food at marae gatherings. With the rise of local and regional cuisine, many native ingredients that have been consumed by Māori for generations have begun to be showcased in New Zealand's finest restaurants.

## Special Occasions

The day-to-day eating habits of most Māori are similar to those of New Zealanders of predominantly European descent. Many traditional Māori foods have become expensive or are difficult to obtain or prepare. Special occasions have become a time when the extra expense and effort are made and traditional foods are prepared. Events such as weddings, birthdays, and anniversaries are celebrated by laying down a hāngi or purchasing or gathering fresh seafood. Funerals, or *tangihanga,* are important events within Māori communities. Ceremonial feasts follow these *tangi.* When leaving the graveyard, or *urupa,* Māori wash to break the *tapu* (i.e., taboo associated with death), especially before eating. Rewena bread can be crumbled and used to restore noa in place of water.

## Diet and Health

Prior to Western contact Māori enjoyed relatively good health. A physically active lifestyle, coupled with a nutritious diet, resulted in a strong and vigorous community. Warfare among Māori was common and was a much greater threat to Māori health than famine or disease. Western contact introduced new diseases that became epidemics in Māori communities, and the Māori Wars increased Māori attrition rates and land confiscations. The Māori were relegated to the lower classes during the colonial period, which has had lasting effects on the Māori peoples.

Poor health and diet continue to plague Māori communities. Māori are among the poorest New Zealanders, which directly affects the modern Māori diet. Like the urban poor in most counties, Māori are plied with inexpensive packaged food that offers little nutritional value. Poor diet is then coupled with poor health care. Although health care in New Zealand is free, Māori remain among the most underserviced, especially in rural areas. The traditional Māori diet would be a far wiser choice than the industrialized diet of today.

*Kelila Jaffe*

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# Mongolia

## Overview

Mongolia is the world's largest landlocked nation, sandwiched between China and Russia's Siberia in northern Asia. At approximately 604,000 square miles, Mongolia is slightly larger than Alaska and more than three times as large as France. With a population of only about 2.9 million, it is among the most sparsely populated countries in the world. Called Mongol Uls in Mongolian, it is also known as Outer Mongolia, to differentiate it from the Mongol-inhabited region of China known as Inner Mongolia.

The image people generally have of Mongolia—the vast, sweeping steppe that was once home to the great armies of Chinggis Khaan (the Mongolian spelling of Genghis Khan)—is close to being the whole story in Mongolia. Almost 80 percent of the land is steppe pastureland, which supports huge herds of grazing livestock. The remaining 20 percent of the country is divided almost equally between barren desert and forested mountains. Less than 1 percent of the land is arable, and of that, only about 840 square miles is irrigated. The climate is extreme continental, with hot summers, tremendously cold winters, and little precipitation.

Despite dramatic political changes during the 20th century, Mongolians retain most of their traditions and cultural identity. Early in the century, Mongolia escaped Chinese control, only to find itself taken over by the Soviet Union. The Soviet machine worked to force urbanization on the previously nomadic population and built the kind of hideously polluting industrial installations and blocky worker housing for which the Soviets became so well known, and they replaced Mongolian script with Russia's Cyrillic alphabet. Then, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1990, Mongolia regained its independence. It reverted to being called Mongolia after nearly 60 years as the Mongolian People's Republic; adopted a multiparty, democratic form of government, with free elections; and started on the road to becoming a participant on the world stage. Russian architecture, Cyrillic signage, and a few introduced foods are lingering reminders of the Soviet era, but today, Mongolia balances between the joyous return to traditions by many and the equally joyous rush toward modernization by others.

Even now, with more opportunities available in the cities, half of the country's population still pursues the traditional life of the nomadic herder. Millions of grazing sheep, goats, yaks, horses, and camels spread out across the vast, open grasslands of the steppe. However, even among urban Mongolians, many traditions are observed, including living in *gers* (the round felt-covered tents of the nomads—called yurts by the Russians; *ger* is pronounced more or less like *gair*). Even Ulaanbaatar, the capital and largest city, has large neighborhoods of gers. Along with habitation, food customs have also been preserved.

The population of Mongolia is almost entirely Mongol (about 95%). However, geography and history have dictated that, while religion and housing may differ among the minorities, lifestyle and foodways are very similar nationwide. Education is compulsory for nine years, and the literacy rate is 98 percent. The dominant religion is Tibetan



A local man herds goats in the Mongolian countryside. Most of Mongolia's people live the pastoral life of animal herders in the country's harsh climate. (Travel-Images.com)

Buddhism, usually blended with traditional shamanistic/spiritist beliefs. The Kazakh minority is primarily Muslim. Due to the Soviets' concerted efforts to eradicate religion, about 40 percent of Mongolians now identify themselves as not being part of any religion, though they carry on some of the traditions. Most religious activities involve food at some level, and they often revolve around food and the hope of having enough.

The half of the population that remains nomadic raises livestock, including sheep, goats, horses, yaks, and camels. The makeup of herds varies by region, with more yaks in the north and more camels in the south. The Dukha, a small minority living in the far north, raise reindeer instead and live in tepees rather than gers, but they are nomadic herders like other Mongolians. Livestock raising makes up about 70 percent of the value of agricultural production in Mongolia, and most of the industry that has grown up revolves around processing related to herding, from processing and knitting cashmere to tanning leather to producing meat and milk products. Mongolia does have mineral reserves that have more recently become a factor in the country's economy, but it is still the herds that rule.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Batbayar sits on the edge of the small, metal-framed bed that was placed against the back wall of the ger. The felt at the base of the ger is turned up to allow whatever breeze there might be to pass through. July in the Gobi is hot, but the white of the felt reflects

the heat and, with the breeze, makes the ger relatively comfortable. Soon, the neighbors will arrive, to both help with and celebrate the first milking of the mares. Batbayar watches as his wife, Sarangerel, fills a huge bowl with boiled mutton, scoops soft blobs of camel-milk cheese into another bowl, and stacks dried curd (called *aaruul*) and fried dough (*boortsog*) on a metal plate.

Batbayar and Sarangerel have already started preparing for the winter, as the summer is so short. Strips of drying meat—mutton and horse—hang from the ger framework along one wall. Blocks of aaruul dry on the roof. Large jars along another wall hold various fermented milk products—milk vodka (*arkhi*) from the sheep, yogurt from the camels, *airag* (a fermented milk) from the horses (better known in the West by its Russian name, kumiss). Outside, their herds prepare, too, grazing on coarse golden grass, recovering from the harsh winter and putting on fat for the winter to come—and, more important, having babies and making milk.

Batbayar and Sarangerel's four children play outside among the camels until the guests begin to arrive, and then they enter the ger, too, not wishing to miss any of the celebratory food. As the guests enter, the men begin to pass around their snuff bottles, as the custom of hospitality dictates. Everyone politely reaches around the outside of the two ger poles, never between. Sarangerel opens a large metal container and ladles camel-milk yogurt into bowls, which are passed around the room. Lumps of dried camel milk are passed next.

After eating, everyone goes outdoors—it is time to go to work. First, the foals have to be captured. About half of the men are on horseback. Those on foot help guide the stampeding horses away from the children and toward the riders. One rider has a long pole with a lasso at the end—a device called an *uurga*. This permits the rider to slip a loop of rope over the neck of a horse more easily. As the foals are captured, they are tethered nearby. The foals have to be captured because, unlike cows, mares won't give milk if their foals are not beside them. The mares are captured next and tethered near their foals.

After all this effort, it is time for some refreshment. In the ger, Batbayar pours sheep-milk vodka into a glass, and the glass is handed to one neighbor. After he drinks all he wants, the glass is handed back, refilled, and passed to the next guest. This continues until all have had a drink. Then this is repeated with the camel-milk vodka. A *morin khuur*—the traditional horse-headed fiddle of Mongolia—is produced, and the men sing songs about the earth. Then, at the time appointed by tradition, everyone goes back outside for the milking of the mares. Women are expected to milk sheep, goats, yaks, and camels, but milking horses is men's work. Mare's milk is made into cheese and vodka, like other milks, but most of it is made into airag, a slightly alcoholic, yogurtlike beverage that is the national drink of Mongolia.

Mares milked, the crowd returns to the ger for more food. Sarangerel passes around bowls of mutton soup with noodles while the men fall on the mound of boiled mutton. Soon everyone—men, women, children—are gnawing bones and downing blood sausage and lumps of fat. The meal ends with bowls of tea with camel milk and salt.

Batbayar mounts his horse. The first pail of mare's milk is handed to him, and he threads it onto the uurga pole. Two riders join him, one on either side, holding the pole, while Batbayar holds a ladle. The three then gallop around the camp three times in a clockwise direction, with Batbayar ladling milk into the air, as a gift to the sky. This is to ensure that the mares will continue to give milk.

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### *Guriltai Shol* (Mutton Soup with Noodles)

Traditional Mongolians would make the noodles from scratch as well—simply flat noodles made of wheat flour, water, and a little salt, kneaded, rolled thin, and cut by hand, but in the cities, packets of noodles are available for busy urbanites who no longer have the luxury of time but still long for familiar dishes.

1 lb fatty mutton (beef may be substituted)

1 tsp salt

8 c cold water

Meaty soup bones (optional)

2 medium onions, thinly sliced

4 oz packaged noodles (¾ in. wide)

Cut the meat into strips, as if you were preparing it for a stir-fry dish. Put the meat and 1 tsp salt into the water. (If using soup bones, to create a heartier broth, add them to the water, too.) Boil until the meat is thoroughly cooked and water has become a light broth (about 45 minutes), skimming if scum forms. If you used bones, remove them from the broth after the meat is cooked. Then add the onion and noodles, and continue to boil until noodles are done. Taste for seasoning, and add salt if necessary. Soup is ready to serve once the noodles are cooked.

## Major Foodstuffs

For about half of the population, the "grocery store" is grazing outside, and the "pantry" is any available space in the ger. Grazing animals—sheep, goats, horses, camels, yaks, and, for one ethnic minority, reindeer—provide almost the entire diet, in the form of both meat and milk products, for the half of Mongolia's population that still live as nomad herders. Even those who live in the city often rely on these same provisions, begging relatives for carafes of airag and going to the meat market to buy whole butchered sheep or goats.

Hunting supplements the meat supply, with marmot season of particular importance to those who have developed a taste for this large squirrel relative. Mongolian gazelles and wild sheep are also hunted for their meat. Interestingly, though Mongolia's lakes and rivers team with fish, supporting a small fishing industry, most of the fish that are caught are canned and shipped overseas. While some fish may be served in the cities, it is not part of the traditional Mongolian diet.

Meat and dairy, though occasionally consumed fresh, are usually processed into a wide range of products that will last without refrigeration. Thanks to the dry air (the humidity averages about 10 percent), even milk and meat can be dried safely. Dried meat is called *borts.* The rock-hard borts can be easily stored or transported until needed, at which time it is pounded to powder and put in boiling water. Milk may be fermented, distilled, made into cheese or yogurt, churned into butter, or dried. When fresh milk is available, milk tea, or *suutei tsai,* is the favorite way to consume it. Milk and hot tea are combined in equal parts, and then salt and sometimes butter are added. This beverage makes sense in an arid country where life depends on water, salt, and getting enough calories.

These dining traditions have remained unchanged for 1,000 years or more. When Marco Polo visited this land 700 years ago, his report on the diet was virtually identical to what can be seen today—meat, milk (including mare's milk, which startled the explorer), and game (including marmot, which Polo described as being abundant). He even described the methods of producing dried milk, which are the same methods used by Mongolian nomads today.

Mongolia has one major crop, wheat, though a small amount of barley and millet is also grown. With so little arable land and such a short summer, Mongolia is not a major grain producer, but that hasn't kept Mongolians from utilizing wheat flour, in particular, in traditional cuisine. Bread, boortsog (fried dough strips that are also sometimes called "nomad biscuits"), noodles, and dumplings are the main outlet for wheat. Meat-filled dumplings are much loved, and there are those who believe that the reason every culture from Korea through to eastern Europe has meat-filled dumplings is that that was the extent of the Mongolian Empire. There are three types of dumplings: *buuz, bansh,* and *huushuur* (*buuz* is pronounced *boats,* but the other two are pronounced pretty much as they appear).

Mongolians will sometimes eat fruit and vegetables when they are available, though fruit is the rarer option. As some of the population has adopted a more settled lifestyle, small garden farms have begun to appear around the countryside, making vegetables more readily available. Not too surprisingly, because of both climate and history, the hardy and hearty vegetables valued by the Russians are the ones most commonly found in Mongolia. Beets, carrots, cabbage, potatoes, onions, and turnips are generally the available options. Any and all may appear in soups or stews. The beets, carrots,




A Chinese man selling his fresh produce on a street in HoHot, Inner Mongolia, northern China. (Nico Smit | Dreamstime.com)

and cabbage are most regularly seen shredded and served as salads (even at breakfast), simply tossed with chopped garlic and a little mayonnaise or oil and vinegar.

A few indigenous plants are collected, but they are not a major source of calories. Some imported goods, such as rice and sugar, make their way into the diet in even remote settlements, and a fairly wide range of imports are coming into the cities now. However, the main diet is still meat, milk, and flour. It is this diet that has seen the population not only through centuries of history but also, in recent years, through the severe economic upheaval when the Soviets pulled out.

Even in the cities, while local vegetables are readily available, the foods on offer are heavily weighted toward meat, dairy, flour, and vodka. More convenience foods and imports are appearing in the few grocery stores, but these mostly draw foreigners, while locals get their food at the huge outdoor markets.

## Cooking

A lot of the traditional fare of the Mongolians is not cooked. Meat and curd are dried. Milk is fermented, distilled, or made into cheese. However, Mongolia has some delicious and much-loved fare that is cooked. If an animal is killed for food during the summer, it must be processed immediately. If it is not torn in strips and dried, it must be cooked. Out on the steppe, there are essentially two recipes for cooking a whole animal: You make *horhog* or *boodog.* Both dishes involve hot rocks.

First, two or three dozen medium-sized, water-smoothed stones are collected. The stones are

placed in an open fire and heated until almost red hot. For horhog, a sheep is cut into pieces, with the bones still in. A few quarts of water are poured into a large metal container (a 40-quart container for a medium sheep) with a tight-fitting lid, and then the pieces of meat are added, alternating layers of meat and hot stones. The lid is tightly closed, and the meat is left to cook for an hour or two. This renders a fabulously moist meat that falls off the bone.

Boodog is a dish made of goat or marmot. There is no metal container, as the animal becomes the cooking vessel. The goat or marmot is cleaned out, the entrails being removed through the neck, in order to leave the skin whole, and then the body is filled with the red-hot rocks. It is then sealed tightly. While the meat cooks from the inside out, a torch or gas burner is used to burn off all the hair on the outside.

For both boodog and horhog, when the dishes are cooked, the greasy, still-warm stones are removed first and passed around to the diners, who move the rocks from hand to hand, holding them long enough to warm the hands. This is considered to be healthful; it is definitely relaxing.

While firewood is burned to heat stones for boodog and horhog, for other more common cooking, especially in the steppe, the primary fuel is dried dung, which is abundant and is almost all plant matter. Soups—all with meat—are boiled in pots over open fires, as is the water for suutei tsai (milk tea). Boortsog, a traditional "biscuit," is fried in the oil rendered when soup is made. All these dishes are prepared over the dung fires.

The only other traditional cooked foods are dumplings, and while their recipes are all quite similar, their sizes and the methods for cooking them are quite different. The dough is a simple one of flour and water, and the filling is chopped meat (usually mutton) with onion, garlic, and seasonings. Buuz (pronounced "boats") are two-bite dumplings that are similar to, though fatter than, pot stickers. Buuz are steamed. Bansh are much smaller and are boiled. They commonly appear bobbing around in soup or milk tea. Huushuur are much larger, about five or six inches on its longest side. Huushuur are fried, which makes it more portable than the other two dumplings. In fact, huushuur often appear at outdoor venues and festivals, where they are eaten out of hand.

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### *Huushuur* (Mongolian Fried Meat-Filled Pastries)

*Makes 8 pastries*

#### Dough

2¼ c flour

¼ tsp salt

About 1 c water

#### Filling

1 lb chopped or ground fatty beef or mutton

1½ tsp salt

¼ tsp ground black pepper

½ tsp marjoram

½ onion, finely chopped

1–2 cloves garlic, finely chopped

Oil for frying the filled pastries (mutton fat is traditional, but cooking oil works)

Combine flour and salt. Add half a cup of water to the flour, and then continue to add water a little at a time, mixing it thoroughly, until you have a rough, dry dough, about the texture of that for pie crust.



Traditional Mongolian dumplings stuffed with meat. (Shutterstock)

Knead until dough is smooth and elastic. Cover and let rest for 5 to 10 minutes.

Combine all filling ingredients, mixing thoroughly. If dry, add a few drops of water to moisten.

Divide the dough into quarters. Roll each quarter into a cylinder, and cut in half. Roll each half cylinder into a circle about 5–6 inches across. Place about 2 to 2½ tablespoons of the filling on one side of the circle, leaving space around the outside edge. Fold the other side over, creating a half-moon. Pinch the edges closed, squeezing out air and flattening the filling as you work. Repeat the process with the rest of the filling and dough pieces.

Pour oil into a frying pan to a depth of about ½ inch. Heat oil until hot. Fry two or three pastries at a time for 2 minutes per side, until they are golden to brown and the meat is cooked. The huushuur can be eaten hot or cold.

## Typical Meals

Among the nomad population, the amount and types of food vary with the seasons. In summer, the consumption of dairy products is heaviest, while meat is more heavily consumed during the rest of the year. Cooking is generally done once a day, unless there are guests. Breakfast and lunch are the biggest meals of the day and generally consist of boortsog (fried bread), salty milk tea, boiled mutton, broth with noodles or another starch, and dairy products, depending on what is available—fresh milk, sour clotted milk, yogurt, cheese, curds, or airag. In summer, an entire meal can be made of dairy, or "white food," as the Mongolians call it.

Minor variations exist across the country. In the north, the high-fat milk of yaks is more common, while camels and goats are more numerous in desert regions, so a more common source of milk there. In the far north, around Lake Khuvsgul, the Dukha rely on their reindeer. But everyone is still mixing the milk with tea and salt, making yogurt and cheese, and drying curd. The Muslim Kazakhs of Mongolia's west find nothing to object to in the Mongolian diet, but they tend to eat more horse meat than other Mongolians do. Throughout Mongolia, however, meat and milk are still the foundations of the meal.

In an urban setting, meals vary only slightly. A meal will usually consist of broth with noodles, or possibly borscht, a relic of the longtime Russian presence; a salad of shredded beet, carrot, and/or cabbage; and a meat dish. Desserts are uncommon.

## Eating Out

Eating out for the majority of Mongolians pretty much means either dining outdoors or visiting the neighbors, even for those living in urban areas. The only real exception for many is if one makes the trek to the annual Naadam Festival, and even then, most of the food on offer is fairly traditional, with fresh fruit and ice cream being among the most exotic items offered, amid a sea of grilled meat and huushuur.

However, not every meal is eaten at home. The rural population in particular is very mobile, moving with the herds or making regular, if infrequent, runs to town or distant farms for supplies, and the urban population is increasingly too busy to make familiar dishes. Almost ubiquitous in Mongolia is an eatery called a *guanz.* These generally modest dining establishments can be found in abundance in every town or city, as well as along roads that have regular traffic. A guanz may be located in a building, a ger, a small hut, or even a railway car. These little shops offer basic Mongolian comfort food, including soup, salty milk tea, and either buuz or huushuur. There are also nicer restaurants that serve traditional specialties, including some that offer traditional Mongolian entertainment. However, the average Mongolian is more likely to stop at a guanz to fill up on cheap, familiar favorites.

The real advent of varied cuisine came after the Soviets pulled out. Mongolia is now able to have business and political ties with other countries, there has been an influx of foreign workers and entrepreneurs, more young Mongolians are traveling overseas for advanced education, and tourism is an increasingly important part of the nation's income. All these factors have contributed to growing



A Chinese Mongolian elder offers traditional sweets blessed by Buddhist Lamas at a ceremony on a shrine on top of a hill, during the Naadam festival on the grassland of Gegental Steppe in China's Inner Mongolia region. (Getty Images)

interest in what the rest of the world is eating—and a growing number of immigrants able to bring the cuisines of the world to Mongolia's cities.

Many of the restaurants that are not specifically Mongolian focus on cuisines that value meat, from Korean barbecue to Turkish kebabs. In recent years, French, Italian, German, Mexican, and Indian foods have become available in Ulaanbaatar, as well as in other large cities. A few cities even have vegetarian restaurants. While the cooking style identified as "Mongolian barbecue" in the United States was invented by the Chinese and bears no resemblance to any cooking method in Mongolia, an American Mongolian barbecue restaurant has opened in Ulaanbaatar and has found an amused but appreciative audience. Cafés have become popular, with outdoor seating cherished during the short summer, and there are a few brewpubs, primarily serving local beers, such as Altan gobi, Khan brau, and Chinggis. Pizza has put in an appearance, as have submarine sandwiches (Sub-Baatar), catering primarily to the younger generation. It is unlikely that a major portion of the population will be giving up milk tea and dumplings anytime soon, but for those who wish to explore, or those who have fond memories of food consumed during their travels, there are now several options besides traditional Mongolian food.

## Special Occasions

The biggest event in Mongolia is the Naadam Festival (*naadam* means "games"), held every year on July 11–13. Founded more than 800 years ago by Chinggis Khaan, the Naadam Festival has come to be a celebration of both the great Khaan's birth and Mongolia's independence. This three-day event features the "three manly sports" of horse racing, archery, and wrestling (though women may compete in archery, and children ride in some races). A few remote areas hold their own naadam events, but the big event is in Ulaanbaatar. Temporary villages of gers crowd fields and hillsides around the city. Herds of horses clog the roadways, slowing motor traffic. Everyone who is able comes to Ulaanbaatar for this event, and those who can't come are usually glued to their televisions, to see which horse, archer, or massive, powerful wrestler will be victorious. The president, top officials, and visiting dignitaries attend.

As much fun as watching the sports is the fairway, for those attending. This is the one opportunity many nomadic or rural Mongolians have to eat fruit or buy new clothes, and the fairway is lined with vendors selling everything from huushuur to infant's shoes, and from ice cream to cooking pots—every necessity, as well as a number of luxuries. Even so, many of the vendors are selling familiar foods, and grilled meat is more common than the modest stacks of fresh fruit.

The most important holiday on the Mongolian calendar is Tsagaan Sar, or "White Moon"—the lunar new year. This holiday, which follows lunar cycles, can fall anywhere from late January to early March. It symbolizes new beginnings and is considered to be the day when spring begins to return. Food is a key component of the holiday, as a full belly during Tsagaan Sar is said to represent prosperity in the year ahead. Tsagaan Sar is a family holiday, and much of urban Mongolia shuts down, as people travel to be with their families. Everyone dresses in their best clothes and goes from ger to ger, visiting neighbors. The festivities last for several days. Every family will cook a saddle of mutton and prepare mountains of buuz for family and visitors, and there is even more feasting on the night of the new moon.

Mongolians happily celebrate anything that marks a milestone in life or the year. Birthdays, the first cutting of a child's hair (at age three), weddings, the first milking of mares, and gatherings to shear sheep and make felt for gers at the end of summer are all reasons for eating and drinking. For special events, white foods (dairy products) are served first; these are considered pure and noble. Then red foods (meat) are served.

Mongolian nomads have a strict code of hospitality. Anyone can approach a ger and ask for food and drink. However, there are elaborate rules and ceremonies surrounding both giving and accepting hospitality—including the cry of "hold the dogs" on approaching a ger—which is both good manners and an important safety measure. When the traveler leaves, the host will dip his finger in milk and flick it into the air, in the general direction the traveler will be taking. Like the larger milk-sprinkling ceremony that follows the first milking of the mares, this is done to honor the gods of sky and nature and ask for protection for the traveler.

## Diet and Health

On the whole, Mongolians, particularly those living a traditional lifestyle, are a robust people. However, conflicting reports and incomplete research that started only after Soviet withdrawal make it difficult to know precisely how healthy the Mongolian diet is. The traditional Mongolian diet is not well balanced, and some deficiencies have been detected in some groups but not as many as one might expect. Mare's milk is high in vitamin C, which compensates largely for the lack of fruits and vegetables in the diet. The vigorous lifestyle, especially in winter, requires a high calorie intake, and only the meat and dairy diet can supply all the calories needed, especially in a country where people are generally too poor to seek other calorie sources. Some research seems to suggest that, after more than 1,000 years of eating the same thing, Mongolians have either adapted or are genetically predisposed to digesting large amounts of protein.

While the traditional diet may not be perfect, the urban diet has introduced a number of new problems. Dental health has worsened. Children in Ulaanbaatar, where sugar is readily available, have far more cavities and dental problems than nomad children, for whom the consumption of hard cheese offers generally good dental health. The World Health Organization notes that cancer, heart disease, and other problems associated with lifestyle change are increasing. While urban diets have more variety, increasing urbanization also leads to a generally more sedentary lifestyle and greater consumption of refined carbohydrates and highly processed foods, including a switch to sugared soft drinks in place of milk. While vegetables are more available, it remains to be seen whether the added vegetables compensate for the loss of vitamin C and calcium from the consumption of abundant mare's milk. The sedentary lifestyle has, not too surprisingly, led to an increase in obesity in urban settings.

As more people are living in close proximity to one another, there is also the issue of safe water and sanitation. Mongolia is turning to its allies and trade partners for aid in establishing water-safety and sanitation practices that aren't necessary when one's nearest neighbor is a few dozen miles away.

The biggest threats to health for those who eat the traditional diet are external. Foremost is the *zud* (also occasionally spelled *dzud*). About every 10 years, Mongolia experiences a zud, or dangerously colder winter than usual. The long winter is

normally cold, with January temperatures averaging minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 30 degrees Celsius). Mongolians and their animals easily survive these ordinary freezes, but a zud takes the temperature much lower or brings a combination of factors, such as heavy snow or a layer of ice, which keep the animals from eating. During the winters of 1999/2000 and 2000/2001, approximately six million head of Mongolian livestock (sheep, goats, horses, camels, yaks) perished in record zuds. When animals die, people often perish as well, for lack of food. These last two disastrous cold spells threatened the health and food security of approximately 40 percent of Mongolia's population.

Another external threat is marmot hunting. Marmots may be a favored food, but they are rodents—flea-bearing rodents that often have bubonic plague. As a result, there are a few deaths from the plague each summer, usually after marmot-hunting season.

*Cynthia Clampitt*

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# Nepal

## Overview

The Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal (until December 2008 the Kingdom of Nepal) is a landlocked country bordered to the north by Tibet and to the south, east, and west by India. It has an area of 57,000 square miles and a population of approximately 30 million. Unlike the rest of South Asia (except Afghanistan) Nepal was never occupied by a foreign power. It was virtually isolated from the rest of the world until the 1950s. The country thereafter became a magnet for tourists, including trekkers, mountain climbers, and young people from Western countries. Nepal is an extremely poor country, with an average per-capita gross national product of $1,200.

Nepal is divided into three geographic regions: the lowlands, or Terai (an extension of India's Ganges Plain); the central *pahar* (foothills), which range from 1,000 feet to nearly 15,000 feet with many valleys, including the populous and cultivated Kathmandu Valley; and the Himalayan region with many of the world's highest peaks, including Mount Everest. These east–west regions are intersected by many rivers and streams. Until the 1950s transportation was poor, so that many ethnic groups and tribes lived in isolation from each other for centuries and retained their own customs and foodways.

The original inhabitants of Nepal were probably Mongoloid people speaking Tibeto-Burman languages who came from the Tibetan Plateau. In more recent times, Tibetan refugees came to Nepal. Starting around 2000 B.C. people speaking Indo-European languages came to the region from the plains of India and the western Himalayas and between the 12th and 6th century B.C. established small kingdoms in the Himalayan foothills. Siddhartha Gautama, who became the Buddha, was born in one of these kingdoms in 624 B.C., and Buddhism became the dominant religion of Nepal. The region later came under the cultural influence of various Indian empires, which led to the spread of Hinduism and the entrenchment of the caste system. From 1846 to 1953 the country was ruled by the Ranas, who were originally Rajputs from India. This reinforced the cultural and culinary ties with India.

Nepal is one of the world's most ethnically diverse countries. The 2001 census identified 92 languages belonging to four major linguistic groups (Indo-European, Dravidian, Sino-Tibetan, and Austro-Asiatic) and 103 distinct caste and ethnic groups. More than 80 percent of the population is Hindu, nearly 11 percent are Buddhist, 4 percent are Muslim, and 5 percent are Christian and animists.

The northern region is inhabited by Buddhist ethnic groups of Tibetan origin, including the Sherpas, famous as mountain guides, and the Gurkhas, who once ruled the area and later made their mark as intrepid soldiers in the British army. Other groups include the Gurungs, Magars, and Chetris in the west and the Rais and Limbus in the east. The pahar (meaning "mountain regions") is home to the Parbatiya, the name given to Nepali-speaking Hindus, and the Newars, who live mainly in the Kathmandu Valley. Although numbering only one million they have retained their cultural and culinary identity and have made important contributions to the art, architecture, and cuisine of the country. The Terai region, once nearly deserted because of malaria,

became home to many immigrants from India after the discovery of DDT. The residents have close ethnic and culinary ties with people in the adjacent Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

This diversity means that it is extremely difficult to generalize about Nepali cuisine. Although a national cuisine is developing, or at least certain national dishes, there is still reliance on local ingredients, especially in remote mountain areas.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Uttam Karki is a senior civil servant in the Nepali government. He and his wife, Rajani; their 13-year-old son, Devendra; and their 10-year-old daughter, Uma, live on the outskirts of Kathmandu. After taking their baths, the family has a meal at 9:30 A.M. consisting of dal, rice, and a vegetable stew (a meal known as *dal-bhat-tarkari*), with a little spicy pickle (*achaar*) on the side. The adults drink strong black tea with milk and sugar; the children have a glass of cow or water buffalo milk.

The father and children enjoy a light lunch at their office or school canteens. When Devendra and Uma return from school around 4:00, they join their mother for a light meal called tea or *tiffin*. It includes savory dishes such as pressed rice flakes (*chiura*) with spices and nuts, sautéed potatoes, and samosas (pastries filled with spiced vegetables or meat) as well as sweets (*mithai*) bought from an outside vendor. Like most Nepalis, the Karkis have dinner at 9 or 9:30 P.M. Dinner is the same as the morning meal but with an additional dish, such as a goat curry or sautéed greens.

The Karkis are Hindus belonging to the *chhetri* (warrior) caste (*kshatriya* in India), which means that they eat goat, lamb, and chicken but not beef. Like many Hindus Rajani fasts twice a month. On these days she avoids meat and spicy food and eats only rice, dal, and boiled vegetables. During the festival Dashain the Karkis go to the Dakshinkali temple in Kathmandu, where they purchase a goat for sacrifice. They leave behind the head, neck, and tail at the temple as an offering and take the rest home to prepare.

## Major Foodstuffs

Nepal is a predominantly rural country. The largest crop and the dietary staple for most Nepalis is rice, which is grown mainly in the central region. At higher, drier altitudes, people cultivate wheat, corn, barley, millet, buckwheat, amaranth, and root vegetables as the staples. According to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization, in 2005 Nepalis consumed an average of 180 pounds (82 kilograms) of rice, 86 pounds (39 kilograms) of wheat, and 77 pounds (35 kilograms) of corn per capita per year.

Other important crops are vegetables such as potatoes, okra, taro, radishes, cauliflower, kohlrabi, bitter gourds, snake gourds, *iskus* (a squashlike vegetable with a delicate skin), eggplants, and many vegetables that have no English equivalents, including local greens known collectively as *saag.* Bamboo grows in profusion in Nepal, and the tender shoots are used in many different ways for making pickles and in curries.

### *Tama ko Tarkari* (Bamboo-Shoot Curry)

1 medium onion, finely sliced
2 tbsp mustard oil or corn oil
1 tbsp ginger, finely minced
½ tsp turmeric
½ tsp ground coriander
½ tsp chili powder
1 tsp salt, or to taste
1 c potatoes, cut into 1-in. pieces
1 c black-eyed peas, soaked overnight



A Sherpa woman uses a flat basket to winnow barley in Nepal. (Christine Kolisch | Corbis)

1 ripe tomato, cut in pieces

1½ c water

½ c bamboo shoots (canned or fermented)

Sauté the onion in the oil in a heavy pan until it is golden brown. Add the spices and salt, and fry until they separate from the oil. Add the potatoes, black-eyed peas, and tomato. Cook until tender. Add the water. When it begins to boil, add the bamboo shoots, and cook for a few minutes until they are hot. Serve with rice.

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Locally grown spices include ginger, mustard seed (of which Nepal is the world's largest exporter), nutmeg, mace, cardamom, and chilies. Hotness also comes from *timur,* a berry similar to Sichuan pepper. *Jimbu,* an aromatic grass with a shallot-like flavor, is a popular seasoning, as is *chhyapi,* a member of the *Allium* genus that resembles chives. Oranges and tangerines grow in the hilly regions, mangoes in the Terai, and pineapple in eastern Nepal.

Although most Nepalis practice Hinduism or Buddhism, which have restrictions on meat consumption, all except the most orthodox Brahmins and Vaishnavs (worshippers of Vishnu) eat meat. However, each ethnic group has its own preferences and prohibitions. Virtually no one eats beef (cows are the national animal of Nepal, and killing a cow used to be a capital offense). Some people avoid yak and water buffalo, because they are similar to cows, and chicken, which is considered unclean, although they may eat wild jungle fowl. Venison and wild boar are popular, although their populations in the wild are declining. Some ethnic groups domesticate and eat pigs. Goat meat is eaten by almost everyone and is the preferred animal in sacrifices, which play an important role in Hindu rituals. Fish consumption is not common in central Nepal, but fish is eaten in the Himalayas where carp, trout, and catfish are caught in local streams. Often, fish are smoked or sun-dried.

Tea is grown in eastern Nepal in the region adjacent to Darjeeling in India. Production is small and mainly for domestic consumption. Cow and yak milk are common beverages and are turned into yogurt and *ghiu* (clarified butter).

## Cooking

Traditionally, most utensils and dishes were made of copper or brass. As in India, the main cooking devices are a *karahi,* a woklike pan with two handles used for deep-frying, and a *tawa,* a flat iron pan for sautéing breads. Meat and vegetables are cut on a *chules,* a slanting footlong blade fixed on a piece of wood. The user sits on the ground, presses the end of the wooden block with her foot, holds the item to be cut in both hands, and cuts it by pushing it against the blade. Spices are traditionally ground on a stone slab with a stone roller, but middle-class homes have electric spice grinders and pressure cookers. Standard cooking mediums are ghiu, vegetable oil, and pungent mustard oil. Traditional meals are served on a *thali,* a round tray made of stainless steel or brass with a rim. The rice is placed on the thali, and the other dishes are served in small metal bowls or directly on the thali.

Two popular techniques in Nepal are fermentation and drying. A dish called *gundruk* is made by drying green leafy vegetables in the sun, shredding and crushing them, and then storing them in an earthen jar lined with banana leaves. The vegetables ferment for 10 days, after which they are again dried in the sun. Gundruk is used as an ingredient in curries, soups, or pickles. Meat, especially venison, is cut into long, thin strips and marinated in garlic, turmeric, ginger, and other spices; it is then slowly dried in the air and sun or over a slow fire, a process that may take several days, to make a dish called *sukuti.*

## Typical Meals

Middle-class people in central and southern Nepal eat two main meals a day, one in midmorning and the second in the evening. The meals are basically the same, except that the evening meal may have one or two more dishes since there is more time for preparation. A typical meal consists of a starch—rice among those who can afford it, or corn, wheat, or millet in the hillier regions and among poorer people—accompanied by boiled lentils (dal), two or three sautéed or curried vegetables, and a small serving of hot pickles (achaar), chutney, or salad. This meal, known as dal-bhat-tarkari, is

identical to that eaten throughout northern and eastern India.

Most Nepalis eat rice at every meal. A common greeting is the equivalent of "Have you eaten your rice?" Both long-grain and short-grain white rice are used, and there are many varieties, some of which are boiled and fermented to make alcoholic drinks. A popular rice product is *chiura,* which is made by soaking rice in water, drying and roasting it, and then beating it into flat flakes that are mixed with spices, nuts, or raisins and eaten as a snack. Rice can be sautéed with spices and cooked with meat or vegetables to make *pulaos,* as in North India.

Bread, called roti, is made from wheat, corn, millet, soybeans, legumes, rice, and potatoes. Typically, breads are sautéed in a little oil on a tawa or are deep-fried. Wheat breads similar to those in North India include puri (deep-fried puffy disks), *parathas* (a flaky sautéed flatbread), and flat chapatis. Bread made from corn flour is popular in the hilly regions. In the harsh climate of northeastern Nepal, bread is made from sweet potatoes.

The second major dietary component is legumes, known collectively as *dal,* a word that refers to both the raw material and the boiled dish. They include a wide variety of beans: yellow, green (*moong*), orange (*masur*), black, horse gram, split peas, pigeon peas, and chickpeas. Combined with grains, dal provides most of the amino acids needed to maintain health. The most common method of preparation is boiling the dal in water and adding spices sautéed in ghee or oil at the end. Nepali dal tends to be thinner than dal in India. Soybeans are extensively grown and consumed in Nepal (unlike in India where they have never caught on) and are an ingredient in salads and soups. One of the most famous Nepali lentil dishes that is of Newari origin is *kwaati,* made by sprouting nine or more varieties of lentils and beans, sautéing them with spices, and cooking them to make a thick soup.

Vegetables are eaten at every meal. A standard method of cooking is to sauté spices, ginger, garlic, onions, chilies, and herbs in mustard oil, vegetable oil, or clarified butter, and then add vegetables or greens, cover, and cook slowly, adding water if necessary.

Most families eat meat and fish only occasionally, since they are expensive. Poor people consume meat only on special occasions and at festivals. The most common meat is a freshly slaughtered goat. The Nepali word for goat is the same as the word for meat—*khas* or *boka.* Lamb and pork are eaten less frequently.

A standard way of preparing meat is to marinate it in yogurt, spices, onions, and garlic, then cook it slowly until it is done and the gravy has thickened. The spice mixture often contains fenugreek and *ajowan* seeds and is generally milder than in Indian dishes. The meat is always cooked with the bones since this adds flavor. *Bhutuwa* is a method of preparing boneless goat, pork, or water buffalo by cooking the meat in oil and spices over high heat until it browns. Meat can be cooked very slowly in water and spices to make a thin souplike dish called *suruwa.* Pieces of goat or chicken are marinated in yogurt and spices and grilled to make kebabs, called *sekuwa.*

Achaars (pickles) are an essential component of a Nepali meal since they provide vitamins that may otherwise be lacking as well as variety of flavor. Mustard oil and chilies give hotness and pungency. Almost any fruit or vegetable or even meat can be used to make an achaar, although tomato is the most common ingredient. Chutneys made from fruit, vegetables, dried fish, or mint are usually prepared fresh for each meal and can range from mild to fiery hot.

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### *Achaar* (Tomato Pickle)

2 lb tomatoes

6 cloves garlic, finely chopped

4 green chilies

½ in. piece of ginger, finely chopped

½ tsp salt

⅛ tsp timur (or Sichuan pepper)

¼ c finely chopped cilantro

Bake the tomatoes in the oven at 450°F for 30 minutes or on a grill until the skin darkens. Let cool and remove the skin. Roast the garlic and the green chilies in the oven or on the grill. Grind the garlic, chilies, ginger, salt, and timur in a blender, then add

the tomatoes and mix well. Transfer to a bowl and add the chopped cilantro.

A meal may end with fruit but does not generally include a prepared dessert.

In the midafternoon, a light afternoon meal (sometimes called tiffin or tea) consisting of snacks and sweets is served. Typical teatime snacks are chiura (flattened rice), *pakoras* (vegetable fritters), and samosas (baked or fried pastries filled with meat or vegetables). Many sweets are identical to those of North India, including *halwa* (a grain or vegetable pudding), *gulab jaman* (sugar and milk balls in a sugar syrup), *jilebis* (pretzel-like coils of chickpea batter fried in oil and soaked in sugar syrup), and *barfi* (a fudge made from flour, lentils, nut, fruits or vegetables, and thickened milk). A distinctly Nepali sweet dish is *juju dhau,* a sweetened yogurt traditionally made from buffalo milk and fermented in red clay pots. Tea drinking is an important part of Nepali social life; tea is served throughout the day, usually with milk and sugar.

The 1.2 million Newars, who live mainly in the Kathmandu Valley, have an extremely rich culture and cuisine based on the wide variety of vegetables that grow in their fertile habitat. Newars are one of the few ethnic groups who eat the meat of water buffalo, which may be fried, grilled, dried to make a kind of jerky, boiled into a broth, or cooked in curries. A delicacy is *cho-hi,* steamed buffalo blood eaten with marrow and spices.

*Wo,* a patty made of ground lentils with a meat or egg topping, is eaten as a snack. Two distinctive rice-flour breads are *chatamari,* a flat, round bread eaten plain or topped with minced meat, egg, or sugar, and *yomari,* a steamed conch-shaped dumpling filled with roasted sesame seeds and brown sugar.

The Newaris are famous for their alcohol drinks made from rice and other grains. *Jaand* is a mild rice beer made by fermenting cooked rice for 24 hours and adding water. *Raksi,* sometimes called Nepali whiskey, is a stronger drink distilled from fermented rice, millet, and barley.

Rice will not grow at high altitudes, so in the Himalayas the main starches are barley, millet, and potatoes, made into bread or noodles. A traditional Sherpa meal consists of boiled potatoes rubbed in a thick paste of hot chilies with a few slivers of yak meat dried above the fire. Another staple is roasted barley flour or millet flour boiled in water to make a thick paste (*tsampa*) eaten with chilies. The standard drink is tea with yak butter and salt.

The Tibetan population has made important contributions to the cuisine of Nepal. The most famous Tibetan dish is *momos,* small steamed or fried dumplings made from wheat flour and filled with meat, vegetables, and onion. Other ingredients used in the region are bamboo shoots, soy sauce, salted and pickled radish, and sun-dried fish from the mountain streams. *Thupka* is a traditional Sherpa soup made with noodles and meat. A local alcoholic drink is *chhang,* made from boiled millet fermented in a bamboo container and then in an earthen jar.



Traditional fried Nepalese dumplings, or momos. (Shariff Che' Lah | Dreamstime.com)

***Momos***

4 c white flour

2–3 c water

1 lb minced beef, lamb, pork, or chicken

1 medium onion, minced

1 clove garlic, minced

½ tsp salt, or to taste

½ tsp chili pepper

Knead the flour into a soft, fine dough, adding water as needed. Combine the other ingredients in a bowl and mix well. Pinch off balls of dough the size of an egg and flatten them on a floured surface. Hold a ball in your palm and place 1 tablespoon of filling in the center. Fold over the sides and use the other hand to squeeze the edges tightly to seal and make a little bite-sized bag.

Grease a steamer tray, place momos in it, and steam for 10 minutes. Serve with a mint or tomato chutney.

The foodways in the Terai are very similar to those of the neighboring Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, since many of the residents migrated from there. The standard meal consists of dals, wheat bread or rice, and one or two seasonal vegetable dishes. A typical food of the poor is *sattu,* roasted chickpea flour. Laborers carry it in a towel to their jobs and eat it mixed with salt and green chilies.

## Eating Out

Traditionally Nepalis did not eat meals outside the home, although snack and sweet shops have always existed, but the influx of Western tourists into Kathmandu starting in the 1950s led to a proliferation of restaurants of all kinds, including German, Russian, Indian, Chinese, Italian, French, Japanese, and now American fast food. Kathmandu is famous for its pastry shops that sell Western-style pies and cakes. Tibetan restaurants serving momos are especially popular.

## Special Occasions

Nepali festivals and the foods and food rituals associated with them are numerous. The Newars in particular are known for their festivals, especially during the three harvest months from August to October. The biggest festival is Dashain (the equivalent of Dussehara in North India), which is celebrated for 15 days in September/October. Worshippers celebrate the victory of the goddess Durga over a demon, and the belief is that she must be appeased with blood to prevent her from doing further harm. During this festival, tens of thousands of animals are sacrificed to the goddess, especially goats and black water buffalo, and the courtyards of the temples are literally filled with blood from the sacrifices. People also sacrifice animals at home.

After the animals are killed, every part is consumed, including the liver, intestines, lungs, heart, testicles, and blood. At important temples, braziers are kept burning all day so that the worshippers can cook and consume their meat on the spot. Congealed blood (*ragati*) is considered a delicacy and prepared in different ways. It can be mixed with cumin, garlic, ginger, chili, and turmeric, boiled to a solid mass, and then cut into strips and fried for use in curries. It can be steamed and then cooked with vegetables or be boiled, cut into chunks, flavored with lime juice, and served as a salad. In one version of a dish called *bhutuwa,* intestines and other organs are boiled until done, then cut into small pieces and fried with turmeric, cumin, and chili powder.

Paradoxically, many Hindus fast on certain days of the month, especially on the 11th day after the full moon and the 11th day after the new moon and during festivals associated with the god Vishnu. Fasting can mean many things: abstaining from meat; eliminating cooked food, salted food, or rice; or avoiding food altogether.

Second in importance among Hindus is Tihar, a five-day festival dedicated to the goddess Laxmi and celebrated in October. It is the equivalent of Deepavali/Diwali in northern India. People present each other with sweets during this period. On the first day, food is offered to crows, on the second day people honor dogs, and on the third day cows.

## Diet and Health

Because medical resources are limited, especially in remote areas, many Nepalis have recourse to traditional systems of medicine, including Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, and Amchi, a Tibetan healing practice. There are an estimated 400,000 practitioners of traditional medicine in Nepal. Both systems rely on the use of local herbs (*jadibuti*) to treat illnesses, and the harvesting of these herbs is a source of income for farmers. In Ayurveda food plays an essential role in preventing and curing illnesses. It is based on the principle that disease is caused by an imbalance of humors (*doshas*) in the body that can be restored by eating the appropriate foods prescribed by an Ayurvedic physician.

*Colleen Taylor Sen*

**Further Reading**

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# Pakistan

## Overview

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan has a land area of around 308,881 square miles (800,000 square kilometers) and a population of more than 130 million. It has borders with Iran, Afghanistan, China, and India and 650 miles of coastline on the Arabian Sea. There are three major geographic areas: the towering Hindu Kush Mountains in the north, the green valleys and fertile plains of the Indus River valley, and barren desert in the south. The climate ranges from extreme heat to cold, and the soil varies from rich to barren.

A separate Muslim state on the subcontinent was first proposed in 1930 by the poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal, who suggested that the four northwestern provinces of India (Sindh, Balochistan, Punjab, and the North-West Frontier Province) be united to form such a state. His vision became reality in 1947 when India gained independence from the British Empire and was partitioned into two countries: India, a secular republic with a Hindu majority, and Pakistan, with a Muslim majority. Pakistan initially comprised two parts, West Pakistan and East Pakistan, separated by about 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers) of Indian territory.

During the partitioning, more than 14 million people crossed the new borders. Some 7 million non-Muslims (Sikhs, Hindus, Parsis, Christians) moved to India, while around the same number of Indian Muslims, many from northern India, moved to Pakistan. In 1971 East Pakistan gained its independence following a short war and became the Republic of Bangladesh. Although Pakistan is an Islamic state, the constitution guarantees freedom of religion. According to the 1998 census, 96 percent of the population is Muslim, 1.6 percent Hindu, and 1.5 percent Christian, plus tiny communities of Sikhs and Parsis.

Modern Pakistan consists of four states: Punjab, Sindh, the Northwest Frontier Province, and Balochistan plus several small federally administered tribal areas. Urdu, an Indo-European language written in a Persian script, is the official language of Pakistan; the national language (used in government documents) is English. Around 66 percent of the population speak Punjabi as their first language; 13 percent Sindhi; 9 percent Pashtu; and 3 percent Balochi. The remaining 8 percent are immigrants from India called Muhajirs (Arabic for "immigrants") or their descendants. Their first language is Urdu. The capital is Islamabad, a city built in the 1960s to replace Karachi as the capital.

Speakers of these languages belong to the major ethnic groups in Pakistan, a term we define as a community of persons, related to each other by origin and language, and close to each other by mode of life and culture. These ethnic groups have their distinctive cuisines and dishes, but these are not uniquely theirs since they share the culinary traditions of their co-ethnics in adjacent countries. For example, the food of Punjabis in Pakistan is very similar to that of Punjabis on the Indian side of the border, subject to religious dietary restrictions. Pork is forbidden to Muslims, while most Hindus and Sikhs do not eat beef and many are vegetarian. Balochis and Pashtuns share dishes with their co-ethnics in Afghanistan and Iran. The cuisine of the Muhajirs, with its rich, aromatic *biryanis* (mixed rice dishes), *pulaos* (rice pilafs), and *kormas* (made with yogurt and nuts), is essentially identical to

that eaten by Muslims in Indian cities like Lucknow or New Delhi. There are very few, if any, dishes that are exclusively Pakistani.

One of the very few cookbooks in English with the word *Pakistan* in the title is K. G. Saiyidain's *Muslim Cooking of Pakistan.* Much of it is a verbatim transcription Balbir Singh's superb *Indian Cookery,* first published in the United Kingdom in 1961. The recipes for bread, meat, and rice dishes in the two books are identical except that the publishers of Saiyidain's book substitute the word *Islamic* or *Pakistani* for *Indian* in Singh's text. A significant difference is that whereas *Indian Cookery* has 25 vegetarian recipes, the so-called Pakistani cookbook has only 12, indicative of the important role meat plays in Pakistani cuisine.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Sayeed Ali and his wife, Anita, are a young married couple who live in Lahore, the capital of the province of Punjab. The couple runs a computer consulting business. Their typical breakfast consists of *paratha,* a thick sautéed bread, sometimes stuffed with potatoes, onions, or radish; pickle; and any leftovers from the previous night's dinner, accompanied by a glass of sweet lassi, a drink of beaten yogurt, water, salt or sugar, and mango. Sometimes they have an "American breakfast" consisting of toast and jam and perhaps eggs.

Lunch, eaten around 1 P.M., consists of a chapati, a round wheat bread cooked on a grill; dal (boiled spiced lentils); a couple of vegetable dishes—perhaps carrots or okra sautéed in spices or a potato curry; and just a little meat, since meat is very expensive. Goat meat costs the equivalent of a dollar a pound, the daily salary of an average workingman. Dinner consists of chapati, a *salan* (a goat or lamb curry in a thin gravy) or kebabs, and a vegetable. The Alis eat rice once or twice a week. When guests come they may prepare a more elaborate biryani, a rice and meat dish (see the following). Dessert is not a standard part of their meals, but sometimes they may have fruit in season, a *kheer* (rice pudding), or *firni,* a custard.

## Major Foodstuffs

Pakistan is a predominantly rural country, where more than half the population is involved in agriculture. The dietary staple is wheat, the country's largest cash crop. According to data from the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization, in 2003 per-capita consumption of wheat in Pakistan was 240 pounds (109 kilograms), compared with 136 pounds (63 kilograms) for India. Although rice is the country's second-largest crop, per-capita consumption is only 35 pounds (16 kilograms) per year compared with 136 pounds (63 kilograms) in India and 352 pounds (160 kilograms) in Bangladesh (where rice is the staple). Much of the rice, especially basmati and other high-end varieties, is exported to the Middle East. Other food grains are millet, sorghum, corn, and barley. Chickpeas are the main nongrain food crop in area and production. Pakistan is an important producer of apricots, oranges, mangoes, and other citrus fruits. Livestock, mainly cattle, buffalo, and goats, contributes about half the value added in the agricultural sector, amounting to nearly 11 percent of Pakistan's gross domestic product.



Farmers harvest wheat by hand in Pakistan's Punjab region. (Ric Ergenbright | Corbis)

## Cooking

As in other parts of the subcontinent, most domestic cooking is done in a pot on top of a simple burner traditionally fueled by charcoal, twigs, and dried cow patties. Today, middle-class households use a small cooktop fueled by bottled propane gas. Sautéing and deep-frying are done in a wok-shaped pot made of stainless steel or cast iron, called a *kadhai.* Many urban households own a pressure cooker, which considerably shortens the time needed to cook meat until tender. A heavy flat iron griddle with a wooden handle, called a *tawa,* is used for roasting spices and sautéing breads.

Spices, onions, garlic, and herbs are crushed using a small rolling pin on a stone slab or, in more modern households, in an electric spice grinder. Spices can be dry-roasted and ground into a powder, called *garam masala,* or "warm seasonings"; this is stored in airtight bottles. A few pinches are added to a dish just before serving. Powdered or whole spices may be sautéed and added to a dish at the end of the cooking process to add flavor. Spices can also be ground into a wet paste with onions, garlic, ginger, yogurt, coconut milk, or some other liquid and used to make a sauce or gravy.

A standard method for preparing meat starts with frying spices, garlic, onions, ginger, and perhaps tomatoes in a little oil, then sautéing the meat in the mixture and adding small amounts of water, yogurt, or other liquid a little at a time, stirring constantly. Since most households do not have ovens, roasted and grilled foods, such as kebabs (pieces of meat impaled on a stick and grilled over hot coals or in a tandoor, a large clay oven), are either purchased from outside vendors or sent to a local bakery for cooking. Some villages have communal tandoors for baking bread and roasting meat.

## Typical Meals

One of the most characteristic features of Pakistani foodways is the consumption of meat (at least by those who can afford it), which is two to three times higher on a per-capita basis than in India, even though Pakistan's gross national product and per-capita income is lower. There are very few vegetarians in Pakistan, although there is a tradition of vegetarianism among Sufi saints, who are revered in Pakistan.

Meat is the centerpiece of all feasts and celebrations, including religious holidays and weddings: The greater the number of meat dishes, the higher the status and wealth of the host. The most popular meats are goat, lamb, and chicken; beef is considered somewhat inferior. All parts of the animal are eaten, including the feet, kidneys, livers, brains, and other organs. Pork is never eaten by Muslims.

The most popular meat dishes in Pakistan were brought by the Muhajir immigrants from northern India. This style of cooking is often called Mogul, after the Mogul emperors who ruled much of the subcontinent from 1526 to 1857, but this is a misnomer popularized by restaurateurs and food writers. This cuisine developed over centuries in the kitchens of the Central Asian and Afghan dynasties who ruled northern India from Delhi from the early 12th to the 15th century. Their wealthy courts were magnets for travelers and scholars from the entire Islamic world—the Middle East, Persia, Afghanistan, Central Asia, even North Africa—who brought rose water, saffron, almonds, pistachios, dried fruit, and sweet dishes and pastries. Characteristic ingredients of this cuisine include onions and garlic (shunned by some Hindus); aromatic spices such as cloves, brown and green cardamom, nutmeg, mace, black pepper, and cinnamon; yogurt, cream, and butter; other aromatic flavorings; and nuts, raisins, and other dried fruits.

### *Meat Dishes with a Gravy*

The most popular are *roghan josh,* an aromatic, red-colored curry (stew) marinated in yogurt; korma (also spelled *qorma*), a mildly aromatic braised whitish-colored curry made with yogurt; *dopiaza,* a curry made with a large proportion of onions; and *kalia* (*qalia*), a hot preparation with a sauce made with a paste of ground ginger and onion.

A standard method of preparing meat curries starts with sautéing onions, garlic, and ginger in clarified butter or cooking oil until they are brown; adding the



Roghan josh made with lamb and served with basmati rice. (Monkey Business Images | Dreamstime.com)

spices (both ground and whole); sautéing the meat, which may have been marinated in spices, yogurt, or both; and then adding a small amount of liquid, covering the pot, and simmering slowly. The dish may be flavored with rose water and decorated with fried onions, slivered almonds, and silver or gold foil on special occasions.

**_Korma_ (Lamb Stew with Yogurt)**

3 medium onions, sliced
2 whole green cardamom pods
½ c oil or ghee
½ c yogurt
2–3 cloves garlic
1-in. piece fresh ginger
1 tsp black pepper
1 tsp black cardamom seeds
2 lb boneless lean lamb, cut into 1-in. cubes
½–1 tsp red chili powder (to taste)
1–2 tsp salt (to taste)
Several drops of rose water
15 roasted almonds

Sauté the onions and the cardamom pods in the oil or ghee in a medium pot. When they start to brown, remove them with a slotted spoon and drain as much oil as possible back into the pot. Grind the onions, cardamom seeds, and yogurt into a paste in a food processor or blender, and set aside. Grind the garlic, ginger, pepper, and cardamom pods with a little water until smooth. Heat the oil again, and add the meat, the garlic mixture, and the chili powder. Cook over medium heat for 10 minutes, stirring so that the meat is well coated. Add the onion/yogurt mixture, 2 cups water, and salt. Simmer, partly covered, for an hour or until the meat is tender. Pour into a bowl and sprinkle with rose water, and garnish with the roasted almonds. Serve with paratha or rice.

### *Meat and Grain Dishes*

The most popular dishes are pulao (also spelled pilau, pilaf) and biryani, both originally Persian words. The distinction between these two dishes is blurred and a subject of controversy. Some people claim that a pulao (which can be made with vegetables and seafood as well as meat) is more refined than a biryani; others say the opposite. Both involve cooking the meat with spices, boiling the rice, and combining the two, but the order and manner in which this is done vary.

One way of making a biryani is to boil the meat with spices, cook the rice in the meat water, and then layer the rice and meat in a pan and bake them in an oven. Alternatively, the meat may be marinated in yogurt, spices, and crushed onions while the rice is half-cooked in water. The meat is spread at the bottom of a pot and covered with saffron-flavored milk, the rice water, fried onions, and spices. A layer of rice is spread over the meat and sprinkled with the remaining saffron milk, ground cardamom, and lime juice. The pot is sealed with dough and cooked very slowly so that the contents have a soft texture. On special occasions, biryanis and pulaos are garnished

with fried nuts, raisins, or other dried fruits and decorated with gold and silver foil. *Kabuli* (*qabuli*) *pulao,* a popular rice dish that originated in Afghanistan, is made with lamb or chicken, vegetables such as cauliflower or carrots, and sometimes raisins.

*Haleem* (*halim*), a popular winter breakfast dish, probably came from Iran or Afghanistan and resembles *harissa* in the Arab countries. It is a thick porridge-like stew made from whole and cracked wheat, lentils, sometimes other grains, spices, and beef or lamb; it is garnished with sliced green chilies, fried onions, and coriander and is eaten with nan. It is cooked overnight and stirred constantly to ensure the right consistency. It is used to break the fast during Ramadan and is also eaten during the festival Muharram if it falls during the winter.

### *Kebabs*

These grilled meats originated in Central Asia and the Middle East and are typically made of lamb or beef. Usually they are purchased from restaurants or roadside stalls and either eaten on the spot or taken home. Some popular kebabs are

- *Seekh* kebab: ground spiced meat rolled into long cylinders and grilled on skewers
- *Shami* kebab: a lightly sautéed small patty made of minced meat and ground chickpeas
- *Chapli* kebab: a spicy flattened meat patty (a specialty of the Northwest Frontier Province)
- *Bihari* kebab: long, thin strips of meat, usually beef, marinated in yogurt, papaya, and spices and roasted on skewers
- *Boti* kebab: whole chunks of meat marinated in yogurt and/or spices and grilled on skewers (also called *tikka* kebab).
- Tandoori chicken: chicken marinated in yogurt and spices and baked in a clay oven (tandoor)
- *Shawarma,* unspiced lamb, beef, or chicken roasted on a spit and served with pita bread or baguette (this dish was brought to Pakistan by workers from the Mideast)

### *Sweet Dishes*

Pakistan has a rich tradition of desserts. They include *halwa,* a kind of pudding made from ground vegetables (such as carrot and green squash) cooked in ghee; kheer, a thick rice or vermicelli pudding made from boiled-down milk (*khoya*); *zarda,* a kind of pulao made from rice, raisins, sugar, nuts, and saffron; *kulfi,* cream flavored with mango, cardamom, or saffron and frozen in small cylinders; *jalebis,* funnel cake–like coils of chickpea batter and sugar deep-fried and soaked in sugar syrup; *sewian,* very thin strands of vermicelli fried in ghee, then cooked slowly in milk until it thickens and flavored with rose water; and *sheer korma,* a sweet pudding made from vermicelli, milk, saffron, sugar, spices, and ghee.

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***Sewian***

2 oz fine vermicelli

¾ c ghee

6 crushed green cardamom pods

3 cloves

¾ c sugar

1 qt milk

2 oz dried coconut

10 drops of rose water or *kewra* (screw pine) water

Break the vermicelli into small pieces, and roast them in a heavy frying pan until they are pink. Heat the ghee in a frying pan, and brown the cardamom pods and cloves, then add the sugar and milk. When the milk is reduced to half its volume, add the fried vermicelli and dried coconut. Cook until done. Sprinkle with rose water or kewra water, and serve hot or cold.

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### *Breads*

The major staple in Pakistan is bread, usually made from *atta,* a whole wheat flour that has much of the bran and husk left in it. Probably no other region of the world has such a variety of breads as North India and Pakistan. They may be leavened, semileavened, or unleavened; flat, disk-shaped, round, or oblong; soft, crispy, flaky, or spongy; small, medium, or large; austere or opulent; plain or stuffed; and dry-roasted, sautéed, deep-fried, or baked.

**Table 22.1**

| Name of Bread | Ingredients | Method of Cooking | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Chapati/Roti** | Atta | Dry roasted on a tawa | Unleavened. Saucer-shaped; puffs up slightly, then flattens |
| **Phulka** | Atta | Dry roasted on a tawa, then held with tongs over an open flame | Unleavened. Puffs up to a round ball, then deflates |
| **Paratha** | Atta, ghee | Fried in a little ghee or oil | Unleavened. May be round, square, or triangular. Ghee is added during rolling to create a layered, flaky texture. May be stuffed with vegetables, eggs, or meat |
| **Puri** | Atta or a mixture of atta and white flour; ghee | Deep-fried | Round, 4–5 inches in diameter; puffs up, then flattens. May have a vegetable filling. Often eaten with halwa |
| **Bhatura** | White flour, semolina, sugar, yogurt, baking powder | Deep-fried | Semileavened. Round, slightly puffy. Served with chickpeas. A typical Punjabi dish |
| **Khameeri** | Atta and white flour, milk, ghee, yeast, sugar, aniseed, yogurt | Roasted in tandoor or deep-fried | Leavened, sweetened bread |
| **Nan or tandoori roti** | Atta or white flour, ghee, sometimes baking powder, eggs, yogurt, milk, sugar | Baked on the wall of a tandoor | Slightly leavened. Round or cylindrical. Rather thick, slightly puffy in places. Served sprinkled with poppy seeds and nigella |
| **Bakarkhani** | White flour, milk, sugar, yeast, ghee, almonds, raisins | Baked | |
| **Barqi paratha** | White flour, milk, sugar, ghee | Sautéed in ghee on tawa | Rolled several times, adding ghee to layers. Very flaky and rich |
| **Missi roti** | Atta and chickpea flour, onion, ghee, spices, fenugreek leaves | Cooked on hot tawa, then roasted over fire | Served with fresh butter and yogurt |
| **Kulcha** | Atta, yeast, milk, yogurt, ghee | Baked in tandoor | Semifermented, circular or square shape. Often eaten with chickpeas |
| **Sheermal** | White flour, ghee, milk, sugar, egg | Baked | Leavened. After baking, bread is moistened with milk flavored with cardamom and saffron |
| **Double roti** | White flour | Oven | Name for Western-style bread |
| **Makki ki roti** | Corn flour | Dry roasted or sautéed in a little ghee | Eaten with mustard greens and spinach in the Punjab |
| **Taftan** | Atta, saffron, cardamom | Baked in tandoor | Leavened. Served with *nihari* |

Typically a Pakistani breakfast consists of parathas, perhaps stuffed with potatoes, cauliflower, or grated radish, or chapatis, sometimes accompanied by halwa. More westernized families start the day with toast and eggs or cereal and milk.

The midday meal, eaten around 1:30 or 2:00, typically consists of a vegetable dish, a salan (a curry with a thin gravy), korma, or some other meat curry; dal; pickles or chutney; and yogurt (especially in the summer), accompanied by bread or perhaps a rice pulao. Most people have a light afternoon meal, called a tea, featuring salty items such as *pakora,* vegetables coated with chickpea batter and deep-fried; *aloo bhaji,* potatoes sautéed in spices; or kebabs purchased from a street vendor.

Dinner is eaten around 7:30 or 8 P.M. In some families, dinner is lighter than the midday meal and consists largely of leftovers from lunch. In others, dinner is the main meal of the day and features dishes that involve more preparation, such as haleem, pulao, *kofte* (meatballs), or kebabs, served with rice or bread or both along with yogurt, pickles, and salad.

Desserts are not a standard part of a Pakistani meal, but sometimes fruit (such as mangoes in season) or kheer is served, especially if guests are present.

Punjab, the nation's largest state with 25 percent of the land area and 48 percent of the population, shares a border and a culinary tradition with the adjacent Indian states of Punjab and Haryana. This region is the breadbasket of Pakistan, and the food is closely linked to the land. Typical meat dishes include *keema matar,* a rich, dry stew of minced mutton, beans, tomatoes, onions, garlic, and spices, and *mutton rarha,* cooked with yogurt, tomatoes, and spices until the gravy dries up and the meat is well browned.

The region's thick, rich dals are famous all over the subcontinent. *Dal makhani* is made from black lentils, chickpeas, black-eyed peas, or kidney beans simmered for a long time over a slow fire until they become thick and then flavored with spices and cream. Another well-known Punjabi dish is mustard greens, *sarson ka saag,* served with cornbread that is very similar to corn tortillas.

The second-largest state is Sindh, whose capital, the port of Karachi, is Pakistan's largest city. Since the province has a long coastline, fish and seafood are important parts of the diet. A local delicacy is *bunda palais,* fish stuffed with a paste of red pepper, garlic, ginger, and dried pomegranate seeds, then wrapped in cloth and buried three feet deep in hot sand in the sun for several hours. Other characteristic Sindhi dishes are *palo kok,* lotus stems cooked in earthenware pots, and *kori gosht,* saddle of mutton marinated in salt, tamarind, and yogurt and roasted slowly over a low flame. A popular drink is *thandal,* made from milk and ground almonds, sometimes with rose petals, cardamom, and other spices.



View of traditional Pakistani dishes. Much of Pakistani cuisine includes pickles, lentils, chutneys, and a variety of spices. (Shutterstock)

Many of the residents of Karachi are Muhajirs, who brought with them the food traditions of Lucknow and Delhi. A traditional breakfast dish is *nihari,* beef shank cooked slowly overnight with ginger, fried onions, green chilies, and aromatic spices until a dark, rich gravy is formed. It is garnished with coriander, sliced ginger, and chilies and served with nan. Nihari became so popular that it is now served in special restaurants all day long. *Paya* are goat trotters slowly cooked in a spicy dark brown gravy that becomes gelatinous.

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### *Nihari* (Beef Stew with Ginger)

2 large onions, sliced
1 tbsp oil
1 lb boneless beef, cut into 1½-in. cubes
1-in. piece fresh ginger
3 cloves garlic
1 tsp chili powder
1 tsp salt
2 tsp flour

### *Garam Masala* (Spice Mixture)

6 cloves
1 tsp cumin seeds
8 black cardamom seeds, removed from pods
8 black peppercorns
1 2-in. piece cinnamon stick

### Garnish

Sliced ginger, sliced green chilies, chopped fresh cilantro leaves

Cook the onions in the oil in a medium-size pot for 5 or 6 minutes until they become golden brown. Add the meat, and cook over medium heat for 30 minutes,

stirring frequently. Grind the ginger and garlic in a food processor or blender with a little water until they are smooth. Add to the meat and cook 10 minutes more. Add the chili powder and salt, and cook another 30 minutes. Meanwhile, grind the spices for the garam masala in a spice or coffee grinder to make a fine powder. Mix the flour and spices with a little water, stir into the beef mixture, and add 4 cups water. Mix well, and cook, tightly covered, over very low heat for about an hour or until the meat is tender. Before serving, add the garnishes, and serve with parathas.

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The state of Baluchistan borders on Iran and Afghanistan, and Baluchis live on both sides of the border. Traditionally nomads, they cook many of their dishes over an open fire or in a tandoor. Spicing is much milder than in other parts of the subcontinent. Kebabs are very popular. The best-known Baluchi dish is *sajji,* a whole lamb with all the fat intact, marinated in salt and sometimes papaya paste (for tenderizing), stuffed with rice, and roasted over coals or in a tandoor. It is accompanied by *kaak,* a rock-hard bread made by rolling the dough over a stone and baking it in a tandoor.

## Eating Out

Large cities such as Karachi and Lahore have a thriving restaurant culture that encompasses many kinds of establishments, ranging from little roadside stands serving snacks and kebabs to modern Western fast-food chains and pricey Thai, French, Italian, and even Indian restaurants in five-star hotels. The most popular "ethnic" food by far is Chinese food. Chinese restaurants are everywhere, and chicken corn soup is a standard item on the menus of most restaurants, even those serving Pakistani food.

The country's most famous food district is Gowal Mandi (Food Street) in Lahore, which is lined with restaurants serving traditional dishes like nihari, paya, sajji, kebabs, and biryani at reasonable prices. In Karachi, the main restaurant district is Burns Road, but a newly fashionable area is Zam Zama market, where Thai, French, Japanese, Italian, pizza, steak, Mediterranean, Lebanese, and traditional restaurants are found. During Ramadan, people break their fast by flocking to restaurants and food stalls, which do a booming business at this time.

## Special Occasions

Ramadan, or Ramazan, the ninth month in the Islamic lunar calendar, is a period of prayers and fasting. Fasting, one of the five pillars of Islam, commemorates the revelation of the Quran to Muhammad and is a means of physical and spiritual purification. The fast is strictly observed: No food or water can be taken between dawn and dusk, although special dispensations are given for pregnant women, children, sick people, and travelers.

Muslims begin the day with a predawn meal of porridge, bread, or fruit. The fast is broken every day at sunset with a sip of water, dates, and perhaps a little fruit, a custom called *iftar.* People then enjoy sumptuous feasts with their friends and families, centered around meat dishes such as biryanis, kormas, and haleem. The end of Ramadan, called Eid al-Fitr, is marked by the sighting of the new moon and is celebrated with great fanfare. People put on new clothes, visit the mosque, and give food and alms to the poor. Special sweet dishes are prepared, such as sewian and sheer korma.

The second major festival of Muslims is Eid al-Adha (Eid-ul-Zuha or Bakrid), which commemorates Abraham's offering of his son to God, who at the last moment replaced him with a ram (an event also described in the Old Testament). On this day Muslims are expected to sacrifice a ram or goat if they can afford it and to distribute one-third of the meat to friends, one-third to family, and one-third to the poor. Every meal will include meat dishes until the animal is eaten. Another holiday is Shab-i-Barat, the night when God registers men's deeds and determines their fates. People distribute sweets in the name of their ancestors and offer flowers.

A Muslim wedding banquet is a lavish affair featuring as many meat dishes as the bride's family can afford. Traditionally it includes at least one biryani, a korma, mixed vegetables, shami kebab, fish curry or fried fish, yogurt and cucumber salad, bread, and many desserts.




Pakistani Muslim men eat a predawn meal before beginning their fast at a restaurant in Islamabad on the second week of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. (AFP | Getty Images)

## Diet and Health

The Unani system of medicine (Unani tibbia) was introduced into the subcontinent by the Muslim conquerors in the 14th century and is adhered to by many Pakistanis. The theoretical framework is derived from the writings of the Greek physicians Hippocrates (460–377 B.C.) and Galen (died ca. 200 A.D.) via the Muslim physician ibn Sina (Avicenna, ca. 980–1037). The Arabic word *Unan* derives from Ionian, the west coast of Turkey, which was at the time part of the Greek world. Unani practitioners are called *hakims*.

Unani medicine is based on the humoral theory of Greek medicine, which assumes the presence of four humors in the body: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. Every person is born with a unique humoral constitution, which represents his healthy state and determines his personality. When the amounts of the humors are changed and thrown out of balance with each other, it leads to disease. Restoring the quality and balance of humors is the goal of treatment, using the body's natural power of self-preservation and adjustment.

Digestion plays a central role in the Unani system. Certain foods can cause indigestion and are to be avoided: those that putrefy quickly (milk and fresh fish), those that take time to digest (such as beef), stale foods, spices and chilies, alcohol, strong tea, coffee, and oily food. However, any food is acceptable in moderation. Aids to digestion include drinks made from *ajwain* seeds, mint, and fennel and coriander seeds; pomegranate juice; and other herbs and spices.

When a disease is advanced, treatment often begins with a total fast, which gives the patient's system a chance to rest, or with the restriction of food. A liquid diet consisting of fruit juices or soups made from meat or vegetables is prescribed for digestive

failure. A semisolid diet comprising yogurt or *khichri* (boiled rice and lentils) is recommended in the case of poor or incomplete digestion.

People are also advised to eat foods that have the opposite quality to their distemper. A person who has too much of the sanguine humor, which leads to increased heat, should eat cold food such as barley water or fish and take cooling herbs; if there is a thinning of the sanguine humor, warm and dry foods are prescribed. For diabetes, bitter and astringent foods are prescribed, such as bitter gourd juice. Weaknesses of specific organs are corrected by eating the same organ of an animal.

*Colleen Taylor Sen*

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# Papua New Guinea

## Including Bariai, West New Britain Province

### Overview

Papua New Guinea (PNG), an independent nation-state (since 1975) and member of the commonwealth of former British colonies, is perhaps the most culturally and linguistically diverse area of the world (800–900 languages). Geographically, PNG varies from the high mountains and lush valleys of the highlands, to sea coasts and reefs, to the verdant volcanic islands off its coast. This cultural, linguistic, and geographic diversity makes it impossible to generalize about anything pertaining to PNG. Foodways in PNG share many commonalities, and more specific examples will be given from West New Britain Province, in particular for the 1,500 speakers of Bariai, one of the approximately 25 cultural groups on the northwestern coast of West New Britain. The island of New Britain (population 405,000) lies off the east coast of PNG in the Bismarck Sea, oriented east and west, between 4° and 5° south of the equator. New Britain is a large island, about 373 miles (600 kilometers) in length and between 31 and 62 miles (50 and 100 kilometers) across. The island's spine is comprised of active volcanic mountains, which are reminders of its geomorphic origins, dense tropical rain forests, narrow coastal plains, and, in many areas, beaches protected from the ocean by a fringe of magnificent coral reefs. Given the ecological features of the environment, different foods take on a central role in people's diet, but food is never just about nutrition; food also carries a huge symbolic load in terms of cosmology, gender relations, exchange value, and identity.

More than 85 percent of the population of PNG is rural, with a self-sufficient, subsistence-based system of horticulture and accessing of resources from land, forest, rivers, and ocean. Food production—planting, weeding, harvesting, preparation, and distribution—is primarily a female task. Men help create gardens by cutting down the biggest trees and slashing the low growth, all of which is burned to clear the way for planting and to add needed nutrients to the thin tropical soils. Men also build fences to keep out marauding pigs and perform garden magic to make crops grow well, to keep out various pests that destroy taro and sweet potatoes, and to keep the food from wandering away into a competitor's garden. In addition to its nutritional value, food throughout PNG has social and cultural meaning and is a key ingredient for creating and maintaining social relationships, as well as earning and manipulating power and prestige.

### Major Foodstuffs

Since their introduction to PNG 200 years ago, and as recently as 60 years ago in some areas (see Ballard et al. 2005), sweet potatoes (*Ipomoea batatas*) have become the nutritional basis for people and for pig husbandry. Other sources of carbohydrates, such as sago (*Metroxylon sagu*), taro (*Colocasia esculenta*), cassava (*Manihot esculenta*), and numerous varieties of yams, are preferred foods and items of symbolic value and exchange. Crops such as *pit-pit* (*Saccharum edule*) and many varieties of bananas, plantains, leafy greens, and the omnipresent coconut (*Cocos nucifera*) round out the daily fare throughout much of PNG. Gardens also contain imported food crops, such as pineapples, tomatoes,

cucumbers, squash, and onions and, in highlands environments, the "Irish" potato, cabbages, and carrots. Where conditions allow, people utilize and semicultivate tropical fruits and nuts such as breadfruit, the Malay apple (*Syzygium malaccense*), mangoes, papayas, various citrus fruits, the Polynesian chestnut (*Inocarpus fagifer*), and the *galip* nut (*Canarium indicum*). Although knowledge of bush foods and medicines is declining throughout PNG, the Bariai access a wide range of seasonal, wild, uncultivated, or "famine" foods (Bariai: *baginga*) gathered when gardens are not mature or not producing due to too much or too little rain or pest infestations.

Pigs are raised primarily for exchange and consumption during ceremonials. Animal protein is obtained from the sea or rivers, and hunting in the tropical forests provides other sources of meat including wild pigs, birds, fruit bats (*Megachiroptera* spp.), the dwarf cassowary (*Casuarius bennetti*), lizards, possum, and wallaby. For the Bariai and other PNG coastal dwellers and fisherfolk, the sea and its bounty figure large in people's diets. The Bariai seafood repertoire includes all kinds of reef and deep-sea fish, shark, sea turtles, octopus, squid, spiny lobster, crabs, numerous shellfish, and *bêche-de-mer* (sea cucumber) species. Seaweeds, a salty treat in a largely salt-free diet, are eaten raw or cooked with boiled and baked food as a seasoning and salty garnish.

Every culture has a range of foods considered edible or nonedible, preferred or less preferred. Famine foods are not preferred foods but are accessed as necessary, but knowledge of their seasonality and processing is fast disappearing. The sweet potato, although an introduced crop, is a staple food eaten every day; however, sweet potatoes are also considered pig fodder and take third place to the most important and savored of foods: taro (B: *moi*) and the flour processed from the sago palm (B: *mama*), or, in the highlands, yams. Originally planted as a cash crop (copra) for export, the coconut palm has a number of uses, but, most important, just about everything is cooked in coconut cream or with grated coconut meat. All Papua New Guineans, including the Bariai, are able to purchase imported and processed foods, some of which are just treats (e.g., cookies, soft drinks, potato chips, candy) but others of which, such as rice, flour, salt, sugar, and tea (and in some instances alcoholic beverages), have become indispensable to daily and ceremonial life. Clearly, the Bariai and most people in PNG have an abundance of foods, whether cultivated in gardens and groves; collected or hunted from the tropical forest, the sea, and the coral reefs along their coast and the rivers they navigate; or purchased from shops in towns.

## Typical Meals

Most Papua New Guineans eat two meals a day, one in the morning and one in late afternoon, and in most villages (and towns) meal preparation is heralded by a familiar "scrape, scrape, pause . . . scrape, scrape, pause," the rhythmic sounds of women scraping coconut meat from the shell. The grated coconut is squeezed with water to produce coconut cream. The "scrape, scrape, pause" is accompanied by the thump of axes as women chop wood for the fire, the swish of rakes as women and girls sweep up the debris from around their houses, and the incessant noise of roosters crowing, pigs squealing, dogs barking, and babies crying. Taro is seasonal, vulnerable to pests and drought, and not always available. For both meals, sweet potatoes, cassava (*tapiok*), sweet bananas, or plantains are peeled, cut into aluminum pots, covered with coconut cream, and set on the wood fire to cook. Sometimes tubers are laid on the open fire to roast for snacking later in the day or for children's school lunches. Both the potato peelings and the used grated coconut meat are fed to the pigs. Breakfast is very often accompanied by fish caught in the nets set overnight or by octopus, squid, and lobster caught at night using burning coconut fronds, kerosene lamps, or flashlights. Large fish are cut up and boiled in coconut cream with curry powder and onions if available; smaller fish are roasted on the open fire.

Men often fish at night in preparation for an upcoming church feast day or a traditional ceremony. The fish is slow-smoked over an open fire and keeps for two to four days without rotting. Smoked fish is quite dried out and is eaten cold; only occasionally

will it be put on the fire to warm it up. An ideal meal is taro (but more often sweet potatoes and cassava) accompanied by fish, shellfish, or pork and greens. To eat only sweet potatoes or even taro without a fish or meat accompaniment is not a satisfactory meal.

In Bariai villages, eating is a private act, and families do not sit together to eat; indeed, there is no such thing as a dining table or dining space. In the not-so-distant past, children delivered cooked food to their fathers and elder brothers, who lived and slept in the men's ceremonial house where men ate together, away from their wives and young children. Now, men's houses are not being built, so husbands and sons usually retreat to individual private areas on the house veranda, in the cookhouse, or on the beachfront, where they eat with their backs turned to everyone. During ceremonial feasts, men still eat together in small kinship groups, as do women with their small children and unmarried daughters. At mealtimes, small children run around with a boiled tuber or roasted tapiok root or piece of fish or pork in their hands. Women and their daughters eat last.

After their morning meal, people head off to their gardens and daily chores. Schoolchildren start out on their typically five-mile (eight-kilometer) walk to school, eating their breakfast of roasted tubers or boiled sweet potatoes as they go. No midday meal is prepared, but schoolchildren carry food to school, usually tubers cooked that morning, or grated tapiok that was wrapped in banana leaves and cooked overnight in a stone oven. If available, they carry a roasted fish as well. Women prepare enough food in the morning so that children and elders who stay in the village can help themselves during the day. On returning from their gardens in late afternoon, women haul water, rebuild their cooking fires, and



Bosco, Francis, Tony, and John smoking fish for a feast the next day. (N. McPherson, 2003)

prepare the evening meal following the same routine as for the morning meal.

## Eating Out

Only those who live in towns and cities have an opportunity to eat out at restaurants, which are becoming very popular. Villagers visiting town go to fast-food, take-out vendors who offer roasted cuts of pork and chicken and deep-fried, battered fish with French fried and boiled sweet potatoes as sides. Ice cream cones are a favorite with adults and children alike, and juice boxes and carbonated soft drinks of all varieties are the beverages of choice. Some shops also offer lamb flaps, a very fatty cheap meat that Papua New Guineans, traditionally used to a low-fat diet, find satisfying and tasty. Many women who market subsistence foods as a source of cash income in towns and cities purchase boxes of frozen lamb flaps from supermarkets and cut them into pieces to barbecue at the markets for people to buy as a snack on the go (Gewertz and Errington 2009). Besides basic foods such as taro, sweet potatoes, fruits, and vegetables, market foods also include hard-boiled eggs, rice balls cooked with meat in them, smoked fish, and popsicle-like frozen treats.

## Special Occasions

Even when people's gardens are plentiful with sweet potatoes, tapiok, and bananas, Bariai still crave taro, their "real" food. Taro is so important that it is the focus of three ceremonies that honor a mother and her firstborn child. On the occasion of the appearance of their firstborn's first tooth, parents send bundles of taro stalks, areca (betel) nut, and sprouting coconuts to be distributed in each village to every newly married couple who has not yet conceived or given birth to their first child. The taro corms are immediate food, and the stalks can be planted for future consumption. Thus, taro here is symbolic of plenitude, well-being, and reproduction. The sprouting coconut is also associated with temporal reproduction; planting the nut means a producing coconut tree in the future. The red saliva created when chewing betel nut with betel pepper and lime powder symbolizes blood, not only that of the child's sore gums but also the blood of menstruation and childbirth. A second ceremony requires taro production and a distribution to the firstborn's lineage members and to the married couple who oversee the child's entire ceremonial cycle and the firstborn's decorative finery. Finally, a taro distribution called *otnga dadanga* (clearing or stripping the garden) entails the firstborn's mother preparing and planting five or more taro gardens, thus displaying her strength and ability to work hard, to plan into the future, and to provide sustenance. The firstborn, as her exemplar and in whose name these gardens are made and the taro distributed, is seen as a provider of food. Thus, the Bariai say, "We eat from the hand of the firstborn." The mother, the firstborn, and the taro are decorated and paraded through the village.



Taro decorated for *otnga dadanga* distribution.
(N. McPherson, 2005)

Nutritionally, taro is high in fiber and carbohydrates, but it has no fat (until it is boiled in coconut cream) and contains vitamin C, niacin, calcium, and iron. Eaten with fish or pork and leafy greens it is a nutritious meal. Sago flour is not very nutritious at all, being about 90 percent carbohydrates, but, cooked with coconut cream and served with leafy greens and fish or meat protein, sago is a palatable and healthy meal. During the rainy season or times of famine, when sago flour might be eaten everyday in various guises but without the garnish of vegetables and fish, it is merely a carbohydrate filler and over long periods not nutritious at all. Both taro and sago are such important foods, ripe with symbolic and cultural meaning, that their origins are given in mythology, presented here in truncated form.

**The Origin of Taro**

Galiki, the firstborn, and her grandmother huddled together as the sun set on their fifth day without food. Galiki asked Grandmother to cut her hair, prepare a fire, and make some coconut oil, half of which should be tinted with red pigment and the other half with black pigment. When ready, Grandmother decorated Galiki with red oil on the left side of her head and body and black pigment on the right side.

Then Galiki asked Grandmother to heat a stone oven (*eamo*) even though they had no food to cook. When the stones were blinking with heat, Grandmother removed the big rocks and spread banana leaves on the hot stones lining the oven bed. Galiki sat down in the middle of the leaves on the bed of hot stones. "Replace the hot stones" she said, "and cook me. You will hear me sizzling, like this, SSSSeeeee. When the sizzling stops, I will be done and you can remove the stones. Then you will understand."

When the sizzling stopped, frantic and weeping, Grandmother removed the cool stones. There on the banana-leaf bed, Galiki had been transformed into the many different colors of taro, red, black, white, purple. "Eat, Grandmother, taste me! Collect all the taro stalks you see lying around," said Galiki's voice, "and in five days I will sprout and grow into more taro." Grandmother gathered up and planted the stalks and tended them until the taro matured. She heard Galiki's voice: "All is well again, the taro has matured. We will always have taro and never be hungry again. Taro will sustain us."

Siko Pore, who told this myth in 1985, commented that

> taro is our primary food, ahead of all other foods. Taro is number one, sago is number two and all bush foods are last. Other foods, such as yam and sweet potato, we depend on, but the true basis of subsistence is taro. Taro is significant to us because it was once a human being. If you don't look after taro the pigs will eat it, the sun will scorch it. In times of drought, soak taro stalks in the river and they will germinate for you. Take good care of it and taro will always be with you.

The relationship between food and gender is important here. Taro is the sine qua non of human sustenance and was produced by a process of cooking—transforming the inedible to the edible—in this instance, the female body is transformed by fire into taro. Like the female body, which is symbolically moist, plump, and cool, taro grows well in a cool, moist environment to produce rounded, well-formed corms. Women also create food through the transformation of their labor, the sweat of their brows; and, as already noted, taro, like one's wife, needs to be treated well so that its/her beneficence will not run away, leaving people without any true sustenance. These symbolic meanings appear again when two families reach an agreement concerning a daughter's marriage and her bridewealth amount, and the future groom's family provides a gift of taro and wealth (B: *murannga*) to the bride's parents. The taro corms, complete with stalks, are tied in bundles of four, decorated, and presented in a carved ironwood bowl (B: *tabla*) with two lengths of the highest value of "gold" shell wealth (B: *bula misi*) and five lengths of lesser valued black shell wealth (B: *bula kasuksuk*) to seal the betrothal. The role of taro as the sine qua non of foodstuffs, and its association with the human female body, with women's

bridewealth and their future productivity as taro gardeners, with their reproductive promise of many children, as well as its central role in ceremonies, underscore how important this food is to the Bariai.

Taro gardens were ideally created in quadrants, with each color of taro—red, yellow, white, and purple flesh, the colors the mythic Galiki is adorned in—planted in its own quadrant. While the color quadrants are rarely created today, taro gardens usually have no other foodstuffs grown in them. Garden magic is performed by knowledgeable men who say spells over the red leaves of the blood banana plant (B: *bonbone*), probably *Musa zebrina.* The bespelled banana plants are planted throughout the garden to protect the taro from pests and disease and to make the corms grow large. Before a woman has completed the *otnga dadanga,* both she and her firstborn are unable to wear red in their clothing, decorations, and paint. Red, here represented in the red banana plant, is symbolic of energy, strength, production, reproduction, and the blood of generations of females. To wear red communicates a woman's having achieved high status for having completed the massive taro garden distribution (otnga dadanga).

Taro is cooked by boiling it in coconut cream, roasting it on top of the fire, or baking it in the stone oven. Taro cooked in a clay pot (B: *ulo*) with coconut cream, sweet bananas, and greens is the most relished everyday dish, as clay cooking pots



Rambo and Gena placing grated tapiok wrapped in banana leaves, sweet potato, and taro on banana leaves to bake in the stone oven. (N. McPherson, 2009)

add flavor that is absent from foods cooked in aluminum pots. The most favored and the most important taro dish, always served at ceremonies, is *sapala.* Sapala is prepared by first peeling and cutting the taro into small pieces, then wrapping the chopped taro in banana leaves and baking it in the stone oven. While the cooked taro is still hot, it is placed in a large ironwood bowl (B: *tabla*) or a specially carved mortar (B: *nagalgal*) held between the knees. Coconut cream is added to the hot taro, a little at a time, while pounding with a pestle (B: *iut*) to combine the taro and coconut milk. When done, the taro is a chunky, creamy, and oily mixture that is very sweet, a favored dish with everyone. When taro is unavailable, this same dish can be prepared by substituting ground cassava. For the final firstborn ceremony (of 17), the child's parents prepare sapala in a very large ironwood bowl, top it with 20 to 30 lengths of gold and black shell wealth, and present it to their ceremonial partners to compensate them and mark the completion of their work for the firstborn.

Taro is symbolically female, women are the gardeners (producers) and child bearers (reproducers), and taro ceremonies focus on the mother and her child (fathers are not decorated or celebrated in any firstborn ceremonies). The Bariai do have a gendered division of labor. Men fish at sea, hunt, and do the heavy work of garden preparation and building houses, canoes, and fences. Women also collect



Andrew tipping sago pith into the trough for washing; the flour settles to the bottom of the canoe/container below the trough. Eventually all the water is displaced as the container fills with flour. (N. McPherson, 2009)

shellfish, seaweeds, lobster, crabs, octopus, and squid. Men may help plant new gardens, but after that the labor of weeding, harvesting, and preparing foods is women's work. As is the case throughout PNG, the production of food is primarily a female responsibility, which girls learn from a very early age. Sago processing, however, is often the exception to the rule, and, in many PNG cultures, it is an exclusively male activity. Processing sago flour from the pith of the palm is arduous work. The palm, often 33 feet (10 meters) high or more, is felled. The outer bark is then split and peeled back to expose the inner pith, which must be pounded to loosen the fibers, which are then drenched in water and squeezed to separate the flour from the pith.

Sago work parties leave the village before dawn and rarely return before dusk with the fruits of their labor. Although it is primarily men who chop down the palm and pound the pith, Bariai men and women often share the work involved in washing the sago flour from the pith. But this was not always the case.

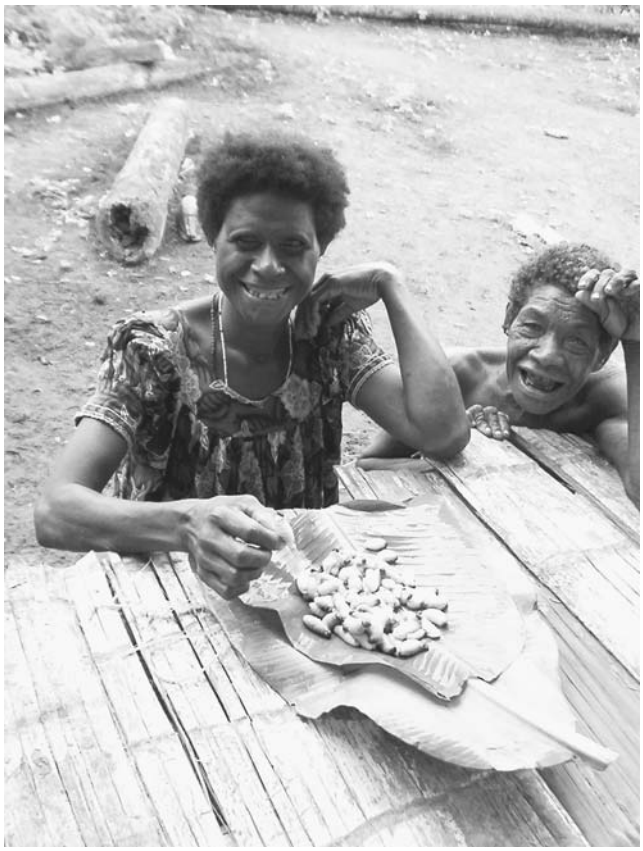
### The Story of Sago Processing

In the past, the story goes, women dressed in their traditional finery and went off in groups to process the sago palms growing near river banks. They did this for several days, cutting, pounding, and washing sago while their menfolk stayed behind in the village. Each day the women, who should have been hot, tired, and dirty from their efforts to process the sago flour, returned looking rested and happy, with large amounts of sago flour. One day, the men decided to spy on the women as they washed sago. Instead of seeing the women hard at work along the riverbank, the men found them, still beautifully outfitted in their best finery, obviously enjoying themselves talking, laughing, and singing together. Unobserved by the women, the men sneaked back to the village, intent on chastising their wives when they returned that evening without sago flour. Instead of returning empty-handed, the women came home with an abundance of sago flour. The men concluded that the women were meeting their lovers in the bush, and these men were processing the sago flour in exchange for sexual favors. Henceforth, the men proclaimed, women would not leave the village to process sago; this work would be a male responsibility. Of course, the women were not meeting their lovers in the bush. The sago was processed for them by powerful spirit beings, who, insulted and angered by the men's jealousy, refused to perform this same service for the men. It is due to the jealous behavior of men that sago processing is now backbreaking men's work.

Since this mythic event, sago processing among the Bariai has been and continues to be a female activity performed by males. Men express this state of affairs in the idiom *tikado tue,* "they use clam shells," the traditional female all-purpose tool (*tue*) made from the sharpened half-shell of the mangrove oyster bivalve (B: *kina*). Sago processing is a time when men "use women's tools" and do women's work, and Bariai men rue the day that masculine foolishness saddled them with this tedious, hard work.

The Bariai process two types of sago: a wild variety (*Metroxylon amicarum*) called *mama gigi* that is dangerously spiny, grows in swamps, has whitish flour, and is less productive than the cultivated variety (*Metroxylon sagu*), which has no spines. The Bariai cultivate the palm by cutting the suckers it produces and transplanting them where the palm will be more accessible for processing. *Mamatau*, the thornless sago, produces a pale pink flour. The sago palm matures in about 15 years, when it sends up a single flower indicating that starch content is at its maximum before going to seed. Sago palms (and other food-bearing trees) are owned by individuals, who keep close watch on them in order to process them at peak starch production when the flowering begins. The tools used to process the sago flour are all made on the spot from the sago palm itself. Fronds are also used for thatch; and the newly sprouted pale yellow-green leaf spear is shredded lengthwise, dried, and dyed for women's grass skirts and used fresh and undyed for skirts worn by spirit beings. The narrow end of the midrib is trimmed and lashed together to make house walls; the wide end of the midrib is used for carrying containers or to hold down roof thatch.

Sago is the only food in this tropical environment that can be stored for months at a time without refrigerating or processing it, usually as a solid piece of hard-packed flour wrapped in banana leaves. Sago is eaten daily when available, and it is a required ceremonial food as well as a famine food. The sago palm is so plentiful in Bariai that, during lean times, neighboring coastal and island groups come to Bariai to trade or purchase processed sago flour or the entire palm, which they then process themselves on the spot. About 90 percent carbohydrates, the nutritional value of sago is very low. An important by-product of the sago palm is the sago grub (B: *aoatol*), the larval form of the Capricorn beetle (B: *tangguri*), which lays its eggs in a felled or damaged sago palm. Sago grubs are a tasty delicacy, eaten raw (minus the head), roasted on an open fire, or wrapped in leaves and baked in a stone oven. The grubs are high in fat and protein, as well as trace elements such as iron and zinc, and are a welcome accompaniment to the bland sago-flour carbohydrates, or simply as a treat.



Aisiga and Giarob offer aoatol, sago grubs. (N. McPherson, 2003)

Perhaps because it is such a bland food, sago recipes abound. *Salnga* is made by dry-frying sago flour until it is very crumbly and warmed through. Then coconut cream is stirred into the dry flour to make a thick paste. The sago coconut paste is wrapped in banana-leaf packages and baked in the stone oven. When done, the sago is gelatinous and solid, often a red-purple color. This makes a great take-out meal when traveling by canoe or spending a day in the gardens or on the reefs. *Mama krokrok* is sago flour mixed with grated coconut meat, wrapped in a banana leaf, and roasted on top of the open fire. As the banana leaf dries and burns, it is scraped off. The bundle is repeatedly turned and scraped until it is cooked and the leaf wrapping is all removed. The toasted outside of the bundle of sago has a thin rind of gelled grated coconut, and the inside is dry and floury. For *didnga,* plain sago flour is wrapped in a banana leaf and cooked on top of the open fire. When done, the sago flour is cut in small bits, placed in a pot of boiling water, and cooked until the sago pieces begin to dissolve slightly around the edges. The boiled sago cubes are removed from the water onto a banana leaf, covered with coconut cream, wrapped, and baked in the stone oven. Similar to this recipe is *kapokapo.* When left uncovered, sago flour turns a deep orange color; kapokapo uses this orange flour pressed into small balls and put in a pot of boiling coconut cream. When the sago-flour balls have absorbed all the coconut cream, they are ready to eat. Both sago and taro are ideally eaten with a fish or meat accompaniment and leafy greens. To eat them without a protein or vegetable garnish is unpalatable, and people complain they have had less than a proper meal.

## Diet and Health

Papua New Guineans have been interacting with outsiders—missionaries, colonialists, and anthropologists—from as early as 200 years ago to as recently as 60 years ago, but it is only in the last



Katrin's daughters watch her prepare sapala in an ironwood bowl. Note the empty coconut shells, the fresh banana leaves ready to wrap food or use as plates, and the cooked taro and tapiok in the brown banana leaves. (N. McPherson, 2003)

30 years that most rural villagers have had easier access to imported processed foods. In the past decade, these foods have become an integral part of the PNG diet, with some imported foodstuffs eaten on almost a daily basis. Canned tuna and mackerel, corned beef, and other meat products are now processed in PNG, while other protein sources, such as lamb flaps or turkey tails (Gewertz and Errington 2009), are imported from Australia and New Zealand. Processed imported foods most desired by villagers include white rice, white flour, white sugar, cooking oil, tea, coffee, various biscuits, cookies, and sweet treats. Children in particular desire candy, potato chips, puffed cheese treats, and carbonated soft drinks. None of these foods is particularly nutritious, most are empty calories, and all must be purchased; thus, people need to find a way to make money.

Most recently, the Bariai have exploited the various species of echinoderms, or bêche-de-mer or sea cucumber (B: *anwe*), a traditional foodstuff that was boiled for a long time to make them soft enough to get one's teeth into. For the past few years, women have been collecting and drying bêche-de-mer on a daily basis for sale to visiting buyers, who sell the product to buyers from China, Japan, Hong Kong, and Indonesia. By 2009, bêche-de-mer species had become quite scarce. Bariai women expressed

concern that the supply would soon be gone; however, they are reluctant to curtail collecting sea cucumbers as these are an exceptionally lucrative income source. Women use money earned from bêche-de-mer sales to pay school and medical fees and buy the imported foods and other goods that were once considered luxury items but have become necessities.

Many villagers in West New Britain, if offered the choice, would prefer canned fish or meat to fresh fish from the sea. Indeed, rice, fried flour, tea or coffee overly sweetened with sugar, canned corned beef, and fish have become especially necessary ingredients for ceremonial feasts. Even with the availability of taro, sweet potatoes, cassava, and sago flour, ceremonies are often put off because no one has money to buy rice, sugar, and tea. The growing need for and consumption of processed foods throughout PNG is beginning to create health problems. When the local Bariai aid-post attendant traveled from village to village for his well-baby clinic, he also lectured the women about diseases associated with eating processed foods (obesity, diabetes, heart disease). He tried to impress on the women the importance of growing and eating traditional foods and the sustainability of their lifestyle based on subsistence horticulture. As the need for a cash economy increases and people live off money rather than their gardens and environment, the need to purchase processed and imported foods will increase. The many imported foods that have become an increasingly central part of their diet are an important issue in food and nutrition studies since these are foods with empty calories and an unhealthy source of sugar, fat, and salt. Obesity, heart disease, and diabetes have become critical health issues in PNG, and there is a movement to encourage people to eat local foods grown in their gardens.

*Naomi M. McPherson*

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# Philippines

## Overview

The Republic of the Philippines consists of 7,107 islands located in Southeast Asia. Its long, broken coastline is surrounded by three major bodies of water—the Pacific Ocean on the east, the South China Sea on the north and west, and the Celebes Sea on the south. The country is divided into three major island groups—Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao—with 17 regions, 81 provinces, and 136 cities. It has 120 ethnic groups and over 180 languages and dialects. Filipino, the national language, and English are the official languages. The Philippines is the 12th most populous country in the world, with over 90 million people. Over 80 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, followed by Muslims (5%), who live mainly on the island of Mindanao. Manila, situated on the island of Luzon, is the nation's capital.

Geography has largely shaped what Filipinos eat. The country's closeness to water sources, its forests and fields, and a tropical climate marked by dry and rainy seasons account for the Filipinos' dependence on rice, fish, and vegetables as diet staples. Other cultures—from the 300-plus years of Spanish rule that started in the 16th century, the presence of Chinese traders and immigrants dating back to the precolonial and Spanish colonial periods, and the 20th-century American occupation—have had a lasting impact on the country's foodways. Filipinos have adapted ("Filipinized") these cultures' dishes to native tastes and the use of local ingredients. In addition, regional differences have resulted in food variations as well as the emergence of trademark dishes.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Ramon and Malou Fernandez live with their two children and a housemaid in a housing development in metropolitan Manila. Ramon is a purchasing manager for a multinational company, and Malou is an administrative assistant to the vice president of a big Filipino corporation. They are a typical two-income middle-class Filipino family who can afford the luxury of a full-time housemaid.

Malou starts every weekend by going to a nearby wet market early Saturday morning with her maid's help. At the market, she buys fresh meats such as chicken, beef sirloin, brisket, and pork loin, as well as shrimp and fish like tilapia, grouper, sole, and milkfish. She also purchases fruits like bananas, apples, pears, papayas, and oranges.

Most Saturday afternoons, the whole family goes to the big supermarket in an upscale mall for grocery shopping. Here, Malou buys pantry staples including corn and olive oils, soy sauce, vinegar, fish sauce, and spices. She also gets rice, pasta, canned fish (tuna and sardines), canned meats (corned beef, Spam, chorizos—spicy sausages), sliced white bread, cereals, low-fat milk, and fruit juices in cartons. In the fresh vegetables section, she often gets potatoes, onions, garlic, tomatoes, lettuce, squash, cauliflower, and swamp cabbage. Occasionally, she also purchases packaged fresh Vigan *longanisas* (specialty sausages from Ilocos Sur, a province north of Manila) and *tocino* (sweet cured pork), which are both popular breakfast foods. She replenishes her stash of snack foods by buying cookies, potato chips, crackers, and ice cream.

Malou writes down a weekly menu for the housemaid, indicating what to serve for breakfast and dinner

every weekday (the couple has lunch at work and the kids eat at school). The family starts their day early, having a quick breakfast around 6:30 A.M., usually consisting of rice, corned beef or sardines, and fried or scrambled eggs. On occasion, they would have cereal with milk and sliced fruit. Dinner is a more leisurely affair. They convene at around 7 P.M. and dine on typical fare like rice, barbecue chicken or grilled fish, fresh green salad, and/or sautéed vegetables like mung beans or shredded cabbage. Dessert is usually fruit such as sliced mangoes, watermelon, or bananas.

Their meals during weekends are more special or elaborate. The family goes out for lunch on Saturdays, usually for Chinese, Italian, or Japanese food. Malou usually cooks dinner Saturday nights, making her husband's and kids' favorite dishes like pasta with pesto, tempura, sukiyaki, and Caesar salad. Sundays are usually spent having lunch with the in-laws.

Many Filipino families still eat home-cooked meals, although some of the meals may come from or include packaged sources, on which there is a heavy reliance (flavoring packets, instant noodles, canned soups). Filipino families, particularly in the urban areas, now also rely heavily on supermarkets for many of their meals, eschewing the wet markets that used to be the primary source for fresh meats, fish, and produce. Although the Fernandez family orders the occasional pizza from Domino's for an afternoon snack, Filipinos in general have not totally embraced the concept of take-out food. They prefer to eat out and, for the middle and upper classes, experiment with other cuisines, as evidenced by the burgeoning growth of ethnic restaurants in many cities around the country. Overall, restaurants serving Filipino food and cheap fast food are still very popular go-to places especially for the middle and lower classes.

## Major Foodstuffs

The Philippines is an agricultural country. Its lands are most conducive to rice growing because of excess rainfall brought about by the monsoon season as well as the year-round warm climate. Rice is the primary staple food of Filipinos, who eat it for lunch and dinner and, frequently, for breakfast. It serves as a base for other foods or viands they eat—from foods as basic as dried fish and vegetables to richer meat and seafood dishes. Steamed rice with its inherent blandness is an excellent foil for the salty, sour, spicy, and bitter foods that Filipinos eat.

Rice is also made into dessert or snack cakes, such as *suman* (a rice cake made from glutinous rice and coconut milk), *puto* (a steamed rice cake), and *sapin-sapin* (a layered multicolored rice cake made with coconut milk). Popular afternoon snacks include rice-based savory dishes like *arroz caldo,* which is rice gruel with chicken and ginger, and the stir-fried rice noodle dish called *pancit bihon.*

Fish and other seafood figure prominently in the Filipino diet. The surrounding ocean and seas, and the country's numerous rivers, lakes, and interior waterways, spawn a wide variety and abundance of seafood. One of the more popular varieties of fish is *bangus,* or milkfish, the national fish, which can be stuffed with onions and tomatoes and grilled, or be salted and dried and then fried. The latter is often eaten for breakfast with garlic rice. Other widely consumed fish varieties are tilapia, swordfish, blue marlin, grouper, catfish, and tuna. Shrimp, prawns, squid, mussels, oysters, and clams are also abundant. Dried fish, called *tuyo,* which could be any salted and dried small fish, is common fare for the country's poor. Fish sauce, or *patis,* made from salted or fermented tiny fish or shrimp, is typically used in Filipino cooking to flavor food or as a dipping sauce. A fermented fish or shrimp paste, *bagoong,* is often paired with certain foods like *kare-kare* (oxtail stew) and used as an ingredient in many dishes.

The coconut is another important land-based crop in the Philippines. Its meat in varying stages of maturity is used for different purposes. The juice of the young coconut, or *buko,* makes a refreshing drink, and its white tender meat can be eaten fresh or used for making sweets, salads, or savory dishes. The mature coconut's (*niyog*) meat is used in sweets and can be grated to make coconut milk. Filipinos also consume coconut-based liquor called *tuba* and *lambanog* as well as coconut vinegar, which is used in cooking and in dipping sauces.

The fertile lands yield a bountiful variety of vegetables. Most vegetables are either steamed, cooked in soups, or sautéed with other vegetables. There

are root crops like cassava (*kamoteng kahoy*), purple yam (*ube*), sweet potato (*camote*), taro (*gabi*), and yam bean (*singkamas*). Other commonly eaten vegetables include swamp cabbage (*kangkong*—water convolvulus, sometimes called water spinach), mustard greens (*mustasa*), banana hearts (*puso ng saging*—actually the blossom of the banana plant), eggplants, and mung beans (*munggo*), as well as gourds like bottle gourds (*upo*), sponge gourds, and bitter melons (*ampalaya*). Garlic is an indispensable flavoring ingredient in everyday Filipino cooking. Tomatoes were introduced to the country by way of the Spanish galleons that plied the route between Manila and Acapulco during the mid-16th to 18th centuries. They are widely used in salads, dipping sauces, and many Spanish-influenced Filipino stews and, when sautéed with garlic and onions, make up the principal flavor base of Filipino cuisine.

Chicken, pork, and beef are the meat staples in the Filipino diet (with the exception of the Muslims on Mindanao, who do not eat pork). Chinese traders are believed to have introduced pork in the precolonial period, which accounts for the Chinese names of many cuts like *liempo* (pork belly) and *kasim* (lean pork). Filipinos use almost every part of the pig in cooking, including its blood and intestines. Beef is said to have been introduced during the Spaniard colonial period, with popular cuts named in Spanish like *solomillo* (tenderloin) and *punta y pecho* (brisket). Many Spanish-influenced dishes use beef as a main ingredient.

*Pancit* (also spelled *pansit*), or noodles, is a mainstay ingredient that has undergone significant adaptations in the preparation process. Filipinos use different types of noodles, such as those made from rice, egg, wheat, and mung beans, to make various pancit dishes. Introduced by the Chinese during the Spanish period, the dish has been Filipinized, and various regions have come up with their own versions as well. These include *pancit Malabon* from the coastal town of Malabon, which is noodles topped with shrimp, oysters, and squid, and *pancit habhab* from the town of Lukban in Quezon Province, which is brown wheat noodles prepared with chayote and pork and eaten without utensils from a banana leaf that serves as the plate.

Filipinos use an assortment of herbs and spices in everyday cooking such as ginger, galangal, lemongrass, coriander, turmeric, bay leaves, screw pine (*pandan*), and black pepper. Different varieties of chili peppers are also common, but the spiciest ones, like the small, very hot pepper called *siling labuyo,* are mainstay ingredients of the Bicol and Lanao regions, where foods tend to be on the very spicy side. Annatto, or *atsuete,* introduced by Mexicans by way of the Spanish galleon trade, is typically used as a food coloring. Tamarind and *kamias* (bilimbi) are used as souring agents, mostly in soups, but they are also made into sweets.

The locally grown *calamansi* or calamondin, a small, tart, green citrus fruit, is a very popular ingredient. It is made into juice, is used to accent foods, and is squeezed into dipping sauces (*sawsawan*) containing soy or fish sauce to complement roasted or grilled meats, seafood, and noodles.

Fruits, just like vegetables, are plentiful in the Philippines. Many of the popular tropical fruits enjoyed by Filipinos such as guavas, pineapples, papayas, avocados, and sugar apples were brought over from Mexico via the Spanish galleon trade. The yellow Philippine mango, *mangga,* is the favorite and most famous fruit, known for its signature succulent sweetness. It is typically eaten fresh and frequently made into desserts. These mangoes are also dried, mostly for export. The province of Davao on the island of Mindanao is the country's fruit capital—it has many plantations growing pineapples, bananas, pomelos, and mangosteens for export.

Water is always served with meals. Juices from fruits like the calamansi, pomelo, watermelon, and *dalandan* (a type of green citrus) are widely drunk. Soda drinks are heavily consumed everywhere in the country. Coffee is grown in the Batangas region on the island of Luzon as well as in certain areas in Mindanao. Filipinos typically drink instant coffee and, increasingly, with the advent of popular chains such as Starbucks and local ones like Figaro, freshly brewed coffee in the metropolitan areas.

## Cooking

In the Filipino household, it is usually the head female—in most instances the wife and mother—who

shops for and prepares the meals. More affluent households have househelp who do the food preparation, which may include the shopping and, in most cases, the cooking. The most affluent households employ cooks whose sole job is to run the kitchen and prepare the family meals.

It used to be that Filipino kitchens were small and basic, with food cooked in earthenware pots on clay burners (*kalan*) over coal or wood fires. But the American occupation in the early 20th century changed all that as Americans introduced technology for cooking and food preservation and Western-style kitchens to Filipinos. Now, many households have gas or electric stoves and burners, refrigerators, microwaves, rice cookers, and other modern conveniences. Cookware such as aluminum and nonstick pots and pans is commonly used. During big feasts or fiestas, however, some of the old cooking implements resurface, such as clay pots (*palayok*) and big metal vats (*kawa*), typically used for cooking food for large numbers of people.

Many middle- and upper-class homes, particularly in the urban areas, have "dirty kitchens," second kitchens where the dirty work involved in food preparation is done. This can include activities like cleaning chicken and fish, chopping vegetables, and peeling shrimp. Some dirty kitchens are still equipped with traditional native cooking implements such as the *kawali,* a multipurpose wok-like cast iron pan, or the mortar and pestle used to pound garlic and spices. The main kitchen houses the modern appliances and is where much of the actual cooking is done.

The most common cooking methods are boiling, grilling, stewing, steaming, and frying—all but frying are indigenous and were used prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. Many of the most popular Filipino dishes are boiled, or *nilaga,* including *bulalo,* a soup made from boiling and simmering beef kneecaps and vegetables that is coveted for its marrow. Grilling, particularly on coals, is widely used for meats and fish.

Stewing is a favored cooking method for chicken and other meats. The country's national dish, adobo, is a stew of fowl, pork, or vegetables (or a combination) typically prepared with garlic, vinegar, and soy sauce. From Spain come tomato-based stews, such as *callos* (tripe with chickpeas) and *apritada* (chicken or pork simmered in tomatoes).

Frying and sautéing in oil are not indigenous cooking methods but are commonly used techniques. Filipinos adapted sautéing, or *guisa* (*guisa* derives from the Spanish word *guisar,* meaning "to sauté"), from the Spanish; it involves sautéing garlic, tomatoes, and onions together.

Many Filipinos, especially those who live close to the water, often make fresh fish and seafood (or meats) into *kinilaw.* This involves putting the raw seafood or meat in vinegar, at times with other ingredients like lime juice and onions. The acidity of the vinegar (as well as the lime, if used) "cooks" the food, even if no heat is involved in the process.



Chicken adobo with egg, a traditional Filipino dish. (Rolen Facundo | Dreamstime.com)

Kinilaw is popular as *pulutan,* which are finger foods typically consumed with alcoholic drinks.

Salting is another common method used for fish, a way to preserve an abundant catch for later consumption. Salted fish—tuyo for small fish and *daing* for bigger fish—is a breakfast mainstay in the Filipino diet. Meat, fish, and vegetable dishes, as well as fruits, that are cooked in rich coconut milk or cream are called *ginataan,* a cooking method particularly popular in the Bicol region in the southern part of the country.

## Typical Meals

Most Filipinos eat five times a day: breakfast, lunch, and dinner, plus two snacks in between—one in midmorning and one in midafternoon, called *merienda.* The food courses in a Filipino meal are served almost all at once on the table, including the soup course if one has been prepared. Typically, the soup is not just eaten on its own but also enjoyed with the food—the diner often ladles some soup broth onto the rice to flavor and moisten it. Communal platters or bowls containing rice and viands (one or two or several) are placed at the center of the table; small sauce plates containing sawsawan, or dipping sauces, are placed on the table as well.

The typical implements in a Filipino meal are a fork and spoon. The spoon is used primarily to scoop the rice and other foods from the plate. In many rural areas, people still eat the traditional *kamayan* way—using their hands. Filipinos from all classes who attend fiestas or feast days in the provinces also get an opportunity to eat celebration food kamayan style.

Steamed white rice is the basis of every major Filipino meal. A main dish consisting of fish, chicken, or some other form of protein is always served with the rice. A vegetable dish usually rounds out the meal. Soup is served on occasion and can also stand in for the main viand if it contains seafood, chicken, or meats. The Filipino table is not complete without a small dish or two containing sawsawan, or dipping sauce. The sauce helps tailor the dish to the diner's individual taste. Grilled fish is often served with a sauce of patis (fish sauce) and a squeeze of the local lime calamansi, while deep-fried pork knuckles are often accompanied by a sauce of soy sauce, vinegar, and crushed garlic. Desserts are not elaborate in an everyday Filipino meal. It can be as simple as a piece or slice of fruit or a serving of ice cream.

Economic status and regional differences and preferences are factors that influence variations in the typical Filipino meal. Poor Filipinos typically subsist on rice and salted, dried, or canned fish and, for the very poor, rice mixed with fermented fish or shrimp paste. Affluent Filipinos may eat rice with two or three kinds of meat on the table.

The regional variations in the typical Filipino meal were primarily shaped by the regions' natural resources—the people used ingredients they were able to readily source from their surroundings—as well as their collective taste preferences. In the Ilocos region north of Manila, known for its harsh climate and limited arable lands, the natives eat a diet heavy in rice, vegetables, and bagoong (fermented fish or shrimp paste), which they use to flavor vegetables and as a dipping sauce. The hardy and thrifty Ilokanos, as the people are called, also have a preference for bitter foods, including ampalaya (bitter melon) and for dishes called *pinapaitan,* where bitter bile from a goat or cow is added to a dish as a flavoring ingredient.

There are many regional versions of the national dish adobo—an everyday dish usually of chicken or pork (or both) stewed in vinegar, garlic, peppercorns, bay leaves, and, often, soy sauce. Manila has the version with soy sauce and vinegar, Cavite in the south puts mashed pork liver in it to thicken the sauce, and Zamboanga adds coconut cream. Other ingredients such as vegetables, seafood, and various fowl (such as duck or snipe) can also be prepared into adobo.

### Chicken Adobo

*Serves 4*

**Ingredients**

8 chicken thighs

Cloves from a head of garlic, crushed and peeled

2 bay leaves

1 tsp whole black peppercorns, lightly crushed

1 c palm or cane vinegar (or apple cider vinegar)

½ c soy sauce

1 c water

1. In a large pot, combine the chicken, garlic, bay leaves, peppercorns, vinegar, soy sauce, and water, and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat, cover, and simmer for about 25 minutes. Discard bay leaves.

2. Remove the chicken pieces, and broil them in a pan on each side until golden brown, about 10 minutes total (alternatively, you can fry the chicken in a skillet in 2 tablespoons olive oil). Transfer chicken to a platter, and set aside.

3. Meanwhile, boil the sauce until about 1½ cups remain, about 15–20 minutes. Pour the sauce over the broiled chicken. Serve with steamed white rice.

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A typical Filipino breakfast consists of *sinangag* (garlic fried rice), fried eggs, and any of the following: fried *tapa* (dried salted sliced beef), fried longanisa (native sausage), sautéed (canned) corned beef, and fried salted dried fish. A dipping sauce of vinegar with salt, crushed garlic, or chilies is typically served with the fried beef, sausage, or fish. At times, Filipinos skip rice and eat the traditional breakfast bread called *pan de sal* (meaning "bread of salt"), which are small, oval-shaped buns that pair well with eggs and popular fillings like *kesong puti* (white fresh carabao-milk cheese), peanut butter, corned beef, and ham. Instant or brewed coffee is often consumed at breakfast.

Lunch usually consists of rice and a dish such as fried or grilled fish like tilapia or pompano, or local dishes like *bistek* (fried sliced beef marinated in soy sauce and calamansi) or *binagoongang baboy* (pork with shrimp or fish paste). Popular vegetable dishes are *munggo guisado* (sautéed mung beans with diced pork and bitter melon), *pinakbet* (a popular dish from the Ilocos region, made of sliced eggplant, okra, squash, and other vegetables flavored with fermented fish or shrimp paste), or *laing* (taro leaves in coconut milk, a specialty of the Bicol region, which is known for its spicy dishes).

A typical dinner features dishes similar to lunch, with rice and perhaps a vegetable side dish. It may also include soup, and among the more typical ones are the classic Filipino soup *sinigang* (fish, meat, or shrimp in broth made with a souring ingredient like tamarind), *tinolang manok* (boiled chicken with ginger), or *suam na tulya* (corn and clam soup from the province of Pampanga, a region acclaimed for its culinary excellence).

Popular merienda (midafternoon) snacks include noodle dishes like *sotanghon* (stir-fried mung bean noodles with chicken and vegetables) and *pancit molo* (soup with stuffed pork and shrimp dumplings that originated from the town of Molo in Iloilo Province). Other favorite merienda foods include *dinuguan* (stew made with pork blood), which is often served with steamed rice cakes, and *tokwa't baboy* (fried tofu cubes and boiled pork in a sauce of vinegar, soy sauce, and garlic).

Filipino food is characterized by four dominant flavors: salty, sour, sweet, and bitter. All these flavors complement rice. There are many food pairings in Filipino cuisine that allow combinations of contrasting flavors to meld pleasingly on the native palate, such as sour green mangoes dipped in salty fermented fish or shrimp paste.

## Eating Out

During the Spanish colonial period, ambulant vendors walked the streets selling foods to natives, sometimes setting up makeshift tables from where they would sell their food to lure passersby. These vendors, called *chow-chow* (from stir-frying or "chow") vendors and known for their noodle dishes, were Chinese and are credited for introducing street-food culture in the country.

In the early 19th century, Chinese immigrants began setting up places for public eating, located mostly in Manila, where the Spaniards allowed them to live in a designated area. These places, called *panciterias* (from *pancit,* or noodles), served Chinese foods with Spanish names on their menus like *morisqueta tostada* (fried rice), *camaron rebozado* (shrimp croquettes), and *torta de cangrejo* (crab omelet). The Spanish nomenclature benefited

the patrons, many of whom were from the Spanish-speaking class. To this day, some restaurants in Manila's Chinatown and other parts of the country still list dishes with Spanish names on their menus.

Cooking and entertaining at home were the norm until a restaurant culture emerged around the 1950s, post American rule. During this period, restaurants offering American food, Spanish food, Continental cuisine from countries like France and Germany, and Asian food sprouted in urban areas, particularly in Manila. Filipinos were finally opening up their palates to other cuisines. But at that time, only a few restaurants offered Filipino food, including two that are still around today, the Aristocrat (founded in 1936) and Barrio Fiesta (founded in 1958).

In the 1960s, more restaurants in the cities started serving Filipino food—the kind typically cooked only at home, such as adobo and *caldereta* (beef stew). With urbanization and industrialization came the need for more restaurants as people became busier and had less time to cook at home. Tourism was starting to climb, too, and an opportunity arose in the form of Filipino restaurants that would cater primarily to tourists. Urbanites also started hankering for the foods they ate growing up. It became very trendy to open all-Filipino food restaurants—from gourmet-type places, to those offering only regional specialties, to those serving only one type of food (such as bangus, or milkfish, restaurants). This became more than just a passing trend, as Filipino restaurants are still very much around today.

Chinese cuisine has remained very popular in the country, and Spanish restaurants serving upscale dishes that Filipinos still associate with special celebrations have stayed around. But globalization has also had a very strong impact on the thriving local restaurant scene. Many urban restaurants offer the world's most prominent cuisines, including Japanese, Indian, Italian, and French. Local and foreign chefs alike are offering fusion-style food marrying Filipino ingredients or traditional dishes with Asian or European ingredients, particularly in the country's major cities.

The United States has made its culinary mark on the country most significantly in the area of fast foods. American fast-food and drink companies such as McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Dunkin' Donuts, and Coca-Cola are ubiquitous in many cities and towns all over the country. McDonald's is a big favorite, luring the Filipino palate with their offerings of local dishes such as the McSpaghetti, spaghetti topped with sweet Filipino-style tomato sauce, and dishes like their longanisa breakfast value meal composed of fried garlic rice, fried egg, and fried native sausage. Many Filipino rivals to this food giant, most notably the highly successful and very popular local chain Jollibee, are giving McDonald's and its ilk stiff competition with their Filipino-influenced burgers and other fast-food dishes.

The Filipino masses also patronize fare served in *carinderias,* or open-air food stalls—places where people sit communally to eat home-style food. Then there are the *turo-turo* ("point-point") establishments, downscale places where one can order from a buffet-style arrangement by pointing to the food one wants to consume. Most of these eateries are found close to offices, public markets, and transportation hubs, catering mostly to low-income workers and families in search of quick, cheap, but satisfying meals.

Ambulant vendors are still very much part of the street landscape today. Popular offerings consist of *balut* (a local boiled delicacy of fertilized duck's egg), *taho* (soybean curd topped with sugar syrup), and fish balls on sticks dipped in sweet or spicy sauce. There are vendors with stationary stalls offering snack fare such as *banana-cue* and



Buying fried bananas from a street vendor in the Philippines. (Mtkang | Dreamstime.com)

*camote-cue*—syrup-coated plantain bananas and sweet potatoes on sticks—and barbecued pork and chicken parts, including entrails. Some of these parts were baptized by Filipinos with descriptive colloquial names such as "Adidas" for chicken feet and "Walkman" for pig's ears. Other popular street foods include fried *ukoy* (fritters made from rice dough or flour topped with small unshelled shrimp) and *halo-halo* (cut-up fruit, beans, and tubers in crushed ice with milk).

## Special Occasions

The introduction of Catholicism during the Spanish colonial period paved the way for the annual celebration of feasts, or fiestas, honoring various towns' patron saints, a ritual that became deeply ingrained in Filipino community life; to this day these are celebrated with much anticipation, fanfare, and local color. Now more than just a saint's feast day, the celebration can also be a thanksgiving for a successful harvest as well as for God's benevolence.

Today's fiestas are a mixture of the religious and the secular—the parish church organizes mass, processions for the honored saint, and prayer sessions, while the townfolk in turn organize events like beauty contests, sporting matches, dances, and other activities intended to bring not just communal enjoyment but also extra funding to the town's coffers. All these activities set the stage for private gatherings that bring friends, families, and even strangers back to townspeople's homes to share the typically extravagant fiesta meal.

The fiestas in the Spanish colonial period were led by the Spanish friar, the head of the church, so the foods that became widely associated with the town celebration tended to showcase Spanish cuisine, as is still the case today. The fare includes the quintessential fiesta food and table centerpiece, the *lechon,* a whole roasted pig, often stuffed with aromatic leaves like lemongrass or tamarind. Spanish-influenced dishes such as paella (rice with meats and/or seafood), *galantina* (stuffed deboned chicken), and *morcon* (stuffed beef roll) remain fiesta mainstays. Some Filipino fare is served as well, such as kare-kare (oxtail stew) and various kinds of steamed or grilled local fish and seafood. The popular Chinese-influenced *pancit* (noodles with meats or seafood and vegetables), typically in one of its more sumptuous regional variations, is usually offered. There are also Spanish-style desserts such as *leche flan* (steamed or baked egg custard) and *brazo de mercedes* (meringue roll filled with custard), as well as American-style cakes and native sweets.

Among the popular fiestas in the Philippines is the Pahiyas, a highly colorful town celebration held in Lukban, in Quezon Province, every May 15 to honor their patron saint San Isidro de Labrador. Here, homeowners decorate the facades of their houses with colorful and edible rice wafers, together with various fruits and vegetables. The wafers are usually fried and eaten after the celebration. In the town of Balayan in Batangas, the Parada ng Lechon, or Parade of Roasted Pigs, is held in honor of the patron saint St. John the Baptist. The pigs are dressed according to the sponsoring team's theme, blessed by the priest in church, and then consumed by the townspeople afterward.

Another highly anticipated event for Filipinos is the Christmas season. Like the fiesta, it has become more than just a religious celebration. One of the highlights of the season is the family meal served during Noche Buena (meaning "night of goodness," that is, Christmas Eve), a meal eaten after attending the midnight mass celebrated in honor of the birth of Jesus Christ. Filipinos celebrate with their families by eating foods like Chinese ham, *queso de bola* (Edam cheese), roast turkey or chicken, fruit salad, and the requisite Spanish-influenced foods like *cocido* (boiled meats and vegetables with broth), *chicken pastel* (chicken topped with a savory crust), *ensaimada* (a brioche-like bun topped with butter and cheese), and hot chocolate (also introduced during the Spanish period). Grapes, apples, and roasted chestnuts are often served.

The season also includes the traditional Misa de Gallo (Rooster's Mass), a 4 A.M. dawn mass held for nine consecutive mornings leading up to Christmas Day. Here, native delicacies—freshly made *bibingka* (a steamed rice pancake topped with butter, cheese, and grated coconut) and *puto bumbong* (a steamed cylindrical sticky purple rice cake served

with butter, sugar, and grated coconut)—are served from stalls outside churches to churchgoers after the dawn mass. Hot ginger tea, or *salabat,* the typical drink accompaniment, helps ward off the early-morning chill.

## Diet and Health

The basic Filipino diet conforms to the tenets of what is universally recognized as healthy eating—rice and tubers are high in carbohydrates, fish is an excellent source of protein and omega-3 oils, and vegetables provide necessary vitamins and minerals. While these food groups remain the basis of the Filipino diet, there have been significant changes in dietary patterns over the years, resulting in obesity and increased incidences of serious diseases.

Filipinos are now eating copious amounts of processed foods (including meats, instant noodles, chips, and baked goods) and drinking more soda. Prices of some processed foods have become even more affordable to the average Filipino than prices of fruits and vegetables. The consumption of fruits and vegetables including roots and tubers has decreased, while consumption of animal-based foods, as well as foods high in sugar, fats, and oils, has increased. Instant noodles are overwhelmingly popular, a major source of empty calories. Many Filipinos are increasingly dependent on street food not just for snacking but for their major meals as well. Most street foods are full of calories, fat, and cholesterol but are highly patronized because of their accessibility, low cost, and ability to fill one up. Restaurant fast foods are now a fixture in the everyday Filipino diet. The incidence of coronary diseases has vastly increased and is associated with the changes in dietary trends in the country. Heart disease is now among the leading causes of adult mortality in the country, alongside tuberculosis, pneumonia, and cancer. Adult obesity continues to rise.

Widespread and fast-growing urbanization, globalization (as evident in the rise of food imports and preference for fast foods), and easier access to technology (cell phones, computers, videos) have all contributed to the significant changes in the Filipino's food-consumption habits. The increased preference for Western foods is a development that has reached even the remotest areas in the country.

With all these changes in the Filipino diet, some things have remained constant. Many Filipinos still turn to the practice of alternative folk medicine by using plants, herbs, vegetables, and other foods to cure common ailments and diseases. Some of these plants and herbs are being manufactured commercially into capsules, powders, and other easily digestible forms. The ampalaya, or bitter melon, widely eaten in the country, is now available in teabag form, and it is being promoted as a treatment for a certain type of diabetes. It is also used for treating cough, liver problems, and sterility. The roots of the *banaba,* a flowering tree, are used for various stomach ailments, and its leaves and flowers for fevers and as a diuretic.

*Maria "Ging" Gutierrez Steinberg*

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# Portuguese in Asia

## Overview

At the end of the 15th century Portuguese navigators sailed around the southern tip of Africa and opened a new sea route to the spice-growing regions of India and the Far East. For the next 150 years, Portugal's monopoly of the European spice trade and profits from slave trading in Africa and sugar plantations in Brazil made 16th-century Lisbon the richest capital in Europe. Merchants from all corners of the globe mingled in the Estado da India (the Asian portion of the Portuguese Empire). Mixed marriages between Roman Catholic Portuguese men and indigenous women from Malacca, Indonesia, the Philippines, India, Africa, Japan, and China gave rise to a richly multicultural Portuguese Eurasian community and a unique cuisine that combined Iberian ingredients and techniques with the great culinary traditions of Asia.

The Portuguese colonies in Asia were Goa (now a state of India), Malacca (the modern Malaysian city of Melaka), Macau (now a special administrative region of the People's Republic of China), and East Timor (independent Timor Leste). Smaller Portuguese enclaves were located elsewhere in India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka), in trading ports scattered around the Indian Ocean, throughout Southeast Asia, and as far east as Japan. Malacca was lost to the Dutch in 1641, but the other colonies remained Portuguese possessions until the 20th century, when they achieved independence and many Portuguese Eurasians dispersed to other parts of the world. Descendants of the Portuguese traders, with family names such as DeMello, DeSousa, Rodrigues, Monteiro, and Fernandes, still reside in the former colonies and territories, in enclaves throughout Asia, and in a global diaspora. Wherever they live and regardless of their ethnic origins, Portuguese Eurasians are united by the Catholic faith and an Iberian heritage that celebrates hospitality, a *sossegado* (relaxed) attitude toward life, and the Latin love of a convivial and generous table.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Sérgio Rui de Pina and Josefina A. do Rosário are Macanese expatriates residing in greater Vancouver, Canada. Sérgio is a retired businessman and a well-known member of the Macanese community. His wife, Josefina, is the current president of the Macau Cultural Association (Casa de Macau) of Western Canada, a cultural and social-networking organization linked to other Casas de Macau and Macanese communities around the world.

Throughout the four and a half centuries of their history, the people of Macau dispersed throughout South Asia and the Far East, primarily as traders. The last significant wave of emigration took place in the mid-20th century when many Macanese left Macau for the United States, Canada, Australia, Brazil, Portugal, and other European countries. Since the return of Macau to Chinese administration in December 1999, Macanese in the diaspora have had to make adjustments to their political, financial, social, and cultural outlook, changes that have come with some costs and sacrifices. Despite this, the Macanese have managed to retain many aspects of their traditional culture, customs, language, and culinary heritage.



Afternoon tea is a time-honored tradition among the Macanese. (D2xed | Dreamstime.com)

Like all Macanese in the diaspora, Sérgio and Josefina have adjusted their traditional eating habits and methods of food preparation in response to their new environment and the availability of ingredients. But their Portuguese Chinese identity still shapes their tastes and the way they cook and eat.

Their day typically begins around 9:00 with a light breakfast of strong, dark brewed coffee and warm bread buns with butter. At around noon they take a very light lunch. Because of Josefina's tight work schedule, it's usually a fairly quick meal in one of Vancouver's many Chinese restaurants. Sometimes, they'll go to a place serving westernized or fusion food for a change. Like most busy people living in large urban centers, Sérgio and Josefina sometimes eat on the run and have learned to accept and enjoy North American fast foods, like burgers with fries, and fish and chips. Afternoon tea is a time-honored tradition among the Macanese. For Sérgio and Josefina, a short afternoon tea break usually means more coffee, accompanied by some biscuits or home-baked cookies or cakes.

Their evening meal is eaten at around 8:00 or a bit later. There isn't as much time for "proper" home cooking and shopping for fresh ingredients every day, but it will still be a fairly traditional Macanese meal, starting with *caldo verde* or another vegetable soup, based on tomatoes, potatoes, or cabbage, with some soup bones in the pot or a few slices of *chouriço* (a spicy sausage) added as a garnish, along with the signature Portuguese finishing touch of olive oil. One or two main dishes and a side dish of vegetables follow. *Pork bafassa,* a joint of pork butt or fresh ham cooked with the skin on and flavored with garlic, green onions, and saffron, is a favorite, although Sérgio and Josefina sometimes use turmeric, which is cheaper than saffron and more readily available in North America. Plain steamed rice, rather than potatoes or bread, accompanies most evening meals, along with a glass or two of red wine. Dessert might be fresh fruit, or a slice of cake or flan, and to finish off the meal, they have a cup of good strong coffee.

## Major Foodstuffs

Luso-Asian cuisine evolved through Iberian contact with Indian, Malay, and Chinese culinary cultures, enhanced by trading links with Southeast Asia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Africa, and the Arabian Gulf. The traffic of people and ingredients along the Portuguese trade routes provided an enormously varied pantry. Rice paddies, coconut groves, the bountiful harvest of the sea, and the cornucopia of Asian fruits, vegetables, and herbs provided the staples. Supply fleets from Lisbon brought wine, olive oil, vinegar, olives, figs, marmalade, jams, and fruits. Merchants from Arabia offered dried fruit, almonds, plums, conserves, saffron, rose water, and dates. From Malacca came spices, Chinese tea, and rhubarb.

Vasco da Gama enjoyed his first meal of fish curry with rice and ghee in India, and the adaptable Portuguese quickly adjusted to a rice-based diet. But their Roman Catholic religion and love of bread, wine, and pork distinguished them from their Asian neighbors, many of whom abstained from alcohol and meat.

Pork is the favorite meat of the Portuguese Eurasians. Roast suckling pig is their classic celebratory dish, and pork is the basis of European-style stews and Asian curries. Pork charcuterie, including chouriço and *linguiça* sausages, *presunto* (Iberian ham), and *morçela* (blood sausage) are enjoyed on their own or used to add flavor to other dishes. Goa's spicy *chourissam* sausages and Cantonese *lap cheong* are local substitutes. Traditionally, lard was used as a frying medium and as a fat for baking.

*Bolo de carne,* a bacon-studded tea cake, is still made in Goa.

Portuguese Eurasians are fond of offal, which is used in dishes such as Goa's *sarapatel* (a vinegary stew), Malacca's *curry feng,* and Macanese *sarrabulho.* They also enjoy beef tripe, liver, and tongue. They are thrifty cooks who traditionally utilized ears, snouts, tails, intestines, hooves, and trotters, as well as the meat of rabbits, horses, frogs, wild game, and fowl.

Fish and shellfish are central to the diet of the Portuguese and the Portuguese Eurasians. *Bacalhau* (salt cod) is prepared in many ways and is much loved, although it's now getting harder to come by. Sea and river fish, rays, octopus, squid, shellfish, prawns, crabs, eels, turtles, crayfish, and lobsters are curried, fried, or steamed in the Asian manner or prepared Portuguese-style, stuffed, grilled, marinated, or included in hearty soups and stews.

The Cristang ("Christian people") of Malacca were specialists in making the pungent fermented shrimp paste called *belacan,* and they use it in a wide variety of dishes. *Balichão* is a Goan adaptation, made with prawns, vinegar, chilies, and garlic. It is eaten as a condiment or used to flavor dishes of meat or fish also called *balchãos.* The Macanese version of belacan is called *balichão* or *balichang.*

Bread is a signature of Luso-Asian cuisine. Soft white rolls—called *pão* in Portugal, *pav* in Goa, *pau* or *bau* in Macau, and *pang* in Malacca—are often served in addition to rice. Bread is used to thicken soups called *açordas,* and breadcrumbs are made into a stuffing-like dish called *migas.* A variety of Asian snacks, such as *epuk-epuk* (Malaysia), *pastel* (Indonesia), *chilicotes* (Macau), and *empadinhas* (Goa), are descendants of Iberian pies traditionally encased in bread, called empanadas.

Fresh cheeses, olives, olive oil, fresh cilantro, and plenty of onions and garlic are other Iberian elements of Luso-Asian cuisine. Olive oil is used for frying and vinaigrettes and is drizzled over finished dishes. Black and green olives are eaten as an accompaniment to wine and used as an ingredient or garnish.

The Portuguese carried many new plants from the Americas to Asia, including tobacco, papayas, guavas, cashew nuts, pineapples, jicamas, squashes, peanuts, custard apples, avocados, passion fruit, sapodillas, tomatoes, capsicums, maize, sweet potatoes, and cassava. New starch crops, in particular sweet potatoes and cassava, helped to reduce the region's dependence on rice and susceptibility to famine. New World fruits and vegetables play an important role in Luso-Asian cuisine.

Cashew trees now grow all over Goa. The nuts are served as snacks, baked into cakes and biscuits, added to meat and vegetable dishes, and used to enrich curries. Another hugely successful import was the chili pepper, which was enthusiastically adopted by the peoples of Asia, including the Portuguese Eurasians. In Goa, mild Kashmiri chilies are used in great quantities to give dishes a distinctive red color. Much more potent *piri-piri* peppers are added for heat. Cristang meals typically include a range of chili-based *sambals.* The Macanese are not so liberal in their use of chilies but enjoy piri-piri sauce and a table condiment of chilies in oil.

The Portuguese had plenty of Brazilian sugar when it was a rare and expensive commodity for the rest of the world. Sweet preserves and conserves, sugar-glazed pastries, fritters and donuts cooked in sugar syrup, candied fruits and vegetables, and versions of the Portuguese quince paste called *marmelada,* using local fruits such as bananas, mangoes, and guavas, make up the Luso-Asian sweet repertoire. The Portuguese also brought the techniques for making marzipans, caramels, and hard candy to Asia and developed fudges (*alua* and *dodol*) and other sweetmeats using local ingredients such as rice flour, jaggery (unrefined cane sugar or palm-sap sugar), and coconut.

European wine, brandies, and liqueurs and exotic local blends made from palm toddy, hibiscus flowers, fruits, spices, ginger, and other aromatics are drunk for pleasure and used in cooking. Portuguese monks introduced the technique of double distillation that made *arak* (palm wine) more potent and produced Goa's infamous *feni,* a brandy made from coconut toddy or cashew-fruit juice. Portuguese Eurasians in India, Malacca, and Macau traditionally chewed areca nut and betel leaf, but this habit has now largely gone out of style.

Modern Portuguese Eurasian cooks have access to ready-made spice pastes and other convenient foods such as canned frankfurters, coconut powder, evaporated milk, mayonnaise, bottled sauces, and instant noodles. They are acquiring international palates, shopping in supermarkets, and using more manufactured foods. Inevitably, some traditional foodways are being lost, but adaptation and innovation lie at the heart of Luso-Asian cuisine, and it continues to evolve.

## Cooking

Luso-Asian cooking is characterized by complex flavors and generous use of spices and aromatics. Common ingredients include European herbs such as bay leaf, thyme, rosemary, and fresh cilantro; Middle Eastern saffron; Indian spices including turmeric, cumin, cinnamon, coriander, and ginger; and Southeast Asian flavorings such as tamarind, lemongrass, galangal, candlenuts, and belacan (shrimp paste). Chinese ingredients such as soy sauce and star anise are also used, along with Indonesian pepper, cloves, nutmeg, and mace.

Historically, many Portuguese Eurasians were economically challenged. They are thrifty cooks who excel at producing richly flavored and nourishing dishes from humble ingredients. Stir-frying and clay pot cooking, which conserve fuel, are common cooking methods. Portuguese techniques such as roasting (*assado*), stuffing (*recheado*), stewing (*guisado*), and steaming (*bafado*) are also used. Braising meats and then finishing them by frying is a Portuguese technique used in dishes such as Malay/Indonesian *rendang.* The class of Indonesian dishes called *balado* ("with chilies") probably also originated with the Portuguese.

Luso-Asian cuisine relies heavily on meat, which is often marinated in vinegar or cooked with it. *Vinho d'alhos,* a marinade of wine, vinegar, and garlic that improves the keeping quality of foods and imparts a distinctive tangy taste, gave rise to dishes such as Goa's famous *vindalho.* Local souring agents such as lime, tamarind, and *belimbing* (star fruit or carambola) are also used to give dishes an acidic zing.



Vinho d'alhos, a marinade of wine, vinegar, and garlic that improves the keeping quality of foods and imparts a distinctive tangy taste, gave rise to dishes such as Goa's famous vindalho. (iStockPhoto)

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***Goan Vindalho***

Vindaloo served in Indian restaurants in the West has a reputation for being fiercely hot, but the amount of chili or cayenne can be adjusted to suit your taste. The Portuguese favor pork, but the recipe works just as well with beef. Vindalho tastes best when made a day or two ahead so the flavors can develop.

**Ingredients**

8 tbsp olive oil, divided

6 medium onions, peeled and sliced into half-moons

2 tsp cumin seeds
2 dried, hot red chilies, or 1 tsp cayenne
1 tsp black peppercorns
1 tsp cardamom seeds
3-in. cinnamon stick
2 tsp black mustard seeds
1 tsp fenugreek seeds
5 tbsp red wine vinegar
2 tsp salt
1 tsp brown sugar
6 tbsp water, divided
2 lb boneless pork shoulder or loin, cubed
8 cloves garlic, peeled
1-in. piece fresh ginger, peeled
1 tbsp ground coriander
1 tsp ground turmeric
1 c red wine

Heat 4 tablespoons of the olive oil, and fry the onions, stirring occasionally, until deep brown, about 20 minutes. While they are cooking, grind the cumin, red chilies, peppercorns, cardamom, cinnamon, black mustard, and fenugreek seeds in a coffee grinder. Put in a blender with the vinegar, salt, brown sugar, and 3 tablespoons of the water. Add the browned onions, and blend to a paste. Scrape out into a large bowl, and mix with the pork cubes until they are well coated. Set aside for 1 hour (or up to 24 hours in the fridge).

Roughly chop the garlic and ginger, and put into the blender (or a mortar and pestle) with 3 tablespoons water. Blend to a coarse paste. Heat the remaining 4 tablespoons olive oil, and fry the paste for 1 or 2 minutes until fragrant. Add the coriander and turmeric. Fry for another 30 seconds. Add the pork cubes, scraping in all the spice paste, and add the wine. Bring to a boil, cover, turn down the heat, and simmer very gently for 2 hours, stirring occasionally, until the pork is very tender.

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Traditionally, every Portuguese Eurasian household had a kitchen garden (*horta*), and sourcing the freshest produce is very important. The Cristang, who endured centuries of economic deprivation after the loss of Malacca to the Dutch, developed a wide range of vegetable and meat-stretching dishes. Like Macanese cooks, they cut vegetables on the bias and stir-fry them in the Chinese manner. Many Goan vegetable dishes reflect the influence of the indigenous Saraswati Hindus, whose meatless curries and dals were adopted for Catholic fasting days. Dishes made with fresh palm toddy, salted buttermilk, curd, yogurt, and ghee, as well as fruit desserts and sweets made with rice, coconut, and jaggery (palm sugar loaves, also made from sugarcane), crossed over from the Hindu kitchen.

The Portuguese Eurasians are masters of preserving fruits and vegetables using salt, vinegar, and sugar. In India, they developed tangy-sweet chutneys that inspired Anglo-Indian classics like Major Grey's. They also adopted the Indian vinegared vegetable pickles called *achars* and Southeast Asian sambals (chili sauces).

Many dishes start with the classic Portuguese *refogado* of garlic and onions slowly caramelized in olive oil. In Malacca, traditional Iberian pot roasting combined with the Chinese *lu* technique gave rise to the method known as "flavor-potting." It is widely believed that the Portuguese popularized deep-frying in Asia, inspiring many of the region's snack foods and Japanese tempura.

Kitchen tools include the Portuguese *tacho* and *panela* (a terra-cotta baking dish and iron soup kettle), the Malay *batu giling* (grinding stone) and *pilung tek-tek* (mortar and pestle), Indian-style *tezalers* (curry pots) and *kadais* (miniwoks), and a Chinese wok and cleaver.

Herbs and spices are usually ground fresh in the Indian manner. Goans make South Indian–style curries thickened with freshly grated coconut. Cristang cooks use the Malay technique of frying spice pastes in coconut cream.

At the village level in Asia, traditional cooking methods are still used in simple kitchens equipped with propane cooktops and/or a charcoal brazier. European-style cakes were traditionally cooked in a makeshift oven made by putting a tray of hot coals on top of the brazier. Today, broilers or

toaster ovens are often used to achieve a characteristic browned top on baked cakes. Full-size Western ovens, which are expensive to run and heat up the kitchen, are mostly used in Western-style homes or apartments with air-conditioning.

Many Asian cakes and sweets are of Portuguese origin, with rice flour, tapioca, cassava, and other starches replacing wheat flour. Seventeenth-century Portuguese nuns were famous for confections made from egg yolks and sugar. Thai temple sweets such as *foy thong* (golden threads), Malaysia's *serikaya* (a curd made from coconut, sugar, and eggs), and Chinese egg tarts are believed to have descended from these traditional Portuguese sweets. Cakes such as *bolu, molho, koku,* and *putugal* appear in all the former Portuguese territories in Asia, along with the wafers known as *love letters,* sweet fritters called *sonhos* ("dreams"), and various interpretations of *bebinca,* a rich layer cake made from reduced coconut milk and jaggery.

Modernization is changing the way foods are procured, prepared, and consumed. Families are smaller; many women have jobs and rely on convenience foods and cooking methods. Fewer Portuguese Eurasian households hire domestic help, and there isn't enough time to prepare the labor-intensive dishes of the past. Refrigerators do away with the need for preserving, and well-stocked supermarkets mean there is no need to stockpile food for the monsoon. But Portuguese Eurasian cooks still recognize that the best flavors come from coconut, chilies, herbs, and spices ground fresh every day and the traditional cooking methods of their grandmothers.

## Typical Meals

The wealthy colonial Portuguese lived in grand style. A huge staff of slaves and servants supervised by the *dona de casa* (lady of the house) dealt with the daily tasks of purchasing and preparing food. The main meal in a Catholic Goan country mansion, served in the evening or as a leisurely lunch, was an elaborate affair. A soup course came first, with crusty bread, cocktails or sangria, and cashews and other snacks such as salt cod balls, turnovers, or shrimp rissoles. Main dishes might include grilled prawns, a pork balchão, fish curries, roasted pomfret (a popular white fish in Goa) stuffed with chili paste, or chouriço or Goan chourissam sausages fried with potatoes and onions, accompanied by European breads and Indian chapatis, boiled rice and an elaborate pilaf, salads, vegetable dishes, and an array of pickles and condiments. The repast would be washed down with Portuguese wines and Indian or Chinese tea, followed by digestifs, port, and desserts such as pudding, flan, or bebinca and fresh fruit. These excessive meals were never wasted—leftovers were distributed to household staff and less-well-off members of the Portuguese community.

Except for the bread and wine of Holy Communion and the very occasional feast of roast pig, the poorer Portuguese and *mestiços* (children of mixed marriages) largely followed indigenous foodways, often at a subsistence level. Modern Luso-Asian cuisine is far more egalitarian, the main dichotomy existing between rural (more traditional) and urban (more westernized) foodways. In both groups the dining table, chairs, and tablecloth are likely to be European, but dishes are served all at once, Asian-style.

Fish curry and rice is the staple dish of Hindu and Catholic Goans and is eaten at any time of day. Many Portuguese Eurasians now start the day with tea and toast, but breakfast might also be leftover fish curry for a Goan or a bowl of congee (rice porridge with tasty toppings) for a Macanese. Lunch and dinner are similar meals, centered on rice and a mixture of meat, fish, and vegetable preparations served with condiments and Asian or European breads. Traditionally, a wide variety of dishes were brought to the table, even at lunchtime, but nowadays meals tend to be simpler, with one or two principal dishes, such as *caldeirada* (fish stew), *guisado* (pot roast), or *xacuti* (a fiery Hindu curry of vegetables with chicken or pork). Some traditional Muslim dishes, including rice-based pilafs and *biryanis,* kebabs, mutton dishes, rich *kormas* (food cooked in a yogurt and nut sauce), and desserts such as sweet rice and *kheer* (rice pudding) also appear on Portuguese Eurasian tables. A wide array of chutneys, pickles, and condiments typically accompany

a Luso-Asian meal. Portuguese kale soup (caldo verde), made with local Asian greens, is a Luso-Asian soul food that often appears as a first course.

A Cristang meal will typically consist of rice, two or more curries, sambals, and vegetable dishes. Diners help themselves and traditionally eat with the fingers of the right hand in the Malay fashion, or with a spoon and fork. *Bife assado* (beef pot roast), *debal* (devil curry), and curry feng are Cristang specialties. Rice dishes are either European-style (*arroz*) or Malay-style (*nasi*).

The Dutch and British who followed the Portuguese into Asia also influenced Luso-Asian cooking. Stews containing carrots, cabbage, onions, and potatoes; meatballs called *frikkerdel* or *pikkadel;* yeasted sweet breads; and cakes baked in fancy brass molds and cakes with dried fruit reflect the Dutch influence. The British popularized hams, roast beef, dishes served on toast, and afternoon-tea treats such as filled cakes, sandwiches, and scones.

Along with the Portuguese, Chinese, Arab, and Indian settlers influenced Timorese cuisine. *Seu mai* (dumplings) and *chau min* (noodles) are local renditions of Chinese dishes. Arab-inspired kebabs (*sassate*) are made with goat meat or chicken. Frugal, one-bowl meals called *agua e sal* (water and salt), made from meat, poultry, fish, or vegetables served over rice and eaten with a fork and spoon, are enjoyed in every household. The mountain people's traditional stew (*seduk*) is also widely consumed.

The final course of a Luso-Asian meal is likely to consist of fresh fruit or a European-style dessert. Mango pudding is a tropical version of the Portuguese *pudim,* and there are various Asian interpretations of Iberian flan. There might also be a European butter cake, Chinese mung bean porridge, or Peranakan pineapple tarts. Pastes made from guavas and lime juice (*perada*) or mangoes (*mangada*) are served with coffee or a glass of port.

## Eating Out

"Goa is crying for her lost cuisine," reads a billboard advertisement for a restaurant in the state capital, Panjim. When Portuguese Eurasians eat out, it will rarely be at a restaurant serving their own, homey cuisine. Many people outside the Portuguese Eurasian community find their traditional foods too spicy or strange or think them unrefined.

Few traditional restaurants survived Macau's transformation into a Chinese tourist resort with Vegas-style casinos and hotels. A few token "Portuguese" and "Macanese" restaurants cater to foreign visitors with an interest in cultural tourism. When the overseas Macanese eat out, which they love to do, they'll often head for the local Chinatown. There are only a handful of Cristang living in Malacca today and even fewer traditional cooks. Some Cristang dishes may be found at Peranakan restaurants.

Although restaurants are not a feature of traditional Luso-Asian culture, eating foods prepared outside the home has always been popular. In Asia, hawker stands, bakeries, and the "merenda man" (vendor of teatime treats) traditionally provided a wide range of inexpensive cooked foods at any time of the day or night—curries and bread in Goa; noodles, steamed buns, and barbecued pork and ducks in Macau; sticks of chicken *satay* and entire meals of rice, meat, and vegetables wrapped in banana leaves in Malacca. The cry of street vendors and the steam whistles, bells, and clacking bamboo that announced the arrival of a hawker pushing a cart or balancing a shoulder yoke are nostalgic memories for Portuguese Eurasians in the diaspora. The familiar street foods of their childhood are often the first thing they seek out when they go home for a visit.

Lightened and modernized by chefs who have studied contemporary cooking in the West, Luso-Asian cuisine is starting to be recognized for its eclectic, exotic flavors and unique multicultural style and may begin to appear more often on restaurant menus.

## Special Occasions

Easter and Christmas are the biggest celebrations of the Luso-Asian year and are associated with traditional Portuguese foods. Yeasted cakes and breads, some decorated with colored eggs, are popular at Easter. Most Catholics fast to some degree during Lent, even if it just means giving up a favorite

indulgence such as chocolate or steak. A whole roast lamb or kid on Easter Sunday is the traditional reward.

The 12 days of Christmas are the high point of the culinary year, bringing forth a multitude of marzipans, halwas, breads, cakes, and confections with evocative names such as nun's bellies, pope's ears, sighs, dreams, and pillows for Baby Jesus, as well as a super-rich egg custard called *toucinho de ceu* (heavenly bacon). Christmas Eve calls for *consoada* (bacalhau and potatoes) or *galinhia pai* (chicken pie), eaten after midnight mass. The Cristang serve a brandied pig-trotter soup, called *teem,* and debal, a spicy curry of Christmas leftovers. Sarapatel, traditionally served with *sanna* (puffy breads made from rice and palm toddy), is mandatory at Goan feasts.

The Portuguese Eurasians also participate in some indigenous Asian holidays, such as Chinese New Year and the Mid-Autumn Festival, which are celebrated by the Macanese. Catholic Goans take part in the Hindu carnival called Holi, buy or make special sweets for Diwali, and celebrate Pongal, the South Indian harvest festival, with the traditional dish of sweetened rice. Cristang cooks will prepare special treats for their Muslim friends and neighbors at the close of Ramadan.

Luso-Asian weddings combine a Catholic ceremony (blessed with bread and wine and followed by wedding cake) with local nuptial customs. Cristang brides traditionally dress in Malay sarong and *kebaya,* while Catholic Goan and Macanese brides may appear first in a European bridal gown and then in Asian costume. Portuguese folk dances and music accompany the wedding feast, which in Timor may include the sacrifice of a buffalo.

The Feast of St. Francis Xavier, patron saint of the Portuguese Eurasians, draws Catholics from all over the world to the Basilica of Bom Jesus in Old Goa, where the Jesuit missionary's body is preserved. In Mumbai, the Bandra Feast celebrating the birthday of Mary attracts pilgrims from throughout India. In Malacca, the Festa de San Pedro involves a blessing of the fishing fleet, carnival competitions, and a traditional parade.

Among the Macanese, birthdays, weddings, important business meetings, and other community celebrations call for *cha gordo,* which literally means "fat tea." Community cooks band together to create a banquet featuring the dishes that connect the Macanese with their heritage. There will be *chamuças* (like samosas), *bolos de bacalhau* (codfish cakes), *pão recheado* (small, deep-fried stuffed buns), and other finger foods. Chafing dishes will display *chicken cafreal* (spicy African chicken), *tacho* (a hearty pork and offal stew), *porco balichang tamarinho* (pork belly with tamarind and shrimp paste), chili prawns, Goan vindalho, and steaming mounds of white rice, *arroz chau-chau* (Portuguese fried rice), and stir-fried noodles. There may be *empada* (an exotic fish pie enclosed in sweet pastry) or *capela* (meatloaf baked in the shape of a crown), and there will definitely be the much-loved *minchi* (ground beef and/or pork with soy sauce and other Asian flavorings, onions, and cubes of fried potato).



Sarapatel, a vinegary stew often served on Christmas Eve by Portuguese Eurasians. (iStockPhoto)

### *Minchi* (Macanese Ground Meat)

All Macanese cooks have their own (often secret) recipe for minchi, the Macanese version of "mince." It's a comforting and homely dish that can be served at any time of day, by itself or with rice, noodles, bread, or just about anything else.

2 potatoes, peeled and cut into small cubes

Oil for frying

1 lb ground beef
½ lb ground pork
1 tsp light soy sauce
4 tsp dark soy sauce
1 tsp sugar
1 tsp salt
½ tsp pepper
1 onion, finely chopped
2 cloves garlic, chopped

Deep-fry the potato cubes, and set aside. Mix the ground beef and pork with the soy sauces, sugar, salt, and pepper. Sauté the onions and garlic in a little oil until softened. Add the seasoned meat, and stir-fry until cooked but not dry. Mix in the fried potatoes. Taste and adjust the seasoning before serving. Some cooks like to add a dash of Worcestershire sauce, toasted sesame oil, or *tau cheo* (fermented yellow soybean paste).

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At the dessert end of the table, choices might include *baji* (glutinous rice pudding), *bebinga de leite* (a coconut custard), *pastéis de nata* (Portuguese custard tarts), and *cabelo de noiva* (a tart topped with sweet egg threads called angel's hair). There will be *bolos* (sponge cakes and pound cakes rich with eggs and butter), *batatada* (a delicious sweet-potato cake), cornstarch cookies called *genetes,* cupcakes, and *malassadas,* which are little donuts.

And, if the guests are lucky, one of the older Macanese cooks will still remember how to make *alua* (a fudge containing lard) and *ladu,* another very traditional confection. Otherwise, they will have to be brought back from Macau, where one or two artisan confectioners may still make these treasured heritage sweets.

## Diet and Health

The Roman Catholic calendar of fast and feast days laid the framework of the Portuguese diet. Fasting, either total or partial abstention from meat and rich foods, was associated with spiritual purity and undertaken by most of the population. At the basic level, Portuguese Catholics abstained from eating meat on Fridays and the eve of feast days, ate sparingly during the week, and enjoyed a more elaborate meal on Sundays after church.

The 16th-century Portuguese relied on humoral theory, herbal potions, bloodletting, superstitions, and religious interventions to ensure good health. Antidotes against poisoning by one's enemies were particularly important, and when long-distance voyaging revealed the scourge of scurvy, the diet of seamen became another concern. Vasco da Gama noted that citrus fruits cured scurvy, a fact unknown to British mariners until the 18th century, but a huge number of lives were lost on Portuguese ships sailing to the East, and unfamiliar tropical diseases claimed many more.

The Portuguese studied indigenous Asian healing systems, dietary principles, and folk medicine. They adopted aspects of holistic Indian Ayurvedic practice as well as the Chinese theory of hot and cold, and wet and dry, foods. In Malacca, they learned about *jamu* (Javanese herbal medicine) and the Malay spiritual healers called *dukun.*

The physician Garcia de Orta established a garden for medicinal plants in Goa and wrote Europe's first treatise on tropical medicine. Christoforas Acosta, born in Portuguese Mozambique, published another of the Western world's earliest pharmacological manuals. Jesuit doctors in Macau studied Chinese medicines and used them in their hospital. The Portuguese also studied the effects of local intoxicants and poisons, including palm wine, marijuana, betel leaf, and datura (which contains atropine, both hallucinogenic and poisonous). Goan Catholic women were reputedly notorious for drugging their husbands with heady-scented datura in order to facilitate amorous liaisons with other men. The Portuguese captain Rui Freyre de Andrada escaped from British capture in the Persian Gulf by lacing his enemies' food with the drug.

Some elements of the Portuguese Eurasians' traditional diet are falling from favor in modern times. Animal fats, once an important source of calories, are now thought to encourage arteriosclerosis, and eating food from communal platters with chopsticks is thought to encourage transmission of disease.

Factory-farmed pigs are regarded as "cleaner" than the pigs that root around in village garbage heaps. A generation accustomed to supermarkets is put off by the sights and smells of traditional wet markets. Homely dishes containing offal and animal "parts" are increasingly seen as fodder of the lower classes, while the cuisine of the modernized West is synonymous with social and economic advancement.

Like everyone else living in industrialized countries, the modern Portuguese Eurasians are now falling victim to illnesses caused by urban lifestyles and stress. Most use Western medicine, but traditional folk remedies still have their place. The Cristang protect their health by avoiding eating too much meat. A Macanese with a sore throat may brew up a restorative herbal soup or a traditional cure called *mui-garganta,* made from salted plums. Goan housewives still know that the juice from the cashew apple helps the digestion and that sour belimbi fruits cleanse the blood.

*Janet Boileau*

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# Singapore

## Overview

Singapore is a small island nation in Southeast Asia, whose geographic size belies its international and culinary significance. It is the third-largest port in the world and commands a standing disproportionate to its population, particularly with regard to technology and regional leadership. Singapore, unique in many ways, is politically and geographically unique in being a city-state. It is an entirely urban nation, with no agricultural hinterland.

Historically, Singapore was a sporadically occupied trading site before its establishment as a British Crown Colony in 1819. Between the 7th and 10th centuries it is thought that the Sumatran Buddhist Srivijaya kingdom used Singapore as a trading outpost. Likewise, between the 13th and 15th centuries there is archaeological evidence to suggest that the island was used by Muslim traders based in Melaka. During the period of Portuguese rule in Melaka (in the past spelled Malacca), a sultanate was established in Johor—just across the causeway from Singapore, and again there is some limited archaeological evidence of trade activities. There was no permanent indigenous population or local food culture.

Today, however, with a Chinese majority population (76%) coexisting with Malay (15%), Indian (8%), and other (1%) minority communities, Singapore forms a uniquely Chinese society in a predominantly Muslim and Malay region. This Chinese population has diverse origins, and although officially Mandarin-speaking, many can trace their origins to dialect-speaking southern China.

In terms of religion the Singaporean Chinese population is quite diverse, with many people incorporating a mixture of Taoist and Buddhist practices and Christianity—both Catholic and Protestant. The Malay population is largely Muslim, and the Singaporean Indian population Hindu, though there are also some Christian Indians—both Catholic and Protestant.

Singapore's population of only four million includes one million migrants. Foreign workers present a wide spectrum—both by class and by occupation—including day workers who sleep in Malaysia and work in Singapore; Western and Chinese "foreign talent" who work in Singapore for high salaries for a limited period; domestic workers on five-year maid contracts; and construction workers on one-year limited visas. Migration has thus historically promoted, and to an extent continues to promote, diversity and cosmopolitanism in Singapore.

The island has a land area of only 247 square miles, and no land boundaries, other than the causeway to Johor in Malaysia; its total coastline is 120 miles. The foundation of Singapore's geographic constraints thus lies in its small size. Size aside, Singapore has other geographic challenges. Although the rivers were one of the factors that led to the original settlement, Singapore no longer has sufficient water to supply its needs. Recently, Singapore has been buying dirty water from Malaysia, cleaning it, keeping half, and selling half back; this "new water," however, still leaves them dependent on another nation-state for an essential resource. In attempts to rid itself of this dependency, Singapore is emerging as a world leader in water conservation, reclamation, and desalination.

Singapore's unusual path to nationhood (a reluctant expulsion from the Malaysian Federation in 1965)

and its remarkable economic success give it some unique characteristics. Singapore has no lengthy history, no farmland, and only limited water. That is, without the port, Singapore cannot exist. Historically, the status of the port as entrepôt was critical, and while economic policies have shifted with global economic changes, the port remains critical to Singapore's economy and character. The port is the breadbasket of Singapore. The port feeds the nation in multiple ways: bringing in the goods that fill the population's bowls; providing the money that allows people to buy food; and fundamentally shaping how Singaporeans think about their country.

Though culturally and geographically distinct, Singapore has much in common with its Asian neighbors, including the experiences of colonialism and Japanese occupation. Like Hong Kong and Taiwan, it is an island-state with a predominantly Chinese population. Like Malaysia, it is a former British colony with strong political leadership. And like many Asian nations, it has pursued capitalist economic development, evolving from export-oriented industrialization to high-tech industrialization and more recently to information technology and notably successful value-added service industries.

## Food Culture Snapshot

The Chan family conforms exactly to the Singaporean archetype—a husband, a wife, and three children. Husband Jason is two years older than his wife, a product, in part, of the two-year national service requirement, which meant that when Jason and Siew Mae met in their first year at the university, Jason was older than Siew Mae. They married after they had both graduated and accumulated substantial savings for their married life. Both adults work full-time. The children, Kevin (nine), Lily (six), and Timothy (four), are the major focus of the family.

Living with the Chan family is a maid, Wulandari. She is from Indonesia, although many of her colleagues are from the Philippines and increasingly from Bangladesh. Wulandari is employed largely to care for the children, but her duties also include some food preparation, especially for the children, and breakfast for the family.

Breakfast is an early meal; with school starting at 7:30, everyone in the household is up by 6:00. All the children eat cereal. In some households congee, or Chinese porridge, would be more common. Toast is also a popular breakfast choice, often served with *kaya,* a coconut jam. Many Singaporeans eat breakfast out, but a large number still eat this meal in their homes.

Having spent time overseas, Jason and Siew Mae developed Western breakfast habits for weekdays. But on the weekends, holidays, or special occasions they are more likely to eat the foods of their childhoods. For Siew Mae this might be congee, a savory Chinese rice porridge. She knows how to make this dish herself but is more likely to go out and buy congee than cook it at home.

The two older children take small snack foods with them to school—a packet of dried raisins or rice crackers. They will eat lunch at the school canteen. The food at school is generally healthy, and options are provided to meet dietary restrictions, especially those that are religious in nature. As in all canteens, separate trays are used for halal food and utensils. Children are taught to respect religious and ethnic practices in a practical everyday manner by following respectful food practices, such as keeping halal and nonhalal plates separate.

Jason and Siew Mae will both eat out for lunch as well. For Jason this will be a meal at his workplace canteen. Small food stalls are given very low-cost leases in the workplace canteen, and each stall makes only one or two dishes, further keeping prices low. His employer is, thus, effectively subsidizing Jason's meal. The food provided will range from snack foods to elaborate meals. At his workplace there are more than a dozen food stalls, including an Indian food stall (which sells only vegetarian foods), a Muslim Indian stall (which has both vegetarian and meat dishes), a halal Malay stall (which sells rice and vegetable and meat dishes), a Western stall (which sells dishes such as fried eggs, sausages, and chops), a stall that sells steamed dumplings, a fresh fruit and juice stall, a stall that sells fried *kway teah* (a noodle dish), and a Malay noodle stall (which sells *mee rebus* and *mee siam,* spicy noodle dishes with peanuts and shrimp), as well as hot-drink stalls that sell tea and coffee (available sweetened with condensed milk). The canteen is simple and utilitarian, with washable surfaces, attention to ventilation, and reusable plastic or metal tableware. The food

is good, fast, and cheap. Jason eats *Hokien prawn mee* today—noodles cooked with prawns.

There is also a stall that specializes in a dish called carrot cake. It is in fact neither a cake (in the sense of a sweet baked dish) nor made with carrots. Rather it is a savory dish made with grated white radish and eggs, flavored with spring onions, soy sauce, and chili. It is a snack food. Jason comes back to the canteen in the midafternoon for a cup of coffee and a serving of carrot cake.

Siew Mae eats in a hawker center (like a food court) for lunch. It is similar to the canteen where her husband eats lunch, though not subsidized. Prices, however, are still low. She selects a dish of roasted pork, rice, and steamed Chinese green vegetables. The vegetables are served with oyster sauce and deep-fried shallots. Siew Mae does not have time for a formal snack like Jason's, but she has tea and a small cake when she gets home from work. She buys the cakes on her way home and shares them with the children and the maid.

Wulandari does most of the food shopping. Buying food takes her to a variety of places. Fruits, vegetables, and meats come from the local wet market, and specialty markets may be visited for other items. In addition, she visits several different supermarkets—the local supermarket run by the National Trade Union for staple foods and ColdStorage, a competing supermarket, for other items, especially school snack items.

Sometimes Wulandari does the shopping for the evening meal—chicken, vegetables, and rice. Depending on the needs of the children, she will occasionally cook this meal and eat it with the family. Sometimes Jason cooks, and sometimes Siew Mae cooks. On a school night these are simple meals—a chicken curry thickened with potatoes and served with rice and a green vegetable. For a special occasion much more elaborate meals would be cooked.

After a long day, when no one is cooking, the family might get take-out food. At the bottom of their apartment complex is a small hawker center, less elaborate than where Siew Mae ate lunch. This is an indoor/outdoor space with open sides for the breeze; meals can be eaten here or taken out. The Chan family orders steamed fish, fried chicken, stir-fried *kang kong* (water spinach), a dish of Chinese flat noodles with soup and dumplings, and ostrich in black pepper sauce, as well as rice. Items are purchased from a variety of stalls—noodles from one stall, meat from another, and vegetables from a third. The dishes will be shared, although all the children have specific favorites. The meal concludes with fresh fruit.

With the children in bed and the work of home and office caught up on, Jason and Siew Mae will have a light supper (as the latest evening meal is called) at 10 or 11 P.M. This may be no more than a cup of tea and perhaps a leftover cake. If there is lots of work still to be done, they might instead step downstairs for a more substantial snack—perhaps sharing a piece of *prata* (fried bread) dipped in curry gravy.

## Major Foodstuffs

With the exception of hydroponic bean sprouts, there is basically no agriculture in Singapore. There is very limited landmass and an inadequate water supply. Public spaces devoted to parks and the botanical gardens preserve some of the early attempts at agriculture in Singapore, but housing, business, and public services take priority over agriculture for land use.

The island-state relies entirely on imported food and, consequently, on the port. Fresh milk, meats, and other perishables also arrive by plane. Many of these goods come from Australia and New Zealand (milk and meat), but foods are also imported from China, Britain, North America, and Europe. Goods from Southeast Asia arrive by ship or by bus.

Despite, or perhaps because of, these agricultural limitations, Singapore has developed a very varied national cuisine. The foods of the ethnic groups—Chinese, Malay, and Indian—dominate, but the port has provided ingredients from all over the world, and this is evident in the cuisine. Among other influences, there is a sustained tradition of British food, a product of colonial rule. The culinary evidence of this can be seen in both food adaptations and food traditions, including high tea, sandwiches, and pies.

*Rojak,* a Malay-influenced salad, is a tremendously important and commonly eaten dish that illustrates the breadth of Singaporean foodstuffs. It consists of both fruit and vegetables such as pineapple, cucumber, onions, and bean sprouts and may include fried tofu. It is dressed with *belacan* (a dried shrimp paste),

sugar, chilies, and lime juice. The ingredients are cut into bite-sized pieces, tossed in a bowl with the dressing, and topped with chopped peanuts. This dish has also come to have a social meaning—the term *rojak* literally means "mixture" in Malay. Rojak has colloquially come to be an expression for any kind of mix and in particular is often used to describe the multiethnic character of Singaporean society. That is, all the pieces in the salad are separate and remain distinct rather than being mixed, but they are bound together by the dressing. Singapore describes its ethnic policy as one of multiracialism rather than multiculturalism—the salad bowl, not the mixing bowl—and rojak exemplifies that. A delicious salad, the metaphor of rojak is a potent national symbol that simultaneously speaks to diversity and unity.

## Cooking

Much of the cooking in Singapore is done by professionals or paid help. Even a lot of "home cooking" in middle-class homes is done by a domestic worker. In hawker stalls where food is cooked over open flames and intense heat, the physicality of the work has somewhat gendered it; much of the commercial cooking is done by men. There certainly is some domestic cooking, but it is difficult to categorize. In some families, the majority of meals are eaten at home, cooked by an older woman, perhaps. In others the work of cooking is shared by members of the family. In others still, cooking at home is for a special occasion or event.

A lot of Singaporean food requires cooking at high heat, so it is a noisy, messy affair. Singaporean kitchens are architecturally distinct, being largely indoor-outdoor spaces—even in high-rise apartment buildings. Many kitchens back onto a balcony for better ventilation. There is nearly always a door between the kitchen and the living room—to protect the living space from the heat and fumes from the kitchen.

Rice is an important staple for all the ethnic groups in Singapore, and many kitchens have a rice cooker. Likewise, refrigerators are essential for the safe preservation of food in hot and humid temperatures. Kitchens will have a stovetop, often gas, but ovens are rare, since they generate too much heat in the tropical climate. Wealthy Singaporeans, however, may have ovens, and baking has become something of a class symbol.



Street food vendor preparing a spring roll in Singapore. (Shutterstock)

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***Kaya***

Kaya is a jam made with coconut and egg. Its method and qualities are similar to that of lemon curd, only with coconut and *pandan* (screw pine)-leaf flavoring. As with other jams, kaya is typically spread on toast and is eaten both at breakfast and as a snack. Traditionally kaya is made only with fresh coconuts, but it is possible to make a version with strained coconut milk. To make strained coconut milk, place a piece of muslin in a large sieve, pour a can of coconut cream into the sieve, and leave to drain for an hour.

**Ingredients**

2 c granulated sugar, if possible caster sugar

4 eggs, lightly beaten

½ c thick coconut flesh and milk, from 1 grated coconut

2 pandan (screw pine) leaves, fresh if possible

Place the sugar in a wok (or large saucepan), and slowly heat it, stirring regularly, until the sugar is golden brown. (Do not try to substitute brown

sugar!) When it has become golden, remove the pan from the heat. Once the sugar has cooled a little, transfer it to a large bowl, and add the eggs, one at a time, stirring as you go, and then add the coconut. Beat until the sugar has dissolved. Pour into a pan, and add pandan leaves. On low heat, stir the mixture until it starts to thicken (to test for thickness, place some of the mixture on the back of your spoon and run your finger through it—if it stays separate, then it is ready). Allow the kaya to cool a little before you put it in jars—this gives the pandan leaves extra time to flavor the jam. Remove the leaves just before sealing the jars. Traditionally, this mixture is not refrigerated, but it can be stored in the fridge.

## Typical Meals

Breakfast, like all meals in Singapore, varies depending on the ethnicity and social position of the person consuming it. For many Singaporeans rushing to get to work, breakfast is a quick meal—cereal with milk, toast, and so forth. Breakfast is also a meal that might be consumed on the way to work, purchased at a hawker center; this kind of meal might be *nasi lemak*—rice cooked in coconut milk, served with a rich curry gravy, peanuts, a cold hard-boiled egg, and *ikan bills* (air-dried and salted fish). Congee is another common breakfast food, especially for Chinese Singaporeans. *Tong ho choy,* "tea" made from pork ribs, various herbs, and soy sauce, might also be drunk. Tea and coffee are popular beverages, and a wide range of fresh juices—watermelon, papaya, star fruit, pineapple—are readily available.

Like breakfast, lunch could include food from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. Of all the meals it is the one at which people are most likely to eat food outside of their cultural background. This could be because they are eating with a group of colleagues or because they are grabbing a quick and self-contained meal. Noodles and rice form a staple of lunch offerings. Popular noodle dishes could be either Chinese or Malay.

Typical Malay noodle dishes are mee rebus and mee siam. The noodles in mee rebus are yellow egg noodles, and these are served in a thick and spicy gravy. The gravy is thickened with potatoes and flavored with salted soybeans, dried shrimp, and peanuts. Mee rebus may be garnished with hard-boiled egg, limes, spring onions, fried shallots, and bean sprouts. Mee siam can be served "wet" (with a lot of gravy) or "dry" (with less gravy). The noodles in this dish are thin, and the gravy, while spiced, is sour and tangy in taste and has a tamarind base. The dish can be garnished quite similarly to mee rebus and is likely to be topped with dried bean curd.

The Chinese-influenced noodle dishes that might be eaten at lunch vary from indulgent and rich dishes to austere and healthy ones. *Char koay teow* is made from flat rice noodles stir-fried with soy sauce, chili, *belachan* (shrimp paste), tamarind juice, bean sprouts, and spring onions. Other additions might include prawns, cockles, Chinese sausage, beef, and fish cakes. Traditionally, the dish is cooked in pork lard, but many stalls now offer healthier oils. *Lor mee* is another



Fish-ball soup with noodles, a very common soup in Singapore. (Yew Wah Kok | Dreamstime.com)

popular noodle dish in which a gravy of spiced cornstarch is used. Fish-ball soup and plain soups with rice noodles, a little cooked meat, and green vegetables are common choices.

Dishes served with rice are popular in Chinese, Malay, and Indian lunch choices. A very popular option is fish-head curry, in which the head of a fish is stewed in a curried gravy with vegetables such as okra and eggplant. The dish is usually served with rice, but some people will order it with bread. *Biryani,* or, as it is sometimes referred to, *nasi biryani,* is an Indian spiced rice dish. It is served both as a meal, when made with meat or fish, and as an accompaniment to wet curried dishes for special occasions. Plain white rice served with curried meat and vegetables is very popular at both lunch and dinner, especially, but not exclusively, among the Indian community. An Indian lunch meal, especially one purchased from a hawker stall, will generally include rice, dal, and two or more other dishes such as a bitter melon curry, curried mutton, curried chicken, a dish of spiced and shredded carrots and cabbage, or a green vegetable.

Snacks are a very important part of eating in Singapore and may be had at most times of the day and night. They are multiethnic and widely available. *Tahu goreng* (fried tofu) is one such snack food. The tofu is deep-fried, then cut into triangles and served with bean sprouts, cucumber, spring onions, and a dark, spiced sauce enriched with tamarind, chili, and shrimp paste. Indian snacks might include *murtabak,* a folded and fried bread filled with ground mutton, eggs, and onions and served with a dipping gravy. A less filling version of this dish—*roti prata*—is very popular: unfilled fried bread served with a dipping gravy. *Popiah,* a local variant of a fresh spring roll, is also a popular snack. The exterior is made of a flour-based crepe, and it is filled with a sweet hoisin-based sauce and a mixture of white turnip or jicama, grated carrots, chopped lettuce, tofu, and bean sprouts. It can be topped with fried shallots and peanuts. Curry puffs are a very common snack food. These are small pies made of a puff pastry, filled with curry—vegetarian or chicken and vegetables—and deep-fried. All these snacks can be purchased at small stalls or coffee shops and at hawker markets.

A wide variety of drinks are available in Singapore, and many will be consumed with snacks or instead of a snack. Cold drinks include fresh fruit juices; fresh lime juice diluted with water and sugar is another popular fruit drink. Milk-based drinks—such as Milo Dinosaurs (a chocolate-malt drink with an extra scoop of powder on top)—are quite popular as are bubble teas. India-style tea and *teh tarik* (a pulled tea in which condensed milk is rapidly poured to create both texture and foam) are very popular. Coffee is widely consumed, both in the commercial form produced by international chains and in local variants, often sweetened with condensed milk. Alcoholic beverages, including the locally produced Tiger beer, are available but high priced.

Dinner might include many of the aforementioned items eaten for lunch. It is a meal that is likely to be shared and to include many more dishes—but perhaps only a few mouthfuls of each dish. Some dishes are less likely to be shared—such as *laksa,* a coconut-based noodle soup—but many families will order or cook a range of dishes, which might include meats, fish, vegetables, tofu, rice, and noodles. Many families will purchase some or all of the dishes for an evening meal at a local hawker center but may well eat at home. Singapore's signature dish, chili crab, while not eaten every day, may make an appearance even in hawker fare. The dish is made with soft-shell crabs, such as a mud crab, and the sauce has a base of chili and tomato, flavored with garlic and rice vinegar and thickened with flour and ribbons of egg. It is often served with *mantou*—steamed bread rolls.

If eaten out, especially if eaten in a hawker center, dinner is more likely to include dessert. There is a wide range of Singaporean desserts. One of the most popular is *ice kacang,* a mixture of shaved ice, sweet syrup, and beans. Fruit is often included, and the syrup is brightly colored so the dessert forms a large cone of multicolored ice. Variations are also common in the toppings, including grass jelly, palm seeds, coconut milk, corn, and red beans. Tropical fruits are often served for dessert and are used in other desserts, too, such as mango pudding, which is made with mango, evaporated milk, sugar, and agar.

A typical meal in Singapore is shared. That could be both in the sense of not eating alone and in the



Dessert kebabs made with fruit and glazed being sold in an all-night market. (Kelvintt | Dreamstime.com)

sense of sharing dishes. One particularly notable Singaporean dish is chicken rice. It is a dish that can be enjoyed by Singaporean of all religious groups. The dish relies on a master stock, identifying it as Chinese in origin, but also includes ingredients from Southeast Asia, such as sweet Indonesian-style soy sauce—*kecap manis* (from which the word *ketchup* is derived).

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**Chicken Rice**

**Ingredients**

*For the Master Stock*

2 chicken carcasses with meat removed
4–6 chicken wings
3 pieces ginger
2 shallots, or 1 red onion

*For the Chicken*

1 chicken (as fresh as possible)
6 thick slices fresh ginger
2–3 cloves garlic, peeled and crushed
4 shallots, sliced in a few pieces
1 tbsp Chinese rice wine
2 tbsp soy sauce, divided
1 tsp sesame oil
½ tsp salt

*For the Rice*

3 c rice, preferably long-grain
2 tbsp chicken fat or vegetable oil
1 small piece ginger, finely grated
3–4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 tsp salt
3½ c chicken stock

*For the Chili Sauce*

10 small red chili peppers, seeds removed
3 cloves garlic
1 large piece ginger
2 tsp chicken stock
1 lime, juiced (kaffir limes or regular limes)
Salt to taste

*For the Ginger Sauce for Dipping*

1 large piece ginger
6 cloves garlic
½ tsp salt
2 tsp lime juice
2 tbsp chicken stock

*For the Chicken Soup*

Chicken stock (from the boiled chicken)
Chopped shallots and a little bit of cabbage, chopped

*As a Garnish or Condiment*

Sliced cucumbers, sesame oil, and fresh cilantro

A large stockpot is required for this dish. Begin by making the master stock. Place the chicken carcasses and wings in a large stockpot. Add the ginger and shallots. Cover generously with water. Bring to a boil. Skim the foam from the surface. Turn the temperature down, and let the mixture cook for at least 90 minutes, stirring occasionally. The stock will now need to be strained. Using a large sieve pour the liquid into a large bowl. Discard the bones and

other flavorings. The stock can be left to cool. If left overnight a layer of chicken fat will form on top; this can be discarded (not traditional) or used to cook the rice.

When you are ready to cook the chicken, heat the stock; you will need a pot large enough to fit a whole chicken and sufficient liquid to cover it. Make a paste of the ginger, garlic, and shallot. Rub the chicken inside with rice wine and a little soy sauce, and place the paste inside. Bring the stock to a boil, turn off the heat, and put the chicken into the stock with more pieces of ginger and shallot. Every 5 minutes lift the chicken out of the stock and let the liquid drain. Then put it back into the pot. Repeat several times to make sure the chicken cooks through. After half an hour turn the heat back on, but be sure not to let the stock boil. Then turn the heat off again, and let it sit for another half an hour undisturbed. Then remove the chicken from the pot and rub with more soy sauce, sesame oil, and salt. Let cool, and then cut directly through the bones with a heavy cleaver into bite-sized pieces.

To make the rice, begin by washing the rice and draining it. Next, put the chicken fat or oil in a hot wok, and fry the chopped ginger and garlic. Remove them, and add rice and toss for about a minute or two. Remove the rice, place in a pot, and add chicken stock. Bring to a boil, then lower the heat and cook gently, covered, for about 20 minutes.

The chili sauce is made by chopping the chilies with the garlic and ginger and either pounding it into a fine paste with a mortar and pestle or pureeing it in a food processor. Add some stock, lime juice, and salt. The ginger sauce is made the same way. These are both served on the side.

For the chicken soup, reheat the master stock and ladle a small amount into serving bowls. Add finely chopped shallot. Blanch the cabbage and add to the bowls.

To serve, the sauces should be placed on the table, so people can add them to suit their taste. The kecap manis should also be placed on the table. The chopped chicken can be placed on a platter, and the rice is served individually. Slices of cucumber, dressed with sesame oil and topped with cilantro, can be placed either on a separate platter or under the chopped chicken.

## Eating Out

Singapore is a nation of eaters, and much of this eating takes place outside the home. In part, this is a product of geography. The island of Singapore is very small, and the housing is largely high-rise apartments, so that a variety of public spaces are vitally important to Singaporean food culture and socializing. The coffee shop is not just a place where people eat and drink, it is a social space in which Singaporeans "talk-cock," that is, talk hyperbolically, voice conspiracy theories, and gossip.

The hawker center is likewise a vital part of the fabric of Singaporean society—a space where the quality of the food is far more important than the decor. While eating is a universal human experience, for Singaporeans it takes on a preeminent position in definitions of both the national and the everyday lived experience. The popular Singlish phrase, "die die must try," is not so much an exaggeration as it is a reflection of the lengths that Singaporeans will go to find great dishes.

A huge array of food is available in Singapore. Singaporean cuisine is certainly worthy of celebration, but it is also a city in which foods from all over the world can be sampled. There are, of course, the ubiquitous chains—KFC, Deli-France, Starbucks—but there is far more than this; there are European, Australian, and Asian restaurants, there are casual places and glamorous places, there is terrible pizza and delicious pizza, there are Vietnamese delicacies and Sri Lankan curries, and there is spaghetti cooked in a wok.

Food provides Singaporeans with a memory of home, with comfort and nostalgia, as it does elsewhere; but in a society that has undergone substantial change in a relatively short amount of time, food serves as a poignant connection to the ever-changing past. Eating—the how and the what—has provided a unifying experience for a diverse society, a metaphor for multiracialism and recognizable national symbols for a fledgling state.

## Special Occasions

Chinese New Year is an important event for Chinese communities around the world, including Singapore. For Chinese Singaporeans the reunion meal (New Year's Eve meal) is highly significant and may be eaten at home or out. If eaten out, it is a very expensive affair, with many restaurants charging by the table rather than by the number of diners. The menus, at home or out, incorporate a range of specific foods associated with key concepts of good fortune in Chinese ideology.

In Singapore, *lo hei,* a fish salad, is commonly eaten at the start of a celebratory meal on the seventh day of the Chinese New Year. The dish is said to have the capacity to raise good luck. The dish has a clearly performative aspect—all the ingredients are chopped, perhaps including the fish, shredded white radish, carrots, red peppers, and shrimp crackers. A family, or gathering of friends, will crowd around the platter that it is being served in, and using their chopsticks they will toss the salad ingredients in the air, calling as they do "Jíxiáng Huà"—auspicious wishes and greetings. The higher you toss, the greater your fortunes are reputed to be.

The dish is a crucial part of Singaporean Chinese New Year celebrations, but it would not be recognizable to a mainland Chinese person. Although the origins of the dish are Chinese—a raw fish salad tossed by the diners—the dish as eaten in Singapore originated in 1964 at the Lai Wah Restaurant and was invented as a symbol of prosperity and good health among the Chinese.

Moon cakes, eaten at the Mid-August (or Zhongqiu) Festival, are another traditional celebratory food for Chinese Singaporeans. Moon cakes are



Fish salad, traditional cuisine eaten during Chinese New Year. (Wai Chung Tang | Dreamstime.com)

made of a light dough and a sweet, dense filling. The cakes contain one or more whole salted egg yolks in their center to symbolize the full moon.

For Indian and Malay Singaporeans, festival foods are also important. For Malay Singaporeans the Islamic calendar determines many of these, with Ramadan being the most significant. During Ramadan, Singaporean Muslims fast during the day and break their fast in the evening with quite luscious foods—a practice more common in Southeast Asia than in the Middle East. The end of Ramadan (or Hari Raya Puasa) is marked with especially delicious foods, generally in the form of a family feast. As this is a time marked by openness of heart and mind, non-Muslim friends and colleagues are often invited to share the meal.

Deepavali, the Festival of Lights, is celebrated by Hindus and Sikhs in Singapore; from a culinary perspective it is a time of small snacks, especially sweets. The festival is a public holiday in Singapore and a time when people visit friends and family and receive guests, with ensuing hospitality.

Aside from religious festivals, weddings are considered one of the most special of occasions in Singapore, underscored in Singapore by anxiety about falling birth rates, associated in the public mind with delays in marriage. Wedding food varies by ethnicity and social class. A midrange Chinese wedding banquet, for example, might include eight or nine dishes. Only one to two of these would be sweet—perhaps red bean cakes with lotus seeds—and the majority would be savory. Dishes would be intended to be shared by the table rather than plated individually. The shared dishes would likely include a shark's-fin dish and a range of other seafood dishes, such as scallops with celery or steamed sea bass. There would be meat dishes, perhaps roast pork or a golden fried chicken dish. There would also be a vegetable dish and a noodle dish, like braised *ee-fun* noodles.

A more elaborate and expensive Chinese-style wedding banquet would offer a greater number of dishes, probably 10, and more elaborate dishes. One distinction is exemplified by the different ways shark's fin might be presented on a wedding catering menu. A basic affair might list "Braised Shark's Fin with Crabmeat in Thick Sauce," while a midrange menu might include "Shark's-Fin Soup with Crabmeat and Golden Mushrooms in Lotus Leaf." The most expensive menu would have more elaborate preparations and more expensive ingredients, such as "Double-Boiled Superior Shark's Fin in Thick Sauce." The 10-course version would tend to include more seafood (maybe abalone and dishes of whole fish), more poultry (especially roasted duck), and more meat (generally more pork dishes).

The menus at Malay and Indian weddings would be equally elaborate, although in the typical Malay wedding banquet, rules of halal food preparation exclude pork. Items in a Malay wedding banquet might include a spicy mutton soup, fried or baked chicken, *ikan asam manis* (a sweet and sour fish dish), some kind of *satay* dish (meat or seafood grilled on a skewer), a curried vegetable dish, and a rice dish (*nasi goreng*—fried rice—or *nasi padang*—a pilaf-style dish). Again, a simple dessert course would be served—maybe coconut and pandan-leaf flavored sweets or bean curd served with fruit.

Some families serve buffet-style wedding banquets—generally a more expensive option. Such a buffet might include up to 20 savory dishes and a notably more elaborate dessert menu, including perhaps 5 to 10 different sweets and a wide range of fresh fruit. The buffet would certainly include a range of beef dishes—like beef *rendang* (a slow-cooked beef curry)—and far more side dishes, such as *bawang sambal telur* (an egg and onion dish).

Singaporean Indian weddings are both Indian and Singaporean in character. In form, the Indian wedding banquet is structured more like a Western meal, with a clearer distinction between appetizers and the main course. Appetizers might include *allo chaat* (a potato dish) and grilled chicken dishes. Like the Malay menu, a soup would be included. There would be a range of meat dishes, probably a chicken dish, a mutton curry of some variety, and a dish like *machchi* curry (a Goan-style fish dish). The banquet would also include a range of vegetable dishes such as *aloo gobhi* (potato and cauliflower curry) and *mattar paneer* (pea and cheese curry), as well as curries made from okra and eggplant. There would be plain basmati rice, *biryani* rice (basmati rice cooked with spices

and meat), and condiments such as a fresh chutney made with cilantro. To finish the meal there might be *gajar halwa* (a sweet carrot dish) or *gulab jamun* (a sweet dairy-based dessert served in a sugar syrup).

## Diet and Health

Singapore has an enviable world-class health care system. Despite the culinary focus of the culture, the population has not been beset by the problems of widespread obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and so forth. That said, the government takes an active role in preventative campaigning. In the "Healthy Choices" campaign, for example, Singaporeans are encouraged to select foods that are less rich and lower in fat and to eat coconut-based dishes in moderation because of the high levels of saturated fat. Stalls at hawker markets will display government signs about types of oils, indicating that a "healthy choice" can be made at their stall. Largely, Singaporeans are quite health conscious.

While traditional medical practitioners play a role in Singaporean health care, people are more likely to consult these specialists for minor matters, especially relating to the skin and stress. Additionally, the medicinal properties of food are widely respected by members of the three major ethnic groups, and people will alter their food choices in line with, for example, Chinese medical practices. There are a range of restaurants that cater to these needs. It is possible, for example, to order soups with specific herbs or ones that are prescribed for specific conditions.

All three major ethnic groups in Singapore follow specific dietary practices for pregnancy and the period following birth. The month or so after birth is referred to as the confinement period, which was traditionally characterized by a specific diet and the assistance of a confinement specialist who would cook the required foods and help the mother with the new baby. During this period the mother would not leave the home, hence confinement. Confinement diets are continually evolving and will both prohibit some foods and prescribe others. Today, many Singaporean women follow some of the practices of confinement, especially the confinement diet, and middle-class women still often employ a confinement specialist.

There are significant similarities between Chinese, Malay, and Indian confinement practices, but there are also some important variations. The Chinese confinement diet aims to enhance immunity and to help women regain physical strength. Restrictions include discouraging eating cold food. Cold in this context means both temperature and temperament. It is believed that cold foods can harm the spleen because they retard the discharge of toxins. Foods that are considered cold include some meats and seafoods (especially snails, clams, and oysters), certain fruits (including pomelo, star fruit, and watermelon), a range of vegetables (mushrooms, bitter gourd, water spinach, bamboo shoots), and other items such as seaweed and soy sauce.

Malay mothers in confinement are discouraged from eating spicy food, foods cooked with coconut milk, shellfish, and eggs. Their confinement diet emphasizes soft food, especially soups, often served with rice, as well as noodle dishes. Indian confinement diets also have restrictions and a focus on the role of food as medicinal. Additionally, certain foods are encouraged as aiding bodily functions—for example, brown sugar to expel blood from the uterus or toasted garlic to increase lactation. In all three traditions, women are encouraged to drink warm rather than cold water.

*Nicole Tarulevicz*

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# Sri Lanka

## Overview

Known as Ceylon until 1972, Sri Lanka ("resplendent isle") is a teardrop-shaped island located in the Indian Ocean approximately 30 miles south of India. Sri Lanka is considered part of the Indian Subcontinent, which also includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan. The country is made up of nine provinces and 25 districts. Besides being Sri Lanka's capital and largest city, Colombo has served as a major seaport since the fifth century. During the 15th and 16th centuries, foreign traders from the Netherlands, Portugal, and Great Britain brought spices and cooking styles from all over the world to Sri Lanka. As a result, Sri Lankan cuisine reflects these influences, along with aspects of Arab, Malay, and Indian food and cooking techniques.

Language and religion shape Sri Lanka's ethnic groups. Among the population of 20 million, 73 percent are Sinhalese, 18 percent are Tamils, and 9 percent are Muslims. There are also smaller communities of Veddas, Burghers, Moors, and other ethnic groups. The majority of Sri Lankans follow Buddhism. Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and other religions are also practiced. The common perception is that the prevalence of vegetarian dishes in Sri Lankan cuisine is due to religious reasons. While vegetarianism is more prevalent among Hindus, Sri Lanka's tropical climate and long history as an agricultural society, along with the rising price of meat, also play a major role in the population's preference for vegetables.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Padma Vaas is a high school student who lives in Colombo with her parents and younger brother. Her family is considered middle class, with both parents employed professionally. On weekdays, Padma eats a quick breakfast of *hoppers* (little bowl-shaped rice-flour pancakes), fruit, and hot tea before heading off to classes. For lunch, her mother packs her rice and curry, or she purchases a lunch packet from the street vendor by her school. Padma occasionally picks up a pastry or roti (flatbread) from a short-eats stand after school. Dinner, the most substantial meal of the day, provides an opportunity for the family to catch up and is always eaten together. Padma's mother starts cooking around 6 P.M., with the family sitting down to eat by 8 P.M. A typical weekday-night dinner for the Vaas family is steamed rice, a fish or chicken curry dish, and two or three vegetable or lentil curry side dishes.

However, it is on the weekends that Padma and her mother really have the opportunity to cook together and talk. The urban home garden they started last year has now flourished, yielding abundant eggplant (*brinjal*) and chili harvests. The day's menu is planned the night before, followed by an early-morning trip to Pettah Market, an open-air market in Colombo with a dizzying array of wares, spices, vegetables, dried fish, and fruits. Dried shrimp, *goraka* (dried fruit for curry dishes), *Maldive fish* (dried fish), and coconut meat are frequently on the Vaas's shopping list. Once home, Padma and her mother spend the remainder of the day preparing the dinner meal—which includes a lengthy process of roasting spices and simmering a multitude

of curry dishes. On the weekends, up to 12 side dishes may be served, sometimes more if extended family members visit.

## Major Foodstuffs

Despite the rise of the manufacturing sector, Sri Lanka remains mainly an agricultural society—tea, rubber, coconut, cacao, and spices are key exports. Tea estates can be found throughout the southern and central regions at altitudes between 3,000 and 8,000 feet. Tea was first commercially produced in Sri Lanka in 1867 by a Scot, James Taylor, and was largely controlled by British companies until 1971, when the Sri Lankan government assumed ownership through the Land Reform Act. The majority of the world's spices are also produced by Sri Lanka. These include cinnamon, cardamom, pepper, turmeric, and ginger. Two-thirds of the world's supply of cinnamon is grown in Sri Lanka.

Rice is a main staple of the Sri Lankan diet. Over 15 varieties are grown for local consumption, along with fruits and vegetables. Bowl-shaped, thin pancakes (hoppers) are considered native to Sri Lanka and eaten as a staple for breakfast and lunch. To make *stringhoppers,* rice flour and salt are formed into a paste and forced through a mortar with a circular opening (*ural*) onto a steaming tray. They are then steamed for 5–10 minutes and served with *sambal* (coconut-based chutney) and/or curries. Stringhoppers can also be purchased ready-made in restaurants and grocery stores. Other types of hoppers include egg, milk, and sweet varieties (*vanduappa, paniappa*).

Sri Lanka's year-round tropical climate offers a fruit paradise with many varieties: mangoes, papayas, durians, bananas, passion fruit, mangosteens, and rambutans, among others. Besides being used for refreshing drinks, fruit is a central ingredient for producing chutneys, cordials, syrups, jams, and marmalades.

Seafood factors heavily into the Sri Lankan diet, with fishing connected to the country's two monsoon seasons. Cattle are mainly used for milk and farmwork. Though some Sri Lankan dishes incorporate beef as an ingredient, Hindus highly revere cows and do not eat beef. Most Buddhists also refrain from beef consumption.



Display of fruit in a Sri Lankan vendor's stall. Many tropical fruits are native to Sri Lanka, including durians, passion fruit, and woodapples. (Shutterstock)

The most popular nonalcoholic beverage in Sri Lanka is tea sweetened with sugar or milk. Coffee is rarely drunk, though available in more upscale urban areas. Popular drinks on a hot tropical day are *tambili* (water from orange coconuts) and *kurumba* (water from young coconuts)—both are believed to bring health benefits. The most popular alcoholic drink is *arrack,* which is distilled from fermented coconut-palm or palmyra-tree sap (toddy). Toddy tappers travel between treetops using rope walkways high above ground to collect sap, "tapping" up to 100 trees a day.

Popular snacks include a deep-fried patty made of lentils and flour (*vadai*) and a soft tortilla filled with different mixtures such as meat, vegetables, and chili peppers (*rotty*). Two sweets commonly consumed in Sri Lanka are *kavun* and *wattalapan.* Made of rice flour and treacle, kavun is deep-fried until golden brown. Wattalapan, first introduced by the Malays, is a steamed pudding cake made of coconut milk, eggs, and jaggery (refined sugar from palm-tree sap). Most sweets are of South Indian (Tamil Nadu) origin and are served during New Year celebrations.

## Cooking

Globalization has heralded an influx of fast-food options such as McDonald's and Pizza Hut in Sri Lanka. However, most meals are still traditionally

cooked, though exact recipes are seldom followed and preparation can be labor-intensive. Cooking in middle- and upper-class families may be handled by cooks or servants. In households without servants, women are responsible for housework and meal preparation. However, gender roles are shifting, especially in urban households where both the husband and wife may be employed outside of the home.

Due to the smokiness associated with Sri Lankan cooking, the traditional kitchen is located either at the back of the main house or in a detached structure. An open fireplace (*lipa*) is common, with coconut-frond stems serving as fuel for the fire. A brick or iron oven with a door handle and fire pit is also frequently found in rural homes. However, since many aspects of the traditional kitchen are impractical, the two-burner propane stove has now replaced the lipa in most modern kitchens.

Many Sri Lankan dishes appear similar to those of South India, though two distinguishing hallmarks are the use of extremely hot spices and local ingredients. Sri Lankan dishes are considered among the spiciest in the world. Hot chilies, such as *amu miris, kochchii miris,* and *maalu miris* (capsicum), are frequently incorporated into dishes, along with coconut milk.

Unique fresh herb- and spice-preparation methods (roasting, pounding, tempering) also distinguish the cuisine from others. Traditional kitchens often have a chili stone (*mirisgala*) made of granite (or another hard stone) that serves as a hard surface for grinding chilies and whole spices. A mortar and pestle (*vangediya*) is used for ingredients that cannot be effectively pounded on the mirisgala. The cylinder-shaped mortar is also made of a hard stone and can reach heights and widths of up to 12 inches. Pestles may be up to five feet long and are generally made of *kitul* wood. In modern times, spice preparation involves heating spices in a dry pan until fragrant, then grinding them in an electric grinder once cool.

Regional availability of fresh ingredients largely defines the variances in dishes served. The north is known for the palmyra tree, while rice, fish, and jackfruit appear frequently in dishes from the south. In the central region, also hill country, vegetables and mutton are the mainstays, with fish and spices used less intensely. Maldive fish (dried fish) is another local ingredient often used to thicken and flavor dishes, especially vegetable curries.

The two most prevalent frying techniques are tempering and sautéing, with the first being more common. Whereas sautéing is a gentler form of cooking ingredients in a flat-bottomed skillet until translucent, tempered ingredients are fried over very high heat until they are fragrant and golden brown. Following tempering, the ingredients are then simmered on low heat with a partially closed lid. Seasonings are adjusted just before the food is served. Clay pots are the preferred cooking vessel—older pots flavor food more intensely and function similar to cast iron skillets in Western cooking.

## Typical Meals

A simple Sinhalese greeting literally translates into "Have you eaten rice?" The typical Sri Lankan meal (also called "rice and curry") is not divided into separate courses, such as appetizers and entrées. Instead, all dishes are served at the same time, with rice being the central mainstay, accompanied by curry-based side dishes. Lighter fare (called short eats) may be served first at social events, though.

After everyone has been served, meals are traditionally eaten using the fingertips of the right hand to form small balls of rice and curry. In rural homes, meals are consumed while seated on leaf mats on the floor; in urban settings, the dining room table is the site of social activity and meals. While multigenerational households are fairly common throughout Sri Lanka, the number of nuclear families is on the rise with the influences of westernization and urbanization. Most Sri Lankans consume three meals a day (breakfast, lunch, and dinner).

Traditional breakfasts, especially in rural homes, consist of tea and rice-based dishes, including hoppers, a steamed rice/coconut mixture (*pittu*), panfried soft bread (*rotis*), milk rice (*kiri buth*), and leftover rice, curries, and sambals. City dwellers may have bread, fruit, and eggs during weekdays and a more substantial, traditional breakfast on the weekends.

Steamed rice and curry form the staples of lunch and dinner meals and are consumed almost daily. Dinner, usually eaten around 8 P.M., is considered the



Egg hoppers, a crepelike hopper containing a fried egg. (Paul Cowan | Dreamstime.com)

heaviest meal of the day. The typical meal consists of a main curry, made with fish or meat, and several vegetable-, fruit-, or lentil-based curries (*dhal*). Depending on the spices and seasonings used, curries can be white, brown, black, or red. Coconut is frequently incorporated as a base in many dishes. Up to 12 side dishes can be served; these include pickles, chutneys, and spicy chili-based condiments or sauces (sambals).

***Brinjal (Eggplant) Sambal***

Sambals tend to be spicy hot and are served as a condiment or relish alongside rice and curry dishes. There are many variations of sambals—sugar (*seeni*) sambals are the most traditional. Typical sambals use different combinations of chilies, vegetables, and spices.

*Serves 2*

¼ lb eggplant, diced
¼ tsp ground turmeric (optional)
½ tsp salt
1½ tbsp canola or vegetable oil
1–2 chilies, chopped
¼ c yellow onions, chopped
½ lime, juiced
1½ tbsp coconut milk
Salt to taste

Wash and dice eggplant. Season with turmeric (if using) and salt. Heat oil and fry eggplant until browned. Remove from pan and drain on a paper towel. Mix chilies, onions, lime juice, and coconut milk. Combine with eggplant, and add salt as needed.

Most meals end with a serving of fruit, which is readily available on this tropical island. Desserts are reserved for special occasions and teatime.

## Eating Out

Sri Lanka has been slow to cultivate a distinctive restaurant culture, since most authentic meals are served within the home. *Buth kadé* (a rice shop) and *kopi kadé* (a coffee shop) selling short eats are available in most towns and villages. As a result of globalization, American fast-food chains are becoming more prominent, though fast food is considered more of a snack than a meal. The impact of tourism can be observed, with at least one Chinese-style restaurant in each town, and restaurants serving local and international cuisines in most large urban cities. Lunch packets (rice, curry, curried vegetables, and sambal), typically sold between 11 A.M. and 2 P.M., are also immensely popular.

## Special Occasions

Sri Lankans embrace a strong connection between food and festivities—food embodies much more than



The interior of a typical Sri Lankan restaurant. (StockPhotoPro)

just a means for survival. As a symbol of life and fertility, rice is frequently incorporated into celebrations. For example, milk rice (kiri buth) is served at almost all major ceremonial festivities, including as a baby's first solid food, the first food a new bride and groom serve each other, and a food eaten during the New Year. For the Sinhalese, milk rice boiling over the pot is considered to be a good-luck omen during New Year celebrations. Alcoholic beverages are not included as part of any formal ceremonial festivities.

There are over 30 public Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian holidays celebrated annually—many which correspond to the full moon (*poya*) and lunar calendar. The Buddhist and Hindu Sri Lankan New Year (Aurudu) occurs on April 14, which aligns with the end of the harvest season and beginning of the southwestern monsoon season. Special foods enjoyed during these festivities include plantains, oil cake (*kaung*), and sweetmeat (*kokis*).

The beginning of the harvest (Thai Pongal) is celebrated by Hindus in January with boiled milk, rice, and jaggery (*pongal*) offered to the sun god. In honor of Ramadan, Muslims fast until Eid al-Fitr, when dates, steamed pudding (*vatalappan*), and rice porridge (congee) with a spicy meat-rice dish (*biryani*) are shared and eaten.

## Diet and Health

Ayurveda, an ancient medicinal system that views the five elements (air, earth, light, water, ether) as connected with the five senses and an individual's biological, psychological, and physiological life forces (*doshas*), is popular in Sri Lanka. The premise is that when doshas are out of balance, disease and illness may prevail. Almost all foods are classified into a "hot" or "cold" framework, whereby over- or underconsumption may contribute to health issues.

Herbs, roots, spices, and dietary changes are often prescribed to address unbalanced doshas. For example, when consumed in moderation, tea is believed to have medicinal properties, ranging from improved digestion to prevention of heart disease. *Gotu kola,* another leafy green plant commonly used in Sri Lankan dishes (*mallung*), is also believed to possess health benefits as a diuretic and mild anti-inflammatory and antibacterial, among other functions.

*Mary Gee*

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# Thailand

## Overview

Thailand is a constitutional monarchy, headed by the longest-ruling monarch in the world, King Bhumibol Aduladej. Bangkok, the capital, dominates the economy and culture of the country. The Thai in Thailand make up the dominant ethnic majority in the country—about 75 percent of the population. Many other ethnic minorities including Chinese and Vietnamese live in towns and cities, and groups such as the Lisu, Chin, Kachin and Akha, and Hmong occupy more marginal lands, including upland forests. Theravada Buddhism is the dominant religion in Thailand. The upland peoples often practice shifting (swidden) cultivation; fields are cleared, burned for fertilizer, planted, harvested, and left to fallow; these subsistence farmers then shift to plant new fields. Rivers such as the Mekong and Chao Phraya create rich alluvial soils ideally suited for wet-rice agriculture. Between the uplands and the lowland river valleys, there are a variety of different agricultural niches. Rice, the dominant staple of Thailand, adapts to these different ecological niches.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Thongchai and Lek live with their two school-age daughters in the suburbs of Bangkok. Thongchai is a Thai civil servant, and Lek works in a bank. Every morning, they set the electric rice cooker to have hot rice available by 6 A.M., when Lek's mother stands outside the door to offer rice to the orange-robed monks who pass by their laneway on their way back to the temple from their morning alms round. Thongchai and Lek make coffee and eat a quick meal of rice and leftover dishes from last night's dinner. Their daughters prefer toast and jam with a yogurt drink that they learned to like at school. Lek drops the girls at school after two hours in the congested Bangkok traffic.

Lunch is a formal Chinese restaurant meal with business associates for Thongchai, and a quick bowl of noodles from her favorite street vendor for Lek. She uses her lunch hour to pick up vegetables and condiments at a nearby supermarket and keeps them fresh in a cooler in her car. Like busy women everywhere, Lek does not have a great deal of time to devote to food preparation. Lek might be considered one of Bangkok's many plastic-bag housewives, who pick up bags of wonderful side dishes on the way home from work from street vendors. Leaving work at 5 P.M., Lek returns to her favorite street vendors and picks up plastic bags of freshly made beef curry, *tom yam kung* (tamarind-based shrimp soup), and some Thai desserts made from agar-agar and coconut, favorites of her girls.

Once home, electric rice cookers make monitoring the timing for cooked rice a thing of the past. Electric grinders and blenders shave hours from complex food-processing tasks such as making flavor pastes. Once a week, the family does a larger shopping trip at a supermarket near their home. Thongchai prefers buying fish and fresh vegetables at the open markets early on Saturday morning, but Lek enjoys the air-conditioned comfort of the supermarket where she can pick up vegetables and condiments from all over the world, as well as packages of precut vegetables, fresh herbs, and shrimp paste for making traditional Thai side dishes "from scratch."

## Major Foodstuffs

In Thailand, rice is the dominant and preferred cereal crop; it is used for making noodles, rice flour, and rice wine, and it is valued far beyond its nutritional value. Rice needs constant attention from humans to grow, for rice has a soul that must be nurtured. The best-known Thai rice is the long-grain variety known as aromatic jasmine. High-yielding varieties of rice are widely grown in Thailand and exported to North America and elsewhere. Thailand is the world's largest exporter of rice, with around 10 million metric tons projected for the year 2010.

Since the 1960s, high-yielding varieties of irrigated wet rice produced by the green revolution increased rice yields dramatically in the country. However, the newer varieties rely on irrigation to flourish and require insecticides and fertilizers to produce high yields. They also damaged the delicate rice ecologies and encouraged a shift away from subsistence production. Nevertheless, most rice grown in Thailand comes from modern high-yielding varieties. Dry rice varieties are grown in the uplands. Rice is milled and polished in local rice mills. Thai in the north and northeast of the country use glutinous or sticky rice as their daily staple. In other areas of the country, glutinous rice is grown for making desserts, rice flour, and rice wine. Unpolished black and purple varieties are particularly popular for making special desserts.

Fish is also very important in the Thai diet. Freshwater fish, sea fish, and shellfish are the major sources of protein for most meals. Snapper, catfish, and mackerel are popular fish eaten in the country. The Thai enjoy a long coastline that gives them access to an abundance of fish plus lobsters, crabs, squids, and shrimp. Many rural Thai raise fish in ponds near their homes and rice fields. People seek out fresh fish



A food stall in an open air market in Bangkok, Thailand. (Jiri Kulhanek | Dreamstime.com)

in rivers, streams, or ponds late in the day to eat for the evening meal. Fish and other seafood are widely available in the open markets. Small sun-dried and salted fish are popular additions to meals throughout the year. Fish are most plentiful in the rice fields after the rainy season (October to December). Today, raw fish dishes are discouraged as public health officials consider them unhealthy.

Accompanying most Thai meals is a sauce or paste made from fermented fish or shellfish. The fish are salted, dried, pounded, and packed with toasted rice and rice husks in jars for a month or more. Fish sauce (in Thai, *nam plaa*) is a crucial ingredient in most Thai dishes. The Thai make a fermented salted shrimp mixture usually mixed with chili peppers, called *kapi.* Most often, fish sauce is mixed with chili peppers. The Thai term *nam prik* refers to a fish sauce mixed with ground roasted chilies and other local ingredients according to the region of the country to produce *nam prik plaa pon* (with the addition of ground dried fish), *nam prik plaa raa* (with the addition of fermented fish), *nam prik kapi* (with the addition of shrimp paste), or *nam prik ong* (with the addition of ground pork and tomatoes).

Side dishes including raw salads are made using a wide range of fresh greens and vegetables, including different varieties of onions, garlic, water spinach, eggplants (from long green or purple plants used for grilling or stir-fries to tiny bitter pealike plants flavoring Thai curries), banana blossoms, bitter melons, lotus, bok choy, rapini, napa cabbage, sweet potatoes, bean sprouts (from soy and mung beans), and a wide variety of local greens. Fruit is eaten as a snack between meals or incorporated into special desserts like mangoes and sticky rice.

## Cooking

Thai cooks seek out the freshest possible ingredients and spend a great deal of time cutting and preparing them for cooking. But cooking times are usually short and make use of simple techniques like boiling, steaming, and grilling. Cooking techniques in Thai households are not learned through cookbooks, although Thai cookbooks authored by celebrities sell well in a market that is fascinated with elite cooks and royal meals. Professional chefs may read cookbooks to learn what is new in Hong Kong or Singapore, but chefs expect that books will not reveal all secrets about a dish, including a complete listing of all ingredients. The idea of recording favorite family recipes has a long history among the Thai elite. Since the late 1800s, cremation volumes, small books given away at funerals, often included cooking instructions and favorite recipes of the deceased.

Kitchens of the rural poor are sparse and may contain only an open fire or a closed ceramic or cement bucket-like stove, a mortar and pestle, cutting board, bamboo steamer, cleaver, wok, spatula, ladle, coconut graters, and baskets for storing rice, vegetables, and spices. The space is always clean and uncluttered, as the equipment is often hung vertically on hooks. Coconut-shell implements are rapidly being replaced by plastic in communities with markets and a cash economy. Dishes may be limited to a few enamel plates or bowls. Food may also be served in cucumbers, coconuts, and pineapples or wrapped in banana or pandanus leaves. Urban Thai households have kitchens as modern and elaborate as Euro-American kitchens, with electric refrigerators, stoves, rice cookers, microwave ovens, and a wide range of specialized appliances from local, Japanese, and European suppliers. But these modern urban homes may also have a simple village-style kitchen behind the house with a charcoal stove, grill, and mortar and pestle for preparing traditional dishes.

Supermarkets in the cities of Thailand provide precut ingredients to simplify cooking tasks in households no longer employing cooks. Many elements of a Thai meal can be prepared ahead in quantities and kept in jars or frozen for later use. For example, fried onions and garlic can be prepared in quantity and stored in jars; curry pastes can be ground in amounts sufficient for several meals; ground toasted rice for Thai-Lao dishes can be prepared and stored for later use; and canned coconut milk and rice paper make meal preparation easier for urban cooks and displaced Thai in North America. Canned bamboo shoots are acceptable substitutes in American kitchens.

The popularity of Thai food overseas has been reinforced by the availability and promotion of

semiprepared Thai food in food kits (also for sale in the Bangkok airport). Outside of Thailand, flavor pastes have recently become available in powdered, canned, and frozen forms, lessening the burden for new immigrants to Australia, Europe, and North America who want to make the dishes they remember from home. To release the flavors, one fries the paste in oil or heats it in coconut milk.

The palace kitchens of the Indianized royal courts in Thailand and Cambodia always produced more elaborate recipes and meals. In the 1800s, Western cooks were hired to teach Western-style dishes to palace cooks. Culinary skills for women were particularly highly valued. The service of royal wives and concubines provided the extra effort necessary to make elaborate meals with theatrical garnishes; time-consuming carving of fruit and vegetables displayed royal power. Even a carved flower made from a green onion, a chili pepper, or a radish could turn a simple stir-fry into a dish fit for a king. The Thai royal tradition in palace food has been made public in a number of cookbooks, complete with instructions for vegetable carving and for making time-consuming difficult elements like egg nets.

## Typical Meals

Both rural and urban Thai generally prepare rice with side dishes such as curries, soups, and stir-fried dishes for all meals. Western-style breakfasts with cereal and toast are recent urban innovations. Towns and cities provide more alternatives, such as noodle soups or lightly boiled eggs for early breakfasts and late-night snacks. Desserts are seldom included with meals, but fruit is a welcome snack any time of day.

Food acquisition in rural areas can be as simple as reaching out the back door to grab a handful of edible greens such as watercress or morning glory leaves. Throughout the country, in rural villages, direct patron-client relations distribute and redistribute food within the community. One household may regularly provide another with fresh vegetables, in return for emergency supplies of rice in the hungry season or for help with special occasions such as weddings or funerals. These food-based debts are never fully repaid, for to do so would be to end reciprocal relations basic to community survival.

Thai meals are always presented in aesthetically pleasing ways, even in poor households. Side dishes of food are garnished with fresh aromatic herbs, fried onions, or even edible flowers. Plates, rice bowls, or shallow rimmed bowls are in common use and vary from antique works of art, to products from local ceramic factories, to brightly colored plastic. Forks and spoons are the easiest, most efficient way to eat rice and side dishes, with chopsticks used primarily for noodles and Chinese dishes.

Rice is the central core of most Thai meals, and it is usually served from a common bowl. Rice has a soul and is a gift of the ancestors; its quantity and quality, taste and smell, are a matter of constant concern. Side dishes, literally referred to as "with-rice" dishes, accompany rice and are also served in common bowls for sharing. If rice is not served, then one is "eating for fun," often with drinks, rather than consuming a meal. Thai meals are served all at once rather than in courses. This simultaneous presentation of all parts of the meal provides the eater with maximum choices about what tastes go best together. Each meal served with rice tries to balance the tastes of hot, sour, salty, and sweet. The people eating the meal create the final balance as they serve themselves from the available side dishes in the order they prefer and fine-tune tastes with wet or dry condiments, reflecting individual needs and desires.

Side dishes usually include soup as a meal component along with rice and other side dishes, rather than as a separate course. Soups are served from a common bowl directly onto rice or into individual bowls. Most soups are fast-cooking, keeping vegetables crisp and nutrients readily available. Soup, either a rice congee or a noodle soup, can also be a meal in itself—often for breakfast or a late-night snack. Soups with a coconut base are more associated with palace cooking, as in this Thai favorite.

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***Tom Kha Gai* (Coconut Chicken Soup)**

4 c stock

4 chicken breasts, sliced

2 pieces galangal, 1 in. long, split or sliced

4 wild lime leaves, deveined and torn

2 pieces crushed lemongrass, about 2 in. long

4 c coconut milk

4 chilies, sliced

4 tbsp fish sauce

Bring the stock to a simmer, and add chicken, galangal, lime leaves, and lemongrass. Cook 10 minutes or until chicken is cooked through. Add coconut milk, chilies, and fish sauce; heat through and serve.

## Eating Out

Bangkok provides the largest range of restaurants for dining out. But in the 1960s, there were very few Thai restaurants in the city. The best known include Jit Pochana, Seefah, and Sorng Daeng, where visitors and middle-class Thai ate classic dishes, many from the palace tradition. Sorng Daeng opened in 1957 in its present location near government offices in Bangkok and still operates today. Here, one could eat a very high-quality noodle dish served on a banana leaf, tasting very much like the dish served by street vendors in the back alleys but, of course, much pricier.

Eating out for lunch is particularly common in urban areas like Bangkok where the traffic can be very slow and the workplace very distant from home. Street vendors provide foods for early-morning travelers and late-night revelers. Night markets in the towns and cities of Thailand gather together a number of food vendors to facilitate late-night dining when the temperature is lower. Hawker or street foods are not always available in restaurants; they can best be enjoyed on the street. The preparation of some street foods may be too complex or labor-intensive for restaurants or may require special equipment.

Although McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Dunkin' Donuts, and other Western fast-food outlets are common in Thai cities, they have not displaced local fast foods that offer better value for money. Today, food courts are available in shopping malls throughout the country and are popular with tourists and locals alike. The customer buys redeemable coupons and uses them as cash to purchase a wide range of dishes from a selection of food vendors. The vendors then redeem the coupons and pay a percentage to the owner of the food-court space.

Chinese restaurants are still the most popular locations for special meals consumed outside the house. Chinese restaurants have adapted to local tastes with the use of coriander root, tamarind paste, lemongrass, and chilies. But attempts have been made to distinguish between a Chinese and a local noodle dish for nationalistic purposes. For example, pad Thai (Thai fried noodles) is a dish invented in the 1940s in Bangkok in an attempt to distinguish Thai noodles from Chinese noodles and to encourage Thai civil servants to eat local. Pad Thai is one of the favorite Thai dishes of foreigners visiting Thailand, and it is popular in Thai restaurants overseas. But it is only one of many fried noodle dishes available in Thailand. Perhaps its popularity with foreigners is due to the fact that it can be ordered by name in restaurants and from street vendors without the need to speak Thai. Other Thai noodles involve a long dialogue: Do you want your noodles thin, medium, or wide? Wet or dry? With beef, shrimp, or chicken?

### *Pad Thai* (Thai Fried Noodles)

A dry stir-fried noodle dish well known outside of Thailand, pad Thai is usually accompanied by bowls of chili-vinegar sauce, dried chili flakes, lime slices, chopped peanuts, sugar, bean sprouts, and sliced cucumbers and is decorated with cilantro.



Pad Thai, a dry stir-fried noodle dish well known outside of Thailand. (Shutterstock)

2 oz thinly sliced pork

1 tsp sugar

1 tbsp soy sauce

1 tbsp fish sauce

1 tbsp tamarind juice (or pulp squeezed from tamarinds soaked in 2–3 tbsp warm water)

2 eggs

3 tbsp oil

2–3 cloves minced garlic

2 oz thinly sliced tofu (a 2-in. cake)

½ lb dried rice noodles, soaked in warm water for 20 minutes

2 c rinsed bean sprouts

3 green onions, cut in 1-in. pieces

1 tbsp dried shrimp

Toss pork slices with sugar. In a small bowl, mix the soy sauce, fish sauce, and tamarind juice. Lightly beat eggs with a pinch of salt. Stir-fry the garlic, pork, and tofu in a tablespoon of oil. Pour in egg mixture until it starts to set, and remove to a plate. In the remaining oil, stir-fry the drained noodles until they are well heated and seared. Add to the center of the wok the bean sprouts, green onions, dried shrimp, and the soy sauce mixture. Mix in the egg and pork mixture. Turn out onto a platter or individual plates, and garnish with an assortment of the condiments listed.

## Special Occasions

Food creates and maintains social relations between Thai, and between them and the spirit world. Feeding others occurs across all transitions in the life cycle and across the generations. Those who sponsor feasts gain status from feeding others appropriately and generously. It would be unthinkable to celebrate without food. Most celebrations have a religious or ritual component to them, but purely secular celebrations also involve food.

The predominant religious tradition in Thailand is Theravada Buddhism, a community-based religion practiced in rural and urban areas in varying intensities. Buddhism and food intertwine at the level of rituals and lay offerings but also at the level of ideology and text. Fasting and not feasting is the Buddhist pattern, recalling always the middle way, avoiding the extremes of asceticism. However, community-based rituals with lay participation are usually celebrated with elaborate shared meals.

Religious rituals are closely integrated with the seasonal agricultural cycle, primarily irrigated rice in mainland Southeast Asia. However, the adoption of high-yielding varieties of rice and other technologies that permit two or three crops a year alter the significance of Buddhist celebrations, since the cycle of planting, transplanting, and harvesting is no longer coordinated with Buddhist seasonal rituals. This results in differences in what Buddhist rituals are emphasized in rural and urban temples.

Everywhere in Southeast Asia, the spirit of rice is feminine and must be placated and carefully tended. Mother rice is the self-sacrificing mother who is given gifts and offerings of food to guarantee a bountiful rice harvest. She is treated like a pregnant woman whose every whim must be indulged. Known as *mae prasob* in Thai, she determines the auspicious days to plant, transplant, and harvest rice. The rice fields are protected by spirits who must be ritually fed for the land to produce the highest rice yields. Feeding spirits may involve simple practices such as leaving a small serving of rice and fruit in a spirit house in the northeastern corner of a Bangkok house, as the inhabitants leave for work.

Theravada Buddhism provides a structure for sharing the best dishes the household can prepare with monks on their early-morning alms round. After elderly household members place some of these dishes in the monks' bowls, the family consumes these special dishes or shares them with neighbors at the community temple. For the rural poor, these occasions may be the only days that rich coconut-based meat curries are made. Ordinations, weddings, and funerals are also occasions for special meals. On such occasions, households may provide elaborate wet and dry desserts that require time and skill to prepare. Some are shaped to resemble miniature fruits and vegetables.

Monks, like spirits, need to be fed. The Buddhist pattern of moderate asceticism is reflected in the practice of restricting the number of meals for monks and the timing of meals. Monks fast from noon on, accepting only tea or sweet drinks in the afternoon and evening. Buddhists accrue merit through *dana* (meritorious giving), including giving daily food to monks. This is one route to a better rebirth and to avoiding dangers in the present life. Most of those feeding monks and spirits are women. In all the Theravada countries, women are the most generous supporters of temples, providing the food for early-morning alms rounds, cooked dishes for the monks' noon meal, and uncooked rice for special ceremonies and community rituals at the temple. In a more commercial vein, women often sell food at temple fairs as a means of earning merit and money.



Buddhist monks carry alms given in the street, Thailand. (StockPhotoPro)

Ordinations of new monks, giving of gifts of robes to monks, and consecrations of religious buildings and Buddha images are all occasions for pilgrimages and festive meals. Food connects urban and rural communities on these occasions. Income differences may be apparent in the foods given to monks; however, any food given with a good intention is valued. Ethnic heritage may also be reflected in the food given to monks. For example, a rice-flour noodle known as *kanom jeen* mixed with a fish curry (*nam yaa plaa chon*) is often served at temple events in areas of Thailand where the Mon settled. It is made from snakehead fish, garlic, shallots, shrimp paste, galangal, and ginger and is served over coiled rice noodles.

After the food is given to monks, everyone who participated in the service shares the donated food. In Buddhist ceremonies, white thread is used to define sacred space and transfer the merit made by feeding monks and spirits to all who participated in the ritual. Merit made by feeding monks can also be transferred to ancestors in general or recently deceased relatives through a ritual known as *kluat nam;* water that has been blessed by the monks is slowly poured into another container or onto the ground, while monks chant appropriate Pali stanzas. Thus, both food and merit are widely shared with the living and the dead.

Theravada Buddhists are not generally vegetarian. In the Theravada tradition, meat dishes are given to monks in most communities. In Buddhist communities, it is more often the elderly who fast, meditate, and keep extra precepts all day, because they no longer have to worry about the work of food production and preparation. Women and the elderly are also more likely to enter into longer-term fasts. New Buddhist movements such as Santi Asoke require their adherents to be vegetarian. Recently, more Theravada Buddhists are taking on the Mahayana practice of fasting a few days a month.

## Diet and Health

Thailand imported from India some of the ideas about the cooling and heating properties of food

and how food affects individuals at certain stages of their life cycle. But since Thailand did not import the South Asian system of castes and subcastes, the heating and cooling properties of food and people had no connotation of purity and pollution; as a result, everyone could eat together.

In the Theravada Buddhist communities of Thailand, some monks, particularly forest monks who reside alone and practice meditation, gain reputations for their skills in healing through herbal and spiritual methods. In the past when villagers might not have had access to any health services, monks were honored as valuable healers who helped reduce suffering out of loving-kindness, free of charge. Ritual speech, words spoken over medicinal mixtures, can be called on in cures. Whether efficacy can be attributed to the placebo effect, or the peace of mind that comes from practicing morality, is not of great concern, particularly in households where no other remedies are available. Spiritual healing is particularly important in palliative care, treating chronic diseases, and when illnesses have a mental health component. Midwives, specialists in traditional massage, herbalists, and shamans all contribute their expertise to the varied healing strategies in Thailand, in addition to the sophisticated and effective public health system in the country.

Food-secure countries like Thailand face a difficult set of problems, as their policy makers must deal with problems related to both under- and overnutrition. This double dilemma is a result of improvements in food supply combined with changes in food habits. Food security and good health care systems in Thailand are reflected in the low infant and under-five mortality rates in 2005: 18 per 1,000 and 21 per 1,000. A related challenge concerns the complex interactions between malnutrition and HIV/AIDS. For the many people living with HIV/AIDS in Thailand, adequate and healthy food is their most immediate and critical need, as antiretroviral therapy works effectively only for people who are well nourished.

Although Thailand has low rates of malnutrition, some families may still have to deal with both low-birth-weight infants and overweight schoolchildren. In addition to an estimate of 9 percent low-birth-weight infants and 10–15 percent overweight children in primary schools in the country, about half the people in central Thailand and urban areas now have high cholesterol rates. Changes in food habits and food availability are responsible for this modern "toxic food environment," according to media reports in Thailand. Climbing obesity rates are blamed on Western fast-food chains. Problematic foods are identified as those high in salt, sugar, and fat, including instant noodles, deep-fried chicken, pizzas, hamburgers, French fries, doughnuts, cookies, and cakes. These mouth-watering edibles are found everywhere, leading to increasing rates of coronary heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, and, to some extent, cancer. Heart disease and cancer, diseases of the affluent, are now the primary causes of death in Thailand.

*Penny Van Esterik*

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# Tibet

## Overview

Tibet is an autonomous region of southwestern China (since 1950) that borders the nations of India, Nepal, Burma, and Bhutan. With an area of 471,700 square miles, it occupies most of the landmass known as the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau—the highest region on earth—and sits at an average elevation of 14,000 feet above sea level. Tibet is virtually surrounded by mountains, including the renowned Himalayan range, where Mount Everest (Chomo Langma), the world's highest at over 29,000 feet, straddles the border with Nepal. Given its geographic position, the climate of Tibet is primarily cold and dry, although some parts of the south are mild and temperate. Many of Asia's largest rivers run through the plateau, including the Mekong (Zachu), the Yangtze (Drichu), and the Indus (Senge khabab). Tibet is divided into one municipality—the capital city of Lhasa—and six prefectures including Shigatse in the southwest, Ngari in the west, Lhaoka in the south (central), Chamdo in the east, Nakchu in the north, and Nyingtri in the southeast. The total population in 2008 was reported at approximately 2.8 million, mostly concentrated in Lhasa or other urban areas. This figure does not include any ethnic Tibetans living in surrounding Chinese provinces that belonged to Tibet prior to Chinese occupation. The total number of ethnic Tibetans living in and surrounding the autonomous region is around six million.

Before 1950, Tibet was an independent territory ruled by a theocratic government, with the Dalai Lama—a Buddhist high priest believed to be a reincarnated deity—acting as head of state. As the official public religion, Buddhism shaped all social values, norms, rituals, and institutions. Following a political rebellion in 1959, the Dalai Lama fled to India to establish a government-in-exile, triggering the exodus of numerous Tibetans into neighboring countries and beyond. Today, Tibetan Buddhism remains the leading religion in the area, with only a small number who practice the traditional Bön religion (an indigenous faith that some contend existed before Buddhism but that has nonetheless been strongly influenced by it), and even fewer Muslims.

Tibet's strategic location in Central Asia has made it vulnerable to invasion throughout its long history, particularly by the Mongolians and the Chinese. Nevertheless, the Tibetan people have remained relatively isolated from outside influences, resulting in a truly unique culture with its own ethnic group, language, social customs, and cuisine.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Norbu Tsering and his wife, Rinchen Lhamo, live in a small house in the historic district of Lhasa—the largest city and the capital of Tibet—together with their seven-year-old daughter, Rabten Pema, and five-year-old son, Lobsong Tashi. Since Norbu and Rinchen were born after Chinese occupation at a time when Tibetan culture was undergoing a tremendous surge of development, they each had the opportunity to receive a formal education—a new phenomenon for many Tibetans. Both of them grew up in farming villages outside of Lhasa but moved into the city to attend Tibet University, where they first met as students of literature. While many ethnic Tibetans have greeted the Chinafication of their society with great resistance, Norbu



A Tibetan family has their meals in the wild field after working on their farm. (Gan Hui | Dreamstime.com)

and Rinchen believe they will have more ability to effect positive change as well as greater personal opportunity if they are compliant. They are both fluent in Tibetan and Mandarin Chinese, which serves as an important factor in finding and maintaining full-time employment, especially in a region where inequality is continually on the rise and the throngs of Han Chinese immigrants seem to be getting preferential treatment (most jobs require an understanding of Mandarin). Norbu is a teacher at a local elementary school, and Rinchen works as an editor at a Lhasa television station. Most of Norbu's colleagues are Han cadres, sent to the area by the central Chinese government to serve terms lasting between two and eight years. Similarly, Rinchen's coworkers are predominantly Chinese from neighboring provinces like Sichuan and Yunnan. The children attend the primary school where their father teaches and count language classes in both Tibetan and Mandarin as some of their favorite subjects. In socioeconomic terms, this family is characteristic of the emerging urban middle class in contemporary Tibetan culture.

Norbu, Rinchen, and the children enjoy and are very thankful for all of the conveniences an urban life affords them. Their home is outfitted with electric power, providing them with heat during the harsh winter months and plenty of light throughout the year. Rinchen has a very modern kitchen by Tibetan standards, with appliances like a methane-fueled stove, a pressure cooker, an electric butter churner, a small refrigerator, and a host of plastic storage containers on hand. The family especially appreciates the color television they recently received from Rinchen's company. Watching televised programs has become a favorite family activity and a special time to spend together.

Among the many benefits of living in the city, Norbu and his family relish most the availability and variety of foods to be found. Lhasa has several daily food markets and street-side stalls selling everything from fresh

vegetables and yak meat to yogurt (*sho*), yak butter (*mar*), barley (*ney*), and brick tea (compressed black tea). While fresh meat and produce were hard to come by in the past, they appear abundantly all over the city today. Greenhouse farming has become very popular throughout Tibet, leading to the cultivation of "exotic" foods such as strawberries and watermelons—fruits that Rabten and Lobsong find particularly enjoyable. Locally produced peaches, pears, apricots, and grapes are favorites for the whole family when in season. Additionally, Rinchen likes to keep dried fruit and nuts on hand for special occasions.

Enormous quantities of fresh produce are flown into the region from neighboring provinces on a daily basis. Therefore, it is not uncommon to find tomatoes, chili peppers, bok choy, carrots, bean sprouts, eggs, spices, cabbage, turnips, potatoes, radishes, garlic, ginger, and more lining market shelves. Wild herbs and mushrooms are abundant throughout the city, too, and the family likes to keep them on hand for medicinal purposes. Rinchen makes regular trips to the market because she likes to keep fresh items on hand but has little refrigerator space in which to store them.

In recent years, Lhasa has seen the opening of three supermarkets, making access to dietary staples and packaged foods all the more convenient. Rinchen purchases the bulk of her family's food from street markets because she believes the quality of the ingredients is far superior, but occasionally she visits the supermarket to purchase processed roasted barley flour (*tsampa*), wheat, rice, salt, cooking oil (canola), dried yak meat, instant noodles, candy, Pepsi, local barley beer (*chang*), and the like.

While Rinchen handles most of the cooking and shopping, Norbu and the children like to participate from time to time. They particularly enjoy going to the Tianhai Night Market on the west side of town because it is lined with all sorts of street foods, snacks, and sweets. In fact, the daytime market on Barkhor Street is closer to their home, but Rinchen's work schedule makes it difficult for her to shop during the day. Fortunately, Tianhai is open in the evenings, and the prices are much lower. Here, the family enjoys an inexpensive night out, making dinner out of the Sichuan food stalls. While numerous restaurants are popping up all over the city, many of them are too expensive for the whole family.

Rinchen keeps the family well stocked on Tibetan staples like barley, dairy products (yogurt, cheese, and butter), and yak meat, but on occasion she enjoys splurging on rare or unusual foodstuffs like eggs, seafood, pork, and chicken. The children have acquired a taste for these and other Sichuan foods, as they appear regularly during mealtime at school. Historically, Tibetans were forbidden to eat small animals according to Buddhist law. Yet following the Chinese occupation and the influx of Han ethnic groups, attitudes toward religious taboos relaxed; and poultry, pork, and seafood became increasingly available. Norbu and Rinchen still feel that it is best not to indulge in these foods, except on special occasions.

In contrast to the modern lifestyle led by Norbu and his family, the traditional ways of procuring food in Tibet were far more complex. In fact, this is still very much the case in most rural areas today. Prior to Chinese occupation, many of the foods used in Tibetan cooking were cultivated, prepared, and consumed directly in the home. Everything else was purchased at annual or biannual markets (*lotsong*). These markets were held following a harvest, usually during the ninth month of the year (Tibetans observe a lunar calendar), and were located in areas easily accessed by nomads and farmers alike. Lotsong typically took place over a period of two to three weeks to ensure enough time for exchanging goods and stocking up on important staples not readily available at home. Ordinarily, markets were regionally based, providing goods for up to five or six villages at once, but larger cities offered their own municipal markets. Nomads would bring with them an abundance of animal products in exchange for the agricultural harvests of village farmers. Vegetables and fruits were dried to ensure a long shelf life—because the growing season was very short—and to stand up to the demands of the nomadic lifestyle.

## Major Foodstuffs

The high elevation and cold, dry climate of Tibet, serving as a natural boundary to the variety of foods grown in the region, have been instrumental in the development of a unique cuisine. Traditionally, very few agricultural crops could withstand such extreme weather conditions, making the use of animal products

an essential means of subsistence. Limited international trade and religious dietary restrictions have been equally influential. Only a few items from surrounding countries such as brick tea, rice, and sugar appear with any regularity, and Buddhist law has forbidden the consumption of seafood, poultry, and other small animals. In recent years, Tibetan cuisine has begun to see major changes, yet food staples have remained relatively constant.

Perhaps more than any other factor, however, social diversification has shaped the production and specification of food in Tibetan homes. It is difficult to understand Tibetan culture at all apart from an understanding of its social structure—with farmers (*rongpa*), nomadic animal herders or pastoralists (*drokpa*), and religious clerics forming the basis of society. Until recently, social organization throughout Tibet remained largely unchanged, thanks to the region's relative geopolitical isolation. Farmers had permanent homes in villages and towns, where they cultivated their own crops and consumed a predominantly vegetable-based diet. Since most of them did not have their own livestock, they relied on pastoralists for meat and dairy products. Alternatively, animal herders lived as nomads, occupying tents and moving from place to place depending on the season. Most of the foods consumed by pastoralists came from their own herds, including meat, fat (*tsilu*), and dairy products. With little access to vegetables or grains, nomads depended on the agricultural harvest of farmers to supplement their diet. Occupying the highest social positions in Tibetan society were monks, priests (*lamas*), and nuns, who did not produce their own food—although they did cook—but depended on the provisions of farmers and herders for all their dietary needs including vegetables, grains, and dairy products (they were forbidden to eat meat).




A Tibetan monk shopping in Lhasa, Tibet. (iStockPhoto)

The most abundant and valuable crop in Tibet is barley (ney), which alone accounts for around 55 percent of all cultivated land and 56 percent of total food production. The average person consumes around 341 pounds (155 kilograms) of the grain per year. Most of the time, barley is ground into flour and toasted (tsampa), forming the basis of the Tibetan diet. A typical adult will consume at least 176 pounds (80 kilograms) of tsampa every year. And children will eat as much as 158.5 pounds (72 kilograms) in the same time period. No home is considered complete without tsampa. Other grains might be substituted including wheat, buckwheat, corn, millet, oats, or soybeans, but the most popular and respected tsampa is made with barley. Tibetan people believe that tsampa is pure only if barley is used and that it possesses healing, restorative properties. It is so highly revered that it is used as an offering in most religious ceremonies and is always present on special occasions. While it is mainly mixed with a little Tibetan butter tea and eaten as a sort of dough, tsampa is used in a multitude of recipes, from soups (*tsamtuk*) and dumplings to sweet and savory cakes (*sengong* and *pag*). In a typical Tibetan home, tsampa is eaten with every meal—three times a day—and is processed on-site. Each household is equipped with milling stones for grinding flour, and every village has a mill house, used to process large quantities. The grains are thoroughly cleaned, then toasted in sand prior to being ground, which cooks them evenly and reduces the threat of burning. A sieve is used to separate the barley from the sand. The whole grains of barley (ney) are also popular when toasted and eaten as a snack (*yoe*).

In addition, barley (ney) is used to make beer (chang), another staple of Tibetan cuisine. Like tsampa, other grains may be used such as rice, corn, oats, millet, and wheat, but the most traditional and popular chang is made with barley (ney). It appears at almost all religious events and festivals, although most monks and priests (lamas) are forbidden to drink alcohol. Chang is enjoyed by people of all ages either hot or cold, and it has an alcohol content of approximately 5 percent. In almost any home, chang is offered as a sign of courtesy to guests, who out of respect for the host must first take three sips and then drink the entire serving. Chang can be made into a distilled alcohol (*arag*) as well, appearing regularly at religious ceremonies and on special occasions.

The use of animal products in everyday cooking has been fundamental to the survival of the Tibetan people. As a result, meat, fats, and dairy products predominate in the local cuisine. Almost all foods consumed in Tibet are accompanied by something from an animal—be it meat, fat, butter, yogurt, or cheese. Ironically, Buddhism forbids the killing of animals, except in places where vegetables and grains are so scarce that meat is the only means of survival. Historically, it was only the nomads—animal herders by trade—who were "allowed" the privilege of taking an animal's life, and that applied only to large species. Buddhist philosophy reasoned that it is better to kill large animals for food as one slaughter feeds many mouths. Therefore, the consumption of small animals, birds, and fish was strictly prohibited. Furthermore, monks and priests (lamas) were forbidden to eat meat of any kind, and farmers could partake only in the event of a natural or accidental animal death. Dairy products were available to all social groups since they could be obtained without killing. Today, many Tibetans, particularly the younger generations, are beginning to overlook these religious stipulations and are now eating poultry, seafood, and other small animals.

The meats most commonly used in Tibetan cuisine come from yaks, barren female yaks (*dri*), sheep, goats, cows (*lung-pi*), and yak-cow crossbreeds (*dzo* or *dzomo*). Because the killing of animals is seen as a necessary evil, a ritual precedes each slaughtering, in which prayers, holy water, and butter lamps are offered to the animal. Consequently, no part of the animal is left unused. Fine cuts are enjoyed on special occasions, animal skins and stomachs are used in cooking or for storage, organ meats and blood are eaten in sausages, and even the dung is used to seal storage spaces and as cooking fuel. Dried meat (*sha kampo*) is particularly popular in Tibet and has been a dietary staple for hundreds of years. In the Tibetan climate foods can be dried quickly, a process that prolongs the shelf life and makes them convenient for traveling. The meat is often cut into strips and hung to dry in the sun. Sha kampo is eaten raw or cooked.

Other typical meat dishes might include meatball curry served with cream (*shabril*), blood and liver sausages (*gyuma*), spiced grilled meat with tomato sauce (*sha katsa*), and meat and noodle soup (*thugpa*), just to name a few. Meat- or vegetable-stuffed dumplings (*momo*) are the most popular of Tibetan dishes, typically served at formal meals and celebrations. The dumplings are folded into a variety of shapes, depending on the occasion, and served with chili sauce or pickled radishes and cabbages (*lakyur*). In recent years, momo have become so popular with tourists that restaurants in urban areas offer them daily.

### *Momo*

In a typical Tibetan home, these dumplings are filled with yak meat, beef, or mutton, but in monasteries and areas where meat is not available, a vegetable mixture is substituted. The traditional and most popular cooking method is steaming, but the dumplings are sometimes fried as well.

#### Filling

1 lb ground beef or lamb

½ c celery, diced

¼ c green onion, finely sliced

1 tsp fresh ginger, minced

¼ tsp ground cumin

¼ tsp ground nutmeg

2–3 tbsp water, or just enough to bind

Salt to taste

#### Dough

3 c white flour

½ tsp baking soda

Water, just enough to bring together into a firm dough (approximately ½ c)

In a large bowl, mix together all ingredients for the filling, cover, and chill.

To make the dough, mix together all the dry ingredients in a large bowl. Add water little by little, making sure to stop just when the dough comes together into a firm ball. Chill the dough for approximately 30 minutes (dough can be prepared and chilled overnight). Then cut the dough into 4 pieces. Using a rolling pin, roll each piece out until it is ⅛ inch thick. Using a round cookie cutter, cut the dough into approximately 2–3 round disks. Be sure to roll the dough in stages to prevent it from drying out. In the center of each round put about a teaspoon of filling. Fold the disk in half and firmly pinch together the edges, creating a half-moon shape. Repeat until all the dough and filling have been used. Be sure to keep the completed dumplings covered with a damp cloth or paper towel. The dumplings can be stored overnight and cooked the next day. To cook them, use a bamboo steamer placed over a wok or pot with a little boiling water, and heat, covered, for about 30 minutes or until the filling is well cooked.



Traditional Tibetan dishes, momos (center) and bouillon (left). Momos are doughy pouches often filled with a variety of items, including meat, vegetables, or cheese. (Shutterstock)

In Tibetan cuisine, dairy products are equally significant to tsampa (toasted barley flour), forming a major portion of the diet and maintaining a prominent position at religious ceremonies. Butter (mar), above all other foods in this category, is indispensable in a Tibetan kitchen. Traditionally a high-value trade item produced by nomads, butter is used in

everyday cooking and beverages, or as cooking and lighting fuel (butter lamps). In religious rituals, it is shaped into elaborate carvings and used as offerings. The milk of dri (female yaks) is believed to deliver the finest-quality butter with a pleasant golden hue, but sheep, goat, and dzomo (female yak-cow crossbreeds) milk are used as well. Ordinarily, it is made by hand and stored in wet animal skins that shrink as they dry, creating an airtight container that preserves the butter for long periods of time. Butter is the key ingredient in Tibet's most important beverage—butter tea (*boeja*)—a warm, salty concoction that is consumed at every meal and throughout the day. It is not unusual for a Tibetan to drink up to 40 cups a day. Imported Chinese brick tea is steeped in salted water until it is very strong, then is poured into a tall churn and whipped heavily with butter and salt, resulting in a thick consistency very much akin to broth. Boeja is served as a token of hospitality in any household, and the cups are refilled after every sip.

Milk, cheese, and yogurt are common food staples as well, appearing regularly at meals and in numerous recipes. Most of the milk comes from the dri, but sheep, goat, and dzomo milk may be used as well. Two kinds of cheese are typical: a hard variety (*chura*) that is dried in the sun and a softer type (*chura loenpa*) reminiscent of cottage cheese. Chura has always been a popular snack because of its durability on long journeys. It is so hard that it is best when added to soups or stews. Yogurt (sho) is mostly used for making butter, but it is also enjoyed in cooking or as a snack. It is believed that sheep milk makes the best cheese and that dri (female yak) milk makes the best butter.

## Cooking

The functionality and layout of traditional Tibetan kitchens varies depending on the lifestyle of the domestic unit. However, every household is equipped with a stove, a stone mill for grinding flour, and a wooden butter churner. In the past, the primary fuel for cooking was wood, but animal dung was used by nomads or in areas where wood was scarce. Today, charcoal and gas are becoming popular sources for fuel. Modern Tibetan homes in villages and towns are beginning to have access to running tap water and electricity, giving rise to more convenient cooking equipment such as electric butter churners, solar-powered stoves, and refrigerators.

It is most common for women to do all the cooking and food preparation in a Tibetan family home, but it is not unusual for men to participate in household duties as well. Children begin learning to cook as early as three years of age and are expected to regularly assist in meal preparation by the age of six. In religious houses, every inhabitant shares in domestic duties including cooking and purchasing food.

A typical kitchen for a nomadic household is placed in the center of the tent, where tables and portable stoves made of metal tripods are placed. Food is stored in animal-skin bags and kept near the stove for everyday use. Surplus food is placed in cellars dug out of the ground. Because the soil is so cold, these storage pits are excellent natural freezers, preserving foods for long periods of time. They are usually lined with animal dung, which acts as a seal when closed, creating an airtight environment for the food.

As inhabitants of permanent homes, farmers have individual rooms that are used for both cooking and eating. These kitchens are equipped with large stoves made of stone, allowing for several foods to be cooked at once. Most households have additional rooms that are used as storage pantries and for drying meat.

Tibetan monasteries tend to have large, well-equipped kitchens because of the great number of inhabitants (sometimes more than 1,000 people). It is not uncommon to find teapots the size of rooms that require the attention of multiple cooks for churning tea and cleaning.

Professional cooks are highly regarded in Tibetan society and may be hired for special occasions and religious ceremonies. Wealthy families tend to employ them as full-time household cooks. Traditionally, all professional cooks were men and were expected to learn the trade as apprentices of master cooks (*gyal se machem*).

Cooking vessels and serving dishes fluctuate depending on the region, occasion, or social status of the household. Pots for cooking are made from

earthenware, brass, copper, iron, and bronze. Storage containers might also be made of wood. Serving dishes and utensils are usually made of wood or silver. Tibet has its own deposits of jade, so it is normal to find special containers and bowls for barley beer (chang), barley liquor (arag), or toasted barley flour (tsampa).

## Typical Meals

Location and social status play a key role in determining the kind of meals that are consumed in Tibetan households. Nomads tend to eat dishes heavy in animal protein, whereas monks and farmers eat more vegetables and grains. Most Tibetans consume three meals a day, and snacks are always nearby. Babies also eat three daily meals that usually consist of tsampa, butter (mar), milk, and yogurt (sho) or soft cheese (chura loenpa).

Breakfast might consist of a soup (tsamtuk) made with tsampa, along with dried cheese (chura), dried meat (sha kampo), dried fat (tsilu), and roasted soybeans. Butter tea is the drink of choice, with at least three or four cups consumed at breakfast alone. A little of the tea may be mixed together with some tsampa and crumbled cheese, then hand-kneaded into a dough or "cake" (pag).

Lunch and dinner usually follow a similar pattern, although the midday meal is the heaviest and dinner tends to be light. Tsampa and butter tea are always on the table, but chang (barley beer) is common, too. Vegetarian dishes served for lunch or dinner might include buckwheat leaf salad (*yaba*), baked and buttered mushrooms (*sham trak*), and spicy potato curry (*shogok katsa*). Side dishes like pickled cabbage or radishes (lakyur) and tomato-based hot sauce (*sipen mardur*) are frequently served. Meat dishes such as grilled yak served with tomato sauce (sha katsa), blood sausages fried in mustard oil (gyuma), broth (*ruetang*), dumpling soup (*boetuk*), meat and noodle soup (thugpa), and meatball curry (shabril) are popular throughout Tibet.

Desserts are not as prominent in Tibetan cuisine as in the West but might appear on special occasions and during religious festivals. The two most prevalent sweets are both made out of rice, a food item that has been scarce in Tibet until recently. *Dresil* is sweetened rice mixed with butter and dried fruits, served with yogurt. *Omdre* is a very similar recipe, except it does not call for dried fruit or butter and may have a thicker consistency, more like a pudding. On special occasions like New Year's Day (Losar) rice cookies are popular, eaten either baked or fried.

Snacks are enjoyed throughout the day and are especially handy when traveling. The demand for Chinese snacks is growing throughout Tibet these days, following the arrival of numerous Han immigrants (mostly from the Sichuan Province). Traditional options like dried meat (sha kampo), dried cheese (chura), and toasted grains (yoe) are prevalent all over Tibet, and Chinese alternatives such as raviolistyle dumplings (*shuijiao*) and steamed dumplings (*baozi*)—much like momo—are popular in urban areas.

Tibetans have an elaborate set of rules surrounding the meal that mirror social norms and religious beliefs. The order of service is crucial, as it follows a hierarchical arrangement believed to be pleasing to Buddha. Those of the highest social status must be seated at the head of the table and served first during a meal. No one else may eat until the head of the table has prayed and begins. In some areas of Tibet, it is polite for guests to lick their bowls or plates to show appreciation. Also, belching is another sign of appreciation that is practiced in some parts of the region. Avoiding bad manners during a meal is as critical as expressing gratitude and respect. Some instances of bad manners are chewing with an open mouth, talking loudly, stepping over food, pointing one's feet or stretching the legs, eating from communal dishes or utensils, and passing one's plate or bowl over the dish of another guest.

## Eating Out

Eating out in Tibet is a remarkably recent phenomenon, and the majority of restaurant patrons are tourists and urban dwellers (young people). As an isolated territory for much of its history and a region closed to foreign visitors between the 1960s and the 1980s, this comes as no surprise. Traditional society was not conducive to restaurant development

because so much of the population lived as nomads or in remote areas. Some monasteries did offer food and accommodations to travelers, but this practice never became a point of focus.

Following Chinese occupation in 1950, Sichuan restaurants began to appear in cities and towns throughout Tibet. Today, they outnumber any other type of eating establishment. Menus feature specialties such as stir-fried meats and vegetables, noodles, dumplings, rice noodles cooked in a clay pot (*shaguo mixian*), fried noodles (*chaomian*), and egg-fried rice (*dan chao fan*). Even the smallest villages in Tibet will have a Sichuan restaurant, but the prices are much higher than what can be found in the capital city of Lhasa. These eating establishments, and the growing numbers of Han Chinese immigrants, have been responsible for introducing foods into the Tibetan diet that hitherto were forbidden by Buddhist law. Prawns, crabs, chicken, duck, pork, and fish appear on many restaurant menus and are easily found in supermarkets.

Cities and towns are beginning to have a variety of restaurants that serve Nepalese, Indian, Muslim, and Western-style foods, in addition to those that serve traditional Tibetan dishes. Western foods like sandwiches, burgers, pizzas, cookies, and snack foods are easy to find in supermarkets and hotel restaurants. Nepalese and Indian curries are popular as well.

Restaurants in urban parts of Tibet now offer a variety of beverages in addition to butter tea and barley beer (chang). Sodas, mineral water, Chinese green tea, and Pakistani sweet tea (*cha ngamo*) are widely available. Bottled beers are gaining popularity as well, including the Tibetan Snow and Lhasa brands, as well as Budweiser. Chinese red wine can be found on some restaurant menus and in supermarkets.

## Special Occasions

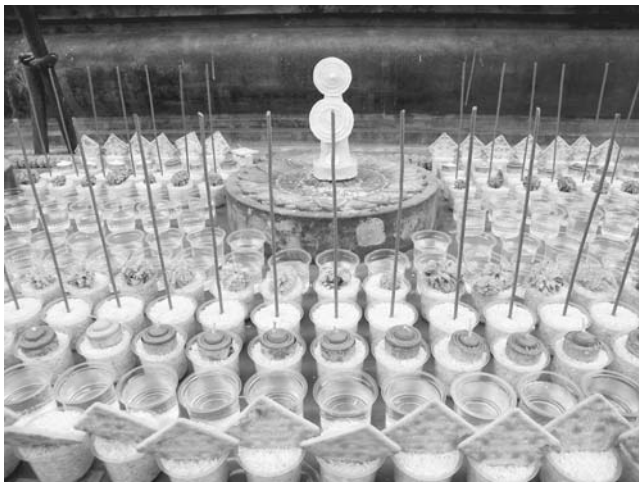
The Tibetan people love to celebrate, which has given rise to many special holidays and festivals. Many of these events originated as religious ceremonies and have become part of the popular culture today. Food staples like barley flour (tsampa) and butter



Typical dishes one might find in a feast in Tibet. This one was prepared for a wedding. (StockPhotoPro)

(mar) are commonly used as offerings and made into elaborate carvings. No matter what the occasion, feasting is always part of the agenda.

The Tibetan New Year is considered the most important annual festival, as it is a time for cleansing and new beginnings. It is celebrated over a period of several days and involves a series of monastic and popular rituals. It begins on the 29th day of the 12th month (following a lunar calendar) with monastic prayers and the burning of a giant sculpture called *Goutor.* On the same day, families clean their homes and enjoy a meal of dumpling soup (*gouthouk*) and dough made from tsampa (barley flour). From the dough and the remaining soup a human sculpture is created and taken out of the house to ward off any negative elements. On the first day of the New Year, all monasteries are cleaned, and offerings of scarves, butter lamps, and luxury foods—rock sugar, candies, nuts, and dried fruits—are brought. The monks hold a ceremony where they burn incense and distribute small amounts of barley flour (tsampa) to all the people, who eventually throw the grains into the air as a symbol of luck and the passing into a new year. During the ceremony there is plenty of chanting, music, and dancing. Inside family homes, everyone wears new clothes and celebrates the upcoming year with a feast that includes the finest meat and vegetable dishes, tsampa mixed with butter and sugar (*chemar*), rice dishes, yogurt (sho), rice cookies, and barley beer (chang). The chemar is meant to symbolize a plentiful barley



Decorative food prepared in anticipation of the New Year celebration, Tibet. (Jeeraphat Jantarat | Dreamstime.com)

harvest for the upcoming year, and the sho, plentiful animal products. Prior to the arrival of Buddhism, a sheep was sacrificed as an offering during this festival, and the head (*luggo*) was served during the meal. Although sacrificing sheep is not part of the celebration today, an image of a sheep's head carved out of tsampa is served as a substitute. Meatball curry (shabril) is an example of the kind of dish enjoyed on New Year's Day and other festive occasions.

***Shabril***

**Ingredients**

2 lb ground lamb or beef, or 1 lb each combined
4 tsp vegetable oil
½ c onions, diced
2 tsp fresh ginger, minced
2 cloves garlic, minced
½ tsp turmeric
1 tbsp soy sauce
1 c mushrooms, sliced
½ c daikon radish, finely sliced
8 oz sour cream or plain yogurt
Salt to taste
½ c green onions, sliced

Season the meat with salt, and shape into ½-inch balls. Set aside. In a large saucepan, sauté onions in the oil over medium heat until golden brown. Add the ginger and garlic, and cook for 2–3 minutes more. Add the meatballs, and cook on one side for 2–3 minutes, or until lightly brown on one side, and then flip. Repeat. Add the turmeric and soy sauce and cook for 2 more minutes. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 4–5 minutes. Add the mushrooms and radishes, and cook for an additional 10–15 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat, and add sour cream in small batches, stirring constantly. Once the sour cream is well incorporated, return pan to the heat and bring to a gentle simmer. Then turn off the heat, season with salt to taste, and add green onions. Serve with rice and hot sauce or pickled cabbage.

The Great Butter Festival is a traditional Buddhist ceremony held in Lhasa that falls on the 15th day of the first month, when butter lamps are burned and a variety of sculptures are created out of butter including birds, animals, figurines, and flowers. It is the last day of the festival of prayer and a celebration of Buddhist enlightenment.

## Diet and Health

Known as the "science of healing" (*gsowa rigpa*), Tibetan medicine is an ancient practice with strong links to Buddhist philosophy, Ayurvedic traditions from India, Chinese medicine, and various forms of astrology. It involves a series of complicated diagnoses and treatments including acupuncture, pulse and urine analysis, herbal remedies, diet and lifestyle modifications, heat therapy, and the like. Tibetan medicine upholds the belief that the health of the body depends on the health of the mind. All illnesses, therefore, come from the three poisons of desire, hatred, and ignorance. The ignorant state of consciousness is the root of all disease because it gives rise to desire, which in turn breeds hatred.

Tibetan medical theory asserts that the body is composed of three humors—wind, bile, and phlegm—that control all bodily functions and correspond to

the five elements found in nature—earth, water, fire, wind, and space. There are numerous subcategories for each humor as well. The key to good health is to maintain a balance of these humors in the body, in the mind, and in relationship to nature. It is believed that individuals have a tendency toward a predominant humor, or a distinct combination thereof, determining a physical disposition and temperament. That is, a person with a bile temperament is prone to bile-related illnesses.

Furthermore, this system classifies all matter as either hot or cold, both in the environment and in the body. The wind humor is associated with air and thus has a cold quality; bile is linked with fire, producing a hot disposition; and phlegm is associated with earth and water and has a cold quality. Since bile is connected to the element of fire, for example, its function in the body might include producing internal body heat and strength and promoting digestion. And a person with a bile humor, or bile-related illness, has a hot disposition.

Foods are either hot or cold as well, playing an important role in overall health. To promote equilibrium of the body, all foods must be consumed in moderation and should correspond to an individual's predisposition. That is, persons with cool temperaments should consume mostly warm foods, and vice versa. Not only is diet a preventative measure for health, it can be used in healing treatments as well. Many Tibetan doctors prescribe diet modifications to improve internal balance. All the major food groups in Tibetan cuisine are categorized in this manner, and the staples of the local diet are considered some of the healthiest foods. Fresh barley flour (tsampa) is considered a cool food and is believed to cure headaches, stomachaches, and fevers (all hot) if cooked as a porridge with milk. Fresh meat is cool, whereas aged meat is warm and thought to strengthen digestion. These classifications do not correspond with the temperature of the foods but rather their constituents. Broadly speaking, Tibetans believe that cooked foods are superior to anything raw.

In the same manner that a proper diet can restore health, poor food habits are believed to destroy it. An improper diet involves the consumption of anything in excess and the combination of foods that do not belong together. Some examples might include hot milk and fruit, hot milk and sour foods, or drinking cold water with heavy, greasy foods.

*Jennifer Hostetter*

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# Vietnam

## Overview

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam curves along the western edge of the Indo-Chinese peninsula of mainland Southeast Asia. After nearly 20 centuries of war, colonization, and foreign occupation, the country is now undergoing rapid economic and social development.

Vietnam is bordered by China to its north and Laos and Cambodia to its west. Tropical lowlands and densely forested highlands cover nearly 80 percent of the country, leaving most of its agricultural and urban development concentrated into two main areas, the Red River Delta of the north and the Mekong Delta of the south. Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (once known as Saigon) are located, respectively, in these deltas. The two burgeoning cities contribute to Vietnam's standing as the 14th most densely populated country in the world. Its population reached 86 million in 2008 and continues to increase by 1 million every year.

Vietnam's geography, culture, climate, and cuisine can be divided into three distinct regions: the cool north, the central highlands, and the hot south. Neighboring China, which ruled the area as a tributary state for 2,000 years, heavily influenced the food of northern Vietnam. In the 16th century, the Nguyen dynasty established Hue, located at the narrow fulcrum of the country, for its imperial capital and created an elaborate cuisine for the central region. The hot, fertile lowlands of southern Vietnam, once a part of the Funan Empire that reached from northeastern India, have long boasted an abundance of fresh fruit, vegetables, and fish.

After its arrival in Vietnam in the second century A.D. Buddhism blended easily with Confucianism, Taoism, ancestor worship, and indigenous animism. After decades of Communism, the country has become strongly secular, yet a majority of Vietnamese still consider themselves Buddhists. The most devout Buddhists are vegetarian, while others may simply abstain from eating eggs or the flesh of any animals on the 1st and 15th days of each lunar month. Strict Catholics, who make up about 7 percent of the population, observe the Lenten fast. Followers of Cao Dai, a syncretic religion unique to South Vietnam, must eat a vegetarian diet for at least 10 days during each month. All food served in Buddhist and Cao Dai temples is vegetarian, though Cao Dai allows the use of garlic and onions, which are typically prohibited by Buddhist strictures.

## Food Culture Snapshot

The Nguyen family resides in Long Xuyen, a prosperous town with a population of nearly 300,000 in the Mekong Delta region. Dung Cong is a swimming coach at the local university, while his wife, Dung Phuong, takes care of their household. Their daughter, Thao, 21, works as an administrative assistant in a downtown office. Their son, Duc, 19, is a full-time student of engineering. As is typical for unmarried children, both Thao and Duc live with their parents and return home to eat most of their lunches and nearly all their dinners there.

Dung Phuong, who cooks for the family, shops for ingredients every day at 9 A.M. Most days, she walks

about 300 feet to the neighborhood open-air market. There, she chats briefly with the vendors while she typically selects freshwater fish such as eel or *basa* catfish. Increasingly, she has been able to buy pork and poultry, and for special occasions, she can now choose a cut of beef. Seasonal fruit, fresh greens such as watercress or spinach, herbs, spices, eggs, and tofu will also make their way into her basket. Once or twice a week, she rides one of the family's scooters to a large, newly built supermarket. Frozen foods, dry staples, soft drinks, beer, ocean fish, and packaged snacks are all items the family prefers to obtain from the supermarket.

Two or three times a month, each family member enjoys eating at a favorite street vendor, especially for *pho bo* or *bun rieu,* noodle soup specialties that require too many ingredients and too much time to prepare easily at home. During especially hot days, Dung Cong, Thao, and Duc might purchase a small snack, such as sticky rice pudding or fresh fruit skewers sprinkled with salt and chili, to carry them over to a late cooked dinner.

During the past decade, as Vietnam prospered and distanced itself from the difficult postwar years, Dung Phuong has noticed food becoming more affordable for her family. Many ingredients, especially meats and vegetables, are abundant year-round, and her family now has access to products from other countries. Ingredients such as Italian pasta, American apples, French mustard, Chinese noodles, and Japanese pickles are available at the large supermarkets. Thao has been learning to cook from her mother and is beginning to shop for meals during the weekends when she is not working at the office. Though food tends to be more expensive at the new supermarket, Thao values the hygienic packaging and the convenience of the fixed prices she finds there. Dung Phuong enjoys experimenting with unfamiliar foods. Still, most of the meals she prepares for her family revolve around the local region's freshwater fish, vegetables, and rice.

## Major Foodstuffs

Rice in some form appears at the center of nearly every meal in Vietnam. Of the arable land in Vietnam, 60 percent is dedicated to growing rice. The Red River Delta and the Mekong Delta have long symbolized the country's rice baskets, and recent economic growth is especially evident in their increased supply of rice. Vietnam now ranks fifth in the world in consumption of rice and is the third-largest exporter of the grain after Thailand and the United States.

Jasmine rice, or long-grain *gao thom,* literally "fragrant rice," is the preferred variety for its flowery aroma. Its long and narrow grains are typically polished to a white color during milling and are then rinsed well before cooking to remove excess starch, as Vietnamese diners tend to like less starchy grains that retain a firmer bite while fluffing to a lighter texture. While there is some awareness of eating whole-grain rice with its healthful bran layer, polished white rice is still very much widely preferred.

A batter made from ground rice also becomes the base for distinctive *banh trang,* or rice paper. As a cottage industry throughout the countryside, women spread rice batter into paper-thin rounds onto fabric stretched tightly over simmering water. After steaming briefly, the rounds are then transferred to woven mats to dry in the sun. They become thin, translucent, parchment-like rounds that can be stored indefinitely. Later, after a quick dip in warm water at the table, they transform in seconds into delicate wrappers that are used for wrapping thinly sliced meat, seafood, fresh vegetables, and herbs. These rolls, called *banh cuon,* are one of the classic dishes of the Vietnamese table.

In the cooler highlands of the west and north, hill tribes terrace their mountain slopes with curving fields of glutinous rice. Also known as sticky rice or sweet rice, it contains much higher amounts of amylopectin, a branching molecule that results in a stickier, starchier texture upon cooking. There are different varieties of glutinous rice, from short, white, pearly grains to long, thin, purple-black rice. All are eaten as an accompaniment to savory dishes as well as being added to sweet desserts and snacks. Also distinctive to highland cooking is the use of *thinh,* a powder made from raw rice grains that have been roasted until golden brown and then ground fine. The powder lends a sweet, nutty flavor to savory dishes, helps bind minced-

meat preparations, and adds a delicate, powdery texture to salads.

Vietnamese cooks have developed a variety of noodles based on rice, from threads as fine as hair for serving with delicate fish to wide, silken ribbons for hearty stews. Each type of noodle has a different name. *Banh pho* are the flat, square-cut strands that appear in the popular beef soup. *Banh canh* are thick, chewy, round noodles that have both heft and resilience for soups with rich, spicy broths. *Bun,* also known as rice vermicelli, lend their name to the cold noodle salads that are commonly eaten for lunch. *Banh hoi* are extremely thin strands that are delicately steamed, pressed into a veil of noodles, and then cut into small squares for rolling inside lettuce leaves with slices of grilled meat.

Wheat and egg noodles reveal Chinese influence. Known as *mi* in Vietnamese, the golden, toothsome noodles typically marry with heartier flavors. *Mi vit* features a rich broth and duck flavored with five-spice powder and orange peel. When deep-fried, egg noodles become a crunchy, fluffy pillow that serves as the base for a variety of stir-fried dishes such as sweet and sour shrimp or mushrooms with yellow chives.

*Mien* noodles, made from the starch of mung beans, turn transparent once boiled. Also known as cellophane or glass noodles, the chewy noodles hold up well to stir-frying and braising. They star in *mien ga,* a popular, comforting soup with a clear broth and shredded chicken. Chopped finely, mung bean noodles also help bind the filling for fried spring rolls, steamed pork cakes, and other minced-meat preparations.

Fish and shellfish play an important role in Vietnam's cuisine. The country's long coastline, defined by the Gulf of Thailand, the South China Sea, and the Gulf of Tonkin, stretches 1,860 miles (3,440 kilometers). Further inland, Vietnam's navigable waterways total nearly 9,700 miles (18,000 kilometers), placing it eighth in the world, significant for a country of its small size. Vietnam's many rivers and lakes, along with its flooded rice paddies and irrigation canals, teem with freshwater life. Catfish, eel, and shrimp—along with frogs and snails—all figure heavily in the day-to-day meals of rural communities. Mud crabs thrive among the roots of coastal mangrove trees. Meaty and sweet, they are cracked and coated with a sweet-sour tamarind glaze or dry-fried with butter and black pepper. A delicate crab and asparagus soup served at formal banquets reveals the influence of French cooks.

One of the most popular ways to serve shellfish of all kinds is simply steamed or grilled and then dipped in a mixture of fresh lime juice, salt, and coarsely ground black pepper. Bream, grouper, and trevally (giant kingfish) are highly sought, expensive fish reserved for special meals. Squid, octopus, clams, mussels, lobster, and other seafood are not widely available locally, as the majority of the catch is destined for fine restaurants, luxury hotels, or the export trade. Freshwater channel fish, perch, and carp appear more frequently in local markets.

Fish and shellfish are often dried for easy, inexpensive transport and storage. Shrimp, crab, and small fish such as anchovies and sardines are also preserved in salt and fermented to make *mam,* a pungent paste that adds depth of flavor to many traditional dishes. *Nuoc mam,* or fish sauce, is an amber-colored liquid that seasons nearly every Vietnamese dish. It is pressed from anchovies that have been salted and fermented. Fish sauce serves as a seasoning in the kitchen, a condiment at the table, and a base for numerous dipping sauces. Dried shrimp is another very common and versatile ingredient. It can be cooked whole with glutinous rice, shredded for garnishing steamed noodles, or ground into a fine powder to make a convenient base for quick stocks.

Vietnam's fishing industry, concentrated in the Mekong Delta, is still dominated by small boats, though many are mechanized. Fish-sauce makers are also based in the south, especially on and near Phu Quoc Island, where the same families have been pressing high-quality fish sauce in small batches and aging it in wooden casks for generations.

Vietnamese cooks prefer to purchase their meat and poultry live from wet markets. Pork is the predominant meat in Vietnam. More than 98 percent of households consume pork, and it comprises about 75 percent of the meat eaten in the country. *Thit kho nuoc dua,* or pork stewed with fresh coconut juice, and *nem nuong,* small meatballs grilled on

skewers and served over rice noodles, are two popular ways of enjoying pork. The French introduced charcuterie such as pâté and forcemeats. Adapting European techniques, Vietnamese cooks perfected *cha lua,* a smooth, pale bologna made with finely pureed pork and potato starch and then cooked inside banana leaves. Other specialties such as headcheese and cured ham have also been incorporated into the Vietnamese kitchen.

Pork is among the most affordable of meats, as pigs can be raised on much less land than other animals and are much easier to feed. Furthermore, the country does not export pork and can thus maintain low domestic prices. As urban dwellers become more affluent, they tend to include more pork in their diets, and pork consumption remains concentrated near the large cities of the Red River and Mekong deltas. Most pigs are raised on small farms of only a few animals.

Poultry accounts for about 15 percent of meat consumption. Vietnamese cooks prefer *ga di bo* (literally, "walking chicken"), small, free-range chickens that have firm, dark, lean flesh. Younger chickens are cooked in *ga xa ot,* a highly flavored dish with lemongrass, chilies, and turmeric. Long-simmered *chao ga* combines creamy rice congee with the rich flavor of older, tougher hens.

The penchant for eating beef was introduced into Vietnam, as through much of Asia, by Mongolian horsemen. Dishes that now highlight beef were once predominantly made from the meat of water buffalo or oxen. These traditionally involved grinding, mincing, thin slicing, or long simmering to tenderize the meat of an old animal that had worked much of its life pulling a plow or cart. Hanoi is home to the country's most famous dish, pho bo. The rice noodle soup, now enjoyed all over Vietnam, highlights the meat in many forms: rare slices, well-cooked brisket, chewy meatballs, crunchy tripe, and rich tendon. Oxtail and beef shank enrich the soup's broth, while ginger and onion scorched over an open flame deepen its color and flavor.

*Bo bay mon* is the name of a festive meal involving seven courses of beef. Certain restaurants specialize in this traditional feast. The most famous dishes of the meal include thin slices of beef rolled with peppery *la lot* leaves and grilled, slices of beef cooked at the table in lemongrass-infused vinegar, and a soothing rice soup made from the bones that closes the meal. *Bo kho,* chunks of beef stewed with carrots, potatoes, lemongrass, and star anise, can be served with rice or with thick slices of crusty French bread. In the highlands, strips of sun-dried beef complement green papaya salad for a simple lunch.



Pho, Vietnamese soup at a restaurant in Ho Chi Minh City. (Shutterstock)

*Chuot dong,* sweet-fleshed field mice that live in rice fields and feed only on the ripened grain, are eaten by nostalgic older diners who remember the more difficult war years; they have also, increasingly, become popular among young, urban food adventurers who travel to the countryside. Historically, dog meat has been a delicacy in Vietnam. Increasing exposure to Western culture, however, has imported an awareness of discomfort in serving it.

*Rau song,* literally, "live greens," refers to the abundance of raw vegetables that are served at the Vietnamese table. Wrapping food in lettuce or young mustard leaves is a common way of eating. Crisp *goi* salads often start formal banquets or are served as a side salad with rice soups. These salads feature crisp, finely shredded vegetables, from everyday carrots, celery, or cabbage to special ingredients such as the segmented stems of lotus plants (*bap chuoi*) or shredded strips of banana blossoms (*sen*).

Cooked greens accompany meats and fish. *Rau muong,* known as water spinach, has long, hollow stems and dark green, arrowhead-shaped leaves that



Goi Ga, a traditional Vietnamese chicken salad. (Shutterstock)

are similar in flavor to spinach. It grows at the edge of rivers and canals and is an especially important vegetable in northern Vietnam. Watercress, Chinese chives, chrysanthemum greens, and a wide array of cabbages are other leafy vegetables often served at the Vietnamese table. Chayote (*su hao*), bitter melon (*kho qua*), angle squash, long beans, taro stems, and bottle gourds are green vegetables that appear in soups and quick stir-fries.

### *Canh Chua Ca Loc* (Sour Broth)

This colorful soup depends on tamarind's fruity tartness. *Canh chua,* literally, "sour broth," is traditionally served alongside other dishes as a palate cleanser. Ladled over rice, it becomes a comforting, filling meal. Catfish is the most common protein added, but shrimp, eel, and fried tofu are all common substitutes.

*Serves 6*

1 lb fish fillets, cut into 2-in. pieces

2 tbsp fish sauce

½ tsp ground black pepper

4 c fish or chicken stock

¼ c tamarind pulp, softened in 1 c boiling water and strained

6 thin slices ginger

1 red or green chili pepper, sliced thinly

1 tbsp canola oil

1 shallot, thinly sliced

2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced

2 tomatoes, seeded and cut into wedges

2 c chopped fresh pineapple

1 c mung bean sprouts

¼ c fresh cilantro leaves

2 scallions, sliced thinly

Combine the fish, fish sauce, and black pepper in a bowl, rubbing to coat the fish evenly; set aside. In a large pot, stir together the stock, tamarind, ginger, and chili pepper. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer, partially covered, for 15 minutes.

Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add shallots, and cook, stirring, for 30 seconds. Add garlic and cook 1 minute. Add the marinated catfish and sear 3 minutes on each side. Transfer the fish to the soup along with the flavorful oil. Add the tomato, pineapple, and bean sprouts. Increase heat to bring the soup to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer until the fish is opaque at the center, 3 to 5 minutes. Sprinkle with the cilantro and scallions; serve immediately.

### *Goi Ga*

This savory salad is a classic example of the fresh vegetables and herbs that frequently appear on the Vietnamese table. It may be offered as a first course in a banquet or as an accompaniment to a bowl of rice congee.

1½ c cooked chicken, torn into bite-sized shreds

½ small head cabbage, cut into thin ribbons

1 carrot, coarsely grated
¼ small onion, cut into paper-thin slices
¼ c chopped mint leaves
¼ c chopped *rau ram* leaves
3 tbsp fish sauce
3 tbsp fresh lime juice
1½–2 tbsp sugar
1 red chili pepper, thinly sliced (optional)
Freshly ground black pepper
2 tbsp cilantro leaves
2 tbsp chopped, toasted peanuts

In a large bowl, combine the chicken, cabbage, carrot, onion, mint, and rau ram. In a small bowl, stir together the fish sauce, lime juice, sugar, chili, and black pepper until the sugar is completely dissolved. Drizzle the dressing over the salad, and toss to mix evenly. Set aside to let flavors meld for 15 to 30 minutes. Just before serving, toss again, transfer to a serving platter, and garnish with cilantro and peanuts.

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In Vietnam, green tea was traditionally the drink of choice. A large pitcher filled with weakly brewed tea, cooled with a solid block of ice, and placed on a table in the main room of the home will provide refreshment for a family throughout the hot, dusty day. Restaurants immediately offer glasses of tea to each table to welcome diners. Tea infused with jasmine is a favorite served both hot and iced, while for special occasions, tea flavored with lotus blossoms may be poured for guests.

French colonists first planted coffee on the mist-covered slopes of Vietnam's central highlands. Since then, both arabica and robusta coffee plants have flourished, and *cafe sua da,* or iced milk coffee, has become an iconic, much-loved beverage. Preparing the coffee is as much a ritual as drinking it: A metal filter fits over each individual cup, and an intensely dark, thick, strong brew drips slowly through it. A spoonful or two of sweetened condensed milk, a tall glass of chipped ice, and a long spoon all aid in transforming the coffee into a sweet, cooling drink.

The country's hot weather prompts many sidewalk vendors to sell local fruit drinks. *Nuoc mia* is the faintly sweet juice pressed from fresh sugarcane. Limeade and orangeade sweetened with sugar and frequently dressed up with fizzy soda water are refreshing drinks offered at nearly every eatery. The country's abundant coconut trees provide a steady source of *nuoc dua,* the clear and refreshing water of young coconuts. *Chanh muoi,* a limeade flavored with salted plums, replaces valuable minerals sweated out of the body on particularly sultry days. Sodas are becoming increasingly popular among younger generations. European and Australian wines, domestic and imported beers, and special, fruit-based cocktails fill the menus of popular clubs and bars.

Many families still make their own rice wine from cooked glutinous rice. Formed into balls, sprinkled with brewer's yeast, packed into ceramic crocks, and immersed in water, the rice ferments within days to create *ruou nep,* which may have 10 to 20 percent alcohol by volume. In the highland regions, the fermented rice wine is infused with herbs and spices for serving from communal jugs at weddings, festivals, and other special occasions.

## Diet and Health

Chinese medicine, called *thuoc bac,* has long been practiced alongside traditional Vietnamese folk remedies, called *thuoc nam.* Tue Tinh, considered the founder of traditional Vietnamese medicine, was a scholar and Buddhist monk of the 14th century. He wrote several books that listed hundreds of medical herbs and thousands of recipes for herbal remedies. Today, common home-based cures for colds and pains include massaging with aromatic oils, inhaling steam imbued with healing herbs, and sipping bitter teas and rich broths.

From the 1940s through the 1980s, the country endured severe shortages of food. A drop in livestock numbers after the Vietnam War, combined with devastating floods in 1978 that destroyed 20 percent of the remaining cattle herds, led to a significant decrease in meat consumption. After the United States lifted its economic embargo against the Communist government in 1994, food from around the world began entering the country. Income levels

have doubled every few years since 1990, and after decades of severe food shortages, Vietnam has resumed food exports.

While increasing prosperity has improved the diet of the average Vietnamese, the nutritional status of both children and adults remains poor. The country continues to have one of the highest malnutrition rates in Asia, with 22 percent of children under age five considered low in weight for their age and 33 percent of children under age five considered low in height for their age. For adults, the average consumption is 1,850 calories, or one-fifth less than the accepted minimum daily standard of 2,300 calories.

*Thy Tran*

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# Other

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# Antarctica

## Overview

Antarctica is a large continent of ice, over five million square miles in area (nearly 14 million square kilometers). It has no native population and no agriculture. While there are potential native foods on the continent—penguins and seals, for example—their hunting is restricted, and they were significant as food products only during early exploration of the continent. Still, Antarctica is a fascinating case in food culture. About 4,000 scientists and support staff live and work for months at a time on the continent (with a much smaller population over the winter). A somewhat newer tourism industry brings tens of thousands of visitors to the continent each year.

Antarctica is the highest, driest, windiest, and most remote continent. Its international contingent of researchers and staff operates out of research stations run by Great Britain, Norway, Russia, Japan, Argentina, Chile, France, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States of America.

Many explorers, beginning with Ferdinand Magellan in 1519, reported seeing a Terra Australis (southern land). Magellan's sighting, south of his eponymous strait, was actually Tierra del Fuego, South America, now divided between Chile and Argentina. Subsequent exploration, most famously by the British Captain James Cook from 1773 to 1775, revealed a number of Antarctica's outlying islands, called the Subantarctic Islands. Inspired by these early explorers, European nations dispatched numerous expeditions to discover and claim this most southerly land. The first explorer credited with seeing the continent of Antarctica proper (as opposed to outlying islands) is the Russian explorer Fabian Gottlieb von Bellingshousen in 1820.

The heyday of Antarctic exploration occurred in the decades preceding and following the "race to the [South] Pole," begun in 1902 with the attempt by Robert F. Scott, Edward Wilson, and Ernest Shackleton. The race was won (to England's dismay) by Norwegian Roald Amundsen and his team in 1911, beating another attempt by the British team of Robert F. Scott, Edward Wilson, Edgar Evans, and Lawrence Oates by about one month. These and other early explorers hunted seals for fur, perhaps the only industry besides exploration on the continent. Many nations dispatched expedition teams to survey and claim portions of the continent.

By 1959, the age of exploration of Antarctica gave way to the age of scientific discovery with the signing of the Antarctic Treaty. The treaty, effective as of 1961, designated the continent for peaceful purposes, banned mining, and later limited the use of sled dogs and the killing of local wildlife.

## Major Foodstuffs

"Food assumes a role of abnormal importance in a place so deficient of so many of life's pleasures" (Wheeler 1996, 86). Since the earliest days of Antarctic exploration, food has meant survival, solace, a heavy, impractical burden, a waste of time and fuel, a tangible reminder of the good life "off the ice," and much more for the men (and more recently women) who have sought to know this inhospitable land.

Provisioning a continent with no agriculture and few native foods and cooking that food in subfreezing temperatures without vegetation that can be

used for fuel are challenges going back to the earliest days of exploration. Even fresh water—abundant in millions of cubic miles of ice—was a challenge to make usable, requiring a great deal of time, effort, and fuel to melt.

Food in the early days of Antarctic exploration was largely utilitarian. Given the energy required to live and function in this harsh environment (early explorers rationed about 4,700 calories per person per day, about double the U.S. Department of Agriculture's recommended allowance for adults), and the importance of the expedition at hand, it is little wonder that early expeditioners would not have wanted to spend even more energy to make food pleasurable (Swithinbank 1997). Even today, Antarctic cooks take a certain pride in making do with what's available rather than fussing over perfect ingredients as one might do off the ice.

Pride in cooking with efficiency of fuel and time, in opposition to the waste and delicacy of the homeland, is a sentiment that can be found among the earliest Antarctic literature, such as this journal entry of Edward Wilson (1872–1912), dating to the Discovery expedition of 1901–1904: "I confess I do fancy myself as a sledge cook, which doesn't mean that I can make a good omelette, but I can manage a primus lamp and melt the snow and boil up the tea, cocoa or pemmican, and fry the bacon with little wasted time" (Savours 1966/1904, 181).

Pemmican, a food mentioned in the preceding quotation, was a staple of early Antarctica and is a good example of a food that maximizes efficiency. It is a preparation adapted from a Native American food that combines pounded dried meat with animal fat and berries into a dense cake or bars. For Douglas Mawson (Australian Antarctic explorer and geologist, 1882–1958) and other early Antarctic explorers, pemmican was ideal as it was a highly concentrated source of calories and could fulfill their goal of "reduc[ing] as far as possible the weight of food taken upon any journey . . . [such that] only highly concentrated foods are admissible" (Mawson 1998/1911, 116).

Mawson's need for efficiency on the trail was almost consuming as he recounts in his journal on Christmas Eve, 1912: "A violent blizzard, could not travel. . . . I cannot sleep, and keep thinking of all manner of things—how to improve the cooker, etc.—to while away the time. The end is always food, how to save oil, and as experiment I am going to make dog pem[mican] & put the cocoa in it" (Jacka and Jacka 1988, 165).

More efficient than pemmican for early explorers was to live off the land, which in Antarctica meant killing and eating seals, penguins, skua (another seabird), and, in times of desperation, their own sled dogs. The blubber of seals was also the primary source of cooking fuel, and the meat of all these animals was used to feed dogs as well. Mawson wrote in 1908, "We must live on seal flesh and local food cooked by local means as much as possible" (Jacka and Jacka 1988, 16).

Early into the Antarctic exploration, seal had made its place as an integral part of the explorers' diet. An entry from Edward Wilson's Discovery diary reads: "Seal meat for breakfast, jam and bread and butter and tea at 1 o'clock and seal meat for dinner at 6. . . . We eat the whole seal, heart, liver and kidneys. The liver is as good as any I have ever eaten, the kidneys are tougher in texture than sheep's even when well cooked and quite fresh. The flesh is dark indeed, but makes very excellent dishes. . . . Appetites simply immense and *how* we enjoy our food, *and* our sleeping bags, though the joy of breakfast always makes up for the necessity of turning out in the morning" (Savours 1966/1904, 218, emphasis in original).

Later, Wilson remarked, "Our food here is always either seal liver, or Adelie penguin, or skua cut up and fried in butter—simply excellent" (Savours 1966/1904, 335). Local meat became so integral to the Antarctic diet that as late as the 1950s, when the Antarctic Treaty was signed to protect the local wildlife, the United States airdropped beef tenderloins to camping expeditioners. Although the expeditioners had ample food, including non-Antarctic meat, the government considered seal and penguin a sufficiently important part of the diet to bring fresh meat at any expense (Bechervaise 1964).

Despite this recent trend toward luxury amid hardship, today's chefs emphasize the extra steps it takes to be successful on the continent:

> All our produce is brought in once a year at the main re-supply so we make do with that. One thing I will say is you adapt to using aged produce. I have to make my own self-rising flour, my eggs are nearly twelve months old so need to be floated first to weed out the rotten ones (they float). The first thing that comes to mind is the age of produce and other products that are used here that you would never use under most other circumstances. For example eggs that are twelve months old (dipped in oil to help with preservation), carrots (10 months old), potatoes (10 months old). They tend to look very ratty after a while but as you're not likely to get anymore you make do and are forced to make the most of it. It's not unusual for me to rummage through a box of apples on the off chance I'll find 10–15 good ones." (Chef Michael Lunny, Casey Antarctic Station [Australian], in an interview with the author)

While floating eggs may seem a world away from Mawson's experiments with dog and cocoa pemmican, the sentiment is similar. Antarctica is a harsh place calling for a can-do attitude with little patience for the niceties of home. At the same time, while efficiency may be a noble goal for an Antarctic expedition, living on a continent with no indigenous foodways, vegetation, or even sunlight for much of the year reminds even the most diehard expeditioner that she or he is human and has food needs far beyond adequate nutrition. Even Mawson, who passionately touted the efficiency of "highly concentrated foods" for sledging, had a soft spot for an occasional treat: "Speaking generally, while living for months in an Antarctic hut, it is a splendid thing to have more than the mere necessaries of life. Luxuries are good in moderation, and mainly for their psychological effect. With due regard for variety during the monotonous winter months, there is a corresponding rise in the 'tide of life' and the ennui of the same task, in the same place, in the same *wind,* is not so noticeable" (Mawson 1998/1911, 115–16, emphasis in original).

This theme of nostalgia is poignantly shown in the diary of Wilson, who earlier preaches the wonders of seal in the rigorous Antarctic diet but cannot let it corrupt his English Sunday dinner. In July, he writes, "Sunday dinner all through this winter has been celebrated by fresh roast mutton off the sheep given us in New Zealand. They have been frozen in the rigging since December [approximately seven months], but are excellent with mint sauce and beer" (Savours 1966/1904, 161). It is not until the first of September that Wilson acknowledges that his nostalgia may have had the upper hand in their menu, when he writes, "We have finished all our mutton, having had it every Sunday all through the winter. As it was tainted, I think it's a good thing there was no more" (Savours 1996/1904, 287).

Even in contemporary Antarctica with its modern kitchens; the ability to ship, store, and cook a year's supply of fresh, canned, and frozen foods; and relative comfort, there is a need to reinforce the idea of home. When asked if he perceived a nostalgic sentiment for food back home, Chef Michael Lunney replied, "Every minute of every day. This becomes more of a topic of conversation as the year draws on." The lack of fresh produce is especially felt at certain times of year, with expeditioners saying things like, "It's strawberry season back home." While hydroponics on the continent have helped to curb some of the cravings for fresh produce, production is low as authorities are wary of introducing new microbes into the Antarctic ecosystem.

Still, the governments are cognizant of the need to provide a semblance of normalcy in Antarctic life and attempt to achieve this by making luxury items such as wine, quail, and good cheese available to chefs, installing espresso machines, and encouraging chefs to keep flexible menus to respond to special requests for traditional dishes.

## Cooking

On the barren and remote continent of Antarctica, there has long been pride in cooking with efficiency, juxtaposed against another theme of nostalgia for home and for the early days of Antarctic exploration. The methods themselves are similar to those done in a typical kitchen environment—baking, roasting, sautéing, braising, simmering. Due to the extreme environment, outdoor cooking is rarely done unless

camping out. Even then the food is usually prepared under some shelter as it is nearly impossible to cook in the subfreezing wind.

For early explorers, gastronomic pursuits at the campsite—specifically, adapting cooking methods to the Antarctic environment—were detailed alongside the scientific pursuits of the day. Mawson writes, "I have tried yeast bread but find there is not sufficient constancy or warmth in the Hut temperature for proving" and "Correll is now turning out fine scones" (Jacka and Jacka 1988, 85, 90). Wheeler (1996, 87) recalls that "in the early days culinary ingenuity occupied a good deal of the time. One man assured himself lifelong popularity by producing minty peas, revealing later that he had squirted toothpaste into the pot."

Cooking with a minimum expenditure of fuel has long been valued on the continent. Even after Antarctica was settled with buildings and working kitchens and the local wildlife was protected, there was evidence of a certain pride in being as efficient as possible. Charles Swithinbank, writing of his expeditions in the 1960s, recounts an innovation that reinforces the dichotomy between the efficient and the nostalgic:

> Copper-bottomed stainless steel saucepans replaced the traditional aluminum pans, and hard plastic mugs and bowls replaced enamel plates and cups. Though visitors to the tent never knew it, the result was that we went through the whole season without ever washing dishes. The high fat content of our diet and the absence of burnt food sticking to the pans meant that we could clean everything by wiping it with toilet paper. Water on the trail is expensive. Every drop has to be melted from cold snow. Wiping saved fuel. However there is residual ethic in the sledging fraternity that favors primitive and inconvenient cooking utensils. Thus our eminently successful improvements never caught on outside our little group. Burned aluminum, cracked enamel mugs, crumbling pot scourers, and dirty dishwater are evidently the order of the day for macho explorers. (1997, 72)

With a span of over 50 years of Antarctic exploration, Swithinbank straddled the end of the discovery era and the beginning of the scientific era. His unheralded dedication to efficiency was felt not only in the preceding quotation but also when he returned to Antarctica in his late sixties to follow up on some research. To his surprise, a two-pound bag of brown sugar was airdropped over their camp at the request of a research assistant who didn't like white sugar on his morning oatmeal. What would early intrepid explorers have thought of that?

## Typical Meals

By 1912, Mawson's diary reveals a balance between living off the land and living off the rations. An early menu found in his diary shows the rotating entrée from the dinner menu: "Monday—Penguin, Tuesday—Seal, Wednesday—Canned Meats, Thursday—Penguin, Friday—Seal, Saturday—Variable, Sunday—Mutton" (Jacka and Jacka 1988, 59, 63). Wilson's crew incorporated the local fauna into traditional British dishes including seal steak and kidney pie.

In the 1970s the first Indian Antarctic expedition was planned. While the meat-centered European diet adapted relatively easily to the Antarctic climate, the challenge of cooking dried pulses at negative 40 degrees Fahrenheit is greater. Consequently, a line of Indian rations was developed: preserved chapatis, dehydrated pilaf, and dehydrated dal (Subramanian and Sharma 1982–1984).

Because Antarctic research stations are tied to a national government entity, the daily meals are typically reflective of the host nation's dining habits. There is typically a commissary or cafeteria in each research station staffed by government or military employees or, increasingly, by government contractors. Because there are no options for meals outside of the station (there are no real restaurants beyond a burger bar at McMurdo station), great attention is given to providing variety, nutritional balance, and food that feels like home. Increasingly, there is more effort to prepare food reflective of the diversity of the researchers themselves. In general, most researchers report that Antarctic food is quality institutional food, perhaps equivalent to food in a good college cafeteria. Monotonous and institutional, to be sure, but not as bad as is often expected.

Nearly every food item needs to be brought from home, often at an annual resupply (some limited fresh produce is grown indoors). Consequently, elaborate planning as well as culinary ingenuity is needed to maintain quality. Running out of an ingredient is no problem at home—you can run to a store or call a vendor to replace it. Not so on a continent of ice!

## Eating Out

Eating out is largely a moot question on Antarctica. While McMurdo station boasts a burger bar in addition to the cafeteria, most of the continent's dining is restricted to the institutional cafeterias at research stations or aboard the tourist cruise ships.

## Special Occasions

Feelings of nostalgia, contrasted with a lack of practical resources, spur a unique improvisation that would hardly be appropriate anywhere else in the world. Sara Wheeler tells about a visit to Scott Base, a New Zealand Antarctic base: "They put on an Italian night and even produced ciabatta [bread]. An Andres Segovia tape was unearthed; they admitted he was Spanish, but Antarctica taught you to improvise. . . . In the evening we drank the wine the winterers [those relative few who stay over the Antarctic winter] had made from raisins and sultanas. It tasted of cooking sherry, but they had decanted it into Chateau Lafite bottles" (1996, 215). An earlier example dates to 1957, when John Behrendt tells of an improvised cocktail party where "Clint and Mac mixed up some martinis using ethanol (190 proof) for gin and Chilean white wine for vermouth. . . . They must [have been] quite sick of beer" (1957, 138).

Such improvisation is no recent phenomenon. On Christmas Day in 1902, Edward Wilson recounts the menu, which concludes: "Then a very small plum pudding, the size of a cricket ball, with biscuit, and the remains of the blackberry jam and two pannikins [small cups] of cocoa with plasmon [dried milk]. We meant to have had some brandy alight on the plum pudding, but all our brandy has turned black in its tin for some reason, so we left it alone" (Savours 1966/1904, 228).

While a plum pudding sans plum seems a strange improvisation in 1902, Wilson's compatriot on this side of the century, Sara Wheeler, has made numerous "Bread and Butter Puddings (Antarctic Version)" on the ice, whether or not there was actually any butter, milk, eggs, or sugar available. For special occasions in Antarctica it is very much the thought that counts (Wheeler 1996, 301). Because there is no native population on Antarctica, every holiday is necessarily a time of homesickness and nostalgia. Cooks make efforts to reproduce the foods and feelings of home.

## Diet and Health

Because of the extreme Antarctic climate, early rations were more than double the recommended daily dietary intake: about 4,700 calories (Swithinbank 1997). Now that many researchers spend the majority of their time indoors, efforts are made to provide lower-calorie, healthy meals as well as ample opportunities for physical exercise, especially in the dark winter when it is nearly impossible to venture outdoors.

Early explorers suffered from scurvy and vitamin A toxicity (hypervitaminosis A) due to a diet based on seal and penguin (high in vitamin A, especially the liver) with few or no fruits or vegetables. This caused a loss of hair and teeth and skin lesions. Starvation and extreme hunger were constant concerns—and the unfortunate end—of many early Antarctic explorers.

While many tend to view gastronomic variety as a luxury, there seems to be evidence that in times of scarcity, thought of food can be psychologically debilitating if left untended. Mawson and his colleagues wrote extensive menus while subsisting on dog through an Antarctic trek. "Young duck with apple sauce, *petit pois,* new potatoes and American sweet corn," are some of the 11 courses they devise for their return home to Sydney, Australia (Jacka and Jacka 1988, 39).

Similarly elaborate food dreams abound in the early Antarctic literature, characterized by an abundance

of food and a rude awakening when the dreamer discovers it is unattainable. Mawson dreamed of buying an elaborate cake in a confectioner's shop and accidentally leaving the store without the cake. When he returned, the shop had a sign in the door that read "early closing" (Jacka and Jacka 1988, 175–76).

Wilson writes of dreams with unnerving similarity to Mawson's:

> Nearly every night we dream of eating and food. Very hungry always, our allowance being a bare one. Dreams as a rule of splendid food, ball suppers, sirloins of beef, cauldrons full of steaming vegetables. But one spends all one's time shouting at waiters who won't bring one a plate of anything, or else one finds the beef is only ashes when one gets it, or a pot full of honey has been poured out on a sawdusty floor. One very rarely gets a feed in one's sleep, though occasionally one does. For one night I dreamed that I eat the whole of a large cake in the hall at Westal without thinking and was horribly ashamed when I realized it had been put there for a drawing room tea, and everyone was asking where the cake was gone. These dreams are very vivid, I remember them now, though it is two months since I dreamed them. (Savours 1966/1904, 221)

Because of the diversity of the research station personnel and the international treaty managing the continent, all of the world's major religions are represented on the continent at one time or another. There are particular challenges for researchers who require a vegetarian, halal, or kosher diet, and extensive arrangements need to be made in advance since food deliveries to the stations are infrequent and other options for dining do not exist.

In considering the food of Antarctica, past and present, two themes emerge. The first is the idea that food is a necessary burden that needs to be handled deftly and efficiently in order to make for a successful expedition, be it one of early exploration or present-day research. The second theme is that despite the inhospitable climate and geography of the continent, there is a need to occasionally eschew efficiency and practicality to feed the nostalgic, impractical impulses of the resident. These two themes synthesize to form a contemporary Antarctic food culture that is neither wanton nor ascetic and that prides itself on improvisation, making the most of that which is available. In the words of Sir Douglas Mawson, it is "a subject . . . which requires particular consideration and study" (1998/1911, 115).

*Jonathan Deutsch*

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# Space

## Overview

Food is an essential component in human space exploration. If it had not proved possible to eat and digest in space, none of the longer-term space missions since the 1960s would have been achievable. Space travel has such a significant impact on the body that good nutrition is critical. Bone density decreases; muscles waste; cardiovascular deconditioning occurs; red blood cells are lost. Space sickness affects more than half of all astronauts, regardless of experience; and exposure to high levels of radiation can increase susceptibility to other problems such as cataracts and cancer later in life. Space conditions—in particular, the shift of fluid to the head and a low intake of zinc—impact the senses of smell and taste, both of which are reduced, making stimulation of the appetite more difficult. At the same time, the cramped, stuffy, smelly, and noisy conditions on board the spacecraft conspire to dampen the appetite further. Early on, the astronauts would return to Earth thinner and weaker—and with a large proportion of their allotted food uneaten.

## Major Foodstuffs

Every aspect of eating in space must be planned months ahead of any meal being eaten. Minimal quantities of fresh food can be taken into space, so seasonality is not a consideration. Rather, an approved list of pre-prepared foods are tasted by the astronauts, their selections are made, and menus for the complete mission are constructed for each one of them. Nutritional balance is an important consideration in the design of each menu, as is the need to ensure that favorite foods—including snacks like M&Ms—are included in sufficient quantities to keep morale boosted throughout the trip.

Exactly what the foods on the menu are depends largely on the space program. The Chinese *yuhangyuan* don't eat with chopsticks, but they do eat a recognizable Chinese cuisine with rice, meats, and vegetables in classic sauces of bean, chili and Sichuan pepper (kung pao chicken), or garlic, and fruit dishes; the Soviet Union's space program supplied Russian favorites like borscht (beet soup), pickled herring, and porridge; and the United States' food teams made sure they developed classic meat and vegetable dishes like chicken à la king and mashed potatoes, as well as hamburgers, hot dogs, and Thanksgiving dinners. The impact of space conditions seems to make most travelers crave strong flavors, so sauces are popular with every visitor—fresh onions and garlic for the Russians and chili sauce for the Americans.

## Cooking

Astronauts open cans and packets and rehydrate and reheat fully pre-prepared meals. Storage problems and lack of refrigeration mean that there is little or no fresh food except at the very beginning of a mission or immediately after a resupply visit, but even if ingredients were available, there is no kitchen and no equipment to process it with. Every space capsule is a closed environment, so the production of fumes, steam, or, worst of all, smoke, is best avoided. Historically, there was barely enough room to move, and even now interior space is limited

to a fairly tight 1,438 cubic yards (1,100 cubic meters) for six astronauts in the International Space Station. Making room for kitchen equipment would be an expensive undertaking, and it has never been a priority. The astronauts have a demanding work schedule, often cited as another important reason for freeing them from kitchen drudgery and providing ready-to-go convenience foods.

Everything that is consumed in space is prepared in advance—several months in advance—having been tested and tasted by the astronauts, who choose their menus as part of the preflight planning. The food is packaged carefully to minimize its weight and bulk and to reduce spoilage in the extreme and fluctuating conditions of space. The packaging often doubles as the serving dish, and a number of foods can be eaten straight from the package without the need for any utensils other than the scissors to open the bag.

The cooking techniques used on the ground vary according to the type of food being prepared. Historically, pureed foods in aluminum tubes, originally developed in the 1940s and 1950s for air force pilots who had to use pressurized headgear, were the archetypal space food for both the United States and the Soviet Union. Almost anything could be put into these containers, both savory and sweet. In the early 1960s, U.S. scientists put a lot of effort into developing bite-sized compressed foods, which were tested on some of the early Mercury missions. These foods were small, dehydrated cubes (coated in gelatins, starches, or oils to stop them from disintegrating) that would rehydrate in the mouth as they were chewed. They came in a number of flavors—bacon, cheese and crackers, toast, peanut butter, fruitcake—but it was hard to tell them apart without looking at the label. The astronauts found them unpleasant in the mouth and to the taste, and some of the coatings caused stomach upset, so they were discontinued.

Given the concerns about the weight and bulk of everything that is launched into space, dehydration has remained an important technique for preserving and preparing food for space travel. A wide range of freeze-dried meat- and vegetable-based meals were developed during the 1960s, first for the Gemini and then the Apollo missions. These foods were packed into plastic packages that would then have water injected into them before being massaged by hand to ensure even distribution of the water. The water used was a by-product of the fuel cells that operated the generators on board, but the Gemini capsule produced only cold water, which did little to increase the appeal of items like mashed potatoes. Apollo had warm water, which helped, although the need to knead the food probably did little for its texture and appearance. These types of foods continued to be developed and remain an important source of food on the Space Shuttle, and the range has increased to include fish dishes and breakfast foods as well as soups and casseroles and a variety of drinks provided in powdered form.

By the end of the 1960s there was another advance: thermostabilized wet meat products in plastic pouches or cans. These foods are heat-treated to destroy bacteria, in the same process as is used in normal canning. The Soviet Union used many canned foods on its missions from the earliest stages of the space race. It seems that the weight of the cans discouraged the United States from doing the same, so the development of the pouches was an important step forward in providing better and more familiar food for the astronauts. Thermostabilized foods are commonly warmed on board before being eaten with a spoon or fork. This type of packaging has become particularly used for fish, fruit, and puddings. More recently, irradiated food has been provided on the Space Shuttle. This technique helps to prolong the shelf life of smoked and fresh-cooked meats, fruit, and vegetables.

Bread has been variously provided in cans, pouches, and vacuum packs, all in an effort to reduce crumb production. Crumbs floating in a weightless cabin would, of course, be impossible to sweep up. The provision of tortillas instead of more traditional breads has helped overcome the crumb issue. The tortillas are preserved for up to 12 months by being packaged in a nitrogen atmosphere with an oxygen scavenger packet to ensure no mold can grow.

Everything prepared for space flight is given a technical name. “Intermediate-moisture” foods have long been a staple of the space larder and would

simply be described as dried fruit or jerky by a non-astronaut. "Natural-form" foods like M&Ms, nuts, or granola bars would, equally, simply be called by their own name anywhere but in space. The preparation required on the ground is limited to putting them into appropriate secure and portion-controlled packaging. Condiments like ketchup and chili sauce are provided in individual pouches, requiring no special preparation before launch; but pepper and salt must be liquefied (pepper in oil and salt in water) and put into dropper bottles.

## Typical Meals

The meals devised for space fit into to a typical Western pattern of three meals (breakfast, lunch, and dinner) with snacks. However, it is not clear that every mission conforms to this pattern in the timing of its meals. The workload is extensive, and the impact of being in space can reduce the appetite. Many meals are eaten on the move, alone, and without really taking a break.

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**Gemini Mashed Potatoes**

Most of the processing of space food demands industrial techniques that are impossible to replicate domestically. The keen experimenter is limited to using common foods available in the local supermarket and attempting to replicate the space experience by improvising appropriate packaging.

1 package dehydrated mashed potatoes

1 ziplock bag with label

1 syringe

Cold water (quantity according to instructions on original package)

Carefully tip the dehydrated potatoes into the ziplock bag. Seal the bag. Measure the water into the syringe. Inject water into the bag, as close to the seal as possible. Gently massage the bag until the water is evenly distributed and the potato is hydrated. Open one corner of the package and eat with a teaspoon.

For Apollo mashed potatoes, follow the same procedure, but rehydrate with warm water instead of cold.

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## Eating Out

Every meal in space is a meal eaten in—although every meal in some sense lies far beyond the ordinary. Astronaut Michael Collins apparently devised his own Michelin-style grading system for space food, awarding helmets rather than stars for the items he most enjoyed, although it is not clear that any of the items on the menu would have been award winning back on Earth.

The best way to get a space meal that might come close to eating in a restaurant seems to be to invite a French *spationaut* to join one. From their earliest collaboration with the Russian program to the present day, French chefs have devised delicious meals for spationauts to share with their colleagues on special occasions. Richard Filippi, a chef and cookery school teacher, worked on the first of these dishes in the mid- to late 1990s, developing magnificent delicacies for Mir. In 1996 Claudie Haigneré treated her fellow cosmonauts to beef daube, confit of duck with capers, pigeons in wine, and a rich tomato sauce, all washed down with wine from the Alsace. Filippi's other dishes were sent to Mir with French spationauts throughout the 1990s: squid in lobster sauce, toffee rice pudding, and, most spectacular, whole quail cooked in wine sauce, then deboned, sliced, and reassembled (including its wings) into a 3.5-ounce can.

More recently, space tourism has given a boost to the idea of restaurant-quality food in space, with chefs like Emeril Lagasse and television cooks like Martha Stewart and Rachel Ray contributing ideas and recipes to the development teams. Bringing a feast to share with the crew has become a component of the experience for the visitor.

Looking further to the future, Michelin-starred chef Alain Ducasse has turned his attention to fine dining for a possible mission to Mars, devising exquisite vegetarian recipes from the foods that could be grown on board or at a base on Mars: Martian

bread with green tomato jam, spirulina gnocchi, tomato and potato mille-feuille. He's even said he would open a restaurant there, so perhaps there is hope for a future of eating very far out indeed.

## Special Occasions

Creating an environment that can feel as much like home as possible is a tremendously important consideration for the crews, which means that providing familiar foods is the priority in food provisioning. Of course, occasional treats are part of fostering team spirit and boosting morale. The Soviet Union used to send caviar to the cosmonauts for New Year and birthday celebrations, and the United States developed Thanksgiving and Christmas meals for its astronauts in the Apollo program. Individual teams on long-term missions in space have developed their own traditional treat foods, like Shannon Lucid's Sunday night Jell-O parties with her colleagues on Mir in the mid-1990s.

## Diet and Health

Health is a primary concern on all space missions, and every facet of the astronaut's physiology and metabolism is scrupulously monitored, especially given the unique circumstances of weightlessness and the tendency to lose muscle mass and experience other forms of fatigue. The dietary composition of space food is likewise carefully analyzed by nutritionists and naturally changes with the development of nutritional science over the decades since humans were first sent into space.

*Jane Levi*

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# About the Editor and Contributors

**Ken Albala,** Editor, is professor of history at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California. He also teaches in the gastronomy program at Boston University. Albala is the author of many books, including *Eating Right in the Renaissance* (University of California Press, 2002), *Food in Early Modern Europe* (Greenwood Press, 2003), *Cooking in Europe 1250–1650* (Greenwood Press, 2005), *The Banquet: Dining in the Great Courts of Late Renaissance Europe* (University of Illinois Press, 2007), *Beans: A History* (Berg Publishers, 2007; winner of the 2008 International Association of Culinary Professionals Jane Grigson Award), and *Pancake* (Reaktion Press, 2008). He has co-edited two works, *The Business of Food* and *Human Cuisine.* He is also editor of three food series with 29 volumes in print, including the Food Cultures Around the World series for Greenwood Press. Albala is also co-editor of the journal *Food Culture and Society*. He is currently researching a history of theological controversies surrounding fasting in the Reformation Era and is editing two collected volumes of essays, one on the Renaissance and the other entitled *The Lord's Supper.* He has also coauthored a cookbook for Penguin/Perigee entitled *The Lost Art of Real Cooking,* which was released in July 2010.

**Julia Abramson** has visited France on a regular basis for more than 25 years to study, research, travel, and eat. She has published essays on aspects of food culture from vegetable carving to gastronomic writing and is the author of the book *Food Culture in France.* Abramson teaches French literature and culture and food studies at the University of Oklahoma, Norman.

**M. Shahrim Al-Karim** is a senior lecturer of food service and hospitality management at the Universiti Putra Malaysia. His research interests include food and culture, culinary tourism, food habits, and consumer behavior. He received a BS in hotel and restaurant management from New York University; an MBA from Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia; and a PhD in hospitality and tourism from Oklahoma State University, United States.

**E. N. Anderson** is professor emeritus of the Department of Anthropology, University of California, Riverside.

**Laura P. Appell-Warren** holds a doctorate in psychological anthropology from Harvard University. Her primary focus of research has been the study of

personhood; however, she has also studied the effects of social change on children's play. She has done research among the Bulusu' of East Kalimantan, Indonesia, and among the Rungus Momogon, a Dusunic-speaking peoples, of Sabah, Malyasia. In addition, she has traveled widely throughout Arctic Canada. She is the editor of *The Iban Diaries of Monica Freeman 1949–1951: Including Ethnographic Drawings, Sketches, Paintings, Photographs and Letters* and is author of the forthcoming volume entitled *Personhood: An Examination of the History and Use of an Anthropological Concept.* In addition to her current research on cradleboard use among Native North Americans, she is a teacher of anthropology at St. Mark's School in Southborough, Massachusetts.

**Heather Arndt-Anderson** is a Portland, Oregon, native who draws culinary inspiration from many world cuisines but prefers cooking from her own backyard. She is a part-time natural resources consultant and a full-time radical homemaker; in her (rare) spare time she writes the food blog *Voodoo & Sauce.*

**Michael Ashkenazi** is a scholar, writer, and consultant who has been researching and writing about Japanese food since 1990. In addition to books and articles on Japanese society, including its food culture, he has written numerous scholarly and professional articles and papers on various subjects including theoretical and methodological issues in anthropology, organized violence, space exploration, migration, religion and ritual, resettling ex-combatants, and small arms. He has taught at higher-education institutions in Japan, Canada, Israel, and the United Kingdom, directing graduate and undergraduate students. He is currently senior researcher and project leader at the Bonn International Center for Conversion in Germany, with responsibility for the areas of small arms and reintegration of ex-combatants. He has conducted field research in East and Southeast Asia, East and West Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.

**Babette Audant** went to Prague after college, where she quickly gave up teaching English in order to cook at a classical French restaurant. After graduating from the Culinary Institute of America, she worked as a chef in New York City for eight years, working at Rainbow Room, Beacon Bar & Grill, and other top-rated restaurants. She is a lecturer at City University of New York Kingsborough's Department of Tourism and Hospitality, and a doctoral candidate in geography at the City University of New York Graduate Center. Her research focuses on public markets and food policy in New York City.

**Gabriela Villagran Backman,** MA (English and Hispanic literature), was born in Sweden and raised in Mexico and the United States; she currently lives in Stockholm, Sweden. She is an independent researcher, interested in food studies, cultural heritage, writing cookbooks, red wine, and the Internet.

**Carolyn Bánfalvi** is a writer based in Budapest. She is the author of *Food Wine Budapest* (Little Bookroom) and *The Food and Wine Lover's Guide to Hungary: With Budapest Restaurants and Trips to the Wine Country* (Park Kiado). She contributes to numerous international food and travel publications and leads food and wine tours through Taste Hungary, her culinary tour company.

**Peter Barrett** is a painter who writes a food blog and is also the Food & Drink writer for *Chronogram Magazine* in New York's Hudson Valley.

**Cynthia D. Bertelsen** is an independent culinary scholar, nutritionist, freelance food writer, and food columnist. She lived in Haiti for three years and worked on a food-consumption study for a farming-systems project in Jacmel, Haiti. She writes a food history blog, *Gherkins & Tomatoes,* found at http://gherkinstomatoes.com.

**Megan K. Blake** is a senior lecturer in geography at the University of Sheffield. She has published research that examines the intersections between place and social practices. While her previous work focused on entrepreneurship and innovation, her recent work has examined food practices and family life.

**Janet Boileau** is a culinary historian who holds a master of arts degree in gastronomy from Le Cordon Bleu Paris and a doctorate in history from the University of Adelaide.

**Andrea Broomfield** is associate professor of English at Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kansas, and author of *Food and Cooking in Victorian England: A History.*

**Cynthia Clampitt** is a culinary historian, world traveler, and award-winning author. In 2010, she was elected to the Society of Women Geographers.

**Neil L. Coletta** is assistant director of food, wine, and the arts and lecturer in the MLA in gastronomy program at Boston University. His current research includes food and aesthetics and experimental pedagogy in the field of food studies.

**Paul Crask** is a travel writer and the author of two travel guides: *Dominica* (2008) and *Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique* (2009).

**Christine Crawford-Oppenheimer** is the information services librarian and archivist at the Culinary Institute of America. She grew up in Ras Tanura, Saudi Arabia.

**Anita Verna Crofts** is on the faculty at the University of Washington's Department of Communication, where she serves as an associate director of the master of communication in digital media program. In addition, she holds an appointment at the University of Washington's Department of Global Health, where she collaborates with partner institutions in Sudan, Namibia, and India on trainings that address leadership, management, and policy development, with her contributions targeted at the concept of storytelling as a leadership and evidence tool. Anita is an intrepid chowhound and publishes on gastroethnographic topics related to the intersection of food and identity. She hosts the blog *Sneeze!* at her Web site www.pepperforthebeast.com.

**Liza Debevec** is a research fellow at the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovene Academy of sciences and arts in Ljubljana, Slovenia. She has a PhD in social anthropology from the University of St. Andrews, United Kingdom. Her research

interests are West Africa and Burkina Faso, food studies, Islam, gender, identity, and practice of everyday life.

**Jonathan Deutsch** is associate professor of culinary arts at Kingsborough Community College, City University of New York, and Public Health, City University of New York Graduate Center. He is the author or editor of five books including, with Sarah Billingsley, *Culinary Improvisation* (Pearson, 2010) and, with Annie Hauck-Lawson, *Gastropolis: Food and New York City* (Columbia University Press, 2009).

**Deborah Duchon** is a nutritional anthropologist in Atlanta, Georgia.

**Nathalie Dupree** is the author of 10 cookbooks, many of which are about the American South, for which she has won two James Beard Awards. She has hosted over 300 television shows on the Public Broadcasting Service, The Food Network, and TLC. She lives with her husband, Jack Bass, who has authored 9 books about the American South and helped with her contribution to *Food Cultures of the World.*

**Pamela Elder** has worked in food public relations and online culinary education and is a freelance writer in the San Francisco Bay area.

**Rachel Finn** is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in various print and online publications. She is the founder and director of Roots Cuisine, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the foodways of the African diaspora around the globe.

**Richard Foss** has been a food writer and culinary historian since 1986, when he started as a restaurant critic for the *Los Angeles Reader*. His book on the history of rum is slated for publication in 2011, to be followed by a book on the history of beachside dining in Los Angeles. He is also a science fiction and fantasy author, an instructor in culinary history and Elizabethan theater at the University of California, Los Angeles, Extension, and is on the board of the Culinary Historians of Southern California.

**Nancy G. Freeman** is a food writer and art historian living in Berkeley, California, with a passion for food history. She has written about cuisines ranging from Ethiopia to the Philippines to the American South.

**Ramin Ganeshram** is a veteran journalist and professional chef trained at the Institute of Culinary Education in New York City, where she has also worked as a recreational chef instructor. Ganeshram also holds a master's degree in journalism from Columbia University. For eight years she worked as a feature writer/stringer for the *New York Times* regional sections, and she spent another eight years as a food columnist and feature writer for *Newsday*. She is the author of *Sweet Hands: Island Cooking from Trinidad and Tobago* (Hippocrene NY, 2006; 2nd expanded edition, 2010) and *Stir It Up* (Scholastic, 2011). In addition to contributing to a variety of food publications including *Saveur, Gourmet, Bon Appetit,* and epicurious.com, Ganeshram has written articles on food, culture, and travel for *Islands* (as contributing editor), *National Geographic Traveler,*

*Forbes Traveler, Forbes Four Seasons,* and many others. Currently, Ganeshram teaches food writing for New York University's School of Continuing Professional Studies.

**Hanna Garth** is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles. She is currently working on a dissertation on household food practices in Santiago de Cuba. Previously, she has conducted research on food culture, health, and nutrition in Cuba, Chile, and the Philippines.

**Mary Gee** is a medical sociology doctoral student at the University of California, San Francisco. Her current research interests include herbalism and Asian and Asian American foodways, especially with regards to multigenerational differences. Since 1995, she has actively worked with local and national eating disorders research and policy and advocacy organizations as well as for a program evaluation research consulting firm.

**Che Ann Abdul Ghani** holds a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in linguistics. She has a keen interest in studying language and language use in gastronomy. She is currently attached to the English Department at Universiti Putra Malaysia. Her research interests range from the use of language in context (pragmatics) to language use in multidisciplinary areas, namely, disciplines related to the social sciences. She also carries out work in translation and editing.

**Maja Godina-Golija** is research adviser at the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, Scientific Research Centre of Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

**Annie Goldberg** is a graduate student studying gastronomy at Boston University.

**Darra Goldstein** is Frances Christopher Oakley Third Century Professor of Russian at Williams College and the founding editor-in-chief of *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture.*

**Keiko Goto,** PhD, is associate professor at the Department of Nutrition and Food Sciences, California State University, Chico. Dr. Goto has more than 15 years of work experience in the field of nutrition and has worked as a practitioner and researcher in various developing countries. Dr. Goto's current research areas include food and culture, child and adolescent nutrition, sustainable food systems, and international nutrition.

**Carla Guerrón Montero** is a cultural and applied anthropologist trained in Latin America and the United States. She is currently associate professor of anthropology in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Delaware. Dr. Guerrón Montero's areas of expertise include gender, ethnicity, and identity; processes of globalization/nationalism, and particularly tourism; and social justice and human rights.

**Mary Gunderson** calls her practice paleocuisineology, where food and cooking bring cultures alive. Through many media, including the sites HistoryCooks.com

and MaryGunderson.com, she writes and speaks about South and North American food history and contemporary creative living and wellness. She wrote and published the award-winning book *The Food Journal of Lewis and Clark: Recipes for an Expedition* (History Cooks, 2003) and has authored six food-history books for kids.

**Liora Gvion** is a senior lecturer at the Kibbutzim College of Education and also teaches at the Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Environment at the Institute of Biochemistry, Food Science and Nutrition Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

**Cherie Y. Hamilton** is a cookbook author and specialist on the food cultures and cuisines of the Portuguese-speaking countries in Europe, South America, Africa, and Asia.

**Jessica B. Harris** teaches English at Queens College/City University of New York and is director of the Institute for the Study of Culinary Cultures at Dillard University.

**Melanie Haupt** is a doctoral candidate in English at the University of Texas at Austin. Her dissertation, "Starting from Scratch: Reading Women's Cooking Communities," explores women's use of cookbooks and recipes in the formation and reification of real and virtual communities.

**Ursula Heinzelmann** is an independent scholar and culinary historian, twice awarded the prestigious Sophie Coe Prize. A trained chef, sommelier, and ex-restaurateur, she now works as a freelance wine and food writer and journalist based in Berlin, Germany.

**Jennifer Hostetter** is an independent food consultant specializing in writing, research, and editing. She has degrees in history and culinary arts and holds a master's degree in food culture and communications from the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Italy. She also served as editorial assistant for this encyclopedia.

**Kelila Jaffe** is a doctoral candidate in the Food Studies Program at New York University. Originally from Sonoma, California, and the daughter of a professional chef, she has pursued anthropological and archaeological foodways research since her entry into academia. She received a BA with distinction in anthropology from the University of Pennsylvania, before attending the University of Auckland, where she earned an MA with honors in anthropology, concentrating in archaeology. Her research interests include past foodways, domestication, and zooarchaeology, and she has conducted fieldwork in Fiji, New Zealand, and Hawaii.

**Zilkia Janer** is associate professor of global studies at Hofstra University in New York. She is the author of *Puerto Rican Nation-Building Literature: Impossible Romance* (2005) and *Latino Food Culture* (2008).

**Brelyn Johnson** is a graduate of the master's program in food studies at New York University.

**Kate Johnston** is currently based in Italy, where she is an independent cultural food researcher and writer and a daily ethnographer of people's food habits. She

has a degree in anthropology from Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia, and a recent master's degree in food culture and communication from the University of Gastronomic Sciences, Italy. She was also editorial assistant for this encyclopedia.

**Desiree Koh** was born and raised in Singapore. A writer focusing on travel, hospitality, sports, fitness, business, and, of course, food, Koh's explorations across the globe always begin at the market, as she believes that the sight, scent, and savoring of native produce and cuisine are the key to the city's heart. The first and only female in Major League Eating's Asia debut, Koh retired from competition to better focus on each nibble and sip of fine, hopefully slow food.

**Bruce Kraig** is emeritus professor of history at Roosevelt University in Chicago and adjunct faculty at the Culinary School of Kendall College, Chicago. He has published and edited widely in the field of American and world food history. Kraig is also the founding president of the Culinary Historians of Chicago and the Greater Midwest Foodways Alliance.

**R. J. Krajewski** is the research services librarian at Simmons College, where among other things he facilitates discovery of food-culture research, especially through the lens of race, class, and gender. His own engagement with food is seasonally and locally rooted, starting in his own small, urban homestead, much like his Polish and German ancestors.

**Erin Laverty** is a freelance food writer and researcher based in Brooklyn, New York. She holds a master's degree in food studies from New York University.

**Robert A. Leonard** has a PhD in theoretical linguistics from Columbia. He studies the way people create and communicate meaning, including through food. He was born in Brooklyn and trained as a cook and *panaderia-reposteria* manager in the Caribbean; his doctoral studies led him to eight years of fieldwork in language, culture, and food in Africa and Southeast Asia. In the arts, as an undergraduate he cofounded and led the rock group Sha Na Na and with them opened for their friend Jimi Hendrix at the Woodstock Festival. Leonard is probably one of a very few people who have worked with both the Grateful Dead and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which in recent years recruited him to teach the emerging science of forensic linguistics at Quantico.

**Jane Levi** is an independent consultant and writer based in London, England. She is currently working on her PhD at the London Consortium, examining food in utopias, funded by her work on post-trade financial policy in the City of London.

**Yrsa Lindqvist** is a European ethnologist working as the leading archivist at the Folk Culture Archive in Helsinki. Her research about food and eating habits in the late 1990s, combined with earlier collections at the archive, resulted in 2009 in the publication *Mat, Måltid, Minne. Hundraår av finlandssvensk matkulur.* The book analyzes the changes in housekeeping and attitudes toward food. She has also contributed to other publications focusing on identity questions and has worked as a junior researcher at the Academy of Finland.

**William G. Lockwood** is professor emeritus of cultural anthropology at the University of Michigan. His central interest is ethnicity and interethnic relations. He has conducted long-term field research in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Croatian community in Austria and also among Roma and with a variety of ethnic groups in America, including Arabs, Finns, and Bosnians. He has long held a special interest in how food functions in ethnic group maintenance and in reflecting intra- and intergroup relations.

**Yvonne R. Lockwood** is curator emeritus of folklife at the Michigan State University Museum. Her formal training is in folklore, history, and Slavic languages and literatures. Research in Bosnia, Austria, and the United States, especially the Great Lakes region, has resulted in numerous publications, exhibitions, festival presentations, and workshops focused on her primary interests of foodways and ethnic traditions.

**Janet Long-Solís,** an anthropologist and archaeologist, is a research associate at the Institute of Historical Research at the National University of Mexico. She has published several books and articles on the chili pepper, the history of Mexican food, and the exchange of food products between Europe and the Americas in the 16th century.

**Kristina Lupp** has a background in professional cooking and has worked in Toronto and Florence. She is currently pursuing a master of arts in gastronomy at the University of Adelaide.

**Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire** is a lecturer in culinary arts in the Dublin Institute of Technology. Máirtín is well known as a chef, culinary historian, food writer, broadcaster, and ballad singer. He lives in Dublin with his wife and two daughters. He was the first Irish chef to be awarded a PhD, for his oral history of Dublin restaurants.

**Glenn R. Mack** is a food historian with extensive culinary training in Uzbekistan, Russia, Italy, and the United States. He cofounded the Culinary Academy of Austin and the Historic Foodways Group of Austin and currently serves as president of Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts Atlanta.

**Andrea MacRae** is a lecturer in the Le Cordon Bleu Graduate Program in Gastronomy at the University of Adelaide, Australia.

**Giorgos Maltezakis** earned his PhD in anthropology with research in cooperation with the Institute Studiorium Humanitatis of the Ljubljana Graduate School of the Humanities. His dissertation was on consumerism, the global market, and food, which was an ethnographic approach to the perception of food in Greece and Slovenia.

**Bertie Mandelblatt** is assistant professor at the University of Toronto, cross-appointed to the departments of Historical Studies and Geography. Her research concerns the early-modern French Atlantic, with a focus on commodity exchanges at the local and global scales: Her two current projects are the history

of food provisioning in the Franco-Caribbean and the transatlantic circulation of French rum and molasses, both in the 17th and 18th centuries.

**Marty Martindale** is a freelance writer living in Largo, Florida.

**Laura Mason** is a writer and food historian with a special interest in local, regional, and traditional foods in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. Her career has explored many dimensions of food and food production, including cooking for a living, unraveling the history of sugar confectionery, and trying to work out how many traditional and typically British foods relate to culture and landscape. Her publications include *Taste of Britain* (with Catherine Brown; HarperCollins, 2006), *The Food Culture of Great Britain* (Greenwood, 2004), and *The National Trust Farmhouse Cookbook* (National Trust, 2009).

**Anton Masterovoy** is a PhD candidate at the Graduate Center, City University of New York. He is working on his dissertation, titled "Eating Soviet: Food and Culture in USSR, 1917–1991."

**Anne Engammare McBride,** a Swiss native, food writer, and editor, is the director of the Experimental Cuisine Collective and a food studies PhD candidate at New York University. Her most recent book is *Culinary Careers: How to Get Your Dream Job in Food,* coauthored with Rick Smilow.

**Michael R. McDonald** is associate professor of anthropology at Florida Gulf Coast University. He is the author of *Food Culture in Central America*.

**Naomi M. McPherson** is associate professor of cultural anthropology and graduate program coordinator at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan Campus. Since 1981, she has accumulated over three years of field research with the Bariai of West New Britain, Papua New Guinea.

**Katrina Meynink** is an Australia-based freelance food writer and researcher. She has a master's degree in gastronomy through Le Cordon Bleu and the University of Adelaide under a scholarship from the James Beard Foundation. She is currently completing her first cookbook.

**Barbara J. Michael** is a sociocultural anthropologist whose research focuses on social organization, economics, decision making, and gender. Her geographic focus is on the Middle East and East Africa, where she has done research with the pastoral nomadic Hawazma Baggara and on traditional medicine in Yemen and is working on a video about men's cafes as a social institution. She teaches anthropology at the University of North Carolina Wilmington and has also worked as a consultant for several United Nations agencies.

**Diana Mincyte** is a fellow at the Rachel Carson Center at the Ludwig Maximilian University-Munich and visiting assistant professor in the Department of Advertising at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Mincyte examines topics at the interface of food, the environment, risk society, and global inequalities. Her book investigates raw-milk politics in the European Union to consider the production risk society and its institutions in post-Socialist states.

**Rebecca Moore** is a doctoral student studying the history of biotechnology at the University of Toronto in Ontario, Canada.

**Nawal Nasrallah,** a native of Iraq, was a professor of English and comparative literature at the universities of Baghdad and Mosul until 1990. As an independent scholar, she wrote the award-winning *Delights from the Garden of Eden: A Cookbook and a History of the Iraqi Cuisine* and *Annals of the Caliphs' Kitchens* (an English translation of Ibn Sayyar al-Warraq's 10th-century Baghdadi cookbook).

**Henry Notaker** graduated from the University of Oslo with a degree in literature and worked for many years as a foreign correspondent and host of arts and letters shows on Norwegian national television. He has written several books about food history, and with *Food Culture in Scandinavia* he won the Gourmand World Cookbook Award for best culinary history in 2009. His last book is a bibliography of early-modern culinary literature, *Printed Cookbooks in Europe 1470–1700.* He is a member of the editorial board of the journal *Food and History.*

**Kelly O'Leary** is a graduate student at Boston University in gastronomy and food studies and executive chef at the Bayridge University Residence and Cultural Center.

**Fabio Parasecoli** is associate professor and coordinator of food studies at the New School in New York City. He is author of *Food Culture in Italy* (2004) and *Bite Me: Food and Popular Culture* (2008).

**Susan Ji-Young Park** is the program director and head of curriculum development at École de Cuisine Pasadena (www.ecolecuisine.com); project leader for Green Algeria, a national environmental initiative; and a writer for LAWEEKLY'S Squid Ink. She has written curriculum for cooking classes at Los Angeles Unified School District, Sur La Table, Whole Foods Market, Central Market, and Le Cordon Bleu North America. She and her husband, Chef Farid Zadi, have co-written recipes for *Gourmet Magazine* and the *Los Angeles Times.* The couple are currently writing several cookbooks on North African, French, and Korean cuisines.

**Rosemary Parkinson** is author of *Culinaria: The Caribbean, Nyam Jamaica,* and *Barbados Bu'n-Bu'n,* and she contributes culinary travel stories to Caribbean magazines.

**Charles Perry** majored in Middle East languages at Princeton University, the University of California, Berkeley, and the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies, Shimlan, Lebanon. From 1968 to 1976 he was a copy editor and staff writer at *Rolling Stone* magazine in San Francisco, before leaving to work as a freelance writer specializing in food. From 1990 to 2008, he was a staff writer in the food section of the *Los Angeles Times*. He has published widely on the history of Middle Eastern food and was a major contributor to the *Oxford Companion to Food* (1999).

**Irina Petrosian** is a native of Armenia and a professional journalist who has written for Russian, Armenian, and U.S.-based newspapers. She is the coauthor of

*Armenian Food: Fact, Fiction, and Folklore* and holds degrees in journalism from Moscow State University and Indiana University.

**Suzanne Piscopo** is a nutrition, family, and consumer studies lecturer at the University of Malta in Malta. She is mainly involved in the training of home economics and primary-level teachers, as well as in nutrition and consumer-education projects in different settings. Suzanne is a registered public health nutritionist, and her research interests focus on socioecological determinants of food intake, nutrition interventions, and health promotion. She has also written a series of short stories for children about food. Suzanne enjoys teaching and learning about the history and culture of food and is known to creatively experiment with the ingredients at hand when cooking the evening meal together with her husband, Michael.

**Theresa Preston-Werner** is an advanced graduate student in anthropology at Northwestern University.

**Meg Ragland** is a culinary history researcher and librarian. She lives in Boston, Massachusetts.

**Carol Selva Rajah** is an award-winning chef and food writer currently based in Sydney, Australia. She has written 10 cookbooks on Malaysian and Southeast Asian cuisine. Her book *The Food of India* won the gold award for the Best Hardcover Recipe Book at the prestigious Jacob's Creek World Food Media Awards.

**Birgit Ricquier** is pursuing a PhD in linguistics at the Université Libre de Bruxelles and the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium, with a fellowship from the Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique (FNRS). The topic of her PhD project is "A Comparative Linguistic Approach to the History of Culinary Practice in Bantu-Speaking Africa." She has spent several months in central Africa, including one month in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a member of the Boyekoli Ebale Congo 2010 Expedition and two months of research focused on food cultures in Congo.

**Amy Riolo** is an award-winning author, lecturer, cooking instructor, and consultant. She is the author of *Arabian Delights: Recipes and Princely Entertaining Ideas from the Arabian Peninsula, Nile Style: Egyptian Cuisine and Culture,* and *The Mediterranean Diabetes Cookbook.* Amy has lived, worked, and traveled extensively through Egypt and enjoys fusing cuisine, culture, and history into all aspects of her work. Please see www.amyriolo.com, www.baltimoreegypt.org, and diningwithdiplomats.blogspot.com for more information and further reading.

**Owen Roberts** is a journalist, communications instructor, and director of research communications for the University of Guelph in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. He holds a doctorate of education from Texas Tech University and Texas A&M University.

**Fiona Ross** is a gastrodetective whose headquarters is the Bodleian Library in Oxford, United Kingdom. She spends her time there investigating the eating foibles of the famous and infamous. Her cookery book *Dining with Destiny* is the

result: When you want to know what Lenin lunched on or what JFK ate by the poolside, *Dining with Destiny* has the answer.

**Signe Rousseau** (née Hansen) is Danish by birth but a long-term resident of southern Africa and is a researcher and part-time lecturer at the University of Cape Town. Following an MA in the Department of English and a PhD (on food media and celebrity chefs) in the Centre for Film and Media Studies, she now teaches critical literacy and professional communication in the School of Management Studies (Faculty of Commerce).

**Kathleen Ryan** is a consulting scholar in the African Section of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia. She has carried out research in Kenya since 1990, when she began a study of Maasai cattle herders in Kajiado District.

**Helen Saberi** was Alan Davidson's principal assistant in the completion of the *Oxford Companion to Food.* She is the author of *Noshe Djan: Afghan Food and Cookery;* coauthor of *Trifle* with Alan Davidson; and coauthor of *The Road to Vindaloo* with David Burnett; her latest book is *Tea: A Global History.*

**Cari Sánchez** holds a master of arts in gastronomy from the University of Adelaide/Le Cordon Bleu in South Australia. Her dissertation explores the global spread of the Argentine *asado*. She currently lives in Jacksonville, Florida, where she writes the food and travel blog *viCARIous* and is the marketing manager for a craft brewery.

**Peter Scholliers** teaches history at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and is currently head of the research group "Social and Cultural Food Studies" (FOST). He studies the history of food in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. He co-edits the journal *Food and History* and is involved in various ways in the Institut Européen d'Histoire et des Cultures de l'Alimentation (Tours, France). Recently, he published *Food Culture in Belgium* (Greenwood, 2008). More information can be found at http://www.vub.ac.be/FOST/fost_in_english/.

**Colleen Taylor Sen** is the author of *Food Culture in India; Curry: A Global History; Pakoras, Paneer, Pappadums: A Guide to Indian Restaurant Menus,* and many articles on the food of the Indian Subcontinent. She is a regular participant in the Oxford Food Symposium.

**Roger Serunyigo** was born and lives in Kampala, Uganda. He graduated from Makerere University with a degree in urban and regional planning, has worked in telecommunications, and is now a professional basketball player for the Uganda National Team. He also coaches a women's basketball team (The Magic Stormers).

**Dorette Snover** is a chef and author. Influenced by French heritage and the food traditions of the Pennsylvania Dutch country, Chef Snover teaches exploration of the world via a culinary map at her school, C'est si Bon! in Chapel Hill. While the stock simmers, she is writing a novel about a French bread apprentice.

**Celia Sorhaindo** is a freelance photographer and writer. She was the editor of the 2008 and 2009 *Dominica Food and Drink Guide* magazine and content manager for the Dominica section of the magazine *Caribbean Homes & Lifestyle*.

**Lyra Spang** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Anthropology and the Food Studies Program at Indiana University. She has written about food, sex, and symbolism; the role of place in defining organic; and the importance of social relationships in small-scale food business in Belize. She grew up on a farm in southern Belize and is a proud promoter of that country's unique and diverse culinary heritage.

**Lois Stanford** is an agricultural anthropologist in the Department of Anthropology at New Mexico State University. In her research, she has examined the globalization of food systems both in Mexico and in the U.S. Southwest. Her current research focuses on the critical role of food heritage and plant conservation in constructing and maintaining traditional foodways and cultural identity in New Mexico. In collaboration with local food groups, she is currently developing a community food assessment project in the Mesilla Valley in southern New Mexico.

**Aliza Stark** is a senior faculty member at the Agriculture, Food, and Environment Institute of Biochemistry, Food Science, and Nutrition at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

**Maria "Ging" Gutierrez Steinberg** is a marketing manager for a New York City–based specialty food company and a food writer. She has a master's degree in food studies from New York University and is a graduate of Le Cordon Bleu. Her articles have appeared in various publications in Asia and the United States.

**Anita Stewart** is a cookbook author and Canadian culinary activist from Elora, Ontario, Canada.

**Emily Stone** has written about Guatemalan cuisine in the *Radcliffe Culinary Times,* and she is at work on a nonfiction book about chocolate in Central America. She currently teaches journalism and creative writing at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, China.

**Asele Surina** is a Russian native and former journalist who now works as a translator and interpreter. Since 1999 she has worked at the Institute of Classical Archaeology at the University of Texas on joint projects with an archaeological museum in Crimea, Ukraine.

**Aylin Öney Tan** is an architect by training and studied conservation of historic structures in Turkey, Italy, and the United Kingdom. Eventually, her passion for food and travel led her to write on food. Since 2003, she has had a weekly food column in *Cumhuriyet,* a prestigious national daily, and contributes to various food magazines. She was a jury member of the Slow Food Award 2000–2003, with her nominees receiving awards. She contributes to the Terra Madre and Presidia projects as the leader of the Ankara Convivium. She won the Sophie Coe Award on food history in 2008 for her article "Poppy: Potent yet Frail," presented

previously at the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery where she's become a regular presenter. Currently, she is the curator of the Culinary Culture Section of Princess Islands' City Museum. She is happy to unite her expertise in archaeology and art history from her previous career with her unbounded interest in food culture.

**Nicole Tarulevicz** teaches at the School of Asian Languages and Studies at the University of Tasmania.

**Karen Lau Taylor** is a freelance food writer and consultant whose food curriculum vitae includes a master's degree in food studies from New York University, an advanced certificate from the Wine and Spirits Education Trust, and a gig as pastry cook at a five-star hotel after completing L'Academie de Cuisine's pastry arts program. She is working toward a master's degree in public health while she continues to write, teach, test recipes, eat, and drink from her home in Alexandria, Virginia.

**Thy Tran** is trained as a professional chef. She established Wandering Spoon to provide cooking classes, culinary consultation, and educational programming for culinary academies and nonprofit organizations throughout Northern California. Currently, she is a chef instructor at the International Culinary Schools at the Art Institute of California–San Francisco and Tante Marie's. She is also the founder and director of the Asian Culinary Forum. She co-authored *The Essentials of Asian Cooking, Taste of the World,* and the award-winning guide, *Kitchen Companion*.

**Leena Trivedi-Grenier** is a Bay-area food writer, cooking teacher, and social media consultant. Her writings have appeared in *The Business of Food: Encyclopedia of the Food and Drink Industry, Culinary Trends* magazine, and the *Cultural Arts Resources for Teachers and Students* newsletter and will be featured in several upcoming titles by Greenwood Press. She also runs a food/travel/gastronomy blog called *Leena Eats This Blog* (www.leenaeats.com).

**Karin Vaneker** graduated from the AKI Academy of Visual Arts in Enschede, the Netherlands. She later attended Sint-Lukas Hoger Instituut voor Schone Kunsten in Brussels, Belgium. She has written for numerous Dutch newspapers and magazines, specializing in trends and the cultural and other histories of ingredients and cuisines, and has published several books. Furthermore, Vaneker has worked for museums and curated an exhibition about New World taro (L. *Xanthosoma* spp.). At present she is researching its potential in domestic cuisines and gastronomy.

**Penny Van Esterik** is professor of anthropology at York University, Toronto, where she teaches nutritional anthropology, advocacy anthropology, and feminist theory. She does fieldwork in Southeast Asia and has developed materials on breast-feeding and women's work and infant and young child feeding.

**Richard Wilk** is professor of anthropology and gender studies at Indiana University, where he directs the Food Studies Program. With a PhD in anthropology from the University of Arizona, he has taught at the University of California,

Berkeley; University of California, Santa Cruz; New Mexico State University; and University College London and has held fellowships at Gothenburg University and the University of London. His publications include more than 125 papers and book chapters, a textbook in economic anthropology, and several edited volumes. His most recent books are *Home Cooking in the Global Village* (Berg Publishers), *Off the Edge: Experiments in Cultural Analysis* (with Orvar Lofgren; Museum Tusculanum Press), *Fast Food/Slow Food* (Altamira Press), and *Time, Consumption, and Everyday Life* (with Elizabeth Shove and Frank Trentmann; Berg Publishers).

**Chelsie Yount** is a PhD student of anthropology at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. She lived in Senegal in 2005 and again in 2008, when performing ethnographic research for her master's thesis at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, on the topic of Senegalese food and eating habits.

**Marcia Zoladz** is a cook, food writer, and food-history researcher with her own Web site, Cozinha da Marcia (Marcia's Kitchen; www.cozinhadamarcia.com.br). She is a regular participant and contributor at the Oxford Symposium on Food and History and has published three books in Brazil, Germany, and Holland—*Cozinha Portuguesa* (Portuguese cooking), *Muito Prazer* (Easy recipes), and *Brigadeiros e Bolinhas* (Sweet and savory Brazilian finger foods).

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# Food Cultures of the World Encyclopedia

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# Food Cultures of the World Encyclopedia

## EUROPE

**Volume 4**

KEN ALBALA, EDITOR

GREENWOOD

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# List of Abbreviations

c = cup
fl oz = fluid ounce
gal = gallon
in. = inch
lb = pound
mL = milliliter
oz = ounce
pt = pint
qt = quart
tbsp = tablespoon
tsp = teaspoon

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# Preface

This encyclopedia is the culmination of nearly a decade's work on the *Food Culture around the World* series. As that project expanded to 20 volumes, we realized that many peoples and places, fascinating and important in their own right, had not been covered. Considering that the cultural study of food has become more sophisticated and comprehensive over the past decade, that food has become a legitimate academic topic in curricula at every level of education, and that we seem to become more obsessed with food every day, we recognized that we simply could not leave out much of the planet. The only way to satisfy this growing demand is the set you see before you, which includes material covered in the series plus new articles that span the globe. We have gathered food scholars from around the world—people whose passion and expertise have given them deep insight into the ingredients, cooking methods, and ways of eating and thinking about food in their respective countries.

A number of questions regarding breadth and depth naturally arose in planning this work, particularly about the level of analysis for each article. Could we do justice to the vast array of distinct cuisines on earth? Could we include regional coverage for well-recognized food cultures? That is, rather than the nation-state as the criterion for inclusion, why not add Alsace, Provence, and Burgundy with France, or Sichuan, Hunan, and Canton with China? It became apparent that we would need another 20 volumes or risk very brisk, superficial coverage and that as arbitrary as the construction of nation-states has been historically, in particular the way minority cultures have tended to be obscured, the best way to organize this encyclopedia was by nation. Regional variations and minority groups can, of course, be discussed within the framework of nation-based articles. On the other hand, some groups frankly demanded separate entries—those who stood out as unique and distinct from the majority culture in which they happen politically to be included, or in some cases those people who either transcend national boundaries or even those very small places, whose great diversity demanded separate coverage as truly different from the culture around them. Thus we include the Basques separate from Spain and France, and the Hmong. We have not, however, included every single people merely on the basis of national status. This should not be taken to suggest that these cultures are unimportant but merely that many places share a common culture with those around them, though divided by national borders. In such cases we have provided cross-references. This seemed a preferable solution to suffering repetitiveness or unmanageable size.

The format for each entry also raised many questions. "Eating Out," for example, is simply not relevant in some places on earth. Would forcing each article into a common structure ultimately do injustice to the uniqueness of each culture? In the end it seemed that the ability to conduct cross-cultural analysis proved one of the most valuable assets of this set, so that one could easily compare what's for lunch in Brazil or Brunei. Moreover, tracing the various global currents of influence has been made possible since a shared set of parameters places each article on a common footing. We can trace, for example, the culinary influence of various peoples as they spread around the world. In this respect this work is unique. There are several excellent food encyclopedias on the market, all of which cover individual ingredients, topical themes, cooking methods, and sometimes recipes. None, however, treats individual food cultures as discrete units of analysis, and for students hoping to find an in-depth but succinct description of places, or for those hoping to compare a single food topic across cultures, this is the only source to which they can turn. We anticipate that this work will be invaluable for students, scholars, food writers, as well as that indomitable horde popularly known as foodies.

The other major question in designing this encyclopedia was how to define what exactly constitutes a *food culture*. This term should be distinguished from *cuisine,* which refers only to the cooking, serving, and appreciation of food. Naturally we include this within each entry and in doing so have taken the broadest possible definition of the term *cuisine.* That is, if a people cooks and recognizes a common set of recipes and discusses them with a common vocabulary, then it should be deemed a cuisine. Thus there is no place on earth without a cuisine. A nation, continent, region, and even a small group may share a common cuisine. This encyclopedia, however, covers much more. It explores the social context of consumption, the shared values and symbolic meanings that inform food choices, and the rituals and daily routine—indeed everything that constitutes a food culture. Thus we include religion, health, mealtimes, and special occasions, as well as the way certain foods confer status or have meanings beyond simple sensory gratification. Nor have we neglected the gastronomic angle, as recipes are an essential expression of what people think is good to eat, and their popularity is the outcome of decisions made at every level of society, from the farmer who grows food, and the environment and material resources that make it possible, to the government policy that promotes certain ingredients, to the retailers who market them, to the technologies by which they are transformed, and to the individual preference of family members at the level of the household. To this end we have added food culture snapshots to each entry, which puts a human face on the broader topics under discussion.

As with the series that preceded this encyclopedia, our aim is to present the panoply of human experience through the lens of food in an effort to better understand and appreciate our differences. We will find remarkably common experiences among us, especially as the world increasingly falls under the sway of corporate multinational food industries, but we will also find deep, profound, and persistent distinctions, ones that should and must be preserved because they are essential to who were are and how we define ourselves. These are differences

that should not be effaced nor lost as our tastes become increasingly cosmopolitan. I hope that in reading these articles you find, like me, that the world is a marvelously diverse place and what people eat tells us about them in such an immediate and palpable way that in a certain sense you feel you know the people at some level. This, of course, is the first step toward understanding, appreciating, and living with each other peacefully on this small lump of turf we call earth.

*Ken Albala*
*University of the Pacific*

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# Armenia

## Overview

The Republic of Armenia, bordered by Azerbaijan, the Republic of Georgia, Iran, and Turkey, is the smallest and most ethnically homogeneous nation of the former Soviet republics. Ethnic Armenians compose 95 percent of its population, while Kurds and Russians make up less than 2 percent of the three million total inhabitants. Armenia is highly urbanized, with more than 70 percent of the population living in cities and towns. Most urbanites are no more than a generation or two removed from rural peasant roots.

Armenia is one of the oldest nations in the world and was the first to adopt Christianity as its official religion. Except for brief periods of unification and relative prosperity, for most of its history Armenia has been under foreign domination, subjected to Arab, Byzantine, Ottoman, Persian, and Russian influences. After becoming independent from the Soviet Union in 1991, the Republic of Armenia went through many painstaking changes from its centralized, Socialist economy to the free market system. Despite yearly government reports indicating economic growth, Armenia is still a poor country, with at least 35 percent of its population living below the official poverty line.

Armenian society is divided between a very small upper class that benefits from the market economy and a very large underclass. In turn, the poor are divided into those who can regularly afford staples such as cereals, pasta, bread, and cheese and the poorest, whose main source of nourishment is potatoes. While there are signs that a small Armenian middle class is emerging, it is not yet well defined.

Armenians have often sought security and prosperity beyond the boundaries of their homeland. Large or small Armenian diaspora communities can be found in almost any country of the world. Thus, Armenian cultural territory is much larger than the physical size of the modern Armenian republic, which is smaller than Belgium. Armenian Americans played an important role in promoting Middle Eastern culinary traditions in the United States. The challenge for the modern Republic of Armenia is not only to carve out its own culinary personality based on locally available foods and traditions but also to embrace the rich culinary heritage of Armenian communities outside its borders.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Vahram Ananian, age 55, an engineer in a road-construction company, and his wife, Roza, 53, an elementary school teacher, live in a three-room apartment with their children: 26-year-old Vahan, a manager at a Yerevan bank, and their 24-year-old daughter, Marina, a project coordinator for a Western nongovernmental organization. Vahram and Roza feel very fortunate that their children were able to find decent jobs in Armenia, unlike many other young Armenians who must emigrate in search of better opportunities.

The Ananians are a typical Armenian family whose standard of living is far above the poverty line but is not quite at the level of a comfortable middle-class lifestyle. Most of the family earnings are being saved since the future is uncertain and they will need to spend a lot when the children get married.

Roza takes all the responsibility for food shopping and cooking in the family, though on weekends

Vahram goes with her to the farmers' market. Using saving strategies honed during Soviet and post-Soviet times of food scarcity and hardship, Roza prefers to buy food from the farmers' market rather than from higher-priced supermarkets in the downtown district.

Summer and fall are busy months for Roza. Like many Armenian women, Roza throws herself into a frenzy of canning called the *zakati sezon,* "the time for preserving." Most fresh produce available in summer and autumn from the farmers' market is preserved for enjoyment in the winter and spring months. Roza gets a helping hand from her daughter and other relatives, who also stock up with homemade canned foods. Some families exchange jar sets of their fruit compotes and pickled vegetables for variety's sake.

The Ananians buy meat from a small butcher's shop near their residential area. The owner of the shop, Armen, knows the preferences of his loyal customers very well. He is ready to offer Roza fresh ground beef that serves as a filling for stuffed vegetables or pieces of cut beef for soup. Rosa is known in the shop as "Kufta Rosa" because she often asks for well-kneaded ground meat to make *kufta,* Armenian meatballs. By Armenian standards, the Ananians are doing very well, since, for many of their neighbors who live in the same high-rise apartment block, meat is unaffordable and accounts for only a small proportion of the average weekly purchases.

In the spring and summer seasons, twice a week Roza buys *khar kanachi,* an attractive bouquet-style bunch of fresh herbs consisting of those most often used by Armenian cooks: cilantro, dill, basil, and parsley. She also buys tarragon and other fresh herbs in bulk and dries them in the sun on her apartment balcony for later use. At the top of Rosa's vegetable list are eggplant, bell peppers, and tomatoes. They are fried, stuffed, or baked and can be served as either a side dish or a main course at the dinner table.

Though usually not involved in the family chores, the Ananians' children often do some after-work shopping in the supermarkets and treat their family with expensive, imported foods. Sometimes they arrange a day off for Rosa by ordering pizza delivery or take-out grilled meat for the family or their guests to enjoy at dinnertime.

## Major Foodstuffs

The Republic of Armenia is a highland country, with only 10 percent of its territory lying below an altitude of 3,280 feet. Sharp changes in altitude bring variations in weather and the types of soil, creating a diversity of agricultural produce. The three main zones of agriculture are the Ararat Valley and its surrounding foothills and mountains, the Shirak Plateau, and the plains around Lake Sevan. The Ararat Plain, part of the Ararat district with metropolitan Yerevan at its center, is the most fertile region. It makes up 4 percent of the total arable land but yields 40 percent of all agricultural production.

Of all the fruits grown in Armenia, the most celebrated is the apricot, *tsiran.* People buy apricots in buckets and wooden crates during apricot season, which lasts from the beginning of June until the end of July. Out of 200 types of grapes grown in Armenia, the most famous is the *areni,* a black grape grown in Vayots Dzor. The special taste of Armenia's produce is attributed to its mineral-rich soil and continental climate, which is drier than in neighboring Georgia and Azerbaijan. Armenians enjoy an average of 2,500 hours of sunshine per year. Northern Armenia is famous for its wild, delicious miniature pears, which are called *panda* because it was once erroneously believed they were a favorite fruit of panda bears.

Dried fruits are historical foods of Armenia and were used as a replacement for sugar in old times. *Chuchkhel* is made by repeatedly dipping strung walnuts or hazelnuts into grape juice. Once coated, they are removed and hung vertically to dry. Another delicacy is *alani,* dried peaches stuffed with a filling of walnuts, sugar, and cinnamon.



Chuchkhel, Armenian national candy made by dipping walnuts hazelnuts into grape juice then dried. (Shutterstock)

Since Armenia is in the northern limit of the subtropical zone, there are no native citrus fruits. Bananas, citrus fruits, and pineapples have not yet become items of mass consumption. Eating oranges and tangerines is an exclusively winter ritual, not a year-round activity, and many families indulge in them only during the New Year holiday.

The Shirak region in the northwest is known as the Armenian granary. Armenian women used to be true experts in grinding grains with stones and sieving them to create many varieties of wheat products. Historical reports mention 15 types of sieves used in Armenian households. In modern Armenia, the most popular grains are *dzavar,* hulled wheat; *atchar,* also known as German wheat; *korkot,* grits made by crushing hulled wheat kernels; and *blghoor,* made by boiling wheat until it swells, then drying and grinding it. Rice was once locally grown in the lowlands around Yerevan and was even a main export item, but in Soviet times all the wetlands around Yerevan were drained in an effort to end epidemics of malaria. Armenians eat rice imported from India and Iran.

Armenia is a landlocked country, but it has 100 mountainous lakes; the largest, Lake Sevan, is in the northeast. Out of the 31 fish species that reportedly exist in Armenia, the whitefish called *sig,* originally introduced to Armenia from Russian lakes, and the trout called *ishkhan* are the most popular. Gentle poaching is the main cooking method for fish. "Leave well enough alone" is the guiding principle for cooking any freshwater fish, since elaborate sauces or dressings are regarded as disguises that may hide the quality of the catch.

The Gegharkunik Province around Lake Sevan is the country's main supplier of potatoes, cabbage, and barley. For many families in this region, the winter diet consists mainly of fried or mashed potatoes accompanied by sauerkraut. Both foods appeared in the Armenian diet a century ago as a result of Russian influences. Throughout Armenia tomatoes and cucumbers are so tasty and flavorful that they are not only used in salads but also eaten whole and raw, as if they were fruits.

Cheese and traditional plain yogurt are the most frequently consumed dairy products. The two traditional types of cheeses are *lori* and *chanakh.* Both require short periods of fermentation and are aged in brine. Other traditional Armenian cheeses are string cheese, *chechil;* mold-ripened cheese with a crumbly texture, *mklats;* and the fresh, naturally fermented sheep-milk cheese, *vochkhari panir.* Salty, fetalike goat cheese, *aitsi panir,* packed in small clay pots, is one of the success stories of modern Armenian cheese making.

Armenia is home to an incredible variety of herbs. A wild indigenous sorrel, *avelook,* is collected in the spring, dried in braided ropes during summer, and used in winter. Fresh tarragon sprigs are served at almost every meal during spring and summer. Other popular herbs are horse fennel, sage, *malva* (mallows—a leafy green), goose foot (like spinach),



Roasting kebabs in a roadside cafe in Armenia. (Radist | Dreamstime.com)

*falcaria* (or sickleweed, in the carrot family), and lemon balm. Greens are usually sautéed with onions and eaten with garlic-seasoned yogurt. Mountain greens are gathered in the wild by low-income villagers to sell in local markets. Lately, Armenian ecologists have taken issue with the widespread picking of wild herbs out of fear of the damage caused by overharvesting.

Mutton is not a popular food choice for Armenians. Only young lamb is in demand with tradition-bound Armenians who follow an age-old symbolic ritual meal of animal sacrifice, called *matakh* in Armenian. Small meat shops near churches in Armenia sell young sheep to accommodate this dining practice. The sheep-breeding businesses are mainly oriented to the export of both live sheep and meats to markets in Iran and the United Arab Emirates. Most Armenians prefer pork over any other meat, another example of the Russian influence on the Armenian diet. Consumption of pork soars closer to the New Year holiday because a roasted piglet (*gochi* in Armenian) is a traditional part of the festive table. Pork is the preferred meat for popular indoor and outdoor barbecues, too. Roasted pork chops called *chalagach* are a favorite part of the barbecue menu.

## Cooking

Depending on the family's economic circumstances and on the specific occasion, the same dish can be cooked in a plain or a more sophisticated style. If a stew is made as a dinner meal for the family, the meat and vegetables will be cooked in a broth relying on the natural flavors of the ingredients. But if a stew is meant to be enjoyed by guests or is made for a special occasion, then the cook will make special efforts to enrich its flavor by frying or sautéing the meat and vegetables before adding them to the stockpot and by using more varied ingredients.

For religious observances, the style of cooking is always plain, without seasoning other than salt, itself a symbol of purification. *Khashlama* is a generic name for any dish of boiled meat. The name stems from the verb *khashel,* the Armenian word meaning "to boil." Compared to roasting over fire with its connotations of primitivism and paganism, boiling was regarded as a more refined cookery appropriate for Christian rites. If khashlama is offered on restaurant menus or cooked at home for celebrations, it is fancied up by addition of seasoning, herbs, and vegetables.

The most common and quick method of preparing a grain dish is to boil the grain in chicken broth or water and then season it with butter and onion. The two methods of cooking rice are called *kamovi* and *kashovi.* Kashovi requires the rice to be cooked in water, butter, and salt until the liquid is fully absorbed, with the heat reduced just before it boils. Rice cooked in the kamovi style is boiled just long enough to be tender but still firm, then drained and cooked using dry heat with butter. Again, for special occasions or on restaurant menus, grain or rice dishes are more elaborately prepared.

Another traditional cooking style is the blending and combining of ingredients in one-pot cooking. The components of Armenian casserole-type dishes should be packed closely together and in a special order. The traditional flavor of Armenian stews is defined as *ttvash,* meaning "tart." A good stew should be enlivened with the right touch of tartness. Usually plums, the juice of unripened grapes, or cornelian cherries provide a hint of tartness. Stews and casseroles are delivered to the table in a two-handled crock called *kchooch.* Large clay pots are designed for efficient heat retention, allowing food to stay piping hot for many hours and preserving its juicy flavor. *Chanakh* and *putuk* are stew dishes named after earthenware pots or bowls.

The crown jewel of the Armenian menu is the barbecue (*khorovats*). Barbecuers usually don't bother to marinate meat before grilling as the exquisite taste needs no enhancement. A simple dash of salt and pepper allows the flavor to shine through. Vinegar is not used for marinating as, according to barbecue vendors, it kills the natural meat taste and raises a customer's suspicion about its freshness. A good cut of fresh meat, professional skewers, and the glowing embers of a natural hardwood fire are enough for making good barbecue. Cheese, fresh herbs, tomato-cucumber salad, and pickled green



An Armenian man enjoying khash, a dense soup of beef tripe and trotters lavishly seasoned with garlic. (Shutterstock)

chili peppers are traditional side dishes that enhance the flavor of barbecue.

The traditional Armenian oven, the *tonir,* is a ceramic cylinder sunk into the ground; it is used in rural households. Country families in modern Armenia use *atar,* dried cow dung briquettes, to fuel the tonir. The tall heaps of bricks made of cow dung mixed with straw, stacked next to country homes, are a striking detail of the Armenian rural landscape. In urban households, refrigerators are used to store perishable foods, and cooking is usually done on a gas range. It is more common for food to be prepared over heat than to be baked or roasted in an oven. The flavors of most Armenian cooked dishes are delicate and subtle, not fierce.

Frying is done in a one-handled skillet, the *tava.* When meat is frying in the skillet, the English-trained ear hears the sound "siz-siz-siz," thus the word "sizzling" in English. Armenians hear "tzh-vzh-tzh," so they named their popular dish of liver fried in hot oil *tzhvzhik.*

## Typical Meals

Soviet modernization in the early 1920s radically changed eating habits in Armenia. The table etiquette of drinking out of a common cup and handling food with fingers was now considered déclassé. Instead of a single meal prepared to be eaten throughout the day, the tradition of serving three distinct meals—breakfast, lunch, and dinner, with appropriate foods for each meal—became the daily habit.

Armenians have a light breakfast or no breakfast at all. Wraps made by spreading a cheese and herb filling on *lavash,* a traditional flatbread of Armenia similar to the tortilla, and rolling it tightly, is the traditional breakfast or lunch. An example of an Armenian-style breakfast is a lavash wrap of boiled eggs and tarragon.

The lunch break is usually at noon for office workers. Snack-food shops and fast-food eateries serve those who have busy schedules and need to buy a quick lunch. Others manage to go home for a light meal. Dinner, the main meal of the day, is served usually after 6 P.M.

No matter what else graces the Armenian table, *panir* (cheese) should be there. Having a meal of bread and slices of cheese is an Armenian emblem of simple, happy, and unpretentious living. *Hahts u panir,* bread and cheese, is the national snack of Armenia, served and eaten at any time of the day. For many low-income Armenians, bread and cheese has always compensated for the lack of meat.

Along with bread and cheese, common to the dinner table is a plate of fresh herbs with radishes, tomato, and cucumber, served as a salad or just cut into pieces. In winter, homemade canned goods serve as a replacement for fresh vegetables and herbs from the farmers' market. *Basturma,* dried slices of lean, salt-cured, pressed beef coated with a mix of peppery powdered spices, and another traditional Armenian cold meat, *soojookh,* a spicy, dark brown sausage made from ground lamb and lots of garlic, used to be made at home. Nowadays, they are mostly bought from stores. A table platter

of alternating rows of thinly sliced basturma and soojookh immediately upgrades the level of respect shown by a host toward guests.

Meat *tolma* (leaves or vegetables stuffed with meat) or a Lenten version (filled with a rice or lentil mixture) is a mainstay of the dinner table. Methods of tolma preparation have become badges of identity within Armenia. Tolma from Echmiadzin showcases a trio of stuffed vegetables: eggplants, tomatoes, and peppers in a tart sauce. In the Ashtarak region, tolma is meat-stuffed apples stacked on top of stuffed quinces, with dates and dried apricots placed in-between. Armenians share with the neighboring Iranians the predilection and skill for combining the textures and flavors of meats with fruit.

Many Armenian meatless dishes originated from the tradition of fasting. The culinary repertoire evolved around legumes, grains, fruits, vegetables, and herbs in different combinations. Unlike Russians, Armenians don't include mushrooms in their diet as a replacement for meat during fasting. Out of 300 edible mushroom species identified by Armenian specialists, only 10 are actually commonly used in modern Armenia.

After dinner, Armenians usually serve desserts. The choice of pastry often depends on the availability and price of baking supplies. Light sponge cakes are preferred whenever the price of eggs goes down since the recipes require lots of eggs. Coffee not only marks the end of hospitality for guests but also is a very popular morning fix. Armenians are heavy coffee drinkers. Tea with *mooraba,* preserves made of any fruit or berries, is also served, especially in cold winters. Armenian homemade fruit preserves are thinner in consistency than Western-style jams and contain much less sugar.

A classic dish of Armenian cookery, a yogurt soup called *spas* is made of hulled wheat and yogurt, usually seasoned with cilantro. Egg yolk and flour are added to the soup to prevent the yogurt from curdling. In many Armenian villages, spas was made in a large pot and eaten as a one-dish meal for several days. An enduring symbol of earth and home, spas continues to have a deep emotional significance for modern Armenians. And, like so many other Armenian dishes, it is proclaimed to have curative powers.



Gata, a mildly sweet, flat coffeecake, is a traditional Armenian pastry. (Mirvard | Dreamstime.com)

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***Spas* (Yogurt Soup)**

1 c korkot wheat (dried or roasted cracked wheat, similar to bulgur)

7 c water

Salt to taste

1 large onion, finely chopped

3 tbsp butter or vegetable oil

1 tbsp fresh mint, finely chopped

1 tbsp cilantro, finely chopped

1 tbsp parsley, finely chopped

2 c plain yogurt

2 eggs, beaten

Combine korkot with water in a saucepan. Bring to a boil, and lower the heat. Add salt to the liquid, and let simmer for about 1 hour. Sauté the chopped onion in butter or oil until it is golden brown. Remove the skillet from the stove, add seasonings to the onions, and mix well. Pour the contents of the skillet into the saucepan when the korkot becomes tender.

Place yogurt in a bowl. Beat with a spoon until it is smooth. Beat in the eggs. Gradually add a little of the hot liquid from the saucepan to the yogurt mixture while continuously stirring to prevent the

egg from curdling. After about 2 cups of liquid have been added to the yogurt, pour the mixture back into the saucepan. Stir for a few minutes until the yogurt is blended. Remove from heat. Serve hot or chilled.

## Eating Out

The restaurant scene in Armenia was similar to the deplorable state of dining in the Soviet Union as recently as 1990. But it has radically changed and developed at a rapid rate in recent times. There are about 200 restaurants, cafés, and bars in Armenia, the best of which are mostly concentrated in downtown Yerevan. The restaurant industry is considered one of the fastest-growing sectors of the Armenian economy. Restaurants offer eclectic menus mixing European modernity with more Armenian traditional cuisines, revived to stimulate tourism.

Hot, hearty dishes served in a pleasing oven-to-table presentation are meant to entice diaspora Armenians, who make up the majority of tourists visiting Armenia. Fine restaurants serve food in clay bowls to assure that the dish is authentic and obviously ethnic in origin. It is very chic to offer guests wine poured from a clay pitcher. Antiqued earthenware is used as an artistic decoration, prominently displayed as a means of attracting customers. Like in many post-Soviet countries, local restaurants are not affordable for locals and are mainly oriented toward tourists or expatriates.

Yerevan is famous for its summer downtown cafés, which are open around the clock. Armenia, the smallest republic of the former Soviet Union, was a pioneer of café culture in the Soviet Union. In the more permissive atmosphere of the 1960s, cafés were a sign of modernity, added to a relaxed lifestyle after so many years of Soviet austerity. Though cafés were a sign of social sophistication at first, they were still, in Soviet times, a place for male gathering. In the more liberated times of the independent republic, and with the proliferation of cafés and restaurants, Armenian women feel more comfortable going out to eat or having a cup of coffee without the company of men.

Nonetheless, there are still a lot of eateries where men get together to have parties. Small establishments attended by locals offer *khash,* a dense soup of beef tripe and trotters lavishly seasoned with garlic, for winter early-morning parties. Winter khash parties lend some excitement to those dreary months when the majority of the population is waiting for warmer days to come.

Summers in Yerevan are hot and dry, with temperatures often topping 100 degrees Fahrenheit. People stop by small shops or stores to quench their thirst with *tahn,* a lightly viscous drink made of yogurt blended with chilled water and salt. Produced commercially in plastic containers, tahn competes with soft drinks sold in store coolers.

## Special Occasions

Food is placed at the center of relationships in Armenia. The word for friend, *enker,* means "eating together." A host treats guests as if they honor their host by their presence. The Armenian word for "party" is *utel-khmel,* meaning literally "eat-drink."

Like people all over the world, Armenians celebrate important events with food. Different occasions call for particular dishes or delicacies. Salty bread, *aghablit,* is the main culinary emblem of Saint Sarkis Day, celebrated 63 days before Easter, in January or February, in memory of the martyr Sergius of Caesaria in Cappadocia (now in eastern Turkey). Saint Sarkis was executed in 304 A.D.



A banquet of ethnic Armenian foods and drinks. (Corel)

during anti-Christian persecutions by the Roman emperor Diocletian. During his saint day, it is customary for young ladies to eat salty bread and go to sleep thirsty in the hope that dreams will reveal a special romantic someone in their future.

The culinary symbol of Trndez, another ancient Armenian festival of love and marriage, which is celebrated in February, 40 days after Christmas, is *aghandz,* a snack made with roasted, salted grains, nuts, and different kinds of seeds. Married and recently engaged couples not only eat aghandz but also jump over a bonfire for good fortune.

Another symbolic dish is *harissa,* a thick porridge made from korkot (dried or roasted cracked wheat) and fat-rich meat. It is slowly simmered and stirred all night long to ensure a viscous consistency. Like other ritual dishes, the time taken for its preparation is part of its cherished value. Harissa is a symbolic dish of resistance that commemorates those who died during the Turkish siege of Musa Dag Mountain in the Adana Province of the Ottoman Empire, at the beginning of the 20th century. Survivors of the tragedy who still live in Armenia celebrate the deliverance of Musa Dag by sharing harissa. Over 100 cauldrons of harissa are cooked each year in September for crowds of up to 5,000 people. Overnight, participants take turns stirring the commemorative porridge.

Food is also central in Armenian mourning customs. It is customary not only to have a wake after the burial but also to get together again 7 days after the death, and again 40 days later. In the strong belief that when food is shared or given, it is a comfort to the souls of the dead, families take food to the cemetery and leave it there as a *hogebazhin,* literally "soul-part." The rising cost of living has made it difficult for many to honor their dead lavishly, but the pressure not to lose face obliges them to lay the food table, at least for a close circle of people.

The most important time in the entire year is the New Year holiday, that special time when the dinner table should be loaded with sweet treats representing optimism for the future. The essential part of Armenian celebrations is drinking and toasting. Because Armenia is famous for its brandy and, to some extent, wine, there has been a broad misconception that Armenians are avid consumers of wine and cognac. In fact, they mostly drink vodka. *Tti oghi,* mulberry vodka, is considered a real man's vodka. Another strong, time-honored alcoholic drink is vodka made of cornelian cherries, *honi oghi.* Vodka consumption is three times higher than wine consumption. One might blame the Russian influence, along with the availability of low-priced vodka. In recent years, local consumption of wine has increased due to aggressive marketing campaigns by the Armenian wine industry.

Armenians invest a special symbolism in their brandy, the best of which matures in oak barrels for a minimum of 10 years. The sale of the national brandy factory to the French Pernod Ricard company caused a heated debate in Armenia. To its credit, Pernod Ricard modernized the factory, promotes Armenian brandy internationally, and supports Armenian farmers by using only local varieties of grapes for its brandy production.

The line by the legendary Armenian bard Sayat Nova, "If one gives you bitter bile, you, in return, serve him with a sweet," encapsulates the symbolic importance of sweets in Armenian culture. With a flourishing pastry business in modern Armenia, many urbanites prefer buying ready-made pastries from shops instead of baking them. But still, for special occasions, women make them from scratch at home to show off their baking skills. *Gata,* a mildly sweet, flat coffee cake, is a traditional Armenian pastry. The most popular type contains *khoriz,* a layer of filling made from flour, butter, and sugar. Simpler versions of gata used to be a popular snack carried by travelers since it keeps for a long time. Ornate gatas made for weddings and ceremonies were imprinted with decorative designs.

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***Gata***

**Dough**

1 tbsp dry yeast

1 c sour cream

1 c butter

1 egg

1 tbsp vegetable oil

1 tbsp vinegar

3 c sifted flour

**Filling**

1 c butter, melted

2 c sifted flour

1¼ c sugar

½ tsp vanilla

**Glaze**

2 egg yolks, beaten

To make the dough, combine the yeast with sour cream. Set aside for 10 minutes. Add the butter, egg, oil, and vinegar. Mix well. Add flour gradually. Knead the dough well. Refrigerate overnight.

To make the filling, mix butter and flour. Add sugar and vanilla. Stir well.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Divide the dough into 8 equal balls. Roll each ball out as thinly as possible. Brush each sheet with melted butter. Cut the sheet in half, and fold each half into a square. Spread filling in the center, and fold the square in half. Press along the edges to seal in the filling. Roll out the square until it is ½ inch thick. Place pastry about 2 inches apart on a lightly floured baking pan. Brush the surface of each pastry with the beaten egg. Bake until golden brown. Remove pan from oven and allow the pastries to cool.

## Diet and Health

Armenian food culture is deeply embedded with medical beliefs and prescriptions for good health. In old times, treatment with food was often the only hope for recovery, not just in rural households, but also in towns. The first hospital did not open in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, until 1890.

Myths about the healthy qualities of herbs are passed from generation to generation. A person who did not know the medicinal and healthful values of herbs and plants was offensively called *angitats,* "ignorant," by Amidovlat Amasiatsi, the 15th-century Armenian physician. Mhitar Heratsi, a famous Armenian physician of the 12th century, mentions in his writings the primacy of food for survival in both the healthy and the sick.

Fruits are rich in vitamins, and doctors prescribe them for people on low-calorie diets. Armenians used many foods not only to prevent illness but also to cure diseases. Jerusalem artichoke, *getnakhndzor,* is a good substitute for potatoes and starches in diabetic diets. It is sold in large bags during August and September and advertised as a natural insulin. The Chinese date (*Ziziphus jujuba*), called *unab* in Armenian, is a medicine for high blood pressure and chronic cough. Hawthorn, *alotch,* is known as a treatment for heart conditions and high blood pressure.

Meat did not figure prominently in the traditional Armenian diet, not only because it was unaffordable to peasants but also because meatless religious fasts were strictly obeyed by the faithful. In the past, fasting was strictly followed in Armenian communities. Devout Armenians abided by the dictates of the Armenian Orthodox religious calendar and not only fasted before major holidays but also kept weekdays as abstention days. Keeping off meat and dairy products for 158 fast days freed up more resources to be given and distributed to the village community on festive days. Feasting was an extreme activity because it was about overindulgence following the periods of hunger, plus the value placed on



Broiled fish from an Echmiadzin restaurant in Armenia. (Corel)

certain foods was heightened because they were denied for so long.

Rarely do modern Armenians fast as they did in olden times. Some families do make minor changes to their diets, such as replacing butter with oil or showing a preference for kidney beans or herb soup in the period before Easter or Christmas. The modern pattern of overeating at parties and consuming generous portions of meat, when it is available and affordable, harkens back to the ascetic practices of fasting and abstinence followed by heavy feasting in Armenia.

*Irina Petrosian*

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# Austria

## Overview

If geography is destiny, as some historians believe, then Austria proves the case, at least in respect to its gastronomy. The republic, an area of approximately 32,377 square miles, lies in southern central Europe. It is landlocked and bordered by eight countries, many of which, or portions of which, were part of the vast Austro-Hungarian Empire at its peak of central European domination in 1914. These include Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein. Austrian culture, and, in particular, its food culture, draws from all of these neighbors and more. It seems that all who passed through this central hub over the past two millennia left their imprint on the land and its cuisine.

The Danube, the second longest of Europe's rivers, flows eastward as it meanders through Austria's western and north-central plains and valleys, then constricts through the Wachau Valley before passing through the Vienna Plains as it heads toward Hungary. The Danube has long been a major byway between central and eastern Europe, transporting ships, great barges laden with goods, and travelers. With the completion of the 106-mile Europa Canal connecting the Rhine and Main rivers of Germany with the Danube in 1992, a direct shipping passage now allows transport of goods from the North Sea to the Black Sea.

Because of Austria's central location, plains, and waterway, perhaps no other country in western Europe has been, from its earliest beginnings, so traversed by others. Countless groups passed through and often settled within the flexing borders of this great commercial hub. Etruscans, Visigoths, and Romans inhabited what is now Austria. In 500 B.C., Celts came to extract salt from its mines, later yielding them to the Romans, who, in 15 B.C., settled Vindobona, a military outpost that grew into present-day Vienna. Later, Slavs, Turks, Huns, Magyars, and Bohemians invaded. In recent years, refugees from eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have sought harbor in this generous and neutral land. Each of these groups has left its mark on Austria's culinary heritage.

Austria became one of Europe's strongest powers under the long-reigning Babenberg and Hapsburg emperors, the latter having ruled the country from the 1200s until 1918, and uniting its nine independent provinces. Throughout a succession of wars and conflicts, the empire's boundaries were redrawn many times. By the early 1900s the Austro-Hungarian Empire had expanded to become the largest power of all of Europe. But following its defeat in World War I, Austria was reduced to its current size, which is slightly smaller than the state of Maine.

The Federal Republic of Austria consists of nine provinces: Vienna, Burgenland, Styria, Carinthia, Tyrol, Vorarlberg, Salzburg, Upper Austria, and Lower Austria. Each has a distinct geography and culinary specialties. The country's terrain is two-thirds alpine, with northern highlands that form part of the Bohemian massif and lowlands to the east. The Alps dominate the western and southern regions of the country. Though most of the area is covered with forests and mountains, the country is almost fully agriculturally self-sustaining. The flatter northern and eastern parts hold the greatest

concentration of the population, with 67 percent living in urban areas, yet Austria's smaller towns and villages are considered to be among the most picturesque and livable in all of Europe.

Today, tourism is a pillar of Austria's economy, and the country's varied cuisine and high-quality wines are an important attraction. Viennese pastries, first prepared by the pastry chefs of the emperors, are among the country's most famous contributions to world cuisine, but many other specialties are also renowned.

Austria's population in 2007 totaled 8.3 million inhabitants, with an annual growth rate of 0.4 percent. Ethnic groups included Germans, Turks, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, and Bosnians; other recognized minorities included Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, and Roma. The major religions are Roman Catholic (73.6%), Lutheran (4.7%), and Muslim (4.2%). All but 10 percent of Austrians speak German as their primary language. Sizable concentrations of Croatian (in Burgenland), Slovene (in Carinthia), Hungarian, Czech, and Slovak minorities live within the country, with the preservation of their language and culture guaranteed by Austria's constitutional law. Literacy is high (98%), as is life expectancy (76.6 years for men and 82.6 years for women). In 2007, 4.2 million were employed in Austria's workforce, with 67 percent performing service jobs, 28 percent engaged in industrial work, and 5 percent in agriculture and forestry. As of 2006, Austria was the fourth-richest nation among all European Union countries in terms of its gross domestic product per capita. In 2008, Austrians' per-capita income was the 16th highest in the world, according to World Bank figures.



Close-up of coating a raw veal cutlet in breadcrumbs to make Wiener Schnitzel. (Carmen Steiner | Dreamstime.com)

## Food Culture Snapshot

Johann and Annamarie Baumgartner have a home on the outskirts of the industrial and contemporary arts city of Linz, in Upper Austria. Johann is an accomplished violinist and plays in a major orchestra as well as teaching at a private music university. Annamarie is a physical therapist and works with children and adults with physical disabilities. The Baumgartners' twins, a son and daughter, attend a renowned public technical high school, where Felix studies information science and Catarina studies communications. Annamarie, Felix, and Catarina are avid amateur musicians and each play one or two instruments, so the family enjoys making music together, whether at home or at gatherings of family or friends.

Annamarie does all of the cooking, with some help from Catarina and Felix, and Johann and the children welcome a variety of foods, including Austrian traditional fare and foreign specialties. On vacations, the family has hiked in the neighboring Alps and Dolomites in several nearby countries. Johann has also traveled extensively throughout Europe and England for musical performances and has a cosmopolitan appetite. Although they occasionally order pizza or chicken takeout, the family reserves fine dining for special occasions. There are many excellent restaurants in Linz, and Salzburg, with its fine offerings, is only about an hour's drive from Linz.

Linz has a wide variety of stores available for food shopping, from large supermarkets to artisanal food shops where Annamarie can find excellent local produce in season or imported produce throughout the year; top-quality meats, fowl, and freshwater fish; excellent cheeses and dairy products; and many kinds of spices and condiments. She buys organic products as much as possible. There are excellent bakeries in the city, and specialty stores feature many types of foods

and specialties, so she has a wide selection of food to inspire her cooking. She especially enjoys preparing Italian dishes, especially when fresh, vine-ripened tomatoes are available. She has collected many recipes from magazines and has several favorite cookbooks from which she prepares Austrian, Hungarian, French, and Italian dishes.

Because of Austria's diversity and wealth, and the resulting range of choice, it is difficult to typify an Austrian family and its food habits and cooking styles. However, as most Austrians live in cities or large towns, the typical urban-dwelling family has access to good farmers' markets, supermarkets, local bakeries, and specialty stores. Most are likely to keep coffee or tea, yogurt, fruit, milk, rolls, bread, butter and jam, and perhaps packaged muesli or whole-grain cereal, as well as cheese and sliced sausage, on hand for a light early breakfast or late-morning snack consisting of any combination of these foods.

A home cook might choose veal, chicken, beef, pork, fish, or sausage to prepare for the entrée of the main meal. Wiener schnitzel (breaded veal cutlets fried quickly in butter), or one of its many variations, is a typically popular dish. It is frequently available preprepared, along with various other entrée choices, at deli counters in larger supermarkets and specialty food stores. Vegetables, noodles, potatoes, rice, or dumplings might accompany the main course, and for these, a home cook might have purchased potatoes and other vegetables (fresh in season or frozen) at a local market or supermarket. Convenience foods and packaged mixes abound in today's Austrian supermarkets, and many busy home cooks keep them on hand and use them readily. For the salad that may accompany or follow the main course, lettuce, cucumbers, and tomatoes are available much of the year owing to imports and greenhouse production.

Many Austrians, particularly city dwellers, often take a mid- or late-afternoon break for coffee and a snack, such as a delectable pastry enjoyed at a favorite coffeehouse. Coffeehouses have been a distinctive part of Austrian social culture since soon after coffee was introduced in Vienna. A Polish hero, Franz George Kolschitzky, purportedly opened the first coffeehouse after the failed siege of the Turks in 1683. The Turks, for whom coffee was a customary beverage, fled so quickly they left behind sacks of beans; Kolschitzky, a translator, at first tried to sell the beverage as the Turks prepared it: ground and boiled several times. Only when he strained it and served it with added milk did it gain acceptance. Today, coffeehouses are popular venues for breakfast, light lunches, or snack meals in the late morning or afternoon.

For light suppers, cold meats, cheese, or smoked fish might have been purchased at the market, to be served with bread and a variety of sauces or condiments such as a range of mustards. Fruit, fresh or stewed (sometimes with rum, as for the traditional *Rum Topf* ), served either alone or with heavy cream, is a popular dessert, as are strudels, fruit-filled flaky pastries with or without *Quark* (a smooth, fresh sour cheese, not unlike yogurt). Wine, beer, fruit juices, and mineral water are the common beverage choices.

Austrian home cooks buy a variety of cooking vegetables, herbs, cheeses, and condiments to keep on hand. These include onions, red and green cabbage, chives, mustards (of which there are a great variety, including sweet, horseradish-flavored, spicy, and wine- or herb-flavored types), and spices or packaged spice mixtures. For the spice rack, a home cook would have parsley (for soups); caraway, paprika, and marjoram (used in making meat stews and Hungarian goulash); and cinnamon (for rice puddings and compotes). Fresh or dry lovage might also be purchased for use in soup stocks or in dishes calling for a light celery accent. Lemons accompany some schnitzels or are purchased for the rind to be used in flavoring desserts.

Lean, dry cured or smoked ham called *Speck* is purchased for seasoning many dishes such as noodles and dumplings. Home cooks buy eggs to have on hand for omelets, soufflés, soups, and puddings. Freshwater fish (carp, pike perch, lake trout, and salmon) and chicken are prepared in many traditional ways, and turkey has gained popularity as a substitute for chicken or even veal. Beef, especially cut for *Tafelspitz* (a distinctive boiled beef dish prepared from a special cut of fine-grained meat from the leg), and pork are also popular. Good-quality veal is plentiful and is used for schnitzels, though chicken, pork, and turkey are also frequently used for this popular breaded and panfried meat preparation. Lamb is neither as plentiful nor as popular as other meats.

Sour cream and whipping cream are staples for cooking. Cheese purchases in 2001 averaged 10 percent of a household's fresh-food bill. Austrian cheeses have received many world cheese awards. Popular cheeses include Quark, Pinzgauer Bierkäse, Salzkammergut Käse, and Vorarlberger Bergkäse.

## Major Foodstuffs

Farms are mostly family owned and small (45 acres, or 18.4 hectares, in 2005) in comparison with the U.S. average (445 acres, or 180 hectares). The average dairy herd is comprised of just 12 cows. Still, Austria's self-sufficiency for major agricultural products exceeds 100 percent. The top three products are beef and veal, drinking milk, and sugar. Self-sufficiency is lower for poultry, fruit, and vegetables. The total value of Austria's agricultural production in 2006 was 5.68 billion Euro (US$8.4 billion), with a little over half from animal production and the rest from plant production. About 5 percent of the nation's gainfully employed persons worked in agriculture or forestry.

Austria's agricultural production includes cereals such as maize, wheat, and barley, much of which is grown in the eastern plains. Oilseed production, including rapeseed, sunflower, soybeans, pumpkin, poppy, linseed (flaxseed), safflower, and sesame, has been increasing since the mid-1990s. Root crops such as potatoes and sugar beets are also plentiful.




Organic fruit display at a farmers market in Austria. (Shutterstock)

In 2006 about 835,000 tons of fruit were harvested from intensive and extensive fruit farming, with apples, plums, peaches, apricots, pears, and garden strawberries of major importance. Viticulture in Lower Austria, Burgenland, Styria, and Vienna has a long tradition dating back to the Roman age. Production and exportation of Austrian-produced wines are both on the rise.

Mountain farmers are federally subsidized to assure quality, agricultural continuity, and food security. Thus, especially for mountain farmers, milk and cattle production constitute a major source of income. Grazing lands are cultivated organically, and Austria is recognized as a leader in high-quality dairy and cheese production.

Livestock of predominantly combined milk/meat breeds are bred, and beef production exceeds domestic consumption by 40 percent. Pork production meets domestic consumption needs, and poultry and egg production nearly do (84% and 74% respectively in 2005). Sheep farming has been on the increase since 1975; most lamb is sold via direct marketing.

Domestic production of fish is limited to freshwater species such as trout and carp. Seafood consumption is rising due to health awareness, and marine fish, shellfish, and crustaceans are imported from other European suppliers such as Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway.

In 2005, Austria ranked third among the top European spenders for organic foods. About 15 percent of Austria's agricultural land is certified organic, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management encourages further development of organic production through active agri-environmental research and marketing assistance. The number of organic farms is on the rise, and in recent years, Austrian consumers have increasingly favored *bio,* or organic, ingredients and products for home cooking.

## Cooking

Kitchens range from basic to ultramodern. Cooktops and ovens are heated by electricity or natural gas or by propane in more remote locations. In a corner of the kitchen there is often a nook with a

table and built-in bench seating at which the family eats its daily meals. In addition, a formal dining room, where fine dinnerware may be kept in a freestanding buffet, is a common feature of many homes. The extended family traditionally gathers for a large midday meal on at least one weekend afternoon, usually with the eldest woman or women doing the cooking. Outdoor grilling of meat, sausages, or fish may be done by men or women.

The female head of the family traditionally prepares the daily meals, possibly with her daughters' assistance. Children of both sexes often are expected to help with setup and cleanup. Today, many working couples, with or without children, may share in preparation and cleanup duties.

Soups and stews are simmered on modern stoves and cooktops. Meats and fish may be roasted, fried, or grilled in roasters, grills, or frying pans. For example, chicken paprika, roast chicken with paprika sauce that came from Hungary, is a popular Austrian dish. In some health-conscious homes, whole grains for use in baking are milled using a small household grain mill. Many home cooks enjoy baking, although working women have fine bakeries from which to choose a wide variety of baked goods, and they very often do. Potatoes are commonly served boiled or roasted. *Nudeln* (noodles) and various forms of dumplings, are common starch accompaniments. Rice is also served but not as often as potatoes.

## Typical Meals

A light, early breakfast (*Frühstück*) in Austria might consist simply of a roll with butter and jam; bread with sliced cold meats or cheese; or cereals with milk or yogurt, all accompanied by coffee, tea, cocoa, or fruit juice. Traditionally, those who have eaten their breakfast early might take a break from their work around 10 A.M. to have a second light meal (*Gabelfrühstück*) consisting of a sausage or other snack.

Noontime has traditionally been when the main meal of the day (*Mittagessen*) is served at home, in a restaurant, or in a workplace cafeteria. Today's busy work schedules allow less time for a leisurely, multicourse noontime meal, however, so a quicker and lighter meal may be taken at noon, with a more relaxed larger meal consumed in the evening. Whenever it is served, the main meal might consist of soup and a main course followed by a small salad of mixed vegetables with lettuce and a dessert.

Stews or roasted, grilled, or panfried fish or meats such as veal, beef, or pork are most commonly served for the main meal entrée. Schnitzels (breaded and fried veal, pork, or chicken cutlets) are very popular entrée choices. Root vegetables or green vegetables in season or from hothouses, and noodles, potatoes, or dumplings (large, boiled ones, or tiny ones, such as *Spaetzle*) usually accompany the main course, and the meal may be served with bread. Some restaurants add a small cover charge for a dinner roll with butter. A small mixed-vegetable salad, either in vinaigrette or mayonnaise, may follow or accompany the main course. Wine, beer, or mineral water is also served. Wine is most popular in the eastern provinces, and beer is favored in the west. The meal concludes with dessert, which Austrians, and particularly the Viennese, enjoy immensely. Today's increasingly health-conscious Austrians might favor fruit desserts, but cakes, sweet dumplings, and puddings, as well as strudels and other pastries, are also served.

Many Austrians, particularly city dwellers, often take a midafternoon break to enjoy *Jause,* a light snack of coffee and a delectable pastry enjoyed perhaps at a favorite coffeehouse. Coffeehouses are also popular for breakfast, snacks, or light lunches. A more elaborate afternoon social gathering, like an English tea, including small sandwiches, cakes, and coffee or tea and enjoyed either in a home or in a coffeehouse or café, is also called a Jause.

For the evening meal (*Abendessen*)—traditionally consisting of lighter fare unless the main meal could not be eaten at noon—cold meats, sausage, cheese, or smoked fish might be purchased, then served with bread and condiments such as a selection of mustards. Or leftovers from a heavier meal might be served. Wine, beer, and fruit juices are the beverages of choice.

The food of Vienna is among the most cosmopolitan of all of Europe, with especially strong influences from Hungary, Bohemia, and Italy. Starters



A vast array of pastries being sold in a shop in Vienna, Austria. (iStockPhoto)

may include clear soups, perhaps with strips of cooked egg or small dumplings, noodles, vegetables, or sausage. For main courses, the popular Wiener schnitzel, a breaded cutlet of veal that is fried, is served with potatoes. Favored stews include *Gulyas,* a thicker variation of the paprika-spiced Hungarian goulash. Austrian Gulyas is mainly made from beef, veal, or pork, but one famous restaurant in Vienna specializes in Gulyas and prepares it with beans, mushrooms, turkey, fish, or chicken livers and even offers a vegetarian version. *Wiener Backhendl,* lightly breaded fried chicken that is served with lemon, is also a popular Viennese specialty.

***Wiener Schnitzel***

Meaning "Viennese slice," Wiener schnitzel is a breaded meat cutlet. It can be made of veal, pork, or chicken. Schnitzels are enjoyed in Germany as well as Austria, but a true Viennese Wiener schnitzel is a thinly pounded, perfectly crispy veal cutlet that's been fried in butter or a mixture of butter and oil and is then garnished with lemon and possibly anchovies, capers, and parsley.

To prepare Wiener schnitzel, allow one 6-ounce cutlet per person. Fill the bottom of one large salad plate with flour, and fill a flat soup bowl with beaten eggs to which a splash of water has been added, and then a second salad plate with crispy breadcrumbs. Pound the cutlets evenly on both sides with a meat mallet until about ⅜ inch thick; they will spread out in size considerably. Lightly season the meat with a sprinkling of salt and pepper. Dip each first into the flour (patting off extra), then into the egg (allowing the excess to run off), then into the breadcrumbs—again shaking gently to remove excess. Make sure that all the meat is covered with crumbs. (If a thicker coating is preferred, dip the crumb-coated meat back into the egg, then into the crumbs a second time.) Place the breaded cutlets on a cake rack as you coat them, then chill on the racks, uncovered, in the refrigerator for about 20–30 minutes before cooking. This will dry the coating slightly to assure a crispy crust and moist meat.

Heat a frying pan large enough to accommodate one or two cutlets at most. When hot, add enough butter (or half butter and half canola or other oil with a high smoke point) to coat the bottom of the pan to at least ⅛ inch. When the butter begins to foam, or the oil and butter combination ripples with heat (do not allow it to smoke), put cutlet(s) in the pan and fry each side for a few minutes just until browned. Additional butter may be required before each turning. Keep cooked cutlets hot in a prewarmed oven until serving. Garnish with sliced lemon and a parsley sprig, along with a few capers and an anchovy, if desired, and serve with parsley-buttered potatoes.

Viennese pastries are world famous, and there are said to be over 100 varieties of cakes made. These include the famous *Sachertorte,* a chocolate cake with apricot filling; *Erdbeeroberstorte,* or strawberry cream torte; the layered *Dobostorte* that originated in Hungary and is frosted with chocolate buttercream; *Malakofftorte,* or ladyfinger torte with rum cream; and *Esterhazytorte,* or a Hungarian-style wafer torte filled with chocolate mousse and apricot jam. In addition, there are various strudels, or rolled flaky pastry filled with fruit or sweetened cheese. These also originated in Hungary, and the most famous of these is *Apfelstrudel* (apple strudel).

Viennese cuisine sets the national standard, and many of its dishes are served throughout Austria.

However, each of Austria's nine *Bundesländer,* or federal states, boasts its own specialties. A marketing initiative, GENUSS ("Region of Delight"), led by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, aims to bring visibility to the culinary specialties of each region.

Vorlarlberg, the westernmost federal state, is related more closely to Switzerland in respect to gastronomy than it is to the rest of Austria. The mountainous region produces over 40 cheeses, many of which win awards in international cheese-making competitions. Cheeses and plenty of carbohydrates find their way into hearty Vorlarlberg dishes. One of the most popular is *Käsknöpfle,* or cheese noodles made with potatoes and regional cheeses. Others include cheese dumplings and fried breads.

The Tyrol, which is also mountainous, is known for its fortifying foods as well. These include dumplings made with ham, spinach, and *Graukäse,* or Tyrolean mountain cheese. *Kaspressknödel,* a cheese dumpling, is served in soup or with sauerkraut. *Tiroler Gröstel,* a hashlike mixture of meat, potatoes, onions, and herbs, and *Melchermuas,* a large dessert pancake, are two dishes that are traditionally served in the heavy cast iron pans in which they're cooked. *Kiachl,* doughnut-like fried cakes, are another favorite specialty of the region.

The federal state of Salzburg encompasses the beautiful Salzkammergut Valley with its many beautiful lakes. The northern part of Salzburg leans toward Bavarian influence, whereas the southern part is alpine and Tyrolean influenced. Because of its long independence under the rule of Catholic archbishops until 1816, the cuisine of Salzburgerland has been influenced greatly by church practices, particularly during Lent.

In the southern part, meals are cheese-centric with very little meat or fish, with the exception of *Tiroler Leber mit Polenta,* or calf liver fried with onions and served over cooked cornmeal. Tyrolean mountain valleys produce wild mushrooms that are popular in dishes such as wild mushroom stews. Local fruits and berries are blended into sweet dumplings of Bohemian origin. *Nidai,* or fried potato dough, and *Schlutzkrapfen,* or spinach ravioli with butter and Parmesan cheese, are also specialties of the region. Salzburgerland's northern lakes yield fresh fish and crayfish. The best Austrian beers are produced here. Perhaps the most famous Salzburger specialty is *Salzburger Nockerl,* a light, sweet soufflé that is dusted with vanilla-flavored powdered sugar.

Upper Austria's specialties include its dumplings, which may be made of wheat flour or potato and are filled with sweet or savory fillings. Sauerkraut and cabbage salads and potatoes are frequent Upper Austrian accompaniments. *Linzertorte,* a raspberry jam–filled almond-flour cake from Linz, is a popular pastry that is served throughout the country. Schnapps and *Most* (apple or pear cider) are also specialties of the region.

Specialties of Carinthia, Austria's southernmost province, include *Schlutzkrapfen,* cheese ravioli with mushrooms; *Kasnudeln,* potato ravioli filled with Quark and mint; *Ritschert,* a bean and barley stew flavored with smoked meat; and *Reindling,* a traditional cake filled with cinnamon, sugar, and raisins.

In Styria there are vast vineyards and pumpkin fields. Light omelets, both savory and sweet, that are torn before serving are a specialty. Collectively, they are known as *Schmarrn* and include the most popular, *Kaiserschmarrn,* a sweet pancake-like omelet with raisins that is served with fruit preserves. Savory specialties include *Steirisches Wildschweinernes,* or wild boar simmered with onion, root vegetables, and spices; and *Heidensterz,* or fried buckwheat groats with cracklings. Pumpkin seeds and pumpkin oil are produced in Styria and used for salads and to garnish pumpkin soup. Many fruits and nuts are grown in Styria.

Lower Austria possesses world-famous vineyards along the Danube Valley. The region's specialties include white asparagus, venison, pheasant, boar, rabbit, poppy seeds, and apricots.

Burgenland's broad plains came under Hungarian administration in the days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Carp, pike perch, chicken, duck, and goose are popular dishes. Wild mushrooms, wild asparagus, and polenta are widely used in this wine-producing region. A favorite dish is *Eszterhazy-Rostbraten,* filet of beef with a root vegetable and sour cream sauce. *Mohntorte,* or poppy seed cake, is also a specialty.



Kaiserschmarrn, a sweet omelette with raisins and served with fruit preserves. (Shutterstock)

## Eating Out

Stift St. Peter Weinkeller in Salzburg, founded in the year 803, is the oldest inn and restaurant in Europe. The monastery and wine cellar are chronicled in the writings of Alcuin, Charlemagne's leading adviser. Austria has long been a mecca for dining and today offers many excellent restaurants from which to choose.

Many types of restaurants can be found, and although most meals are prepared at home, Austrians love to dine out and usually have favorite local restaurants they especially enjoy. A *Heuriger* is a rustic wine tavern, often associated with a winery. Many can be found in the suburbs of Vienna such as Stammersdorf, Grinzing, Semmering, Nussdorf, Neustift, and Ottakring, as well as in other wine-producing areas throughout the country. Foods served at these pleasant wine-garden restaurants are generally limited to cold buffet items and are accompanied by the slightly spritzy new wine of the latest vintage. Folk music known as *Schrammelmusik* is featured in many Viennese Heurige. Few evenings in Vienna can be more memorably spent than with good food and wine, and the lovely Austrian tunes one enjoys at a Heuriger.

For a light meal, there is a *Kaffeehaus* or *Konditorei.* Similar to a café, a coffeehouse is a social gathering place that specializes in coffee drinks and pastries but often offers light lunches as well. A Konditorei specializes in pastries and confections, though many such shops have expanded their menus and now resemble cafés.

*Biesl* are cozy restaurants where typical Viennese specialties are served. These might include Tafelspitz (boiled beef with horseradish applesauce), *Beuschel* (stewed organ meats: calf lung and heart served with a bread dumpling), *Leberknödel* (liver dumplings), or other dishes. A *Wurstlstand* is a street stand at which steaming sausages with rolls and mustard and other condiments may be bought throughout the evening. They are mostly found in the larger cities. In addition to various casual dining choices such as these, there are fine-dining restaurants as well, and many Austrian chefs have been recognized around the world for their creativity and skill. There are numerous Michelin-starred and other highly rated choices.

## Special Occasions

Austria is nearly two-thirds Roman Catholic, and the church's holy days are observed, with Easter, Advent, and Christmas being special times for family gatherings. For Easter, braided breads with raisins are enjoyed at the Easter dinner, for which a whole suckling pig, ham, lamb, or rabbit may be roasted. Dessert might be a special cake such as Sachertorte, a chocolate cake with apricot filling and dark chocolate frosting.

At Christmastime, a pre-Christmas fast may be observed, and on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, families celebrate with special meals, mulled wine, and Christmas cookies shaped like stars. For Christmas Eve supper, a light meal of clear or vegetable soup, fried carp, potatoes, cucumber salad, and mushroom rice may be served before the family attends midnight mass. On Christmas Day, some families still serve the traditional roast goose with red cabbage, potato dumplings, and dried fruit–studded Christmas breads and sweetmeats. But in some homes, turkey or Wiener schnitzel may be substituted.

For New Year's Eve, the extended family will gather for a noisy and fun celebration. Good-luck charms such as marzipan pigs may be given, followed by champagne or sparkling wine at midnight, and dancing. New Year's Day will be quieter, with many enjoying the annual Vienna Philharmonic

Orchestra's New Year's concert from Vienna on television.

Many cities also celebrate patron saints' feast days. In Burgenland, for example, roast goose is served on Martinsdag, or St. Martin's Day, on November 11. In fall, vintage festivals are held in various wine-producing areas.

## Diet and Health

An old Austrian epithet advises against eating too much and too late: "Frühstücken wie ein König, zu Mittag essen wie ein Bürger und zu Abend essen wie ein Bettler" (Eat breakfast like a king, lunch like a townsman, and dinner like a beggar). During World War II and the subsequent occupation, rationing was severe and Austrians didn't have much to eat at all. Following the war, sugar, butter, and other goods became available, and some Austrians overcompensated for their wartime deprivation. The national sweet tooth grew with increasingly available and excellent pastries and confections. Although the daily consumption of sugar in Austria remains somewhat higher than in many other European countries, it has declined in recent years.

The Austrian diet today is generally well balanced, although still excessive in carbohydrates and fats in some regions, leading to the development of diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease in some people. Austrians in general, however, are very active and healthy. Many Austrians today, particularly younger, better-educated, and health-conscious citizens, enjoy sweets in moderation and engage in activities such as walking, hiking, cycling, skiing, and other cardiovascular exercise in order to maintain their energy intake/output balance. With their high life expectancies, most Austrians live long, productive lives. Many might gladly admit that they also live very well.

*Pamela Elder*

**Further Reading**


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# Basque Territory

## Overview

The Basque territory occupies an area that spans adjacent sections of northern Spain and southwestern France, and the population is around three million. It comprises three provinces in France: Lapurdi (Labourd), Nafarroa Beherea (Basse Navarre), and Zuberoa (Soule), and four in Spain: Bizkaia (Vizcaya), Gipuzkoa (Guipúzcoa), Araba (Alava), and Nafarroa (Navarra). The first three Spanish provinces are autonomous, having a large degree of self-rule at the provincial level. Navarra has a different legal status, allowing it to join the other three by a popular vote. Thus far that has not happened. The Basque word for Basque country is *Euskadi,* meaning "land of the Basque speakers."

The Basque civilization is ancient and enigmatic. Its exact origins are unknown, and the Basque language (Euskara) is unlike any other spoken on Earth. Research suggests that Basques may descend from the earliest human settlers of the region, predating Indo-European arrivals, since the Basque language is the only surviving pre–Indo-European language in Europe. The Basque people have never had a country of their own, although the medieval Kingdom of Navarre might qualify, yet they have managed to preserve their language and rich culture over the course of millennia. Throughout history they have existed with various degrees of autonomy from and varying levels of hostility toward different rulers and the many invading armies that have passed through the region, all of which have influenced their culinary traditions.

Much of the terrain in Basqueland is rugged, so agriculture has historically mostly been limited to small plots and grazing, though the river valleys are quite fertile. The relative austerity of the land has made the sea a central focus for Basque culture and food. Basques have been famous throughout history as mariners and anglers; they made early contact with Vikings and may have had a significant presence in the Americas before Christopher Columbus arrived. Several members of Columbus's crew were Basque, as were many of the men who crewed the Spanish Armada.

Food and cooking are centrally important to Basque culture; a passion for cooking and eating is a defining characteristic of the Basque people, and they are fiercely proud of their culinary traditions and accomplishments. Basque cuisine has benefited from many influences. The cuisines of France and Spain are obviously important, and before them the Romans and Moors brought ingredients and cooking techniques. From the Vikings, the Basques learned about cod and the location of the great fisheries off of northeastern North America. Basques eagerly adopted peppers, both sweet and hot varieties, as well as tomatoes, chocolate, and spices from the Americas into their cooking. The very inclusive and open-minded attitude toward ingredients and an improvisational streak that always tinkers with and tests new possibilities accounts for the quick adoption of New World foods.

## Food Culture Snapshot

María and Esteban Etxeberria live in Bilbao. María works as the office manager for an architecture firm, and Esteban is an accountant. They have two sons in grade school. As middle-class residents of a bustling city,

their dietary habits are broadly reflective of their fellow urban citizens. Their day typically begins with coffee or hot chocolate with croissants, cold cereal, or a baguette with butter and jam. Most Basque families eat lunch together every day; schools let out for two hours at lunchtime, busing kids home, and many businesses close for the same period. Lunch will usually be a soup, freshly made or reheated, followed by sandwiches or, time permitting, a fish or meat stew, with cheese and fruit to finish. After the family returns from work and school at the end of the day, they have a snack: a simple sandwich, or tea and cookies or pastry. Dinner might be a whole grilled fish, a roast chicken with rice, or *marmitako* (a fish stew with potatoes). On a weekend, a slow-cooked lamb stew might make an appearance, or the family would go out to meet friends at a local bar for *pintxos* (as tapas are called here). Both parents shop for food, and it's often a challenge, since many stores are closed during the lunch break. They stock up on fresh produce, cheese, bread, fish, and meat as needed and make sure that the pantry is never without dried peppers, *bacalao* (salt cod), olive oil, and other staples.

As in the rest of Europe, supermarkets are gradually supplanting the traditional open-air markets, with shopping now done less often than the previous norm of every day. Supermarkets also tend to stay open throughout the day, allowing more opportunities for working people to shop there. As more women enter the workforce, traditional roles and institutions are changing in response. Home cooking was traditionally the exclusive territory of women, while restaurants, cider houses, and the all-male gastronomic societies gave the men a forum in which to cook for each other. Today, the traditional gender roles are much less strict than they used to be, especially in the more urban areas, but for the most part Basque women still spend an average of nearly twice as much time cooking and doing housework as men. These roles are best viewed in the larger context of Basque tradition, which is nuanced; women controlled domestic and civic finances and sat in the nave in church, while men had to sit up in the balcony.

## Major Foodstuffs

Basque cuisine, like much of the territory, faces the sea. The areas farther inland feature more meat, but it is from the sea that Basque civilization gained its sustenance and fortune. Basque country can roughly be divided into three geographic regions, each of which has a different type of cuisine. The coastal areas feature seafood of all types, treating it with a light touch so that the beauty of the catch can shine: usually grilled, baked, or sautéed with a simple sauce. This simplicity—letting the freshness and quality of ingredients speak for themselves—is a trademark of Basque cooking from any region and has proved very influential for modern chefs worldwide. Farther inland, in the mountains, meat (especially mutton and lamb) and game feature more prominently, along with cheese, foraged mushrooms, and legumes. The inland regions share more foods with Castilian Spain, especially beef, pork (including cured ham and sausage, like the famous chorizo), and the red wines of Rioja. The ease of transport today has allowed each of these formerly distinct culinary regions to borrow liberally from each other, making for a somewhat more homogeneous cuisine than in the past.

Seafood is central to Basque cooking, especially in the coastal regions. Tuna, cod, squid, crab, eels, and shellfish are all prized. Onshore, where other ingredients are more easily available, more complex preparations evolved. Marmitako is a traditional stew made from tuna, potatoes, onions, and peppers and is a perfect example of a now-classic dish that originated on fishing boats. Fresh tuna is gently stewed with the precooked vegetables so that all the ingredients are perfectly tender upon serving. Squid (*txipirones*) are often grilled or stewed in their own ink. Baby eels (*angulas*) are prized and very expensive due to scarcity and demand. The eels, hatched in the Atlantic, swim thousands of miles back to the same rivers their parents lived in. Caught in the fall, at about three inches long, they are usually quickly cooked *a la Bilbaina,* or Bilbao-style, in hot garlic-infused olive oil and then served immediately.

Salt cod, or bacalao, is one of the most important foods of the Basque people. Basques were originally whalers, hunting in the Bay of Biscay. Their success depleted the whale population, so they ventured farther north, where they met and traded with Vikings who told them of the great cod fishing grounds off of Newfoundland. One of cod's defining characteristics

is its lack of fat, meaning that if salted it will not go rancid over time. As a result of this, salt cod became both a crucial commodity and a means by which a ship could stay at sea for long periods without any fresh food. Salt cod offered a versatile meat substitute after the Vatican imposed a ban on Friday meat consumption, and it quickly became a staple all over Europe. Basques developed a wide range of dishes using salt cod that elevated this humble ingredient to luxurious heights. This, combined with their legendary marketing prowess and business acumen, helped to popularize cod all over Europe. As a result of cod, the ports, and manufacturing, the Basque provinces continue to be the wealthiest in Spain.

Basques were among the first Europeans to embrace the foods that colonists brought back from the Americas, among them tomatoes, peppers, and potatoes, all of which now form the basis of many dishes, including the classic *pipérade* (*piperrada*), a sauce of peppers, tomatoes, and onion, seasoned with dried hot Espelette peppers, and sometimes with eggs cracked in toward the end. Various kinds of peppers can be seen drying all over the region in the summer and fall, and they form an essential component of all kinds of Basque food. Fire-roasted *piquillo* peppers in jars are a principal export of the town of Lodosa in Navarra, and they are often stuffed with everything from seafood to sausage to cheese. *Piparras* are long, thin, slightly hot green peppers, often pickled like Italian *peperoncini;* they are natural accompaniments for ham and sausage. Probably the most famous Basque pepper is the *piment d'Espelette* (Espelette pepper), grown in the eponymous town in Labourd. Dried and ground, the complex heat and flavor of the peppers form an integral part of many Basque dishes, including the cured hams of Bayonne. Espelette peppers have received the *appellation d'origine controlee* (AOC) designation, in common with fine wines, that regulates exactly where any peppers bearing the name must be grown.

Corn and beans—two other imports from the Americas—were also thoroughly embraced by Basque cooks. Especially in Guipúzcoa, corn and beans are still often grown together in the American Indian fashion, allowing the beans to climb the cornstalks. *Talos* are thick corn tortillas used by farmers and shepherds to wrap their lunch, and cornmeal is used in a variety of cakes. Beans are eaten both fresh and dried in a multitude of preparations. Among the most prized are beans that are mature but not yet dry; called *pochas,* during their short season they are often featured in a stew with quail. In Tolosa, the local black beans are called *alubias* and are so revered that the town holds an annual festival to celebrate them and vote for the best grower. The traditional Tolosan method of preparation is to simmer the beans in an earthenware crock with garlic and olive oil and then serve them on braised cabbage.

The varied landscape and climate of the Basque region are ideal for many species of edible mushrooms. Many Basques are avid mushroom hunters, especially in the spring and fall when the best conditions make for bountiful harvests. Among the most cherished species are truffles, cèpes (porcini), and a delicate species called *perretxiku,* which grow in the spring, but there are many more. Traditionally, and in keeping with the practice of minimal intervention, mushrooms are served simply: grilled, scrambled in eggs, or added to soup.

The Pyrenees and Cantabrians are home to deer, wild boar, and a number of species of game birds. Venison is a popular ingredient in sausage and is also often grilled and served with one of the traditional sauces. Boar is also used in sausages and to make *civets,* or stews. In the steep mountain passes, a unique method of bird hunting has evolved: White decoys—which doves mistake for hawks—are thrown into the air. The birds respond by flying down close to the ground, where they are caught in nets stretched across the narrow ravines. The doves are usually served grilled or stewed.

Basques have been shepherds since before recorded history. Goats are rarely kept, which explains the relative scarcity of Basque goat cheeses, but sheep are ubiquitous. Lamb is an integral part of any special meal, often roasted whole or quartered on iron stakes driven into the ground next to a large fire. Lamb is also commonly made into stews and sausages. A dish using both methods, and highlighting the resourceful frugality at the core of traditional Basque food, is *txuri-ta-beltza,* or "black and white." The small intestine of a lamb is cooked, chopped with garlic and onions, bound with eggs,

and stuffed into the large intestine. The sausages are then gently stewed in the lamb's blood. Poultry is widely raised, though eggs tend to feature more prominently in Basque cooking than do the birds. The pink-and-black Basque pig was very nearly extinct in 1981, with only 20 left in the world. A few enterprising producers brought the breed back into widespread use, and now many of the great hams of Bayonne are made from Basque pigs.

Bayonne ham (*jambon de Bayonne*) has received a Protected Geographical Indication from the European Union and is thus carefully regulated in all aspects of its production. The pigs from which the jambon de Bayonne is made are free-range, foraging for tree nuts to supplement their grain. After slaughter, their legs must be rubbed with local sea salt and cured for at least seven months, though many are cured longer, for up to a year. They are often rubbed with ground Espelette pepper during curing to impart a slightly piquant complexity. Bayonne ham is expensive but extremely popular both as charcuterie and as an ingredient in many dishes. The ham shank bones are prized for soups.

Basque sheep cheeses are famous, and several have received either AOC or *denominación de origen* (DO) designation, depending on which side of the border they are made. *Idiazábal,* made in Guipúzcoa, is probably the best-known Basque cheese. Made mostly from Latxa sheep, after aging, it is often smoked to add complexity and deepen the flavor. Other well-known examples include Roncal (from Navarra) and Etorki, Ossau-Iraty, and P'tit Basque (from the French side). Roncal is a semihard cheese made from the milk of Latxa and Aragonesa sheep grazed around the seven villages in Navarra's Valle de Roncal. Etorki, made from the milk of black-headed Manech ewes in Mauléon, has an orange rind and a smooth texture with a subtle flavor and notes of burnt caramel. P'tit Basque is a mild, semisoft cheese developed in 1997 and marketed aggressively as an alternative to stronger-flavored sheep-milk cheeses.

Cheese, along with quince paste (*membrillo*), fruit, and nuts, traditionally concludes a meal. Sweets are more often eaten in the late afternoon around teatime, or an hour or so after dinner. Traditional Basque desserts range from *mamia*—a junket with fruit originally made in wooden milk pitchers by shepherds, who heated the milk with hot rocks—to simple walnut, chestnut, or rice puddings and custards flavored with seasonal fruit. In addition to grapes, apples, and cherries, other berries and tree fruits are widely grown in gardens and on farms, and walnuts, almonds, and chestnuts are all traditional staples still used whole, roasted, or ground into flour for both sweet and savory preparations. Honey is also produced all over the region, though not traditionally used much in cooking. Chocolate came to the Basque territory with Jews who fled the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal and settled in Bayonne. These refugees had learned to sweeten and emulsify the cacao and soon had mastered making solid bars; prior to this, chocolate had only been drunk. As a result, Bayonne became famous for its chocolates, a reputation that endures. Probably the best-known dessert on the French side is the *gateau Basque* (*biskotx*): two layers of pastry baked with either pastry cream or cherry jam between them. The cherries, if used, should be from Itxassou, which is famous for them. There are as many versions of the recipe as there are Basque bakers and much good-natured disagreement about which filling is superior. Cherries are also often made into *gerezi beltza arno gorriakin,* a soup of the fruit poached in sweetened wine.

Cider has historically been as important as wine, if not more so; every Basque farmhouse had an orchard. Dozens of varieties of apples thrive in Basqueland, and the *sagardotegi* (cider houses) are important institutions. Over the years, they have evolved from simply being houses where cider was made into something closer to a restaurant; patrons would originally bring some food along when stopping in to buy cider, since the drink is meant to accompany food. Over time, a traditional meal took shape around the tasting, and the cider houses began to prepare food themselves. Now they are something like brew pubs, offering a three-course meal of a salt cod omelet, then a grilled steak, and then cheese with nuts and quince paste for dessert.

The cider is stored in large barrels with a tap about six feet from the floor. Periodically during the meal,

patrons are called to gather at the barrel, catching the thin stream from the tap in their glasses, which aerates the cider. This is called a *txotx.* Since Basque cider is almost all still, this aeration helps to enliven the flavor and gives some temporary effervescence to the drink. The cider season lasts from mid-January through May, after which the cider houses close. Other times of the year, cider is bought in bottles. Bottles are traditionally held high while the cider is poured into glasses held low, mimicking the effects of the txotx. Most Basque cider is produced and consumed in Guipúzcoa.

Over time, as Basque tastes were influenced by outsiders, production of wine far exceeded that of cider. Txakolí, a slightly fizzy, low-alcohol white wine meant to be drunk in the year it is made, is the most famous Basque wine. Made mostly from the Hondarribi Zuri grape, it is produced in Alava, Vizcaya, and Guipúzcoa. Each region uses different grapes to supplement the Hondarribi, and differences in climate and terrain between the regions also make for variations in flavor and quality. Some red is made, from Hondarribi Beltza, but the vast majority of Txakolí production is white. It is also an ingredient in many dishes, especially seafood, which take advantage of its bright acidity to build sauces.

Irouleguy is the only Basque wine made on the French side to have received AOC status. Reds (about 70% of the total production) are made mostly from Tannat, Cabernet Franc, and Cabernet Sauvignon grapes, as are the rosés, making up another 20 percent. Some whites are made from Corbu and Manseng grapes. The best reds can age well for up to 10 years. Wine production dates back at least to the Romans and used to be far more widespread; in the Middle Ages the great pilgrimage routes led through this area, and the pilgrims required a great deal of wine. Though the quantity produced has declined dramatically since then, there is no doubt that the quality has improved a great deal both before and since the AOC designation. Some producers of note include Brana, Abotia, and Ilaria, where grapes are grown organically.

Much of Basqueland's southern border is defined by the Ebro River, along part of which lies the famous Rioja wine region. Though not specifically Basque, Rioja is commonly drunk throughout the area, as it complements the more meat-oriented food found farther from the coast. Rioja Alavesa, the northernmost of the three areas within the Rioja DOC (Denominación de Origen Calificada—a legal protection of the wine's origin), falls within the Basque province of Alava. The wines tend to be lighter and more acidic than those made farther downstream where the climate is hotter, but the poor soil and low yields make for wines with strong character. Rioja is made primarily from Tempranillo grapes, with Garnacha (Grenache), Mazuelo, and Graciano added to tailor the blend. White Rioja consists mostly of Viura grapes, blended with smaller amounts of Malvasia and Garnacha Blanca. Most *rosados* (rosés) are made from Garnacha, which has lighter flavors than Tempranillo and is better suited to rosés. Some Rioja rosés can age well for a remarkably long time.

*Patxaran* is an old liqueur from Navarra that originated as sloe berries (wild plums or blackthorn) macerated in anise-flavored liquor. Over time the recipe was refined and now usually includes a few coffee beans and vanilla to round out the flavor. Patxaran (*pacharán* in Spanish) is popular throughout Spain. On the French side, Izarra is a digestif made in Bayonne that is flavored with mixtures of local herbs and botanicals. It comes in green or yellow. The green is minty, with a higher alcohol content, while the sweeter almond-based yellow version includes saffron and honey. It is usually drunk neat or on ice, though more recently it has found favor as an ingredient in cocktails and desserts, including chocolates and ice creams.

## Cooking and Typical Meals

A typical meal near the coast might begin with *porrusalda,* a leek and potato soup, followed by a fish stew: marmitako, *bacalao a la vizcaina* or *bacalao al pil-pil,* or txipirones (squid) stewed in their own ink. Bacalao al pil-pil is a signature Basque dish, embodying the refinement and alchemy borne of humble ingredients for which the cuisine is renowned. It features salt cod, the longtime staple around which

much of the Basque economy and foodways were built. The desalinated fish fillets, cut into pieces, are gently sautéed in olive oil in which garlic and peppers have been lightly browned. The trick to the dish is creating a silky emulsion between the olive oil and the juices given off by the fish, an operation that involves gently agitating the pan over heat for some time. Gelatin from the skin of the fish helps with the emulsification, so cod with the skin on is essential. The name of the dish comes from the popping sound that results from adding wet fish to hot oil. When properly prepared, bacalao al pil-pil transcends its simple components to become something extraordinary and thus exemplifies the Basque approach to cooking.

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***Marmitako***

2 dried *choricero* chilies (substitute ancho if needed)

1 lb tuna steak

2 lb potatoes, peeled

½ c olive oil

1 Spanish onion, chopped

1 green bell pepper, julienned

2 cloves garlic

2 teaspoons *pimentón* (smoked paprika)

Soak the chilies in warm water to soften. Remove and discard seeds and chop flesh coarsely. Cut tuna into roughly 1-inch cubes. Cut potatoes into similar cubes. Heat olive oil and add onion, pepper, chilies, and garlic, and sweat them for 5 minutes until soft. Add potatoes, paprika, and enough water to just cover, and simmer for 20 minutes until the potatoes are soft. Add tuna and cook gently for 5 more minutes, then remove from heat and let sit, covered, for 30 minutes or so to marry the flavors and thicken a bit. Reheat if needed before serving.

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Basque seafood sauces are deceptively simple. They are often made with just a few ingredients, but proper execution requires attention to detail and much practice. *Merluza en salsa verde* (hake in green sauce) is a perennial favorite, where hake steaks are quickly browned and then finished in a garlicky herb sauce flavored with parsley, chives, and peas. Potatoes and clams are also frequently prepared in green sauce. *Vizcaina* is another classic Basque sauce, made from rehydrated *choricero* peppers, onions, and ham simmered with garlic, olive oil, parsley, and wine and then blended smooth. It is used for salt cod, cod-stuffed peppers, and many other dishes.

Farther inland, the ingredients shift to those from the farm: birds and mammals, vegetables, and legumes. Dinner might begin with an omelet—with ham, peppers, or asparagus—or a pipérade, then feature a steak or roast bird with foraged mushrooms, or a stew of lamb or game with chorizo or other sausage. Corn and beans are much more likely to make an appearance, whether as talos to mop up the sauce or slow-simmered beans in or apart from the stew. Cheese with nuts and membrillo is a standard dessert. Pipérade, like the seafood preparations, is deceptively simple. Onions, peppers, and tomatoes are humble ingredients, but the quality thereof and the subtleties of cooking technique can transform them into a dish of great depth and richness. The freshness of the vegetables is paramount; produce not in season is simply not used. The olive oil, the herbs, and the dried peppers are all from the region, and the result is an encapsulation of the flavor of the place. Letting the ingredients speak for themselves through artful, reverent manipulation is probably the most important and influential aspect of Basque cooking.

After fisherman, shepherds have had the biggest influence on Basque cuisine. Lamb is as centrally important to the inland food tradition as seafood is to the coast, appearing as meat (whole and sausage) and as sheep-milk cheese in a wide variety of subtly different variations. *Sauce Basquaise* is a variation on pipérade that is pureed smooth and used in many meat dishes, especially with lamb. Nuts—almonds, walnuts, and hazelnuts—are often paired with lamb as part of a pesto or as flour to thicken a stew. Easter lamb is traditionally stuffed with olives and almonds, and lamb holds a special status as the meat of special occasions. Steaks are fixtures on the standard cider house menu, and pork, especially

ham and chorizo, is also ubiquitous. Many farms still hold an annual communal winter hog slaughter, called a *txarriboda,* at which the whole animal is processed into ham, chorizo, chops, and other cuts. Nothing, not even the blood, is wasted.

There are some differences in ingredients between the French and Spanish sides. The wines tend to be consumed fairly close to where they are produced, so one is unlikely to find much Txakolí used in French cooking, for example. Bayonne ham is not common in Spain, where there is plenty of *jamón iberico* instead. Most fresh vegetables do not travel far from their source, so regional differences are still significant, setting towns apart from each other in terms of what they are best known for making. The French side of Basqueland is smaller and more culturally integrated into France than the Spanish side is into Spain—the Basque language is much less used in France—but the food remains distinct from that in the rest of the country. In Spain, the dietary divide increasingly is more between urban and rural rather than between coast and mountains; the urban population has access to all of the ingredients and restaurants (Basque and foreign) common to any European city, while residents of smaller, more rural towns tend to eat more traditionally.



A typical type of tapa, a pintxo, from San Sebastian, Guipuzcoa, Spain. (Shutterstock)

## Eating Out

Eating out is an integral part of the social fabric of Basque culture; Basques spend twice as much of their discretionary income on food outside the home as Americans do. Pintxos (the Basque word for tapas, from the Spanish *pinchar,* "to skewer") represent the essence of Basque cooking: the freshest ingredients, combined in nearly infinite ways using refined technique and playful imagination, and served as many small courses along with drinks. A common evening ritual is *ir de pintxos*—to go from bar to bar, having a plate and a drink or two at each before moving on. It's a mix of conviviality and competition, as the patrons socialize and the bar owners try to outdo each other with creative and delicious preparations.

Pintxos are traditionally served on a slice of bread, the topping held in place with a toothpick: hence the name. More recently, though, especially in and around San Sebastián, presentations have become decidedly more adventurous, and ingredients can get quite exotic as chefs experiment with ingredients and techniques from around the world. This is a logical continuation of the history of Basque cuisine, which has assimilated so many ingredients and made them quintessentially Basque. Most eating outside the home will be casual, in bars, with more or less perambulation depending on the mood of the group. For more formal events, there are many restaurants offering more refined interpretations of standards as well as adventurous departures from tradition. In urban areas, options like pizza, Chinese food, and sushi are now normal, especially for young people.

Influenced by the French nouvelle cuisine of the 1970s, which featured lighter, smaller-portioned interpretations of classic dishes, Basque chefs responded by updating some traditional dishes and inventing many new ones. Their efforts, along with those of some equally talented Catalan chefs from northeastern Spain, were crucial to the development of the *Nueva Cocina* ("new cooking") in Spain. Recently, this approach further evolved to propel Spain into the vanguard of cutting-edge culinary techniques and presentation. Basque chefs preside at several Michelin-starred restaurants, and the guide rates Juan Mari Arzak's three-star restaurant Arzak in San Sebastián as the third-best restaurant in the world. Martin Berasategui, chef and owner of the

eponymous three-star restaurant outside San Sebastián, has another in the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao and recently opened a new one in Shanghai. These two chefs are hugely influential and revered in Spain and around the world for their understated virtuosity at combining traditional Basque dishes with the exotic ingredients and technological techniques of contemporary haute cuisine. Not all chefs embrace the status such awards convey; some have expressed concern after receiving a star that the attention might pressure them to change their very personal and nonaristocratic approach to cooking.

Another unique and important component of Basque culinary culture is the widespread presence of *txoko,* or gastronomic societies. Traditionally limited to men (though women are now allowed into some, especially at lunchtime), they are communally owned places where men can gather and cook for each other on a regular basis. The societies originated in 19th-century San Sebastián when friends rented a space in which to eat and drink outside the home and unfettered by cider house hours. All members had keys to the space, and all costs were shared communally. The idea spread quickly, and most sizable towns now have several. Members sign up to cook on a given night and may invite guests. Each member is responsible for purchasing any main ingredients for the meal but may use anything from the communal pantry. He must make a careful accounting of all communal ingredients used so that supplies can be replenished.

The gastronomic societies combined dishes and techniques from the two main influences on Basque cuisine: fishing boats and farmhouses. Over time they have grown into influential institutions that keep old recipes alive while also constantly innovating, with both new twists on standard fare and bolder, more experimental efforts. Though amateurs, many members are very skilled and put enormous effort into the meals they prepare; some societies have influenced professional chefs, spurring them to innovate. The gastronomic societies make annual trips to vineyards to taste the new vintages and place orders, and they are active in the community, hosting parties and organizing festivals.

## Special Occasions

Basques are a celebratory people, and most foods, no matter how humble, are honored with an annual festival in some town or another that produces a key ingredient. Even the simplest dishes are treated with respect, and since festivals mostly include competitive cooking, the techniques and recipes are preserved throughout the years. No festival, saint's day, or party is complete without a feast. *Garbure* is a vegetable soup that features white beans, cabbage, and ham. At different times of the year, other seasonal vegetables are added depending on what is available. The town of Anglet, near Biarritz, holds an annual garbure festival. Olite, a town in Navarra, celebrates *menestra,* a spring vegetable stew with ham, every April. Tolosa celebrates its beans, Tudela its artichokes, Itxassou its black cherries, and Espelette its peppers, featuring them in *axoa,* a beef or veal stew. Mardi Gras, or Jueves Gordo, is enthusiastically celebrated by Basques. They are the most devoutly Catholic of Spain's citizens, and yet they also embrace the pagan roots of the festival with raucous dancing and feasting. The Tamborrada is a festival held every year on January 20 in San Sebastián. Adults dress as chefs and soldiers and parade through the town beating drums. All of the gastronomic societies participate and open their doors to all for the one night. The combination of military and culinary imagery symbolizes the degree to which the cultural pride and fierce independence of the Basque people are connected to their food.

## Diet and Health

The increasing popularity of processed convenience foods has made healthy eating more difficult; obesity and the resulting illnesses are increasing among Basques as they are in the rest of Europe. Street markets, a central Basque commercial and social institution, are losing customers to supermarkets. Daily shopping at outdoor markets is exercise; weekly shopping at supermarkets is not. As the traditional roles gradually break down and yield to more European norms, the health problems that beset modern

Western societies are tending to increase. While the traditional Basque diet and lifestyle are extremely healthy, it remains to be seen how they will adapt to the pressures and changes of 21st-century life.

*Peter Barrett*

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# Belarus

## Overview

The Republic of Belarus is a landlocked nation in eastern Europe. It is bordered by Russia, Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, and Latvia. For much of its history it has been a part of either the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth or the Russian Empire, and later the Soviet Union. It has a population of almost 10 million people, about 80 percent of whom are native Belarusians. Its two major religions are Russian Orthodox Christianity (80%) and Roman Catholicism (almost 20%). Until World War II Belarus had a significant Jewish population (8% of the total population, and up to 40% of the urban population), which by the end of the 20th century became as small as 0.3 percent of the population. There is also a small but significant Muslim Tartar population (0.1%), which has also influenced Belarusian cuisine. The official languages are Russian and Belarusian. About 70 percent of the population lives in cities. Belarus is flat and heavily forested. It has many lakes and three major rivers: the Dnepr, the Neman, and the Pripyat'. It also has significant marshland.

The position of Belarus between Russian, Baltic, Ukrainian, and Polish lands, as well as the influence of two major branches of Christianity and Judaism, profoundly affected its cuisine. Belarusian food features ingredients and recipes familiar to all eastern Europeans—potatoes, beets, rye bread, borscht, and porridge. The climate, forests, marshes, and relatively poor soil ensured that Belarusian cuisine emphasizes mushrooms and game, potatoes and river fish. Many dishes have been borrowed from western Europe through the influence of its westernized, Catholic nobility and from the Caucasus and Central Asia during the Soviet period. What distinguishes Belarusian cuisine from those of other eastern European countries is the great emphasis on potatoes and mushrooms, as well as some unique methods of preparing these ingredients.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Alesya Kupala and her husband, Vasil' Kupala, live in Minsk's Serabranka neighborhood. Alesya works for the Minsk Kristall wine and liquor factory. Vasil' used to work for the electrical repair plant nearby but now runs a computer sales and repair business from their apartment. Their son, Serhiy, studies at the Belarusian National Technical University and, like many other young Belarusians, lives at home with his parents. The Kupala family meals include both traditional Belarusian foods that Vasil' and Alesya's parents prepared, as well as foods introduced through Soviet influences and the global economy. They have three major sources of food: modern supermarkets, farmers' markets, and a garden plot just outside of Minsk.

All members of the family do some shopping, but it is mostly Alesya who shops for food and cooks the family meals. On a typical day, she is likely to stop at the local supermarket to buy bread and milk. The family shops together at a large "hypermarket" at the edge of Minsk. For this weekly shopping trip they use their car. At the hypermarket, they stock up on meat and poultry, cheese, and sausage, as well as grains such as buckwheat and oats. The men of the family also buy recently introduced convenience foods such as ramen noodles that they prepare when Alesya is not home. She buys most of the vegetables for the family at the



Belarus woman and her husband pick potatoes in the field in the village of Pererov, 2010. (AFP | Getty Images)

farmers' market, hoping that these will be tastier grown in soil that is not polluted. She is careful to ask where the farmers come from, trying to avoid areas known for their industrial pollution.

## Major Foodstuffs

Belarusian soil is poor, and the climate is relatively cool. Therefore, the traditional source of grain for bread was rye, not wheat. Oats and buckwheat are also commonly used for flat cakes, soups, and porridges. Wheat bread was traditionally reserved for the nobility and became more commonly accessible only in the 20th century. Oats were used for almost all foods requiring flour that are not bread. From the 19th century on Belarus has been dominated by the potato, its most common and iconic ingredient. It is used to prepare soups, main dishes, and snacks. Among other vegetables, beets are used, but to a lesser extent than in the Ukraine. Carrots are also often added to dishes. Cabbage is extremely common—both fresh and fermented as sauerkraut. It is used in soups, stews, and stuffed with various fillings. Sorrel and beet greens are used in soups as well. Mushrooms are, along with potatoes, one of the most distinctive elements of Belarusian cuisine. Depending on the type of mushroom used, they are marinated, salted, dried, or cooked fresh. Traditionally, they were used as a flavoring agent in soups and other dishes, but today they are also used in salads and main dishes, and often combined with meat and fish. Berries are another traditional ingredient in Belarusian cuisine, with cranberries a common ingredient in the marsh Palesye region. Fruit such as apples, pears, and cherries is used to sweeten dishes, to stuff dumplings, and to make drinks that are either fermented (kvass) or thickened with potato starch or flour. Belarusians collect birch sap in the spring and drink it as a healthy and refreshing beverage (*biarozavik*), sometimes after fermentation.

Meat has been generally a food for the well-to-do, becoming gradually more common in the 20th century. Pork is the most popular meat, often eaten roasted and stewed. Blood and meat are used in sausages. Pork fat, like elsewhere in eastern Europe, is salted or smoked and then used as a flavoring agent for starches, as a cooking fat, and, in more recent years, as an appetizer and a delicacy. Game, small and large, has also been a popular ingredient. Belarus has a large population of the *zubr,* or European bison, which are under government protection today but in the past were hunted along with boar. Boar, or domestic pork instead, along with cabbage, sausage, mushrooms, and spices, is used in the traditional hearty stew, *bigas,* that is common in Poland and Lithuania as well. Pork is not eaten by Belarusian Tartars and Jews.

Unlike Tartars who live elsewhere in eastern Europe, Belarusian Tartars do not eat horse meat, which, therefore, has not been a part of Belarusian cuisine. Beef became more popular thanks to the Soviet influence, but it was also common in Jewish cooking, often prepared in a sweet and sour sauce. Jewish influences are also seen in the preparations of poultry with fried chicken fat and stuffed necks of chicken and geese, popular dishes introduced by

Jewish innkeepers. The Catholic influences are seen in the popularity of roast geese, especially on St. Martin's Day. Until the 20th century, Belarusians ate only river fish and salted fish from the Baltic, particularly herring. While fresh fish was made into soups or baked, it was also used as a stuffing for dumplings prepared in the marshes of Palesye. Herring is especially associated with the Jewish culinary heritage in Belarus, but it has passed into the cooking of all ethnicities. Fish would be commonly eaten during the numerous Catholic and Orthodox fasts and Lent.

Milk and eggs also play an important role in Belarusian cuisine. Milk was used as a condiment to "whiten" soups, stews, pierogi, and potatoes. It is also used to prepare soft farmer's cheeses (*tvaroh*), which are either eaten plain or in dumplings and fritters. Eggs are eaten as well, added to soups and fried, often with pork fat. Painted eggs form an important part of Easter celebrations.

Generally, the flavors of Belarusian cuisine are quite mild. Salt, pepper, onions, garlic, bay leaf, dill, and occasionally coriander and caraway seed are the primary spices, and these are used sparingly. Most of the flavors in food are derived from the cooking techniques and not spices.

## Cooking

Traditional Belarusian cuisine divided ingredients into five categories according to the role they played in the recipe. The main ingredients, usually vegetables or grains, constituting the bulk of the dish, were known as *privarki,* while meat, mushrooms, or fish, which imparted the dish its main flavor, were called *zakrasy. Zakolota,* or the thickening agent, consisted of flour or pieces of potato, and *vologa* were liquid fats added to moisten the dish. Finally, spices were called *prismaki.* This system of five categories of ingredients is directly related to the traditional preparation of many Belarusian dishes: the stewing of all ingredients in one pot inside a large oven, producing a kind of thick soup or stew. The simplest example is *zatsirka,* a soup of the poor, made of water and flour, with milk added as flavoring. Today, this soup is prepared with milk and egg dumplings.

Other cooking techniques are also important. Some of the oldest recipes call for the preparation of large pieces of meat or fish, while the relatively newer recipes, borrowed from Polish cooking, use finely minced ingredients, for either dumplings, fritters, sausages, or stuffing. An entire goose stuffed with porridge and mushrooms and then roasted remains an exemplary dish. *Piachisto* is the general name for a large part of an animal or an entire bird or fish that is stewed, usually in the same pot with peeled whole potatoes. A stuffed *yutz* is a stuffed stomach of a cow, pig, or sheep, prepared similar to a Scottish haggis. Instead of oats, however, buckwheat is used. A good example of a dish using ground meat is *zrazy,* baked or fried chopped meat or potato, usually wrapped around some stuffing. These can also be prepared with thin meat strips rolled up around the filling. *Kalduny,* a kind of stuffed dumpling, similar to Italian ravioli or Russian *pel'meni,* are also popular; these are stuffed with a finely chopped filling of meat, fish, mushrooms, or vegetables. The local Muslim Tartar population favored particularly large kalduny in their cooking. Contact with the Western, Catholic world brought a pasta casserole similar to the Italian lasagna, known as *lazanki.* Remnants of past contact between the Slavs and the Greeks can still be seen in the Belarusian preparation of cucumbers with honey. A traditional snack of white or black radish with honey, oil, or Jewish-style with chicken fat is also very popular.

Food is often preserved, since the growing season is fairly short. Fish and mushrooms are dried and then used during the cold seasons of the year. Belarusian Tartars also dry lamb and beef. Herbs are dried as well, to be used in medicinal teas. Salted and marinated mushrooms were introduced from Russia and Poland and are now common. Fruit and berries are dried or are made into fruit preserves.

Many otherwise-simple ingredients are subjected to lengthy preparatory processes before becoming part of a dish. Thus, many dishes call for a fermented solution of oat flour and water called *tsezha.* Milk and buttermilk are also often fermented. Fruit and grains are used to produce fermented malt beverages, kvass. Potatoes are either boiled or stewed with lard. For some recipes, raw

potato is grated and used with the resulting potato juice; for others, the raw, grated potato is drained in a cheesecloth bag (*klinok*). The third method is to use boiled and mashed potatoes. These three types of preparation can also be combined for some recipes. *Dranniki,* an iconic Belarusian dish, are fritters made from drained raw, grated potato. Dumplings, or *galki,* are made of mashed potato with some egg and flour added or with mushrooms or fish and then boiled. Potato *babka,* a baked pudding made out of potato and eggs, with or without additional ingredients, is a popular dish originating with Jewish Belarusians. Tvaroh, like potatoes, may be additionally processed, strained, and hung in the klinok bag. The curds are then dried and used to flavor foods, rather like Parmesan.



A plate of traditional dranniki. (Shutterstock)

Desserts are not common in Belarus. Pies and cakes were introduced fairly late. Sweet dishes are usually simple preparations of baked fruit or berries with cream or honey. *Kaldunki,* a smaller version of the kalduny dumplings, are filled with sweet cheese or cherries and served as dessert, particularly during holidays. Fruit juices are boiled and thickened with starch to make *kissel. Kulaga* is a mixture of apples and berries cooked in water with rye flour, left to ferment, and then cooked again. For weddings a large sweet bread (*karavay*) is baked. Everyday treats may also be baked crispy cookies called *korzhiki,* common to Russian and Ukrainian cuisines as well. Modern Belarusians have absorbed Russian and Western-style desserts as well. Rich cakes and pastries are popular, as are chocolate candies produced by large factories such as Spartak in Minsk.

## Typical Meals

Traditional peasant meals in Belarus would be simple and as high in calories as the family could afford. Like their neighbors, Belarusians would eat plenty of bread with kvass or, in the 20th century, tea. Lard on bread, fried or boiled potatoes, porridge with milk, and eggs fried with lard or simply boiled could all serve as breakfast. *Vierashchanka* or *machanka,* a meat and flour gravy used as a dip for pancakes made of oats, potatoes, or later wheat flour, was another traditional breakfast food. The rich families' version of this dish contained more spices, as well as sausages. The main meal of the day in poor and well-to-do families would include a rich soup and a main dish, usually a stew cooked in a pot. Kvass, a very lightly fermented beverage made from rye bread, sometimes flavored with fruits, would serve as a main beverage, but vodka (*harelka*) could also be served, as could fermented birch juice. The poorest would eat bread and perhaps zatsirka. Supper would be similar to breakfast, including porridge, bread, potatoes, and milk. The noble upper class would usually identify with the monarch and so would eat either as the Polish nobility did or, later, as the Russian nobles would. However, many Belarusian nobles adapted traditional recipes for more elegant meals. Hence, kalduny à la

Count Tyshkevich is similar to normal Belarusian dumplings but has a rich filling of eggs, ham, and mushrooms.

Modern Belarusians still tend to have a filling breakfast. They are likely to eat bread, either spread with butter or as sandwiches with pâté, sausage, and cheese. Porridge made of buckwheat, farina, or oats with milk or sugar is also eaten. Eggs, boiled or scrambled, are also popular breakfast foods. Western-style dry cereal is growing in popularity. Tea or coffee is the drink of choice. Lunch was still the main meal of the day for much of the 20th century. A salad or herring was served as an appetizer, along with a thick soup such as *borshch* (cooked in Belarusian, Russian, or Ukrainian style), then a main course with a meat and a starch, followed by a simple dessert. Today, more people are likely to have a smaller, Western-style lunch. Instant convenience foods such as ramen noodles are becoming more popular. Dinner is now more commonly the largest meal of the day. The food can be similar to either breakfast or lunch, with bread, porridge, eggs, soup, and especially potatoes served. Following a common Soviet tradition, grilled shish kebabs (*shashlyk*) are cooked when picnicking outdoors or when eating at the summerhouse, called a *dacha.*

***Dranniki* (Potato Fritters)**

2¾ lb potatoes

½ c rye or wheat flour

1–2 eggs

1 tbsp rye bran or fine breadcrumbs

3 tbsp vegetable oil (preferably sunflower)

½ c sour cream

Wash, peel, and grate the potatoes raw. Do not drain the liquid. The rye flour in this recipe will make it the proper consistency. Mix the potatoes with flour and eggs. Form into small, thin patties. Cover on both sides with bran or breadcrumbs, and fry in oil on both sides until cooked through and nicely browned. Place into a warm dish until all dranniki are cooked. Serve topped with sour cream.

***Kalduny* (Dumplings)**

**For the Dough**

2 c flour

¼ c warm water

1–2 eggs

Salt

Mix ingredients well into a strong, thick, and elastic dough. Chill slightly. Roll out very thin. Cut out small circles, place a small ball of filling (following) in the middle, fold the dough pocket into a half-circle, and pinch closed. Place prepared kalduny into salted boiling water. The kalduny are ready 5 minutes after they float to the surface. Serve with melted butter.

**Tyshkevich-Style Filling**

5 oz dry porcini mushrooms

2 onions, minced

Some fat (bacon fat or oil) for frying

7 oz ham, finely chopped

2 hard-boiled eggs, finely chopped

1 raw egg

Salt and pepper

Soak mushrooms in warm water for 3–4 hours. Strain the mushrooms, reserving the liquid. Rinse the mushrooms well, and boil in the soaking liquid for 1½–2 hours until soft. Chop the mushrooms finely. Sauté the onions in fat until they become translucent, add the mushrooms, and sauté together for a minute or two. Remove from heat and cool. Add the ham and the hard-boiled and raw eggs. Season and mix well.

## Eating Out

In the 19th century and earlier, eating out in Belarus generally meant eating in a tavern. Many of these were kept by Jewish Belarusians, who were barred from many other professions. Along with alcoholic drinks, they served foods that have now

been absorbed into Belarusian cuisine: *sheykas,* stuffed goose neck, various preparations of herring, and sweet-savory *tzimmes,* or carrot stew. Jewish emigrants have spread Belarusian cuisine as well. Dranniki, for instance, are more commonly known as latkes in the United States.

In modern Belarusian cuisine, traditional recipes are prepared for special occasions in cities and more often in the countryside. Since the 19th century, Belarusian cuisine has been greatly influenced by Russian food. In the 20th century, foods from the rest of the Soviet republics reached Belarus. Today, Belarusian cuisine is more influenced by Russian and modern Western traditions than by the past. This is especially noticeable in foods served outside the home in Belarus. At the same time, patriotic and nostalgic restaurants serving traditional foods have become common.

There are plenty of Soviet-style cafeterias left, serving dishes borrowed and simplified from Slavic, Caucasian, and Central Asian cuisines. The same menu could contain Ukrainian borshch as well as *azu,* Tartar-style sliced steak served with pickles. Restaurants serving food from the Caucasus are very popular. They specialize in grilled meats and make much more prominent use of spices than Belarusian cuisine. Central Asian foods, especially from Uzbekistan, are served in many restaurants. Recently sushi restaurants have also appeared. This variety of restaurants can be found primarily in the capital city of Minsk, as Belarus remains fairly poor and its regions isolated from the globalized economy. Most Belarusians still do not eat out in restaurants very often.

Various forms of fast food are affordable and common. Belarusian fast food developed in the Soviet period and featured baked or fried pies with meat, egg, cabbage, or potato fillings. *Bul'bianki,* Belarusian-style pies made of potato dough with fillings similar to Russian pies, were and remain very popular. Today, Belarus has a few very popular branches of McDonald's restaurants. Pizza can also be found, along with European-Turkish *doner kebabs* (ground meat on a vertical rotisserie, similar to gyros). *Bliny* stands serve crepes with various fillings, sweet and savory. Finally, inexpensive but high-quality, high-fat ice cream made from recipes developed during the Soviet period remains a popular treat to eat on the go.

## Special Occasions

Special occasions in Belarus can be classified as traditional, usually religious, holidays; Soviet-introduced holidays; and life events. All holidays are likely to have both traditional holiday foods and also Soviet-period holiday foods served. Christmas is a holiday celebrated with feasting, caroling, and fortune-telling. Homes are decorated with straw, in remembrance of Jesus of Nazareth's birth in a manger. Christmas dinner features stuffed carp, fancy borshch with mushroom-filled dumplings (*vushki*), and desserts. These are fragile cookies called *lamantsi* and traditional barley or wheat-berry pudding with poppy seeds and honey, called *kuttsia,* often served with an almond soup-sauce *poliuka.* Shrovetide, or Mas'lenitsa, is celebrated by Orthodox Christians but has recently become popular among otherwise-secular Belarusians. An equivalent to Western Mardi Gras, this holiday is a week of feasting and carnivals, with revelers eating pancakes, butter, and eggs but no meat, which is forbidden during this week for believers. During Lent, rich foods, especially meat, are forbidden for Orthodox and Catholic Christians alike. Potato and mushroom dishes dominate the menu during this time. Fish, especially herring, is eaten by itself or with potatoes. In the past, beaver tails, due to their fishlike appearance, were allowed to be eaten during Lent and were seen as a delicacy. On Easter, *babka,* a rich egg bread with raisins, is served. Eggs are served as well, some decorated to become *pisanki.* Egg and cheese dishes, such as cheesecake-like *syrniki* fritters, are also served, along with springtime favorites like sorrel soup and birch sap. Catholic-influenced holidays bring other special foods to the Belarusian table.

Kupalle, or St. John 's Eve, is an ancient festival related to the sun and fertility. Today, it is marked with a mixture of pagan and Christian elements. Catholic Belarusians celebrate the holiday on the night between June 23 and 24, while the Orthodox celebrate between July 6 and 7. The day following



Babka, a spongy yeast cake that is traditionally baked for Easter Sunday in Belarus. (Mariusz Jurgielewicz | Dreams time.com)

the celebration is meant to commemorate the birth of John the Baptist, but the celebrations of the night before hark back to pre-Christian fertility rituals. The holiday is directly related to food, as its rituals are meant to help the harvest. Women go into the ripening fields and gather wildflowers for wreaths. At night, fires are lit and many games are played, all involving jumping over the flames. These rituals are meant to please the sun, which will warm the crops as they grow. Dishes of fried eggs—cooked on a fire and resembling a burning sun—are cooked, along with fruit-filled dumplings. On All Saints' Day (November 1) sheep are slaughtered and prepared, while on St. Martin's Day (November 11) geese are eaten, with their giblets cooked in plum sauce.

Weddings feature a rich, large bread called karavay, similar to an Easter babka. Kuttsia since ancient times was served not only at Christmas but also during funeral meals. A rich egg and flour dish, *drachena,* has often been served in villages on special occasions. It is part omelet and part pancake and can be either sweet or savory. Its rich ingredients made it a special-occasion food. Belarusian Tartars prepare *bialushi,* round meat pies stuffed with fatty lamb and spices. These became popular quick snacks during the Soviet period. Otherwise, the Tartar population has been largely integrated into the ethnic Belarusian population and eats similar foods during their own holidays such as the Bairam festival.

Soviet holidays have become very important to modern Belarusian identity. The New Year now has essentially replaced Christmas as the most important holiday of the year. It is celebrated with gift giving, a decorated pine tree, and a large celebratory meal. The meal is likely to include traditional winter holiday foods, as well as Soviet celebratory classics, such as *olivie* or *stolichnyi* salad made with potatoes, meat, carrots, peas, and pickles and generously dressed with mayonnaise. A similar salad, sometimes called *Minskyí,* is made with potatoes, chicken, grated cheese, and mushrooms and is also dressed with plenty of mayonnaise. All celebrations now tend to feature imported wines and domestically produced harelka. Soft drinks, both the traditional kvass, *syta* (honey and water combination), and *uzvar,* a drink made of dried fruit and oat flour, are supplemented by mineral water and sodas. A similar menu is served to celebrate Victory Day (May 9), marking the defeat of Nazi Germany—an extremely important event to Belarusians, who suffered greatly under German occupation.

## Diet and Health

Food has been seen as medicinal in Belarus. For instance, combinations of vegetable or herb juices with honey and alcohol are common folk remedies for many illnesses. Many medicinal plants were gathered on Kupalle night, as it was believed that their power is then at its peak. These beliefs remain today as well. Major newspapers, books, and calendars contain articles, often submitted by the readers themselves, about various folk remedies. Mint or lime-tree tea is considered helpful for dizziness. A plaster made of hot mashed potato mixed with vodka and honey applied to the chest and back is said to prevent colds and coughs.

Belarusians eat many starchy foods and a lot of fatty pork. In the past, heavy work in the fields made this traditional diet a necessity. In the past, access to fresh herbs and berries from the woods aided Belarusians in obtaining enough vitamins in their diet. Today, most of the population lives in cities and is relatively poor. Belarusians rely on inexpensive foods to provide most of their daily energy intake.

Due to the fairly cold climate they have little access to or inclination to eat more fresh fruit and vegetables out of season, and poor exchange rates prevent their importation. Heavy drinking and smoking, imported from the former Soviet Union, remain serious problems. These factors lead to about half of Belarusians dying in their mid-sixties from cardiovascular diseases.

Industrial pollution and remaining radiation from neighboring Ukraine's Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1986 have tainted some Belarusian farming land, water, and the food supply. The concern about pollution remains strong for many people, who ask farmers about the origins of food in farmers' markets. These concerns are also addressed by the marketing of many food brands as coming from "ecologically pure" sources.

*Anton Masterovoy*

**Further Reading**

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# Belgium

## Overview

Bordered by the Netherlands in the north, Germany and Luxembourg in the east, France in the south, and the North Sea in the west (with England nearby), the Kingdom of Belgium (12,500 square miles) has three distinct geographic regions: lower, central, and upper Belgium. Lower Belgium is flat (under 350 feet above sea level), with 40 miles of coast and very fertile lowlands. Central Belgium (up to 700 feet above sea level) has very fruitful clay plateaus and many gentle hills. Upper Belgium (700 feet or more above sea level) is full of woods, with large, fertile valleys and plateaus.

Belgium gained its independence from the Netherlands in 1830. This brought together two regions into the Belgian nation: Flemish-speaking Flanders in the north and French-speaking Wallonia in the south. The new state had a long-standing urban and trade tradition, with Roman, medieval, and early-modern cities like Tongeren, Tournai, Bruges, Ghent, and Antwerp. Later, industrial areas around Mons and Liège and the service city of Brussels generated huge wealth as well as social inequality. Today, Belgium is one of the most urbanized and densely populated countries of Europe, ranking as the 15th-richest nation in the world. Antwerp is the third most important harbor of Europe, and Brussels hosts the headquarters of many international organizations and corporations. Once an essentially Catholic country, religious control has greatly diminished since the 1950s, except for moderately growing Muslim influence that came with migrants. State reforms reorganized the nation into three communities based on language (Flemish, French, and German) and three regions (the Flemish region, the Brussels Capital region, and the Walloon region), with each having a parliament and government. Reforms did not abolish the federal parliament and government, so this little country of about 10 million people now has seven parliaments and six governments.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Sylvie Delfosse, from Liège, and Hans Martens, from Bruges, have lived in Brussels since university. They fell in love, easily ignoring linguistic and cultural differences. She is a teacher, and he works in the advertisement business. They earn enough, but the children (Jaak, seven years old, and Evy, four years old) cost more than Sylvie and Hans expected. They rent an apartment in a trendy neighborhood, regularly set aside time for themselves, and are trying to save money to buy a house. The family represents the average European urban lifestyle of a couple with young children.

Weekdays begin in chaos. Everybody needs to be somewhere by 8 A.M., and breakfast is often limited to a cup of coffee for the parents, orange juice for the children, and a piece of toast with jam for all. Consequently, Sylvie, Hans, Jaak, and Evy need a snack around 11 A.M. (a chocolate bar or a waffle). Lunch is eaten in cafeterias or sandwich bars, although Hans occasionally has a business meal in a fancy restaurant. The children pay a small amount for a hot school meal (soup, a meat dish or pasta, and dessert), Sylvie uses the salad bar at her school, and Hans is happy

with the sandwiches he purchases near his firm. Returning from her school at 4 P.M., Sylvie fetches the children and buys food in the supermarket, which offers a very rich variety. Around 6 P.M. the family is home. Sylvie and Hans cook together, serving fresh and healthy food every day. They try to limit meat, although Evy and Jaak like hamburgers, sausages, and chicken nuggets. The evening meal is limited to a hot dish, but occasionally there's dessert, mostly fruit. The children drink water or soda; Hans is keen on a glass of beer, but Sylvie prefers wine.

On weekends the family takes more time for cooking and eating, although outdoor activities sometimes take precedence. Sunday breakfast consists of fresh croissants. Sylvie loves to experiment for lunch and often reads through cookbooks from around the world. A treat on weekends is visiting the local open market where exotic food is sold. Occasionally, the family goes to a restaurant; before they had children, Sylvie and Hans very often ate in restaurants, which they adored.

## Major Foodstuffs

As in most European countries bread forms a staple food in Belgium. Not that long ago, most of the tilled land was utilized to grow grain, mostly wheat, but today it occupies only 20 percent of all agricultural land. Importation of grain has always been significant. Bakers sell diverse sorts of bread and are continuously expanding their offerings. For a long time, the most common bread (*pain de ménage,* a 1¾-pound oval bread) was made of highly refined wheat flour. Until 2004 the government controlled its price by setting a maximum. Gradually, customers began to prefer so-called improved or special bread made of a mix of grains or containing raisins, nuts, or honey. Within a couple of decades, the hierarchy of bread types has totally reversed: Today, dark bread is much more appreciated and expensive than the wheat bread that had been the bread of the rich people until the 1950s.

For a long time, turning milk into cream and then into butter was time-consuming and very costly, so until the 1950s many people spread lard on bread. When more milk was produced and dairy machines appeared, the price of butter fell, and specialized dairy factories produced more and more cheese, cream, and, later, desserts like ice cream. Butter comes in diverse forms. Some people could not do without salted butter, but others profoundly dislike the salty taste. Margarine is available in numerous brands and types, and it is marketed as a health-conscious choice (for example, advertised as lowering cholesterol). Belgium produces three types of cheese: cottage cheese, soft cheese, and hard cheese. Quite popular is cottage cheese mixed with salt and pepper and garnished with thin slices of radish. Pungent, soft cheese made with unpasteurized cow milk, *fromage d'Herve,* has had the European Union's certificate of Protected Designation of Origin since 1996. Belgian hard cheese is similar to Gouda. Processed meats, such as ham, salami, sausages, pâté, or *kipkap* (minced, seasoned meat), are much appreciated. These have a very long tradition that catered to both affluent consumers, in the case of ham and salami, and more modest ones, with preparations made of offal. The latter, enriched in various ways, are gaining new appreciation recently.

***Konijn met Pruimen or Lapin Aux Prunes* (Rabbit with Plums)**

1 rabbit (about 2½ lb)

1 tbsp butter

Salt and pepper

5 shallots

1 bottle dark beer (1½ c)

Thyme and bay leaf

Prepared mustard

1 slice bread

½ lb dried plums (about 2 c)

Cut the rabbit into large pieces, and fry in butter until the meat is brown; sprinkle with some salt and pepper. Then, chop the shallots and add them. After 10 minutes, put in the beer, thyme, and bay leaf; spread the mustard on the bread and add to the meat. Simmer for at least 40 minutes on a very moderate flame, then add the plums. Cook for an-

other 15 minutes. Serve with floury potatoes or croquettes.

Before 1800 potatoes were eaten with reluctance as they were seen as pig fodder, but by 1850 they had become a staple food, eaten by rich as well as poor people. Nowadays, *pommes frites* (French fries) are very popular. In particular, the "fries shack," mostly small, separate constructions with a window on one side where the fries are sold in paper cones and eaten while standing outside, is typical of Belgium. Rice and especially pasta have become popular but do not challenge the potato's position.

Belgians see meat as the centerpiece of a hot meal. Pork, beef, and poultry are very popular. Lamb, horse meat, and goat are rarely eaten, while game, rabbit, and other sorts are limited to particular seasons or social groups. Ground meat, mostly a mixture of pork and beef, gained great importance because of its use in sausages and hamburgers. All meat together adds up to an annual consumption of 220 pounds per person. Meat has always been a strong marker of social status, which is also true of fish: Rich people consume expensive species (like turbot or crustaceans), but poorer people buy cheap ones (like herring or mussels). Mussels have become very popular among all classes since the 1920s.

Carrots, turnips, and cabbage were the ingredients of a simple, hot meal, forming the base of today's well-liked *hutsepot* (stew). Gradually, other vegetables like cauliflower, asparagus, brussels sprouts, and witloof (Belgian endive) have been increasingly consumed, marking largely present-day Belgian identity. Most vegetables are bought fresh, leaving the canned and deep-frozen supply far behind.

Chocolate in Belgium is a matter of both daily and special consumption. It is everywhere: in shops, advertisements, people's minds, and household cupboards. The 1.4-ounce chocolate bar is a classic. In addition to plain milk chocolate and dark (*fondant*) chocolate bars, there is an enormous selection: white, extra dark, with nuts, and with fillings (cream, banana, strawberry, cherry, and more). Pralines, or small filled chocolate bonbons, are particularly popular and have long been considered the perfect gift.



Table display of chocolate-covered nuts, almonds, and raisins at a chocolate shop in Brussels, Belgium. (Jborzicchi | Dreamstime.com)

There are dozens of brewers and hundreds of beers in Belgium, together with many beer museums and beer restaurants. Belgian beers are famous worldwide, with several brands appearing in recent top 100 lists of best beers. Their international success contrasts with the continually declining consumption in Belgium over the last century. Of all the beer consumed in Belgium, about 70 percent is plain pilsner beer. Then come the renowned Trappist beers made by monks and abbey beers, the specialty beers (regional varieties), and the *lambics* (fruit beers). Declining beer consumption is due to the success of wine and soft drinks.

## Cooking

The way Belgians obtain and prepare food is constantly changing, depending on such factors as agriculture, imports, manufacturing, retailing, and kitchen technology. Because of its open, international character, Belgium quickly picks up new trends and serves as a region for market testing. Hence, Belgian foodways are particularly sensitive to international changes. Today, most Belgians buy food in supermarkets of various types, where they make 94 percent of total food purchases, with the remaining 6 percent of sales coming from traditional ("corner") shops, open markets, and farmers. Almost all towns and villages have a weekly market

offering vegetables, dairy products, and fruit. Individual bakers and butchers are able to compete with the huge sale of bread and meat in supermarkets by offering highly specialized products. Within Belgian supermarkets the supply differs, but all sell food: the bigger the supermarket, the more choice, variety, and price diversity. Apart from their size and supply, the hierarchy between brands of supermarkets is equally important. Crucially, because of their scale and international network, supermarkets are the places of food innovation. Through purchases in supermarkets, many people for the first time experience frozen products, convenience foods, foreign spices, unfamiliar fish or meats, organic and health foods, beverages, and other items.

Today, almost 80 percent of Belgians regularly buy ready-made food. Frozen pizza is extremely popular. Buyers of convenience food are primarily young families with little children, who appreciate the taste, the speed and ease, the variety, and the recent price decrease. However, most consumers think convenience food is too sweet, salty, and fatty; still quite expensive; not very healthy; and of average quality. The rapid growth of ready-to-heat dishes goes along with new technological devices that have become very familiar in many Belgian kitchens. Microwaves embody this. Yet traditional home cooking remains the rule. Today, almost two-thirds of Belgians cook with electric stoves and ovens, while the remainder use gas.

Home cooking in Belgium is primarily done by women, and most learned their cooking skills from their mothers by watching and imitating. However, they do not follow recipes or procedures exactly: Most interpret, modify, and innovate. In the 1990s, women reacted to the industrialization and globalization of the food business by revalorizing their mothers' techniques. Since mothers and daughters take less time for cooking, daughters have to learn the skills elsewhere. Most women rely on cookbooks to experiment and learn. Belgian cookbooks have been published since the 1850s, and some were particularly successful, such as *Ons Kookboek* (Our cookbook), which has the reputation of being present in every Flemish household. In many Belgian bookstores the gastronomy section is one of the largest. In addition to cookbooks, housewives may find recipes, ideas, and ingredients in magazines and newspapers and on daily television programs and numerous Web sites. Relatively new are the very popular cooking classes for adults.

Professional cooking is taught in so-called hotel schools, and today Belgium has about 35 of these. Boys and girls between 12 and 18 years of age are trained as cooks, pastry chefs, waiters, or butchers and may receive one year of further training (in *cuisine gastronomique,* for example). Pupils of these schools often win international prizes. Also, they are invited to provide the catering for special occasions. Belgian restaurants are highly appreciated by both Belgians and foreigners, to which the many stars, forks, or *toques* in international eating guides testify. Some of these guides claim that Belgium is, in gastronomic terms, the "best-kept secret of Europe."

## Typical Meals

Since the late 19th century, cookbooks and school manuals have presented a three-meal pattern as traditional and optimal: breakfast (*petit-déjeuner* or *ontbijt*), lunch (*dîner* or *middagmaal*), and dinner (*souper* or *avondmaal*). Four to five hours between each meal are recommended, which implies breakfast around 7:30 A.M., lunch around noon, and dinner at 6 P.M. Eating between these meals is discouraged. Rigid eating times were highly encouraged as enhancing digestion and thus promoting good health. In general, eating hours are shifting, and more and more people skip breakfast and eat lunch and dinner later in the day than they used to.

The proportion of total family expenditures spent on food eaten at home fell from 17.6 percent in the late 1970s to 12.3 percent in 2006 (whereas housing, communication, and leisure expenses rose significantly). The lowest-income groups spent 3.2 times less on food than the highest-income groups. Compared with a decade earlier, this gap has widened.

Breakfast time is between 7:30 and 10 A.M., which is later than in the mid-1980s. On average, Belgians take 11 minutes for breakfast (a couple of minutes more on the weekends). Only one-fifth of Belgians

have a regular breakfast, which worries nutritionists, since they assume that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. This should consist ideally of light and varied food that should be consumed in a relaxed setting. A glass of milk, some yogurt, two to three slices of whole wheat bread with a little jam, cheese, or ham, and some fresh fruit make the perfect breakfast. In fact, most Belgians limit themselves to coffee, some bread, or a bowl of cornflakes with canned orange juice. A sweet snack later in the morning often replaces the breakfast. On Sundays, Belgians love to have a full breakfast with fresh coffee and croissants, *pistolets* (a little, round, crusty bread), and other *viennoiseries* (little sweet breads) bought at the bakery.

Lunch may be eaten hot or cold. Many Belgians prefer a hot lunch, although outdoor activities force people to have a cold lunch in a cafeteria or a sandwich bar. A typical hot lunch is still considered ideal. One-third of Belgian people eat a meal at home between 12 and 1 P.M., and in general, lunch takes about 25 minutes. Since the 1960s, lunch has been later and shorter. Belgians tend to linger at the table on Sundays. As with breakfast, nutritionists advise people to pay ample attention to lunch and to reinstate it as the freshly prepared family meal that it once was supposed to be. Soup is a classic opener. Then comes the main dish, which includes the "golden trio" of potatoes, meat, and vegetables, all put onto one plate and covered with gravy. Plenty of potatoes are crucial, and these come in many forms, including steamed, fried, boiled, simmered, mashed, and baked. Pommes frites (fries) are increasingly viewed as an identity marker for the nation. Vegetables form another part of the hot meal, although many Belgians, particularly those with lower incomes, eat only small portions out of a feeling of obligation (caused by dieticians' great emphasis on the nutritive and digestive value of vegetables). Perhaps Belgians' low enthusiasm for vegetables should be explained by the fact that plain, overcooked vegetables formed the core of hot meals for most people in past centuries. The Belgian top three vegetables are tomatoes, carrots, and various types of lettuce. Quite popular is the combination of mashed potatoes with carrots, beans, or leeks.

Meat is the central part of the typical Belgian hot midday meal. It has always been highly valued by all social classes. Even today, after the weakening of meat's status since about 1980, there are still noticeable differences in family expenditures, with high-income families spending more on meat than low-income households. After World War II, beef and veal became popular, reaching a peak in the 1970s, but now poultry has taken over. Nutritionists see fish as a healthy alternative to meat, but although average fish consumption rose recently, meat's position remains largely unaffected. Commonly, light beer is drunk with the hot meal, but recently wine and sodas have challenged beer's position. A small dessert ends the lunch. This may consist of fruit, but increasingly dessert is bought in the supermarket, which offers an astonishing supply, including a gigantic variety of containers of yogurt, ice cream, puddings, sweet rice, and cheese.

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### *Blinde Vinken* or *Oiseaux Sans Tête* (Blind Finches)

½ lb minced pork

Salt, pepper, and nutmeg

1 lb veal

3½ tbsp butter

1 onion

Bay leaf and thyme

Flour

3 tbsp Madeira wine

1 tbsp tomato puree

Mix the minced pork thoroughly with some salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Cut four to five thin slices of the veal, put the minced pork on it, and roll to make cylinder-like shapes. Bind each piece with a thin thread, and brown the meat in a hot pan with butter (2 teaspoons). Dice the onion, and put it in the pan, together with the thyme, bay leaf, and some salt and pepper. Add half a cup of water, and simmer for half an hour. Meanwhile, prepare the sauce: Melt the remaining butter, add flour, and stir well, adding some water if the sauce is too thick. Gently

pour in the Madeira, add the tomato puree, and leave on low heat for about 5 minutes. Serve with potato croquettes.

Belgians tend to eat their dinner much later nowadays than they used to, while they also take less time for it, about 25 minutes. Nutritionists worry about Belgians eating late, having television dinners, and snacking individually, and they recommend eating varied, light foods, with little or no sweet toppings or fillings. Many Belgians limit their dinner to slices of bread with ham, bacon, pâtés, salami, or meat salads with mayonnaise, with hardly any salad or fruit. Several times a year, freshly made pancakes or waffles with sugar, whipped cream, or jam may replace the bread meal. Light beer, but especially coffee, is drunk.

## Eating Out

As in most European countries, since about 1970, Belgians increasingly eat out. A reliable indicator of this increase is the share of total household expenditures spent on eating out. This reached 1.9 percent in 1961, rising to 3.3 percent in 1978, to attain 5 percent in 1990. Since 1990, this proportion has remained fairly stable. Urban dwellers, couples without children, and big earners eat out the most. The 1.9 percent of 1961 reflects a very different way of eating out than the recent 5 percent does, with the big change being that since about 1970 many more people eat out for pleasure. Before then, this had been the privilege of richer people, whereas eating out related to work has long been common for many people.

There are crucial differences with regard to the location and style of eating out. In the late 1980s, 27 percent of meals eaten out were eaten in restaurants, 8 percent in snack bars, 57 percent in the cafeterias of schools and companies, and 8 percent in other places such as milk bars or fries shacks. Most eating out is thus work related. White- and blue-collar workers away from home buy snacks in a sandwich bar. This is a small shop with a large display window, divided into two parts by a counter, selling slices of bread or baguette with cheese, meat, or fish salads and drinks such as coffee or soda. Other snack bars sell simple dishes such as *roll mops* (salted herring fillet), *oeuf à la Russe* (hard-boiled egg with cold chopped vegetables and mayonnaise), *tomate aux crevettes* (fresh tomato with North Sea grey shrimp), or *filet américain* (raw minced beef with capers, Worcestershire sauce, pickles, small onions, salt, and pepper). Snacks may also be eaten at fries shacks, which sell fries in paper cones, with salt and mayonnaise and some meat. The coming of American-style fast-food outlets in the early 1970s only added to the wide choice for snacking. School and company cafeterias appeared in the 1950s in response to the desire to have a hot lunch at noon. Initially, they served a cheap, often overcooked lunch, but nowadays they offer a growing choice of tasty, healthy, and relatively cheap food.

Eating out for pleasure is relatively new. Many of the aforementioned eateries offer food also during nonwork occasions. Shoppers, students, theatergoers, or soccer supporters may enjoy a cone of fries, a cheeseburger, or a sandwich with tuna salad before, during, or after their activities. In the entertainment districts of the big towns one may indeed find a wide assortment of food almost 24 hours a day. About two centuries ago, however, a new form of eating out appeared in Europe, one that was exclusively oriented toward enjoying gourmet eating: the restaurant. This became such an extraordinary event that it made a special trip to another city or country worthwhile. The legendary Michelin guide labels this as *vaut le détour* (worth taking the detour). For decades now, Belgian restaurants are worth the detour.

Belgium followed closely the Parisian restaurant model because of its close bonds with France. By 1820, French chefs and waiters owned restaurants in Brussels, cooks from Paris worked in Belgium, and Belgians moved to France to learn the French way of cooking. Today, many restaurants in Belgium depict themselves as serving Belgian-French cuisine. This French character has always been highly appreciated by travel guides, which have assigned French




French-inspired restaurants, bars, and coffee shops along the old streets of Brussels, Belgium. (Rostislav Glinsky | Dreamstime.com)

cuisine the highest status. Belgian restaurants generally have done well in these guides.

Not all restaurants in Belgium have been influenced by French cuisine, however. Throughout the 19th century many restaurants, brasseries, cafés, and cabarets had a German, English, or Swiss ambiance. In the 1890s fancy Italian and Jewish restaurants appeared in Antwerp and Brussels, and in the course of the 20th century many more ethnic restaurants were opened. Today, there are about 80 different ethnic cuisines in Belgium.

Until the 1890s, gastronomic restaurants disregarded any reference to local dishes, ingredients, or methods of preparation, the French influence being absolutely dominant. This changed by 1900. More popular restaurants opened and were appreciated by tourists, while fancy cuisine became aware of local ingredients and foodways. Culinary reviewers then described these restaurants as places where Belgians and foreigners adored eating informally and copiously, enjoying mussels with fries, *carbonnades à la flamande* (a beef stew with beer), or *waterzooi de poulet* (a souplike chicken dish with vegetables). Beer was typically drunk, and prices were moderate. Many other old and new *plats belges typiques* (typical Belgian dishes) are served nowadays, some of which had been prepared in the estaminets (small cafés) of the poorer town quarters in the early 19th century and some in petit bourgeois kitchens, although others are quite recent creations that are promoted as authentic and traditional. Belgian chefs eagerly responded to the increasing interest in Belgian cuisine, and they readily incorporated local ingredients and ways of preparation in the fancy cuisine.

***Stoemp met Spruitjes or Stoemp Aux Choux de Bruxelles* (Mashed Potatoes with Brussels Sprouts)**

This is a typical Belgian dish that is prepared in many homes but increasingly also in Belgian top restaurants.

4 medium-sized onions
1 green cabbage (about 1 lb)
10 big carrots
5 big turnips
4 stalks celery
About ½ lb leeks
1 lb brussels sprouts
7 tbsp butter, melted
6 c chicken stock
Bouquet garni of thyme, bay leaves, and parsley
Salt and pepper
2¼ lb potatoes

Clean and wash the vegetables. Mince the onions and the green cabbage very fine, and chop the carrots, turnips, celery, and leeks into coarse chunks. Cut the brussels sprouts in two. Put a large pot on low heat, and melt the butter, then add all the vegetables to sweat (*suer*) for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, stir regularly. Then add the chicken broth, the bouquet garni, and some salt and pepper. Heat until boiling, cover the pot, reduce the heat, and leave for about 30 minutes. Peel and cut the potatoes into little pieces, and put these into the pot; cook for another 20 minutes, stirring regularly. Finally, heat the pot and stir well, and add salt and pepper. Serve really hot. Salted bacon is a typical accompaniment.

There are common features of eating out in Belgium. Bread is always abundant and close by, second helpings of pommes frites are free, and the choice is wide. But there is more. Fancy restaurants affect the way food is prepared, presented, and named in snack bars and cafeterias. Haute cuisine seems to be everywhere: not just in the street but also in the media and the everyday talk of the common people. This presence leads to a diffusion of the restaurant culture, to which even the food in sandwich bars and cafeterias testifies.

## Special Occasions

In the past, stringent traditions regulated eating and drinking during celebrations in Belgium. Restrictions on drinking alcohol were mostly connected to the numerous Catholic festivities throughout the year. There were about 40 "high days" in Belgium in the past, but regulations in the 1780s limited this number. Today, only six Catholic celebration days remain as public holidays. Belgians now have 10 official holidays when shops, schools, and firms are closed. Of course, Belgians do not celebrate only the official holidays. In addition to these, which aim to foster religious and regional communities, local and private feasts are celebrated, which contribute to regional and intimate group identity. A renewed wave of local celebrations emerged in the early 1950s and particularly in the 1970s, which has led to a "feasting culture" nowadays, meaning that virtually every village and city district has its feast.

All of these public and private occasions include food in diverse forms and quantities. An average year means 10 festive dinners for the Belgians, with at least 5 grand meals for Christmas Eve, New Year's Eve, one's birthday, Easter, and a life-cycle ritual like a first communion or wedding. The highest-income group spends 6.3 times more on feast eating than the lowest-income group does, and a lot of this money is spent on champagne, of which Belgians are the fifth-highest per-capita consumers in the world.

Since the mid-1990s, the traditions and rules of the older celebrations have tended to disappear totally. Fasting and its corollary, excessive eating, are virtually gone, whereas only traces remain in the link between feasts and the eating of particular foods, such as fresh eggs on Easter. Old traditions remain or are rediscovered during carnival feasts (Mardi Gras), which are organized in about one-third of the Belgian communes in February, including famous parades such as those of Aalst (East Flanders, going back to the 16th century but with an annual parade since 1851) and Binche (Hainault, maybe appearing

in the 14th century; in 2003 it was put on UNESCO's World Heritage list). While making fun of the rich and famous via decorated floats, funny masks, and clothing, thousands of people eat pancakes, waffles, and pies but also eels, mussels, *smoutebollen* (doughnut balls; called beignets or *croustillons* in French), and sausages in little breads, while they consume quarts of beer.

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***Smoutebollen* or *Beignets* (Doughnut Balls)**

1 tbsp yeast

⅓ c milk

1⅔ c flour

1 egg

1 tsp sugar

½ tsp salt

1 small bottle ***witbier*** (white beer, Hoegaerden type)

2 tbsp butter

Oil for deep-frying

Dissolve the yeast in the lukewarm milk, and add the flour, sifting it well. Separate the egg, and add the egg yolk, sugar, salt, and beer to the milk-and-flour mixture; stir well, and add the melted butter. Then, beat the egg white and fold it gently into the dough. Cover the dough, and let rise until its volume has doubled. Keep it out of the cold. Heat the oil to 350°F. Very gently stir the dough, then drop teaspoonfuls of the dough gently into the frying oil and fry until golden brown, which takes about 1 minute. Use a slotted spoon to remove the doughnuts from the fryer, lay on a plate covered with a paper towel to absorb excess oil, and serve with powdered sugar.

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In general, rites of passage give rise to plentiful eating and drinking, providing the opportunity for families to gather and to renew or intensify ties. Christian families celebrate First and Holy Communion, whereas nonbelievers have the Spring Feast and the Feast of the Secular Youth. Today, there are no longer fixed rules with regard to the food at communion feasts, which may mirror perfectly well the persisting trend toward innovation.

Belgian's declining religiosity implies the loss of traditional eating and drinking associated with Easter, Christmas, and other Catholic holidays. Since the 1950s the increasing purchasing power of Belgians has allowed them to abandon the traditional fasting and the correlated short-lived excesses after breaking the fast, while growing individualization has freed people from long-established community constraints. Yet Catholic high days are still moments of special eating.

The biggest festive meals in Belgium are those around Christmas and New Year's. Generally, Christmas Eve, Christmas, and New Year's Day are spent with family and close friends at home, while New Year's Eve is often spent eating out with friends. In December 2007 a survey found that 89 percent of the interviewees celebrated Christmas, and 77 percent celebrated New Year's Eve. Most people prepare familiar food, although they search for inspiration in cookbooks, Web sites, and magazines, which pay a lot of attention to grand feasts. Christmas dinners are rather traditional, with turkey, shellfish, salmon, game, and foie gras, along with wine and champagne. Since the 1970s, however, magazines and newspapers emphasize innovation with regard to the December feasts: the latest aperitif, an out-of-the-ordinary soup, or a fashionable dessert. In general, New Year's Eve dinner is less elaborate than the Christmas meal.

The food eaten on special occasions not only mirrors the general development of the Belgian diet but also shapes it in that many home cooks wish to excel in preparing special food. This leads to a continuous quest for new tastes, combinations, dishes, and ingredients when the festive days come into sight. Web sites, magazines, television programs, books, and specialized sections of newspapers are oriented toward guiding the home cook in this search. Often, new festive dishes have been tried out on the close family. If the meal was a success, particular dishes or ingredients may make their way into the daily cooking of the family. Festive eating thus introduces and diffuses new things. This contrasts with old traditions, when most feasts were linked to particular



Belgians eat and shop during the annual International Christmas Market in Belgium. (Richard Elliott | Getty Images)

foods. Still, many people prefer to stick to familiar festive food with such classics as asparagus, game, lobster, croquettes, salmon or turbot, cranberries, foie gras, and, most certainly, champagne.

## Diet and Health

Today, in Belgium, food is on sale 24 hours a day, and most Belgians may eat whatever, whenever, and wherever they want. Compared with the past, this is a drastic change. If the pre–World War II food-related problems are viewed in terms of shortage and imbalance, with lack of calories, vitamins, and protein, leading to loss of weight and strength, edema, anemia, lethargy, and, for children, slow growth, the post-1950 abundance has caused problems of a new kind related to body shape and health: Being overweight and obese increases the risk of diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, hypertension and stroke, and some cancers.

Today, 52 percent of the Belgians are considered to have a "normal" weight according to the body mass index (BMI, or the relation between a person's weight and height). The number of obese people, however, is growing slowly but constantly, and about 13 percent of Belgians are considered obese (with a BMI over 30). This worries nutritionists, doctors, and health workers, and public organizations regularly launch information programs aimed at convincing Belgians to move more such as by using the stairs instead of the elevator, while eating less sweet and fat food. Belgians have many ways of trying to lose weight. Slimming products such as laxatives are popular, but starting exercise, or simply more physical effort, is rarely considered. A minority of Belgians calls on a physician for help with losing weight, and stomach reduction has gained popularity. However, the most popular way of losing weight is dieting. This takes many forms: eating less in general, eating less sweet and/or fat food, eating more fruit and vegetables, skipping meals, starting to use diet products, and/or following, strictly or loosely, the latest fad in dieting.

Slimming is not necessarily prompted by health concerns but may be purely cosmetic, to attain the ideal body. Slim ideals appeared among the higher social classes in Belgium in the 1920s but spread to all classes in the 1950s. By the end of the 1930s, many cookbooks suggested a reduction in consumption of meat, cheese, and eggs, for both health reasons and slimming. Calories started to rule the lives of thousands of people.

The public authority's influence on what Belgians eat has largely increased in terms of safety monitoring, information, and recommendations. Belgians nowadays eat more safely than ever before, and, above all, they are much more informed about the tiniest food risk, food-safety procedures in supermarkets, organic foods in cafeterias, and dieting schemes. Yet despite the greater sensitivity regarding health and safety of food, recent crises have shown the very feeble trust most people have in the

food chain. For some, eating copiously provides the badly needed security in today's uncertain times.

*Peter Scholliers*

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# Bosnia and Herzegovina

## Overview

Bosnia and Herzegovina, one of the six federal units constituting the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, has been an independent nation since 1994. It is located at the center of the Balkan Peninsula with an area of some 19,741 square miles and a population of about four million. Bordered by Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina is landlocked, except for about 15 miles of Adriatic Sea coastline around the town of Neum. Bosnia makes up about four-fifths of the country, Herzegovina the remainder. The capital and largest city is Sarajevo.

Bosnia and Herzegovina became independent during the civil war of the 1990s and the breakup of Yugoslavia. The country is currently divided into the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska. The 1991 census, before the civil war, reported 43.47 percent Muslims (1,902,958), 31.21 percent Serbs (1,366,104), 17.38 percent Croats (760,852), 5.54 percent Yugoslavs (242,682), and 2.38 percent other (104,439). According to 2000 data, Bosnia and Herzegovina comprises 48 percent Bošnjaci (Bosnian Muslims), 37 percent Serbs, 14.3 percent Croats, and 0.6 percent other. There has not been a census since the war, but estimated figures show a significant loss of population. All speak the same language, though each group calls it by its own name; because of historical circumstances, groups have different religious affiliations. Serbs are associated with Serbian Orthodoxy, Croats with Roman Catholicism, and Bošnjaci with Islam. Each group also includes nonbelievers. The declared Yugoslavs in the census are those who ranked their citizenship in the nation over their ethnicity, and "others" refers to Roma, Jews, Albanians, and other minorities. The term *Bosnian* refers to all residents of the country, but with the rise of nationalism spurred by the civil war, Muslims are now referred to as Bošnjaci, the term used in the Ottoman period and in modern Turkey.

If one discounts the pre-Islamic medieval state that preceded the Ottoman conquest, the area now comprising Bosnia and Herzegovina was never an independent state until the recent civil war. This means that the area has always been open to the free exchange of cultures, including food and foodways. The region has served as a crossroads between East and West for armies, invaders, migrations, and travelers. Slavs arrived in the region in the late sixth and early seventh centuries, and before and after settlement, control over the region was frequently contested by outside forces. There is an overlay of Ottoman culture throughout the Balkans, but it is particularly thick in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where Ottoman rule lasted from the mid-15th century until the area was occupied by the Austro-Hungarian forces in 1878 and annexed in 1908. Ottoman cultural influence was not just Turkish as is so often assumed. The Turks were a nomadic people until their conquest of Anatolia and the Byzantine Empire and sedentarization. It can be assumed that much of the foodways they carried throughout the Balkans were Byzantine in origin. But the Ottoman Empire also incorporated cultural elements of the various components of the empire. Examples in foods are many, such as pilaf (originally a Persian rice specialty), *burek* (a Persian word for *pita,* while the word for pita dough, *jufke,* is Arabic), and *musaka* (known in the United States



Burek, a Bosnian specialty made with pita and meat. (Blacksnake | Dreamstime.com)

as a Greek dish, spelled moussaka, but Arabic in origin). Regardless of origins, however, the foods are Bosnian today. Austro-Hungarian rule lasted until World War I. Austrian culinary influences were much less evident in Bosnia and Herzegovina than in nearby Croatia, where their rule lasted much longer. The best examples can be found in pastry.

The Yugoslav period, both the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, established in 1929, and the Socialist state (1945–1990), was a time of South Slavic integration, particularly during Tito's life, when great attention was paid to "brotherhood and unity" (*bratsvo i jedinstvo*) and free cultural exchange between the various constituents of the nation. In the post–World War II period, with increased travel abroad and work in western Europe, there was greater openness to the cultures, including the foodways, of the wider world. In the 1970s, for example, a cultural exchange between China and Yugoslavia resulted in the first Chinese restaurant in the country, located in Sarajevo. A Chinese chef was brought to teach local chefs about Chinese food, after which the Chinese chef returned to China and the restaurant was left in the hands of local chefs, with a rapid Balkanization of Chinese dishes.

## Food Culture Snapshot

In Sarajevo, the weekly food purchases for the Dudo family—two working adults and three school-age children—include bread (15.5 pounds) and other starches such as flour, rice, potatoes, pasta, rice pasta, cornflakes, and manufactured jufke. They buy dairy products, including not only milk, cream, brined cheese, fresh cheese, premade ghee, and soured milk (*kiselo mleko*) but also imported Gouda cheese and flavored yogurts. Meat might include ground beef, hot dogs, baked chicken, several varieties of beef sausage, mutton, veal, beef steak, canned chicken pâté, and sardines. They also purchase eggs. Even in January, the Dudos' access to fruits and vegetables exceeds what is available to villagers. Fruits include a variety of citrus, bananas, and dried figs. Besides the basics of cabbage, carrots, and onions, the vegetables also include tomatoes, spinach, red peppers, and mushrooms. Other essentials are garlic, lentils, kidney beans, pickles, granulated and cubed sugar to serve with coffee, sunflower oil, Hellman's mayonnaise, peach marmalade, mustard, sea salt and other salt, chicken soup mix, chicken bouillon, coffee beans, Nescafé, and cocoa. Snack foods consist of raisins, peanuts, and candy, and beverages include sodas, mineral water, and concentrated and powdered fruit juices.

In contrast to villagers, the Dudos' diet includes many imported foods, a fair amount of processed food, and some industrial food. In cities and towns, many residents like the Dudos maintain close ties with family in villages, from whom they often receive meat, vegetables and fruits, *šljivovica* (plum brandy), and other home-produced supplements to their diet.

## Major Foodstuffs

Except for the Islamic prohibition against alcohol and pork, there is little difference between ethnic groups in the major foodstuffs. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the prohibition of pork is much more rigorously observed than that of alcohol. People eat seasonally. Fruits and vegetables are very important in the diet, and vegetable gardens are very popular; on the smallest plots of ground, people find space for a garden. There is also a widespread system of periodic markets that provide both local products and those from other regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the former Yugoslavia. In the summer, melons, especially watermelon, are very popular. In

late summer women buy large quantities of peppers that they stuff, freeze, pickle, make into *ajvar* (a red pepper spread, also eaten as a condiment and salad), and roast and freeze for future salads. Cabbage is put up as sauerkraut, to be cooked or used as salad, and the fermented liquid (*raso*) is drunk between and at meals and in the summer as a thirst quencher. Whole-head sauerkraut is used for cabbage rolls (*sarma*). Fruits are preserved for winter use as compote; fruit butter (*pekmez*), which is especially made from prunes; and fruit syrups. Northeastern Bosnia is known for its smoked prunes from which a distinctive pekmez is made. Fruit brandy (*rakija*) is a very popular use of fruit; in particular, plums are used for šljivovica. Milk and milk products are important in the diet, especially in those zones given to sheep husbandry. This includes sweet milk, soured cultured milk (kiselo mleko), yogurt, sour cream, fresh white cheese, and brined white cheese (often made of sheep milk or a mixture of cow and sheep milk), butter, and *kajmak* (cream skimmed off heated milk, used sweet or soured). The whey left after churning butter (*mlaćenica*) is very important to the diet of families who keep sheep and cows.

Bread is the most essential component of everyday meals; it is said that without bread, one has not eaten. At every meal, except with pita and burek (see the following), slices of bread are placed at each table setting and eaten without butter. In cities and small towns, bread is often purchased, and locals know when bread comes out of bakery ovens. In villages bread is often baked at home. In isolated villages of western Bosnia, at elevations where wheat was not adapted, the everyday bread was of barley; wheat bread was also made, especially for holidays. Cornbread, too, was a favorite food. When these villagers went to market, they would often treat themselves by buying a loaf of white wheat bread for lunch.

Certain foods are emblematic of Bosnia and symbolic of Bosnian identity. These foods include *Bosanski lonac,* pita, stuffed vegetables, and certain sweets such as *halva* and *urmašice* (biscuits soaked in syrup). They are eaten in most homes and found on both everyday and ceremonial tables. The national dish of Bosnia, Bosanski lonac, is a stew of combined meats (typically lamb, veal, and beef) and vegetables slowly cooked for many hours or overnight in a special covered earthenware pot. The pot (*lonac*) is so much a part of the dish that the dish is named after it. Pita is the generic name for ingredients rolled into a very thin, stretched dough (jufke). The dough is made at home or can be purchased in two thicknesses, depending on the dish to be prepared. Common fillings are spinach, fresh cheese, squash, potato, and cabbage. Pita made with meat (chunks or ground) is called burek. Without filling, it is *maslenica* or *maslenjak.* There are many variations. Spinach and white cheese, for example, are often combined; Christians make a potato and pork pita; and one can improvise with fillings such as chopped lamb intestines. Stuffed vegetables are very popular, of which cabbage rolls (sarma) are the most common. A meat and rice mixture is wrapped in cabbage leaves to form a sausage-like shape no



Sarma, a traditional Bosnian dish made with cabbage and meat. (Shutterstock)

bigger than a fat thumb. This beloved dish is favored throughout the Balkans as well as in Bosnia. Other stuffed vegetables include peppers (*punjene paprike*), onions (*sogan dolma*), eggplant, and tomatoes. Balkan peppers are light green, thick walled, and very flavorful, the opposite of bell peppers. Bosnians like sweets, and most households have sweet pastries on hand for guests. Mass-produced cookies and cakes are available at supermarkets, but homemade sweets are favored.

Buying in the marketplace from the growers and producers of products is the preferred way and a natural part of daily life. There are also small grocery stores and, today, supermarkets where staples are obtained. Traditionally, women shopped every day for food, but as refrigerators and freezers became more available and larger and more women entered the workforce, weekly shopping has become more prevalent for urban dwellers.

## Cooking

Bosnian traditional cuisine has certain distinguishing characteristics: Dishes are not made with a roux; strong and hot spices are seldom used; spices are used in small amounts to enhance, not hide the taste of the meats and vegetables; foods are lighter because most are cooked in their own juices rather than in fat; and a wide variety of sweets are consumed. Cookery styles do change, and contemporary cooking styles may modify these generalizations.

The primary home cook is the female head of the household, whose tasks are to plan and prepare the meals. This is especially the case in traditional regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina; however, in contemporary urban settings, more and more men can be found in the kitchen.

Hearth cooking was still viable into the 1970s in isolated mountain villages of western Bosnia. In one example, the stone hearth was approximately 10 feet long and 4 feet wide and stood about a foot high off the ground. It was backed by a stone wall; the smoke from the hearth escaped through the roof of the passageway that divided the lived-in rooms and the storerooms. Wood was stacked at the end of the hearth; a fire burned in the center of it. When they had burned down, the glowing embers were swept aside, the hearth was carefully cleaned, and the ready bread dough was placed on the hot hearth and covered with a *sac* (a convex metal cover similar in function to a Dutch oven), which was then covered with the glowing embers from the fire. Pita and other foods were also baked under the sac. Foods such as eggs (*cimbur*) and soup (*corba*) were cooked in pans over low fires. For long slow-cooking foods, a pot was hung from a heavy chain over the hearth. Eventually, villagers acquired wood-burning sheet metal stoves with ovens. The sac is still available in Bosnia, and sometimes in Bosnian markets in the United States, though it is now seldom if ever used in daily cooking.

In contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina, both rural and urban stoves are electric, burn wood or coal, or use bottled gas. Grills and barbecues are popular, and Bosnians can follow their passion for grilled meats. Spit-roasted sheep is everyone's favorite, and meat, sausage, and cheese are smoked in backyard smokehouses to provide popular accompaniments to rakija. Suckling pig, spit-roasted or roasted in the oven of the local bakery, is popular among Christians.

Sarma, possibly the food that most symbolizes Bosnia and Herzegovina, is one of those dishes that frequently appears on everyday tables and is requisite at celebratory meals. The rolls are made with ground pork, or a mixture of pork and beef, and rice by Christians, and with beef or lamb (or a mixture) and rice by Muslims. The cabbage- or sauerkraut-wrapped rolls are stacked in a pan, which ideally is lined with bones or ribs, to which tomatoes or tomato sauce is added; they are then simmered until done. When whole-leaf sauerkraut is not available, chopped sauerkraut can be added to the pan.

Also symbolic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, pita is the most common dish. It is eaten throughout the former Yugoslavia, but Bosnians are especially known for theirs. Like sarma, pita is eaten every day as well as at celebratory meals. When making pita, it is traditional to place the filled dough into a large round pan with sides about one to two inches high (*tevsija*), starting in the center and coiling it around itself until the pan is full. It is cut into wedges for

serving to individuals, but if it is eaten from the tevsija, people break off pieces with the right hand. It can also be made in individual servings.

*Trahana* or *tarhana* is a special food prepared in Muslim homes, and it is considered a specifically Muslim food, a belief reinforced by a traditional saying, *tarana, Turska hrana* (tarana, Turkish food). Regardless, some Christians buy it from Muslim families. Trahana is a small granular dumpling used in soup and as gruel for babies. Production takes about a week for the dough to sour before it is forced through a traditional sieve (*sito za trahanu*) to form the grains. It is then dried and stored in a dry place.

## Typical Meals

A similar meal pattern can be defined for most of Bosnia and Herzegovina, regardless of ethnicity. The diversity is greatest when comparing rural with urban dwellers. Sunday meals often differ from those on weekdays, and what one eats depends on the season.

The same raw materials are available to every group, with the exception of pork and alcohol, which are prohibited by religious law to Muslims, and the cuisine shows only slight differentiation. A few dishes are, or at least are regarded as, specific to one group or another. Sometimes these foods are linked to distinctive practices; for example, a mixture of a shortening and sugar was traditionally eaten and used for divination by Serbs at Christmas. More commonly, the differentiation occurs in daily diet. Pudding-like dishes such as cooked fruit thickened with flour (*eksija*) and rice pudding (*sutlijaš*) are regarded as typical Muslim sweets, as is halva, a cooked paste of flour, sugar, and oil or butter. As already discussed, trahana is another food closely associated with Muslims. Christians, more so than Muslims, prepare a variety of cakes and cookies.

Of the meals, breakfast varies the most. Coffee is commonly the first thing consumed in the morning, but many Christian men, especially in villages, will start the day with a shot of šljivovica. Children rushing off to school might have a bowl of cold cereal, such as cornflakes, now available throughout the country. A favorite breakfast, if time permits, is pita without filling (maslenjak or maslenica), which is eaten alone or might be accompanied with fresh cheese or eggs (cimbur). This is a typical Sunday breakfast. In cities, few women know how to make maslenjak anymore, or, because they work, they do not have time to make it. A common urban breakfast is coffee with milk and bread with jam. There are, however, frequent coffee breaks throughout the workday. Urban coffeehouses send boys with coffee to businesses. Coffee is usually Turkish, although espresso is increasingly common in urban centers.

The midday meal depends on where one lives and whether one goes to school or works in town or on a farm. Many families eat their largest meal at midday. Some might go home from 12 to 3 P.M. for the largest meal of the day. They might have stewed chicken or Bosanski lonac, one-dish meals that can be prepared the evening before and quickly reheated. If a family works the fields, the woman left at home may bring hot food to the field. Working individuals who do not go home to eat might take leftovers from home or buy something to eat. When they get home after a day at work, they attempt to make a quick meal, the main one of the day for them—soup, fish or meat, a starch, and bread—or they reheat one-dish meals made the evening before.

Sunday dinner is eaten in early afternoon, and it is usually larger than those during the week. It might begin with soup followed by an entrée or two: chicken baked with rice or potatoes, vegetables cooked with meat (*djuvec*), sarma or another stuffed vegetable, and bread. It is fairly common to have more than one meat dish. A salad of greens or raw vegetables would be dressed with sour cream or oil and vinegar. There is always something to drink, such as mineral water, pop, beer, or wine. Dessert is seldom eaten, but coffee usually follows the meal.

When the main meal is eaten at midday, the evening meal is usually light, often consisting of leftovers from midday or possibly the day before, or soup with bread, sometimes with a red pepper spread (ajvar). Desserts are not commonly part of a meal, but rather sweets and pastries are enjoyed as snacks and with coffee or other beverages. Ceremonial meals are an exception to this pattern.

A complex of distinctions exists in drinking habits. Coffee, the variety called Turkish coffee in the United States, is prepared by all groups throughout the former Yugoslavia, but it is especially typical in Bosnia and Herzegovina and has the greatest importance among Muslims. Bosnian Muslims would say that when Yugoslavia again acquired access to coffee after World War II, the first shipments were sent to Bosnia and Herzegovina "because Tito [the former leader of Yugoslavia] knew how much we liked it."

The importance of coffee seems related to the Islamic prohibition on alcohol rather than to differential diffusion. Plum brandy (šljivovica), the national drink of the former Yugoslavia and widely consumed in Bosnia, has strong ritual use in Christian homes. It is served to all guests and at all ceremonies, and elaborate codes of serving and drinking behavior have evolved. Although many urban and lowland Muslims drink alcohol, the šljivovica syndrome is much less elaborate among them and carries little of the ritual importance. Muslims in Bosnian and Herzegovina generally are less observant then those in the Middle East, although a revival followed the civil war.

Upon arriving in a Serbian household, guests traditionally are served a spoonful of a whole-fruit preserve (*slatko*) with water, followed by šljivovica and coffee. In an observant Muslim home the place of alcohol was traditionally filled by sherbet (*serbe*), cold water sweetened with sugar and flavored with lemon or fruit syrup, served in small glasses and drunk immediately, followed by coffee. The ritual significance of serbe in Muslim homes was just as important and as elaborate as that of šljivovica in Christian homes. Serbe is never served in Christian homes, except perhaps for a Muslim guest. Today, in Muslim and Serbian homes, especially in urban centers, serbe and slatko seem to have been replaced by pastries served with coffee. Ideally, women always have pastries and sweets on hand for guests. Bošnjaci might serve Turkish delight (*rahat lokum* or *ratluk*) instead of pastries.

Most of the differences between ethnic groups are unrelated to differential diffusion of Turkish patterns. Turkish influence in all cultural spheres was greatest in the urban centers where Ottoman power was centralized. Like many other aspects of culture, Turkish influence on eating habits follows a rural-urban dichotomy rather than a Muslim-Christian one. Turkish-style dishes, traditionally cooked and served in tinned copper utensils, are perhaps most commonly prepared in the homes of urban Muslim families, but they are more prevalent on the tables of small-town Christians than those of rural Muslims. The exception to this pattern is the use of pork and pork products. The cooking fats among Muslims are butter, clarified butter, and vegetable oil, whereas Christians usually use lard and vegetable oil. Therefore, Christians commonly claim that Bošnjaci have a distinctive body odor because they cook with butter.



An assortment of Turkish delight or lokum. (Alaettin Yildirim | Dreamstime.com)

One distinction most prevalent among Muslims in small towns and villages rather than in large urban centers is the use of a *sofra.* A sofra is a low, round table large enough to seat 8 to 10 people around it on the floor. Traditionally, people would eat from a common dish, using only a spoon, and Muslim etiquette required that individuals take food only from directly in front of them. In village homes in western Bosnia in the late 1960s, village Muslims used only sofras for eating and some food preparation. When not in use, they were hung on the wall. These villagers did not use table and chairs. Christian villagers in the same area used tables and chairs except for large celebratory meals when they, too, brought out the sofras.

Traditionally, coffee was served in small handleless cups (*findzani*). Coffee is made in a special long-handled copper or brass pot (*džezva*) with a lip but no lid that is used only for coffee. Christians tend to make coffee with sugar, while the Bošnjaci style is without sugar, but the coffee is otherwise the same. Bošnjaci serve sugar cubes with coffee; these are either dipped into the coffee cup, or they are placed in the mouth and coffee is drunk through them. Granulated sugar is also available for those who stir sugar into the cup. These distinctions are highly variable.

## Eating Out

Bosnians go to restaurants, but the most popular establishments are eateries that specialize in specific dishes. One food that most if not all Bosnians eat outside the home is the much-loved *ćevapčići* or *ćevapi,* for which one goes to a *ćevabdžinica.* This is finger-sized ground meat grilled and served in a split *lepinje*/*somun* (Bosnian yeast bread about 10 inches in diameter) and eaten with chopped onions. Typically an order comes with either 6 or 10 ćevapi. This food is so tightly integrated into Bosnian culture that some of the first restaurants established by post–civil war immigrants to the United States usually sold nothing but ćevapi. There are many opinions on what makes the best ćevapi; some say it should be a mix of veal and lamb, others that it should also include beef. In the United States packaged ćevapi are available wherever Bosnians settled, and although it is now grilled at home and is a favorite picnic food, Bosnians also eat it at local Bosnian American restaurants. There has been a general replacement of lamb with beef among Bosnian Americans, and this has included ćevapi, which are generally all beef.

Some restaurants are known for having an exceptional mixed grill: ćevap, a meat patty with onion (*pljeskovica*), shish kebab (*šiš-ćevap*), small pieces of veal on a skewer (*ražnjići*), pork cutlets (*culbastija*), and lamb kidney. Bosnians are not big meat eaters, but they like meat and mixed grill is a treat. Proportionally, meat makes up about 40 percent of the Bosnian diet.

Another eatery popular in urban Bosnia is the *aščinica,* which some believe appeared in Sarajevo with the Ottomans in the mid-15th century. Like the historical aščinica, which consisted of a butchery, bakery, and restaurant, today's aščinica offers a buffet with precooked foods, many of which are meat and vegetable one-dish offerings, kept warm in hot water baths. The food is inexpensive, familiar Bosnian fare.

Bosnians like sweets, and to fulfill their wants, they go to special sweet shops (*slastičarnice*), where they choose from a variety of Turkish-style sweets, Austrian-style pastries and cakes, and ice cream. In the fall, one of the specialties is pureed chestnut topped with whipped cream, and on cold winter days one can indulge in *salep,* a hot, sweet drink made from orchid roots. Most of the slastičarnice in the former Yugoslavia were owned and run by Albanians, regarded as specialists in making sweets.

## Special Occasions

The most important celebratory, ritualized occasions in Bosnia and Herzegovina are Ramadan (Ramazan), Eid al-Fitr (Ramazanski Bajram), and Eid al-Adha (Kurbanski Bajram) for Bošnjaci, Christmas and saint's days for Christians, and, in the case of the Serbs, Krsna Slava. These occasions are commemorated with tables overflowing with carefully prepared, often special foods.

Ramadan, the monthlong Muslim fast, is the major event in the Bošnjaci ritual calendar. Believers do not eat, drink, smoke, or have sex between sunrise and sunset. Families wake while it is still dark and eat a larger-than-usual breakfast, often including types of dishes served at midday and evening meals. Their evening meals also consist of more dishes than usual and often include dessert, which is not part of everyday meals. Ramadan is a period of intense devotional activity centered in the mosque and with much socializing in homes in the evenings. The evening meals, which break the day's fast, for example, are often shared with friends and neighbors. Eid al-Fitr is the celebration of the end of Ramadan, and Eid al-Adha is the commemoration, 40 days after Ramadan, of the saving of Abraham's

son through the sacrifice of a lamb instead. Both commemorations consist of three days of lavishly prepared meals shared with friends. For Eid al-Adha, an animal, usually a lamb that is perfect in every way, is sacrificed and the meat distributed to the poor and needy. According to Greater Islamic tradition, one-third is given to the poor, one-third is given to friends or relations, and one-third (the right front shoulder) is retained by the family.

Meals for the Eids are elaborate, with as many as 20 or more dishes. A traditional meal began with a soup (corba) with trahana and lamb. This was followed by dishes served one at a time to the men seated on the floor around the sofra, who ate from the common dish using soup spoons. When everyone stopped eating, the dish was removed and another was put in the center of the sofra. After the soup came eggs (cimbur), bread soaked with lamb juice and covered with pieces of cooked lamb (*potkriža*), unfilled pita (maslenica), cookies soaked with sugar syrup (urmašice), cabbage rolls (sarma), rice pudding (sutlijaš), sauerkraut cooked with dried lamb (*kalja*), cheese pita (*sirnjaca*), a pudding-like dish (eksija) with prunes, buttermilk (mlaćenica), coffee, and serbe. The alternation of sweet and savory dishes is traditional in Muslim feasts.

### *Urmašice* (Bosnian Dates)

Among Bosnians this sweet is also known as *hurmašice, nabrdnjace, brdarice,* and *hurmadzik.* The word derives from *hurma,* meaning "date," and the shape of the sweet is somewhat like that of a large date. Urmašice should be made at least 24 hours before needed.

#### Dough

1 c yogurt

1 lb unsalted butter

2 egg yolks

1 lb flour

Use cheesecloth to drain all the water off the yogurt, which can be done in a sieve over a bowl. This will require about 1 hour. Cream the butter. Mix in the yogurt and egg yolks. Add as much flour as the mixture will take (about 1 pound). The dough should hold together and be firm. Break off pieces of dough the size of an egg, and with your hands form into a ball. On a floured grater, press the dough into the shape of a date. Lift the date off the grater and place grater-side up in a pan with sides at least 2 inches high. Bake in a hot oven until a light golden brown, about 20 minutes.

#### Syrup

1½ lb sugar

2½–3 c water

1 tsp vanilla

Juice of ½ lemon

While urmašice are baking, prepare the syrup. Simmer sugar, water, and vanilla until it forms a light syrup. Add the lemon juice. When the urmašice come out of the oven, let them cool for a couple of minutes. Then, with the syrup simmering, slowly ladle it over the pan of urmašice. Keep urmašice in the pan until all the syrup is absorbed, about 24 hours. They should not be dripping with syrup.

After the meal, the host and other men of the family brought well wishes to their closest neighbors and kin. By custom they were supposed to visit each household in the village during the three days. The visits were seldom longer than 30 minutes, and at each home they would be served coffee, serbe, cigarettes, and Turkish delight (rahat lokum). The next two days the women visited from house to house.

For Eid today, the meal begins with corba (a lamb or chicken soup with vegetables, noodles, or trahana). Subsequent dishes in the order served are cimbur (an egg dish), *djulnari* (a sweet soaked with sugar syrup), okra (*bamija*) with veal, lamb with quince (*ćevap sa djunjama*), pita with spinach, baklava, rose-flavored serbe, stuffed onions (sogan dolma), *gurabije* (a cookie-like sweet), rice and lamb (*janjeci pilav*), rice pudding (sutlijaš), and sour cherry compote (*hošaf od višanja*). All the dishes remain on the table throughout the meal. Bread is taken for granted. After the meal, coffee is served.

A lavish, plentifully laden table is also integral to the most important Serbian celebration, the Krsna Slava, an annual commemoration of the day a family's ancestors were baptized and became Christian and a celebration honoring the saint on whose day this conversion took place. Serbian Orthodox churches, families, and communities have their own Krsna Slava. This celebration requires the presence of an icon of the patron saint and four ritual symbols: a lighted candle, a dish of cooked sweetened wheat kernels (*Slavsko žito* or *koljivo*), a special round loaf of bread (*Slavski kolač*), and red wine. The bread is decorated on top with a large cross. On its Slava, the family attends church for communion, after which the priest is invited to the family's home, where he blesses the bread, cutting a cross into the bottom and pouring wine onto the cut edge. The bread is then torn in half and everyone present tears off a small piece. The koljivo is shared by all guests, who each take a spoonful. A table is laden with food, which is replenished throughout the day and into the night for well-wishers who stop in. Traditional appetizers to be consumed with šljivovica and wine included bite-sized pieces of roasted suckling pig, raw bacon, cooked ham, pickled peppers, homemade fresh cheese, baklava, urmašice, mixed cookies, and white bread. The meal that follows often includes spit-roasted lamb or suckling pig and a large variety of pastries.

The most important day of the year for Croats is Christmas. A traditional serious celebration began on Christmas Eve and continued through the three subsequent days. A meal began with toasts and considerable šljivovica served with appetizers of white cheese and roasted sheep. Food was brought to the sofra in the following order: noodle soup, burek, sarma, unfilled pita sweetened with sugar, cheese pita (sirnjaca), cabbage and ham, boiled wheat with chicken, sutlijaš, and a variety of homemade cookies. Coffee was served at the end.

A very old traditional food, once a common dish of Dinaric herders regardless of ethnic affiliation, has become a ritual dish among Bosnian Christians with the introduction of a cash economy and migrations; it is called *cicvara* or *masla* in Bosnia and Herzegovina and *gotovac* in Montenegro. Corn, rye, or, less often, wheat flour is poured into a mixture of water and milk into which butter and cheese are melted. Even today, some Croats in western Herzegovina and Serbs in eastern Herzegovina prepare cicvara for Christmas.

Secular occasions, such as hosting visiting in-laws or family members from overseas, a work bee (mowing hay or building a house), and a village son's return from military service, are important events that call for roasting a sheep. Throughout the former Yugoslavia, a spit-roasted whole sheep is an integral part of most festive occasions. The act itself, usually accompanied by jovial visiting, drinking, and singing, is as important as the food prepared. It is no wonder that Bosnian immigrants to the United States, with jobs that afford some luxuries, are roasting sheep more frequently than they did in Bosnia. Aside from these festive occasions, spit-roasted sheep is a favorite food anytime. It is not unusual for restaurants in market towns to roast lamb on market day, and shoppers eagerly wait for it to be done. It is usually eaten with bread and fresh green onions or a salad of chopped onions and tomatoes. Marketgoers buy roasted sheep by the kilogram to eat while in town or to take home. Roasting sheep on water-driven spits are prominently placed in front of special restaurants located along well-traveled roads.

## Diet and Health

The traditional Bosnian diet is basically healthful. Instead of being fried, for instance, meats are often simmered, and vegetables are cooked in the meat juices. These vegetable and meat one-dish meals are very common. The diet is grain based; bread, whether made of wheat, barley, or corn, is an essential part of nearly every meal, and polenta (*pura*) and buckwheat mush are surviving traditional foods. Meat makes up about 40 percent of the national diet, though in mountain villages the amount may be far less. In villages fresh meat generally is eaten on auspicious occasions but otherwise used sparingly. Milk products are essential to the diet. Soured cultured milk is heavily consumed in urban centers, and whey from churned butter in villages. Bosnians shop regularly at open markets where

they buy seasonal fruits and vegetables, which they eat fresh and preserve for winter. Buying local without being particularly conscious about it is a Bosnian tradition.

*Yvonne R. Lockwood and William G. Lockwood*

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# Bulgaria

## Overview

Lying between Romania and Turkey but also sharing borders with Macedonia and Serbia, Bulgaria lies on the western edge of the Black Sea with 220 miles (354 kilometers) of coastline. Bulgaria is a southeastern European country on the Balkan Peninsula. Bulgaria's terrain is mountainous, although lowland plains occupy 30 percent of the landmass in the north and southeast. Bulgaria's temperate, warm climate, fertile lands, and diverse environments (a third of the country is forested, and there are deep, fertile valleys and lowland plains) mean that Bulgarian food culture is diverse. Greek and Turkish culinary influences predominate. South Slavic and rooted in southeastern Europe, Bulgarian food is similar to Balkan food in general. The long period of association with other Balkan countries aligned under the dominance of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th and 17th centuries is evident in the presence of baklava, moussaka, and *gyuvetch* (an eggplant dish). Bulgarian food culture is a confluence of influences, coalescing into Balkan-style food in which one can taste the influence of the Greeks, Slavs, Bulgars, Romans, and, even further back, the Thracians.

Within a total population of 7,204,687, ethnic Bulgarians constitute 83.9 percent of the population, Turks are 9.4 percent, and Roma, Tartars, Macedonians, Circassians, and Armenians make up the remaining 6.7 percent. The religious demographic of Bulgaria is as follows: Bulgarian Orthodox, 82.6 percent; Muslim (Pomaks), a sizable 12.2 percent; and remaining Christian denominations (Protestants, Roman Catholics) and other theistic (such as Armenian Orthodox Christianity), agnostic, and atheistic groups, the remaining 5.2 percent. In 2003 it was estimated that 14.4 percent of the population lived below the poverty line.

Bulgaria's main agricultural output (agriculture accounts for 7.3% of the gross domestic product, using 7.5% of the labor force, while the majority of the population—57%—works in the service industries and 35.5% in industry) consists of the following crops: fruits and vegetables, barley, wheat, sunflowers, and sugar beets. The challenges faced by the Bulgarian agricultural industry include deforestation, industrial waste products and heavy metal contamination from metallurgical plants, the pollution of rivers with raw sewage, damage to forested land from acid rain and air pollution, and industrial emissions and the air pollution associated with these. However, the prohibitive costs of chemical fertilizers and pesticides mean that food products are generally free-range or organic. In contrast, for urban centers of agricultural production, the many decades of collectivization and state planning under the erstwhile Socialist regime in Bulgaria mean that these sites of agriculture are more conformist and less diverse in their produce.

The fall of Communism in 1989 caused a seismic disruption in Bulgaria's economy. In consequence, agricultural production declined following the dispersal of cooperative farms, unemployment increased, and the real monetary value of wages decreased; this was coupled with exponential growth in private-sector activity. Although Bulgaria is capable in principle of self-sufficiency in food production, the demise of collective farming has led to a decline in the agricultural production of key crops such as



Traditional Bulgarian moussaka before baking. (Shutterstock)

wheat, as have unpredictable weather patterns. Following further economic change in the 1990s, substantial increases can be seen in the production of food needed for individual household subsistence.

Although there is very little vegetarianism as a lifestyle choice, Bulgarian food culture (*bulgarska kuhnya*) tends to involve lower meat consumption than in other European countries. New European Union member states consume twice as much meat; the monthly per-capita average meat consumption in Bulgaria is 6.7 pounds (3.06 kilograms).

## Food Culture Snapshot

George and Anna live in Sofia, the capital city of Bulgaria. As a middle-class couple, George works in information technology, and Anna is an administrator. George's day starts at 7 A.M. The impact of modern, fast-paced living means that they travel to work separately, working slightly different shifts. The amount of time George spends commuting and working outside the home means that he buys coffee for his breakfast, to drink as he travels. This he buys from a café not far from his work, along with a cheese *banitsa* (pastry). Anna, because she has a later start, at 9 A.M., and because her work is not in the distant business district of Sofia, has yogurt, *kifli* (a flaky pastry made from sweet dough with a jam filling), and coffee at home, all bought in advance from one of the small supermarkets that now proliferate in large cities in Bulgaria.

Lunch, for which they both go to Anna's mother's house, is at midday. As this is the largest meal of the day, Anna's mother has made a starter of *sa'lati shopska* (shopska salad, made from tomatoes, cucumber, onion, and white cheese called *sirene,* similar to feta), meatballs stewed in a *kavarma* (stew with tomatoes and paprika), boiled *kartofi* (potatoes), peppers stuffed with cheese, bread, and yogurt. Anna's mother bought the ingredients for these dishes from the supermarket: The supermarkets have taken a bigger market share, so more processed food is now available and eaten, although most people still cook their evening meal from scratch. The local markets typically sell fruit and vegetables, and as more and more of the Bulgarian ones are exported, more and more is imported from Turkey, with a lower quality. However, Anna's mother bought the meat for the kavarma from a local specialized shop for meat and the sirene cheese for the shopska from a minimarket run by an individual owner.

For dinner, George and Anna return home and eat a light meal of meze (small plates)—this means Anna has to prepare rather than cook the meal, although she did make the baked eggplant the weekend before. The cod roe appetizer and the *pasterma* (air-dried, pressed, and cured beef, flavored with paprika) they eat, along with cornmeal *kačamak* balls, were bought in the small local market, although the pasterma was bought in a large supermarket. As the intricate nature of some meze dishes involves more intensive kitchen-based labor than Anna has time for during the workweek—and it is still the expectation that Anna will take responsibility for domestic arrangements—Anna opts instead to buy in some meals. In Bulgaria, both lunch or dinner can begin with meze, the series of small dishes that link Bulgaria to Turkey: Some meze are baked eggplant, pickles, and the carp or cod roe appetizer *tarama* that resembles Greek *taramosalata.* Bulgarian pasterma is a centerpiece of meze along with other cured meats such as dark Dalmatian ham. Hot cheese, meat, or spinach banitsa may also follow meze. Savories such as kačamak balls, cornmeal-based snacks, stuffed with a local ewe-milk cheese, such as *bryndza,* also feature in meze.

## Major Foodstuffs

Although key staples and ingredients inform the corpus of Bulgarian food, regional culinary differences are apparent and mirror localized environmental

conditions. Along the coastline of the Black Sea, a food culture that depended on fish consumption is evident, despite the diminishing fish stock of the Black Sea. The mountainous landscapes of Bulgaria are a source of dairy products, while fertile plains supply Bulgaria's substantial fresh-vegetable consumption. The everyday diet of Bulgarians is founded on seasonal, local products.

The northern reaches of Bulgaria provide root crops, while the south yields the summer crops of peppers, tomatoes, okra, zucchini, and eggplant. This range of vegetables figures largely in Bulgarian food culture. An extensive array of vegetables is grown locally in Bulgaria and appears on a seasonal basis. The seasonality of vegetables and food means, for instance, that spring sees a rise in the use of wild and domesticated green plants for food, such as dock leaves, sorrel, nettles, and spinach. There has been an increase in the domestic production of vegetables, and some of this produce reaches the open market. These include varieties of potatoes, onions, tomatoes (*domati*), garlic, okra, peppers (*piperki* and *chushki*), carrots, cauliflower, lettuce, cucumbers (*krastavitsi*), cabbage (*zele*), peas, mushrooms, celery, eggplant, zucchini, radishes, spinach, lima beans, pumpkins, turnips, green beans, and olives.

Major fruits include blueberries, melons, apricots, blackberries, raspberries, quinces, medlars, watermelons, muskmelons, strawberries, plums, peaches, cherries, grapes, and pears. Early summer sees the harvest of strawberries and cherries, followed by the harvest of apricots, figs, and numerous other fruits.

In preparation for winter, and the increase in price and decrease in availability of vegetables, vegetables can be canned, bottled, preserved, and stored through the production, for example, of sauerkraut. Indeed, the processing of vegetables into meals can reveal the many influences on Bulgarian food. Turkish nuances are evident in dishes such as stuffed vine leaves; Greek and Turkish tones are clear in zucchini stuffed with rice. The tradition of *turshiya* or *torshi* unites Bulgaria in the pickling of vegetables with wider Balkan and Middle Eastern food culture. Persian influence can be found in the etymology: The Persian word *torsh* means "sour." Turshiya is an appetizer of dried aromatic herbs, peppers, ginger, vinegar, and salt—acting as antibacterial agents—and various proportions of chili, celery, beets, cauliflower, cabbage, garlic, and small onions. Its two most popular incarnations are *selska turshiya* (country pickle) and *tsarska turshiya* (king's pickles). Turkish-style turshiya, called *tursu,* uses a higher concentration of salt. In contrast, Persian-style turshiya, known as torshi, has a higher vinegar content. It can be made within the home—much domestic industry goes into its production in the autumn, even in urban centers—but a processed version of turshiya can be bought in large supermarkets. Served both at home and in restaurants, turshiya will be placed in a bowl alongside the main dishes on the Bulgarian table. Vegetables can also figure in popular vegetable mixtures or relishes such as *lyutenitsa,* which is particularly popular in the summer in northern Bulgaria. Tomatoes, roasted peppers, onions, garlic, and sunflower oil are combined in a mortar and pestle until they are of a rough texture. Parsley is added. The distinctively pungent taste is what stands out most clearly about lyutenitsa—etymologically, *lyut* means "piquant." The mass production of lyutenitsa has flourished in recent years.

High in antioxidants and nutrients, walnuts and almonds are harvested in abundance in Bulgaria. They find their way into the pastry-making industry in such pastries as baklava with its interlayering of phyllo pastry and chopped nuts, sweetened with honey or syrup. Baklava consumption spans food cultures from Turkey to the Middle East, the Balkans, and parts of Central Asia.

Dairy products, in many different forms, are widely consumed but with a particular emphasis on white cheeses preserved in brine, as well as types of yogurt. Feta cheese, popular throughout southeastern Europe, is associated in popular consciousness with Greece, but in fact it originated in the Trakia region, currently designated as southern Bulgaria. Existing in Bulgaria under the appellation *sirene* and made from sheep milk, goat milk, or, more frequently, from cheaper cow milk, with a fat content of 40–45 percent, this brined, grainy-textured white cheese is featured in banitsa and shopska salad. *Kashkaval,* a hard, yellow ewe-milk cheese, also predominates. Popular when dipped in egg and rolled in breadcrumbs, then fried, kashkaval is, in this incarnation, known as "fried cheese."

Yogurt (*kiselo mlyako,* meaning "sour milk") is an integral part of much Bulgarian food and is sold in various grades and qualities. A particularly buttery version, found most often in mountainous regions, such as Shipka and Gabrovo, is the water buffalo–milk yogurt called *bivolsko mylako. Arjan,* a mixture of water and yogurt, is also popular, particularly at breakfast. Purportedly, yogurt originated in Bulgaria, when the ancient inhabitants, the Thracians, carried sheep milk in lambskin bags; *yog* and *urt* translate in Thracian as "thick" and "milk." The high number of centenarians in the Bulgarian population was attributed to the high yogurt consumption in Bulgaria, related to the *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* bacteria used in the process. Although yogurt consumption has decreased in Bulgaria, it still exports some 200,000 tons of yogurt annually to Japan.

Rice cultivation in Bulgaria dates from the 14th century, although rice consumption predates this by some thousand years. Rice is mainly grown in the Pazardjik and Plovdiv regions, due to their proximity to the Maritsa (or Evros) River—at 298 miles (480 kilometers), the longest river in the Balkans' interior—and the Chaia and Goiolnitsa rivers. In relation to grain prices, meat prices have risen markedly, making it financially advantageous to buy grain for family consumption. Rice dishes often incorporate spinach or zucchini in contemporary Bulgaria.

Staples include rice, corn, beans, and lentils. Cornmeal-based kačamak (known as *mămăligă* in Romania) is a traditional Bulgarian dish, made from dried, ground corn grown near the Black Sea. Cornmeal and salt are boiled in water and mashed to a variety of consistencies, but in every incarnation it is a bread substitute and is similar to Italian polenta. In its drier version it can be sliced like bread, and in its more watery version it is resembles a thick ochre-colored porridge and is served dotted with sirene cheese, or with fried pork crackling, *prăzhki.* It can also be accompanied by yogurt and sour cream. It is also baked with meat or with yellow kashkaval cheese (similar though often superior to Italian *cacciocavallo*). Kačamak balls containing cheese, salami, or ham are a popular snack. Traditionally, kačamak was a staple food for impoverished sections of the population, but it has now reemerged as a hip and stylish appetizer dish available in upmarket restaurants.

A key staple is bread, eaten with every meal—Bulgarians consume more than 22 pounds (10 kilograms) per person monthly—but rather than being home baked, bread is often purchased. Such bread would be both leavened and unleavened and uses millet, rye, and, predominantly, wheat. A type of plain donut is also consumed, called *mekitsi,* and a croissant-type roll filled with sweet preserves is popular, called kifli.

Core herbs and spices inform Bulgarian food culture. Summer savory, *čubrica,* is commonly used in Bulgaria and is preferred to winter savory. Similar in taste to oregano, čubrica is dried or ground and sprinkled on soup just before eating. It can be used as a spread on bread in a manner similar to the use made of *za'atar* in Palestine. The Bulgarian table does not have the simple duality of salt and pepper but will, instead, have a triad of condiments: salt, paprika, and dried summer savory. Mixed together, this is called "colorful salt" (*sharena sol*). Parsley, *magdanoz,* is used throughout Bulgarian cuisine, as is thyme, euphemistically also called "shepherd's basil" and "granny's soul;" thyme is used both fresh and dried as a seasoning in such dishes as broad bean stew. Also used sparingly for flavoring soups, and in a number of other dishes, is dried mint, called *djodjen* (*Mentha spicata*). The type of oil most frequently used for cooking is sunflower oil, but olive oil and cow-milk butter are available.

Meat consumption in Bulgaria is relatively low and, per capita, is among the lowest in Europe. Commonly used meats are pork (*svinsko*), chicken (*pile*), and veal (*teleshko*). Beef, however, is less commonly consumed, as cattle breeding focuses on milk as opposed to meat production. This means that veal is readily available and recurs throughout Bulgarian food culture. The availability of meat products shows some seasonal differentiation: lamb during the production period in the spring (Bulgaria is a net exporter of lamb); chicken in the summer; and pork during the winter months. Despite the minority Muslim population's objection to eating pork, it remains the most prevalent meat consumed in Bulgaria. Some explanation is offered in

that, during the period in which the Ottoman Empire dominated Bulgaria, the only livestock animal to be exempt from the "natural tax" was the pig. Meat is stewed with vegetables in kavarma, a stew served in earthenware pots; stewed lamb and vegetables are *gyuvech* dishes; or meat is minced and shaped into spicy meat patties (*kyufteta*) or sausage-shaped grilled meat like *kebapcheta.*

Fish predominates in the coastal region of the Black Sea but is eaten widely throughout Bulgarian cuisine. Fried, grilled, or stewed, varieties such a bream, grey mullet, and scad predominate, as do freshwater varieties such as carp and trout. Shellfish attracts only limited consumption—mussels are a case in point. In 2009, construction of Europe's most extensive black mussel farm began in the Bay of Kavarna: Ironically, mussel output will be channeled to export, as Bulgarian consumption is very limited. The rivers of Bulgaria produce freshwater fish such as carp, which may then be baked with walnut paste or poached with caraway seeds. Trout caught in a river may be wrapped in dampened leaves or paper, packed beneath hot ashes, and cooked.

Coffee consumption follows the Turkish model of imbibing intensely flavored and thick coffee, often with an accompanying sweet. Hot tea is, additionally, a popular beverage. Lying between the alcoholic and nonalcoholic is roseate sweet-sour *boza,* or millet ale, a fermented drink with a very low alcohol content (1%), made with a millet-flour base. Boza, unusually, occupies a special place as a winter breakfast dish, ideally accompanied by a pastry (banitsa).

Bulgarians consume a variety of wines and often region-specific alcoholic drinks such as *mastika, menta,* and *rakiya.* Mastika, which is 90 proof, derives its name from "to chew or gnash the teeth" and



A traditional wine cellar in the village of Melnik in Bulgaria. The village has been famous for its wines for centuries, especially during the Soviet regime. (Asafta | Dreamstime.com)

is usually made from grapes, figs, plums, or raisins. Mastika derives its flavor from resin produced by the small, evergreen Mediterranean Chios mastic tree. The method used for extracting mastic sap is very similar to that of extracting maple sap: collection of sap dripping from incisions made in the tree's bark. Menta is a liquor flavored with spearmint oil. Contrary to the expectations set up by its name, rakiya is not an aniseed-flavored liquor like Turkish raki but instead a fruit brandy, usually based on fermented grapes (*pomorska rakiya*), but also on plums (*slivova rakiya*) and apricots (*kaisieva rakiya*), which are then twice distilled. The Stara Planina region produces the notable Elena plum brandy. Vodka is also produced and a cognac called *pliska.* The most popular types of beer are *zagora, pleven,* and *astika.*

There are several main wine-producing regions, each distinctive, and there are approximately 12 producing wineries in Bulgaria, exporting to over 70 countries. The southwestern region is famed for *melnik,* a red wine—and red wine remains the most popular Bulgarian wine type. The southern reaches of the Middle Balkan mountain range are grape-rich. Intersecting Bulgaria from east to west is the Valley of the Roses, established in the 17th century by the Turks and now the core producer of rose attar, a rose water that is the basis for a small-scale industry in rose liquor and soap.

## Cooking

Women do the majority of household cooking, in both urban and rural contexts. Traditional cooking pots of clay for oven baking, called gyuvech, are used to make the eponymous slow-cooked dish. Western-style cooking utensils and pans are used, in fact, for most cooking. Purportedly, a feature of Bulgarian food culture is that the cooking of one course can be accomplished in one saucepan. To a large extent, sautéing and deep-frying are rare activities: Many Bulgarian dishes are oven-baked, stew-based, or, when called for, steamed. Grilling is also a common practice both in the preparation of fish for the table and in the treatment of varieties of meat, for instance, the preparation of *kébabchés* (kebabs).

## Typical Meals

Bulgarian food culture dictates that the majority of Bulgarians will eat at home but much more so for Bulgarians in a rural context. As the service industry sees restaurants and fast-food outlets grow and expand in cities, so, too, do opportunities for eating beyond the home. Domestic food in Bulgaria tends to emphasize the production of soups, salads, stuffed vegetables, and stews, while bread, sausage, and cheese might be more frequently produced and purchased outside the home.

While there are regional and socioeconomic factors to take into account, most Bulgarians eat three meals a day—breakfast, lunch, and dinner—although these meals may well be supplemented by a midmorning snack and coffee in the afternoon. Breakfast is a light meal, combining yogurt, cheese-based pastries, and fruit. A strudel-like banitsa (pastry) is eaten, which is an interlayering of sirene cheese with phyllo pastry—though it may also contain leeks or spinach (*spanachena banitsa*). There is also a sweeter version of banitsa stuffed with pumpkin (*tikvenik banitsa*) and a milk-based banitsa called *mlenchna banitsa.* Another breadlike product, *krenvirshka,* a frankfurter-style sausage in a light pastry, may also be eaten, as well as the breadlike *kozu'nak,* sprinkled with sugar, accompanied by coffee and yogurt or thick, slightly acidic boza or *airan,* a yogurt drink. A breakfast for children might have, as part of it, *popara,* made from bread soaked in hot milk and mixed with butter, sugar, and sirene cheese or clotted cream called *kajmak.*

Midday is the time for lunch. This is the preferred point for a family meal; if it is such, then it will follow the three-fold linear structure of a salad or soup, followed by a main course, and then dessert. Bulgarian soup has both hot and cold incarnations, the most famous of which is *tarator* soup. Most popular in the summer, this appetite-stimulating cold soup is based on a combination of soured milk (yogurt), walnuts, cucumber, dill, water (which can occasionally replace the sour milk entirely), and sunflower or olive oil. Bread can be used instead of walnuts to thicken this soup, and the soup may even be served with ice in order to keep the tarator's temperature

down. Tarator may be served alongside shopska salad, although a tarator-based salad does exist in the form of *salata snezhanka* (snow-white salad), made using the same constituents and with thicker yogurt and less finely chopped ingredients. Vegetable-based soups (*zelenchukova supa*) dominate, and forest mushrooms appear in *gubena supa.* Bean soups feature in Bulgarian food culture, the most famous being *smilyanski fasul* using Smilyan beans. *Bob chorba,* Bulgarian hot bean soup, is a combination of dried white beans, such as haricot or fava beans, with tomatoes, peppers, chili, onion, and djodjen (mint) or even čubrica (summer savory). Indeed, bob chorba was a favored staple in Bulgarian monasteries. Sourness can be added to produce some of Bulgaria's distinctive hot and sour soups, such as *pacha* soup, a sour lamb's-trotter soup, through adding pickles, bitter fruits, or even vinegar to the broth. Other offal-based soups are also popular, such as *shkembe chorba,* made with tripe and milk.

Sa'lati shopska, typically the salad first course for lunch or eaten with meze or to accompany an aperitif such as rakiya, is made of a core combination of chunks of tomatoes (domati), onion, and cucumber (krastavitsi), with, sometimes, a yogurt dressing. Additionally, cabbage (*zele*) and peppers (*piperki* or *chushki*) can be added. This can then be garnished with a topping of grated white ewe-milk cheese. If dressed with yogurt and nuts and made with ingredients resembling those in tarator soup, this is called *mlechna salata,* and if consisting only of yogurt-dressed pickled cucumbers, this is called *snezhanka.* Furthermore, if a sa'lati comes with the trio of cucumbers, tomatoes, and peppers, this is a *meshana sa'lati.* The salad is often a communal dish, eaten by all participants from a common platter, with diners using their own forks to eat from it. When individual plates are used, the emptiness of the diner's plate will be taken as the signal for more food; a small amount left discreetly on the plate indicates the eater's appetite is sated.

The central course may be kavarma, which may come as casseroled veal or pork with onions and mushrooms, or pork with paprika (*slav gyuvech*). Or it might be spicy pork or veal sausages grilled on skewers with onions and peppers or beef patties in their own sauce, called *kyufte.* All of these grilled meats come under the generic title kebapcheta but vary regionally from Sofia to Dobrudja. Kebapche may consist of minced chicken or veal, combined with onion and cumin and served with fried potato. Also on the table may be rice-stuffed cabbage, chard, or vine leaves, called *sarmi* (derived from the Turkish word *sarmak,* meaning "to wrap or roll"). Potatoes (kartofi) or some stewed, hot vegetable dish such as *gyuvech zarzavat* will be served, accompanied by bread.

Dessert may be a Turkish-style pastry such as baklava (a confection of phyllo pastry with crushed pistachios and sugar syrup) or *kadayif* (a pastry of shredded wheat with syrup and nuts). Peaches may come dotted with butter, baked, spiced with cloves,



Traditional Bulgarian kavarma in a gyuvetche. (Shutterstock)

and drizzled with a brandy, such as kaisieva rakiya (apricot brandy). Rice pudding–style desserts also feature and may be scented with rose water, laced with cinnamon, or flaked with lemon: all distinctively Bulgarian flavors. This lunch structure can always be abbreviated with the impact of modern living, making lunch a lighter meal, eaten at a fast-food outlet, such as a café or kiosk, although such fast-food venues remain relatively uncommon in Bulgaria, concentrated mostly in urban areas.

Dinner is eaten between 7 and 8 P.M. As it is not the central meal, dinner is light; it may include the same foods as at lunch, sometimes excluding the first and third courses: the soup and the dessert. If dinner is a meat stew, fruit may be cooked with the meat, for instance, pork with quince.

Both lunch and dinner may be accompanied by a dish of the spicy vegetable relish lyutenitsa, made from a mixture of peppers, eggplant, and tomatoes, or the similar relish *ajvar,* which is slightly less spicy in Bulgaria than in other Balkan countries.

Western eating styles are most common: Eaters will sit around a table, and each will hold a fork in the left hand, a knife in the right. Meals can last for variable lengths of time—although it is always a given that lunch lasts the longest—except on celebratory occasions, when meals can span several hours and are accompanied by *nazdrave* (toasting), which will occur sporadically throughout the meal.

Although Bulgaria is a small country, there are regional differences in food culture. The Black Sea coast influences the food culture of this coastline in the wealth of fish dishes and the wide range of fish available. Dishes such as the tomato-based mackerel stew *skumriya n keremidi* or a batter-encased whitefish served with fried potatoes (*tsatsa*) appear, as well as turbot, mussels, crab, and shellfish soups, and swordfish steaks grilled with lemon and oil. Dishes utilize the many varieties of fish sourced in the Black Sea such as scad (resembling whitebait) and grey mullet, used in onion and mullet casserole. Nessabar, lying on the Black Sea coast, produces a famous fish soup, made from four or five different kinds of fish, while Sozopol, on the southern section of the Black Sea coast, produces renowned mussel soup.

The southwestern mountainous Pirin region produces its own regional dishes: for instance, Bansko's unusually named sausages *starets* (old man) and *babek* (old woman). Bankso has a reputation for its meat stews such as *kapama,* a stew that combines pork, veal, and chicken, or the veal, onion, and potato dish *chomlek.*

The central Plovdiv region produces sausages, primarily in Karlovo, namely, the red-brown, square shaped semidried sausages *karlovski sudjuk* and *karlovska lukanka.* Made of chopped or minced cumin-spiced beef, pork, and grainy fat, when it is finely sliced, lukanka functions as an appetizer. Cooked sudjuk is used as a breakfast dish, fried like bacon and accompanied by eggs. The central Bulgarian Stara Planina mountain area, particularly centering



Traditional Bulgarian meal made of spinach, feta, and kori (phyllo). (Shutterstock)

on the town of Elena, is famed for its production of the national delicacy *elenski but,* a dry-cured ham, its taste accounted for in part by the climatic conditions of Stara Planina.

The Rhodope mountain region, close to the border with Greece, has many distinctive local dishes. The Rhodope town of Smilya is famed for the beans produced in the upper Arda Valley: a large white or purple streaked bean, used in salads or fried in a light batter; and a smaller brown bean with blue streaks that is a key ingredient in corn and bean *trahna* stew. Also from Rhodope are vegetarian dishes such as *patatnik,* a pulverized potato cake, in which some sheets of potato act as banitsa-style layers, all of which is flavored with mint and summer savory and may be interspersed with crumbled sirene cheese, peppers, and grated onions. *Rodopski klin* is a phyllo pastry dish, enclosing rice and white cheese. Regional varieties of pancakes are popular in this area, too; Rhodope inhabitants make thick pancakes called *marudnitsi* and *katmi.*

## Eating Out

In urban areas and large cities, such as Sofia, Varna, Burgas, or Plovdiv, there are many multicultural restaurants. In Sofia alone it is possible to eat Italian, Russian, Korean, German, Japanese, and Vietnamese food. There is even an Indian restaurant in Sofia: Ramayna, in the Lozenets quarter of Sofia. The roadsides are dotted with stands selling Bulgarian street food in the form of kebapcheta and kyufteta. Patisseries sell tea, coffee, pastries, and cakes such as the chocolate cake *garash.* Along with coffee bars and pubs, these outlets remain popular meeting places. McDonald's and other fast-food outlets are taking hold in Bulgaria, and a recent study published in *USA Today* revealed that as many as 68 percent of Bulgarians interviewed admitted to fast-food dependence.

Traditionally, be it in an urban or rural context, *mehana,* traditional Bulgarian hostelries, would be popular sources of food, along with offering folk dancing and folk music. The mehana also exists in cultures connected to that of Bulgaria, such as Turkey, where such restaurants and drinking establishments are called *meyhane,* with both names deriving from the Persian *may,* meaning "wine," and *χāna,* meaning "house."

## Special Occasions

Fasting is central to the observance of two of the religions of Bulgaria: the dominant theism of Orthodox Christianity and the minority religion of Islam. Orthodox Christians may adhere to the observance of the Lenten fast before Easter, while Muslims may observe the daylight fast of Ramadan (Ramazan). Specific dishes are exchanged at the end of each fasting day: Sugared delicacies are exchanged in the nondaylight eating hours of Ramadan. Both religions also mark celebration, devotion, and rebirth through food. The willing sacrifice of Ishmael by Abraham is relived through food metaphor in the Eid al-Adha (Kurban Bairam) practice of preparing a spit-roasted sheep or goat. This religious observance is the Turkic equivalent to the Muslim "feast of sacrifice," Eid al-Adha (Arabic). Indeed, the word *kurban,* meaning "sacrifice," also denotes a ceremonial meat dish. Spanning the whole year is the Muslim refusal of pork.

The rebirth of Easter is celebrated in the visual extravaganza of braided and dyed *kozunak* bread, dotted with dyed eggs and tasting of warmed rum, raisins, and lemon zest. The joy of Christmas and the Nativity is expressed through a greater number of vegetarian dishes, such as stuffed vine leaves (sarmi) and stuffed peppers, and through visual food "tricks," surprises, and games, such as hiding slips of paper within banitsa. There is the familiar danger of swallowing one's fortune or luck as one of the coins or charms hidden in cakes and pastries made for Christian holidays. Cabbage will be consumed on New Year's Eve. On St. Barbara's Day, December 4 (to honor the saint who protects against smallpox), it is customary to bake unleavened bread, spread it with honey, and offer pieces of this on the roadside to passersby, with the salutation to strangers of "May God bless you, your family, your people, your cattle and all!" The morning of St. Barbara's Day should be marked by an odd number of children boiling kidney beans in a

broth with salt and onion; when ready, the youngest child would put three of the beans on the knees of each of the other children. They then had to eat the beans without using their hands.

On the day of the great winter festival, December 6, Nikulden (St. Nicholay's Day), fish—blessed carp baked in pastry (*ribnik*)—is consumed, having been baked with two loaves of bread per household, and the table is open to all guests. Carp is considered the saint's servant. As St. Nicholay is the saint of the seas, fishermen offer the day's catch to the saint, and the first fish caught will be cooked and eaten, ritually, on the shoreline by the fishermen. After the fish has been blessed, and after incense has been given, the local priest is, traditionally, offered the tail end of the carp. The cross-shaped *krakhche* bone of the carp used to be sewn into children's caps to guard them against malevolent spirits. The bones of the carp must be either burned, buried, or returned to the river. In a similar way, on May 6, Gergyovden Day (St. George's Day, the most popular name day in Bulgaria: Over half of Bulgarian men are named after St. George, farmers bake round bread in honor of the patron saint of farming, and roast lamb is on the table. There is even a special liquor for the day: *rakia Gergyovden.* All of the dishes mentioned should be cooked by the participants: Store-bought, ready-to-cook foods are not examples of genuine veneration.

## Diet and Health

While herbalism has long held an honored place in Bulgarian home treatment, the economic hardships of the 1990s placed Western prescription medicines beyond the financial reach of many Bulgarians, leading many to look inwardly to traditional methods of medical care once again. For instance, čubrica, summer savory, is said, when rubbed on an insect sting, to soothe the skin's painful reaction, but it is also used more generally as a pick-me-up, as an expectorant to help clear phlegm in the lungs and sinuses, and as a preventative of diarrhea and reliever of colic and flatulence. Although there has been debate in Bulgarian food culture about whether the onion should be considered a spice, its efficacy is not questioned. Onion is considered to have some medicinal properties and to stimulate the secretion of gastric juices. It appears raw in salads and travels through Bulgarian cookery, appearing in stews, sauces, and preserves. Bulgaria has great resources of mineral waters, most notably the spring-fed water in a number of towns that cluster around Plovdiv: Brasigovo and Hisarja. Used to treat gastrointestinal disorders, such water is also bottled and distributed commercially. Soup also holds a place in the panoply of anecdotal food "cures" in Bulgaria: The tripe soup shkembe chorba reputedly alleviates the gastrointestinal problems associated with hangovers.

*Fiona Ross*

**Further Reading**

Davies, Trish. *The Balkan Cookbook: Traditional Cooking from Romania, Bulgaria and the Balkan Countries*. London: Anness, 1999.

# Croatia

## Overview

As with every aspect of life in the Balkans, cuisine in Croatia has political and cultural connotations. During the period of government-enforced harmony when the Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Bosnians, ethnic Albanians, and Macedonians were all enveloped in Yugoslavia, cultural differences were officially minimized and almost invisible to outsiders. Since the breakup of Yugoslavia into separate republics, partisans have made exaggerated claims for the uniqueness of each ethnic and religious group's foodways. Although the foodways are superficially similar, Croatia's history and geography have given it a cuisine with subtle differences from its neighbors'.

All cuisines of the former Yugoslavia were influenced by three occupiers: the Ottomans, the Austro-Hungarians, and the Venetians. Though known by different names in the various languages and dialects of the Balkans, Turkish-influenced kebabs such as *čevapčići* and *ražnjići* are enjoyed everywhere. They are made with beef and pork in Croatia, lamb in Bosnia and Macedonia, and all three in Serbia, but the spicing and preparation are essentially the same. All are served either plain or in a domed bread loaf, a *somun,* with or without onions on the side. Similarly, each country has its own version of schnitzel, with only the most minor differences in preparation to distinguish one from the other.

The situation with Croatia is more complex than with most other states of the former Yugoslavia because from medieval times until less than 100 years ago, the coastal and inland regions were often ruled by different empires that fostered cultural ties with faraway capitals. Inland Croatia was occupied by the Austro-Hungarians longer than any other part of the Balkans, and there is a correspondingly strong Germanic influence in the cuisine of that region. Meanwhile, the coastal counties of Istria and Dalmatia were part of the Venetian Republic and later the Kingdom of Italy, and as late as 1910, more than a third of the population of the coastal regions spoke Italian as their native language. Only a tiny section of the coast around the city of Dubrovnik and a few offshore islands, collectively known as the Republic of Ragusa, remained independent and under native Croatian control for any substantial period.

The ease of travel by sea, the wealth of nearby Venice, and the relative difficulty of crossing the Balkans meant that trade links from the sea to the interior were few, and luxury goods and imported spices were more plentiful on the coast. Inevitably, the coastal cuisine contains more complex and sophisticated dishes using seafood, while the cuisines of the mountains and the Pannonian Plain near the Hungarian border are simpler and use more meat.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Dusan and his wife, Dijana, start their day with an early and modest breakfast, rolls with some cheese or smoked meat, yogurt, and a small cup of very strong coffee. She grew up on the Adriatic coast and considers a bowl of soft polenta the best way to start the day, but he is from Zagreb and prefers bread. After he leaves for work, Dijana checks the pot of pork and



Goulash, often made with pork and pumpkin, is a popular Croatian dish. (Shutterstock)

potato stew that was left on low heat overnight. Their apartment is modern and has gas, but through the open window she can hear the neighbor raking out the embers from the stone hearth in their medieval house. She envies that neighbor sometimes for the beauty of her old home, but the sound of the hearth being shoveled out every morning reminds her of the virtues of new construction.

Dijana works part-time, and she spends a few hours around the house in the morning. When she is just about to go shopping for groceries, her neighbor invites her in for *marenda,* the traditional late-morning snack. A meal with a friend is a more attractive proposition than stopping at a street stall at the market, so she gratefully accepts. After fruit and a cup of *jota,* the minestrone-like soup, her neighbor pours a glass of *bevanda,* wine diluted with water. Her husband can't have this traditional accompaniment to marenda because he works for a multinational company that frowns on any consumption of alcohol during working hours. She has no such problem, and she sits over a glass and chats with the neighbor for a few minutes before going to the market.

Although modern supermarkets (often called hypermarkets, in the European fashion) are nearby, she prefers the traditional street market because the selection of fresh fish is usually better. She gets fresh sardines at an excellent price, but the find of the day is at a nearby vegetable stall. There is *blitva,* fresh young Swiss chard, a specialty of the Croatian islands, which will be a good accompaniment to dinner. At another stall an old farmer sells *misanca,* a mix of wild onions, forest herbs, and edible flowers. With a few salted anchovies, a sliced hard-boiled egg, some capers, and olive oil, it will make an excellent salad for dinner.

Dijana makes it home in plenty of time to increase the heat under the stew, mix the misanca into a salad, and make a few quick side dishes before Dusan comes in for lunch. He arrives just after 2 P.M., and they sit down for the largest meal of the day. Dusan mentions that his company's new manager, who is not Croatian, will be hosting important American clients for dinner tomorrow and wants him to join them. The Americans often are confused by the tradition of the marenda and taking the main meal in the middle of the day, and Dusan and the other Croatian managers have to make allowances for their odd habit of having the main meal late. The Croatians think it is unhealthy to eat heavily at night, but business is business.

Dusan goes back to work, and Dijana heads to her job at a local computer store. Like most urban retail businesses, it closes at 7:30 P.M., and she and Dusan are both home by 8 P.M. She fries the sardines in olive oil and herbs, puts them on a bed of sautéed chard, and serves it with some of the leftover stew and glasses of wine. They finish with slices of cherry strudel that she picked up in the market—a simple, light, and satisfying meal to finish the day. Dusan has some friends coming over to play *belot* and other card games, so she sets out glasses and a bottle of *rakija* (a strong clear liquor). Some of the men who are coming don't drink, but offering alcohol is part of hospitality. Dijana knows

that the brass coffee grinder and the ensuing Turkish-style coffee will be popular with everyone.

## Major Foodstuffs

Coastal Croatia is a continuous Mediterranean-type ecosystem with Slovenia and Italy to the north and Macedonia, Albania, and Greece to the south, and all the Adriatic cuisines share the same elements. Ocean fish of many kinds is abundant, particularly tuna, mullet, sardines, squid, octopus, and mackerel, as well as shellfish such as shrimp, mussels, clams, crabs, and lobster. Frogs, eels, and river crabs are all eaten in Dalmatia. Fish is also popular inland, with freshwater species such as carp, catfish, and pickerel predominating.

Pigs and sheep are raised everywhere in the country, while cattle are raised mainly on the inland and northern plains. Venison is a specialty of the alpine and coastal regions, and rabbit is widely eaten in the north. *Prst,* the local version of prosciutto, based on beef, mutton, goat, venison, or goose and turkey, is a popular appetizer.

Cow-, goat-, and sheep-milk cheeses are made throughout the country, mostly by small producers, but the salty, hard sheep-milk cheese from the island of Pag, called *Paški sir,* is the most prized. The taste and texture are similar to Parmesan, and it is eaten as an appetizer with olives and used in cooking. Several soft cheeses and cottage cheeses are used for vegetable casseroles that are a popular side dish. *Kajmak,* a fatty, crumbly cheese based on cream, is universally encountered, even, occasionally, on so-called cheeseburgers.

The principal vegetables include bell peppers, onions, eggplant, green beans, cabbage, and tomatoes. Potatoes are boiled, roasted, fried, used in soups, and pounded into flour for gnocchi (*njoki* in Serbo-Croatian). Other common vegetables and pulses/legumes include beans, peas, lentils, carrots, artichokes, mushrooms, and asparagus. The Istria region produces small amounts of white truffles, which are highly prized. A type of seaweed known as *motar* (rock samphire or sea fennel in English) is a delicacy along the coast; it fell out of favor for many years but has recently enjoyed a rediscovery.

City families often have a *vikendica* (weekend place), where they may grow vegetables and fruits, as well as harvest wild plants, or they may have a city allotment. Spring and summer weekends are usually spent at the vikendica, and fresh foods are brought home either from the family plot or from visits to country cousins.

High-quality wheat is grown in inland areas of the country, and Croatia is a net exporter of winter wheat, spelt, and related products such as pasta. Corn (maize) is widely cultivated and eaten locally, and production has been increasing. Street vendors may be found selling corn on the cob. Buckwheat has been cultivated in Croatia since the Neolithic period and is a staple in the mountainous regions. Modest soybean and barley crops are grown for domestic consumption.

Croatian cuisine as a whole is not highly spiced, but almost any meal might include paprika and other red pepper–based condiments. Other spices that will be found in any kitchen are rosemary, parsley, salt, and pepper. Apples, almonds, chestnuts, plums, cherries, walnuts, grapes, raisins, and elderberries are all used in desserts and in some savory dishes.

## Cooking

The center of a traditional Croatian kitchen is a woodstove known as a *commine,* which is under a domelike hood called a *peka.* Here, pots and skillets sit right on the embers of the fire or hang from hooks, and meat can be roasted on spits or smoked by hanging it in the chimney. Meats prepared in this fashion are known as *na pekara.*

Most families also have a *kotao* (boiler), a wide, shallow cauldron built on top of an iron pot-bellied charcoal stove, usually used outside. Modern homes might have a gas kotao. Items cooked on this stove are called *kotlovina,* meaning "food from the cauldron." Many kotlovina recipes are slow-cooked all day, and a few require more than one day to prepare. Another outdoor cooking method that is popular in the coastal regions is cooking lamb or fish on spikes at the edge of a fire.

Inland parts of the country are famous for pickling in vinegar, and there are many regional varieties

of sauerkraut. Cabbage leaves are also pickled whole and used for the stuffed cabbage called *sarma.* Other vegetables that are pickled are cucumbers, onions, eggplant, beets, and bell peppers. Large plastic tubs of pickled winter vegetables, *zimnica,* are found stored on patios throughout the country. Meats are pickled, too, or made into sausages, dried, or smoked. In the colder parts of the country people still keep a *lodrica ili tiblica*—literally, "big wooden bowl"—with cooked meats preserved under a layer of lard.

The northwest is noted for jams and jellies, particularly from plums, cherries, and rose hips. These are used to spread on bread or are sandwiched in cookies, some of which are then coated in chocolate. Brewing, winemaking, distilling brandy, and making the mead known as *gvirc* are all popular hobbies. In winemaking season, the smell of crushed grapes fills the air in many neighborhoods. It sometimes seems that everyone who owns a plum tree—or knows somebody who has one—is making *slivovitz* (brandy) in their cellar. *Dedo*'s (Grandpa's) is always the best.

## Typical Meals

In common with other cultures throughout the eastern Mediterranean and Adriatic, on the coast all but the simplest main meals begin with appetizers similar to the Greek meze. Favorite items are olives, pickled octopus, slices of sausage or cured meats, and bread. A popular starter anywhere in Croatia is *Štrukli,* cheese raviolis that are fried with butter and breadcrumbs in Zagreb, boiled in the Alps, and usually baked along the coast. A variant on the Štrukli is the *borek,* a baked turnover made with phyllo dough and stuffed with cheese or ground meat.

The Italian influence on Istria and Dalmatia has left a legacy of mildly spiced but rich seafood dishes, including risottos, squid ink pasta, seafood ravioli, and various permutations of grilled fish with olive oil, garlic, and herbs. The most interesting and characteristic Dalmatian dish is *bakalar,* a stew of dried salted codfish and potatoes that is similar to some Iberian preparations. Codfish are caught in the North Atlantic rather than the Adriatic, and this traditional Christmas specialty is a legacy of the maritime tradition during the era when Ragusan sailors traded between the Ottoman Empire and Spain. Other rustic seafood specialties include mussels poached in olive oil with parsley and garlic, finished with white wine, sea salt, and pepper (*dagne na buzaru*).

Besides seafood, coastal Croatian cuisine uses vegetables that thrive in the mild Mediterranean climate, and local olive oil is used liberally in marinades and sautés. Arborio rice is imported from Italy and used in risottos and the locally popular *rizi-bizi,* rice cooked with peas, butter, onions, and herbs.

The stuffed cabbage known as sarma is made throughout Croatia, but while it contains chopped meat and rice in the inland versions, in Dalmatia it has no rice, just ground meat spiced with cloves, cinnamon, and pine nuts. Here it is called *arambašići,* named after Turkish soldiers—*harambaše.*

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### *Sarma* (Stuffed Cabbage)

#### Ingredients

*For the Cabbage*

1 whole head cabbage

1 qt water

8 tbsp salt

¼ c vinegar

*For the Filling*

1 lb finely chopped pork (not ground)

1 lb finely chopped beef

1 large onion, chopped

1 garlic clove, chopped

1 egg

½ tsp cloves

½ tsp cinnamon

½ c pine nuts

Juice of 1 lemon

Salt and pepper

1 8-oz can tomato sauce

**To Pickle Cabbage**

Remove the core from the whole head of cabbage, and place cabbage in a bowl. Add water, salt, and vinegar. Make sure the cabbage is submerged under the liquid, held down with a plate. Keep covered in a cool place for 2–3 weeks. The longer it pickles, the sourer it will be. When ready to assemble, drain and rinse the cabbage and carefully separate the individual leaves from the head.

**To Stuff**

Mix all the ingredients except the tomato sauce, and add salt and pepper to taste. Fill each cabbage leaf with a few tablespoons of the mixture. Roll them up into tidy cigar shapes and line a greased casserole. Cover them with the tomato sauce, adding salt and pepper to taste. Cover the casserole and bake at 350°F for 1½ hours.

Other meat specialties include Dalmatian dried ham, game dishes made with pheasant and wild duck, and *janjetina*—spit-roasted lamb prepared with Mediterranean herbs.

One of the signature dishes of Istria is jota, a soup of beans, onions, sauerkraut, and garlic boiled in an earthenware pot with whatever shreds and ends of bacon and pork are handy. The oldest written jota recipe dates from 1890, from an octogenarian named Bagatina, who described it as a dish of her childhood. Though this soup probably evolved as a way to use up leftovers, in the 1980s gentrified versions of jota became popular in upscale restaurants. Another peasant dish that has flourished in upscale variants is *Dalmatinska pašticada,* a hearty braised dish similar to a French daube. It consists of beef marinated overnight in vinegar, lemon, and rosemary, then stewed with spices and red wine.

One legacy of the long Italian influence on the coast is the popularity of wine there, while all the country's major breweries are inland. Wine production is an ancient tradition, and both the Zinfandel and the Primitivo grape are cultivars of the Crljenak grape that originated in coastal Croatia. During the Soviet era winemakers were instructed to focus on volume rather than quality, and the reputation of Croatian wine has not entirely recovered. White wines make up the majority of the production inland, while red and white wines are both produced near the coast. Grape and plum brandies known as rakija or slivovitz are common and of highly variable quality, and liqueurs are also made from figs and other fruits. The most famous alcohol from the region is maraschino liqueur from cherries and almonds, which has been made in the Dalmatian town of Zadar since the 1500s.

Coastal Croatia is rich in desserts, of which the most famous is probably the Rab cake (*Rapska torta*) of marzipan and spices rolled in short pastry and folded into a spiral. It is claimed that this confection has been made since 1177, and the exact recipe is a secret known only to a few women on the island of Rab. For everyday meals, people enjoy *palascintas,* crepes filled with jam, cheese, or fruit. Other desserts abound—sour cherry strudels, wal-



Traditional Rab cake from the Rab region in Croatia. (Jasna01 | Dreamstime.com)

nut spiral rolls, spicy pepper cookies, and locally made chocolates.

**Palascintas**

**Ingredients**

*For Pancakes*

3 eggs

9 c flour

1 c milk

1 c mineral water

*For Filling*

3 eggs, separated

½ c sugar

Peel of one lemon, grated

12 oz cream cheese

*Directions for Pancakes*

Beat eggs with a pinch of salt. Gradually add flour, milk, and mineral water until the mixture forms a thin batter.

Heat a small amount of oil in a small frying pan. Pour about ¼ cup of batter into the pan, and cook the pancake until small holes appear in the surface.

Loosen the edges of the pancake and flip it over carefully. Cook on the other side for about 30 seconds.

*Directions for Filling*

Separate eggs, pouring the yolks and whites into two different bowls.

Beat egg yolks and sugar together until thick. Add grated peel from a lemon. Beat in softened cream cheese.

Beat egg whites until they form stiff peaks. Carefully fold (mix using a gentle stirring motion) egg whites into cheese mixture.

*Directions for Assembling Pancakes and Filling*

Spread about 2 tablespoons of filling near one side of the pancake. Roll the pancake up to enclose the filling. Place the filled pancakes, side by side, in a buttered baking dish or casserole. Keep warm in a 250°F oven until ready to serve.

Serve warm. May be topped with jam (a Croatian favorite is plum jam), powdered sugar, or sour cream.

There is only one pass from the Adriatic across the beautiful but sparsely populated Dinaric Alps to inland Croatia, and it leads to Zagreb, seat of the viceroys during the long Austro-Hungarian domination. While this is now the capital of Croatia and the largest city in the country, the linkage to the coast is relatively recent. Roads and rail lines between the two areas had been rudimentary until the 20th century, and the first modern paved highway from Zagreb to the Adriatic was not built until the 1970s.

It is therefore no surprise that seafood plays little part in the inland dishes. Game from the mountains and beef from the Pannonian Plain that extends toward the Hungarian border are major elements of this cuisine. Hungarian-influenced dishes are popular, including *game cobanac* (shepherd's stew), *gulyas* (goulash) and other paprika-laced stews, garlicky pickled vegetables, and poppy seed or cottage cheese strudels.

Zagreb specialties hark back to the days of empire, with heavy, bland main dishes like *Zagrebacki odrezak* (stuffed veal schnitzel with gravy) and venison cooked with prunes. These are paired with the local sauerkraut and other pickled vegetables; Zagreb is famous for mild, sweetish sauerkraut, which is served with almost everything. Another accompaniment is buckwheat groats, which are grown throughout the alpine regions and are eaten with mushrooms in soup and casseroles. They also feature in goose Medimurje-style, which is stuffed with buckwheat and nuts.

*Mlinci,* torn pasta fried in turkey, duck, or goose fat, is native to the area near the Slovenian border but popular throughout Croatia. It is usually a side dish with roasted meats but is occasionally served as a main dish with chunks of poultry.

Desserts are usually pastries in the style of an Austrian *Konditorei*—sweet cheese, sour cherry, or

poppy seed strudels and buns, and other flaky, sweet confections. *Kremsnite,* custard topped with flaky pastry sprinkled with powdered sugar, is among the richest sweets, typically washed down with many cups of strong coffee.

The most famous edible product of the Zagreb region is the *licitar,* beautifully decorated gingerbread cookies that are often bought as souvenirs and used as wall hangings. Licitar making originated in Hungary but was brought to a high art in Zagreb, and the gift of a heart-shaped licitar to someone one admires is part of traditional courtship. This practice has been celebrated in popular culture, including a ballet called "Licitar Heart" by Krešimir Baranović. To drink, Zagreb natives enjoy beer, mead, and fruit brandies such as slivovitz, all widely available in home-brewed versions.

As one goes to the north and east from Zagreb into Slavonia, the land becomes flatter, the people poorer, and the cuisine simpler. Beans, potatoes, bell peppers, and cabbage are rounded out with fresh or smoked meats and brittle, garlicky, air-dried sausage. The Hungarian influence is strong here, and popular dishes include stuffed peppers and gulyas stew made with lake fish, beef, chicken, or rabbit. This area has the spiciest food in Croatia, such as the *kulen,* a hot paprika-laced salami. Sausages, blood puddings, and pickled meats use every part of the pig; an example is *hladetina,* a Pannonian headcheese made of jellied meat with hard-boiled eggs, salt, pepper, garlic, and paprika. Offal such as liver and kidneys features in soups and in *svargl,* a kind of Croatian haggis. This consists of a pig's stomach filled with minced meat, pig's blood, and herbs, then air-cured—it is an acquired taste even in the region where it is made. The turkey is an import that has become very popular and is roasted in the same way as is traditional in the United States, including the giblet gravy. Only the accompanying sauerkraut and mlinci would remind one that this is Croatia rather than New England.

In the 20th and 21st centuries, a new Croatian nationalism led to an emphasis on cultural and national unity. The quest for a distinct pan-Croatian cuisine has been explicitly reflected in a recently invented dessert called *croaterra,* made by a commercial bakery of the same name. This cake uses ingredients from everywhere in the country; the principal ingredients are spelt grain, olive oil, walnuts, honey, fruit, and fennel. The first three items are associated with Slavonia, Istria, and Pannonia, respectively, and the remaining items come from the Croatian coast and islands. The company's promotional literature is explicitly nationalist and advises giving croaterra cakes to foreigners as a symbol of Croatian unity.

As political arguments simmered in the former Yugoslavia, local commentators discerned or invented differences between inland Croatian and Serbian cuisines. This trend has occasionally resulted in international friction with Serbia, particularly involving a company called Podravka, headquartered in Koprivnica in northern Croatia. Podravka's most famous product is a mix of dried vegetable, herbs, monosodium glutamate, and salt called Vegeta. Vegeta went on the market in 1959 and is the most popular seasoning among both local and overseas Croats. In 2002 Serbia briefly banned the sale of Vegeta in that country, claiming it was unfit for human consumption. The real differences between modern Croatian and Serbian food is that Serbian food is generally blander, uses less seafood, and has more Germanic and pan-Balkan and less Italian influence.

## Eating Out

The expanding tourist industry has made a growth industry of traditional-style restaurants in Croatia, and all over the country old residences and shops have been remodeled into replicas of antique inns. Coastal Croatian-style restaurants have become popular in inland cities like Zagreb, especially the Dalmatian-style taverns called *konobas.* These are similar to Spanish tapas bars and serve fried sardines and anchovies, vinegary octopus salad, smoked ham, fried olives, and similar salty dishes that encourage the consumption of alcoholic beverages. The popularity of konobas and other coastal cuisines in the inland regions has been a one-way cultural transfer, and few restaurants in the coastal areas offer only inland cuisine.

More sophisticated versions of coastal, Italian, and Hungarian cuisine are also popular throughout the country and are served at establishments called *restaurans.* A lively dining scene in Zagreb and other cities means that young Croatians are also exposed to cuisines that are not available elsewhere in the Balkans, including Chinese, Indian, and Mexican food. Croatians are also innovating on traditional cuisine. The naming of chef Lida Bastianich, who was born in Istria, as America's Top Chef in 1994 was a cause for national pride, and the international success of other Croatian-born chefs has inspired many restaurants that go outside traditional paths. Fast food is hugely popular, and pizza and kebab places selling *cevapčići* (*cevapi*) are full at all hours. A few sell horse burgers, a specialty of Slovenia, along with international standard sandwiches and snacks.

One beverage that has spread across Croatia is *bambus,* an unlikely mixture of half red wine, half Coca-Cola. Exactly where and when this concoction was created is a matter of debate, but bars in the Istrian region probably deserve the credit or blame. While bambus began as a way for bars and restaurants to use up otherwise-undrinkable harsh red wine, it has become popular nationwide and has a reputation as a ladies' drink.

## Special Occasions

The population of Croatia is overwhelmingly Catholic, and the calendar of the saints offers plenty of excuses for feasts and festivals that are popular even with nonreligious Croats. Easter is celebrated with braided breads called *primorski uskrsne bebe,* which are often in the shape of a baby with a colored egg for the head. Otherwise, there are few ritual traditions that are associated with a specific food; the feast day of St. Blaise, patron of Croatia, is celebrated everywhere but with lavish portions of everyday foods. There are a few exceptions, such as Christmas Eve, when codfish stew is the traditional meal, and the *makovnjaca,* a poppy seed roll, and the fruitcake known as "bishop's bread" are made nearly everywhere. In inland Croatia, goose and duck are specialties for St. Martin's Day. This celebration comes at the end of the harvest season and is celebrated by winemakers, who stage elaborate ritual feasts at which mock bishops "christen" their new wines.



Cookies called breskvice, which are shaped like peaches and filled with jam, are often served at Croatian weddings. (Landd09 | Dreamstime.com)

There are also special dishes for weddings, mostly sweets. A cookie called *breskvice,* which is shaped like a peach and filled with jam, is a must; while these were traditionally filled with jam, Nutella is now far more popular. Other secular celebrations that involve food include the completion of a house, which is celebrated with wine and cakes.

During the Yugoslav period, the government fostered nonreligious food and music festivals, many of which have remained popular even after the breakup of the country. These often combine culinary interests with the Soviet mania for all things oversized. At the asparagus festival in April, a highlight is an omelet made with 1,000 eggs and 66 pounds (30 kilograms) of asparagus. The cherry festival in Lovran in May is celebrated with a 33-foot- (10-meter-) long cherry strudel, and other events feature similar outsized entrées.

## Diet and Health

Croatia has a long tradition of folk medicine and home remedies, many of which are still adhered

to among the highly educated elite. In June 2009, health minister Darko Milinovic surprised his colleagues by saying at a press conference that honey, tea, and lemon along with frequent showers was a cure for swine flu. He retracted that claim almost immediately, but it did reveal a typical belief that a simple good diet promotes health.

Croatia has a long tradition of using herbs such as caraway, juniper, and walnut kernels for intestinal problems; mallow, chamomile, mint, and lemon balm for sore throats and cough; and elderflower to improve circulation. Other remedies have more of a magical aspect, as in the burning of alecost with wormwood and rose petals; supposedly, inhaling the smoke has special healing powers. *Raki,* the grape brandy, is used to make herb infusions and also externally to heal wounds or bruises. Wrapping a sore throat in a towel soaked in *lozovac,* a locally produced brandy, is said to aid in healing.

Still, the best folk remedies in the world are powerless against unhealthy modern dietary practices. Changes in the Croatian diet have had a strong negative effect on coastal Croatians; a study conducted in 2003 showed that the percentage of overweight people among residents of Dalmatia had increased to 54 percent of men and 48 percent of women, and 27 percent of both genders were obese. The authors of the study theorized that this was because the islanders now eat much more meat than their ancestors and have not changed their lifestyle accordingly.

Islanders are still healthier than inland Croats. Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in Croatia, and a study from the Croatian Public Health Institute in 2005 showed that inland Croats were far more likely to suffer a heart attack. A poor diet was cited as a major factor. A 2009 study of multiple sclerosis and cancers in Croatia showed that both diseases were twice as common in the inland areas where the diet is rich in meat and fat and suggested that the high intake of olive oil among coastal residents was protecting them from the same fate. The government has been trying to encourage a return to traditional healthy practices such as increased consumption of fish instead of meat. This includes financing a campaign called *Srdela snack,* encouraging people to eat sardines instead of other fast food. It has been relatively successful, but sardine sandwiches still have not replaced hamburgers and cevapi as the most popular quick meals.

Regardless of their region, Croatians have a very high rate of smoking and consumption of alcohol, and the government is taking steps toward discouraging these unhealthy practices. A tobacco ban in restaurants went into effect in 2009 but has been widely ignored; nevertheless, a study by Euromonitor predicted that this ban, combined with an increase in tobacco taxes, will start to reduce tobacco use. An increase in the tax on hard alcohol went into effect in 2007 but has had little social effect for several reasons. It doesn't apply to wine and beer, can't be imposed on the brandy and other liquors that are widely homemade, and, even when it is applicable, is widely avoided. These statistics aside, the general level of health in Croatia is superior to that in most of the other former Yugoslav republics, and the life expectancy of 73 years is not far from the European Union average.

*Richard Foss*

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# Cyprus

## Overview

A small nation with a big history, Cyprus lies at the eastern end of the Mediterranean between Europe, Asia, and Africa, an island gatekeeper to three continents. Its position has proven an irresistible draw to larger and more powerful empires throughout history. Egyptians, Assyrians, Persians, Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Franks, Venetians, Turks, and Britons invaded or annexed the island seeking outposts for military use and trade.

Cyprus today is a divided country. In 1960, the Republic of Cyprus attained independence from Britain, but intervention by both Greece and Turkey provoked over a decade of violence and division. Today, the Republic of Cyprus, occupying the southern two-thirds of the island, is recognized internationally and is a member of the European Union. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus occupies the north and is recognized internationally only by Turkey.

Years of settlement, occupation, and interaction with other civilizations have left Cyprus with a rich culinary tradition. Though close association with Greece has left an obvious imprint, it is geographically closer to Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt, and much of its food culture betrays strong Middle Eastern influences. But Cyprus brings a great deal of its own to the table. Slashed east to west by two mountain massifs, this small country harbors numerous ecosystems and a rich biodiversity including edible plants unknown elsewhere. Foraging remains a way of life in the countryside and a popular activity for townsfolk.

Today, a new kind of international influence flourishes in the larger towns and cities. With modernization, supermarkets have blossomed beside or instead of traditional markets. Meanwhile, tourism has spawned American-style fast-food restaurants like McDonald's, Pizza Hut, T.G.I. Friday's, and Kentucky Fried Chicken. But the interior villages preserve Cypriot cuisine in its purest forms, and, even in town, family meals and traditions reflect a culinary culture shaped over millennia by indigenous ingredients and the influences of civilizations near and far.

## Food Culture Snapshot

It is a Saturday in springtime, and the market is bursting with fresh vegetables and fruit. The Demetriou family heads out to select the very best for the next several days: chard, spinach, cauliflower, and artichokes. Some of the artichokes will be shredded fine and eaten raw, while others will be cooked. This is citrus season, which means oranges, grapefruit, and mandarins are plentiful. They select some of each, along with lemons, a necessity in Cypriot cooking year-round.

For Sunday's dinner, the Demetrious hunt down a Cyprus anomaly, *kolokassi,* known elsewhere as taro, a root product that has migrated all the way from the Pacific Islands. Stewed with pork, it is one of the country's favorite dishes. Then the yogurt supply must be replenished. In Cyprus it is made from the milk of goats and sheep, which thrive much more easily here than cows. The family stops to pick up some freshly made *halloumi,* the country's signature cheese. Traditionally

served either grilled or fried, this cheese maintains its shape even when heated.

Then they are off for a foraging expedition, a favorite Cypriot activity. Out in the countryside, both herbs and greens are there for the taking. *Rigani* (wild oregano or marjoram) grows in multiple varieties. Arugula, fennel, purslane, nettles, dandelion, and amaranth fill up the foraging baskets. Like the vegetables from the market, they will be eaten raw in salads, sautéed simply, perhaps with eggs, or mixed with staples from the family's pantry.

## Major Foodstuffs

A typical Cypriot family keeps its larder well stocked with legumes such as lentils, garbanzos, black-eyed peas, and dried fava beans. Grains of choice are cracked wheat (or bulgur) and rice. Other staples include pastas and *trachanas,* wafers made of ground wheat and soured milk used for porridges and soups in the winter. A plentiful supply of local olive oil is a must.

Many of the spices kept on hand reflect the country's proximity to the Middle East. They include coriander, cinnamon, cumin, and black pepper, along with the less-known mastic—a resin from a small evergreen tree—and *mahlepi,* kernels from the pit of the tiny black cherry. Sesame seeds are used in various ways by themselves, crushed into tahini paste, or pressed for their oil. Favorite herbs, grown at home, foraged, or purchased from the market, are oregano, marjoram, cilantro, parsley, thyme, bay leaf, and mint, which is used both fresh and dried. Important flavoring agents for sweets are rose water, orange flower water, and carob syrup.

Vegetables are key to the country's diet, and Cypriots eat what the seasons offer. In addition to spring's bounty, favorites include tomatoes, eggplant, summer and winter squash, peppers, potatoes, okra, beets (both roots and tops), many members of the cabbage family, and greens, both cultivated and wild. Dairy products are essential to the diet, not only yogurt and halloumi, but other cheeses such as feta and *anari,* which is made from whey.

Residents of this island nation are great lovers of seafood, which is no longer as abundant as it once was. Still, calamari, shrimp, octopus, cuttlefish, and finfish of all sorts find their way onto the table in homes for special occasions and in restaurants. Meats, too, are eaten only once or twice a week at home, though they star on special occasions. Pork is the favorite of the Christian southerners, while the Muslims of the north prefer lamb for religious reasons. Cypriots also produce a delicious variety of sausages and preserved meats.



Traditional halloumi cheese being grilled in Cyprus. (Ron Zmiri | Dreamstime.com)

## Cooking

Frying, braising, baking, roasting, and grilling are all important techniques in preparing Cypriot food, but many of the most popular dishes require little to no cooking at all because Cypriots are great lovers of salads. Their own version of what is known in the United States as "Greek salad" is called "village salad," and it often contains wild greens, shredded cabbage, arugula, or purslane in addition to the predictable cucumber, tomatoes, olives, and feta cheese. Ingredients are sometimes chopped, a Middle Eastern tendency. Other simple raw salads include artichoke hearts, carrots, and kohlrabi that are shredded and tossed with olive oil. Vegetables like beets are boiled first, then receive similar treatment.

Cypriots are also great lovers of dips and spreads. *Skordalia* mixes garlic, breadcrumbs, olive oil, and lemon juice. *Tzadziki* combines yogurt, cucumbers,

garlic, and olive oil. Hummus, a Lebanese or Syrian import, blends mashed, cooked chickpeas (garbanzos) with tahini paste, lemon juice, and garlic.

Grains, legumes, and vegetables dominate the daily menu, but there is much variety in their preparation. Legumes are used in stews, soups, and purees. Bulgur pilaf is a delicious accompaniment to any meal. The cooked grain is also made into *koupes,* or cigars, and stuffed with ground meat. Vegetables are baked, stuffed, fried, sautéed, or braised. Greens are scrambled with eggs. Potatoes, mushrooms, cauliflower, and artichoke hearts may be seared, then simmered in red wine and coriander to make a stew called *afelia.*

Cypriots use a similar range of techniques for cooking seafood and meats, but roasting and grilling are usually reserved for holidays, celebrations, and family outings. Essential to every kitchen is a *tava,* a terra-cotta oven fitted with a tight lid, often shaped like an old-fashioned beehive. Once used outdoors over coals for long, slow cooking of meats, it has successfully made the transition indoors to the oven. Most households also keep a portable grill outfitted with electrically powered spits that turn slowly to produce pork or lamb kebabs or souvlakia, whether at home or off in the countryside.

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***Souvlakia Me Pitta* (Kebabs in Pita Bread)**

*Serves 6*

This preparation is equally good with pork or lamb. Be sure to purchase high-quality, tender meat.

2 lb pork or lamb in 2-in. cubes

4 cloves garlic, crushed

2 medium-sized onions, quartered

2 bay leaves

2 tsp plus 1 tbsp dried oregano

1 tsp cinnamon

3 tsp salt, divided

Red wine to cover

2 tbsp olive oil

Juice of 1 lemon

1 large tomato, chopped

½ cucumber, chopped

Leaf lettuce, shredded

Pita bread

Lemon wedges and yogurt

Place the meat in a large nonreactive bowl. Add garlic, onions, bay leaves, 2 teaspoons oregano, cinnamon, and 2 teaspoons salt. Cover with wine, and toss. Marinate for 2 hours to overnight.

Blend olive oil and lemon juice. Mix 1 tablespoon oregano and 1 teaspoon salt. Mix vegetables together and set aside.

Thread meat and large onion pieces onto either metal skewers or wooden skewers that have been soaked in water for 20 minutes. Grill over moderate heat or broil 5 inches from the heating element, turning from time to time. When meat has lost its color, baste with olive oil/lemon juice mix and sprinkle with the salt/oregano mix. Continue basting and sprinkling every 15 minutes or until meat is done.

Cut the pita bread in half, grill briefly, and remove.

To serve, fill pita halves with meat. Top with vegetable mix, and serve with lemon wedges and yogurt on the side.

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## Typical Meals

Everyday meals in Cyprus consist of grains, legumes, vegetables, fruit, and dairy products, with fish or meat appearing on the menu once or twice a week. Vegetable entrées include an assorted variety layered with cheese and baked in addition to stuffed peppers, eggplants, tomatoes, and squash. As with stuffed grape leaves, or *koupepia,* the essential fillings are rice, onion, and herbs, while meat is optional. Mixing sweet and savory flavors in a single dish does not appeal to the Cypriot palate, so addition of raisins and other dried fruits is rare.

Legumes, simply prepared, are the primary source of protein in everyday meals. A puree of split peas and potatoes, a soup of sharply flavored lentils, a rich fava bean stew, or a mound of black-eyed peas studded with chard makes for a hearty meal, particularly when accompanied by a plate of

seasonal vegetables, bulgur or rice, and a slice of crusty bread.

For a springtime dinner the Demetriou family begins with a lentil soup flavored with cilantro, scallions, and vinegar. But this is the last of the individual courses; family-style service prevails in Cyprus. All remaining dishes are spread on the table at once. Anchoring the meal is a bulgur pilaf.

Tonight's pièce de résistance is mushrooms afelia, a dish in which browned mushrooms are simmered in red wine and crushed coriander seeds. Also on the table are uncooked artichoke hearts shaved finely and tossed in olive oil and lemon juice, as well as sliced beets with skordalia, a sauce made with garlic, bread, ground almonds, and olive oil. A dish of goat-milk yogurt drizzled with olive oil completes the spread. A bowl of mandarins is passed around the table for dessert.

**Black-Eyed Peas with Chard**

1 c black-eyed peas, picked over to check for stones or debris and rinsed

5 c water

1 lb chard, washed

2 cloves garlic, pressed, or chopped and mashed with salt in a mortar

¼ c olive oil

Juice of 1 lemon

Salt and pepper to taste

Additional olive oil and lemon wedges for serving

1. Add enough water to cover the black-eyed peas by an inch, bring to a boil, drain, and throw away the water. Add the 5 cups of water, and bring back to a boil. Begin checking for tenderness at 30 minutes. Peas should be tender within 40 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, trim chard stems, and remove them from the leaves. Slice the stems into ½-inch pieces and shred the leaves.

3. When the peas are just tender, add chard stems along with salt and pepper to taste. Simmer for another 10 minutes. Add shredded leaves, and simmer for 10 minutes more until chard is tender.

4. Drain peas; whisk garlic with olive oil, and drizzle over peas and chard, gently tossing. Pour lemon juice over the dish, and toss again. Adjust salt and pepper. Serve with additional olive oil, lemon wedges, a bowl of whole-milk yogurt, and slices of rustic bread.

## Eating Out

Dining out in Cyprus means a visit to a nearby taverna for a riot of *mezedhes*. These small plates of food are known throughout the eastern Mediterranean, but in other countries they serve as appetizers to the main event. Not so in Cyprus, where a meze means an entire meal consisting of 20 to 25 different dishes. The parade begins modestly with olives, dips, and spreads, moves to salads, and finally ends with hot preparations. In many places, the diner has the option of ordering a seafood or a meat meze. In either case, the preparation will become more elaborate as the evening proceeds, with a skewer or two of souvlakia toward the end.

As recently as 1960, mezedhes were the property of men, the regular taverna customers. These small bites provided nibbles to accompany *zivania,* the native spirit distilled from the pomace of grapes pressed in the winemaking process. With the loosening of social restrictions and the growth of tourism, tavernas have become the principal dining establishments, welcoming everyone, young and old, men and women, and the beverage accompanying the meal is likely to be one of the local Cyprus wines.

## Special Occasions

The Cypriot diet may be largely vegetarian, but weddings, birthdays, name days, and holidays in Cyprus call for meats and sweets. The smell of pork and lamb wafts through the air, either roasting in the oven or turning on the spit. Celebratory dishes include kebabs, *souvla* (skewered bone-in lamb chunks), and *sheftalia* (ground meat sausages bound together with pork caul).

The biggest holiday of the year is Easter with its attendant buildup of Carnival and Lent. The first

day of Carnival is known as "Smelly Thursday" because of the amount of meat grilling throughout the towns and cities. Other Carnival specialties include small cheese-stuffed pastries, known as *bourekia,* and *ravioles,* a gift of the Venetians during their 15th- to 16th-century occupation.

With the beginning of Lent, meat, fish, and dairy disappear from the menu. Tahini cakes and little pies filled with pumpkin and spinach are popular at this time. The first post-Lent meal in the early hours of Easter Sunday is *avgolimono* soup, broth swirled with egg and flavored with lemon juice. Later in the day, the feasting begins. Souvla is the main dish, while the classic pastry is *flaounes,* cheese-stuffed buns sprinkled with sesame seeds.

Christmas in Cyprus once called for the slaughter of a carefully fattened pig, which was turned into hams and sausages to create a supply for the year. Today, the tradition continues in the countryside, but even city dwellers are likely to buy meat for *loukanika,* traditional sausages soaked in red wine. On Christmas Eve, families share a specially baked bread flavored with raisins, nuts, brandy, and orange rind called *Christopsomo*. On Christmas Day, a favorite treat is a spicy cake studded with dried fruits and nuts, inherited from the British.



Baking bourekia in preparation for Easter celebrations in Cyprus. (Shutterstock)

## Diet and Health

Traditional Cypriot cuisine is an ideal example of the widely praised Mediterranean diet. Its foundation is a healthful mix of grains, legumes, vegetables, and fruits, with meat and fish eaten sparingly once or twice a week. Holidays and celebrations call for richer, more indulgent foods throughout the island, but they are balanced in both the north and the south by religious days of fasting and abstention, such as Ramadan in the north and Lent in the south.

That pattern is likely to be challenged, however, now that tourism has become an important driver in the country's economy. Today, restaurants supply holiday foods every day of the week to visitors and Cypriots alike. As the Cypriot standard of living rises, this temptation will become increasingly difficult to resist.

*Nancy G. Freeman*

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# Czech Republic

## Overview

The Czech Republic's food and foodways are a fine balance between its folk traditions and cosmopolitan culture. The country's history, geography, and ethnicity have influenced the "meat and potatoes fare" and a rapidly evolving Continental cuisine brought on by its recent entrance into the European Union.

The Czech Republic for much of the 20th century was the first part of the famous portmanteau, Czechoslovakia. In 1993, it peacefully split with Slovakia in what is called the Velvet Divorce. Now, the country is a parliamentary democracy with a population of 10.3 million, split into two regions, Bohemia and Moravia, with 14 administrative districts. The country has 30,449 square miles (78,864 square kilometers) of landlocked, hilly, and low mountainous terrain and is bordered by Poland, Austria, Slovakia, and Germany. Traditional Czech foods are heavy, simple dishes that reflect the cultivation and preservation of a strong national folk culture but with influence from the changing empires of its neighbors. Schnitzel from Austria, sausages from Poland, goulash from Hungary, and roast goose from Germany are commonly found in Czech cuisine.

Unlike its former counterpart, Slovakia, the Czech nation was an established state until the 16th century, when it came under Hapsburg rule, lasting until 1918. The Czech national movement started with the pre-Reformation leader Jan Hus and came to head in the Czech national revival of the early 19th century when Czechs upheld cultural markers such as language, poetry, and literature as tools to unify all Slavs in the country. These markers tie Czechs to folk traditions, which in turn value home food preservation, household animal husbandry, and gardening.

The 45 years under Soviet influence, from after World War II until 1989, limited the amount of commercial food goods into the country as the food chains were incorporated into an organized economy. As such, food lines, uniform prices, and limited amounts of meat and fresh produce became common. This period drastically changed the cuisine, and only since 1990 has a diverse food retailing and restaurant culture revived as the country draws tourists and business leaders from within the European Union and around the world. Today, Prague is the sixth most visited city in Europe, and foods from around the world are available for foreigners and residents. The country joined the Schengen area (border-free zone) in 2007, and the free flow of people and goods across borders pulls the cuisine of western Europe into the Czech Republic.

The Czech Republic was one of the first nations to industrialize in the early 19th century, losing a large part of its agricultural labor force to mining and manufacturing facilities. Today, agriculture makes up less than 5 percent of the gross domestic product. Since few people are involved in modern commercial farming, rural food nostalgia is tied to an identity cultivated centuries ago in the hills and fields of Bohemia and Moravia. However, harvest festivals, cottage gardens, and simple countryside fare are still valued as strong Czech identifiers.

Only 39 percent of the population considers themselves Roman Catholic, while 40 percent are confirmed atheists and 16 percent more are religiously uncertain. Despite this, many Catholic traditions

are still popular during Lent and Christmas. Meatless fasting meals consist of various vegetable soups and freshwater fish. The Easter meal eaten throughout the country has strong Catholic symbols.

The Czech Republic has had many ethnic groups move and settle throughout the region, but today the country is ethnically uniform, with 94 percent of the country claiming Czech nationality. The repatriating of its large prewar German population was forced by the harsh Beneš Decrees, which economically punished foreign, specifically German, settlers and encouraged Czechs to move back within its borders. As such, strong German food traditions have disappeared. Currently, the significant minority ethnic groups are Roma, Slovak, Polish, German, and Vietnamese.



Many Czechs recognize Vepřo-Knedlo-Zelo as the national dish of the country and will serve it at family meals or special celebrations. (Ingrid Heczko | Dreamstime.com)

## Food Culture Snapshot

Martin is a 46-year-old father of two sons, who lives in an apartment in Prague with his girlfriend, Katarina. Since he finished his mandatory military service as a young man, he has worked in the growing hospitality industry. He recently left his work as a manager at an international hotel chain to open a small café in the middle of a newly renovated shopping center in the center of the city, serving espresso coffee drinks and panini sandwiches in the style of an Italian eatery.

Martin's breakfast includes black tea with muesli and milk, bread, ham, and cheese, followed by an espresso in midmorning. As Martin works in the busy city center, he chooses to eat at a cafeteria for lunch. This cafeteria has selections of food from around the world, including Indian, Chinese, Italian, and Thai. Lunch is the heaviest meal of the day. For dinner he eats a lighter meal at home with his family.

Martin saves his long lunches for the weekend when he cooks with his family. He prefers to cook international foods such as Chinese noodles or Thai chicken, while Katarina makes traditional Czech fare, specializing in the complex baked goods such as *vánočka,* a spiced yeast bread commonly served at Christmas. Martin always drinks Czech beer, his favorite being Pilsner Urquell, with these meals.

### *Vepřo-Knedlo-Zelo* (Pork Dumplings and Vegetables)

Part of the influence of the Czech national revival is the naming of certain national foods. Many Czechs recognize *vepřo-knedlo-zelo* as the national dish of the country and will serve it at family meals or special celebrations.

**For the Meat**

2 lb pork roast

2–3 cloves of garlic

Salt

1 tsp caraway seeds

⅓ c water

1. Preheat oven to 325°F.

2. Rub the meat with crushed garlic and salt. Sprinkle with caraway seeds. Put in a roasting pan with the water.

3. Roast in the oven for approximately 2 hours until the internal temperature reaches 160°F.

4. Let it rest and slice open.

**For the Dumplings**

1½ c milk, divided

1 package yeast

1 tsp sugar

1 egg

½ tsp salt

3½ c flour

3 slices white bread, cubed

1. Take ½ cup milk, and scald it on the stove, then let it cool. Add the yeast and sugar, and let stand for 10 minutes.

2. Heat the remaining milk until warm. Add this to the yeast mixture with the egg and the salt.

3. Mix the flour and bread cubes in a dry bowl. Add the liquid to the flour, and knead it like you would regular bread dough.

4. Leave it in a warm place to rise for 2 hours. It should double in size. Knead again, dividing the dough into three long loaves, each about 2 inches thick. Let these rise for 45 minutes.

5. Boil salted water in a large pot. When the dough has risen, drop one of the loaves into the water and cook for 15 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon onto a greased platter. Repeat with the two remaining loaves.

6. To slice, take a thread, loop it around the loaf, and pull it together. Each slice should be about 2 inches thick.

**For the Vegetables**

1 head cabbage

2 tbsp lard

1 small onion

1 tsp caraway seeds

1 tsp salt

2 tbsp vinegar

1 tbsp sugar

1. Boil water in a pot. Cut the cabbage into thin strips, and blanch in boiling water and strain.

2. Melt lard in a frying pan. Add chopped onion, and sauté until translucent. Add cabbage and caraway seeds, and cook until strips are tender. Season with salt, vinegar, and sugar.

3. Put warm dumplings on the plate, topped with pork and cabbage.

## Major Foodstuffs

Food-retailing structures in the Czech Republic look very different from 1990 and before. The former Communist government demanded a minimum profit margin in the retailing sector; therefore, food marketing was virtually nonexistent: Grocery stores on average had one-third of the space of their Western counterparts, and food goods were priced uniformly across all of Czechoslovakia. So when in 1992, Globus opened its first store in the center of the Czech Republic's second-largest city, Brno, the hypermarket format became an instant success. Leading European retailers, such as Tesco, Ahold, Globus, and Kaufland, quickly moved into the country, and these retailers are still in heavy competition for a market share in the region. In addition, traditional farmers' markets populate the centers of most cities, offering wholesale produce and locally processed and harvested foods. Smaller grocery stores, convenience stores, and fruit stands can be found in most residential neighborhoods.

In general, Czech food is simple and rich with limited spices and heavy sauces. But it is also extremely seasonal and tied to local food production. Meat dishes dominate Czech entrées, with beef, pork, and venison as the proteins of choice. A popular beef dish is *svíčková,* marinated beef served with spiced cream sauce and preserved fruit. Pork is processed into smoked sausages and a wide range of deli meats and bacons. Poultry is more and more popular as a healthy alternative protein. As the Czech Republic is a landlocked country, saltwater fish is

rare, but river fish such as trout and carp are commonly eaten.

Potatoes and wheat flour provide most of the starch on the plate. Rice is commonly served with chicken and fish. Soups and dumplings are made from potatoes. The wheat is processed into pasta and rye and brown breads. Children especially enjoy spaghetti topped with ground poppy seeds and powdered sugar.

Traditionally, vegetables were pickled or processed or eaten only during the harvest season, but this is changing with the availability of more fresh produce from the new retailing structures. More Czechs are eating fresh vegetables and salads with their meals. In the summer and fall, Czechs use the forests to forage for mushrooms for soups and casseroles. Fruits are eaten fresh when they are in season, while most are saved for preserving and pickling. Long gone are the lines for bananas and mandarins, which were available only during the Christmas season, but tropical fruits are still valued as a holiday treat because of their past scarcity.

Lard is the most traditional cooking fat. A slice of brown bread spread with lard and topped with onions, salt, and paprika is a common dish found in pubs and markets. Recently, with the increased knowledge of the health benefits of monounsaturated fats, olive and vegetable oils are becoming more popular. Butter is used in baked goods.

Czech cuisine is not particularly known for its spices except for caraway, paprika, and poppy seeds. These usually make up the only spice for the dishes, other than salt and pepper. Garlic is liberally used in most meat dishes and makes a very popular soup, *cesnekova polevka.*

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***Cesnekova Polevka* (Garlic Soup)**

6 cloves garlic

3 tbsp butter

14 oz chicken stock

1 egg per person

Spring onions, sliced

3 oz semisoft, mild cheese, like Gouda

3 oz ham, diced

1 c hard white bread, diced and fried for croutons

Fry the garlic in butter until aromatic, add stock, and bring to a boil for 10 minutes. Turn the burner to low. Add the egg(s) softly to the pot, and let sit for 5 minutes. Spoon eggs with broth into serving bowls. Add spring onions, cheese, and ham. Add croutons to the soup.

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## Cooking

Most Czechs have modern kitchens with stoves, refrigerators, and sinks with potable water. As such, the cooking methods reflect the Continental style found in western Europe. But many city dwellers like to keep country homes with the traditional kitchens for weekend vacations. They can have wooden stoves and open fires to make stews, roasted fatty meats and root vegetables, and preserves.

Frequently, these small homes have gardens and kitchens with tools to preserve food by canning, pickling, and distilling alcohol. Popular preserves include cherry, peach, and plum jams; pickled beets; horseradish; and pickles. Alcohols are distilled into brandies, more specifically eau de vies, made from plums (*slivovice*), apples (*jablakovice*), pears (*hruskovice*), and peaches (*broskovice*).

## Typical Meals

Czechs usually eat three meals a day: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Tradition calls for all meals to be eaten at home, but many people take weekday lunches at school or work. It is not customary to eat a meal alone. Even at the workplace or at school, there is one lunch hour in which everyone eats together.

Breakfast can be savory or sweet. Ham and cheese sandwiches on *roky,* fresh-baked white-flour rolls, are served with mustard. The breakfast sausage, *parky,* is also served with mustard. Children eat sweeter breakfasts of rolls with butter and honey or cereals that are found in the aisles of the large hypermarkets.

Lunch and dinner fare are similar. Both meals have two courses, a soup and an entrée, and both are served hot. Potato, garlic, and cabbage soups are popular starters. This can be followed by a stewed meat such as svíčková, spiced beef, with *knedlicky,* potato-flour dumplings, or by roasted chicken with rice or pasta. Usually, lunch is a larger meal than dinner.

Midday Sunday, the family gathers for a large meal and eats more traditional Czech fare such as vepřo-knedlo-zelo and Wiener schnitzel. Beers and spirits are included in this meal along with dessert pastries and cakes made from poppy seeds, nuts, dried fruits, or chocolate. Coffee and tea are served after all leisurely meals.

## Eating Out

Restaurants essentially died under Communist control, and today the heart of Czech cuisine is not to be found in the restaurant but in the home. Due to the opening of trade with the West, Czech restaurants have experienced a renaissance in both the variety and the quality of the foods. Visitors to the city centers have dined in Japanese, French, and Italian restaurants since soon after the Velvet Revolution, but more recently classically trained chefs are transforming humble Czech fare into fine dining. These chefs have taken the traditional ingredients like mushrooms, organ meats, and venison and applied French cooking techniques for the modern diner.

The pub is the true gathering place outside the home. The country has a long tradition of beer brewing that is well respected around the world. Western European and American corporations bought many of the most famous Czech beer brands, such as Pilsner Urquell, Staropramen, and Zlatopramen. Furthermore, many pubs in the city centers have exclusive tapping contracts with these large labels. A growing independent beer movement, *ctvrta pipa,* "the fourth pipe," embraces the local microbrewery. Still, Czechs are loyal to these large brands. Beer will always be an intimate symbol of the Czech eating experience whether it is mass-produced or microbrewed.




A sign outside a Czech pub for the popular beer, Pilsner Urquell. Nine out of 10 beers produced and consumed worldwide are made according to a method directly derived from the Pilsner style of brewing. (Sepavo | Dreamstime.com)

## Special Occasions

Wedding celebrations are long events with an abundance of food. A three- or four-course sit-down meal is served, starting with soup. The bride and groom are bound together and must eat the soup with one spoon. It is common for the wedding party to go well into the next morning, and another meal will be served around 1 or 2 A.M. It is usually a simple stew to sustain the guests for the party. In the countryside, some homes may slaughter their own pigs and prepare homemade dishes and desserts for months preceding the wedding. In the city, it is more common for these affairs to be catered.

Easter is tied to strong Catholic traditions. A wicker basket is brought to the church to be blessed by the priest. Different foods represent elements of the Easter story such as joy, mercy, moderation, resurrection, and generosity. This basket includes *paska,* a sweet, rich yeast bread, marked with a cross; *hrudka* or *sirets,* a type of bland spread of cheese and eggs; *šunka,* ham; *maslo,* butter shaped to look like a lamb; *kolbasi,* sausage; and bacon, eggs, salt, and horseradish.

## Diet and Health

Traditional Czech cuisine is heavy in salt and saturated fats. As such, the Czech Republic has one of the highest rates of death due to cardiovascular disease in the developed world. As more awareness is given to health and diet, more and more Czechs are dieting or watching their weight.

To eat dietetically, Czechs increase their consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. Grapefruit and pineapple are considered "fat eaters" and are popular diet foods eaten at breakfast. This is in contrast to eating foods that have the fat or sugar removed. Cheeses, potato chips, milks, and yogurts are all full fat. It is believed that the fat is more natural in these foods.

Czechs have a long tradition of using spas as a health and wellness resource, both for treatment of chronic medical conditions as well as for relaxing vacations. These spas, mostly located around natural mineral springs, take advantage of mountainous forested areas. These resorts have special spa food with more fresh vegetables and lower-fat meats and fishes. It is not uncommon to go to one for several weeks to a month to recover from an illness.

*Brelyn Johnson*

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# Denmark

## Overview

The northern European kingdom of Denmark is one of the oldest surviving monarchies in the world. It was first recognized as a unified territory in the 10th century under the rule of Gorm the Old, said to be a direct ancestor to Denmark's present monarch, Queen Margrethe II. Gorm was succeeded by his son, Harald Bluetooth, who erected runestones in the town of Jelling to commemorate his parents' death and to celebrate Denmark's conversion from paganism to Christianity. Dating from around 965, the Jelling Stones represent Denmark's "birth certificate" and are today recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Denmark's first constitution was introduced in 1849.

The smallest country in Scandinavia, Denmark is made up of three main landmasses (the Jutland Peninsula, connected to Germany, and the islands of Funen and Zealand), as well as a number of smaller islands, including Bornholm, off the south coast of Sweden. The former colonies of Greenland and the Faeroe Islands continue to be Danish protectorates but are now both governed by politically autonomous parliaments.

Denmark's location between the North and Baltic seas secures a rich source of seafood, which features prominently in its food culture. Its temperate climate and largely flat landscape also account for Denmark's long agrarian history, particularly dairy, livestock, and cereal farming. Evidence of animal husbandry and grain cultivation in the area dates to the Neolithic period (3900–1700 B.C.), while the famous "Tollund" man (the fourth-century body found preserved in Jutland's peat reserves in 1950) was found to have soup containing seeds in his digestive tract.

Now predominantly an industrial economy, with agriculture accounting for less than 20 percent of Danish exports and remaining exports mainly dedicated to machinery, pharmaceuticals, electronics, and environmental technology, Denmark is at once a thoroughly modern and a proudly traditional country. Denmark was twice rated the Best Country for Business by *Forbes* magazine (2008–2009) and twice voted the "happiest" country in the world (2006, 2008). Visitors to Denmark will find global brands and products well represented in cosmopolitan centers, including the predictable array of food franchises like McDonald's, KFC, Subway, and Pizza Hut, not to mention a thriving sector of "ethnic" eateries. Immigrants constitute almost 10 percent of Denmark's population of 5.5 million.

Visitors will also find a strong sense of history in the cobbled streets where pretzel signs heralding Danish bakeries outnumber the golden arches and where one hardly ever needs to walk more than a block to find another *pølsevogn* (hot dog stand), a century after they were first introduced in 1910. Inside modern homes, tradition continues in the form of *hygge,* that famously untranslatable sense of comfort and well-being that Danes thrive on creating. Both a verb and a noun, *hygge* can describe a feeling, a situation, or an activity, but more often than not it takes place around a table, where candles may be lit day or night, in summer or in winter, for special occasions and for simple family meals.

Just a few decades ago there existed a clear polarity between "fancy" food—typically the kind



Windmill in a field of barley in Denmark. Sixty percent of land in Denmark is used for agricultural development, but the industry contributes only to just over 4 percent of the gross domestic product. (Corel)

served in restaurants, inspired by French haute cuisine (Queen Margrethe's husband, His Royal Highness the Prince Consort, is French)—and the more hearty "traditional" fare, often in the form of meat, potatoes, and gravy, if not the time-honored *smørrebrød* (open-faced sandwiches), which continue to feature fish and meat toppings preserved by salting, smoking, and brining, techniques probably used by the Vikings. Today, the so-called New Nordic Cuisine is fast gaining the world's attention, particularly after Copenhagen's Noma was voted *Restaurant* magazine's Best Restaurant in the World in 2009. The manifesto of the New Nordic Cuisine stresses local and seasonal cooking and eating. With initiatives such as these—and others, like *smushi,* the playful combination of sushi and smørrebrød pioneered by the Royal Cafe in Copenhagen—Denmark's food culture is fast coming to entail more than pork and potatoes, and rye bread and herring. But in the tradition of the fairytales that Denmark is equally proud of, these culinary innovations are not so much novelties as they are retellings, with a modern twist, of age-old stories. Whether plated old- or new-style, the flavors of sea, smoke, and earth continue to dominate Danish food.

## Food Culture Snapshot

A young couple with small children in Copenhagen, Thomas and Bente both work full-time, so they do most of their shopping on Saturday afternoons. A standard part of their shopping is for *pålæg* ("put on top," or bread toppings), both sweet and savory. Their two children insist on bread with Nutella or *pålægschokolade* (wafer-thin sheets of chocolate) for breakfast whenever they can, but Bente tries to make

them eat cereal more frequently. For her own breakfast she prefers one of the many cultured dairy products available, like yogurt or buttermilk, with a little muesli or the combination of toasted rye crumbs and sugar known as *drys* ("sprinkle"). Apart from Sunday mornings, when he cooks American-style pancakes with maple syrup for the family, Thomas eats a toasted bread roll with cheese and jam for breakfast. He likes the wide variety of ready-to-heat bread now available in supermarkets, so he alternates between ciabatta-style rolls one week and something "healthier," like carrot and bran, the next.

Thomas and Bente both eat lunch at their workplace canteens, but the children take packed lunches to school, as well as a midmorning snack of fruit or a dried fruit stick and a flavored drinking yogurt (chocolate milk when they are lucky). For lunch they generally have open sandwiches, so a packet of presliced rye bread is always on the shopping list, along with their favorite toppings. Hans, age six, gets either salami topped with rémoulade (a tartar-like relish) and crispy onions, liver pâté, or a sliced *frikadelle* (meatball) on his bread. His eight-year-old sister, Pernille, prefers fish and white meat—her favorite is tinned mackerel with a liberal squeeze of mayonnaise, or any kind of herring. But fishy toppings do not travel well, so these mostly stay at home for weekend lunches, and she gets turkey, chicken, or ham sandwiches for school. Sometimes they get leftovers like pasta or lasagna.

Dinner usually consists of meat and some form of vegetable, so the family buys a selection of products that can be stored in the freezer if not used right away, especially minced meat, which can easily become frikadeller, *hakkebøf* (hamburger patties served with fried onions), or a pasta sauce. Bente does occasionally buy fresh vegetables on her way home from work, but they rely mostly on frozen vegetables. They also buy frozen pizza bases that at least once a week they have fun building into "gourmet" pizzas with whatever pålæg needs using.

They do not generally eat sweets, but Thomas and Bente do sometimes enjoy a few pieces of dark chocolate with their evening coffee after the children have gone to bed. On Saturdays Hans and Pernille each choose a DVD to watch in the afternoon, when they are also allowed a small bowl of sweets and maybe some potato chips or microwave popcorn, so there are always some goodies in the shopping cart along with the week's supply of food, coffee, and fruit juice. Thomas and Bente rarely feel like cooking when they come home with their purchases, so on Saturdays the family typically gets a take-out meal in the evening for a bit of hygge in front of the television. They take turns choosing what everyone eats, and the cycles are predictable enough: Thomas likes his *döner kebab* (meat on a vertical spit, similar to gyros), Bente her pizza, Pernille chooses Chinese food, and Hans invariably requests McDonald's.

## Major Foodstuffs

Denmark is famously home to more pigs than people and, in addition to dairy, is probably best known for its pork. These are arguably two of its most important foodstuffs, both on Danish tables and in terms of agricultural exports. Denmark prides itself on a highly efficient and technologically advanced agricultural sector that produces enough food annually to feed 15 million people, approximately two-thirds of which is exported, mainly to the European Union. The industry is dominated by large, mechanized farms run by cooperatives, meaning complete ownership by Danish farmers, whose annual turnover contributes 10 percent to the country's gross domestic product. The Danish Agricultural Council puts a high priority on food safety and animal welfare.

Danish Crown, a cooperative comprising 15,000 farmers and 25,000 employees, is one of the largest companies in Denmark and the world's leading meat exporter. It represents 8 percent of the European Union's total pork production, with two million tons of pork processed annually, as well as 150,000 tons of beef. The joint Danish-Swedish Arla Foods is Denmark's biggest dairy cooperative and one of the few remaining after nationwide mergers decreased the number of cooperatives from almost 1,500 in 1935 to just 12 in 2007. Arla is also the world's largest producer of organic dairy products and counts Lurpak butter and Buko cream cheese as some of its most popular products, both at home and abroad.

Whereas the country's soil used to be poorly suited to grain cultivation, years of applying livestock manure have helped to fertilize the land to the extent that Denmark no longer relies exclusively on grain imports. Now, more than half the arable land is devoted to cultivating grains: some rye and rape but mainly wheat and barley, which are important for the bread industry and for that other Danish favorite, beer. Sugar beet farming occupies less than 2 percent of agriculture, though imported sugar has remained an important foodstuff since it was brought over in the 1600s, when Denmark began to occupy the Virgin Islands, which most certainly helped to fuel a nationwide sweet tooth that can today be satisfied by a number of proudly Danish specialties ranging from pastries to cookies, sweets, marzipan, and chocolate.

Potatoes have featured heavily in the Danish diet since they were introduced from France in the 18th century. For years they have been the main starch of a "proper" meal, and many of the older generation would today still prefer potatoes over rice, pasta, or noodles. Danes are particularly fond of new potatoes, or the first crop of the season, which produces delicately flavored small tubers. The island of Samsø is well known for its new potatoes, although with modern farming and transport, potatoes from the island are available in Danish supermarkets throughout the year. Potatoes have also historically been used in the production of *snaps,* or aquavit, but the spirit is now mostly grain based.

Beyond bread, meat, potatoes, and dairy (and beer and snaps to wash it all down), fish continues to be an important component of the Danish table, with evidence of herring and oyster consumption dating to the Stone Age. The Baltic Sea provides herring—the island of Bornholm is famous for its herring smokehouses—and the North Sea a variety of cold-water fish, like cod, mackerel, plaice, eel, and crustaceans, while the Limfjord Sound is renowned for its oysters. Despite these local resources, Denmark still imports fish, including herring from Norway and shrimp from Greenland, though European Union fishing quotas have made seafood generally more expensive and less abundant in recent years.



A smokehouse and restaurant on Bornholm Island, Denmark. (Collpicto | Dreamstime.com)

A final significant foodstuff in Denmark is fruit. While not a major component of domestic industry, fruit picking on private smallholdings is both a popular tourist activity and a form of seasonal employment for young travelers who help to make the season's best fruit available for Danish consumers. Strawberries are plentiful in summer, as are a number of other berries such as black currants, red currants, blueberries, and cherries, which are enjoyed fresh or made into jams and compotes, if not frozen for later in the year. Hibiscus fruits are popular for making jam, and rhubarb for compotes that are eaten as a dessert with cream or milk or served as an accompaniment to grilled meat or fish. Rhubarb is also a possible ingredient of *rødgrød med fløde,* "red pudding with cream," probably more famous as a Danish phrase that is notoriously difficult for

foreigners to pronounce. Essentially a mixture of lightly stewed fruit—mostly red berries—slightly thickened with corn or potato starch and served with a drizzle of cream, rødgrød med fløde is the perfect expression of Danish summer hygge.

## Cooking

Despite the increased availability of fast, convenience, pre-prepared, and frozen foods, cooking continues to be an important and widespread activity in Denmark. Danish women who work or go to school full-time reflect a variety of attitudes toward cooking: Some cook for pleasure, some as a chore, some to ensure optimal healthiness. Consistent is the regularity of some form of cooking, even if the category of homemade is becoming more ambiguous with the convenience of prepared components of a meal that simply need to be assembled or finished at home. The popular birthday *lagkage* (layer cake), for instance, is often assembled at home using store-bought sponge cake and powdered custard, while potatoes are available by the jar, peeled and preboiled. So while it is entirely possible to produce a lot of food at home with minimal cooking from scratch, or even with minimal cooking skills, the act of regularly preparing food at home remains an essential part of Danish food culture—particularly when it comes to smørrebrød, basically an act of assembly.

Even when made entirely from scratch, cooked Danish food is not traditionally time- and labor-intensive in the style of haute cuisine or other food cultures that rely on heavy spicing and/or marinating. Joints of meat or whole chickens are roasted with minimal preparation, while fish, steaks, and patties are panfried and typically served with boiled potatoes and a simple gravy of cooking juices, cream, and coloring. Salt and pepper are the most important seasonings in a Danish kitchen, and dishes are often finished with a garnish of herbs like chives, dill, or parsley. Baking of bread, cakes, and cookies is perhaps the most time-consuming kitchen activity and also the most popular, although the very labor-intensive pastry making is generally left to professional bakers. When a general strike shut down bread factories for two weeks in 1998, fresh yeast was the first commodity to be sold out in supermarkets, and the event was dubbed the "yeast strike." Most Danes may prefer to buy bread for the sake of convenience, but this episode suggests that a majority of them can bake if they need to.

Following widespread industrialization at the turn of the 20th century, when it became normal to buy bread rather than to bake it (rye bread, in particular, takes a very long time to bake), home-baked bread became fashionable again only in the 1960s and 1970s when Denmark, like many other Western countries, began paying more attention to both flavor and healthiness. In 1972 the Dairy Board published the first of a very popular series of cookbooks called *Karoline's Køkken* (Caroline's kitchen). Compiled from recipes developed to promote the use of dairy products, eight new cookbooks (complete with nutritional information and meal plans) were published between 1980 and 2001, all distributed free of charge to Danish households. Free distribution was discontinued after the firm was taken over by Arla in 2003, but these cookbooks remain the most comprehensive account of Denmark's changing food culture in the final decades of the 20th century. Most obvious is the increasing number of "exotic" recipes as Danes began to embrace and exhibit a more comfortable relationship to food from around the world as a combined result of increased travel, immigration, and access to foreign ingredients and restaurants in Denmark. Changing attitudes about health are also evident in the recipes themselves, as they begin to include less cream and butter and more low-fat dairy products, as well as in the loss of the friendly cartoon cow that was Karoline's icon from the first edition until the 1990s, when she was dropped because a cow was considered inappropriate for connoting good health.

Long before *Karoline's Køkken,* the first Danish cookbook was published in 1616. As with many early cookbooks, the first century or so of Danish culinary guides were written mostly by men for other male chefs, after which women became more common as authors of largely didactic volumes aimed at young housewives. By the end of the 19th century, cookbooks were most frequently authored

by women, written with a less moralizing tone, and included general household tips for an audience presumably more at ease in their kitchens. The most popular book from the early 20th century was *Frøken Jensen's Kogebog* (Miss Jensen's cookbook, written by Kristine Marie Jensen), which went through 75 editions by 1975, in addition to a special centenary edition in 2001. *Frøken Jensen's Kogebog* may be old-fashioned, but it is not outdated. A number of the classic dishes she included continue to be cooked and eaten by many Danes, and perhaps increasingly by non-Danes around the world, thanks to globally best-selling cookbooks like Trine Hahnemann's 2009 *The Scandinavian Cookbook,* which includes a recipe for *æbleskiver* (small, round doughnuts traditionally eaten around Christmas) that is only marginally different from Miss Jensen's century-old recipe for the same.

## Typical Meals

Open-faced sandwiches are extremely versatile in Denmark, extending beyond smørrebrød proper to be a potential component of every meal: a slice of bread or a bread roll eaten as two separate halves with cheese and jam at breakfast, for instance, followed by rye bread with toppings for lunch. Alternatively, if lunch has been a main warm meal, then it is not unusual to have a light dinner of bread or *knækbrød* (crispbread) with cheese and a cup of tea.

Unless it is oatmeal porridge, a Danish breakfast is seldom a hot, cooked meal. Following a general preference for reserving the heavier rye bread for lunch, *morgenbrød* ("morning bread") is a blanket term that refers to bread eaten for breakfast—typically some form of white roll from a bakery. Given the cost of bakery bread, morgenbrød is often a weekend treat, or it is reserved for special occasions like birthdays and anniversaries when it is also standard to bring bakery bread or pastries to work to share with colleagues. Although recent surveys suggest that one in four Danes skip the first meal of the day, a typical everyday breakfast is as likely to feature store-bought bread, cereal, and some form of cultured dairy product.

Denmark's equivalent to the Swedish *smörgåsbord* is the *kolde bord,* or "cold table," which also signals the main difference between them: Most of the items on the Danish table are cold—or if not, just *lune,* or gently heated—rather than properly hot like some dishes on a Swedish table. The cold table, traditionally served at lunch, is a spread of bread and toppings required to make and eat smørrebrød and includes a range of seafood (pickled herring; smoked salmon, eel, or herring; boiled shrimp; crumbed fillets of plaice), cold meats (salami, roast beef, corned beef, ham, roast pork, liver pâté), and a number of condiments including prepared salads (including Italian salad, a mixture of mayonnaise, carrots, peas, and asparagus; Russian salad, with beets; mackerel salad, canned mackerel in tomato sauce topped with mayonnaise; curry salad, mayonnaise mixed with chopped, hard-boiled eggs, apple, and mild curry powder); and rémoulade, sliced beets, capers, onions (raw and fried), bacon, mushrooms, pickled cucumber, red cabbage, and grated horseradish. Warm foods may include panfried slices of pork loin, meatballs, and beef patties. Cheese, including the Funen specialty of smoked curd cheese, is often served with grapes as an end to the meal.

To the uninitiated, this cornucopia can be as confusing as it is tantalizing, but there are strict sequences and combinations to be observed. As a general rule, fish is eaten before meat, and rye bread is used for herring, whereas white bread is reserved for shrimp and cheese. Beyond these, a number of classic combinations exist that Danes seem to know instinctively: Crumbed plaice needs rémoulade, as do salami and roast beef, both of which are topped with crispy onions; liver pâté is topped with bacon and mushrooms and maybe beets; Italian salad goes with ham, roast pork with red cabbage, and so on. Beer and snaps are the traditional accompaniments to a cold table, together with regular toasts. The oft-repeated *Skål!* requires everyone to lift their glasses and drink.

This typical meal is not an everyday meal, but it does contain elements of the kinds of foods that many people eat on a daily basis, either as a packed lunch or from work cafeterias, where employees can choose a few pieces of prepared smørrebrød if not

the salad buffet or a hot meal of the day. Eating smørrebrød for lunch on the job began as a worker's habit in the early 19th century, and it was not until it appeared on the first restaurant menu in 1883 at Nimb, in Tivoli Gardens, that it became fashionable as a high-class restaurant food as well. Now it exists as both, with many high-end restaurants in Denmark serving classic combinations, and the profession of being a *smørrebrødsjomfru* (literally "virgin," *jomfru* refers to young maidens who were historically trained in the art of constructing smørrebrød) continues as a respected trade in Denmark.

Dinner is usually a hot meal and often features some of the same foods that, as leftovers, can be reused as bread toppings, such as meatballs, roast pork, beef, or chicken, with potatoes or other vegetables. In more rural areas, it used to be common to begin the evening meal with some form of porridge or gruel to curb the appetite—at Christmas it was fairly common to eat pudding before the main meal—but this has given way to the more universal practice of an early dinner followed by coffee and a slice of cake or a few cookies later in the evening. Other traditional evening meals include *æbleflæsk* (pork fried with apples and onions), *forloren hare* ("mock hare," or meatloaf), *boller i karry* (pork dumplings in a mild curry sauce), and the evocatively named *brændende kærlighed* ("burning love," mashed potatoes topped with crispy bacon and fried onions). A favorite light summer meal is *koldskål* (buttermilk flavored with eggs, sugar, vanilla, and lemon) sprinkled with *kammerjunkere* (small vanilla cookies). Whatever the food or occasion, two phrases are important to any meal: *tak for mad* ("thank you for the food") and *velbekomme* ("you are welcome").



*Brændende kærlighed* ("burning love," mashed potatoes topped with crispy bacon and fried onions). (Jörg Beuge | Dreamstime.com)

## Eating Out

Given a price structure that includes taxes, service fees, and staff wages, dining in restaurants has generally been considered expensive in Denmark and therefore a regular habit only for the very wealthy, and otherwise reserved for special occasions—the older generation commonly celebrates so-called round birthdays (50, 60, 70) at great expense by reserving an entire restaurant to cater for a family party. The restaurant business nevertheless continues to thrive, thanks to both locals and tourists, who have the choice of newer establishments like Noma and also historic sites like Det Lille Apotek (The small apothecary), the oldest restaurant in Copenhagen, founded in 1720 and said to have been regularly patronized by author Hans Christian Andersen.

Added to these are the now-countless options for eating out offered by international franchises, smaller foreign restaurants, and an abundance of local pavement cafés, which are particularly trendy during summer. The historical *kro,* or inn, typically located outside major towns and often the main attraction of smaller towns, is also a popular place to eat out and typically specializes in traditional Danish fare. The ubiquitous hot dog stands and "grill bars," offering a variety of foods from hot dogs to hamburgers and fries, toasted sandwiches, and ice cream, represent the more casual and affordable side of eating out, as do the many fast-food

outlets selling döner kebabs, pizza slices, and Chinese food.

## Special Occasions

No special occasion in Denmark is observed without special attention to food and drink, and some foods also denote special occasions. Christmas Eve is the biggest food event of the year, although items from the Christmas table are often eaten repeatedly in the preceding months. The November 11 celebration of Morten's Aften (Martin's Evening, named after the French St. Martin of Tours, who tried to hide in a goose pen to avoid being anointed bishop), for instance, looks very much like a Christmas table, with roast duck, caramelized potatoes, red cabbage, and pickled cucumber. Duck is also eaten at Christmas, if not turkey, goose, or pork. *Julefrokost* (Christmas lunch) refers not to lunch on December 25 but to end-of-year parties arranged by employers, students, or any other social group. Generally hosted at lunch, and generally entailing the big "cold table" (which can be used for any festivity), it is not unheard of for a julefrokost to be held in the evening, nor for it to feature the hot meal traditionally eaten on Christmas Eve.

Birthdays are celebrated with lagkage, a cake layered with custard, cream, and fruit, or the more traditional *kringle,* a large pretzel-shaped cake filled with fruit or custard and made with a similar yeast dough to Danish pastries called *wienerbrød,* or Vienna bread, after the 19th-century baker's strike that brought a number of Germans and Austrians to work in Danish bakeries, who introduced the flaky, buttery dough that Danish bakers would later appropriate. Special events like anniversaries are often marked with an open house where friends and family can visit throughout the day to enjoy a piece of pastry or cake with a cup of coffee and a small glass of *Gammel Dansk* ("Old Danish"), an herbal bitters. Another sweet item for special occasions is the *kransekage,* or wreath cake, an elaborate pyramid of cake rings made from ground almonds, egg whites, and sugar. Today, smaller kransekager are widely available from bakeries and supermarkets and generally offered with champagne at midnight on New Year's Eve, but for many years it was splendid enough to mainly be a wedding showpiece. Like many special and everyday events in Denmark that are no longer restricted to Danish food alone, guests at modern weddings, christenings, and confirmation parties are as likely to feast on "foreign" food as they are on anything specifically Danish.

## Diet and Health

With an average life expectancy of 78 years, low infant-mortality rates, and an HIV prevalence of less than 1 percent, Denmark has a generally healthy population. Cancer is the leading cause of death, followed by heart disease. This good health is thanks in large measure to a highly efficient public health system, partly funded by Denmark's global leadership in diabetes treatment, antibiotics, and psychotropic medication. It is also thanks to a general lifestyle that includes a fair amount of physical activity—cycling is the most common mode of transport, for children and adults alike, and large parts of most cities are reserved for pedestrians. However, in recent decades, Denmark has also experienced increasing numbers of people who are overweight or obese, particularly children. This is most often explained as a result of increased consumption of fast food, sweets, and convenience products.

The country does have a long history of monitoring food and diets in the interests of public health. The first major study of the nutrient values of foods was undertaken by physiologist and pathologist P. L. Panum in the 19th century. Panum's work was developed by a number of scientists over the next century or so, notably Christian Jürgensen (author of the first table of "Common Recommendations for the Healthy and the Ill" in 1888) and Richard Ege, whose 1932 nutrition tables incorporated the then–newly discovered vitamins and who continued to publish significant work until the 1970s, when Peder Helms's computerized tables paved the way for the first national Danish Food Composition Database, which published its first official tables in the

1980s. These nutritional databases have been instrumental in compiling dietary recommendations for the Danish population.

The first official food pyramid was launched in 1976 by FDB, a retail cooperative that has been involved in consumer welfare for more than a century. In 1996 they introduced the "S" symbol on supermarket products that were certified as healthy choices (*sundhed* is the Danish word for health). In 2009, following a merger with other Nordic countries, this was replaced by the keyhole symbol that had been introduced in Sweden some years earlier. Criteria for the keyhole include acceptable amounts of fat, sugar, fiber, and salt. Its effectiveness is yet to be measured. As the rest of the world tunes in to not just the gastronomic delights but also the supposed healthfulness of the so-called new Nordic diet with its emphasis on local grains, berries, and fish, it remains to be seen whether Danes themselves will find the fairytale compelling enough to prefer rye bread and herring to a frozen ready-made portion of Moroccan-spiced chicken from the supermarket.

*Signe Rousseau*

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# Finland

## Overview

Finland is said to be a country between East and West, a small nation sharing a border with Russia in the east and the Scandinavian countries in the west. Cultural influences have come from both sides, sometimes dividing the country east to west when it comes to architecture, customs, religion, and food. Also politically Finland has a western and an eastern history, belonging to Sweden until 1809 and then being a part of Russia until 1917. Even so, national borders don't necessarily create new customs or habits; it is more a question of contacts between people, trade routes, migration, and geographic features that form the culture. The Baltic Sea has, for example, been an important area for trade, and some influences have come from Germany, especially feast traditions.

The climate in the north and the traditional dispersion of the population in rural areas are, however, the most essential factors influencing Finnish food culture. Large forest areas have offered hunting opportunities (birds, hare, moose), berries to gather (blueberries, cowberries, cloudberries), mushrooms, and even bark to mix with flour for baking bread in times of famine. Finland is also known as the land of the thousand lakes, and therefore fish has been an important part of the meal not only for the coastal population but also for the inlanders. Potatoes came to Finland with Swedish officers in the 18th century and soon became an important base for every meal. Before that, the turnip was the main root. Meat, milk, and butter are also traditionally important products from cattle breeding among the agricultural population. Since self-sufficiency was a fact for the majority nearly until World War II, islanders also kept cows for milk and butter even if fish dominated as the main food in the archipelago. In the north of Finland both Finns and the Saami population (once referred to as Lapps, though this is considered derogatory) have kept reindeers as their main industry, which is naturally reflected in the diet.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Pekka (38) and Mari (36) live in Helsinki with their two children, Seppo (7) and Satu (5). After a quick breakfast of coffee and two sandwiches, on his way to work, Pekka takes Satu to kindergarten, where she also gets her breakfast, a sandwich and hot chocolate. Mari sends Seppo, who has eaten cereal for breakfast, off to school and then gets ready for work. During the day Pekka eats fried whitefish with potatoes for lunch at a nearby restaurant, whereas Mari chooses to eat a takeout shrimp salad at her desk since she was a little late for work in the morning. Seppo eats sausage soup at school and Satu a spinach crepe at her kindergarten.

On her way home Mari hurries to the nearest market to buy milk, bread, fruit, and some minced meat. She picks up Satu (Seppo is already home from school) and starts to prepare dinner, which is spaghetti and meat sauce. When Pekka arrives, dinner is ready; they eat together, but since Mari takes Satu to her gymnastic lesson this evening, Pekka is left with the quite messy kitchen to take care of.

Pekka and Seppo go by car to a supermarket in a mall outside town and do some shopping for the weekend. In the supermarket Pekka calls up Mari to check if she

thinks it would be a good idea to buy chicken fillets as they are on sale and also whether he also should buy wine for Friday and Saturday. Before they drive back home, Pekka and Seppo eat ice cream in the mall. Back home from the gymnastics lesson, Mari makes Satu porridge for her evening meal before bedtime. The rest of the family eats sandwiches and drinks tea before it is time for sleep.

## Cooking

In old times both fish and meat were mainly salted, as a conservation method, to last through the winter. In western Finland bread was baked only a couple of times a year, and therefore it was dry most of the time. In eastern parts of Finland bread was baked more often, perhaps every week, and therefore eaten fresh. Cooking over an open fire in a pot was the norm until the iron stove became more common in the 1920s in the countryside. At the same time, during the period of independence after 1917, national awareness grew strong and many organizations that took an interest in the welfare of the population started to propagate a healthier and more diversified diet. New schools focusing on giving youngsters education in practical tasks were founded, and the girls participated in cooking courses and in this way spread new recipes and food habits to their families. Since the 1950s both girls and boys have been educated in housekeeping and cooking as a school subject. Since the majority of Finnish women work outside the home, the responsibility for the family cooking, at least among young and middle-aged men and women, is shared quite equally.

Boiling, frying, and baking are still the main cooking methods. The oven has an important role when preparing food. Many common dishes are baked, today mostly in electric ovens. The Finns have quite easily accepted new technology. The microwave oven became a big hit in the 1980s. Since Finland is an industrialized Western country, time is always too short; everything has to be done in a hurry, even cooking. At first, cookbooks for how to cook with microwaves were published, but soon the traditional electric stove and oven proved better for cooking. Gas is also used in Finland but mostly in some areas in bigger cities and in the many holiday cottages used during the summer and on weekends. The microwave oven is still, however, an important article in nearly every Finnish kitchen and has come to stay. The market offers a lot of ready-made food that can be heated quickly, even by the children in the family. Another important use for the microwave oven is to defrost food, since nearly every family has a freezer, not only for ice cream and ice for drinks but also for berries and mushrooms gathered in the forests, garden products, or fish and meat. Finns still love to make their own food supply for the winter, to have raw material of their own, and to take advantage of what nature can offer for free.

## Typical Meals

Since Finland has been mainly a receiver of cultural influences, not much can be seen as typically Finnish when it comes to food. However, typical Finnish bread is made of rye. Every Finn who lives abroad, or even just stays abroad for a vacation, at some point misses dark rye bread. It is eaten in both the morning and the evening as a sandwich with butter and cheese or ham, or as a complement to the main dish, usually then also spread with butter. Not all bread is made of rye, but some kind of whole grain is often preferred. Bread completely made of wheat is not very popular except for sweet coffee bread called *pulla*.

Finns are known as heavy drinkers, but when it comes to everyday meals a typical drink to go with the food is milk, even for adults. Water and nonalcoholic malt liquor or beer are also common, while wine has been accepted among the general public quite recently during the last decades, and even then merely at festive occasions and weekend dinners. A more traditional way to mark a festive dish is to drink a shot of vodka, in Finnish called *ryyppy* and among the Swedish-speaking population known as *snaps*; it is drunk after singing a special snaps song.

Domestic fish is no longer a cheap ingredient for everyday meals. The traditional wild fishes, such as Baltic herring, northern pike, pike perch, whitefish, and pollan, called *mujkku,* are more and more being replaced by imported, mostly Norwegian salmon or

trout grown in net cages by local fishermen in the archipelago; this imported fish is actually cheaper. The latest statistics show that Finns eat 26.5 pounds (12 kilograms) of foreign fish and 11 pounds (5 kilograms) of domestic fish a year. Salmon and trout are used in the same way: baked in the oven, grilled, smoked, or fried, and very often just raw, salted, and served in thin slices with potatoes or rye bread. Salmon and trout are also used for soups and as fillings in pastries, often mixed with rice. It is, however, very popular to catch one's own fish, as the lakes are many and the seashore long. At people's vacation cottages fishing is an important way to relax and to spend time, especially among men, in a way that usually results in food on the table. Depending on what kind of fish one catches, it can be grilled or fried and eaten with potatoes and perhaps with a sauce made of sour cream and herbs (for grilled fish) or a warm sauce made of butter, cream, and white wine (for fried fish). Fish soup is also popular. In the supermarkets highly refined products such as fish nuggets and other ready-made frozen fish dishes are available. These are popular especially among children because the possibility of swallowing fish bones is eliminated. There is also an environmental and ethical question today when choosing frozen fish. Finnish salmon are sent by airplane to Asia for processing and then returned to the Finnish market, requiring a considerable expenditure of fossil fuels and causing unnecessary pollution. This is, of course, a global problem and not significant only for Finland.

Many tourist guides recommend that visitors eat bear when visiting Finland. There may be a few restaurants, mainly in Helsinki, that occasionally do have bear on their menus, but it is definitely rare. Big wild or semiwild animals are indeed served, especially moose and reindeer. The moose population is reduced every year, or at least officials try to keep it in control, by a special moose hunt that many men in the countryside participate in. Moose meat can be bought in the autumn in market halls or well-supplied supermarkets, but mostly it is a product that the participants in the hunt share among themselves and fill their freezers with. It is used like any other meat, in a casserole, in soups, or as minced meat. Reindeer is often marketed as typical for Finland. In the north of Finland reindeer is a natural product, but farther south mainly one dish, called *poronkäristys,* or sautéed reindeer, is really common. It consists of a thin sauce with a lot of very thin slices of reindeer meat, eaten with mashed potatoes and cowberries. A reindeer steak can also be an alternative to beefsteak and is then often served warm or cold-smoked.

Like in many other countries, meatballs are popular among both children and adults; on the whole minced pork, beef, or most often a mix of both is used a lot. Ground meat is quite cheap, easy, and fast to make a sauce of, eaten with spaghetti or potatoes. Pork is common as well, especially grilled in summertime. Both pork and beef are often used in casseroles. Ground meat mixed with rice forms the



Poronkäristys, a thin sauce with a lot of very thin slices of reindeer meat, eaten with mashed potatoes and cowberries, common in the south of Finland. (Shutterstock)

filling for cabbage rolls, a popular dish in autumn. About the same taste, but with less skill needed, can be achieved by mixing cabbage, minced meat, milk, and egg together in a mold and baking it in the oven. Both are served with cowberry jam. Sausages are a popular everyday food as well. A typical Finnish sausage seldom contains much meat, however, and is therefore jokingly even said to be the most popular vegetable in Finnish cuisine.

In almost every supermarket there are ready-to-eat grilled hens and broilers. Mostly, chicken is a cheap product sold in slices, as parts, or breasts, either plain or in different marinades. Poultry is often seen a lighter form of meat and therefore healthier. As for so many products mass-produced as food, ethical considerations now influence people's decisions, however. Broilers are produced and forced to grow quickly, an ethical question, but also a question of taste. Especially when it comes to egg production, eggs from "happy hens" are sold, meaning hens are free-range and not kept in small cages.

Fish, meat, and sausage are all ingredients for making soups. They are traditional everyday dishes, but the younger generation is not so enthusiastic about these, especially if it involves cooking their own dinner. Pea soup is, however, very common and even has its own day, when it is served at lunchtime and in workplace restaurants. Thursday is the day for pea soup, which in Finland is green, compared with a yellow pea soup in Sweden. It is the most common canned soup as well and often eaten in conditions where the cooking facilities are limited.

Pancakes with jam are traditionally served as a dessert after the pea soup. The jam can be made of strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, or cloudberries and is often homemade. Berries are an important part of Finnish food culture. There are 37 edible species of wild berries in Finland, of which about 20 species are picked for consumption. The tradition of picking berries in the woods or home gardens or buying them at the market is well preserved, even among younger generations. Berries are eaten alone or with cream, milk, and a little sugar. A Finnish specialty is *leipäjuusto,* a kind of cheese baked in the oven or warmed in a frying pan and eaten with cloudberries. A cake with strawberries and whipped cream is the ultimate symbol for summer and a must at birthday parties in June and July. Blueberry pie is also a must for most people, eaten with vanilla cream. A specialty originating in Russia is frozen cranberries eaten with hot caramel sauce called *kinuski.* Berries of any kind are also eaten with *Quark* (a smooth sour-milk cheese like yogurt) or ice cream. Ice cream is extremely popular. Among Europeans, Finns eat the most ice cream, despite their northern and mostly cold climate.

## Eating Out

Eating out usually means going out with friends or family. Eating is, of course, an important task, but equally important is the social dimension: One goes out to spend some time together. Finland is one of very few countries where schoolchildren, from first grade to high school, are served a free lunch every day. It is considered the most important part of the national health plan. This means that every child can eat at least one warm, nutritious meal a day. Most Finns are used to eating lunch at noon. Some workplaces have their own cafeterias, and if not, there are dishes with special prices at restaurants during lunchtime. A typical menu for one week at a lunch restaurant in Helsinki can be as follows: Monday—fried salmon with spinach and egg sauce, Tuesday—black salsify soup, Wednesday—sausage soup, Thursday—meatloaf with mushroom sauce, Friday—fried Baltic herring with chive sauce.

Otherwise, the tradition of eating out is quite young in Finland. There are, of course, restaurants with old and fine traditions that the bourgeoisie, civil servants, businessmen, and other groups higher up in society have frequented as long as restaurants have existed. Families have also celebrated special occasions by eating out. Still, a bigger change in eating-out habits has occurred only since the late 1980s. An economic boom and a new generation with money to spend in a new way found their way to the restaurants, not only for feasts and family celebrations but also as a way to spend time, enjoy good food and wine, and relax, even in the middle of the week. Despite the recession in the 1990s, eating together as a

form of social act had come to stay. A pizza or a meal at the gas station is an inexpensive option. There are alternatives for everyone. Ethnic restaurants have a quite young tradition, due to the fact that immigration was very limited until the late 20th century. The first pizzeria opened in the 1960s, but they became common in the 1980s. Indian, Chinese, Turkish, and other restaurants became more common about the same time. The first hamburger restaurant, Carrols, was established in Helsinki in the late 1970s, and McDonald's came about 10 years later.

Today, Helsinki and the larger towns elsewhere in Finland are like any other town in the Western world, and it can be hard to find something special and local when it comes to eating out. Chefs are influenced by international cuisine and follow the same trends worldwide. One new trend is to promote the use of local products for both ethical and ecological reasons. Despite that, in Finland, exotic dishes are commonly served at restaurants such as tuna fish, pilgrim scallop, or even ostrich meat. One specialty of Finland before the "new" ethnic restaurants was a proliferation of Russian restaurants. They were, and perhaps still are to a certain degree, for tourists, when the Iron Curtain made Russia quite exotic but difficult to visit. Finland, as a neighbor, could offer good Russian cuisine and thereby something of the exotic atmosphere as well, at least inside restaurants. Cabbage, mushrooms, pickled cucumber, and of course vodka are ingredients in both countries. There are still a few popular Russian restaurants with a good reputation in Helsinki.

## Special Occasions

Christmas and Easter are the most food-centered festivities in Finland, like in so many other Western countries. There are, however, occasions during the year with culinary traditions and delicacies such as special dishes, pastries, early vegetables, crayfish, and so forth. January and February are a time for blini, a small pancake with Russian origins made of buckwheat and eaten with caviar, *smetana* (sour cream), and chopped onion. These months are also a time for fishing burbot from underneath the ice on the lakes. Burbot is eaten in soup or with white sauce.

A special tart, called Runeberg tart after Johan Ludvig Runeberg, who is the national poet of Finland, is sold some weeks before February 5, his birthday. It is a small cake made of breadcrumbs with a dab of raspberry jam inside a ring of frosting on the top and moistened with arrack liquor.

On Shrove Sunday and Shrove Tuesday, it is time for another pastry, a cream bun with almond paste, lately also sold with jam, and eaten plain or with warm milk from a plate. Pea soup is the natural main dish these days. On Annunciation Day there is an old tradition of eating waffles, not perhaps common in every family but still known in some regions.

The Easter traditions reflect influences from both West and East. Perhaps the only thing really unique to Finland is *mämmi,* a malt-flavored oven-baked pudding, black in color and eaten with cream and sugar. Mämmi originates from the western parts of Finland, while *pasha* (molded sweetened curds with raisins and almonds) originates from Russia and the eastern parts of Finland. Today, these two delicacies are eaten in both western and eastern parts and are sold in markets all over the country. Pasha and a bun called *kulitj* belong to the Orthodox tradition, the Orthodox Church being the second state church in Finland beside the majority Lutheran church. Traditionally, hens started to lay eggs again at Easter time after a long, dark winter, and eggs still play a central role in Easter meals. Other typical things to eat on Easter are lamb, smoked ham, and fish, especially on Good Friday. For children, but also very popular among adults, are Mignon eggs, real eggshells filled with chocolate.

The first of May is celebrated with mead and a kind of fried pastry called *tippaleipä*, similar to funnel cakes. It is also time to welcome springtime and come together, eat a buffet meal, and drink a lot. Summer is the high season for all kinds of fresh vegetables, new potatoes, pickled herring, foods grilled outdoors, smoked fish, strawberries, rhubarb, and later on mushrooms, apples, and things to pick from the forests or home gardens. Midsummer in late June is the biggest summer festival, celebrated with a lot of food and drinks, and nearly everybody

escapes the cities for a weekend in the countryside. In summertime Finns enjoy eating outdoors if possible; they improvise and eat lighter fare and just enjoy the time of nearly endless daylight. The long daylight hours give vegetables, berries, and fruits grown in the north an especially good flavor. A popular vegetarian dish is "summer soup," consisting of potatoes, carrots, cauliflower, peas, and spinach. These are cooked in milk, thickened with flour and egg yolk, and topped with a pat of butter and parsley and sprinkled with salt.

Crayfish season starts on July 21. Once many lakes and creeks hosted a lot of crayfish, but a disease, easily spread by fishing tackle from lake to lake, has made the original crayfish rarer. Another more resistant species has been brought into lakes, but still crayfish parties are a quite expensive feast to arrange considering that the size of the local crayfishes is small and the guests can be hungry. An alternative to domestic crayfish are much cheaper frozen ones, imported mostly from Spain or China. One can also eat crayfish as a starter and then move on to a mushroom tart and berries for dessert. The magical feeling at a crayfish party comes, however, not only from the eating but also from a lot of lights and decorations in the darkening evening; a lot of vodka, beer, or white wine; songs; and happy friends being together. Dill and toasted bread are also essential ingredients for a crayfish party.

Autumn is hunting season. Wild duck and moose are most common to hunt, and lately the deer population has increased. Mushrooms and berries are free to collect for everyone everywhere under a special law. In the cities along the coast special fish markets are held, where fishermen sell pickled and salted herring, a special dark and sweet bread, and even some handicrafts. The fish market is a popular event with over 100 years of history, a time when fishermen and town dwellers meet.

The greatest focus on food is, however, concentrated in December and Christmastime. Gingerbread and mulled wine, served with raisins and almonds, are served both in homes and at restaurants. Friends, business associates, colleagues, and society and club members meet for pre-Christmas lunch or dinner, either at restaurants or for covered-dish suppers at club rooms. The time from Christmas Eve until Boxing Day is reserved for the family and close relatives. Because one is supposed to be surrounded by dear ones, Christmas socially can be quite a hard holiday for single people, of whom there are many in Finland. Typical ingredients on a Christmas table, often served as a buffet similar to the Swedish smorgasbord, are pickled herring, freshly salted or cold smoked salmon, roe with smetana (sour cream), pâtés, and *rosolli,* which is a salad of boiled beets, potatoes, carrots, onions, apples, and pickled cucumber. Then follows Christmas ham, potato casserole, carrot casserole, rutabaga casserole, meatballs, and for some also boiled ling *lipeäkala* (lutefisk), with white sauce, and so forth. The lutefisk can, however, be left for another day if it seems like too many dishes at the same time. Some people can't stand the odor of the lye used to preserve the fish; others love it. In the archipelago the old tradition is to eat pike instead of Christmas ham. Every family has its own specialties with small but ever so important differences, and it is said to be quite difficult to agree on what should be on the Christmas table when a young couple moves in together and both want to take their old family traditions from childhood into the new household.

Rice porridge can be served for lunch at Christmastime but also as a dessert together with cinnamon, sugar, and cold milk or with a sweet fruit soup made of dried apples, prunes, and pears. Puff pastries formed as a star with prune jam in the middle are called *joulutorttu* and are served at every occasion where mulled wine, coffee, or tea is drunk in December. Chocolate, marmalade, raisins, nuts, dates, figs, and cranberries rolled in egg white and icing sugar are all sweets that are associated with Christmas as well.

When New Year finally comes, everyone is tired of Christmas food, and it is time for something fancy and delicious, perhaps a starter of shrimp and lobster salad, a spinach-filled hen with rosemary potatoes as a main course, and a lime cheesecake for dessert. The New Year starts fresh, with promises of a healthier life in the coming year.



Joulutorttu, puff pastries formed as a star with prune jam in the middle and often served at Christmastime. (Shutterstock)

## Diet and Health

Diet and health are important issues in Finnish society and are often mentioned when talking about food. In the 1960s mortality due to heart disease was very high among men, and a major health-promoting project to prevent cardiovascular disease in North Karelia started in the 1970s. It was a big success. Butter, whole milk, and fatty dishes were abandoned in favor of lighter oil-based products, vegetables, and fibers. Still, as in so many Western countries, being overweight is a big problem that causes many health problems such as diabetes. The Development Program for the Prevention and Treatment of Diabetes (DEHKO, 2000–2010) is a national program, the first worldwide to include and implement the prevention of type 2 diabetes. Life has become easier in a way; food is everywhere, and most people don't burn all the calories they take in. Physical work is replaced by sitting still all day long in an office, and people need a lot of information to be able to take care of their health.

Finland is a pioneer developer of health-enhancing foodstuffs. Nutrition research is internationally recognized at a high level, and also many remarkable inventions in functional food development have been made. Probiotics, prebiotics, plant flavonoids, plant sterols, dietary fiber, and more are important ingredients in functional food, seen as a new possibility to promote well-being by using "tailored" foods. Benecol, Xylitol, and Lactobacillius GG are officially approved examples of Finnish food innovations.

Finnish researchers have also pointed out several products that are naturally health enhancing such as rye bread, berries, rapeseed oil, oat products, and buckwheat products. Finnish meat, grain, vegetables, and berries are considered to be very clean. Pollution is limited, and not many insecticides are used compared with many other southern countries because of cold winters and strict regulations. There are also about 4,500 organic farms in Finland, representing 6 percent of all farms. The organic food production has a reliable reputation since the authorities enforce strict regulations throughout the whole organic food chain.

There is an increasing demand for special diet food as well. Many clients in restaurants, patients in hospitals, and students in school need a special diet because of their diseases. High cholesterol, diabetes, celiac disease, and many food allergies have united developers in the food industry and medical scientists to find solutions for dietary needs in society. In fact, Finland has one of the oldest dietary industries in the world.

The reason public authorities focus on nutrition and eating habits is for the prevention and treatment of diseases. The National Nutrition Council in Finland makes statements and recommendations, but Finns wonder about the relationship between food and pleasure and health. In the south of Europe, food and eating are considered to be pleasurable. The Nordic tradition is more spartan; food has for a long time been merely a nutrient, something one needed to survive but not for pleasure. If one is

really enjoying a meal, there must be some reason to feel guilty. Something being both healthy and good tasting seems impossible.

*Yrsa Lindqvist*

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# France

## Overview

Located in western Europe, metropolitan France occupies an area smaller than the size of Texas and has a population of only 62 million. Yet the country has long enjoyed an outsized reputation for its cuisine. Historical, geographic, political, and social factors account for the rich gastronomic and culinary culture, a key element in the French way of life.

The fertility but also the diversity of the geography and climate permit a broad scope in agricultural production. Coasts along the cool North Sea, English Channel, and Atlantic Ocean, and also along the warmer, saltier Mediterranean Sea, yield fish, shellfish, and aquatic plants. Landscapes range from alpine mountains to continental plains, with a full third of the land area considered arable. Climates include the temperate oceanic west but also the drier Mediterranean south.

The agricultural tradition in France is ancient and has been continuous up to the present day. The cultivation of wheat, grapes, and olives for bread, wine, and olive oil—the basis of the ideal diet of classical antiquity, the forerunner of today's Mediterranean diet—is traceable to Greek settlements of around 600 B.C. at Massilia (Marseille) and Agde. Over the centuries, successive migrations to the territory broadened the agricultural traditions and diet. Contemporary to the Greeks, Celts migrated from the area of Hallstatt, Austria, bringing their agriculture and animal husbandry as well as hunting. Celts raised animals for milk, cheese, butter, and lard as well as meat. They preserved fish and meat, especially pork, by drying, smoking, and salting. Today, the taste for charcuterie (cured meat products, especially from pork) remains pronounced. By the Roman era, the lands inhabited by Celtic peoples were famous for their agricultural potential.

The victory of the Roman army over Gallic forces in 52 B.C. resulted in the division of the fertile Celtic territories into Gallo-Roman provinces. The Roman administration opened up the provinces to trade routes extending as far as India and China. Thus, elite diners in what would later become France had early access to exotic spices, such as black pepper, and to foreign foods, which were soon adapted to local cultivation, such as Persian peaches and Numidian guinea fowl. Wealthy Gallo-Romans followed the Roman custom (drawn from Greek precedent) of eating meals in two to seven distinct courses, a practice that would prove lasting. Sophisticated and wealthy eaters tracked local specialties such as coastal shellfish and yearly variations in wine production, their discernment prefiguring that of today's knowledgeable *fines gueules* (gastronomes or food connoisseurs). Barbarian (from the Greco-Roman perspective) Frankish or Germanic tribes that migrated into the Gallic provinces further cultivated the taste for meat, ale (beer without hops), apples, hard cider, spelt, rye, butter, and poultry.

As the Roman Empire declined in the early centuries of the Common Era, Christianity penetrated into Gaul from the south, where the pagan Germanic traditions held less sway. With Christianity came a revitalized emphasis on bread and wine, now symbols of sacrifice and redemption in the communion ritual, and a new asceticism. The ninth-century Carolingian emperor Charlemagne embodied the full, if sometimes uneasy, merging of the primary

cultures—Gallo-Roman, Frankish, and Christian—in early-medieval France. Charlemagne encouraged agriculture with the aim of renewing the achievements of imperial Rome within the Christian empire. His biography shows the effort to negotiate customs from Frankish warrior feasts, which featured meat and alcohol in quantity, along with classical moderation but also Christian asceticism.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, European voyages resulted in the import of New World foods that would become staples in French cooking, such as potatoes, tomatoes, and turkey. The French drive toward overseas territorial and economic conquest began in the 17th century. At this time, Mexican chocolate, African coffee, Chinese tea, and sugar cultivated in Atlantic colonial outposts became fashionable, initially among elites. France's greatest colonial expansion occurred during the 19th through the mid-20th centuries. Rapid contraction followed, and France ceded territories in North Africa and Asia; however, the old politics of imperialism informs the postcolonial era. Beyond metropolitan or European France, the tentacular reach of today's French Republic includes the overseas departments Guadeloupe, Martinique, Réunion, and French Guiana. The population of metropolitan France includes about 9 percent immigrants, of whom about 40 percent trace their origins to the former colonies of the Maghreb.

Contemporary French culture and cuisine have continued to assimilate exotic elements, while attitudes remain ambivalent. Contact with extra-European territories has made such dishes as *accras,* or Caribbean fried codfish balls, into familiar appetizers. Couscous, or semolina-flour pasta that is steamed and served with a choice of meats, fish, seafood, pulses, greens, and vegetables, is eaten in the former colonies of Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria. So familiar and so popular is couscous across France that it has become a *plat national,* a national dish. Yet exotic foods can also stigmatize. Consider the characters of North African origin in the film *La graine et le mulet* (*The Secret of the Grain,* 2007, directed by Abdellatif Kechiche). They identify themselves as French, yet their food marks them as foreign—and as outsiders and interlopers—to the characters of European origin. Ironically, such staples as tender young haricots verts (French green or string beans) depend on economic ties inherited from the colonial past; today, most French beans are in fact grown in northern and western Africa and imported into the Hexagon (a nickname for France). Tension between the politics of assimilation and the experience of difference is a constant in France today. Nowhere is this clearer than at the table.

A distinguishing feature of food culture in France is the grand cuisine that has been elaborated over centuries. In the 17th century, cooks working for distinguished patrons emphasized tastes and techniques that differed noticeably from court cooking elsewhere in Europe and from older practices. Their recipes show the emerging preference for plants, such as onions, garlic, and herbs, rather than spices, for flavoring, a feature that remains typical. Court cooks developed sauces and broths that combined in a modular fashion to produce a range of dishes. In the 18th century, the court ceded its role as the center for cultural production, and cooks employed in the great bourgeois houses took up the tradition of grand cuisine. In the 20th century, Auguste Escoffier installed fine cooking as a feature of commercial luxury hotels. Professional chefs still consult Escoffier's cookbook as the reference for standard techniques and recipes. His repertoire, with its lineage to that of the court cooks, underpins the *cuisine gastronomique,* or elaborate fine restaurant cooking, that is now the most prestigious, highly worked expression of French food culture. Following the Revolution of 1789, shifts in the social structure and the acceleration of consumerism birthed a newly powerful figure: the food critic. The mutual dependence between producer and consumer, chef and informed diner, fostered by Grimod de la Reynière, avatar of contemporary food critics, continues to characterize gastronomic culture. The American animated film *Ratatouille* (2007, directed by Brad Bird with Jan Pinkava), set in Paris, amusingly parodies but also quite accurately depicts the prestige and pratfalls of grand cooking and its critics in France.

Essential, yet often overlooked, factors in shaping the contemporary French diet and food culture are the transition to industrial agriculture, combined

with the completion of urbanization and modernization, in the mid-20th century. In the 18th century, four-fifths of the population of France lived in villages and rural areas. As recently as the late 19th century, two-thirds of the population still lived in or near the countryside. In rural areas, bread and vegetables from the kitchen garden—especially turnips, carrots, and cabbages—were the building blocks of daily meals. Animal protein was likely in the form of eggs, milk, or cheese, although meat consumption varied by region. Throughout the 19th century, meat consumption increased in cities, but prices fluctuated. During World War II, rationing and the export of meat and dairy products to the German Reich reduced the average caloric intake and drastically diminished life expectancies. In the mid-20th century, hunger and diseases that result from dietary deficiencies persisted, public health was at a low point, and the food supply was unstable.

Beginning in the late 1940s, postwar rebuilding heralded a shift in agricultural practices and the dietary paradigm. Under the Common Agricultural Policy of 1962, the European Union began subsidizing French grain, dairy, and beef farmers. The subventions, along with new industrial agricultural practices, resulted in overproduction and a reliable, inexpensive supply of beef, dairy products, and grains. Now, about 77 percent of the population lives in urban and ex-urban settings, while the country's gross domestic product ranks in the top 10 among nations worldwide; France is now an affluent, urban, modern consumer society. It is also the foremost agricultural producer in Europe and a net exporter, although less than 4 percent of the population works in the agricultural sector. Meat competes with bread for the central place in the diet and as the dominant alimentary symbol. Although France is a pillar of the European Union, it has maintained a strongly protectionist stance regarding agricultural production. Against the liberal European approach to free trade and privatization, France has notoriously refused to relinquish European farm subsidies in place since the 1960s. In 2009 it continued to defend its farmers and fishermen, who received French subventions during the 1990s and the early years of the 21st century.

Regional specialization in cuisine is both a fact and a nostalgic idea in contemporary France. Travelers have long remarked on regional variations in French cuisine, while in the 19th and 20th centuries, regionalist movements and then the tourism industry set out self-consciously to cultivate these differences. Lyonnais *quenelles* (poached fish dumplings), heavy Jura wines, *boeuf à la Bourguignon* (beef stew from Burgundy), or an Auvergnat or Aveyronnais *aligot* of potatoes whipped with cheese to a smooth elastic texture can certainly be found in their places of origin. But a Parisian restaurant and the table of a creative home cook anywhere in France are nearly as likely venues. France is the premier tourist destination in the world, receiving approximately 75 million visitors annually. The gastroculinary arts—in their local variations but also their national and international forms—play a major role in the tourism industries, while the appreciation for good food is a distinguishing feature of the culture.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Solange and Denis live outside of Paris in a community of professional and working-class residents. Originally from Bordeaux, Denis attended university in Paris, then stayed to pursue his career. He is a computer programmer who works at a multinational firm outside the city. Solange, a native of Paris, is a lawyer who advises a branch of the police force in the capital. Their lifestyle and foodways exemplify those of the middle and upper-middle classes. When it comes to food, quality but also convenience are primary considerations.

On weekdays, Denis and Solange eat lunch with colleagues at their workplaces or nearby restaurants. After work and on weekends, they shop for the meals they eat at home: breakfast, dinner, and weekend lunches. On weekends, they drive to a supermarket to buy staples and items that will keep for several days in the refrigerator: ground coffee to brew and cartons of milk to heat up for the morning café au lait, butter and fruit jams to spread on bread at breakfast, sunflower oil for cooking, olive oil and vinegar for dressing salads, dried pasta, yogurt, eggs, and bottles of table wine. Thinking ahead to the busy weeknights that leave little time for cooking, Denis and Solange stop at Picard, the

chain store specializing in frozen meal components. Here, they pick up raspberry ice to eat with fruit for dessert and puff pastry shells to fill with cheese or vegetables, such as mushrooms, for a tasty appetizer.

The couple most enjoys the shopping they do on foot on an as-needed basis. Upon returning from work at about 6:30 P.M., they have just enough time to walk to the shops in the town center. Denis and Solange buy fresh bread daily at the *boulangerie* located a few blocks from their townhouse. A baguette, a long, crusty, white bread, accompanies dinner. For breakfast they may try a country loaf made with whole wheat flour, a *pain aux noix* enriched with walnuts, or, for a weekend treat, a buttery yeasted *pain brioché* or a *pain de mie* (white bread).

A stop at the cheese shop follows. They rely on their *affineur* (specialist in aging and storing cheeses) to tell them which cheeses are at their seasonal peak. The couple usually prepares a cheese plate to conclude dinner and the weekend lunches. At the cheesemonger's, they choose a flavorful goat cheese, a semisoft cheese with a white-mold rind made from cow milk, a hard cheese made of sheep milk, and a blue cheese.

At the grocer's shop, Denis and Solange find the quality better than at the supermarket. The fruits are unblemished and ripened to a fine bouquet. The vegetables are flavorful and selected with regard for the season. They purchase a head of lettuce for salad; onions and garlic to use in cooking; green peas, fava beans, and new potatoes to serve as vegetables; and cherries and apricots for dessert.

The last stop is a visit to either the butcher's or the *traiteur,* the caterer specializing in prepared foods. At the butcher's, the couple selects steaks to be panfried for a main course. On the butcher's recommendation, they have tried his rotisserie chicken, which they found to be excellent. When time is short, the caterer can provide further components for the evening meal. They relish his prepared seafood salads and pasta dishes. Both work as main courses, which the couple will supplement with vegetables, a salad, cheese, and bread.

## Major Foodstuffs

France is the premier wine producer in the world, responsible for a fifth of global production. As recently as the late 1930s, wine consumption averaged 45 gallons per person yearly, or the better part of a pint each day. Today, the average stands at about just under 16 gallons yearly, or less than one glass per person per day. Wine has long been practically synonymous with France, as a staple beverage and a symbol, along with bread, associated with the Catholic communion. For the French, wine sets off food, and vice versa; each brings out the taste and textures of the other to best advantage.

For centuries, bread was a staple of the diet, as well as a powerful religious symbol and symbol for life itself. White wheat bread has always been considered the most desirable. Recently, health concerns and the revival of artisanal bread making have created interest in whole wheat and in spelt, rye, and buckwheat. In the last 100 years, average bread consumption has declined from one to two pounds per person per day (historical estimates vary) to about three or four slices. Despite the radical decline in consumption, fresh bread appears on the table for almost every meal. Bread satisfies the French appetite—physical but also psychological—as nothing else can.

Despite the historical, symbolic, and psychological importance of bread, meat is now the centerpiece for most main meals and the cornerstone of the contemporary diet. France is the foremost producer of meat in the European Union, yet the country must import additional meat to meet demand for choice cuts such as chops, steaks, and roasts. On average, each person eats about 220 pounds yearly, slightly behind America and Australia as the biggest consumers of meat in the world. The French eat beef, lamb, goat, horse, pork, and game such as venison. Offal such as veal liver and veal, pork, and lamb kidneys is appreciated. France exports more chicken than any other country in the world. Other popular fowl are turkey and goose for holidays but also guinea fowl, capon, duck, and quail. Rabbit and hare are sold alongside fowl.

Fish and shellfish are popular, particularly in the coastal regions, where specialties vary by location. Markets across the country sell standbys such as cod, monkfish, salmon, sole, skate or ray, trout, mullet, and hake. The tradition of eating snails is



A sprawling vineyard in Alsace, France. France is the premier wine producer in the world, responsible for a fifth of global production. (Shutterstock)

ancient, while eponymous frogs enjoyed a surge in popularity during the 18th and 19th centuries. Neither snails nor frogs can be considered a staple of the modern diet, however.

In the past, *légumes à gousses,* or pulses, were staple foods. Peas and beans provided protein when eaten in combination with grains, contributing to a healthful diet with little or no meat. Today, pulses along with legumes are considered vegetables. Vegetables appear in the entrée course, as side dishes to a meat-based main course, and in salads. Orchard fruits and berries, both European and exotic ones such as bananas, mangoes, and kiwis, are eaten out of hand and as desserts. Fruits figure prominently in pastry making.

Cheese, like wine, immediately evokes France. Dairy products have long been cheaper than meat, while providing protein and, in the case of cheese, preserving milk over time. Today, the taste for cheese, milk, and cream is general. Cheese and cream are used in cooking and baking. Cheese appears as a distinct course in the typical meal.

## Cooking

Cooking at home was long the province of women. The education of women, their entry into the professions, and contemporary notions of gender equality have brought men, as well, into the home kitchen as cooks and nurturers for families and households. Nonetheless, nostalgia centered around home cooking retains an association with mothers and grandmothers. *La cuisine grand-mère* (grandmother's cooking) describes dishes thought to be old-fashioned and soul-satisfying, familiar and comforting, such as the simple dessert *compote de pommes*

(stewed apples) and homey meat stews. Traditional roles still continue in cooking outside the home. Despite the entry of women into the workforce and the prominence of a few female chefs, men dominate professional cooking.

In home kitchens, quick dishes have largely replaced the economical, slow-simmered soups or stews of past centuries. Modern cooking technology, affluence, and time pressures factor into this trend. Searing or sautéing, baking for items that do not require long exposure to heat, steaming for vegetables, and pressure cooking are preferred methods.

Supermarkets sell items suited to the fast cooking methods, such as fish in fillets, meat in fillets and chops, and produce that can be eaten raw in salads. Ready-made, prepared, and semiprepared elements further facilitate the task of cooking and serving meals at home. Bread is almost never made at home, although it is a part of nearly every meal. Other staples purchased ready-made include jams, yogurt, cheese, charcuterie, and mustard, used in vinaigrettes and as a condiment for meat. Home cooks take advantage of fresh preparations from specialty shops, such as a butcher's mixture of fresh, loose, raw sausage meat or ground pork seasoned with spices and herbs. At home, one simply spoons the flavored meat into hollowed-out tomatoes or zucchini, then gives the stuffed vegetables a turn on the stove in an inch of liquid or pops them into the oven. Minimal fuss yields a fresh, home-cooked main dish.

As in the United States, the media extension of food and cooking in France is vast and influential. Food shows appear on television. Web sites catalog and celebrate food and cooking. Food and cooking periodicals have multiplied. Formerly, families owned one or two cookbooks used as references. In contrast, recent years have seen a marked increase in the sale of books on French cooking but also on the cuisines of Thailand or Japan and on foreign foods, such as British muffins, Moroccan tagines, and the Chinese stir-fry. The phenomenon indexes the social prestige of food connoisseurship in the affluent society.

## Typical Meals

Three meals each day is typical in France. This pattern has been common across the population since the mid-20th century. Through the late 19th century, eating schedules varied widely to reflect the profession, region, and income of individuals; season and religion also played a role. Elites might eat twice daily and manual laborers up to four times each day; however, the pattern was inconsistent. Now, school and work schedules are arranged in broad synchrony. Most people eat meals at about the same time, resulting in a strong shared feeling of the day's rhythm.

The *petit déjeuner* (breakfast), eaten in the morning before school or work, is insubstantial. Adults drink café au lait, heated milk mixed with strong, hot, brewed coffee. A section of baguette spread with butter, jam, honey, or Nutella to make a *tartine* is eaten along with the coffee. For a treat, pastry such as a croissant replaces bread. Children drink hot chocolate. Adults wishing to avoid caffeine stir powdered roasted chicory root into their morning hot milk.

A main meal, eaten at noon or in the evening at about 8 P.M., or both, has a typical structure: Dishes appear in a succession of separate courses. An entrée, or first course, might consist of a potage (soup), a plate of crudités (raw vegetables) served with an oil and vinegar dressing, or a cooked salad of warm lentils or carrots. This is followed by a *plat principal,* or main dish. The main dish usually contains animal protein: meat, poultry, fish, shellfish, or eggs. Home cooks prepare sautéed chops with a light sauce made from the pan juices, a chicken stewed in wine, or a grilled or baked fish. Eggs appear as an omelet flavored with chives or bits of *lard* (fat bacon). The main course may be accompanied by a cooked vegetable, potatoes, or beans. Afterward comes a green tossed salad, a cheese course (some substitute yogurt as a lighter alternative), and perhaps a fruit or sweet to finish. Bread is placed on the table throughout the meal, and people take a slice or break off a piece of the loaf as desired. For a main meal, portions are relatively small. The



Cooking the traditional French summer stew. (Shutterstock)

appetite is not overwhelmed by the succession of different edibles.

Because both men and women work outside the home, dinner is often the only weekday meal for which the whole family can gather together. In this case, to accommodate busy working schedules, the luncheon may well consist of a sandwich eaten on the run. For children, an effort is made to serve a full meal at noon, either at the school canteen or at home if it is feasible for the child to return over the lunch recess.

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**Ratatouille (Summer Vegetable Stew)**

This is a typical entrée for cooking and eating at home.

7 tbsp olive oil

1 lb zucchini and/or yellow crookneck squash, sliced into rounds

2 green or red peppers, seeded, membranes removed, and sliced

1 eggplant (about 1 lb), cut into 1-in. cubes

1½ c chopped onion

2 tbsp chopped garlic

2 lb tomatoes, halved and seeded

6 sprigs thyme, leaves stripped from the stems

6 tbsp chopped parsley

8 tbsp chopped basil

Salt

Ground black pepper

Heat 2 tablespoons of the olive oil in a large skillet over moderate heat. Sauté the zucchini about 6 minutes until lightly browned. Using a slotted spoon, transfer to a large bowl.

Add 1 tablespoon of oil to the skillet, then sauté the sliced peppers for 5 minutes, and transfer to the bowl.

Add 3 tablespoons of oil to the skillet, then put in the eggplant. Stir to prevent the eggplant from sticking to the pan. Cook until the eggplant is soft, light-colored, and smooth in texture (about 8 or 9 minutes). Add to the bowl with the other vegetables.

Pour the last tablespoon of olive oil to the pan, and sauté the onion and garlic for about 3 minutes, watching carefully to prevent them from browning much. Add the tomatoes, thyme, and half the parsley. Simmer for 10 minutes. Return all the vegetables in the bowl back into the pan with the tomatoes, stir gently to mix, and cook for 10 more minutes. The vegetables should be cooked through and tender but not mushy.

Take the pan off the heat. Stir in the rest of the parsley and the basil. Season with salt and pepper. Serve hot, cold, or at room temperature.

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***Poulet Aux Poireaux* (Chicken with Leeks and Tarragon)**

This is a typical entrée for cooking and eating at home.

2 large leeks

Salt

Ground black pepper

6 individual chicken breasts on the bone

2 tbsp unsalted butter

2 tbsp olive oil

4 c chicken stock or white wine

1 tbsp chopped fresh tarragon

Cut away the bearded root and tough, dark green end of the leeks. Slit the leeks in half lengthwise and wash them under cold running water, removing any dirt trapped between the leaves. Slice the leeks thinly.

Salt and pepper the chicken breasts. Heat the butter and olive oil in a large skillet over moderate heat. Cook the chicken skin side down until brown (about 10 minutes), then turn and cook 5 minutes more. Transfer chicken to a plate.

In the same pan, sauté the leeks until soft. Add 3 cups of stock and the tarragon. Bring the liquid to a simmer and cook until stock reduces by about half.

Return the chicken to the pan, and add the remaining cup of stock. Bring to a simmer, then reduce the heat to medium low and cover the pan. Cook until the chicken is done, basting occasionally with the pan juices (about 15–20 minutes).

To serve, ladle the sauce and leeks over the chicken. Serve with rice or noodles.

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Balance and harmony are sought when planning a meal. The French palate prefers rich, deep flavors over sharp or spicy ones. Edibles seek complements. A course or finished dish is more than the sum of its parts. For a summer entrée, crisp peppery radishes are balanced with creamy dairy butter spread on bread and finished with a sprinkle of salt. For a main dish, the clean acidity of tomato and the aroma of aniseed complement the marine flavors in a fish soup. Durable combinations of flavors and textures are sought. A hot main dish may be followed by a crisp, cool salad. The mixing of sweet and salty flavors within a single dish is unusual. Sweets appear at the end of a meal.

A sense of leisure and conviviality is prized as integral to meals. This is true across the population. The French value sociability and community. Eating is considered a convivial activity par excellence. The community aspect of meals strengthens social ties and expresses shared values. The family meal or meal with friends or colleagues is a central feature of daily life, despite circumstances that mitigate against it, such as fast-paced work schedules and larger numbers of people living alone.

In addition to the main meals, two smaller meals are served primarily to children. For the *collation du matin* (morning snack) at about 10:30 A.M. and the after-school or late-afternoon *goûter,* at about 4:00 P.M., children eat a tartine, a piece of fruit, or a yogurt, and in the afternoon perhaps a pastry. Adults may take a coffee or tea break and in the afternoon eat a light snack such as fruit or yogurt, although snacking between meals is otherwise frowned upon.

## Eating Out

Eating at home is the norm, yet traditions of eating out go back centuries, and the practice is typical. In the Middle Ages, especially in urban areas, people purchased foods from street stands and boutiques. They ate out in taverns and inns and at *tables d'hôte,* which featured meals served at common tables, at fixed times, and with a single menu, giving diners hot food but no choice in the matter of what they ate. Establishments calling their products and then themselves *restaurants* emerged in France in the 1760s. Here, the diner ate at a private table but in a public venue, choosing foods and beverages from a menu, or list of what the kitchen offered, for a price.

With the spread of industrialization in the 19th century came inexpensive restaurants where workers could eat a full meal in two to four courses but without breaking the bank. The end of the century saw the development of the extensive *cantine* or cafeteria system in businesses and schools. Today, many French employees eat their daily noon meal in the *restaurant d'entreprise* (in-house work cafeteria). As a separate or a substitute benefit, they receive *tickets* (restaurant coupons) from their employer. Schoolchildren who cannot return home for the noon meal eat in the school canteen.

Today, the average person eats 120 meals outside the home each year, or one meal out approximately every three days, and spends just over a fifth of his or her total food budget on eating out. The French eat outside the home less frequently than residents of some nations with a comparable standard of living, such as the United Kingdom. Yet the trend from

about 1970 has been to spend less on food to be prepared and consumed in the home. The modern trend to eat outside the home results from affluence but also from the fast pace of life and the incursion of work into mealtimes.

The prominent restaurant culture offers extensive choices for eating out. Bistros and brasseries, formerly associated with beer brewing, tend to offer an informal dining experience. Restaurants serving foreign cuisines reflect the presence of the dominant immigrant groups in France, such as Algerians, Moroccans, Vietnamese, and Chinese. In the cities, restaurants serve cuisines hailing from Tibet to Peru, attesting to the influence of the global economy, migration and immigration, and the interest in foreign cultures associated with travel. A renowned feature of the French restaurant scene is the high-end *restaurant gastronomique,* with its refined, complex cooking. An equally remarkable element of the French restaurant scene is the general availability of a reasonably high-quality meal. The system of apprenticeships for cooks under the early-modern trade guilds, and the development in the 19th century of organized cooking schools, contributed to the robust tradition of professional cooking and *restauration.* In turn, the French population maintains high expectations, looking for an advantageous ratio of *qualité* (quality) to *prix* (price) when eating out.

Eighteenth-century Paris saw the rapid rise not only of restaurants but also of urban cafés. Cafés provided a meeting place for people from all walks of society, as well as a space to read newspapers and debate the latest in politics and the theater. The café remains an institution in French life, as a welcoming spot to drink coffee or an aperitif, eat a light meal, socialize, and watch people and the world go by. Cafés are widespread, although statistics from 2009 indicate that they are seeing a slow decline in popularity and in viability as businesses.

The media have extensively covered protests against fast-food restaurants, symbols for the French of the American way of life that is publicly deplored and highly controversial. Yet both French and foreign fast-food chains have been successful within France and continue to grow.

## Special Occasions

The care, interest, and enjoyment that the French bring to cooking and eating can add a certain reverence and revelry to nearly any meal. This is typical *savoir-vivre* (knowing how to live well) applied at the table on a daily basis. A holiday atmosphere prevails for the Sunday family lunch and at the dinner party given on a Friday or Saturday evening for close friends. These meals begin with a leisurely aperitif and feature the full sequence of courses. They center around a large dish such as a roast leg of lamb studded with garlic and perfumed with sprigs of rosemary, or a *pot-au-feu.* Pot-au-feu, or mixed boiled meats, yields a soup that appears as a first course. The succulent sliced meats are served as the main course, along with pickles, horseradish, and mustard as garnishes. Holidays and special occasions have their rituals marked with particular foods. The holiday calendar attests to France's history as a strongly Catholic country but also its contemporary identity, which is officially secular.



Varzy, Burgundy: Preparing the festive lunch sponsored by the village to celebrate the national holiday on July 14, 2008. Méchoui, spit-roasted lamb typical of the Algerian Berbers, is the centerpiece. The meal includes ham and melon for an entrée, the lamb along with fried potatoes and beans, apple cake, wine, and coffee. The mix of local and naturalized exotic elements is typical. (Photo courtesy of Julia Abramson.)

The federal government mandates 11 holidays. July 14, popularly called Bastille Day, is the national holiday. The day brings tremendous collective celebration, including municipal meals, parades, fireworks, and outdoor concerts and dancing. Since *le quatorze* falls during the heat of summer when people turn out of doors, menus often feature grilled *merguez* (North African lamb or beef sausages), steaks, lamb chops, pork cutlets, spit-roasted fowl, and even whole spit-roasted pigs and lamb.

Like the other Christian holidays, Christmas, celebrated on December 24, was formerly a day of abstinence or fasting in Catholic France. Like nearly all holy days, it is now marked with a feast rather than a fast. The old lean dishes are replaced by festive foods that suggest prosperity and sensual indulgence but are now within reach of many wallets. Oysters and foie gras often appear as appetizers, despite the controversial status of the latter; the ancient practice of gavage, or force-feeding geese to produce the unctuous, silky, fatted liver, is held by some to be inhumane, by others to be a defensible part of the *patrimoine,* or cultural heritage. For the main course there is roasted turkey stuffed with chestnuts. Wines accompany the meal, with champagne saved for the dessert. Many families eat a *bûche de Noël,* or rolled cake decorated to resemble a Yule log. Traditional dishes vary by region, such as the group of 13 Provençal desserts based on local winter fruits, dried or preserved summer fruits, and nuts.

Epiphany, or the *fête des Rois,* demands a *galette des Rois,* or 12th-night pastry, a puff pastry shaped into a crown that may be filled with a semisweet almond paste. The Chandeleur (Candlemas) on February 2 and Mardi Gras (Shrove Tuesday) preceding Lent are marked with egg-, butter-, and oil-rich treats such as stuffed crepes, butter cookies, and, for Fat Tuesday, beignets (doughnuts). Easter brings a new round of celebrations with spring foods such as roast lamb, *blanquette de veau* or *blanquette d'agneau* (white stew with veal or lamb), and, in the south and on Corsica, roasted kid goat. Eggs, symbolizing renewal, appear in rich breads and pastries and in omelets, hard-boiled in salads, and baked whole into savory dishes. November 11, the Saint-Martin, marking the traditional end of the harvest season, is celebrated with a thanksgiving meal of roast goose and new wine.

New Year's Eve, *la fête de Saint-Sylvestre,* is as often spent with friends as with family. An elegant festive meal concludes at midnight with popping corks from champagne bottles to bring in the New Year. The meal repeats many of the Christmas foods. It may feature a roast beef or ham instead of a large fowl.

People used to observe their saint's day or name day as a religious holiday. Given the trend toward secularism and the emphasis on the personal in modern life, families and circles of friends now celebrate personal days such as birthdays and wedding anniversaries. Milestone birthdays are often celebrated with a large party for family, friends, and colleagues. The birthday person plays host and offers a formal celebration dinner served in several courses.

Progress through the old religious cycle of sacraments, including baptism, communion, and marriage, brings festive luncheons or dinners crowned by a pièce montée, or showy dessert. A typical example is the *croquembouche,* an assemblage of puff-pastry balls filled with cream or custard that are built up into a pyramid. At wedding feasts, like at feasts for Christmas and the New Year, foods are high-status items presented as elegantly as possible. Menus often include foie gras, lobster, roasted monkfish, and boned and stuffed fowl such as a guinea hen or capon. A dessert of layer cake or the pyramidal croquembouche includes champagne.

Since the 1990s a trend to revive traditional agricultural and regional celebrations has served to affirm local identity and maintain the sense of history. Most villages and small towns have a *fête votive, fête patronale, fête du pays,* or *kermesse* celebrating the town's patron saint. The festivals usually take place on a Sunday during the warm season (May through October). In the past, such celebrations marked the communal agricultural events of planting and harvest. Today, they are valued as community and civic events, and as a way of preserving and teaching about local customs from dress and dancing to gastronomy.

## Diet and Health

Variety has characterized the French way of eating since the end of World War II. The diet is relatively high in fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes, in addition to meats, cheeses, and other dairy products. The use of butter fats, animal fats such as lard and goose fat, and vegetable oils used to vary largely by region. At present, the broad preference for cooking with vegetable oils such as sunflower oil stems from their lower prices, on the one hand, and information about health benefits associated with unsaturated vegetable oils and the Mediterranean diet, on the other. Wine was long viewed as a healthful, strengthening beverage and in this sense was perceived as different from distilled alcohols. Despite this perception, rates of alcoholism and diseases such as cirrhosis of the liver were high through the mid-20th century. In this nation of wine drinkers, the *crise de foie* (liver crisis) was a classic complaint, extensible to nearly any malaise. The view that wine is healthful has not disappeared, but consumption has declined. Water is the most widely consumed beverage.

The French associate eating the full three-course meal with a sense of well-being and with good health. The structured family meal provides nutritional balance. It conditions daily eating while contributing to the highly valued quality of life. The benefits of eating the full three-course family meal are thought of in a holistic fashion. The American practice of counting calories and weighing portions would seem strange to most French. Rather, eating a broad selection of fresh foods is understood as key to *une bonne nutrition* or *une alimentation saine* (good nutrition, a healthful diet). And variety is precisely what characterizes the full meal with its complement of three or four different dishes.

Beyond nutrition, culinary quality and the appreciation of food are essential to the perception of eating well. Conviviality and social connection to family and friends are equally necessary ingredients. The respite imposed by the slow rhythm of the full meal cannot be discounted. People use the terms *équilibre* (balance), *modération* (moderation), and *plaisir* (enjoyment, pleasure) to name the salient features of eating well, and *harmonieuses* (harmonious) to describe the ensemble of practices that go into eating well. These ideas guide practical aspects of cooking and serving, such as determining the relatively small portion sizes for meal components.



A long-time French delicacy, foie gras is the liver of a duck or goose that has been fattened through the process of force-feeding. Although popular, the process remains controversial. (Shutterstock)

In the past, most health care was given at home, including for severe illnesses. Home cooks and cookbooks had a repertoire of foods for the sick, such as "pectoral" broths to strengthen the lungs. Today, there remains little concept of specific foods appropriate for the ill. Adjustments are made to the diet, such as excluding greens and salads, in favor of plain boiled rice and cooked carrots, until a stomach ailment has passed, or reducing protein on a daily basis in the case of a chronic kidney problem. To improve digestion, people take mineral waters

high in magnesium, salads, fresh fruits and vegetables, yogurt, or a drink of pastis (anise liquor).

The general health of the population is relatively good. To be sure, as in other affluent nations, abundance, the modern lifestyle, and agricultural and manufacturing practices create dietary dilemmas. For some, *grignotage* (snacking) replaces or augments the cycle of three daily meals. The sedentary lifestyle combined with an unbalanced diet contributes to rising levels of obesity and diabetes. Pathological behaviors related to eating and having psychological causes, such as anorexia and bulimia, are on the rise. Genetically modified foods and agribusiness practices are perceived as threats to health. Yet other indicators remain quite positive. The life span for women is more than 83 years, the longest in Europe. The national health system, which provides nearly universal access to high-quality medical care, emphasizes prevention. The state, which regulates health care, has stressed intervention, such as removing vending machines from public schools in 2005 to reduce young people's consumption of sugar, salt, and fat as empty calories in junk food. In France, the precautionary, preventive, and interventionist attitude plays a role in maintaining public health, while the shared strong emphasis on food culture enhances *la vie à la française*—the French way of life.

*Julia Abramson*

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# Georgia

## Overview

Geographically part of Asia yet professing Christianity, the tiny nation of Georgia has for centuries stood at the confluence of East and West. The capital city of Tbilisi (Tiflis) was situated on the major trade routes between the Caspian and Black seas and in the 19th century was celebrated as the Paris of the Caucasus for its elegance and sophisticated tastes. Thanks to the country's agricultural riches and long tradition of hospitality, Georgia has long been an object of desire for outsiders.

The Georgians date the beginnings of their culture to the sixth century B.C. The ancient Greeks established colonies along the Black Sea coast in a region they called Colchis. In 66 B.C., when the Roman general Pompey invaded and brought the area under Roman rule, Greek control came to an end, but the outposts in Colchis remained important links in the trade route to Persia. Tbilisi was founded in the fifth century A.D. According to legend, King Vakhtang Gorgaslani, on a hunt near the Kura River, killed a pheasant, which he retrieved fully cooked from the hot springs where it had fallen. Toasting his good fortune, Gorgaslani vowed to create a city on this auspicious site. He called it Tbilis-kalaki, or "Warm City" (hence the name Tbilisi; outside of Georgia, the city was known as Tiflis into the 20th century).

Following a mid-7th-century invasion, Tbilisi fell under Arab control, and between the 8th and 11th centuries the city was controlled successively by Arabs, Khazars, and Seljuks, even though the populace remained Christian. By the early Middle Ages Tbilisi had become a major stopover on the medieval trade routes, a midpoint between the Muslim East and the Christian West.

As an important stopover on the trade routes, Tbilisi both benefited and suffered from repeated waves of migration and invasion, each of which left its traces on Georgia's cuisine. By the late 16th century, the country was effectively split in two, with western Georgia falling under the Turkish sphere of influence and eastern Georgia politically part of northwestern Iran. Repeated attacks by the Persians, the Turks, and Muslim tribesmen in Dagestan finally caused the Georgians to turn for help to Russia, their mighty Christian neighbor to the north; in 1801 Russia incorporated Georgia into its empire. The Russian presence in Georgia lasted until 1918 when, following the October Revolution, Georgia declared its independence. But in 1921 Bolshevik troops invaded, and once again Georgia was incorporated into the empire of its more powerful northern neighbor, this time the Soviet Union.

Until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Georgia existed as a constituent republic of that country, with its economy dependent on the Soviet system. Georgia's citrus fruits, fresh vegetables, herbs, tea, and wines found a ready market in Russia and the other Soviet republics, and the Georgian economy flourished. When the Soviet system collapsed, the country suddenly experienced severe economic distress, which was exacerbated by political conflicts in the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These conflicts have led to continued unrest. In 2005 Russia embargoed Georgian agricultural products, including citrus fruits and the Borzhomi mineral water



Weighing section at a tea factory in Chakva, Georgia. Under Soviet leadership, Georgian farmland was collectivized. The region specialized in growing such export crops as tea, citrus fruits, and grapes, making farmers dependent on importing such necessities as meat and grains. (Library of Congress)

that provided an important source of export revenue; in 2006 Russia extended the embargo to Georgian wines, claiming that they had been adulterated. This move was, in fact, political retaliation for Georgia's desire to ally itself with the West by seeking membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union; the Russians were further displeased by the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil project and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzerum natural gas pipeline, both of which bypass Russian territory. Nevertheless, Russia's attempts to control Georgia must be seen in historical perspective, as the Russians are only the latest in a series of outsiders to covet this rich land.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Georgian society is rapidly changing, but until the 21st century most families followed traditional patterns of eating. Even urban dwellers had country cousins or a small plot of land outside the city to supply them with fresh produce and meat, by necessity organically grown, as there was no money for chemical fertilizers. Because there were no mega-supermarkets, people frequented local specialty purveyors or the central farmers' market in their town for items they could not produce themselves. Typical of this largely self-sufficient way of life is the Lataria family, Guram and Gulisa, who, until being forced to relocate due to the war with Abkhazia, lived in the town of Khobi, near the Abkhazian border. Today, the Latarias live in Tbilisi, where they run a beautiful guesthouse. In Khobi their table was always amply spread with vegetables harvested from their backyard garden; in Tbilisi they shop at the city's produce markets, where they have developed close relationships with purveyors who set aside their best produce, meats, and cheeses for them.

Their daily breakfast is leisurely, featuring shimmering yogurt made from water buffalo milk, aromatic orchard fruits (plums and apricots in summer, apples in the fall), and crusty bread baked in a *toné,* a tandoor-like clay oven. Lunch typically consists of a soup or stew—perhaps a tart summer lamb soup with eggplant, green beans, and handfuls of fresh herbs, or spicy *kharcho* (meaty soup) seasoned with the classic Georgian spice mixture, *khmeli-suneli.* Dinner is the grand meal of the day, especially when guests are present. The table is laid with an array of local specialties like cabbage, carrot, and eggplant slices stuffed with walnuts, spices, and pomegranate seeds; *adzhapsandali,* a ratatouille-like mélange of eggplant, peppers, potatoes, and tomatoes; *khachapuri,* the famous Georgian cheese bread; chicken *satsivi,* which is roasted, then topped with a sauce of ground walnuts; boiled kid; and *gomi,* a cornmeal pudding. Bread again accompanies this meal. Although supermarkets now offer packaged bread, most Georgians still prefer the traditional *shoti* and *lavash* baked in a toné. In Khobi, Guram and Gulisa had a toné in their backyard; in Tbilisi they buy bread from a traditional bakery or at the farmers' market.

### *Adzhapsandali*

Adzhapsandali is a spicy Georgian vegetable medley, like ratatouille with a bite.

*Serves 6*

1 small eggplant (1 lb)

1 large boiling potato

1 medium onion, chopped

2 tbsp vegetable oil
1½ lb ripe tomatoes
1 medium green pepper, seeded and chopped
3–4 garlic cloves, minced
3 tbsp minced dill
3 tbsp minced cilantro
3 tbsp minced parsley
3 tbsp minced basil
¾ tsp salt
¼ tsp paprika
¼ tsp cayenne (or less, to taste)
Freshly ground black pepper to taste

Pierce the eggplant, and bake in a preheated 375°F oven for 35 to 40 minutes, until soft. Allow to cool.

Meanwhile, boil the potato in salted water until just tender. Cool, then peel and cube.

Sauté the onion in the oil until soft.

Drop the tomatoes into boiling water and cook them until soft, about 10 minutes. Drain, then force through a sieve to make a puree. Add the tomato puree to the onion, along with the chopped green pepper and the minced garlic. Simmer uncovered for 10 minutes, until slightly thickened.

Peel the eggplant and cut it into cubes. Add the cubes to the tomato mixture along with the cubed potato. Stir in the remaining ingredients and heat gently for 5 minutes more. Cool to room temperature before serving.

## Major Foodstuffs

Remarkably, through all the invasions, sieges, and subjugations, Georgia has maintained a strong national identity and a distinctive national cuisine, even though the presence of so many outside rulers and visitors inevitably introduced foreign ways. Georgian food is reminiscent of both Mediterranean and Middle Eastern tastes, the result of a rich interplay of culinary ideas carried along the trade routes by merchants and travelers alike. Some borrowed practices are easily recognizable. The pilafs of southeastern Georgia echo those of neighboring Iran, and the meats simmered with fruit are similar to variations of Persian *khoresh* (stew), though to yield the tart taste they prefer, the Georgians more often stew meat with sour plums or pomegranates than with sweeter fruits like quinces or prunes. Many savory dishes are flavored with khmeli-suneli, Georgia's aromatic mixture of ground coriander, basil, dill, summer savory, parsley, mint, fenugreek, bay leaf, and marigold. Like the turmeric used in curry blends, the dried marigold petals—known as Imeretian saffron for the region where the flowers are grown—add a rich yellow cast to many foods; their use may reflect a culinary legacy from the Moguls. The prized Georgian *khinkali*—the overstuffed boiled dumplings of the mountainous zones—reveal the culinary influence of Central Asian Turks. Along the Black Sea coast in western Georgia, the stuffed vegetable *tolmas* resemble Turkey's various dolmas. But the Georgians never developed a taste for the elaborate oriental sweets from Turkish, Persian, or Armenian kitchens; instead, they limit dessert mainly to fresh fruits and nut preparations.

Not yet fully documented is the kinship of Georgian food with that of northern India. The ruling Moguls of northern India invaded Georgia in the 13th century. The correspondences in culinary terminology between contemporary Georgian and Hindi are especially notable in a language like Georgian, which is not even Indo-European but South Caucasian, an entirely separate linguistic group. The Georgian word for bread, like the Hindi word, is *puri;* and the Georgians use the toné for baking bread and roasting, much as Indians of the Punjab use the tandoor. The Georgian *tapha,* a special pan for making the succulent, flattened chicken *tabaka* that is so emblematic of Georgian cuisine, is related to the cast iron skillet, or *tava,* of northern India.

But differences often reveal more than similarities. What most distinguishes Georgian cuisine from that of its neighbors is the use of walnuts, not merely as garnish, but as an integral component in a wide variety of dishes. To offset what might otherwise be a cloying richness from the nuts, many recipes call for a souring agent. Yogurt (*matsoni*), pungent cheese, and immature wine (*machari*) often serve as counterpoints

to ground walnuts; vinegar or fruit juices and fruit leathers similarly lend balance. Marigold lends an earthy depth to Georgian dishes and sets them apart from those of other culinary cultures. For instance, cinnamon and vinegar regularly flavor meat in the Georgian diet, just as they do in Middle Eastern cuisines, but marigold rather than true saffron adds the distinctive touch.

Other differences are visible in the staple foods. Where Persian cooks turn to rice and Armenians use bulgur, Georgians rely on wheat and corn. And instead of the legumes typically found in the Middle East and the Mediterranean—lentils, chickpeas, and favas—Georgians favor kidney beans, like corn a New World crop. Walnuts predominate over pine nuts and almonds. So well loved are walnuts that many standard dishes prepared without nuts, such as the spicy beef soup kharcho or the chicken stew *chakhokhbili,* often include walnuts in their western Georgian renditions. Freshly pressed walnut oil provides a necessary supplement of fat, as do the rich *suluguni* and *imeruli* cows' milk, served in place of butter with cornbread in western Georgia.

Stretching as it does from the Black Sea nearly all the way to the Caspian, the Republic of Georgia has numerous climatic zones, from the mountainous to the subtropical. Western Georgia, bordering on the Black Sea, endures high precipitation and steamy temperatures. Here, tea and citrus fruits thrive. Eastward the climate grows progressively drier, until sere Central Asian winds buffet the plateaus to the east of the Likhi chain. This hot, dry atmosphere produces the lush stone fruits and grapes of the Kartli and Kakheti provinces. The boundary between east and west is also visible in the relative degree of spiciness in the food. Eastern Georgians prefer a cool, fresh taste, thanks in part to their hot, arid summers, while western Georgians add generous amounts of fresh and dried hot pepper to their food, consuming nearly twice as much as eastern Georgians. A second difference lies in the western Georgian preference for corn over wheat. Here, *mchadi,* or corncakes, are prepared instead of puri. In the mountainous regions, when wheat flour is scarce, the roots of wild plants are first dried and then ground for use as bread additives, creating a rather coarse, though tasty loaf.

As is evident from their reliance on such ingredients as corn, peppers, and beans, western Georgian cooks put crops originating in the Americas to good use. Another transplant from the Americas, the tomato, is highly appreciated by eastern and western Georgians alike. Kartli, the eastern province in which Tbilisi is located, is known for its orchard fruits, especially apples and peaches, the best of which come from the environs of Gori, where dictator Joseph Stalin was born. The local markets abound with seasonal golden lady apples, pink gooseberries, red and black currants, many varieties of plums (sweet and sour; purple, yellow, green, and red), apricots, pears, berries, sweet cherries, and sour *shindi* or cornelian cherries, the juice of which Georgian warriors once drank before battle to fortify their blood. Mounds of dried fruits and locally grown walnuts, almonds, and hazelnuts are available year-round.

## Cooking

Georgian dishes evolved naturally from the produce available, and traditional methods of preparation have hardly changed over the years; high tech does not yet have a solid place in the Georgian kitchen. To an extraordinary degree, Georgians still integrate the outdoors into their lives when they cook and eat. Grilling remains a preferred way to cook meats in Georgia—recalling the Promethean legend: Prometheus is said to have given fire to mankind when he was chained to a rock on Mount Elbrus in the Caucasus. Georgians frequently cook not only meats and vegetables but also breads and stews over an open flame.

A second standard method of preparing food is by slow cooking, and Georgian cuisine has an extensive repertoire of soups and stews. The heat remaining in the toné after bread baking is used for dishes like *purnis mtsvadi,* lamb braised slowly in a clay pot. In western Georgia, *chkmeruli* (fried chicken) and corncakes are baked in special red clay dishes called *ketsi,* which range in diameter from 6 to 12 inches. The use of ketsi is another way in which the Georgians continue to practice time-honored cooking methods. This technique can be

traced back to the ancient Egyptians, who stacked earthenware pots filled with food atop one another to seal in moisture—creating an oven, in effect—before baking the food over an open fire. Today, in urban apartments, the foods traditionally prepared in ketsis can successfully be made indoors on the cooktop.

Perhaps the single most important implement in the Georgian kitchen is a mortar and pestle for grinding nuts and spices. Although many affluent families now have food processors, the best Georgian cooks swear by labor-intensive hand-grinding, which yields the finest texture.

Bread is still baked in the traditional round toné, for which a very hot fire is made from dried grapevines on the oven floor. By the time the flames die down, the sides of the oven have been coated with black ashes, which soon turn white, indicating that the oven has reached the proper temperature. Salted water is then splashed against the sides of the oven to test the temperature. When it instantly sizzles, a metal lid is placed over the burning vines. Water is sprinkled onto old ashes to make a rather dry mix that is spread over the lid to cool down the fire. The baker then runs a piece of wet burlap along the sides of the toné to clean it of ashes. Ovals of dough are sprinkled lightly with salted water and slapped directly onto the inside walls of the oven. The bread bakes on one side only. When it is done, taking less than 10 minutes in the first round of baking, each loaf is secured with a hook before being removed from the oven wall with a spatula.

## Typical Meals

The most typical and distinctive Georgian meal is the formal feast, or *supra,* which is organized at the slightest excuse—a birthday celebration, a good report card, or the arrival of a guest. The supra is a ritual affair that calls for the skillful exercise of moderation in the face of excess—no small feat, considering the meal's extravagances. The shared table is meant, above all, to promote a feeling of kinship and national unity. Centuries of gathering around the table to affirm long-standing traditions have helped the Georgians preserve their culture even under foreign subjugation. The supra represents the collective public face the Georgians proudly present to the world even as it reflects the honor of an individual household.

The rules for commensal celebration are strict. Most important, a *tamada,* or toastmaster, is chosen to orchestrate all but the most informal meals. This practice may have evolved from the ancient Greek custom of choosing a symposiarch to guide the progression of the feast. The role of the tamada is taken very seriously, and he is accorded great respect, for it requires skill to keep all the guests entertained, ensure that the meal is proceeding apace, and see to it that no one drinks or eats to excess, as drunken guests bring shame on the host. The best tamadas are renowned for their wit and eloquence, including an ability to improvise. The tamada guides the company through a series of toasts, which can be brief or complex. Each calls for downing a glass of wine. Georgians do not sip, and drinking out of order or at random is not allowed. A *merikipe* is appointed to make sure that diners' glasses are filled at all times.

The rules of the Georgian table call for uplifting toasts, so that each occasion, even a sad one, becomes an affirmation of life. Traditionally, toasting begins with glasses raised heavenward in acknowledgment of God's presence. Then the host family is toasted, particularly the lady of the house responsible for the meal. The tamada's ability to pace the evening is crucial. Each time a toast is pronounced, whether by the tamada or someone else, wine is drunk as a mark of honor. But if inebriation seems likely, the tamada must slow down the succession of toasts. The traditional meal is punctuated by breaks for entertainment, often a cappella singing, a holdover from medieval patterns of feasting when entremets were actual diversions.

Given such ritualized drinking, the apparent chaos of the food service can seem surprising to outsiders. Courses are not always presented in the fixed order of the *service à la russe* that western Europeans, and later Americans, adopted in the 19th century, and which still prevails in Europe and America today. By contrast, the Georgian style of service is intended to dazzle the eye and pique the



An old man serves as the tamada at a funeral in Osetia, Georgia. (AFP | Getty Images)

palate through contrasting colors, textures, and flavors. When diners sit down to eat, the table is already laid with a wide variety of dishes. As the meal progresses, the hostess does not remove serving plates that still contain food but rather continues to pile new dishes on the table, balancing some on the edges of others, so that by the end of the evening the table is laden with a pyramid of plates, ensuring plenty at every stage.

### *Georgian Wine*

If food is the heart of the Georgian feast, then its spirit resides in wine. For a Georgian, wine evokes both culture and community. Based on evidence of grape pips unearthed from archaeological sites, viticulture is an ancient art in Georgia, practiced as early as the fourth millennium B.C. Scientists believe that the species *Vitis vinifera,* the original wine grape, is native to the Caucasus region, and many linguists consider the Georgian word for wine, *ghvino,* the prototype for such Indo-European variations as *vino, vin, wine,* and *Wein.* The grapevine symbolizes life and faith, a belief that Saint Nino of Cappadocia adapted to Christian doctrine when she introduced it to Georgia in the fourth century. Bearing a cross plaited of dried vines and tied with her own hair, Saint Nino seemed to represent divine approval for the winemaking that had been practiced for centuries. The vine and the cross became inextricably entwined, each an object of devotion.

The center of wine growing in Georgia is Kakheti, in the eastern half of the country. The region is known for its traditional method of winemaking, which differs considerably from standard European practices because it is so labor-intensive; it is dying out as a commercial process. After the grapes are pressed, the juice is fermented together with the

skins, stems, and seeds to yield distinctive wines of a lovely, deep amber hue and a raisiny taste with a hint of Madeira.

Traditionally, wine was made in large, red clay amphorae known as *kvevri.* Nearly every Georgian country household has a *marani,* a place where the temperature remains cool and steady. Here, the kvevris are buried up to their necks in the earth. If the house lacks an earthen cellar, the kvevri are buried directly in the ground outdoors. To make wine by the Kakhetian method, the freshly pressed juice, along with the skins, stems, and seeds, is poured into the buried amphorae and stirred four or six times a day for three to five months. The resulting new wine is called machari. When the wine has achieved the desired degree of fermentation, it is drawn off from the lees. If produced commercially, the wine is transferred to oak barrels to age for at least a year, but homemade wine is usually ladled by means of a special long-handled gourd from the first kvevri into smaller ones for aging. These kvevris are topped with a wooden lid, then sealed with mud. Dirt is mounded all around the lid to keep air out, lest it spoil the wine. Whenever wine is taken off from a kvevri in any quantity, the remainder is transferred to progressively smaller vessels.

Some Georgian families still use special vessels to bring wine to the table, such as the *chapi,* a two-handled jug with a squat neck and bulbous body tapering to a narrow base. From this transitional vessel the wine is poured into a variety of other containers intended either for pouring or drinking. Quite common are a single-handled pitcher and the more elaborate "mother jug" (*deda-khelada*) composed of a central pitcher with several smaller pitchers affixed to the sides, like a mother with numerous breasts.

The most widespread red wine grape of Georgia is Saperavi, which, depending on its treatment, can yield wines ranging from dry to semisweet. For white wines, the indigenous Rkatsiteli grape makes nicely acidic wines with a fresh, green taste. Both varietals predominate in Kakheti's Alazani River valley, which lies between the high peaks of the Greater Caucasus to the northeast and the foothills of the Tsiv-Gombori Range to the southeast. They are made into wines bearing such controlled appellations as Mukuzani, Kindzmarauli, and Tsinandali. Today, artisanal producers like Mildiani make some extraordinary wines that blend ancient traditions with modern technology.

## Eating Out

The great 19th-century Russian poet Alexander Pushkin once said that "every Georgian dish is a poem." Similarly, nearly every occasion offers cause for celebration. Most gatherings still take place in private homes, although since the collapse of the Soviet system a lively restaurant culture has developed in Tbilisi. Most villages and towns feature at least one hole-in-the-wall café offering tasty local food such as khinkali, the famous oversized dumplings that are a specialty of taverns along the old Georgian Military Highway. As soon as the weather turns nice, Georgians like to gather for impromptu picnics, even just by the roadside. They consider al fresco dining the best way to eat, a chance to appreciate nature while consuming its gifts. Georgians also enjoy street food. Appealing stands along the Black Sea coast offer corn on the cob, which is either grilled or boiled to order. The national fast food is khachapuri, a cheese-filled bread that comes



Khachapuri, a cheese-filled bread that comes in a variety of shapes and sizes and national fast food of Georgia. (Sergey Zavalnyuk | Dreamstime.com)

in a variety of shapes and sizes. One specialty is the Adzharian version, *adzharuli khachapuri*—an open, boat-shaped loaf brimming with fresh sheep-milk cheese, with a still-runny egg baked on top. It is a meal in itself. To eat it, a piece of crust is broken off and dipped into the near-liquid cheese in the center of the loaf.

***Khachapuri***

Most cafés sell the appetizer khachapuri made with yeast dough—Georgia's answer to pizza. At home, baking soda, a European import, or yogurt is often used to tenderize the dough, resulting in a rich, flaky pastry.

*Serves 16*

2 c unbleached white flour

½ tsp salt

12 tbsp cold butter, cut in pieces

2 eggs

¼ c plain full-fat yogurt

1¼ lb mixed Muenster and Havarti cheeses

1 egg yolk, beaten

Put the flour and salt in a medium bowl, and cut in the butter until the mixture resembles coarse cornmeal. Beat 1 egg, and stir in the yogurt, then add to the flour mixture. Form into a ball, and chill for 1 hour.

Grate the cheeses coarsely, beat the other egg, and stir it into the cheese. Set aside.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease a large baking sheet. On a floured board roll the dough to a rectangle about 12 x 17 inches. Trim the edges. Spread the cheese mixture over half the short side of the dough. Then fold the other half over to enclose it. Roll the extra dough on the edges up over the top and pinch the edges decoratively to seal.

Transfer the bread to the baking sheet and brush with beaten egg yolk. Bake for 50 minutes, until nicely browned. The bread is best served slightly warm, cut into small squares.

## Diet and Health

Throughout most of Georgia's history, meat was a luxury, so the Georgians took great advantage of copious fruits, vegetables, and herbs. The bulk of the Georgian culinary repertoire is made up of preparations for vegetables, both cultivated and wild. Over 100 varieties of such wild greens as sarsaparilla, nettles, mallow, ramp, and purslane are still gathered in season and prepared in a surprising number of ways—cooked, marinated, dried for seasoning, or steeped in water for a nutritious drink. But above all, the Georgians enjoy their greens fresh, and no Georgian table is complete without a large platter of leafy cilantro, dill, tarragon, parsley, basil, summer savory, and peppery *tsitsmati,* or falseflax (*Camelina sativa,* similar to arugula). Often there is also *dzhondzholi* (Colchis bladdernut, *Staphylea colchica*), an edible ornamental plant with long stems of tightly furled, beadlike tendrils redolent of garlic. The greens, which are rich in nutrients, provide a refreshing counterpoint to the heavier foods in the meal.

These foods are washed down with wine and local mineral waters like Borzhomi and Nabeghlavi, which have long been touted for their health benefits. To diners used to the mild taste of Perrier or Pellegrino, these waters seem heavy and salty (so much so that Borzhomi is now bottling a Borzhomi Light), but Georgians have traditionally put them to therapeutic use in addition to serving them at the table. Certain foods are also considered especially nutritious. The benefits of yogurt have been touted by Madison Avenue in ads featuring the long-living inhabitants of the Caucasus. Georgians more frequently prescribe *khashi,* a much-loved tripe soup, for digestive problems; it is also a favored hangover remedy when consumed early in the morning following a drinking bout. The marigold petals used in place of saffron are also said to aid in digestion, while *nadugi,* the delicious whey derived from cow milk and often served mixed with fresh herbs, is virtually fat-free and is considered a sclerosis preventative. The traditional Georgian diet is notable for its high amount of omega-3 fats, found in walnuts, walnut oil, and purslane. Purslane contains more omega-3s than any other leafy green vegetable.

The 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union ushered in an era of civil unrest and economic pressure. A new generation of Georgians is working to overcome the problems that still plague the country after so many years of dependence on the larger Soviet economy, which provided a ready market for Georgian produce and prepared foods. Although small-scale farms never died out in Georgia, there was plenty of industrial farming to supply the needs of the Russian market, and activists are now working to reestablish sustainable agricultural practices and revive the legendary wines that had either disappeared from the market or been restyled for the Russian palate. In the 21st century Georgia is a small country with a shattered infrastructure, but it is placing a good measure of economic hope on fairly traditional, organic agriculture.

*Darra Goldstein*

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# Germany

## Overview

Germany is situated in the middle of the European continent: east of France, west of Poland, north of Switzerland, and south of Denmark, between Slavs and Romans, cold and heat, sea and mountains. Over the course of history it has been enormously influenced from all sides—one could even say it is composed of those influences. Although Germany is not particularly large (in terms of land area, it is slightly smaller than Montana), its culture is very complex. In addition to geographic, climatic, and religious reasons, this is mainly due to migrations throughout history, with new peoples bringing their foods and foodways with them, as well as the fact that until the declaration of the German Empire in 1871, Germany was composed of countless small individual kingdoms, fiefdoms, and free cities. This made for a variety of regional cuisines. Unlike, for instance, its neighbor France, Germany has no single national, overarching haute cuisine, not even a national dish.

When industrialization reached Germany around 1850, compared with almost a century earlier in England, the effects were far-reaching. In the process, agrarian Germany was quickly and thoroughly urbanized and came to rely more and more on "modern" food industries. As 19th-century industrialization gave way to 20th- and 21st-century globalization, German food culture shifted once more to contend with worldwide food trends. Despite heated debates about the rights and wrongs of fast food versus "real" food, world cuisine versus home-style regional cooking, food scares, and one of the highest standards of living worldwide, culinary Germany today at last seems to have reached a more balanced normality.

Germany is no agricultural idyll—with more than 81 million inhabitants it is densely populated, thoroughly urbanized (72% of Germans live in towns of more than 10,000 inhabitants, 32% in large cities of more than 100,000), and heavily industrialized. Although the general standard of living is high, differences in income are rising steadily. Competition is steep because of the European single market as well as imports from non–European Union countries. With strong trade unions, labor is expensive and, in spite of high unemployment, difficult to find (today, viticulture and asparagus cultivation, for instance, would be unthinkable without foreign workers from Poland and Russia), which leads to further attempts to increase efficiency through concentration, mechanization, and rationalization.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Petra and Jan are in their mid-thirties and live with their children Paul, seven, and Maria, three, in a leafy Berlin suburb. Jan comes from Hamburg; Petra is a Berliner. They are both architects, running an office in the center of town together with a colleague. Since they are freelance, their income varies quite a lot, but they have learned to adapt to that and prefer to forgo long, expensive vacations rather than stint on food. Like many other Germans, they make a big shopping trip with the car to a large supermarket once a week, mostly on Friday afternoon, to stock up on basics like flour, sugar, cereals, yogurt, ice cream, frozen pizza, dried pasta, canned tomatoes, and the like, as

well as mineral water, beer, and fruit juice. Petra used to have a subscription to have a box of fresh vegetables delivered every week from an organic farm not far from Berlin, but recently going to the farmers' market in their neighborhood has become a family ritual on Saturday mornings. Here, they buy vegetables, fruit, eggs, bread, meat, and cheese from the vendors they have come to know and trust, after which they meet friends for a coffee and a pastry. During the week, they tend to combine shopping with driving to work and dropping the children off at school and kindergarten. For fresh food like bread, milk, and vegetables, they frequent an organic store that is situated near their office, and on their way home, they often stop at a small independent wine shop. Both Petra and Jan remember many more independent butchers and bakers from their childhood, and for special occasions like dinner parties with friends they sometimes drive to one of the few remaining ones. On the whole they feel that shopping has become much more relaxed since shop hours are no longer strictly regulated. Until the end of the 20th century, shops had to close at 6:30 P.M. on weekdays and 1 P.M. on Saturdays, and were completely closed on Sundays and public holidays. As they often worked late before having the children, a small store run by a Turkish family was frequently their last resort, as those shop owners tended to take their time closing up. Now most stores stay open until 8 or 9 P.M. (6 P.M. on Saturdays), and some are even open on Sundays.

## Major Foodstuffs

Bread is arguably the most significant German food. The traditional multitudinous variety of bread and rolls is based on different grains (wheat or rye, pure or in all possible mixtures with oats, spelt, buckwheat, linseed, and millet), coarse or finely ground flours, and varying fermentation methods (sourdough or yeast) and baking methods, as well as shapes and seasonings in the form of nuts, seeds, or spices, all developed through specific regional conditions. All over Germany, darker, whole-grain breads have seen a renaissance during the last decades through the organic and health movements. For breakfast, fresh rolls are for many people almost a necessity.

Next to bread, potatoes are the most important staple food. Although the potato repertoire includes ever more finished products like chips, fries, dumplings, ready-to-serve fried potatoes, or dried mashed potatoes, Germans still see themselves as potato eaters and distinguish between *fest, halbfest,* and *mehlig kochend* (waxy, semiwaxy, and floury) varieties. Broadly speaking, in the north, potatoes are regarded as a staple food, a starch in the same league as rice or pasta, traditionally served with every warm meal on principle. In the south, however, they are treated as a vegetable. Potato soup is perhaps the most German of all soups, sometimes refined with cream and often served with small rounds of *Frankfurter* or *Fleischwurst* (a larger type of scalded sausage).

### ***Kartoffelsuppe* (Potato Soup)**

1 onion, diced
2 tbsp bacon, diced
2 tbsp butter
1 carrot, diced
1 small leek, sliced
2 tbsp celeriac or celery, diced
1 tsp dried marjoram
Sea salt
White pepper
Nutmeg
1 lb floury potatoes, peeled and diced
1 qt water
½ c heavy cream (optional)
Fresh parsley, chopped

Sauté onion and bacon in butter until translucent, adding carrot, leek, and celeriac or celery after a little while, together with seasonings. After some minutes, add potatoes, cover, and let cook for 10 minutes. Add water, and bring to a slow boil. When vegetables are soft, add cream, if desired, and puree the soup in a blender to the desired consistency—it should not be too smooth. Serve with parsley and possibly sliced frankfurters.

Dumplings are found mostly in southern and central Germany. In their countless versions and variations, they are comparable to the multitude of pasta shapes and uses in Italy. They are made from flour and/or potatoes. Confusingly, they are occasionally called *Nudeln* (noodles), which also designates Italian-style pasta, also widely consumed in Germany (15.65 pounds per person in 2006). Rice is not grown in Germany but has long been imported. German stores carry all the usual varieties of mostly Italian and Asian rice, with risotto being very popular.

Pork is the favored meat of Germans, although since World War II, beef and poultry consumption has risen with affluence and health awareness, and mutton and goat meat are slowly gaining ground. *Schlachteplatte* is the German version of Alsatian *choucroûte,* combining all kinds of salted and boiled pork cuts, served with sauerkraut and boiled potatoes. In spite of the low pork prices of today, *Schweinebraten* (pork roast, frequently a leg) with crackling crust is still considered something special in the southeast, whereas beef is more common in the north, center, and west. Panfried meat patties that are called *Buletten* (in Berlin), *Frikadellen* (all over Germany), or *Fleischpflanzerl* (in Bavaria) are very popular eaten warm or cold, often as a snack with beer. Ground meat is also made into all kinds of dumplings served in sauce.



Sausages served with sauerkraut, a popular German dish. (Shutterstock)

Following the same model as sugar, poultry was once considered a high-prestige item, but its consumption has soared with cheaper, industrial production. Erstwhile festive dishes like *Hühnerfrikassee* (chicken fricassee) are still popular but have become much less special. Offal can be everything from a lowly substitute for "real" meat to an expensive delicacy. Although the gusto for eating steak in modern Germany rivals Texas or Chicago, there is no particular tradition for raising and maturing beef that corresponds to that in the United States. Veal is often panfried as *Schnitzel* and roasted as *Kalbshaxe* (shank). Although venison is widely available and affordable today—also with imports of farmed venison from New Zealand—the meat of roe, red, and fallow deer, as well as wild boar, is still seen as special, and a venison roast is a marker for festive occasions. Besides that, *Gans* (goose) and *Ente* (duck) account for a large part of festive winter roasts and often take pride of place on Christmas dinner tables.

The variety of sausages and ham in Germany is overwhelming and dominated by pork. Ham and sausage are mostly eaten as cold cuts with bread, but some varieties are also served warm. Very broadly speaking, *Wurst* (sausage) in the north tends to be made from raw meat. In the south, many sausage varieties are made from finely cut meat, possibly with larger pieces of ham or pickled tongue added afterward, and scalded in a fashion similar to mortadella or bologna. *Würstchen* (smaller, individual sausages like frankfurters) are served heated and whole, often in pairs. All over Germany, sausage is also made from cooked meat, often seasoned with marjoram and/or onion. *Leberwurst* (liver sausage) is always spreadable, resembling chopped liver. Ham is mostly made from pork leg or shoulder and smoked or cooked; some types are boiled or baked, as the climate permits air-drying only for smaller sausages rather than larger cuts like in Italy or Spain. There are versions matured on the bone and deboned varieties like *Schwarzwälder Schinken* from the Black Forest.

Germans are not great fish eaters, consuming only about 30 pounds per capita annually, about a sixth the amount of meat consumed. Although with

modern transportation, fresh and frozen fish of all international varieties is readily available throughout Germany, northerners still consume more than southerners. Most offerings today come from aquacultures around the world. Of the fish consumed in Germany, 85 percent is imported, and *Lachs* (salmon) is as common as chicken. *Karpfen* (carp) is perhaps the most traditional fish dish and still plays a role on special occasions, especially those historically related to fasting. *Salzhering* (salted herring) today mostly survives as *Matjes* (caught young and fat).

Dairy farming is generally highly industrialized. Except for a very small number of estates that, under strict controls, offer untreated *Rohmilch* (raw milk) and *Vorzugsmilch* (special milk) for sale, milk in Germany (by definition cow milk; other kinds have to be designated as such and do not play an important role) has to be pasteurized and most often is homogenized as well. Milk is still seen as a healthy product, important for infants and children, whereas adults consume less than 0.53 pints per day. *Schlagsahne* (whipping cream) is used for cooking and eaten with cake. Yogurt in all its modern forms is a favorite for breakfast and snacks and seen as very healthy. In contrast to American-style cottage cheese (in Germany less common and called *Hüttenkäse*), *Quark* is smooth and homogeneous in texture with a more or less pronounced acidic tang. A multitude of regional names for Quark attest to its traditional importance in the daily diet. It is also used for *Käsekuchen* (cheesecake), which is either baked or made with gelatin, and combined with all kinds of fruit for desserts.

Germans eat 48.28 pounds of cheese per capita annually; the cheese ranges from industrial, rubbery slices to the most sophisticated imports from France and Italy. Traditionally, cheese is consumed on bread as cold cuts, but more and more it is also taking the place of dessert. German cheese culture was so quickly overwhelmed by industrial production at the end of the 19th century that it has only very recently begun to search for a distinctive character. A growing number of German dairy farms, predominantly small and organic, are developing new regional cheeses. Prior to industrial farming methods, butter was considered a luxury product. With the onset of modern technology, it became more affordable but kept its high reputation. Most German butter, which is always made of cow milk and rarely salted, tastes rather bland and is quite soft to assure good spreadability. Germans consume 14.77 pounds of butter per person per year, spreading it on bread and rolls with jam and cold cuts, as well as using it in baking and cooking. Until butter became widely affordable, most of the fat consumed was in the form of *Talg* (suet) and *Schmalz* (lard). Schmalz in Germany is made from the rendered flare, back, and belly fat of pigs as well as the much softer goose fat. It is still popular, often homemade, but also commercially available. Margarine, introduced as a cheaper butter alternative in the 1870s, now covers all sorts of lower-fat spreads and butter substitutes and is mostly promoted as a healthier alternative to butter. However, in that respect, it cannot beat *Olivenöl* (olive oil) in German kitchens. Olive oil is seen as very healthy and is offered at all price levels. Consumption of olive oil stands at 1.8 pints per person per year, which puts Germany significantly behind Mediterranean countries. Besides other seeds and nuts, *Mohn* (poppy seed) is especially popular in eastern Germany and is used for cooking and baking.

Eggs are used in pastries and desserts but are also eaten boiled or as scrambled eggs for breakfast, or as an alternative to meat. Today, consumption averages 290 eggs per person per year. However, eggs are constantly surrounded by concerns about production methods and scares about food safety, raw eggs now being considered very risky.

Vegetables in general accompany meat or fish as a side dish, are eaten raw as *Rohkost,* or are made into salads or soups. The proverbial Germanic preference for cabbage reaches back at least to the Middle Ages. Round white and red cabbages are traditional standard fare all over Germany during autumn and winter. Sauerkraut is found throughout Germany.

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***Kohlrouladen* (Cabbage Rolls)**

½ lb ground meat (half pork, half beef)

1 egg

1 onion, finely diced

Half a stale white roll, soaked in water or milk, squeezed dry, and torn into small pieces

Sea salt

Black pepper

1 tbsp parsley, chopped

2 small or 1 large head white cabbage or savoy cabbage

2 tbsp butter or lard

4 thin slices bacon

1 c water

1 tbsp dried porcini mushrooms

Mix the meat with the egg, onion, and bread, and season well with salt and pepper. Add the parsley, and divide into four parts. Cut cabbage(s) in halves, and cut out the core liberally, taking out enough of the heart of the cabbage as well to create a hollow for filling. Season cabbage with salt and pepper. If working with two small heads, fill each of the four halves with one part of the stuffing, fold gently to form rolls and tie with string. If using one large head, the halves first need to be gently separated into two layers. Brown rolls on all sides in butter, cover each with a bacon slice, add water and mushrooms, and cover and braise for about 1 hour. Serve with boiled potatoes. Optional: Cooking liquid can be slightly thickened with some potato starch.

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Besides cabbage, root vegetables such as beets and turnips as well as French beans play an important role. Legumes are seen as time-consuming to prepare and hard to digest and have never been as popular in Germany as they are, for instance, in India. For Germans they rather represented an answer to the problem of storage and winter food supply. *Spargel* (asparagus), however, is a national passion in Germany. It is cultivated in all the states, but Schwetzingen near Heidelberg and Beelitz southwest of Berlin arguably enjoy the highest reputation. Although the green version is now produced and eaten as well, and fresh spears are imported from Israel, California, and Peru in the off-season, asparagus in Germany is still clearly defined as white, something special, and strictly seasonal. Omnipresent today, albeit mostly in an industrialized, robust, long-life version, tomatoes count among the most popular vegetables. Bell peppers, eggplant, zucchini, and fennel are all common (mostly imported) and available year-round. *Kürbis* (designating both pumpkin and squash) has recently been experiencing a culinary renaissance, furthered by the offerings of organic gardeners growing smaller, more flavorful varieties. *Salat* (lettuce, although in German *Salat* also means salad) is omnipresent, with all the modern varieties available, increasingly also in ready-to-eat bags. Fresh herbs, most commonly parsley, chives, and dill, are used as a garnish, as well as in all kinds of dishes, and are widely available commercially in small bunches or pots. Cèpes/porcini, chanterelles, and bay bolete are seen as very special, either gathered privately or bought in the market, where they are often imported from eastern European countries.

As for seasoning, the salt shaker is an essential part of the table setting in Germany. More often than not it is joined by a pepper shaker or mill. Otherwise, spices are used sparingly compared with practices in other countries. Apart from salad dressings, vinegar is used in traditional cooking for purposes of seasoning, preserving vegetables and meat, or tenderizing. Mustard above all is an important accompaniment for all kinds of sausages. In the south, freshly grated, pungent horseradish often replaces mustard with boiled beef or sausages.

As with fresh vegetables, fresh fruit was deemed not very nourishing in the 19th century, and it was even more perishable than vegetables and thus difficult to store and transport. Consumption really picked up only toward the end of the 19th century. Today, Germans annually consume about 165 pounds of fresh fruit, about a quarter of which is produced in Germany, mostly around Hamburg and on Lake Constance, plus about 88 pounds of citrus fruit, much of it in the form of juice. Apples are probably seen as the most "German" fruit, with local varieties enjoying a revival, but strawberries are the great favorite (at least strawberry is Germany's favored yogurt flavor) and a symbol of spring or early summer. For jam—on buttered rolls or bread a

necessity for breakfast and often homemade rather than purchased—strawberry seems to top an enormous variety of other flavors in popularity.

Sugar in Germany is commonly white refined beet sugar. Brown, unrefined cane sugar is perceived by some as healthier although it is more expensive, and thickened fruit syrup is used in health food. However, as in other Western cultures, sugar generally has a negative image and is seen as a major culprit in obesity and related health problems. Artificial sweeteners are widely available, as are sugar-free diet versions of soft drinks and all kinds of food. Honey is spread on buttered bread as an alternative to jam and is used to sweeten herbal tea as well as in baking gingerbread for Christmas.

Although tea has a long tradition in the north, coffee is the hot caffeinated drink of choice in Germany. It is drunk at breakfast, during numerous breaks throughout the day, and especially for *Kaffee und Kuchen* (coffee and cake) in the afternoon. Italian espresso machines have become fashionable, but the standard is less concentrated *Filterkaffee* (filtered coffee), drunk with milk or condensed milk and sometimes sugar. International coffee chains as well as most bakeries offer take-out coffee in all the modern latte versions. With few exceptions, tea is prepared using bags of undifferentiated black tea, with various herbal types as a healthier alternative, lately joined by green tea and caffeine-free rooibos tea from South Africa, also available in a multitude of flavored versions.

Beer has been *the* German drink since ancient times. Today, an average of 274.84 pints per person are drunk annually, whether with meals or on its own, at home or in pubs and bars. Most beer today is bottom-fermented and sold in bottles, although draft beers are more highly valued by connoisseurs. *Pilsner* (frequently shortened to *Pils*) is almost a synonym for beer in the north and tastes in general much bitterer than the light *Kölsch* of Cologne. Brown *Altbier* is the specialty of Düsseldorf, and there are various local specialties like *Gose* in Leipzig or *Berliner Weisse,* both slightly sour wheat beers, the latter served flavored with a dash of red or green fruit syrup. In Bavaria, where beer consumption is the second highest (following Saxony), beer is considered a food more than an alcoholic beverage, and Bavarian varieties tend to be lighter than in the north.

Generally, wine complements beer in regional consumption, with the exception of the north, where spirits play a more important role in total alcohol consumption. Riesling is the most important variety of German wine in terms of quality. Traditionally, and in complete contrast to Roman culture, wine, produced in Germany at least since the first century A.D., was and to some extent still is drunk by itself, for instance, in the afternoon or after dinner, and in general does not require food as an accompaniment. Since the 1990s, Germans have developed a keen interest in all kinds of wines from around the world, as well as wine and food combinations. Wine service and wine lists in restaurants have become much better, and wine shops with a very good international selection are common now.



German amber beer being poured into a glass. (Shutterstock)

Around Frankfurt and in the southwest, traditional apple and sometimes also pear cider is made and mostly consumed locally like beer. Most spirits, commonly called *Schnaps,* are drunk in the north in the form of a clear grain spirit often flavored with juniper. They are often accompanied by beer. In the southwest, all kinds of fruits are distilled to make fruit brandy, of which *Kirsch(wasser),* a type of cherry brandy, is perhaps the best known.

In 2006 Germans drank 627.27 pints of alcohol-free beverages on average (up 3% from the previous year, and second behind Spain for all of Europe) and spent slightly more on them than on alcoholic beverages. Although tap water is perfectly safe everywhere and unchlorinated, today many prefer to buy bottled mineral water. Apple juice is a big favorite, followed by orange juice, often available freshly squeezed.

## Cooking

In Germany, as in most societies and cultures worldwide, the private kitchen where cooking and related tasks take place has traditionally been women's domain. According to a time budget study from 2001–2002, German women on average still invest one hour and six minutes daily in household tasks, of which 45 minutes are spent on food preparation. German men spend just 23 minutes daily on food preparation and directly related tasks like setting the table and washing the dishes. In families with children and working mothers, fathers contribute even less time, and almost half of the male population is being looked after by women. Young people show the same gender pattern, with 72 percent of young men between 20 and 25 years of age not getting involved at all in food preparation. At least there seems to be a tendency for retired (pensioner) couples to share food-related tasks more evenly. Obviously, these numbers would have been much higher in the past. The decrease in food-preparation time is related on the one hand to the availability and use of prepared food and meals—ever less is prepared from scratch or made into preserves—and on the other hand to the logistics and technicalities of the kitchen and its equipment.

In spite of the dominant pattern in which women are responsible for the food, cooking and eating are changing from a pure necessity to a freely chosen option of how to spend one's time. In the 1970s, men discovered cooking as a hobby with high prestige. Most of these *Hobbyköche* (hobby cooks) are not interested in the everyday routine of the kitchen but instead plan and produce complicated meals on the weekend. However, younger Germans have a more relaxed approach; they see cooking not as a task but as a trendy, relaxed, and delicious pastime of choice, to indulge in during free time or on the weekend. Meeting with friends to cook or inviting them for meals is a popular social activity. In recent years, cooking schools and courses have become very popular.

In German apartments and houses, the kitchen is seen as the second most important room after the living room: It is often described as the most used room, with the best atmosphere or feeling, and it is the room most used to receive visitors. Younger Germans especially use the kitchen in a very multifunctional way; many a party ends there. The *Einbauküche* (fitted kitchen) still is the ideal for the majority. However, most of them like to combine its functionality and technical potential with more *Gemütlichkeit* (homey contentment). Most people have at least breakfast in the kitchen, and often a separate dining room is used only for more formal or festive occasions or when guests are invited.

Germans love electric kitchen gadgets, and kitchens are generally fitted out well. Although many everyday dishes are made without consulting a recipe, cookbooks are deemed essential, with a multitude of cookbooks published every year, directed at all social groups, ages, and budgets. Most households own a liter measure as well as (electric) scales for baking, as recipes are given in (kilo)grams and (milli)liters.

The techniques used to prepare food in Germany are by and large the same as in other Western cultures. *Dünsten,* which is stewing in its own juice with a little fat and some liquid like wine, stock, or simply water added, is perhaps the method most commonly used for vegetables and meat. It combines dry heat for roast flavors with wet heat to tenderize and

yield some sauce. This is also the case with *schmoren* (braising), most often used for ragouts, goulash, and large cuts of meat: The meat is browned, and then some vegetables like carrots, celeriac, and onions are added and lightly sautéed as well before the *ablöschen,* when a little liquid is added. Then a lid goes on the pan, and the meat is slowly finished, often in the oven, where it yields the gravy deemed essential for a traditional "real" meal with dumplings or potatoes.

## Typical Meals

*Frühstück* (breakfast) is mostly eaten at home, consisting at its most basic of a hot beverage, more often coffee than tea, with milk and hot chocolate as alternatives, in particular for children, and some kind of starch. This can be—depending on the preference for sweet or savory—bread or rolls spread with butter, then topped with jam or honey, cheese, Quark (sometimes with herbs), sausage, ham, or, more luxuriously, smoked salmon. Sweet pastries are also popular as are various cereals with milk.

At school or at work, a break is taken during the morning around 10 A.M. It could be just a *Kaffeepause* (coffee break) for a cup of coffee and perhaps a cigarette. Schoolchildren might have a sandwich they brought from home, but in rural areas, where there is a greater number of manual laborers, more solid fare is consumed. *Brotzeit* might consist in Bavaria of *Weißwurst und Brezel* (scalded white veal sausages and a pretzel) or in Swabia of a slice of freshly baked *Leberkäse* (baked meatloaf) in a roll. Both might be washed down with a beer.

In rural areas and traditional households, *Mittagessen,* the meal around noon, is on principle a warm meal, and more importance is given to it than to dinner. At its most classic, Mittagessen consists of meat or fish accompanied by a vegetable and a starch, often preceded by soup or a salad and followed by a dessert like stewed fruit, yogurt, custard, or ice cream. A recent survey of favorite dishes among Germans aged 14 to 60 years produced a hit parade that is headed by global dishes like spaghetti Bolognese but dominated by regional fare like asparagus and sauerbraten.

Traditionally, meatless dishes, like soft-boiled or fried eggs on spinach with boiled potatoes, are served on Fridays, although today they are probably chosen by vegetarians rather than for religious reasons. In urban surroundings and among office workers, long breaks for an extended meal at lunchtime are rather unusual. Most people have time only for a snack—the business lunch offered by many restaurants is by definition quick. Sunday lunch tends to be a more sumptuous and family-oriented affair than meals during the week, often accompanied by a glass of wine.

In the afternoon, two very different in-between meals are possible. On the one hand, between 3 and 4 P.M., it is time for Kaffee und Kuchen, that is, coffee (or exceptionally tea, mostly in the north) and cake. On the other hand, a bit later, between 4 and 5 P.M., especially in the southern, more rural areas, *Vesper* or Brotzeit is taken after the day's work, traditionally between the day's work in the fields and the evening milking of the cows. This cold snack can consist of all kinds of sausages, ham, or brawn (headcheese-like sausage); bread, rolls, or Brezeln; sliced and salted long white radish (in Bavaria); and/or cheese, and it is often accompanied by beer or wine.

*Abendessen* or *Abendbrot,* the evening meal, can either be cold, resembling the afternoon snack, or warm, above all on days and occasions when lunch has been cold. It tends to be structured similarly to a warm meal at lunchtime but will probably evolve in a more leisurely fashion and be eaten in a larger group, with family or friends. This is the occasion for enjoying food and drink in a relaxed way.

Table manners became much more relaxed in Germany during the last decades of the 20th century. However, some basics still apply. It is considered bad taste to start eating before the head of the family or the person of highest rank at the table says *Guten Appetit* (bon appétit), wishing all an enjoyable meal.

Roughly one out of every nine people in Germany is not of German heritage and thus probably eats differently, to varying degrees. The Turkish are by far the most numerous of this group, making up more than 25 percent of immigrants, followed by

immigrants from Asia (12.2%), Italy (8.0%), and Greece (4.6%). Most Germans are of Christian background, and Christian traditions still dominate foodways, although religious rituals, especially in urban surroundings, are superseded by a secular lifestyle. Only 0.013 percent of all Germans are Jewish, and their influence on the food available and consumed in Germany is hardly noticeable. Their number is currently increasing, however, because of Jewish immigrants, mainly from Russia.

## Eating Out

For most Germans, eating out in a restaurant is not just another everyday meal option but is widely regarded as something special. Generally it is a luxury to be indulged in only when the most important status symbols like a nice home, car, and vacations are already guaranteed. Although Germany is generally perceived as an almost-classless society, the strong opinions and delicate decisions about who eats out where and with whom, as well as anxiety about being at the "wrong" place or not dressed "right" for the occasion, betray the subliminal existence of a distinctive social hierarchy. In fact, the term *ausgehen* (to go out) still designates both eating out and entertainment such as concerts or the theater.

Whereas in West Germany until today schools tend to end around midday with no meals provided, day schools—and with that school cafeterias—used to be the norm in East Germany but are currently on the rise throughout the country. However, eating in cafeterias or schools is regarded as an unavoidable necessity when studying or working. The same applies for food in hospitals and nursing homes: Its quality obviously varies, but its overall reputation is bad.

But in general the profession of chef has become very attractive, with stereotypes changing from unreliable drunkard to star artist. New technical equipment has made kitchen work less physically demanding, and during the 1980s the almost exclusively male profession slowly opened up to include women, although they are still in the minority. Some German chefs are as much influenced by the Spanish chef Ferran Adrià and his futuristic cuisine, commonly called molecular cuisine, as their colleagues in other Western countries, but most of them are very aware of their origins and surroundings. They use all kinds of ingredients, elements, and styles but tend to integrate them into a regional culinary pattern, striving for a clear, straightforward taste. Beginning as a necessity for travelers, eating out in Germany has developed into a plethora of possibilities.

Hot food is served in most places during fixed lunch and dinner hours. It is the exception for German restaurants to do two seatings in the evening as is common in American cities, and guests decide for themselves how long to linger after the meal. Be it in the beer gardens in Bavaria, in the traditional *Ausflugsgaststätten* (gastronomic day-trip destinations) around the larger cities, or in their own gardens and on their balconies, Germans love to eat and drink outside. When the weather permits in the summer months, many German meals on the weekend revolve around the barbecue. Younger Germans and Turkish citizens flock to public parks for this occasion, loaded down with a grill, table, and chairs as well as victuals. However, the majority of Germans prefer to retreat to their private yards. Weekend barbecues are a good occasion to invite neighbors and friends, as they are much less formal than normal dinner invitations.

Café culture is not quite as developed as in the Austrian *Kaffeehaus,* but most cafés in Germany open in the morning and offer breakfast and some menu of simple hot and cold food all day long. Some double as a bar and stay open until late. Affordable, informal restaurants in Germany are often run by immigrants, and in spite of all regional influences, the chances of finding a pizzeria or a Greek or Asian restaurant are probably higher in most of Germany than those of coming across a traditional inn. Even in the southwest with its more indulgent food culture and higher density of restaurants of all categories, people love to go *zum Italiener* or *zum Griechen* (to the Italian or the Greek). Besides Italian and Greek restaurants, French, Austrian, Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese, Lebanese, Japanese (sushi), and many other ethnic eateries abound.

Until about a decade ago, with the exception of ice cream and food at fairs, eating while walking in the street was considered unacceptable behavior and was rarely seen. Drinking from a beer bottle in public was just one step further down the social ladder and a sure sign of a homeless person. Today, it is quite normal and socially acceptable to walk around German streets eating or with a drink in one's hand, although admittedly most take-out and street food is offered in busy city centers, in open-air markets, around large department stores, near tourist attractions, and in or around train stations, largely replacing the *Bahnhofsrestaurant* (train station restaurant) of old.

Today, fast food carries with it notions of fun and social freedom. It is an affordable alternative, especially for allowing young people to escape family restraints and meet with friends over a meal. Turkish *Döner Kebab* (meat on a vertical spit, similar to gyros), Lebanese falafel, Berlin *Currywurst* with French fries, and pizza dominate the offerings.

## Special Occasions

The differentiation between *Alltag* (everyday) and *Festtage* (holidays or special occasions) used to be much more marked in Germany. It was mostly based on Christian religious rules and prohibitions. One used to dress better, go to church, and eat differently and more sumptuously on holidays or special occasions. However, with the onset of industrialization and the dominance of mechanical production, new time patterns and eating groups emerged. New developments were furthered by general affluence: Modern wealthy people moved away from religious holidays spent with the family or a larger social group toward a more globalized and nation-transcending celebratory culture (witness the rise of Halloween in Germany, unknown until a few years ago), accompanied by a loosening of social taboos and peer pressures.

There are relatively few nationwide public holidays in Germany besides those celebrated on weekends. As religion plays less of a role in most Germans' lives, many originally religious holiday rituals survive as almost-secular events, including Christmas. Furthermore, the wide availability of most foodstuffs nearly throughout the year makes it difficult for distinctive food traditions related to holidays to survive. But even if the reasons might not be as clear as they once used to be regarding holiday fare, special occasions—which, of course, also include personal festivities such as birthdays or weddings, more official occasions like fairs, and private gatherings, mostly on the weekend—still include special food.

As a general rule that remains valid until today, however, holiday meals tend to involve larger gatherings than weekday meals and tend to be richer and longer, for instance, including a more sumptuous dessert. Sweet baked goods, such as pastries, cakes, and cookies, are the most obvious and continuing markers for special occasions in Germany. They range from a *süßes Stückchen* (sweet pastry), eaten as a private treat on the go, to Sunday afternoon cake, traditional Christmas cookies, and extravagant wedding cakes. Before private households were generally equipped with an oven, all the baking was done at a communal oven or at the bakery. Deep-frying pastries in lard was the housewife's alternative then and represents a category of its own, above all associated with Carnival time.

For most Germans the weekend is experienced as a short holiday, as the contrast between work and free time tends to be strongly felt. Friday night, Saturday, and Sunday, when most people do not work, are a highlight to look forward to. Besides household chores, gardening, do-it-yourself car and house projects, and larger shopping trips, these days are spent going out (Friday and Saturday are the busiest nights in German restaurants), meeting friends, or going on day trips to the countryside or other destinations.

Kaffee und Kuchen is the least formal way to mark a special event with a meal. Unlike most American cakes, German *Torten* tend to be somewhat lighter, favoring whipped cream and some buttercream over the popular American cream icing. The best-known German Torte, without doubt, is *Schwarzwälder Kirschtorte* (Black Forest cherry gâteau), at its best a glorious combination of chocolate sponge cake, tart cherries, Kirschwasser (cherry brandy), and freshly whipped cream. However, frequently

it is only a poor imitation of the real item, relying on cheap and longer-lasting buttercream and maraschino cherries.

Christmas undoubtedly is the most important holiday of the year, connected to special foods of all kinds. At its core, its present form goes back to the bourgeois families of the 19th century. It is still very much a rather quiet family affair, *eine besinnliche Zeit* (a time of contemplation), but also the occasion for a *Weihnachtsfeier* (Christmas party) at businesses and offices during the Advent weeks. During the whole Advent period, *Weihnachtsbäckerei* (Christmas baking) plays an important role. It is often an occasion for friends to gather, with children joining in the mixing and stirring and especially the cutting and decorating of cookies. The most traditional German Christmas cake is the *Stollen.* Looking at today's recipe, heavy with butter, almonds, and dried fruit, it is hard to believe that Stollen originally started as a cake for the Advent fasting period before Christmas. *Lebkuchen* (gingerbread) is rarely made at home. Its tradition goes back to when the crusaders brought exotic spices home with them. Marzipan (almond paste) is generally regarded as special. For Christmas it mostly takes the shape of *Marzipankartoffeln* (literally, marzipan potatoes), small balls coated in cocoa powder, or other imitations of fruits and vegetables. Christmas lunch on December 25 is for most Germans quite a grand affair, depending on personal means. Restaurant dining is more of an option than on Christmas Eve, but, for the most part, geese, ducks, or venison legs or saddles are roasted in private ovens, to be served with brussels sprouts or red cabbage.

A multitude of *Volksfeste* (fairs) all over Germany offer a mix of fun rides, amusements, and food and drink, the most important being Oktoberfest in Munich, which centers around huge amounts of beer and accompanying *Schmankerl,* hearty fare like grilled chicken and pork shanks.



Inside one of the many beer tents at Oktoberfest in Munich, Germany. (Shutterstock)

## Diet and Health

For most Germans, diet and health are closely linked. This could be traced back to the holistic approaches to medicine that were practiced in medieval times, and thus to its roots in India, where it is still alive in the Ayurvedic school. But with collective morality loosening, moral obligations have become more individualized and today include the obligation to eat right, that is, healthily.

Life expectancy in Germany is increasing; currently, it is at more than 75 years for men (of which more than 68 years are spent in good health) and more than 81 for women (of which 72 in good health). But it is still thought that nutritional knowledge is insufficient. Overall alcohol consumption is decreasing, and there is a trend toward eating poultry and fish instead of red meat, but fat consumption remains too high and not enough vegetables and fruit are eaten. Varying levels of education, financial means, and gender make for different patterns. The higher social classes and women have significantly better nutritional knowledge than the lower classes and men, respectively.

According to a survey conducted in 2003, 66.9 percent of all German men are overweight, with a body mass index (BMI) of 25 or above, including 17.1 percent who are obese, with a BMI of 30 or above. As in most Western countries, slimness is seen as an ideal and is projected as such in the media. In its most excessive forms, for instance, in fashion advertising, it is also publicly criticized. The link to eating disorders, which are seen as psychological in origin, is widely accepted. Seventy percent of girls between 14 and 15 years are thought to have a diet history. Indeed, diets are an ever-present subject in newspapers, magazines, and books.

Food production, preparation, and trade are strongly regulated in contemporary Germany. The *Lebensmittelrecht* (food law) is a federal law falling under the jurisdiction of both the Ministry for Consumer Protection and the Ministry for Health. Its main purpose is to guarantee food safety as well as a certain level of quality. Looked at rationally and put into a larger perspective, most food scares and scandals seem somewhat overblown when set against the actual casualties. Undoubtedly, objective food safety in Germany has never been as high as today, and the crisis surrounding bovine spongiform encephalopathy (mad cow disease), for instance, became a turning point in German food politics, as from that point transparency and organic agriculture were heavily promoted.

Genetically engineered food is a very controversial topic in Germany, where the first experimental plantings have only recently been allowed. Another discussion concerns ingredients seen as potential allergens or for those who are subject to lactose, gluten, and other food intolerances.

Insecurity and angst resulting from the inability to understand the often-complex interrelations between diet and health combine with a romanticization of supposedly pure natural food versus artificial human-made food. This has led to a rise in vegetarianism—these days about 8 percent of all Germans are vegetarians—as well as growing environmental awareness, apparent in a multitude of ecological groups, notable among them the Green Party.

But many today apply *gesunder Menschenverstand* (literally, healthy common sense) to seek a balance between human-scale artisanal and industrial perfection in food. Healthy alternatives take different forms for different people. Abstention from smoking, alcohol, and/or sweets during Lent (the weeks leading up to Easter) is not necessarily linked to religious practice. Homeopathic treatment is gradually being recognized by health insurers. Pharmacies expand to become health centers. Ayurvedic treatment is in, and yoga schools are booming. But most important is the growing market for organic and biodynamic food, led by small chains of organic supermarkets. Customers are mainly families with young children from the middle to upper classes, but generally, in spite of discussions about what is acceptable as such, the organic alternative, though not affordable for all, is seen as the better option for reasons beyond personal health.

*Ursula Heinzelmann*

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# Great Britain

## Overview

Great Britain is an island with a heavily indented coast situated on the northwestern continental shelf of Europe, with Ireland to the west. It contains three countries, England, Wales, and Scotland, which, together with the Province of Northern Ireland, make up the United Kingdom. Colloquially, Great Britain refers to the political unit of the United Kingdom as well as to the island. Global interaction through trade and empire has affected food and taken British ideas about it to former colonies. In the 1970s the United Kingdom joined the European Union, whose policies on agriculture have had a significant impact on food production.

The population of the United Kingdom is about 61,383,000; between 4.5 and 5 million are of Asian, Caribbean, African, Chinese, or other non-British origin. The country is heavily urbanized and industrialized and dominated by London as a source of new ideas.

Southeast Britain is a mixture of flat or rolling land and low hills; the west and north contain areas of low mountains, the highest just over 4,000 feet. Soil types are varied, reflecting a complex geology. The climate is temperate, although the west and north are significantly wetter. About 25 percent of agricultural land in Great Britain is arable, principally in southern and eastern England, and northward up the east coast into Scotland. In the west and north, the emphasis is on cattle and sheep.

Agriculture is intensive but fulfills only about 60 percent of the county's food needs and employs under 1 percent of the labor force. Processing, distributing, and retailing food are important sources of employment, as is catering. Food production generally is industrialized. Dependent on imports, both of raw ingredients and ideas, current food trends tend to be inspired by other cultures and subject to fashion, and they spread across the country in a few years. British food culture has changed markedly since the 1960s, as interest in dishes and ingredients from all over the world and a vibrant restaurant scene displaced an earlier reputation for plain, bland, poor-quality food.

The traditional diet is based on bread, potatoes, dairy produce, and meat. Regional ideas related to food survive but are nuanced and sometimes difficult to detect. More obvious is a reliance on imported food, including many tropical crops and fruit and vegetables. Migrant communities, cheap foreign vacations, media interest in food, and supermarkets' marketing strategies have influenced and altered eating habits significantly. Personal taste is important in food choice; ideas relating to health or to ethics about production systems and animal welfare are influential among some groups. Religion has a weak influence, except among minorities, for instance, those from religious backgrounds such as Hinduism or Islam.

Economics are important. Money spent on food as a proportion of income, and in real terms, has fallen over the past 50 years. It has also declined as a proportion of household expenditure. Food and drink accounted for about 25 percent of consumers' total spending in 1976 but in 2001–2002 was down to about 16 percent.



Fish and chips, a classic dish in Great Britain. (Shutterstock)

## Food Culture Snapshot

John and Kate Smith live in an outer suburb of London. John works in information technology for the local council and walks to work; Kate commutes into central London. Her journey takes an hour each way, and she sometimes works late, until 7:30 P.M. Neither was born in London. Like many of their friends, they have little time for shopping and food preparation and rely on the supermarket, take-out food, and eating out. Their weekly one-stop shopping trip includes bread, milk, tea, coffee, pasta, rice, breakfast cereal, fruit juice, yogurt, biscuits (cookies), cheese, margarine, and meat or fish, usually in portions—steaks, chops, chicken pieces, salmon steaks. Vegetables include peppers, tomatoes, onions, carrots, frozen peas, and prewashed salad in bags; they stock the fruit bowl with bananas, apples, and oranges or buy whatever soft fruit (strawberries, raspberries, blueberries) is on special offer. Pre-prepared meals, chilled or deep-frozen, also go into the basket.

On working days Kate rises at about 6:30 A.M. and leaves the house an hour later. John eats cereal or toast and drinks tea at home; Kate buys a pastry and a cappuccino at the station and sees this as a reward for early starts and long days. She packs a lunch; it might be sandwiches filled with cheese and chutney or cold roast chicken, or a salad based on pasta or rice from the previous evening. John eats a subsidized lunch in the work cafeteria. He tries to make a healthy choice from the salad bar but often ends up with chips (French fries) on his plate.

On weekday evenings, they eat dinner when Kate returns. They tried not to rely on expensive pre-prepared meals, but new or exotic-sounding dishes in the supermarket freezer are tempting. Otherwise, they favor pasta or rice dishes, quick-to-prepare heat-and-serve pizzas, or meat such as chicken portions baked in a ready-made curry sauce. When Kate works late, she often collects a take-out meal from a nearby Indian or Chinese restaurant on her way home, and they consume it with a bottle of wine while watching a cookery program on television. They rarely eat dessert or pudding during the week, except ice cream, fruit, or yogurt, although both are fond of biscuits and chocolate. On weekends they look through their collection of cookbooks and shop for fresh ingredients for more ambitious fish or meat dishes, or they make a Sunday roast of beef, lamb, or chicken, followed by apple crumble or a chocolate cake, or eat out at a favorite pub.

They would like to cook more and are conscious that their diet is reliant on processed food and tends to be high in fat and salt, but long working hours seem to leave little time and energy for this or for local shopping. There are few of these local shops left, although a street market still thrives about a mile away. This reflects a recent influx of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, and sometimes they look at the stalls and wonder how to cook cassava.

## Major Foodstuffs

Diversity is the only word to describe contemporary British food. The most obvious influence is multiculturalism, and cuisines from all over the world are raided for ingredients and techniques. The growth of vegetarianism, foreign travel, and the work of chefs and writers inspired by other cultures have influenced choices, as have changes in retailing and an intense media interest in food. The long-standing reliance on wheat, potatoes, meat (especially beef), and dairy produce was evident well into the 1970s, and these are still important, but their proportions in the diet have fallen, while intakes of poultry, rice, and pasta have risen.

Flour always means white wheat flour, unless otherwise stipulated, and products made from it are important sources of carbohydrates. It is used in bread, cakes, pastry, biscuits, sauces (for thickening), and many other items. Bread means white wheat bread, the popular choice, in the form of soft, oblong, thin-crusted loaves, sold presliced and wrapped. As toast or sandwiches, together with related products—rolls, buns, teacakes—it is the basis for snacks and light meals. Other important items are scones, crumpets or pikelets, and muffins (all types of griddle breads, i.e., what are called English muffins in the United States).

Breads made using continental European and eastern recipes are popular: croissants, focaccia, ciabatta, pita, nan (a flat, tear-shaped leavened bread), and chapati (thin, circular, unleavened bread); pizza is also common. Rich fruitcake made with flour, butter, eggs, sugar, and dried fruit, covered with marzipan and icing, is a celebration food. Cakes and pastry are treats and the basis for some puddings (desserts). Many types of sweet biscuits are made commercially and at home and are eaten with tea or coffee.

Oats are used in traditional baking and for breakfast porridge. Barley is important in brewing beer and making whiskey. Maize is little used, although its derivatives have numerous applications in the food industry. Other important cereal products are breakfast cereals, pasta, and rice; quickly prepared, they fit in with a perceived time shortage in British life and with growing tastes for Italian and Southeast Asian food.

Pulses are most popular as canned baked beans, usually eaten on toast. Dried peas and beans are used in soups, and interest in vegetarian and ethnic foods has stimulated interest in dishes such as dal, a staple of Indian cuisines, and hummus. Soybeans are less popular, although tofu is used to a limited extent.

For centuries meat has been eaten by all who could afford it, and nutritional theories about the importance of it as a protein source enhanced its status. Attitudes are also influenced by price, farming methods, and perceptions of health risks. Beef, lamb, and pork provided the basis for most main meals in the mid-20th century; poultry and game were luxuries. Chicken is now inexpensive and the basis of many routine meals, and beef and lamb have become more costly.

Roast beef is a dish for Sunday dinners; steaks are also, as a treat. Beef goes into stews, pies, burgers, and sauces for pasta, but veal is little used. Lamb or mutton (from older sheep) is also used as roasts, chops, or steaks, or in stews and in dishes inspired by French, Middle Eastern, or Indian cookery. Fresh pork is used for roasts or is grilled or fried as chops or steaks. Pork products include pies that are prepared with pastry made using lard melted into hot water and mixed with flour, filled with chopped pork and jellied stock. Fresh sausages are made from lean and fat pork, seasonings, and rusk. Salted, the meat becomes bacon and ham, the former essential for a traditional British breakfast and in sandwiches eaten as snacks or quick meals.

Chicken is cheap and ubiquitous. It is roasted, baked with a bought or homemade sauce, or made into stews, curries, or stir-fries. It is especially popular in curries developed by Indian restaurants, and one of these, chicken tikka masala, is quoted as the nation's favorite dish. Thai dishes, especially green chicken curry, are popular, too. Convenience foods, from supermarket versions of curries to heat-and-serve nuggets, use chicken as a base, and cold cooked chicken is used in salads and sandwiches. Turkey is mostly served roasted at Christmas but is also made into convenience products for a year-round market. Guinea fowl, quail, and duck are available, but consumption is relatively small, and goose is restricted to Christmas.

Game, once a high-status food, is widely available and compares well in price with farmed meat. Venison, hares, rabbits, pheasants, partridges, grouse, and several other bird species are all available in season. Offal (internal organs) from all meat animals is eaten but has declined in popularity over recent years. Beef, lamb, and chicken are used in curries, *kofta* (meatballs), and kebabs by ethnic minorities, especially Muslims from the Indian Subcontinent. Versions of these, and of Chinese-influenced stir-fries, have been adopted by the wider population.

Fish, another source of protein, has become less important. Cod, haddock, and herring, once important, are all overfished, and salmon, much farmed off northern Britain, is now relatively inexpensive and used in many routine meals with different sauces and flavors. The taste for smoked fish like kippers has declined, but smoked salmon, formerly a luxury, is easily available. Shellfish are popular but vary widely in price, with crabs, prawns, and mussels being relatively cheap, and lobsters and oysters expensive. Tastes generally have moved toward convenience. Fish products such as frozen fish fingers or fish cakes are popular. Commonly used canned fish types include salmon, tuna, sardines, pilchards, and anchovies.

Eggs cooked in various ways are a component of a full breakfast and the basis for light meals. They are essential ingredients in baked goods, puddings, and other dishes, as bindings, batters, food coatings, and pastry glazes.

Milk (mostly cow milk) and milk products are important, though changes in agriculture induced by European Union policies have increased interest in sheep and goat milks and their products. Liquid milk is available as whole milk (about 3.5% fat), semiskimmed, and virtually fat free, although consumption of it is declining. It is used as a drink, poured over breakfast cereal, and much used in cooking for sauces and custards.

Cream of various thicknesses is used in or to accompany many desserts and in cooking. Clotted cream is very thick and rich, a traditional product of southwestern England. Yogurt was virtually unknown until the 1960s but is now widely consumed, as are various dairy desserts such as ice cream, mousses, and *fromage frais* (a cultured semiliquid dairy product not unlike yogurt).

Cheese is eaten alone or as an ingredient. Cheddar is most important. Much cheese, especially the "territorials" (nine traditional recipes for hard cheese), is made in creameries (factories). Changes in the dairy industry led to the growth of artisan cheese making, and hundreds of recently developed cheeses, including sheep- or goat-milk ones, are now produced. Cheese is also imported, both from former colonies and from continental Europe.

Fats and oils include butter and margarine, spread on bread and used for frying and as ingredients, especially in baking. Choice is dictated by price, flavor, and perceptions of healthiness. Other solid fats include lard for frying and pastry, drippings (rendered beef fat, for frying), and suet in pastry and puddings, but these are losing importance and vegetable oils have gained ground. Olive, corn, sunflower, soy, and rapeseed (canola) oils are all used for frying and in dressings.

Vegetables are recognized as providers of vitamins and minerals but received little attention in traditional British cookery. Potatoes are most important, cooked in many different ways and popular as products such as crisps (potato chips). They are most important as a source of carbohydrates but are often eaten in large enough quantities to contribute useful amounts of vitamin C to the diet.

Green vegetables, mostly belonging to the cabbage family, are important. Beans and peas, whether homegrown, flown in from warmer countries, or frozen, are also popular, as is asparagus. Onions, celery, and garlic are important for flavoring. Carrots, turnips, and parsnips are winter staples, often added to soups or stews or used as accompaniments.

Mushrooms are usually cultivated, although an interest in wild ones has developed recently. Fresh salad leaves and herbs of many kinds are used, including the traditional English specialty of watercress. A taste for green cilantro is recent, stimulated by the taste for Indian and Thai food. Tomatoes and vegetables that were once highly seasonal or exotic, such as peppers, eggplant, zucchini, and squash, are readily available. Supermarkets have helped to develop the market for exotic vegetables. Some vegetables, especially onions and beets, are pickled in vinegar, and others are made into chutneys (spiced sweet-sour relishes). Tomato products are important in sauces and flavorings.

Fruit is consumed raw, cooked, and as juices or is made into sweet puddings, preserves, and jams. Apples are a quintessential British fruit. There are many varieties, but in practice only a few commercially successful ones grown in southern England or abroad reach the market. The best known is Cox's Orange Pippin. Some are grown specially

for cooking; these varieties, such as Bramleys, are acidic and used in sweet dishes such as pies and crumbles. Apples are also pressed for juice, and special varieties are grown for cider, which is always a fermented drink.

Pears are also grown for both eating and cooking. Many are imported, as are most species of stone fruit, though some plums and cherries are grown in southern England. Damsons (a small, acidic, juicy plum) grow well over much of the country but reach the market in relatively small quantities. Peaches, nectarines, and apricots are imported from continental Europe and further away.

Strawberries and raspberries are popular, both homegrown and imported. They are eaten with cream for dessert and are used for filling cakes and to make jams. Red and black currants are also used in desserts and jams. Gooseberries (*Ribes grossularia*) grow easily throughout Britain and are cooked for puddings. Pink forced rhubarb is a delicacy available only in the late winter and early spring.

Citrus species (oranges, lemons, limes, and grapefruit) are vital and have been imported fresh or preserved for centuries. Most are consumed raw, as fresh fruit or juice, or are used in desserts and some savory dishes. Lemons are especially important in flavoring sweet dishes such as lemon meringue pie, lemon curd, syllabub, mousses, and ice creams. Seville (bitter) oranges are grown in southern Europe for the British market and make orange marmalade essential for breakfast.

Other imported fruits include grapes, figs, melons, dates, bananas, pineapples, mangoes, papayas, kiwi fruit, avocados, and other tropical species such as lychees, some of which have a limited market among ethnic minorities. Fruit-based preserves are widely used, both alone and as flavorings.

Baking includes dried fruit: Sultanas, raisins, currants, prunes, dates, and candied orange, lemon, and citron peel are all essential for fruitcakes, traditional enriched breads, plum puddings, and mince pies. Nuts—hazelnuts, almonds, walnuts, Brazil nuts, pistachios, and pine nuts—are also essential. Almonds are the most important and are the basis for marzipan, which is used for decorating fruitcakes. Coconut is another popular flavoring.

Sugar is the principal sweetener. Cane sugar is imported from tropical countries; beet sugar is produced within the European Union. Its use in hot drinks, as a preservative for jams, and a bakery ingredient has declined, but soft drinks, processed food, and confectionery keep the intake relatively high. Corn syrup and other sweeteners are used in industry. Black treacle and golden syrup give characteristic flavors and textures to some baked goods. Honey is mostly used as a spread on bread and toast.

Vinegar is an essential souring agent and pickling liquid. Malt vinegar (made from malted barley), with a characteristic flavor and brown color, is used to pickle vegetables and eggs as well as in chutneys, and it is sprinkled over chips, fried fish, and other foods. Wine or cider vinegar is used for salad dressings and dishes in which a gentler flavor is required.

Spices of many types are widely used. In traditional cookery they are most important in sweet foods. Cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, and cloves are used in baking. Vanilla is used for flavoring sugar, custards, and ice creams, and ginger is used in biscuits and gingerbreads. Pepper is ubiquitous in sauces and stews, and a mixture of black and white peppercorns, mustard seeds, and whole dried chilies flavors pickling vinegar. Allspice and pepper occur in mixtures for salting meat. A little chili powder and mustard are often added to cheese dishes. "English" mustard is a fine, pungent yellow flour, mixed to a smooth paste with water to accompany cold ham and beef; milder coarse-grain mustards and French mustards are popular as well.

Curry powders, originally arriving with the East India Company, have been a part of British food culture for over 200 years. Recent immigration from India and Southeast Asia has brought new ideas about spice mixtures. Sauces and pastes, bottled or chilled, are sold as convenience products for use with meat, vegetables, and rice or noodles. Varieties include tikka or tandoori pastes and *rogan josh,* derived from Indian traditions, and Thai green curry paste. Chinese mixtures such as sweet and sour sauces and Italian-type cook-in sauces based on tomatoes, cheese, or pesto are also common.

Another British tradition is the use of bottled sauces such as Worcestershire sauce and mushroom

ketchup, used for savory dishes, and brown sauces such as HP, which is thick, sweet-sour, and spicy and is used as a table condiment, as is tomato ketchup. Commercially produced chutneys and pickles, soy sauce, and mixes for making gravy, stuffing, custards and other desserts, cakes, and breads are all to be found.

Hot drinks include tea, closely identified with British food culture. It is drunk with food, after meals, and any time in-between. Most is black tea of Indian origin, purchased as teabags. Coffee, mostly instant, is equally important. Chocolate-based drinks are also common, although consumed with less frequency, and chocolate confectionery (often very sweet and low in cocoa solids) is ubiquitous. Sugar confectionery is also widely consumed.

Alcoholic drinks are widely purchased, ranging from canned lager-type beers to artisan-produced real ales, including bitter, porters, and dark beers. Wine is mostly imported, though a small amount is produced in the United Kingdom. Of spirits, whiskey (closely associated with Scottish and Irish cultures) and gin (frequently consumed as an aperitif with tonic water) are perhaps the most typically British. Alcoholic drinks are also used in cookery, as liquids or flavoring agents. Bottled mineral waters and soft drinks, both as cordials for dilution and as carbonated products, are also widely consumed. Neither drinks nor confectionery are seen as food in the sense that meat, bread, and potatoes are, but, with the exception of mineral water, they contribute energy, and sometimes other nutrients, to the diet.

## Cooking

Domestic cookery was always considered to be women's work, and it is still largely a female




A traditional British pub in Cornwall. (Shutterstock)

responsibility to maintain basic stocks of food and put meals on the table at the expected time. However, men are more willing to cook than formerly, particularly for special occasions, and restaurant chefs are often men.

In practice, much cooking is now actually heating of purchased prepackaged meals. These have been developed by an innovative and powerful food-retailing sector exploiting a desire for convenience, long working days, a rise in car ownership, and a tendency to dislike or feel inadequate about cooking as a task. Ethnic minorities tend to have more obviously gendered and traditional food cultures and to adhere more to their communities' food traditions.

Despite this, kitchens are important rooms, often expensively fitted and equipped. Gas or electric cookers are usual, but ranges such as Agas have a following. Microwave ovens are common, usually supplementing conventional ones. Perishables are generally stored in a fridge. Small appliances always include a kettle, usually electric, for heating water for tea and other drinks, and a toaster or grill for bread. Ownership of cake mixers, bread makers, slow cookers, pressure cookers, espresso machines, spice grinders, rice cookers, food processors, juicers, and liquidizers depends on individual means and interests. Their presence does not always mean that they are used. Meals are often eaten in the kitchen, or in front of the television.

Basic kitchen utensils are similar to those from much of the Western world: pots, pans, casseroles, and roasting pans of various sizes and shapes. A traditional emphasis on baking means that most kitchens have bowls and pans for mixing and shaping cakes, pies, and tarts, as well as a wooden rolling pin for pastry. Scales are routinely used for measuring. Metric measurements are officially used, but imperial ones of pounds, ounces, and pints (20 fluid ounces) are still quoted. Nonindigenous communities such as the Chinese and groups from the Indian Subcontinent have brought their own utensils, and some of these are found in the wider British domestic sphere; the wok is probably the most widespread.

Recipes are as likely to come from television chefs, magazines, newspapers, or promotional leaflets as from previous generations. Quick and easy preparation is favored. Many basic raw ingredients can be bought in a semiprepared state, for instance, peeled potatoes vacuum-packed in plastic, ready-washed salad leaves, or trimmed and ready-cut beans or carrots, all reducing the time taken to cook a meal but not the expense.

Roasting is always the first choice for prime cuts of meat, such as beef sirloin, a leg of lamb or pork, and birds such as chicken or turkey. This usually takes place in an enclosed oven and is, more correctly, baking, but it is usually called roasting. Gravy, based on the sediment left by the meat in the roasting pan, often augmented by a packaged mix containing thickeners and flavorings, is an important part of a roast meal. The remains of a roast are often expected to provide one or two subsequent meals, eaten cold or reheated in various ways with or without sauces.

A perceived shortage of time means that steaks and chops, or convenience foods such as sausages, bacon, or burgers, are popular, grilled or fried. These methods are also used with fish. Frying is used for cooking eggs, as well as vegetables such as tomatoes, mushrooms, and potatoes, and also for reheating leftovers. Beef, pork, and chicken are now used extensively in stir-frying, and barbecues have become increasingly popular for cooking in summer.

Boiling is a common method for cooking vegetables. Braising or pot roasting is sometimes used for large pieces of meat. Poaching—cooking gently in water, milk, or wine—is often used for fish, with the cooking liquid being used in a sauce (fish pie is usually this type of recipe, topped with mashed potatoes). Meat is often cooked in casseroles and stews, usually flavored with onions, herbs, and sometimes other vegetables. More complex methods and seasonings derived from southern European or Indian cookery, or marinades or sauces, either home-prepared or purchased, are used by more ambitious cooks. Fish and vegetables are also cooked this way, as are beans for vegetarian dishes.

Baking is a traditional culinary strength. Until the 1970s, the making of bread and yeast products varied across the country as to whether this was carried out at home or by a professional baker. The

further one was from the southeast and metropolitan influence, the more likely this was to be practiced at home, and the more varied the products, with numerous regional types of bread rolls and buns. Soda bread, leavened with baking powder, is regarded as an Irish specialty, and *girdle* (griddle) baking as characteristic of Wales, Scotland, and the northernmost part of England.

Cakes and other products raised with baking powder were frequently made at home and still are, though in smaller quantities. There are numerous recipes for fruitcakes, sponge cakes, tea breads (plain cakes of the banana-loaf or date-and-walnut type), scones, gingerbreads, and biscuits, all enormously popular. They were eaten as snacks, offered to guests, and served for evening teas; now, they are more likely to be occasional treats or are made when guests are expected.

Another branch of sweet cookery in which the British have a long interest is making puddings or desserts. Pudding can refer to any sweet item eaten at the close of a meal, including fruit or ice cream, but it also denotes a cooked dish, often some combination of fruit with a sweetened cereal mixture. Typical examples are crumbles (apples, rhubarb, gooseberries, or any other fruit with a topping of flour, butter or margarine, and sugar); fruit baked under a cake or gingerbread mixture; concoctions of fruit, custard, and cream; or suet puddings, now best known as Christmas plum pudding, but also including sweetened mixtures of suet, flour, and fresh fruit, spices, or jam. Pastry is used for both sweet and savory dishes, mostly pies of fruit or meat. A basic short type is often made at home, but puff pastry is usually purchased ready-made.

Home preserving has been rendered less important by the year-round availability of frozen or imported fresh fruit but was another traditional skill, and many people still make small amounts of sweet fruit preserves. Orange marmalade is perhaps the most characteristically British of these items.

## Typical Meals

Food is organized into several named meals. Breakfast begins the day; lunch is always a midday meal, although older people and those from provincial and rural backgrounds sometimes refer to this as dinner. This word implies the main meal of the day, once routinely taken at midday but now much more likely to be an evening meal. Those who eat dinner at midday call their evening meal tea—not to be confused with afternoon tea, which is essentially a snack between lunch and a midevening dinner.

Breakfast eaten at home on a working day is usually a snack of fruit juice, coffee or tea, and breakfast cereal with milk or yogurt, or toast with butter or margarine and jam or marmalade. On weekends or vacations, especially if staying in a hotel, breakfast is often a cooked meal. Fried bacon and eggs are most important in this; sausages, black pudding (blood sausage), fried bread or potatoes, mushrooms, tomatoes, and baked beans are added in any combination, and toast and marmalade are expected as well. Alternative cooked breakfasts include eggs in various forms and fish such as kippers or kedgeree (a mixture of smoked fish, rice, and fried onions, derived from Indian *kichri,* a mixture of rice and lentils).

Lunch depends entirely on individual means, tastes, and schedules. Sandwiches are probably most common; light meals of salad, soup, or a pastry-based snack are also common choices, but in practice the meal can range from a chocolate bar and a drink to an elaborate meal of several courses. Dinner is the largest meal. British food culture contains



A typical breakfast in England including blood pudding, baked beans, bacon, eggs, and sausage. (Shutterstock)

the notion of a "proper meal" or a "cooked dinner." At its most basic, this is meat, potatoes, and vegetables. A sweet pudding often, but not invariably, follows. The savory course could stand as a meal on its own but not the pudding.

The idea of a proper dinner is most developed in the "roast"—roast meat, gravy, roast potatoes, and boiled green vegetables, closely associated with Sundays, although less of a ritual than it once was. The format is relatively stable. Accompaniments are Yorkshire pudding, horseradish sauce, and mustard for beef; mint sauce for lamb; and applesauce and sage and onion stuffing for pork, which is cooked to ensure the skin makes crackling. Pudding for Sunday dinner is often trifle, a layered dish of wine-soaked sponge cake, fruit preserves, custard, and cream.

**Roast Beef and Yorkshire Pudding**

About 5 lb beef sirloin or rib, preferably from a traditional breed fed on grass

Salt, pepper, and a little dry mustard powder mixed with about 1 tbsp flour

**For the Pudding**

4 oz (1 scant cup) all-purpose flour

Pinch of salt

2 eggs

5 fl oz milk and 5 fl oz water, mixed

Dust the fat of the meat with the flour mixture. Put the joint in a roasting pan and start in a very hot oven (475°F), for about 20 minutes. Turn the temperature down to 375°F, and cook for 15 minutes per pound (rare), plus 15 extra minutes (for medium-rare), plus 30 minutes extra (for well-done). Remove the meat from the oven, and put it on a heated plate in a warm place. Leave to rest for 30 minutes before carving.

While the meat cooks, put the flour for the pudding in a bowl, and add a pinch of salt. Break in the eggs, and stir well. Add the milk and water slowly, stirring well. The batter should be the consistency of light cream. When the meat comes out of the oven, take a roasting pan and add about a tablespoonful of drippings from the meat. Heat it in the oven for a few minutes at 450°F. Remove the pan from the oven, and pour in the batter (wear oven gloves, as the fat may spit). Return to the oven, and bake for 30–40 minutes, until golden and rumpled. Cut into squares for serving.

Make the gravy in the pan the meat was cooked in. Pour all the fat and juices into a small bowl. Spoon off the fat, and reserve the juices. Add about a tablespoon of fat back to the pan, and stir in a tablespoon of flour. Stir over gentle heat until the mixture is lightly browned. Then blend in the juices from cooking the meat and some stock (or water from cooking vegetables or a gravy mix) to make a thin sauce. Cook gently for a few minutes, adjust the seasoning, and serve with the beef and Yorkshire pudding.

Choices for weekday meals include meat pies, sausages, chops or steaks, meat stews, and fish, egg, or cheese dishes. Salads are unusual as main meals. Choices for dinner now also include many nontraditional foods: pasta or rice dishes, stir-fries, or curry for cooking meat. These have sometimes been adapted to the idea that the meat and carbohydrates are most important, with vegetables in third place. Purchased fish and chips, or hot food from a take-out place (usually relating to an ethnic minority community), is often chosen as a minor treat or when time is short.

Afternoon tea, like cooked breakfast, now survives mostly in hotels, but snacks consisting of drinks, especially coffee or tea, or soft drinks, plus biscuits, crisps, confectionery, or fruit are taken at almost any time of day.

## Eating Out

In the 1980s, the nation's favorite meal out was prawn cocktail, steak, and chips followed by Black Forest gâteau; it is now claimed to be curry, especially chicken tikka masala, a dish developed from Indian tandoori cooking under the influence of British tastes, but these clichés disguise the extraordinary complexity, dynamism, and eclectic nature of eating out in contemporary Britain.



A table set with tea and sweets for a classic British afternoon tea. (Dreamstime)

London has an especially vibrant and interesting eating-out culture, with numerous excellent restaurants, cafés, and pubs. The capital sets the fashions for Britain generally, but recently provincial restaurants have shown more interest in reflecting their locality. The other side of this picture is one of a nation that can be sold the latest fad and that consumes fast food in enormous quantities.

Places to eat out take many forms: pubs, hotels, sandwich bars, coffee bars, tea shops, carveries (where they carve large roasts buffet style), pizzerias, kebab houses, snack bars, fast-food outlets, motorway service stations, and restaurants from basic to Michelin starred, plus a substantial noncommercial sector providing food in institutions. Eating out is seen on one level as a pleasurable, social activity. Drinking, on the other hand, is often seen as a pastime that does not necessarily involve food.

Inevitably, income plays a part in choice. Lower-income groups tend to spend more on takeout than other groups, but eating out has accounted for a steadily increasing percentage of household expenditures over the last 50 years. Most money is spent on eating out in southeastern England, where both wealth and premium-priced restaurants are concentrated.

Restaurants identify themselves in terms of cuisine (French, Italian, Indian, Mediterranean, modern British), type of food (pizzeria, kebab house, steakhouse), or mode of operation (fast-food restaurant, carvery). They can be independent or part of a large chain. Being a chef is now seen as a route to celebrity and a lucrative media career. The food in the best restaurants is excellent in quality and expensive; wine is also expensive. Most restaurants offer vegetarian options on their menus.

Ethnic restaurants began to spread during the 1950s, as Chinese and Italians, followed by Indians (mostly Punjabis) and Greek or Turkish immigrants, opened eating places. Most communities bigger than villages have restaurants serving Chinese, Indian, or Thai food. The success of these restaurants lies partly in the ability to adapt their cuisines to dishes that suit the British palate and notion of a proper meal, with large portions of meat in sauce and less emphasis on the smaller dishes that make up a meal in their native traditions.

Indian restaurant menus include kormas (mild and creamy), vindaloos (hot with chili), and tandooris (spiced meat cooked in a tandoor, a clay oven) as well as rice, Indian breads, *pakoras* (vegetable fritters), and samosas (deep-fried pastries). "Going for a curry" is an inexpensive night out with friends or a good way to round off an evening's drinking. Balti houses, developed in Birmingham, offer *baltis,* curry sauces containing onions, tomatoes, and sweet peppers and meat such as chicken, served in *karhais,* traditional cooking dishes shaped like small woks.

Bar meals in pubs have become an increasingly important element in eating out. Food provides additional profit and has made pubs, traditionally a masculine environment concerned with beer, more

attractive to women. The flippant term *gastropub* indicates a place with the character of a pub that also offers good and imaginative food at reasonable prices. Menus include classics such as sausages and mash, steak pies, calf's liver and bacon, or fish and chips, as well as more exotic items. Some pubs specialize in Thai food.

Fish and chips (French fries) have been street food since the late 19th century. Usual options are cod or haddock fried in batter. Sprinkled with salt and vinegar and wrapped in paper, they are usually carried out, either consumed with the fingers while walking down the street or taken home. Mushy peas (dried peas cooked to a puree), curry sauce, chicken portions, sausages, squid (popularized by cheap vacations to the Mediterranean), pies, and, in Scotland, sausage-like puddings are usually available as well.

## Special Occasions

The most important calendar festival is Christmas, on December 25. A typical Christmas Day menu is imposed by tradition. Usually a midday meal, it involves roast turkey with stuffing, gravy, bread sauce, sausages, rolled-up bacon rashers, roast and boiled potatoes, brussels sprouts, and other vegetables. A minority favor alternatives such as goose, game, or a large piece of beef. A steamed Christmas pudding made with suet, breadcrumbs or flour, dried fruit, eggs, and sugar follows. This is flambéed with brandy and contains a coin, which is lucky for the finder. The Scots have their own version, *clootie dumpling,* cooked by wrapping it in a *cloot* (cloth) and boiling.

Other Christmas foods include mince pies, small double-crusted pies filled with currants, raisins, sultanas, candied peel, sugar, spices, apples, and suet minced together, offered with coffee, sherry, or mulled wine at almost any gathering between late November and early January. New Year is important in Scotland; food plays a secondary role to drink, although shortbread (a rich shortcake) and black buns (raisins, currants, almonds, candied peel, and spices, wrapped in pastry) are midwinter specialties.

Other foods associated with the season are nuts, dried fruit, candied fruit, oranges, and sweets and chocolates generally. Certain cheeses are also important, especially Blue Stilton, which is sold in vast quantities at this time, as is Christmas cake, a rich fruitcake. Decorated with appropriate motifs, this is also important for other celebrations, such as Easter, weddings, christenings, and birthdays.

**Rich Fruitcake**

12 oz (2¾ c) flour

Pinch salt

1 tsp ground cinnamon

1 tsp mixed spice (similar to pumpkin pie spice)

10 oz butter

10 oz caster sugar (superfine sugar)

6 large eggs

2 tbsp brandy or rum

4 oz mixed candied peel, chopped

4 oz blanched almonds, chopped

1 lb currants

1 lb seedless raisins

8 oz sultanas

4 oz glacé cherries, halved

Line a cake pan about 8 inches in diameter with a double thickness of greased paper. Sieve flour, salt, and spices together. Put the butter and sugar in a large bowl, and beat until light and fluffy. Beat the eggs in separately, blending each well before adding the next. Stir in the dry ingredients and the spirit. Add a little milk if the mixture seems stiff. Turn into the prepared pan. Bake in a slow oven at 300°F for about 1½ hours, then reduce the heat to 275°F and bake for a further 4–5 hours. When fully cooked, the cake should be coming away from the sides of the pan a little, and a fine skewer inserted in the center will come out clean. Wrap and store in an airtight tin; the cake can be unwrapped and a little brandy sprinkled over it at intervals. Before eating, cover with a layer of marzipan or almond paste, and ice and decorate as desired.

Other calendar festivals include Burns Night dinners of haggis, neeps, and tatties (turnips and potatoes, boiled and mashed), washed down with whiskey, held around January 25 to celebrate the life of Scottish poet Robert Burns. Shrove Tuesday, immediately before Lent, is a time for pancakes. Easter is celebrated with hot cross buns (light, spiced, and yeast-leavened, marked with a cross) on Good Friday, and chocolate eggs and simnel cake, fruitcake with a layer of marzipan in the center, on Easter Sunday. Gingerbread and toffee are traditional autumn foods for the time around Halloween and November 5 in some parts of the country. Ethnic communities celebrate their own festivals, including Diwali, the Chinese New Year, and several other community-specific events.

Births, marriages, and deaths also have special foods. Weddings are the most visible. The cake (generally rich fruitcake, piled up in tiers) is important. Wedding breakfasts have no specific menu but are composed with the disparate tastes of different generations in mind; they are generally either of the roast dinner type or a cold collation of meats and salads, followed by creamy desserts.

Christenings are generally low key and vary widely, from drinking sessions for the father and his friends to a decorous tea party for family and older relatives. A funeral, too, is generally followed by a gathering involving eating and drinking. It is generally impossible to predict the number of guests, so an afternoon tea or finger buffet-type meal is usually provided.

Most families celebrate birthdays, especially for small children, with a birthday cake and candles appropriate to the birthday on top. Families celebrate other events as individual tastes and inherited customs dictate. Engagements, graduations, and anniversaries all provide an excuse for parties, but there are no traditional forms for these to follow.

## Diet and Health

There are variations in diet according to region and income group—the Scots eat especially high levels of salt, sugar, and fat, while people in the southeast of England spend the most on fruit and vegetables. Low-income families tend to resist change and avoid experiments with new foods. Substantial minorities observe special diets, based on religious (kosher, halal, Hindu) or ethical (vegetarian, vegan) requirements.

A lack of food is rare, as are diseases due to dietary deficiencies, although nutritionists express concern over intakes of certain micronutrients, particularly vitamin D and iron in some groups of the population. More problems are related to overnutrition including high intakes of fat, refined carbohydrates, and salt and the associated obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and hypertension. Levels of obesity (a body mass index of over 30) have increased significantly in the past three to four decades, especially among children and adolescents. Cardiovascular disease is a major cause of premature death in the United Kingdom, and there is evidence for a link to diet, as with the high incidence of type 2 diabetes. High alcohol intake among some groups is also a concern.

The official advice is to reduce the proportion of energy derived from fat and increase that from complex carbohydrates in the diet, and to increase intakes of vegetables and fruit. Encouraging higher consumption of these is an official priority, promoted in various ways, including provision of fruit in primary schools and a campaign called "Eat Five a Day" (five portions of fruit or vegetables).

Consciousness of food hygiene has become increasingly important, as more food is pre-prepared and held in a partially or fully cooked state; intensive farming and industrial processing have also given rise to concerns about pathogens ranging from salmonella in eggs to bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, or mad cow disease) in beef. Responses have ranged from public health measures, such as tightening legislation relating to food safety, to individual choice in pursuit of organically grown food. Most food-borne illnesses are probably related to *E. coli* 0157, salmonella, *Listeria monocytogenes,* campylobacter, and *Clostridium perfringens.* Less quantifiable threats are BSE, pesticide residues, irradiation, and genetic modification, all recurrently the subject of intense debate and suspicion.

Relative perceptions of the risk to health from diet vary between health professionals, the media,

and the public. Health professionals consider poor diet and food-borne bacteria or viruses as the highest risks. The media concentrate on "scares" and stories with sensational and sinister implications. The public, nervous of an industrialized food supply and cynical of advertising, tends to choose on the basis of personal likes and dislikes, fashion, and convenience.

*Laura Mason*

**Further Reading**

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# Greece

## Overview

Greece is located in the south of Europe and makes up the majority of the Balkan Peninsula. Its size is 50,949 square miles (131,957 square kilometers), and it falls within the Mediterranean climatic zone. Greece as a geographic region is characterized by 1,400 islands as well as the mainland. In addition, it is located at the meeting point of the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Its neighboring countries are Italy to the west, Albania, Bulgaria, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to the north, Turkey to the east, and Libya and Egypt to the south. Greece has an estimated population of 11,262,539, of whom approximately five million live in the capital city, Athens. The population is rather homogeneous, with 93 percent being Greek and only 7 percent of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, mostly Albanian, Bulgarian, some African, and some Pakistani and Indian. As a nation, Greece is relatively new. Its present geographic form was established right after World War II in 1947. The current constitution was formed on June 11, 1975, under the presidency of Konstantinos Karamanlis, who was also head of state in 1981 when Greece entered the European Union.

Keeping in mind the geographic location of Greece, its long history, and its current state, one can argue that it is the place where Western cuisines and Eastern cuisines meet. In historical terms, the ancient Greeks were avid traders, which acquainted its people with new foodways and exotic ingredients. Historical accounts refer to the regions where one was able to find the best products. One example is by Archistratos, who gives a detailed description of the best place to find the top-quality *amia* (small tuna fish) and how to prepare it. He claimed that the best specimens were found around Byzantium and that it should be cooked as simply as possible. Greek cuisine was also influenced by Asia, especially after the conquests of Alexander the Great, who introduced to the Greeks new fruits and vegetables as well as spices from as far as India.

After the fall of the Roman Empire and its division into eastern and western parts, Greece was part of the Byzantine Empire, which encompassed much of the Middle East. This relationship brought together various cuisines and exotic ingredients in different parts of Greece. At the same time some islands of Greece were under the influence of the Venetians, who brought their own cultural and culinary traits. Finally, with the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1452, the Ottoman Turks took over Greece for approximately 400 years, and they in turn introduced many culinary traditions. After the Greek revolution in 1821, Greece started to regain its autonomy, and in 1922 the creation of the state of Turkey brought to Greece thousands of ethnically Greek immigrants from Asia Minor who in turn brought with them their cultural and culinary traditions.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Greek dietary habits are similar throughout the country. People usually start their day at around 7 to 7:30 A.M. with a cup of coffee, which is a crucial beverage in Greek culture. It can be cold or hot. Cold coffee is referred to as *frappe,* which is shaken instant Nescafé



Shaving gyro meat into a pita. (Shutterstock)

and is never made from any other kind of coffee. Among younger generations cold variations of coffee may also include *fredo,* which is iced espresso, and *cappuccino fredo,* which is iced cappuccino. Hot coffee is mainly consumed in winter months and includes all the Western forms of coffee (cappuccino, instant coffee, filtered coffee, and so on) and also Turkish coffee. Greek people refer to Turkish coffee as Greek coffee, and they are very sensitive about that. Waiters will refuse to serve it if not ordered as Greek coffee. Whatever the name, Greek coffee is consumed frequently, and Greek people prefer to buy it fresh. Coffee for Greeks is not considered just a drink. It is thought to be part of a meal. It is perceived as highly nutritious (especially Greek coffee) although somewhat difficult on the stomach by itself. For this reason Greeks take their coffee with a cookie or a piece of cake.

For Greeks, the first proper meal is at about 11 A.M. and includes a fresh *tiropita* (cheese pie), spanakopita (spinach pie), or *koulouri* (bagel), which they purchase from bakeries or various snack places on the street. These products, together with fresh orange juice, compose the first meal of the day. Lunch is served between 2 and 4 P.M. This is the time of day when everything closes in Greece. It is the first more important meal of the day, and it is highly valued. Lunch will usually include bread, salad, cheese, a main course, and some fruit at the end. Lunch being the first complete meal of the day, there is an effort to include all nutrients in it, from protein to carbohydrates and fat. In between lunch and dinner, people might enjoy another cup of coffee and some fruit to keep them going. Between 8 and 9:30 P.M. dinner is served. Dinner is the final meal in a Greek person's day. It is usually made up of small meze, which are small plates of various kinds of foodstuffs. These include bread, cheese (just like with lunch), light varieties of some spreads like *tirokafteri* (spicy cheese salad) or *tzatziki* (yogurt sauce with cucumber and garlic), maybe some small meat meze like *keftedakia* (meatballs) and *bekri meze* (pork chunks; literally translated as the "drunken snack"), and always some fruits and vegetables.

It is normal for routine shopping to take a long time. Shopping is done predominantly by women. While supermarkets are modern and designed to satisfy all consumer needs, Greeks prefer to divide their shopping among various stores. Supermarkets are used for dry staples such as pasta or flour, or for products that are very specific, such as cheese for sandwiches or ham. Shopping for fresh produce is done in specialized shops. For fresh fruits and vegetables people go to the *manaviko,* a shop that specializes in fruits and vegetables. For meat, they go to the *kreopolio* (meat shop), for fish to the *psaras* (fisherman) or the *psaradiko* (fish shop), and for bread to the *fourno* (bakery). The reason for this is not that the products found there are necessarily of better quality than those found in a good supermarket. Instead, sale of fresh products in Greece is very much based on personal relations. These shops are found locally in one's own neighborhood, and each neighborhood has its own manaviko, fourno, and so forth, or they are found in a concentrated block of similar shops,

in which case the entire neighborhood is named after the shops: *perasa apo ta psaradika gia na ertho* (To come I passed the neighborhood of fish shops).

## Major Foodstuffs

Greeks have three basic ingredients that have throughout history been used in their cuisine: bread, wine, and olive oil. Since ancient times they were considered to be the essential elements of Greek cooking. The ancient Greek god Apollo had three daughters: Spermo (Grain), Elais (Olive), and Oeno (Wine). Even today among Orthodox Christians, who make up 98 percent of the population, it is believed that Jesus especially blessed *arton* (bread), *oinon* (wine), and *eleon* (olive oil). These three ingredients are the foundation for modern Greek cooking as well. Everyone buys them and uses them as is, or they add them to recipes. Olive oil especially is the essential ingredient for cooking. Greeks use oil to fry, add it to boiled dishes, and even baste meat or fish before roasting. It is used in practically every recipe, whether cooked or raw.

Bread is also an integral part of Greek cuisine. It is the companion to every food. Greeks often eat bread for breakfast with some cheese. Different varieties of bread are used, such as *xoriatiko* (bread from the village), *lefko* (white), *polisporo* (with different seeds), *mavro* (black), and so on. Greeks are very fond of dry bread as well. In this case fresh bread has been sliced up and put back in the oven to dry at low temperatures. This is a technique people used so they did not waste any bread that was leftover and going stale. Bakeries are always busy, and a good bakery can make a fortune just by selling good bread. Bread symbolizes life, and even prayers of the Orthodox Church use bread as a metaphor for life, especially in Holy Communion.

Proteins come from various sources in Greek cooking. People usually consume sheep or goat meat, but beef and pork are also widely used. Fish on the islands and anywhere near the sea is a principal protein source and may be prepared in various ways. The occupations of shepherd and fisherman are still very common in the country. People tend to look for and appreciate homegrown meat products, believing that since the animals run free in the lands, they must be cleaner and healthier. The same goes for fish. Local fishermen are very much trusted, and fish consumption is based on how fresh the fish is. In the majority of cases fishermen will not have every kind of fish but only what they can catch, and thus buyers adjust their purchase accordingly.

Meat has not always been the main protein source for Greeks. In the recent past, poverty was widespread across the country, and not everyone had the financial means to buy meat. Thus an essential element of Greek cuisine that contains the necessary nutrients is *ospria* (legumes—beans and peas). *Fasolia* (beans), *fakes* (lentils), fava beans, and other, similar legumes were known to Greeks from ancient times. Today, they exist in almost every household together with later arrivals such as snap peas, sweet peas, chickpeas, and so on. Even more recently a wide array of beans, such as the kidney bean, arrived from the Americas. They are prepared in various ways and are very popular during the fast of Lent and other times when consumption of meat is forbidden by the church.

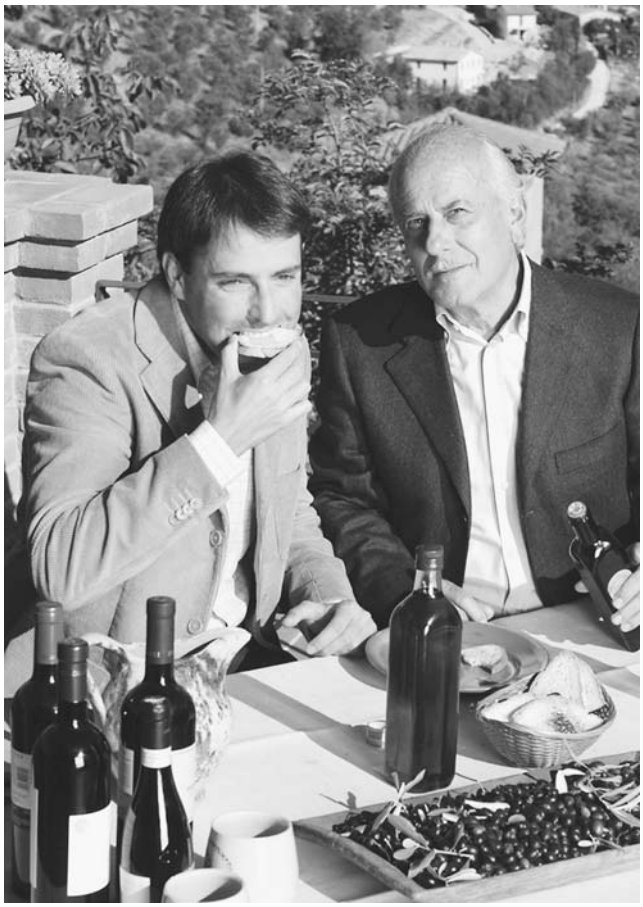
Cheese is also found in every grocery store and supermarket. Greeks are enthusiastic consumers of cheese, and several varieties are native to Greek cuisine. Every location has its own unique type, but there are some varieties that are used across the country—from the well-known fresh sheep cheeses like feta, which are soaked in brine, to others such as *kefalotiri, graviera, anthotiros,* and *mizithra.* Cheese can also be used as part of a recipe like *saganaki* (fried breaded cheese). Every Greek refrigerator has a chunk of cheese in it, and it is a main part of all meals of the day.

Greeks pay special attention to the fruits and vegetables they consume. Shopping for fresh ingredients is seasonal and highly localized. It is very rare to see a Greek person buy nectarines, watermelons, or grapes in winter or oranges, apples, and mandarins in summer. This means that Greeks do not trust fruits and vegetables that come from abroad unless they do not exist in Greece. Vegetables are

also bought only when in season. Tomatoes, for example, are not eaten in winter as often as in summer, nor cabbage in summer. Each region has its own special products that are highly valued in the rest of the country. Peaches from northern Greece and parts of Greek Macedonia are greatly appreciated, and the same applies to tomatoes from Crete and cherries from Aigio.

Herbs and spices are considered very important in Greek cuisine. Major flavorings include oregano, thyme, coriander, cumin, and rosemary. Some of these ingredients can be found growing in almost every uninhabited rocky space in the country since the climatic conditions and the soil are perfect for them. Other spices are used only in particular areas of Greece but are not common everywhere. Saffron, for example, is widely used in Kozani (northern Greece) and is most widely known in Greece as *krokos Kozanis,* which means the flower that comes from Kozani. Bay leaves, parsley, fennel, basil, and sage are also used widely for their special taste and aroma.

Last but not least are olives and olive oil. Olive trees are grown throughout Greece along with vineyards. Olives have been considered sacred and the essence of life since ancient times. The myth suggests that when it was time to name Athens, there was a battle between the goddess Athena and Poseidon. The one that would offer the most important present to the city would be the one to give it its name. First, Poseidon knocked the rock of Acropolis, and fresh water started to spring forth. Then it was Athena's turn, and she threw a seed that turned into an olive tree. Athenians thought of the olive tree as the most important gift since it symbolized wisdom and prosperity, and thus they named their city Athens. Olives and olive oil are still central to Greek cuisine, and Greeks use olive oil everywhere. It is highly appreciated for its nutritious and healthy properties. Different varieties of olives are grown around the country, but not all of them are used for olive oil. Some of them are just for eating, while others are cultivated only for making olive oil. There are many expressions in Greek that emphasize the importance of olive oil. Such expressions are used when people go to eat and suggest *pame na fame gia na ladosi to anteraki mas* (Let's go eat, so some oil will go to our intestines).



Men enjoy fine bread, wine, and a spread of olives, classic ingredients in Greek food. (Shutterstock)

## Cooking

Most cooking in Greece is done by women, and it involves a great deal of time and skill. It is very common for someone to hear conversations between people praising their mother's or grandmother's cooking. Cooking skills are considered as something to be very proud of. Kitchens in Greece are perceived as the areas where meals take place and women do their magic. Greek women are very proud of their kitchens and, most important, their cooking, even among those who work outside the home and consider themselves equal to men.

Kitchen appliances are modern and electric. Kitchen stoves are also electric since Greece has

only recently started to import natural gas from Russia. In the recent past stoves used propane from very big, heavy, external cylinders. In addition, cooking was also done outside in the garden or the front yard, where a fire was made and pots or grills were put on it in order to prepare food.

Many different cooking techniques are used, and there is no distinctive way of cooking in Greece. Boiled, fried, oven-baked, and grilled food is prepared everywhere. Greeks are not fond of raw food, though. A raw or medium beef steak is not considered a food cooked at home in Greece. Possibly the only raw protein Greeks consume is sea urchin eggs or the red fish egg pastes called *taramas.*

Garlic and onion are essential in cooking as well. Tomatoes, although from the Americas, arrived via Italy in 1815, and they are now essential in Greek cooking. The combination of tomatoes and onions is referred to in Greek cooking as *stifado;* if tomatoes are the dominant taste in the sauce, then it is called *kokinisto* ("made red"). Other cooking techniques involve frying (*tiganito*) or baking in the oven (*psito*). All techniques use olive oil as a basis, and the seasoning changes according to the recipe. Preparation of food through salting and air-drying is also common in Greece. Usually dry salamis and sausages such as *salami aeros* or *pasturma* are air-dried. Salted preparations involve foodstuffs such as haddock (*bakaliaros*) and are referred to as *pastos* because of the technique used.

Kitchen utensils vary depending on the technique, but they are the same as in any other modern European kitchen. Frying pans (*tigani*), pots (*katsaroles*), and pans (*tapsi*) are the predominant kitchen tools. In addition, pressure cookers (*hitra taxititos*) are used to shorten the cooking time of products such as fresh beans or goat meat. However, Greeks use another pot that is not widely used in Europe, used only to cook Greek (Turkish) coffee. This is called *briki* and is a small pot that can hold 8.5 ounces (250 milliliters) of water. After water is put in the briki, it is placed on a hot fire to boil. Immediately after the water is put on the fire, coffee and sugar are added, and it is stirred well. Once the mixture starts to rise, the coffee is ready to be served. Because of this cooking technique Greeks ask people whether they should cook them a coffee rather than make them one.

## Typical Meals

Greeks have two main meals, lunch and dinner, and two supplementary snacks in the late morning and early afternoon. The two main meals take place either in the kitchen, which is the most common eating place, or in the dining room. In addition, every house in Greece has small shot glasses for *raki* (alcohol made of distilled grape pomace left over from winemaking) or *tsipouro* (similar to grappa) and slightly taller and wider ouzo glasses. Ouzo is similar to raki but is flavored with aniseed and may be single or double distilled. Also, coffee glasses are found in every household for serving Greek coffee. These glasses are somewhere between a mug and an espresso cup.

There are a few typical meals in Greece. This is due to different climatic conditions, which affect the natural resources and thus culinary practices. Furthermore, migration, especially from Asia Minor and Pontus, together with the dominance of many different empires in the country (Roman, Venetian, Byzantine, and Turkish), has affected what Greek people eat in various locales. In northern Greece and Greek Macedonia, for example, there is an extensive use of pies. The pastry used is phyllo pastry, and the pies can be filled with anything from meat, to cheese, to vegetables and several different kinds of wild green leaves. In addition, food in this part of the country is much spicier than in the rest of Greece. In Epirus, in contrast, people eat more meat of all kinds. The climatic conditions there favor rearing of cattle, as well as pigs, lambs, and sheep. Thus, meat is the main ingredient in almost every dish. In the Peloponnese and Crete consumption of vegetables and wild herbs is most common. People use products that come from the earth since the ground is very fertile. There is widespread production of olives and grapes; thus, meals based on olive oil and vegetables are available. With the exception of Crete all the people who live on the islands of Greece eat fish most often. Due to their surroundings and the strong winds in the Aegean

and Ionian Sea the soil is not very fertile. Thus, the sea itself provides much of the necessary foodstuff for people on the islands to survive.

Recipes typical of this cuisine are common everywhere, though it varies from place to place. Fish is consumed everywhere, and so are vegetables. One such example of a typical Greek meal that is consumed all around the country is *gemista* (stuffed vegetables). One can find it in households as well as restaurants and tavernas. The word *gemista* in Greek means "stuffed," and it refers to tomatoes, zucchini, eggplant, and even occasionally potatoes that are stuffed with a mixture of rice, herbs, and vegetables.

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### *Gemista* (Stuffed Vegetables)

4 medium-sized ripe tomatoes

2 large zucchini

2 medium eggplants

1 medium green pepper

1 onion

1 carrot

3 tbsp olive oil

1½ tsp oregano

Salt and pepper

½ c parsley

1 tsp celery

1 c basmati rice

1 tsp vinegar

Take the tomatoes, zucchini, eggplants, and green pepper, and cut the tops off so you have access to the inside, but do not throw the tops away. Take a soup spoon and scoop out the inside of each vegetable carefully, making the walls as thin as possible without cutting through to the outside. Discard only the ribs and seeds of the pepper, but keep everything else. For the zucchini, slice off a thin top lengthways and scoop out the insides like a canoe. Scoop out the inside of the vegetables into a bowl. Arrange the hollowed vegetable shells in an ovenproof pan or a baking dish.

Chop or thinly slice the onion and the carrot, and add the vegetables' insides with olive oil, oregano, salt, and pepper. Chop the parsley and celery, and add. Finally, add the rice and vinegar, and stir well. Be careful not to use more rice than the amount listed; otherwise, when the rice starts to cook, the vegetables will split and the stuffing will go everywhere. Once the mixture is well stirred, use the spoon to stuff the vegetables. Fill the vegetables only ¾ full so the rice has enough space to expand. Cover the vegetables with their tops, and add some olive oil on the top. Once they are ready, put them in a preheated oven at 350°F for an hour and a half.

Optional: For a better visual effect you can add some breadcrumbs on top of the vegetables to make a tasty crust.

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Another typical and highly characteristic meal consumed in Greece is an omelet called *sfougato.* This literally translates as something that becomes spongelike: Its texture and appearance when ready make it look like a big yellow sponge.

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### *Sfougato* (Omelet)

1 large potato

1 onion

4 eggs

Oregano, salt, and pepper

½ c milk

1 c salty cheese (white or yellow) with rind trimmed, diced

1 tomato

Cut the potato in pieces as for French fries or in round slices, and fry them in oil. Just before they are crispy take them out and drain them on a plate covered with a paper towel or kitchen towel. Sauté the onion, and add the potatoes. Then take the eggs, oregano, salt, pepper, and milk, and mix them in a bowl all together. Add this to the onions and potatoes, and cook over very low heat. Make sure the mixture has solidified in the frying pan and then turn it so it gets crispy on the other side. Add the cheese and some slices of tomato. Cook on low

heat for another 10–15 minutes, and serve on a large platter.

In general, there are many dishes that could be argued to have great importance in Greek cuisine. Dishes such as moussaka and *pastitsio* (macaroni casserole) are very popular. However, products such as okra (*bamies*) are very widely used. There are also several types of foods that combine vegetables or legumes with meat, such as beef cooked with green beans in tomato sauce in a casserole or lamb cooked with artichokes in egg and lemon sauce.

Sweets are also important in Greek culinary culture. One such sweet is baklava. Although there is an argument whether it comes from Greece or Turkey, Greek people love it. Baklava is a sweet made of several different layers of phyllo pastry and nuts of different kinds (commonly walnuts, almonds, and pine nuts) and the addition of syrup. A very similar sweet but with different pastry is *kadaifi.* The main difference between baklavas and kadaifi is that in the latter the dough is shredded phyllo.



Stuffed vegetables in the Greek style filled with meat and rice and served with French-fried potato chips. (Paul Cowan | Dreamstime.com)

Other syrup-based sweets are also predominant in Greece, such as *ravani* (semolina cake), but as a general rule all these sweets fall under the category of *syropiasta* due to the syrup that adds the sweetness. Another popular sweet in Greece is *glika tou koutaliou* ("sweets of the spoon"). The name derives from the serving size, since they are so sweet that they are served in small amounts. These sweets are usually ripe fruits and vegetables boiled in water and then cooked again with sugar syrup. Most famous are sweet figs, grapes, oranges, carrots, and young eggplants.

There are non–syrup-based sweets in Greece also. Greeks enjoy *koulourakia* with their coffee. These are sweet small cookies of different shapes made from a mixture of flour and water, sugar, and nuts. They are fast and easy to make. Other types of sweets come in different seasons. For example, *kourampiedes* and *melomakarona* are types of sweets mainly cooked for the Christmas holidays. Kourampiedes are sweet cookies with almonds covered with powdered sugar. Melomakarona are honey and spice cookies with the addition of semolina, cinnamon, and orange juice, which gives them a special soft texture.

Another very popular Greek sweet is *mpogatsa.* This sweet is very similar to the tiropita, but instead of cheese cream is added. In some regions in northern Greece they eat mpogatsa with a salty stuffing as well, but the most common way is with cream and sugar or cinnamon. A very similar variation of mpogatsa is *galaktompoureko,* with the difference that the cream is much sweeter and it is served with honey.

## Eating Out

Eating out has always been very popular in Greece. Even in difficult times under Turkish rule there were many small places where men could gather and enjoy a glass of wine with some food. In addition to

those places there were *hania,* or inns, where travelers could stop and enjoy a warm meal and some rest. Although eating out used to be the privilege of men, after World War II women became entitled to spend time eating out.

In modern Greece eating out is part of the local culinary culture. For this reason there are several different types of places where people can enjoy good food outside their homes. The most popular are the *giradika* or *souvlatzidika,* which sell a very popular Greek dish, gyros, or the widely known souvlaki. Gyros is made out of pork and more specifically out of the meat that surrounds the shoulder blade, which is ground with the addition of several different spices such as cumin, oregano, thyme, and rosemary. (In the United States, it is usually made with ground lamb.) It is formed around a vertical rotary spit, which is heated slowly by burners from behind as it turns. Meat is sliced off as it cooks. It can be served on its own with fried potatoes or, the most popular way, in Greek pita bread with potatoes, yogurt or tzatziki (a yogurt, garlic, and cucumber sauce), fresh tomatoes, onions, and parsley. Souvlaki, on the other hand, is made out of the leg of the pig cut into cubes and placed on small skewers. It is prepared on the grill, and it can also be served on its own with some fried potatoes or in the same way as gyros. Places that sell this food are very busy. They are a meeting point for young people who want to eat cheap and heavy food full of taste or for people who need something to eat after a night of heavy drinking.

Other popular places for Greek people to eat out are tavernas. These are medium-sized restaurants that offer cheap, homemade food. They used to be very popular between the 1970s and 1990s because they offered good food at very reasonable prices. Now, although still popular, they have to compete with modern restaurants and gourmet choices that are advertised by the mass media. Similarly, there are the meze restaurants. These are something like a tavern, but instead of serving food in big portions or personal dishes, they offer small menus with several different tastes that accompany drinks. When someone visits a *mezedopolio* (meze restaurant), the first thing to notice is that drinks arrive first, which can be wine or raki, tsipouro, or ouzo, and then the food. Some meze restaurants do not have a menu and serve whatever is prepared for the day, in this way making sure that they always serve fresh food.

A custom that has become popular since the 1990s is fine restaurants. Greeks, especially the younger generations, enjoy eating out in restaurants. The haute cuisine of famous chefs, despite being expensive, is nonetheless popular. In addition, there are restaurants offering international cuisines such as Italian, Chinese, or Mexican. However, restaurants that offer alternative or refined Greek food are more popular.

Eating out also receives great attention by the Greek mass media. There are many publications about what defines good food, and almost every magazine offers an article on the best places to visit based on what one can afford. Television shows are dedicated specifically to places to eat, and these are very popular.

## Special Occasions

In Greece food is connected to special occasions in every way, shape, or form. From social events to religious celebrations food is integrated with expressions of every emotion. Special types of food are prepared according to the type of celebration, both in the home and outside the home. On some occasions, markets adjust to the occasion and sell food products that are appropriate to the time of the year and what is being celebrated.

One such occasion is what Greeks call Kathara Deftera, which is literally translated as "Cleansing Monday," that is, the beginning of the 40-day fast of Lent leading up to Easter. On this day the Greek Orthodox Church prohibits olive oil and all kinds of animal products from the table. Although modern Greeks do not strictly follow this rule, almost everyone abstains from meat and uses vegetables and grains, as well as seafood, instead. Because of the restriction on olive oil, a different type of bread is sold on this day: *lagana.* This bread is made from just flour, water, and sesame seeds. It is flat and drier than regular bread. Mostly bakeries produce this bread and sell it in large quantities.

Another special religious occasion connected with food is Easter. The entire Great Week (Megalobdomada) and Easter Day (Pasha) are characterized by activities in the kitchen. The most significant days with regard to food are Great Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Easter Sunday. On Great Thursday eggs are painted red to symbolize the coming Resurrection. In addition, this is the day when *dolamdes* (vine leaves stuffed with rice and vegetables) are prepared. This is a very typical food eaten in Greece, but on this day it initiates the beginning of summer since it the first point in the year when fresh vine leaves can be collected. On Great Saturday there is a very lengthy preparation of food. Greeks celebrate Easter not only on Sunday but also on Saturday after midnight. In the Greek Orthodox Church, Easter mass is performed on Great Saturday at midnight, and there is a second celebration on Easter Sunday afternoon. However, the most popular one takes place on Saturday. Thus the entire day is spent in preparation for that evening and the day that follows. In the early morning *tsourekia* are prepared. These are Easter breads that take a rather long time to prepare and are made of sweet dough. In some parts of Greece tsourekia take the form of *kalitsounia* or *diples.* These are sweets made out of sweet dough stuffed with white sweetened cheese and mint. Once the tsourekia are made, the typical midnight food called *magiritsa* is prepared. This is a soup made out of the boiled kidneys, liver, and stomach of a sheep or goat with the addition of fennel, parsley, and young onions. Once they are boiled, lemon juice is added as well as eggs, which thicken the soup.

The peak of celebrations takes place on Great Easter Sunday. Men start the day early with roasting a whole lamb. The entire animal is skewered on a big iron spit and fastened on with wires. Once it is stable it is placed on the fire for five to six hours where it roasts as it turns. Men suggest that to properly cook the lamb, the fire has to be situated most prominently beneath the head and the legs of the animal so the heat is evenly distributed all over. During cooking men smear the skin with a mixture of olive oil, oregano, and lemon, using branches of rosemary so all the aromas of the herbs are transferred to the meat.

A special type of food is prepared for all religious and personal occasions. Marriages and funerals or memorials have special food. For example, at all memorials for people, even years after their death, *koliva* are distributed. Koliva is boiled wheat that is left to dry for a couple of days. Once it is dried, pomegranates, raisins, cinnamon, almonds, walnuts, and granulated sugar are added, and this makes a very sweet mixture. It is served outside the church after the memorial.

## Diet and Health

For Greeks, food is basic for the healthy balance of the body and mind. This is obvious in the relationship that Greek cuisine has with natural products. Fresh produce and ingredients are fundamental to Greek cuisine not only for their better taste but also for their nutritional value.

Greek food is highly seasonal and localized. Greeks believe that local products are always best. In addition, the long history of farming and well-established traditions assure its people that the products they get are appropriate for their health. The diet has even been recognized throughout the world as the so-called Mediterranean diet, which is based on fresh local products, eaten in moderation. Modern industrialized farming makes Greek people unsure about the quality and safety of products since, according to their beliefs, when money is involved in such mass production, there is little personal care by the farmers for their products.

Greeks believe that healthy food means cooked food and that the longer it cooks, the better it is. It is only recently that Greek people might enjoy a medium-cooked steak, and even now it is highly unlikely to find this as a home-cooked meal. For Greeks, the application of fire kills any type of bacteria or germs that might exist on vegetables.

In addition, religion is highly connected with diet and health in Greece. In the Greek Orthodox Church there are several long periods of fasting (*Sarakosti*). There is a period before Christmas for about 30 days; the *megali sarakosti* (Lent) before Easter, which lasts for a bit longer than 40 days; and finally the 15-day sarakosti before August 15, when

the Virgin Mary is celebrated. Although many people do not actually believe in these long periods of abstinence from animal products, they do follow it since they believe that it is very good for the body and cleans out all the toxins. At the same time, the church has carefully devised the diet so people get all the necessary nutrients.

A healthy diet and the use of natural products are also important for medical purposes. Greeks are generally aware of the nutritious properties of foods. For example, they know that tomatoes, lentils, and beets contain a lot of iron. Thus they try to combine or use ingredients so as to include all the important nutrients in their diet. However, certain combinations are used for various more serious health issues. Greek coffee dissolved in lemon is highly recommended for diarrhea. *Glistrida* (purslane) is considered to be medicine for high cholesterol, onions for people with high blood pressure, garlic for those with low blood pressure, and so on.

Evidently, although Greece is a modern, westernized, progressive country, people have a special bond with food and as a consequence with nature. They follow the seasonal life cycles with the celebration of different occasions, and they understand food as the transformation of nature into something tasty that fulfills, follows, and emphasizes important phases of life.

*Giorgos Maltezakis*

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# Gypsies

## Overview

After their departure from India sometime around 1000 A.D., Gypsies dispersed throughout Europe and beyond. In the process they were fragmented into a great number of national and tribal groups lacking sustained contact, and consequent cultural exchange, with one another. Therefore, one finds little if anything in common between what is eaten, for example, by Gitanos in Spain, Romnichals in England, and American Kalderash. Much of the descriptions that follow of Gypsy food are true only of the particular group being described and cannot be generalized.

The very name by which Gypsies call themselves is a good example of this cultural heterogeneity. The majority of Romani speakers are properly called by the name they call themselves, Roma (singular Rom, masculine, or Romni, feminine). With the development of greater Romani political consciousness, this has gained wider usage, both among other Romani groups and among the general public. But a number of other groups, including those that speak one of the several creolized Romani languages, use other terms. Most Anglo-Romani speakers prefer to be called Romnichals, Romanies, or simply Travellers. Almost all Spanish Gypsies identify themselves as Gitanos. Most Sinti and Manouche, the majority of whom are located in Germany and France, respectively, strongly object to being called Roma. There is no term in Romani that denotes all these people despite their common history, hence the use of the term Gypsies here, which many consider pejorative.

Despite the general misconception that Gypsies are nomadic, only a minority are. Ever since their arrival in Europe, the majority have been settled, sometimes in cities, sometimes on the periphery of peasant villages or in separate hamlets. Of those who were nomadic, some traveled more or less fixed annual routes, while others wandered internationally to the extent they were allowed. Then and now any nomads travel only seasonally.

Gypsies remained in the Balkans for 200 years before some dispersed throughout western Europe during the 14th and 15th centuries. Those in Romania and some adjacent regions were enslaved until the mid-19th century. This period in the Balkans left an indelible imprint on the culture, including the foodways, of many contemporary groups of Gypsies. Others, like the Gitanos of Spain or the Romnichals of England, eat a variant of the national cuisine of the country they live in. There is often an evident culture lag, in which the elements of the cuisine are more reflexive of the foodways of a nation in which they used to live than of that in which they live now. Kalderash Americans still prefer a Russian-style tea, drunk from glasses with pieces of preserved fruit. Some still use an heirloom Russian samovar to prepare it.

Each Gypsy community developed its own distinct foods and foodways, often completely unrelated to one another. Nevertheless, there are some common patterns that can be broadly, if not universally, applied. Those groups that are still nomadic place a natural emphasis on stewing and frying, rather than baking, steaming, or roasting,

other than whole animals on a spit. They also incorporate into their diet wild foodstuffs, both vegetable and animal, to which they have ready access. Romnichals have a reputation, in part deserved, of poaching rabbits and game birds from private property. All over Europe, nomadic or recently nomadic Gypsies will collect young nettles in the spring, which they cook as a green.

By far the most important and far-reaching factor shaping what Gypsies eat and how they prepare their food is a complex of beliefs concerning pollution and ritual purity that originated in India. These are more stringently held in some groups than others, and specific practices vary from one group to another, but all Gypsy life has been shaped to some degree by these beliefs, and this is particularly true of food and food preparation. American Roma (including Kalderash, Machwaya, and Kunéshti) are particularly strong adherents and serve as a good example.

Roma believe in a bifurcated world divided into Gypsy and non-Gypsy, men and women, ritually clean (*wuzho*) and unclean (*marime*). The body above the beltline, especially the head, is considered sacred; that below, especially the genital area, is marime. A woman is marime during and six months after childbirth and during menstruation. A marime woman cannot cook or serve food to men. She cannot step over anything belonging to a man or allow her skirt to touch his things. For a woman to throw her skirt at a man or to lift her skirt to him is a defiling act. Women's and men's clothing must be washed separately. Upper garments must be washed separately from lower garments. A tablecloth would never be washed with underwear. Dishes could never be washed in the same sink or washpan as clothing. All food is prepared, served, and eaten with the greatest concern for ritual quality. Anything brought into the home from outside is considered possibly polluted and is, therefore, scrutinized with care. Only freshly grown foods are considered safe, but everything, including meat, is cleansed thoroughly before use. People who, for some infraction, have been declared marime cannot eat with others. Roma do not eat with strangers or with those they don't trust. To refuse to eat with a Rom is a sign of distrust, implying that he is not ritually clean. Non-Gypsies follow none of these proscriptions and are, therefore, considered marime. Many Romani households will keep a separate coffee cup and other tableware that they reserve for the use of non-Gypsy guests. Some will destroy or discard a cup that a non-Gypsy guest has used.



A Gypsy woman cooking stew over an open fire. (Shutterstock)

There are also certain qualities of lifestyle that are emphasized in most Gypsy communities, though these are not necessarily true for all groups or for all members of any group. These include spontaneity, adaptation, improvisation, and extravagance even in the face of poverty. These can be seen as adaptive strategies that have allowed Gypsies to cope more easily with problems such as discrimination, poverty, and pariah status. These qualities are present throughout Romani culture, including food and foodways.

Spontaneity in Gypsy cultures is such that dishes are never exactly the same. One uses what is available or what comes to mind. No one uses a cookbook or written recipe, so recipes are never standardized. Moreover, the common practice of not storing foodstuffs ahead of time, either because of not having money to build up stores or through lack of facilities to store them, means fewer options when cooking. One must think creatively.

While there is a strong tendency to hold onto tradition, Gypsies are very quick to adopt and adapt those features of mainstream culture that fit into their own way of life. Thus, in some areas, Gypsies more quickly adopted the cell phone than did their non-Gypsy neighbors. In England, Romnichals took the notion of the travel trailer and adapted it to their own needs along the lines of their traditional horse-drawn, highly ornate *vardos* (living wagons). So, too, in food. Bosnian Xoraxane in Italy, used to produce purchased in farmers' markets, quickly learned to make use of tubes of tomato paste and bouillon cubes produced in Italy.

There are Romani lawyers, doctors, university professors, and well-to-do businessmen, but a disproportionate number of Gypsies are poor, some extremely poor. Nomadic Xoraxane in Bosnia expect some sort of meat at every meal, while the villagers among whom they wander, who raise the meat they eat, tend to reserve meat for special occasions. Nomadic Kalderash in Sweden eat only butter, never margarine, no matter how poor they might be. On special occasions Kalderash Americans produce lavish displays of food, including numerous whole roasted animals, that put the Thanksgiving and wedding feasts of non-Gypsies to shame.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Halil and Hanifa Salkanović are Xoraxane (Muslim) Čergaši (nomads) from Bosnia. They speak the Gurbeti dialect of Romani but are equally fluent in Bosnian and Italian and speak a number of other European languages to some degree. Like other members of their group, Halil was a peripatetic coppersmith who traveled from village to village, market town to market town, repairing and retinning the copper utensils that were traditionally used in Bosnia for cooking and serving. Hanifa told fortunes by reading palms. When these copper utensils were replaced by plastic and enamelware in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they and many of their relatives moved into western Europe seeking other forms of livelihood. Almost none have been able to obtain regular employment because of discrimination, lack of education and marketable skills, and government obstructions. Halil and his family manage by buying and selling various objects and by collecting scrap metal, and they benefit from some social services. Several members of the larger group make fanciful copper vessels sold as mantle pieces rather than cookware. Children beg or wash car windows at traffic lights.

After much traveling, including in North Africa, and extended stays in Germany and the Netherlands, they settled down in a rough campground designated for Gypsies on the outskirts of Rome. Their dwelling is similar to others in the camp: a travel trailer, now immovable, with extensions built of scrap lumber and sheets of plastic. Their four surviving sons and their daughter, all now adults with their own families, are settled in adjacent campsites. There is no kitchen or special area set aside for food preparation. There is a propane cookstove in one corner, but much of the cooking in good weather is done at the campfire in front. Similarly, there is no special area for eating. Usually, diners will just take their plate to a chair or upturned bucket to eat by the campfire. There is no refrigerator, and there is a strong tendency to shop for each meal. Leftovers are often discarded. Meals are very irregular, with no set schedule and not everyone eating at the same time. Each of the six adult women of the extended family shops and cooks individually, but food, both raw and cooked, is very commonly shared.

The day starts with coffee, if there is any. In camp, the women prepare Turkish-style coffee. The men will very often go to a nearby café for espresso, both upon rising and repeatedly throughout the day. This was especially true before the acquisition of cell phones, when the café telephone was essential for keeping in touch with family members scattered throughout Europe. Those who want breakfast will eat leftovers from the previous day's supper and perhaps a piece of fruit.

Halil will often drop by Rome's central market, sometimes making a purchase that strikes his fancy, such as some turkey wings, a chicken, or some fatty cuts of beef. The younger women of the extended family will go to the market just prior to closing time to ask for items of produce, most often seconds or items that may spoil before the next day. They usually return with enough for a mixed bowl of fruit and a

combination of vegetables to comprise the stews that are the most common dish prepared. In mid- to late afternoon, when all have returned to camp, supper will be prepared. If a man or a family group is hungry before they can return, they might stop for pizza, but restaurants are seldom patronized otherwise.

Supper may consist of a stew of turkey, potatoes, string beans, and tomatoes heavily seasoned with black pepper, or "pasta *suta,*" consisting of a package of *zita* mixed with a couple of cans of Campbell's *ragu di carne* and a cube of margarine. Eggs are much used for their convenience and low cost. One preparation is to crack half a dozen eggs into a melted cube of margarine flavored with garlic and cook them sunny side up. Supper almost always includes a typical Bosnian salad of tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, and onions dressed with vinegar, oil, and salt, but they will make do with whatever combinations of these vegetables is available. If they are out of vinegar, the salad is dressed with oil and salt; if there is no oil, then just salt. In a pinch, just a raw onion will suffice. There is always bread. Beer, or more often wine, is drunk before, during, and after the meal by the men and sometimes the women. Most evenings conclude with the men seated around the campfire drinking wine while the women do household chores.

***Trgance***

Trgance is considered a Bosnian Xoraxane Čergaši specialty. Mix 3–4 eggs into 2 double-handfuls of flour. Meanwhile, prepare a chicken or meat broth. On the day observed, the cook used a chicken carcass left from the previous day's dinner. It is said to be even better to add a couple of packages of the commercial soup base "Brodo Ricetta Sapore" instead of salt. For a change of taste, some tomato paste can be added. The broth is thickened with flour fried in lard or oil. When the broth is boiling, add irregular lumps of the trgance dough, varying in size. Cook approximately half an hour.

## Major Foodstuffs

The culinary raw materials used by Gypsies are as unlimited as those of the nations they live in. Even international nomads are quick to adapt to local availabilities. There are few restrictions governing what they can or cannot eat. Some groups refuse to eat horse meat, presumably because of their close association in the past, but other groups do. American Roma consider birds that fly, such as doves or pigeons, marime and therefore inedible, while chickens, turkeys, and other fowl that do not usually fly are edible.

Meat is of special importance in the diet of most Gypsies. Many Gypsies of many groups expect some sort of meat at every meal. Meat is especially important at any Gypsy feast. The feast (*slava*) honoring the patron saint of a New Jersey family that was attending the annual pilgrimage at the Basilica of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, near Quebec, included roast beef, turkey, salmon, hot dogs and hamburgers, and spit-roasted sheep and pigs. Another family's feast at the same event included nine sheep roasted on spits in the parking lot. Spit-roasted meat, either sheep or pigs, is obligatory at any feast in many Romani communities.

Fatty meat is generally preferred to lean. Except among Muslim Gypsies, who generally observe the Islamic prohibition, there is a widespread preference for pork. The many poor Gypsies often make use of cheaper cuts: turkey wings instead of breast, calf lungs, pig tails and feet, sheep's heads, soup bones, and offal such as tripe and kidneys. Historically, some groups in eastern Europe ate "dead meat" (*mulo mas*), a pig or some other livestock that they secretly poisoned and then offered to dispose of for the hapless owner.

A meat that is iconic in the cuisine of many European Gypsies is the hedgehog, though it is seldom if ever eaten today. It is now a protected species in many European states, though its decreasing importance in the Romani diet may have less to do with its rarity than with Gypsies' increasing sedentarization in urban places and other modernization processes. Various ways of preparation have been reported, but the most common is packing the gutted but unskinned animal in clay and burying it in the coals. When the fire dies down, the clay is cracked off, taking the skin and quills with it. Others report laying the carcass on its back in the coals, after which the quills can easily be removed. The animal can then

be cut into pieces and fried or roasted on a stick over the fire.

Vegetables are not particularly important in most Gypsy diets, though some groups or individuals greatly appreciate them. American Roma believe black pepper, red pepper, salt, vinegar, garlic, and onions to be lucky (*baxt*) foods, and they make much use of all of these. Many Gypsies like spicy food, and this is especially true of American Roma. Celery is believed by American Roma to promote virility. At feasts, a stalk of celery is laid at every place setting. Bread is essential at every meal, and there is a general appreciation of quality bread. There are a number of home-baked traditional breads, including some made by nomads without the benefit of an oven. Kalderash in Mexico have adopted tortillas (along with many other items from the Mexican menu), though they have not given up bread.

## Cooking

In an extended-family household, the most recently arrived daughter-in-law is usually expected to do the cooking. Otherwise, the mother or eldest daughter may be the designated cook. Although cooking is generally considered woman's work, men are not restricted from the kitchen or from cooking when called upon, as when the usual female cook is prohibited to do so because of marime conventions. Some men take great pride in their cooking abilities. Among American Roma, men cook all festival food, thereby ensuring that the food is ritually safe.

Gypsies of many groups, both travelers and semisettled, prefer to cook outside. Many travelers, from Xoraxane Čergaši to English Romnichals, will cook outside even when they have a perfectly good stove inside their caravan.

Gypsy cooks seldom if ever employ cookbooks. Although illiteracy rates vary from country to country, until recently Romani women could not have used Romani cookbooks even if they had existed. Gypsy cooking tends to be spontaneous, and recipes are very loose. Australian Romnichal Rosemary Lee-Wright, in what is apparently the first cookbook by a Gypsy, explains that Gypsy measurements are "a handful," "a palm" (level or heaped), and "a pinch." For a number of years, Lee-Wright's was the only authentic Gypsy cookbook, though it was quite limited in the contextual information provided with the recipes. Several other books by non-Gypsies were extremely fanciful and offered no sources for their recipes, which appear not to have had ethnographic validity. Since 2000, however, a number of Gypsy cooks have provided authentic pictures of Romani food in a variety of countries, such as England, Spain, Palestine, and the United States. Elsewhere, sympathetic and knowledgeable non-Gypsies have worked together with Gypsy cooks to collate and publish their recipes, such as in France, Italy, and Slovakia.

Stews are a particularly common dish. They are convenient, especially for travelers—a one-pot meal incorporating a wide variety of available foodstuffs. Stews can be lavish, utilizing a variety of meats, or very inexpensive. They can be cooked on a single burner or a campfire. Frying is also common. Roasting tends to be reserved for festive occasions. Steaming or oven roasting is rare, though the latter is becoming more popular as Gypsy populations become more settled with modern kitchen stoves.

Cooking pots were sometimes suspended from a tripod of iron stakes driven into the ground around the campfire. Romnichals also used the *chitty,* an iron rod in the shape of a shepherd's crook that was driven into the ground with a chain suspended from the crook at the top. Cast iron pots with a bale were preferred. Romnichals also used a cast iron skillet with a fixed bale with a ring at the top so it could be



A typical Gypsy stew made with vegetables and beans. (Shutterstock)

suspended from a tripod or chitty. These also came in the form of a griddle. An alternative mode of cooking that was sometimes utilized by Romnichals was the hay pit. A hole was dug a foot deeper and wider than the cookpot and lined with hay or straw. The hot pot was placed in the hole, and more hay or straw was packed tightly around. A sack stuffed with more hay or straw was placed on top. In this way the family could be gone for the day, reheating the pot prior to eating.

## Typical Meals

There is little or no resemblance between the meals typical of one group and those of another. Some examples from specific groups follow:

An American Romnichal. His ancestors came to the United States from England in the mid-19th century. He grew up on the road but now is long settled in Ohio, where he works as a painter of barns, a traditional American Romnichal occupation, and commercial buildings.

Breakfast: coffee, frozen waffles or Special K cereal

Lunch: on the job, goes to a fast-food restaurant

Supper: fried pork chops, fried potatoes with onions, bread and butter, iced tea

Sedentary basketmakers in Izmir, Turkey.

Breakfast: *Simit* (sesame rolls that a street vendor delivers every morning), rolls filled with sweetened sesame paste, tomatoes, cucumbers, olives, honey, and tea

Gitanos in Barcelona.

Dinner, around 2 or 3 P.M.: bean soup with noodles (*fideos*), garlicky *bacalao* (dried salt cod) and potatoes, tomato salad, bread, stewed fruit, red wine

## Eating Out

The amount of eating out varies considerably from group to group, though in general eating in restaurants is not particularly common among most Gypsies. Those still forced to live in poverty, as in eastern European ghettos and western European designated camps, seldom have the funds for more than an occasional snack at a marketplace stand or a local shop. At the same time, many wealthier Gypsies, like the Kalderash and Machwaya of North America, try to avoid food prepared by non-Gypsies because of presumed impurity. They will usually not eat in non-Gypsy homes or eat food prepared by non-Gypsies and brought to their homes. If forced to buy cooked food while traveling, they prefer food wrapped in plastic or clean paper rather than food on plates. If forced to eat in a restaurant, many will avoid eating utensils, preferring to eat with their fingers. Often they will ask for paper or plastic cups, which they can be sure have not been used previously by a non-Gypsy. If food is suspect for any reason, it will be rejected. The preference is for well-lit restaurants where the food preparation can be observed.

## Special Occasions

Special occasions among Gypsies, as among other groups, call for special foods. Even the poorest will do their best to provide as lavishly as they can. Bosnian Xoraxane, both when they were still peripatetic coppersmiths in Yugoslavia and now, when they are currently encamped semipermanently in western Europe, consider a spit-roasted sheep essential for any wedding.

The Balshaldra (sometimes called Slovak-Hungarian in the literature) came to the United States from villages in Slovakia, which was then a part of Hungary. Most settled in Midwestern industrial cities, at first in Hungarian neighborhoods. Most of the men are professional musicians, and music, both as professionals playing for others and for their own community, is an important unifying factor. They are unusual among American Gypsies in the emphasis they place on education, including but not limited to advanced musical training. Music has been instrumental in their maintaining a strong Romani identity, even though an increasing number are now entering other professions. Their cuisine,

including that for special occasions, does not vary greatly from that of other fourth- and fifth-generation Americans of eastern European background. A wedding feast provides a good example: roast chicken, pasta with tomato sauce, cabbage rolls, mashed potatoes, string beans, green salad, Jell-O salad, relishes (including celery, carrot sticks, dill pickles, and pickled beets), walnut torte (purchased from a local Hungarian baker), wedding cake, coffee, and an open bar.

It is among American Roma that Gypsy feasting reaches its highest expression. Of special importance is the slava, a saint's-day feast most often fixed according to the Orthodox calendar. A slava feast brings good luck, good health, and prestige to the family that gives it. Over time, some slavas have become traditional for some families or groups of related families. In other cases, a slava is given because of a promise to a saint for curing a person in ill health. Food for a slava, which must be of the utmost ritual purity, is prepared the night before by the family giving the slava (an occasion called *tšinašara* by Kalderash and *večera* by Machwaya). Each slava features a specific meat: roast pig for Saint John's Day, fish for Saint Nicholas, roast lamb for Saint George, Saint Mary, Saint Anne, and Easter. A slava feast should also include certain auspicious foods: *gushvada* (cheese strudel), *pirogo* (noodle cake), and especially *sarmi* (stuffed cabbage). An excess of food is very important, and great attention is paid to its display. Lavish feasts are also obligatory at weddings, funerals (*pomana*), baptisms, *pakiv* (a feast honoring some important individual), and *kris romani* (the trials at which laws governing social behavior are resolved). Newly arrived Romani immigrants were also quick to adopt Thanksgiving and New Year's celebrations. Some Romani families like feasts so much they will celebrate both Catholic and Orthodox Christmas and Easter. Photographs from special-occasion feasts, especially weddings, are commonly displayed on YouTube. Feasts have great social significance. Guests number in the hundreds and may come from across North America. The sharing of food at a feast table expresses mutual respect, friendship, and acceptance of one another's ritual cleanliness.



Pork stuffed cabbage rolls, or sarmi. (Shutterstock)

Over the last several decades there has been a steady conversion to evangelical Protestantism. The majority of American Roma are now members of evangelical churches with Romani pastors. Since saints are not recognized in these churches, those who have converted no longer celebrate slava, though the other feasts are still held.

***Sarmi***

The most important dish of the American Romani menu, served at all feasts, is stuffed cabbage (sarmi). There is much variation, but the following is typical. Core and boil a large head of cabbage together with ½ pound lard, 2 cups vinegar, and sufficient water to cover. When soft, remove the cabbage, saving the water. Cut pork into small pieces, and fry with rice in lard until slightly brown. Add chopped bell peppers, jalapeño peppers, onion, celery, parsley, and black and red pepper, and sauté briefly. Add a can of tomato paste and some of the reserved water, and cook until rice is about half done. Roll mixture in cabbage leaves, one handful to a leaf. Place sarmi in a pot, cover with reserved water, 3 more cans of tomato paste, and a can of tomatoes. Cook till done, an hour or longer.

## Diet and Health

The many impoverished Gypsies of eastern Europe and the camps of western Europe have poor health due to inadequate and unbalanced diets as

well as generally poor living conditions and poor health care. But even middle-class and wealthier Gypsies often have health problems resulting from unhealthy diets and lifestyles. Studies of American Roma have demonstrated that the diet, which is high in salt, sugar, and animal fat, together with a lack of aerobic exercise and a nearly universal prevalence of smoking, leads to very high levels of blood cholesterol, triglycerides, and blood sugar. Abnormally high blood pressure usually begins before 30 years of age. By age 50, nearly 100 percent are afflicted with diabetes and vascular disease. Roma generally are considered old if over 55. Heart attacks occur in the early thirties, even the late twenties. Some Romani families eat only fish and vegetables for Lent, but there is a general opinion in the community that this Lenten diet is unhealthy, even for patients with cardiovascular disease. In recent years there has been some improvement as many members of the community have become more health conscious and as smoking has somewhat decreased, but as yet there are no recent studies to confirm this.

Dietary problems have been compounded historically by a cultural bias for obesity. To be fat was to be powerful; thinness was a sign of weakness. The term in Romani for a traditional leader is *Rom Baro,* or "big man." While meant in the sense of political power, it is also almost always literally true.

*William G. Lockwood*

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# Hungary

## Overview

The Republic of Hungary is in central Europe, landlocked between seven neighbors: Romania, Ukraine, Austria, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Slovakia. Hungary is a parliamentary democracy, consisting of 19 counties. The country's population is nearly 10 million, and about one-fifth of the population resides in Budapest, the capital city.

Hungary is roughly the size of the U.S. state of Indiana, and much of the country consists of flat to rolling plains and some low mountains. Though Hungary is blessed with fertile soil—nearly half of the country consists of arable land—and agriculture plays an important role in the economy, cooking with fruits and vegetables takes a back seat to meat. Hungarians are avid meat eaters, with pork being the preferred meat. Very few Hungarians are vegetarians, and at traditional Hungarian restaurants, vegetarian dishes are rare.

Slightly more than half of Hungarians are Roman Catholic, about 16 percent are Calvinist, and small percentages are Lutheran, Greek Orthodox, and Jewish. Religion does not have a major effect on eating habits in Hungary, although Catholics do not eat meat on Good Friday and Christmas Eve. Very few Hungarian Jews follow a kosher diet.

Hungary has the distinction of being one of Europe's unhealthiest countries, largely due to the traditional diet, which is high in animal fat, cholesterol, sugar, and salt and is generally low in fiber, fruits, and vegetables. Obesity is an increasing problem. There is a sharp difference, however, between the lifestyles and eating habits of the younger generations of Hungarians and those of the older generation who came of age during Communism. There is also a clear difference between the eating habits of those in Budapest and those in the countryside.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Katalin and László Kovacs live in an affluent Budapest suburb with their three young children. Katalin—originally from a village called Bőny in northwestern Hungary—is currently in graduate school. László—originally from the town of Kecskemét in central Hungary—owns a midsized software-development company. Although they can afford to spend a significantly higher amount than the average on food, their diet still reflects the traditional elements that they grew up with in the countryside. But they eat significantly less sugar, salt, and fat than their parents' generation did. They do occasionally splurge on expensive imported food, but for the most part, their daily meals consist of typical Hungarian dishes and ingredients. Unlike their parents' generation, Katalin and László enjoy dining out at restaurants on a fairly regular basis, while the children stay at home, with either their grandparents or a babysitter.

Breakfast in the Kovacs' household is at around 7:30 A.M., when Katalin and the children eat toast, cold cuts, biscuits, or cereal. László rarely eats breakfast at home during the week since he leaves early for work. During the week the children eat lunch at school, which consists of two courses: a soup followed by a main course, which is often a vegetable stew (*főzelék*). During the week, Katalin doesn't cook lunch for herself. She will eat whatever is around, such as leftovers from the night before. Like many who work in offices, László

eats at restaurants for lunch. Dinner is served around 7 P.M., and it usually consists of something warm but uncomplicated: warm sandwiches, ham and eggs, or a homemade stew or soup pulled from the freezer.

On weekends, when the whole family is at home together, the Kovacs eat big lunches together as a family, which include a soup and a meaty main course accompanied by rice and either pickled vegetables or a salad. When the family hosts guests, Katalin will prepare something special and more time-intensive such as a roasted duck with red cabbage, foie gras, and a cake.

As is common in Hungary, both Katalin's mother and László's mother, who both live in the countryside, often come to visit to help with the children. While they are in town, the two mothers do all of the family's cooking, even preparing extra dishes to store in the freezer. Katalin and László also frequently travel to the countryside to visit their families, and their mothers always send them home with several containers full of leftovers, baked goods, and fruit, vegetables, and eggs from the garden.

Katalin does the grocery shopping every two or three days. She shops at a midsized supermarket where she can do one-stop shopping for things like dairy products (yogurt, kefir, butter, milk, cheese, and sour cream), kitchen staples (flour, rice, sugar, and salt), and meat (sausage, cold cuts, various cuts of pork). When she has time, she goes to the neighborhood farmers' market, where she prefers to buy her fruit and vegetables. Although Budapest has a variety of international food shops, Katalin doesn't shop at them. She prepares mostly the same traditional foods as her mother did, although with a lighter touch.

## Major Foodstuffs

Agriculture is an important element of the Hungarian economy, and a significant amount of the produce for sale at the markets is grown in Hungary. The most important agricultural products are wheat, corn, sunflower oil, potatoes, sugar beets, pork, beef, poultry, and dairy products. Hungary has no sea, but water is important to the Hungarian psyche, and the main rivers—the Danube and the Tisza—essentially split the country into three vertical sections. Hungary's Lake Balaton is the largest lake in central Europe, and Hungarians are fond of their local freshwater fish such as carp, catfish, trout, and pike perch.

The diet in Hungary is meat-centric, and meat is often accompanied by potatoes, which are abundant in Hungary. By far the most popular meat is pork, and a wide variety of types of bacon and sausage are available. Other commonly eaten meats are chicken, duck, goose, foie gras, beef, and mutton. Lamb, veal, and game are less common but are easily available at the markets. Butchers and markets in Hungary carry all parts of the animal, and offal, tripe, and other cuts infrequently seen in the West are easy to find and commonly used in Hungary. The preferred cooking fat is pork lard, but sunflower oil is gaining popularity.

Important vegetables include root vegetables, particularly for soups (celeriac, carrots, parsley root, kohlrabi, etc.); squash and zucchini; peppers; and tomatoes. Plums and apricots are plentiful and are eaten plain, as well as turned into jam and *pálinka* (fruit brandy). For many home cooks, particularly older ones, canning fruits and vegetables is still an important part of their cooking routine. They turn fruit into jams, sugary syrups, and compote; peppers into paprika paste; and tomatoes into juice. They can *lecsó* (stewed peppers and tomatoes) to last the whole year.



A man makes sausage by hand in a Hungarian deli. (Shutterstock)

Milk products are an important part of the Hungarian diet. Sour cream is a common addition to soups and salads, and some stews and even meat dishes are topped with it. Yogurt and kefir are also commonly eaten. *Túró,* curd cheese, is made from both sheep and cow milk and is a major ingredient in many Hungarian dishes, both savory and sweet. It is served with pasta and lecsó in a dish called *túrós csusza;* used as a filling for a ravioli-like pasta called *derelye;* or turned into a spread spiked with paprika and garlic, called *kőrözött.* Desserts featuring it include *rétes* (strudel), *túró gomboc* (dumplings), and *palacsinta* (crepes).

Paprika is, by far, the most important spice in Hungarian cuisine. It is used in abundance in many of the best-known Hungarian dishes. As the saying goes, "All good Hungarian recipes begin by sautéing onions in bacon and then adding paprika." Most commercially produced Hungarian paprika comes from the southern towns of Szeged and Kalocsa. It is never smoked in Hungary, and it comes in a range of varieties from sweet through hot, and finely ground through coarse. At home, people make paprika by simply grinding peppers. Hungarian cuisine has a reputation for being hot, but in reality it is not. Sweet paprika is always used in cooking, and hot paprika or paprika paste is provided at the table for diners to individually add heat. Caraway seeds, nutmeg, and cinnamon are also frequently used. The most common herbs are flat-leaf parsley, dill, and marjoram.

Hungarians like to say that anywhere one drills in Hungary, thermal water will be found. Mineral water is abundant in Hungary, and there are dozens of commercially bottled varieties. Additionally, in some areas there are public springs where locals can bring bottles to fill. Hungarian mineral water is known for its high mineral content. In restaurants it is common to drink mineral water, while at home Hungarians drink both mineral water and tap water.

Hungary is a wine-drinking country, with 23 different wine regions producing a wide range of wines. The wine industry has grown up considerably in the past two decades, and Hungarian wine is being increasingly recognized for its quality.

## Cooking

Hungarian food is generally uncomplicated to prepare. There are no laborious sauces or preparation methods. Throughout Hungary's history cooks were forced to be economical with ingredients, and they developed ingenious ways of doing things when little was available. This is still evident in the way that most people cook at home, which is why there are animal parts like tails, necks, and feet at the markets in Budapest. Many of the most typical—and traditional—Hungarian dishes require long, slow cooking, such as stews (*pörkölt*) made from beef, pork, or other meats and roasts made with the less-than-tender cuts.

Many Hungarian recipes begin with onions slowly cooking in fat, with a healthy portion of paprika stirred in. It's a combination that gives off a distinctively Hungarian aroma. Then the meat is added and browned, and a variety of dishes can result. Hungarian food has a bad reputation for being heavy and greasy. But it doesn't have to be. Pörkölt and goulash (*gulyás*), for example, use very little fat. Deep-frying is a common technique, as are panfrying and roasting.

Soups are thickened with either sour cream or a *rántás* (roux) of flour slowly browned in hot lard. Sour cream is a favorite Hungarian ingredient—in addition to soups, it's also added to stews like *paprikás* (made with paprika), *székelykáposzta* (a stew with sauerkraut), főzelék (vegetable stew), and even some sweets. Vinegar is often added to soups at the table.

Hungarians generally do not use as many kitchen utensils and appliances as Americans do. Most Hungarians have a battery of aluminum pots, but Hungarian cuisine doesn't require any special utensils (other than a *spaetzle* plane—a device that batter is passed through, into a pot, to make rough noodle-dumplings. Since kitchens tend to be small, avid home cooks often have large cutting boards that they pull out to use as temporary additional counter space when preparing large meals. Grilling is not common in Hungary, but during the warm months Hungarians like to cook soups and stews outdoors in a cauldron. Another outdoor cooking event is the

*szalonnasütés,* in which a fire is built and participants stick slabs of bacon along with onions on the ends of sticks, hold them in the fire, and catch the drippings on pieces of bread. Traditionally, bread was baked in an outdoor wood-burning oven (*kemence*), but these days most people buy bread from the grocery store. Pickling is important and is done in abundance with both fruits and vegetables. During the summer, cucumbers are also fermented in large jars set out in the sun to make *kovászos uborka.*

## Typical Meals

Hungary is a small, relatively homogeneous country, with few regional specialties or differences. But typical meals for Hungarian families will vary greatly depending on their economic and social standing, age, and location such as rural or urban. Traditionally, breakfast in Hungary has been a substantial meal, typically consisting of a "cold plate" of a variety of sliced cheeses; cold cuts, dried sausage, and salami; Hungarian banana peppers and tomatoes; bread and butter; and strong espresso-style coffee. For those living in the countryside as well as for many blue-collar workers in cities, breakfast still looks like this. But urban Hungarians will often have a more westernized breakfast such as cereal, eggs, or yogurt. Or they will buy scones (*pogácsa*) or sweets from a nearby pastry shop to eat on the way to work. Increasingly, as lifestyles become more hurried, Budapesters will do what was unthinkable not long ago: get their coffee in a to-go cup rather than sitting and relaxing with it. A midmorning snack called the *tíz órai* is customary in Hungary and generally consists of coffee or tea and either something sweet to eat or something simple like toast.

Lunch at around noon is typically the main meal of the day in rural Hungary, where, if they are able to, people go home for a home-cooked family lunch. Increasingly, however, this habit is eroding. In Budapest, most workers either bring something from home or have a restaurant lunch. Many restaurants specialize in delivering hot prepared lunches to offices. Eating a large Sunday lunch, however, remains an important family custom, in both cities and rural areas. Children generally eat hot lunches at school, which are fairly nutritious and varied.

Traditionally dinner was a lighter meal than lunch, eaten around 7 P.M., and often it was a cold plate, similar to breakfast. In rural areas, this is still typical. In Budapest, dinner habits have become more westernized, with a large dinner becoming the main meal of the day, around 7 or 8 P.M. Hungary produces a significant amount of wine, and wine or beer is usually drunk with dinner.

Soup is an important element in a Hungarian meal, and no Hungarian meal is complete without it. Bread is never served on its own, but it is always served with soup. Despite the stereotypes, very few Hungarian dishes feature hot paprika. However, a bit of hot paprika powder or paste is always placed on the table for diners to add heat to their food individually. Vinegar and sour cream are also added to soups at the table.



Traditional Hungarian goulash, or beef stew, served from a crock pot. (Shutterstock)

***Gulyás* (Goulash)**

Goulash is an everyday dish served at nearly every Hungarian restaurant. It is so simple to make that any Hungarian who cooks can do it. Many also cook it over an open fire in a *bográcsc* (cauldron), which adds a smoky flavor. Some cooks add pinched pasta (*csipetke*) before serving. If you were to continue cooking the meat without adding water or potatoes, the resulting dish would be pörkölt, which is the stew that foreigners tend to think of as goulash. Gulyás is an everyday meal, eaten with thick-crusted white bread.

4 tbsp sunflower or canola oil

2 yellow onions, chopped

1½ lb beef chuck, trimmed and cut into ½-in. cubes

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

¼ c sweet paprika

2 tsp dried marjoram

2 tsp caraway seeds

2 cloves garlic, finely chopped

2 medium carrots, cut into ½-in. cubes

2 medium parsnips, cut into ½-in. cubes

1½ lb medium-sized new potatoes, peeled and cut into ½-in. cubes

1 tomato, cored and chopped

1 Italian frying pepper, chopped

Heat the oil in a pot over medium heat. Add the onions, cover, and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft and translucent, about 10 minutes. Increase the heat to high. Add the beef, and season with salt and pepper. Cook, uncovered, until the meat is lightly browned, about 6 minutes. Stir in the paprika, marjoram, caraway, and garlic, and cook until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Add the carrots, parsnips, and 5 cups water. Bring to a boil; reduce heat to medium. Simmer, covered, until the beef is nearly tender, about 40 minutes. Add the potatoes, and cook, uncovered, until tender, about 25 minutes. Stir in the tomatoes and pepper; cook for 2 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

The main course of a Hungarian meal is always a big portion of meat—whether it is a roast, a stew, or vegetables such as cabbage or peppers stuffed with meat. Potatoes are the most common accompaniment, and sometimes these are even served with rice. Stew (pörkölt) has historically played an important role in the Hungarian meal. Stews can be accompanied by buttered parsley potatoes, flour and egg dumplings (*galuska*), or tiny pieces of pasta the size of barley (*tarhonya*). Almost always, they are served with a few pieces of *savanyúság* (pickled vegetables) to aid the digestion of so much fat and starch. Leafy salads are rarely eaten, although Hungarians do eat salads made of sliced cucumbers or sliced tomatoes in a briny dressing made with vinegar, salt, and sugar. Salads are always served with the meal, never as an appetizer.

Lunch will nearly always end with coffee. Hungarians have a legendary sweet tooth, and leisurely meals will nearly always end with cake, strudel, cookies, or some other home-baked sweet. Pálinka (fruit brandy) is a traditional spirit in Hungary, made both commercially and at home. In traditional Hungarian households drinking shots of pálinka is common and done in a variety of situations: to welcome guests, to begin a meal, or to end a meal.

Depending on location and affluence, the types of meals eaten will vary. Hungarians who are well traveled are more likely to add non-Hungarian recipes to their repertoire, while rural Hungarians and those with little exposure to international cuisine will rely more on the diet laden with pork and potatoes. Likewise, the less educated and less affluent will rely on a diet of processed and prepared foods, which are also abundant in Hungary.

The following are examples of typical meals in middle-class families in Budapest and in rural Hungary. Budapest is a bustling, cosmopolitan city of nearly two million people. Life for many residents is fast-paced, which is reflected in the differences between the eating habits and diet here and in the countryside. In Budapest, breakfast varies from the traditional cold plate of sliced meats, vegetables, and cheeses to simple toast and jam or a quick bite on the way to work. There are bakeries and pastry shops on nearly every corner, where people often stop in for pogácsa (savory scones), cheese rolls, or

some other type of baked goods. Hungarians tend to drink lots of strong coffee, made at home with a stovetop coffeepot or purchased at a café. A midmorning snack at around 10 A.M. can simply be coffee or tea, a crescent roll (*kifli*), or a sandwich.

For workers, lunch in Budapest is usually eaten at a restaurant, an *étkezde,* a type of restaurant open only for lunch and serving inexpensive, simple Hungarian dishes, or at a *büfe,* where prepared food sits under heat lamps in chafing dishes. Many who work in offices will order food daily from a delivery service. Restaurants in Budapest cater to workers, with inexpensive and quick two- or three-course lunch menus.

A family dinner now serves the function that lunch once did in Budapest, with most families eating a dinner that is larger than lunch. Some examples of common everyday dinners include pasta with curd cheese and lecsó (stewed peppers and tomatoes with paprika), roasted or fried pork, or beef pörkölt (stew) with potatoes. Dinner may also include foods that are typically considered breakfast foods in Western countries: ham and eggs, savory French toast, rice pudding, and semolina pudding. With the arrival of ethnic ingredients, international cooking shows, and scores of international restaurants, Budapesters are apt to experiment with cooking more exotic types of food.

In the countryside, no matter the region, eating habits are similar. Hungarians tend to rise early, eat breakfast as a family, and, whenever possible, have lunch together. Breakfast is a hearty but cold meal, with smoked bacon, paprika-spiked dried sausage, and salami served alongside sliced banana peppers and tomatoes, cheese, bread, and coffee. Bread with butter, jam, and honey might also be served.

Lunch in rural Hungary is traditionally the main meal of the day and consists of a first course of soup and then a meat-centric main course, usually accompanied by potatoes and pickled vegetables. Dessert could be *almas lepény* (apple tart), a yeasty cake, or walnut cake.

Dinner in rural Hungary is typically served around 7 P.M. and is lighter than lunch. It sometimes features sweet dishes such as pasta with poppy seeds or palacsinta (crepes) with apricot jam, sweetened curd cheese, or ground walnuts. Alternatively, it could be a cold plate, similar to breakfast. Local wine is typically drunk with dinner. Often, pálinka (fruit brandy) is drunk before or after dinner.

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### *Paprikás Csirke* (Paprika Chicken)

Paprika chicken is one of the most classic of Hungarian dishes. Named for the large amount of paprika that goes into the sauce, the *paprikás* method can also be applied to veal. In Hungary, this dish is usually eaten with galuska (or spaetzle—a kind of ragged noodle made by dropping batter into boiling water) and a cucumber salad. The best type of pot to use is a cast iron casserole, but any pot with a tight-fitting lid will do. Cooking the chicken with the skin intact greatly benefits the flavor. For best results use a high-quality Hungarian sweet paprika.

2 tbsp lard (or oil)
2 large onions, peeled and minced
1½ tsp salt
2–3 tbsp sweet paprika
1 or 2 tomatoes, chopped
2 lb chicken pieces
1 banana pepper, sliced into rings
2 tbsp sour cream, plus more for garnish if desired
1 tbsp flour
2 tbsp heavy cream

Heat the lard (or oil) in the pot, add the onions, sprinkle with half of the salt, and cook, covered, over very low heat until the onions are glossy but not browned. Turn off the heat (so the paprika doesn't burn and become bitter), and stir in the paprika. Add the tomatoes and ½ cup of water, and mix. Turn the heat back on low, and place the chicken pieces in the pot. Sprinkle the remaining salt on the chicken, cover, and cook for about 30 minutes, checking every few minutes to see whether it needs more water. Remove the lid, add the sliced pepper, and cook for 10 more minutes. In a small bowl, mix the sour cream, flour, and heavy cream. Remove the pieces of chicken, and place the pieces on a serving platter. Add the sour cream mixture to the paprika

sauce, and stir until blended. Cook for a minute or two, but don't let the sauce come to a boil. Pour the paprika sauce over the chicken pieces. Garnish with a spoonful of sour cream, if desired, and sprinkle with paprika.

## Eating Out

Restaurant culture in Hungary suffered horribly during Communism. Businesses were privatized, the quality was poor, and most people wouldn't have had the money to eat out even if there were restaurants. Now, Budapest has a sophisticated restaurant scene with an increasing number of ethnic eateries to cater to both foreigners and Hungarians. There are Western fast-food chains, as well as a few local Hungarian fast-food chains specializing in főzelék. In the countryside, however, restaurants haven't advanced as much. Traditional Hungarian restaurants reign, and the quality is usually not as high.

There are several types of restaurants in Hungary, but these days the lines between them have been blurred. An *étterem* (the most common word for restaurant) can mean anything from a fancy white-tablecloth place to a fast-food eatery. Originally it referred to a more upscale restaurant, but it has now taken on a more all-encompassing meaning. Historically, a *vendéglő* was a step down from an étterem, in terms of both price and decor. It was the kind of place that served hearty portions of classic Hungarian food, and now it might still be decorated with folksy knickknacks and have red-and-white-checked tablecloths.

*Étkezdes* and *kifőzdes* are simple no-frills places that serve lunch on weekdays, and sometimes Saturdays. They're usually one-room restaurants with little decoration and a home-style menu. These types of restaurants have loyal regulars who share tables when needed. Coffee and alcohol are rarely served since the idea is to eat quickly and leave. The short menu usually changes daily, offering a few soups, ready-made dishes like stew or roasted meat, freshly prepared dishes like big slabs of fried meat, pickled salads, főzelék, a pasta, and one or two desserts. There are many simple fast-food stands (büfé), which are basically snack counters serving basic things like cold sandwiches, drinks, and sweets. Chinese buffets (*kínai büfé*) are ubiquitous and usually serve Hungarianized Chinese food. Butchers (*húshentesáru*) serve sausage and bread, and possibly roasted chicken or pork belly, at stand-up counters.

Hungary is also famous for its coffeehouse culture. A *kávéház* can be a trendy place serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner along with an extensive wine list. Or it can be a classic kávéház where coffee is served on silver trays with tiny glasses of mineral water and the decor is lavish with gold gilt, fancy plasterwork, and crystal chandeliers. These are the places that were plentiful at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, popular with writers, artists, and revolutionaries. During the 1930s the elegant kávéház was replaced by the simpler *eszpresszó* (also called *presszó*), which was (and still is) a smoky, unattractive place, serving cheap alcohol and strong coffee. *Cukrászdas,* pastry shops, are usually small places with a few tiny tables just big enough for a cup of coffee and a piece of cake. A *pékség* is a bakery, but there are few dedicated bakeries left, since most people buy their bread in the supermarkets.

## Special Occasions

In Hungary it seems as if festivals with food or wine as their focus are constantly taking place throughout the country. Villages and regions hold festivals honoring important crops, ingredients, or dishes, and there are competitions for cooking gulyás and fisherman's soup (*halászlé*) in many regions. Holidays are closely associated with traditional foods, and the food can be more important than the holiday itself. In Budapest, holiday traditions and customs are generally less elaborate than in the countryside, but customs differ with every family.

The Christmas (*karácsony*) season kicks off in Hungary with Mikulás nap (St. Nicholas's Day) on December 6, when children polish their shoes and set them out for Mikulás (St. Nick) to fill with chocolate and toys. If they've been bad, Mikulás's helper, Krampusz, will leave twigs instead. In December bakeries and home cooks bake enormous amounts of roulade cakes filled with walnuts or poppy seeds

(*bejgli*), which are a crucial part of the holiday season. December 24 is the big celebration, when the children are banished from the living room, and the angels and Jézuska (baby Jesus) bring the presents and decorate the tree with shiny pieces of *szaloncukor* (candies wrapped in colorful foil wrappers). It's customary to abstain from meat on Christmas Eve, so dinner revolves around fish. The meal most often starts with halászlé, followed by whole roasted fish or breaded carp and potato salad with tartar sauce. Christmas Day dinner was traditionally turkey, but these days it is anything from stuffed cabbage to roasted duck. Dessert is bejgli or *mákos guba* (bread pudding with poppy seeds).

Hungarians greet the New Year (called Szilveszter, because it falls on St. Szilveszter's feast day) with sparkling wine. Traditionally, roast suckling pig with horseradish and braised red cabbage was eaten on New Year's Day. Now, the most significant food to consume is some form of lentils, which are said to bring money in the coming year. *Korhelyleves*—a tangy sauerkraut and sausage soup with sour cream—and sausages (more commonly frankfurters) are also eaten in the early morning hours. At midnight everyone gathers around to sing the Hungarian national anthem.



Bejgli, a traditional Hungarian folk cake. (Shutterstock)

The Easter (*húsvét*) meal is one of the biggest of the year, with boiled smoked ham, freshly grated horseradish, boiled eggs, deviled eggs in homemade tartar sauce, light and fluffy Easter bread (*tejes kalács,* similar to challah bread), potato salad in tartar sauce, pickled vegetables, and bejgli. Most Catholics abstain from eating meat on Fridays during Lent, and they often give up something else throughout the Lenten period.

Harvest festivals and processions are held throughout the country during September and October, but the harvest in Tokaj for the famous sweet wine only begins at the end of October, when many festivities are held. November 11 is the feast day of Saint Martin (Szent Márton nap), who was born in what is now Hungary but was then the Roman province of Pannonia. Legend has it that Martin was a devout hermit when he was asked to become the Bishop of Tours. He refused, hid in a goose pen, and then killed and ate one of the geese after their squawking gave away his hiding place. Ever since, it has been a Hungarian tradition to mark the day by eating goose (*liba*) and drinking the season's first wine (*újbor*).

## Diet and Health

Like much of central and eastern Europe, Hungary is struggling with the long-term effects of its traditional diet, as well as of the Communist-era agricultural policies and lifestyles that resulted in meat-centric and fat-heavy diets. Obesity is the number-one public health problem in Hungary, according to studies, with some estimates putting the number of obese adults at more than 15 percent of the population.

Both age and location greatly affect the way that Hungarians cook and eat. Hungarians living in rural areas tend to eat in the most traditional

manner and, ironically, often have less access to a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as the many organic food shops that stock whole grains, than Budapest residents do. Although sunflower oil is increasingly being used, pork fat remains heavily used by many older people who don't take advantage of healthier options now available.

Age is also an important factor in determining lifestyle and health. While the older generation is fairly set in its ways in terms of cooking and eating, younger Hungarians, particularly those living in urban areas, are more likely to cook non-Hungarian and lower-fat recipes. They tend to avoid the abundance of deep-fried dishes and sugary sweets, and they like to shop at organic shops and markets when they can afford to.

In addition to the diet, since the fall of Communism, experts have noted that lifestyles have become less active—in part due to the easier access to cars and the arrival of multiple television channels—with people walking less and not exercising enough. Alcoholism, too, is a serious health problem in Hungary, with mortality due to alcoholism three times higher than the European Union average for males and 2.5 times higher for females.

*Carolyn Bánfalvi*

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# Iceland

## Overview

Iceland is a 40,000-square-mile island country of 320,000 people, which in 2007 the United Nations named the world's best country to live in. It was one of the first to establish a parliamentary democracy; its capital, Reykjavik, is one of the most fashionable urban enclaves on earth; and Icelanders write, publish, purchase, and read the most books per capita globally. The country boasts a landscape of spectacularly unspoiled scenery that includes mountains and oceans, wildlife and glaciers, not to mention volcanoes.

The Norse settlers who founded Iceland between 874 and 930 A.D. came upon mostly the same geography present today, which is 63 percent tundra, 14 percent lakes and glaciers, and only 23 percent vegetation. Located as far north up the Mid-Atlantic Ridge as it is, Iceland saw few ships and explorers at that time, which meant very few imported goods made it to the island. The lack of fertile, arable land also made sustainable agriculture a huge challenge and forced locals to subsist on whatever they were able to forage. And so the way Icelanders eat is mostly a result of the way they were, and are—the cold climate and long winters result in a typical Icelandic diet that is low in vegetables and high in cereals, seafood, and lamb meat, as well as a bounty of preserved foods.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Pétur Galdur and Freyja Andersson are a couple in their early thirties living together in Reykjavik's Old Town neighborhood, an upscale, happening district where shopping, culture, and late-night cafés thrive. Pétur is an architect; he grew up in the suburbs of the city and easily absorbed its progression from an old-world reputation to a hip center of music, nightlife, and cosmopolitan cuisine. Freyja is from Ísafjörður, known for its charming dining culture, and embraces traditional Icelandic cuisine as much as the fusion options available in the capital. While many typical local dishes may seem old-fashioned and very much off the beaten path to visitors, they are a mainstay of urban dining, despite the variety of Asian and other European options available. It's typical for big city dwellers such as Pétur and Freyja to embrace what they ate in their childhood as comfort food while continuing to explore new palates.

Breakfast in Pétur and Freyja's modest one-bedroom loft takes place a little before 8 A.M. It is a hearty affair that includes cold cuts of meat, cheese, *sild* (pickled herring), cottage cheese, and wheat toast or oatmeal, with nibbles of dried fruit and, on the colder days, a banana for an extra boost of energy to battle the icy temperatures. Because Iceland runs on coffee, Pétur and Freyja without a doubt would have already had a cup or two of the country's world-class, gourmet *kaffi* from delicately roasted beans, which come in handy when days are short and dusk falls early. For lunch, eaten around noon, they have an easy meal of soup, bread, and salad from a deli or café near their respective offices, or a hot dish of meat or fish with potatoes, followed by a sweet fruit soup and accompanied with a glass of milk. Between 2:30 and 4 P.M., they will grab an afternoon break of an open-faced sandwich or bread and butter with some sweets, typically selecting from

layer cakes, tortes, or cookies. Because dining out is expensive in Iceland, Pétur and Freyja often cook and eat in, saving trying a new restaurant or visiting a favorite for a fun night out every two weeks or so. Dinner is similar to lunch and finishes with *skýr,* a yogurt topped with sugar and cream. With some of the freshest meats, seafood, and produce in the world, it's easy to shop nutritiously at supermarkets or special produce markets for a fulfilling home-cooked meal. Before they head to bed, coffee and pastries are enjoyed at about 9:30 P.M., sometimes with friends over, other times during a sojourn to one of Reykjavik's beloved coffee shops, which run the gamut from bohemian to trendy, sometimes with live music, but always a comfortable home away from home.

When they do eat out, Pétur and Freyja are never at a loss for where to go. A culinary destination, Iceland has the most wine stewards per capita, and innovative young chefs know no bounds in fusing and creating ingredients to produce wildly new interpretations of global cuisine. Freyja is always amazed at dishes such as pizza topped with alfalfa and snails at Elðsmijan, herring sushi at Apótek, and tuna tandoori at Thorvaldsen—Iceland's famously fresh seafood taking a worldly stage.

## Major Foodstuffs

The two key items on any Icelandic menu are lamb and fish. In a country where sheep outnumber people by four to one, lamb is never lacking, and few parts of the sheep are left out of the kitchen. And with the Atlantic Ocean and the Arctic Ocean as the perimeter, fish of all varieties is a common sight all year round.

The low industrial output and high environmental consciousness in Iceland mean that Icelandic meat and seafood are some of the healthiest in Europe and entirely organic. In fact, this slogan exists



A commercial salmon fishing facility in Iceland. Fishing is the country's economic staple. (Corel)

in a bid to attract interest in exports and tourism: "Sustainable Iceland since 874." Because the waters around the island are unpolluted, the fish is delicious and fresh—most common are cod, haddock, catfish, monkfish, halibut, trout, arctic char, and salmon in the local catch. The lamb has a distinctly wild flavor due to being raised free-range in the country, free of hormones, and purists insist you can taste the wild berries, moss, and herbs the flock feeds on. Apart from lamb, beef and reindeer are robust alternatives, and seabirds such as puffins and guillemots often feature in local dishes.

Dairy makes up a large part of the Icelandic diet as well, with more than 80 types of cheeses produced in the country, Camembert and blue cheese being the most famous. With milk just as wholesome as the cows they come from, it is a popular beverage that accompanies most meals and skýr, a yogurt-like product, is de rigueur daily.

Although agriculture is more challenging than in other parts of the world, hothouse technology has given rise to a decent range of vegetables and some fruit, particularly tomatoes, cucumbers, and bell peppers. That being said, salads in Iceland tend to be a by-the-way sideshow rather than a main attraction.

## Cooking

Because of the country's history and lingering cold climates, preserving food is a long-standing tradition in Iceland—any meat, fish, and produce not eaten fresh are pickled, preserved, and spiced using all possible means. It's no surprise that Icelanders typically like their food saucy, salty, and well seasoned and that traditional cooking methods transform meat and seafood into hearty, heavy dishes. Fish is typically dried, smoked, salted, or baked, with garlic as a common ingredient. The pinnacle of Icelandic preservation practices must be the *hakarl,* shark meat that is buried from anywhere between three and six months until putrefied, breaking down the high levels of toxins in the flesh. While connoisseurs liken the taste to strong cheese, the flavor often makes the eyes water, and chasing a bite with *brennivin* (brandy) is often recommended, although it is too overwhelming even for many locals. A favorite way of serving lamb is in a mustard sauce or cut into filets, as well as in stews, roasts, grilled dishes, and cutlets. Of course, it wouldn't be Iceland if there were not an outstanding way of presenting lamb—*svid* is sheep's head that is first singed to remove the wool, then cut in two to remove the brain, and then boiled to be eaten fresh or pressed into jelly (*svidasulta*).

With bread and pastries an important complement to meals and coffee breaks, baking is a significant part of Icelandic cooking. Milk is also a common ingredient, to add a robust and wholesome taste, and cheese is very popular as a side dish or addition, as well as the ubiquitous skýr. In addition to milk as a drink with meals, strong alcoholic drinks are favored, such as brennivin and other types of vodka.

The utensils in an Icelandic kitchen are similar to those used in other Western cultures, since few traditional dishes require innovative methods of preparation. Consistency is characteristic of Icelandic cooking, as a local cuisine that has thrived on homogeneity with few exterior influences.

## Typical Meals

The structure of meals in an Icelander's day is not unlike that in many European countries, consisting of three main meals with an afternoon snack and a nightcap to top things off. Eating takes place at tables with individual settings of the usual silverware. The long winters and unusually cold temperatures necessitate hearty meals to stay strong and robust, and to keep the chill out, which explains the long tradition of heavy meals. Conveniently enough, the lack of a wide variety of agriculture does not make much of a difference since grains, breads, meats, and seafood are key nutritional items for Iceland's climate. As Iceland's cuisine grows more cosmopolitan, pastas and pizza have become a popular option for carbohydrates.

Interestingly enough, despite how quickly Iceland's culinary scene has been elevated on an eclectic scale, strong traditions remain, such as the constant imbibing of kaffi and skýr for dessert. The

latter is now available in all sorts of berry varieties, shakes, and even a more liquid form to complement cereals. And what may appear to be delicacies, such as *fillsegg* (seabird eggs), *lundi* (puffin), *hreindýr* (reindeer), *hrútspungar* (pickled ram's testicles), *slátur* (leftover lamb parts cooked like haggis), and *hestur* (horse), are common ingredients in the daily repast. In fact, *harðfiskur* (wind-dried haddock or cod) is a popular snack and the local equivalent of gum, eaten by tearing off a piece and chewing away, sometimes with a spread of butter.

## Eating Out

The exorbitant price tag attached to dining out in Iceland, mainly because of high labor costs, makes it challenging for the typical local to regularly sample the burgeoning gourmet scene in major cities such as Reykjavik, which leads the charge (a midscale meal begins at 3,125 kr, or $50). However, when Icelanders do venture into restaurants, the eclectic and innovative range of options, running from contemporary spins on traditional dishes to a fusion of international tastes, is endless. The hallmark of real Icelandic restaurants can still be found in cities outside of Reykjavik, especially in coastal areas, where these are identified by their nautical decor and wide selection of seafood and seabirds, always served with potatoes, familiar vegetables, and rich sauces in large portions and dramatic presentations. These traditional restaurants serve the dishes that are harder to create at home as well as fancier, more expertly prepared versions of comfort favorites.

The focus on modern Icelandic dining is strong and conspicuous—in Reykjavik restaurants, the waitstaff passionately introduce and engage in discourse about their specialties. Service is impeccable and welcoming, the warmth an immediate antidote for the climate, and a fantastic entrée into this wild new (for Iceland) art. Dining hours tend to run on the late side, with most breakfast places opening only after 10 A.M. on weekends and dinner service starting no earlier than 8 P.M.

There is perhaps no better indication of how far the Icelandic culinary scene has come than the Reykjavik Food & Fun Festival, held yearly in February (note that winter does not prevent Icelanders from going out and indulging in great food). Now one of the city's major events, prominent chefs from all around the world descend on the city to collaborate with their local counterparts to produce one-time-only prix fixe menus, at regular prices, in Reykjavik's best restaurants, infusing local Icelandic ingredients with global spices, flavors, and methodology.

In a country where delicacies come all the way out from left field, and with an abundance of fresh meats and fish, it is surprising that hot dogs are revered as an epicurean icon. After dancing a Saturday evening away, with more than a few nips of brennivin, many Reykjavik dwellers can be found in line at Bæjarius Beztu Pylsun, which literally translates as "the best hot dog in town," in the country that considers its hot dogs the best in the world. For only $2, you get lamb, pork, and beef in a supersnappy casing—the addition of lamb mellows and deepens the flavor—and crunchy fried onions, rémoulade, chopped raw onions, ketchup, and mustard nestled in a sweet, soft, and light white bun, the basic construction for *ein með öllu* ("one with everything").

## Special Occasions

There's perhaps no better time than *Þorramatur* to see a parade of Iceland's finest foods. Þorramatur is a selection of local dishes comprising meats and fish cooked in the ways already described and served with *rúgbrauð* (dense and dark rye bread), butter, and brennivin, usually buffet-style. Þorramatur is usually eaten from January through March, particularly during the midwinter feast of Þorrablót, but it is interesting to note that Icelanders enjoy their delicacies so much—the sheep's head, putrefied shark, pickled ram's testicles, and so on, all highlights of Þorramatur—that it is not uncommon to see this served any time the mood arises, particularly since locals truly embrace tradition.

Christmas Eve is a big occasion in Iceland, when a maelstrom of baking is done leading up to the holiday, featuring special spicy cookies. Each family will have at least 10 different types of cookies to offer visiting guests, and the centerpiece on the Christmas

Eve dinner table is usually ham, *hangikjöt* (smoked lamb), or *rjupa,* a grouselike ptarmigan that takes the place of turkey. It is also a long-standing tradition for the family to make *laufabrauo* together, a pancake eaten at Christmas. Pudding with hidden almonds is served for dessert, and the person who gets the portion with the nuts wins a prize.

Although the smell of hangikjöt cooking is a sure sign of yuletide, the feasting begins on the eve of Christmas Eve, St. Thorlakur's Day, celebrated with a skate lunch. Originally eaten to mark the end of the Catholic Christmas fast, the tradition of the skate lunch continued even after Iceland converted to Lutheranism because this was a busy day and a dish that was easily and quickly cooked was needed. Beginning in the fall, skate is pickled and fermented to be ready by December 23 and is then served in chunks with boiled potatoes on the side. While the odor of ammonia is strong and the taste must be acquired, the skate lunch remains one of the most celebrated events of the holiday season.

## Diet and Health

There is no better indication that the Icelandic diet has been lauded and commended for its organic, hormone-free nature than the fact that many countries are importing its meats and fish—in fact, with Whole Foods Market in the United States heavily marketing its selection of Icelandic lamb and skýr, these mainstays of the country's diet have indeed entered mainstream popular culture.

The strong reliance on fish, pasture-raised lamb, and wild game for food means the Icelandic diet is rich in omega-3 fats; some experts attribute the low depression rates, despite the bleak climate, to this.



Some traditional Icelandic food (plate to the left: Hangikjöt, Hrútspungar, Lifrarpylsa, Blómör, Hákarl, Svid; plate to the right: Rúgbrau, Flatbrau). (Shutterstock)

By consuming geothermally grown vegetables, wild berries, and whole grains such as barley and rye, Icelanders absorb a lot of antioxidants, which keep them healthy during the icy months.

*Desiree Koh*

**Further Reading**

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# Ireland

## Overview

Ireland is the most westerly country in Europe and part of the British Isles. For many centuries, the British Crown has exercised dominion over parts of the island and at times the whole. The island of Ireland has 32 counties, 6 of which form Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom. The other 26 counties gained independence from Great Britain in 1921, and the division of the island into two countries has been contentious ever since. Ireland has a mild temperate climate in which grass grows nearly all year long. Ireland also has over 3,500 miles of coastline, which is teeming with fish. It has been suggested that the Irish are more connected to the land than any other western European nation. Although there are only 5 million people living on the island of Ireland, more than 80 million people around the world claim Irish lineage.

Ireland has one of the most interesting culinary traditions in western Europe, which has been influenced by the interaction of climate, geographic location, geology, tradition, conquest and colonization, and commerce. Ireland was the first European country to adopt the potato as a staple crop, which transformed Ireland from an underpopulated island of 1 million in the 1590s to the most densely populated country in Europe in 1840, with 8.2 million inhabitants. The overdependence on the potato, particularly on one variety, the lumper, which was not resistant to the fungal disease *Phytophthora infestans,* led to the disaster known today as the Great Famine (1845–1849), with the result that, by 1851, at least one million of the Irish poor had died and another million had emigrated. Long before the introduction of the potato to Europe, however, the Irish were renowned for their tradition of hospitality, which was enshrined in the ancient Gaelic laws. Parallel food traditions existed in Ireland before, during, and after the famine, in which the middle classes and the Anglo-Irish gentry enjoyed a varied diet that would be hard to surpass in contemporary rural France or Britain. Traditional Irish food is essentially solid country cooking using the freshest of ingredients and treating them simply, letting the food speak for itself. The traditional fresh homebaked breads and scones served with butter, jams, and marmalades form a staple of Irish cuisine. The Irish attitude toward food has transformed dramatically, particularly since the early 1990s. In 2005, Irish people for the first time in history spent more on food to eat outside the home than they did on eating in the home.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Fergus and Niamh Dunne are a typical middle-class family with two children; they live in Dublin. Their breakfast consists of either porridge (oatmeal) or breakfast cereals such as shredded wheat, which is served with milk and sugar. Beverages at breakfast time include orange juice and either tea or coffee. Lunch for both the children and Fergus normally consists of a sandwich (with a ham or cheese filling) served with a fruit smoothie (fruit pureed with natural yogurt and fruit juice) and perhaps some popcorn. Niamh would normally eat some pita bread with hummus or some cream cheese, apple, and crackers for her lunch. As a family they go through phases of using their fruit juicer



Shepherd's pie served with sautéed potatoes and broccoli. (Shutterstock)

or the bread maker but then don't use them again for a while. Like in many families, the evening dinner follows a weekly pattern in which meat, potatoes, and vegetables (for example, chicken breasts, mashed potatoes, and broccoli) would be served around three times a week, with either spaghetti Bolognese or lasagna on another day, fish (salmon normally) served with potatoes and vegetables on Wednesdays, and pizza on Thursdays. One day a week, they would eat dinner from either a fish and chip shop or an Indian or Chinese take-out place. Dinner is usually completed by a cup of tea and some biscuits (cookies) or a slice of cake. Once a week, the children might also eat pasta, chicken nuggets, or slices of pizza when they return from school.

The Dunnes do their main supermarket shopping online and have it delivered. This includes their breakfast cereals, milk, sugar, oil, rice, pasta, fruit (apples, oranges, and bananas), fresh vegetables, frozen foods (peas, sweet corn), jams, and cleaning products. This main weekly shopping is supplemented by about four visits to smaller local shops, including a local butcher, a convenience store, and a weekly farmers' market. During the summer months, salads feature within their diet, and they grow lettuce in the back garden. The children dictate much of the diet; Niamh and Fergus don't eat as much of the ratatouilles or stir-fries they used to eat before the children came along. Fergus makes homemade soup once a week, and they entertain friends for dinner about twice a month. Daily guests, however, are always offered a cup of tea or coffee, which would normally be accompanied with some biscuits or a slice of cake.

## Major Foodstuffs

Potatoes, dairy produce, cereals, meat, and vegetables remain the staples of Irish cuisine, despite the wave of immigration the country experienced in the last two decades. Ireland is now a truly multicultural country where dishes such as lasagna, chicken tikka masala, fajitas, or Thai green curry are as much part of the Irish culinary canon as bacon and cabbage, Irish stew, or shepherd's pie. Ireland's residents are among the highest per-capita consumers of tea, butter, potatoes, pig meat, and milk in the world. Some foodstuffs, which historically had been luxury items, such as chicken, beef, and salmon, have become increasingly popular and affordable in the last few decades. Oatmeal porridge, which has been eaten in Ireland since ancient times, remains a popular breakfast dish, often served with cream and honey. Despite Ireland's island location and the richness of its coastal waters, the Irish have never fully exploited its marine resources. The majority of the Irish catch is exported, and Ireland is on par with landlocked Austria in per-capita consumption of seafood.

Irish cuisine has been influenced by history over the centuries. The Vikings helped to popularize seafood, whereas the Normans introduced new varieties of animals, birds, and fish, including the white-fleeced sheep, domesticated duck, mute swan (as opposed to the native Hooper swan), pike, rabbits, pheasants, pigeons, and fallow deer.

By the late-medieval period, a number of dietary systems were in place in Ireland, according to social rank, region, and access to the market. Areas of direct Norman influence aligned their palate to the medieval European norm. Trade records testify to the use of imported luxury goods like spices, sugar, almonds, pepper, figs, verjuice, and rice. Almonds were used on fast days to make almond milk as a substitute for dairy milk. The older Gaelic diet of

dairy produce, oats, and salted meats coexisted with the newer, more elaborate Norman diet.

Detailed accounts of food eaten before the arrival of the potato in the 17th century exist. Among the vegetables listed, both wild and cultivated, are watercress (*biolar*), sorrel (*samhadh*), nettles, celery, parsley, charlock (*praiseach*), kale and cabbage, shamrock, wild garlic, leek, onion, chives (*foltchep*), peas and beans, carrot and parsnip (*meacan*), beets (*biatas*), dulse (*duileasc*), and sloke (*sleabhcán*). Fruits listed include the blackberry, sloe, wild cherry, raspberry, strawberry, rowan, crab apple, elderberry, whortleberry, and cranberry. Native hazelnuts and imported walnuts are mentioned, but the most frequently mentioned fruit in the early Irish documents is the apple. Orchards were widely distributed, particularly in Leinster but also in the counties of Donegal, Mayo, Armagh, and Fermanagh. Apple tarts and crumbles remain extremely popular as sweet dishes with the Irish, with rhubarb, strawberries, and blackberries also popular when in season.

### *Potatoes*

There were four main phases in the potato's acceptance into the general Irish diet. Stage one (1590–1675) saw the potato used as a supplementary food and standby against famine; in stage two (1675–1750), the potato was viewed as a valuable winter food for the poorer classes; in stage three (1750–1810), the poorer classes became dangerously reliant on the potato as a staple for most of the year; and stage four (1810–1845) saw mounting distress as localized famines and potato failures became commonplace. Two centuries of genetic evolution resulted in yields that grew from 2 tons per acre in 1670 to 10 tons per acre in 1800. The potato was useful for cleaning, restoring, and reclaiming the soil and also for fattening pigs. It has been suggested that increased potato consumption may simply and paradoxically reflect the fact that cereal cultivation intensified in the 1750s and 1760s, resulting in a growing reliance on the potato as a cleaning and restoring root crop. The potato provided food for the growing labor force needed for the move from pasture to tillage that occurred at this time, but this shift resulted in high levels of unemployment following the Battle of Waterloo (1815) when the demand for grain exports fell. During the 18th century there was a steady export demand for Irish salt beef and butter. As dairy herds grew, cattle were drawn out of the poorer household, denying them an important food source, but this gap was filled by the potato, which was a noncommercial subsistence crop.

By the 19th century the potato had established itself as a staple of one-third of the population, an overdependence that led to the devastation of the famine in the 1840s when successive harvests failed. The period 1810–1845 saw the adoption of new, inferior varieties of potatoes, notably the lumper, which promised excellent yields. With this new variety, a family of six could exist for a whole year from one acre of even the poorest land that had been well manured. However, the lumper was not resistant to the potato blight, and this resulted in the dramatic potato failures of 1845, 1846, and 1847.

The potato was enjoyed by rich and poor alike. The custom of preparing potato puddings, both sweet and savory, was particularly noticeable among the wealthy, where extra ingredients like saffron, sugar, and spices differentiated this potato dish from the plain boiled potatoes of the cottiers. Among the poorer classes, who consumed an average of 11 pounds (5 kilograms) of potatoes each a day, it was not uncommon, it was said, to see individuals "eating one potato, peeling a second, have a third in his fist and an eye on the fourth." Boiled potatoes were eaten with a restricted variety of foods—butter, buttermilk, occasional bacon, herring, and seaweed (dulse and sloke) and shellfish in coastal areas. The Irish have traditionally favored floury potatoes over waxy potatoes. Mashed potato dishes such as *champ* (with spring onions), colcannon (with shredded cabbage), and *kala* (with onions and soft-boiled eggs) were popular with those of moderate means and have become very popular in recent times on the menus of Irish restaurants. Another traditional Irish potato dish that remains most popular in the northwestern counties of Ireland is *boxty,* which is made from a mix of cooked

and grated raw potatoes. In 1845 there were over 2 million acres (829,875 hectares) under potato cultivation, but this had fallen to about 50,000 acres (20,000 hectares) in 1991. Popular potato varieties in Ireland include Kerr Pinks, Wexford Queens, Records, Pentland Dells, and Golden Wonders, but the most widespread variety is an all-purpose potato called the Rooster, which was developed in Oak Park, County Carlow. However, pasta, rice, and noodles are beginning to challenge the dominance of potatoes on the carbohydrate front.

### *Pork*

In Ireland today, pork is the most commonly eaten meat. It is eaten in a number of forms, including fresh pork steaks and chops, pork sausages, bacon, hams, rashers (bacon), and both black and white puddings. Historically, potatoes were cooked as feed for pigs. Pigs were also fed whey, the by-product of both butter and cheese making. Some of the pigs were kept for home consumption, but the rest were a valuable source of income and were shown great respect as the "gentleman who paid the rent." Until the early 20th century most Irish rural households kept some pigs. From around the mid-18th century commercial salting of pork and bacon grew rapidly in Ireland. Irish bacon was the brand leader, and the Irish companies exported their expertise to countries like Denmark and Russia. Nowadays, pigs are reared mostly in large factory farms. Pork features strongly in the Irish breakfast, on sandwiches at lunchtime, and in the famous Dublin dish *coddle.* The popularity of pork products became particularly apparent through the amount of empty shelf space in Irish supermarkets in December 2008 when there was a food scare concerning dioxins in pork and all products were recalled.

**Dublin Coddle**

*Serves 4*

½ lb sausages (cocktail sausages are nice)

½ lb bacon (cut in chunks)

½ lb onion (cut in chunks)

1 lb potatoes (cut in chunks)

1 large carrot (peeled and cut in chunks)

34 oz chicken stock or water

½ leek, finely sliced (using green and white of leek)

3.5 oz cream (about ½ c)

Seasoning (mostly ground pepper as little salt is required due to the salt in the meat and stock)

Put all ingredients (except leeks, cream, and seasoning) into a pot, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 25 minutes. Skim any impurities that rise to the top. Add the cream and the chopped leeks, and cook for a further 3 minutes, then season and serve.

### *Milk and Dairy*

Ireland traditionally has excelled in the production of dairy produce—milk, sour milk, butter, buttermilk, curds, and both soft and hard cheeses. Evidence of the Irish fondness for *bánbidh,* "white foods," is found in the 12th-century poem *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne,* where reference is made to a delectable drink "of very thick milk, of milk not too thick, of milk of long thickness, of milk of medium thickness, of yellow bubbling milk, the swallowing of which needs chewing." In both the medieval and the early-modern periods, the Irish were the highest per-capita consumers of butter in the world. Irish butter is sold under the Kerrygold label all around the world. Cheese making has an ancient tradition in Ireland, but it had all but disappeared until the resurgence of an artisan farmhouse cheese industry, led by a number of farmers' wives who had more milk than the European Union quotas allowed them to sell. Prior to this, the cheese industry in Ireland was almost exclusively confined to large-scale production of mainly cheddar cheese in factories, which were mostly owned by dairy cooperatives. Ireland today has over 300 types of farmhouse cheese, which on a per-capita basis is higher even than the production in France. The most popular of these are Cashel Blue, Gubbeen, Milleens, Ardsallagh, Gabriel, Durrus, and Coolea.

### *Tea, Breads, and Cakes*

From ancient times in Ireland, oatcakes, flatbreads, and griddle breads were popular staples. There was no evidence of the built-up oven until the Norman arrival, and leavened yeast bread was common only in areas of Norman influence. During the latter half of the 19th century, there was a general growth in food-related stores and in the number of commercial bakeries and dairies in particular. During this time two items that had been the prerogative of the wealthy, white yeast-leavened baker's bread and tea, became increasingly popular among the working classes. White bread was held in esteem over homemade bread and was offered at special occasions such as wakes, Christmas, and Easter, or when special guests such as a priest visited the home.

A parallel development was the appearance of raised wheaten soda bread that was produced on the open hearth in a *bastible* pot (a type of Dutch oven), due to the increased availability of chemical leaveners (particularly bicarbonate of soda), which along with the soft flour and buttermilk produced a product that is considered to be uniquely Irish. The addition of other ingredients—eggs, butter, dried fruit, and spices—led to the growing repertoire of Irish breads, scones, and cakes. Some regional variation was also evident, with potato breads such as boxty most popular in the northwestern counties. A yeast-leavened bread bap (bun) called *blaa* is considered to be unique to Waterford and may be Norman in origin. Soda farls (a type of scone cooked on a hot plate rather than in the oven) are particularly popular in Northern Ireland and form part of the famous Ulster fry, along with fried bread. Two Irish brands of tea, Barry's and Lyons, have dominated the market from the early 20th century to the present day, and the Irish are still the highest per-capita consumers of tea in the world today.



Traditional Irish soda bread. (Shutterstock)

## Cooking

Roasting, boiling, baking, stewing, and frying are the main methods of cookery used in Irish cuisine. The prime cuts of meat (beef, lamb, pork) are roasted and often served with roasted potatoes and roasted root vegetables (carrots, parsnips, and turnips). Most vegetables are boiled, although some people prefer to steam floury potatoes. Bacon and corned beef are boiled, and the cooking liquor is often used to cook the accompanying cabbage or as an addition to the parsley sauce. Stewed meats are particularly popular in wintertime, with the most famous Irish stew classically containing only mutton, onions, potatoes, and water. Stewed apples are very popular as a sweet, scented with some cloves and served with custard. The frying pan holds pride of place in the Irish household, for it is used to fry sausages, rashers, eggs, black pudding (blood sausages), and tomatoes for the famous Irish cooked breakfast, commonly called a "fry." The more health-conscious broil their breakfast, and some lamb cutlets with butter, pepper, and mustard are also commonly cooked under the broiler. Many children learn to bake by making fairy cakes (little buns) and gradually progress to sponge cakes, apple tarts, and crumbles. It is hard to beat the taste of oven-fresh scones with fresh butter and strawberry jam, washed down with a nice cup of tea.

## Typical Meals

The typical meals in Ireland are breakfast (7:30–9 A.M.), lunch (1–2 P.M.), and dinner (6–7 P.M.). Some people also take a supper (9:30–10 P.M.). There have been changes in the mealtimes and structure in recent years due to the rising female participation in

the workforce. Many families ate their main meal in the middle of the day and then took a meal they called tea in the evening. The main family meal is now most commonly eaten in the evening, albeit sometimes in front of the television.

Breakfast can include one or many of the following: fruit juice, breakfast cereal (cornflakes, Weetabix, Special K, Rice Krispies, and so on), oatmeal porridge, toast, scones, brown or white soda bread with butter, jam or marmalade, yogurt, fruit, croissants, and Danish pastries. A full hot Irish breakfast includes sausages, rashers, fried eggs, grilled tomato, black and white pudding, and mushrooms. The Ulster fry also includes soda farls and fried bread. Boiled or poached eggs are also popular breakfast items, served with toast and butter. Omelets are occasionally served for breakfast as are fried kippers or dishes such as kedgeree. This would be more common on weekends, particularly as a form of brunch on Sunday. Breakfast beverages include tea, coffee, and fruit juices.

The traditional main meal based around meat and two vegetables has not disappeared despite the growing popularity of ethnic dishes such as Thai curry, lasagna, or chili con carne. The most popular meats are bacon (with parsley sauce), chicken (normally roasted with stuffing and gravy), beef (with horseradish sauce), lamb (with mint sauce), and pork (with applesauce). Smaller cuts of meat are also popular, such as beef steaks, pork chops, lamb chops and cutlets, and individual chicken breasts, thighs, or drumsticks. Minced beef is very popular and is used by most families at least once a week to make burgers, shepherd's pie, spaghetti Bolognese, lasagna, meatballs, or chili. Mutton is not as widely available or as popular as in previous times. There has been a decrease in the consumption of offal (liver, kidneys, heart, oxtail, tongue, pig's trotters) among the native Irish since 1990, but they have become more visible in butcher's shops due to the growing multiethnic population (or the new Irish, as they are known), who still value offal for both culinary and economic reasons.

Potatoes are served boiled, steamed, baked, and mashed. Deep-fried chipped potatoes, known as chips, are particularly common but are usually purchased alongside fried fish in batter from fish and chip shops. Common vegetables include cabbage, carrots and parsnips, turnips, broccoli, cauliflower, French beans, and peas. Onions, celery, and carrots are particularly popular as a base for stews (both brown and white). Casseroles are also popular one-pot dishes, particularly in wintertime. It is customary to finish dinner with a cup of tea, which is normally accompanied by a biscuit or a slice of cake. Apple tarts or crumbles might be served with whipped cream or with custard. Sponge cakes and fruit cakes are also popular.

Children are increasingly being fed separate food from what their parents eat, with pizza, pasta, noodles, chicken nuggets, chips, and potato waffles well established as foods most Irish children regularly eat. Another regular snack for children are crisps (potato chips), which come in cheese and onion, salt and vinegar, prawn cocktail, and barbecue beef flavors mostly. Most elementary schools now take part in a government program in which the children grow some food in their schoolyard or classroom. Milk is also delivered free of charge to primary schools to encourage dairy consumption for calcium intake and healthy bones. Childhood obesity and related diseases are, however, becoming an increasing issue in Ireland.

## Eating Out

There has always been a market for eating outside the home in bars, taverns, eating houses, restaurants, cafés, canteens, and clubs. This market grew dramatically from the 1970s, and in the last 15 years, eating out moved from an occasional event to a regular pastime for most Irish people. In 2005, for the first time in history, Irish people spent more money on food consumed outside rather than inside the home. Many Irish public houses (pubs) sell food as well as alcoholic beverages. The most common form is the *carvery,* where roast meats are carved to order and served with potatoes, vegetables, stuffing, and gravy. Wet dishes such as stews and curries are also served at a carvery. The carvery provides the most authentic public form of Irish cuisine. Most Irish people prefer to go to a Chinese, Thai, Italian, Indian, or

French restaurant when dining out. There is also a gradual growth in sushi bars and bagel bars in the large cities. Ireland now has some excellent restaurants and is steadily building a reputation as a culinary destination for travelers. A growing number of restaurants serve what is called modern Irish cuisine, where the best Irish produce is cooked and served using contemporary techniques. There has been a long tradition of a café culture in Irish cities, but in recent years the famous cafés such as Bewley's, where a pot of tea and an almond bun might be consumed, have been replaced by smaller cafés where cappuccinos and Danish pastries or muffins are more popular.

Fast-food restaurants such as McDonald's, Burger King, and Kentucky Fried Chicken are popular in Ireland, but some indigenous chains such as Supermac's and Abrekebabra have proved to be equally popular, serving particularly Irish versions of fast-food items, such as curry chips, taco fries, or garlic and cheese fries. Most Chinese and Indian restaurants also offer take-out menus. The most common take-out place in Ireland is the fish and chip shops, which are mostly run by Italian families. These establishments serve deep-fried fish in batter, battered sausages and onion rings, burgers, southern fried chicken, and sometimes also kebabs. Chips are usually served with salt and malt vinegar. Another source of food outside the home that has become extremely popular in recent years is the deli counters in convenient shops, where fresh sandwiches, rolls, and wraps are made to order. At lunchtime, there are regular queues at such counters throughout the country. A particularly Irish morning offering popular in such establishments is the jumbo breakfast roll, which is two sausages, two slices of bacon, and black pudding placed in a buttered bread roll with tomato ketchup.

## Special Occasions

There are a number of special occasions within the year or social calendar that call for specific foods. Christmastime revolves around the family; the traditional Christmas dinner of roast goose has been replaced by turkey and ham with stuffing, cranberry sauce, roast potatoes, vegetables, and gravy. This meal is often preceded by some smoked salmon on brown bread or a prawn cocktail (cooked prawns on shredded lettuce topped with a cocktail sauce). The Christmas meal is followed by Christmas pudding, also known as plum pudding, which is a rich fruit-based boiled or steamed pudding served with either brandy butter or custard. Later on, with a cup of tea or coffee, you might be offered a slice of Christmas cake, which is a rich baked fruitcake topped with both almond and royal icing. Another popular Christmas food is spiced beef, which was traditionally eaten on Christmas Eve. Both the spiced beef and the turkey and ham are excellent for either cold salads or sandwiches when guests come to visit at Christmastime. Another popular sweet served at Christmas is sherry trifle.

The turkey and ham meal is also often served at family occasions such as weddings or at funerals. Families often invite mourners back to a hotel for either soup and sandwiches or a sit-down meal after a funeral. At other occasions such as christenings, first communions, confirmations, or 21st-birthday parties, it is more common to serve either a cold salad buffet or a hot dish such as chicken curry with rice.

The next food-related date in the calendar is Shrove Tuesday, which marks the beginning of Lent (40 days of fasting from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday). On this day it is customary to eat pancakes, a custom that originated to use up eggs, which would not be eaten again until Easter Sunday. Pancakes were eaten with sugar and lemon or with honey, but nowadays children increasingly prefer Nutella (a hazelnut chocolate spread) on their pancakes. Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and Holy Thursday were all traditionally black fast days when no meat was consumed. Fridays were also traditionally fast days when fish was normally consumed, but these traditions are quickly being lost in an increasingly secular Ireland. Many Irish people continue the tradition of abstaining from some foodstuff during Lent, normally sweets, sugar, cakes, or alcohol. Saint Patrick's Day falls in the middle of Lent, and Irish people are given a special dispensation from whatever they avoided for Lent on this day. On Good Friday, it is customary to eat hot cross

buns (yeast-leavened spiced fruit buns topped with a cross of pastry), and the tradition of eating many eggs on Easter Sunday has been almost replaced by the gifts of chocolate eggs for children. On Easter Sunday it is customary to eat roast leg of spring lamb, which is seasonal.

The arrival of summer is marked with the availability of fresh strawberries and of new potatoes, which are as welcomed in Ireland as the Beaujolais nouveau celebrated by the French. New potatoes are often eaten simply with their skins still on, with butter and salt. Summer is also about eating wild salmon, which is becoming less available due to overfishing. Rhubarb and blackberries are at their best in the summer months also. The tradition of eating goose at Michaelmas (September 29) has all but disappeared, but the game season (venison, pheasant, grouse, etc.) in the winter months is still influential in the diet of the countryside and in gourmet restaurants.

The next special occasion for food is the festival of Halloween (October 31/November 1). Many foods and food rituals are associated with this festival. Many of the traditions are linked to divining the future. From the mid-18th century, colcannon, a dish made from mashed potatoes with curly kale or cabbage, was a traditional supper dish on Halloween night, often containing items such as a coin, stick, or rag to predict the future prospects of the consumers. Another traditional foodstuff at Halloween is *barmbrack,* which comes from the Gaelic *bairín breac,* or speckled loaf. The fruit loaf traditionally contains charms that foretell future events. Finding a ring in the cake meant marriage within the year, a rag symbolized poverty, a bean meant riches whereas a pea meant poverty, a stick forecasted a future beating by one's spouse, and a thimble discovered by an unmarried girl indicated life as a spinster. Most barmbracks nowadays contain only a ring. The American Halloween tradition of the jack-o'-lantern made from a pumpkin is Irish in origin. The Irish used to carry a sod of turf from a sacred fire to their houses inside a hollowed-out turnip (rutabaga), and this tradition was carried on by Irish immigrants in America, using the pumpkin where no turnip was available.



A dish of colcannon. (Shutterstock)

## Diet and Health

Cardiovascular disease is the main cause of death in Ireland, accounting for 36 percent of all deaths and including heart attacks, strokes, and other circulatory diseases. The government has been working with the food industry to reduce salt levels in processed food and is involved in promoting a more active lifestyle among the population. Research shows that certain segments of the community are more likely to suffer from diet-related illnesses. In a study, the contribution of fat to total energy intake increased as socioeconomic status decreased, a finding reflective of the higher consumption of foods high in fat by respondents from socially disadvantaged groups. Energy from carbohydrates was greatest among those from socially advantaged groups and was close to the recommended 50 percent of the total energy intake. Conversely, energy from protein decreased with increasing social status in groups. The mean intake of vitamins and minerals was generally close to or above the recommended values. Another diet-related health issue in Ireland is the amount of alcohol consumed, which is significantly higher than the European average.

*Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire*

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# Italy

## Overview

Italy is located at the heart of the Mediterranean Sea. After years of relative underdevelopment, the country has become one of the most industrialized countries in the world, despite its dysfunctional political structure. Various areas differ in terms of economic activities, social structures, and culture, although some habits, especially those connected with Catholicism, are widespread and widely followed. Because of its long history, the diverse and prolonged influences of neighboring populations, and local differences, Italian cuisine presents a stunning variety of products, foods, and dishes. Italians are usually quite knowledgeable about foods and dishes that have nationwide diffusion and distribution, but they are also very proud of their local products and traditions. In recent years, local foodways, and above all artisanal products, have been rediscovered. However, large sections of the population are abandoning the traditional Mediterranean diet, mainly based on carbohydrates and vegetables, and adopting a diet rich in protein, fat, and sugar; as a consequence Italy is experiencing a growth in obesity and heart disease.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Massimo and Francesca live in downtown Rome with their four-year-old daughter, Caterina. It is Saturday, and on weekends they take the time to go grocery shopping. Like most Romans, they buy different things in different places, depending on what they are looking for. They start early at the outdoor market, the best place for fresh fruit and vegetables. Some produce comes from the central wholesale market, but some stalls belong to farmers from the nearby villages on the hills, who have been bringing their products into the city for years. Now, immigrants manage many stalls, but they are familiar with their Italian clients' foodways and habits. Massimo and Francesca decide to get some fresh fish, too; the best day to buy it is Friday, but today it is still good, and they trust their fishmonger. For meat, although it can be bought at the outdoor market, they prefer to go to the neighborhood butcher's, where they can get the cuts they need in a quieter environment. They also like to patronize the local bakery, where they buy fresh bread and also pizza by weight: Caterina loves it. After taking care of the fresh food, Francesca and Massimo drive to the supermarket, where they buy products that can be stored: canned and frozen food, flour, cookies, and pasta, which are cheaper at the supermarket. Tomorrow they are having friends over, so on their way back they decide to stop at their favorite gourmet shop and get some cheese and cold cuts for the guests. It is expensive, but for special occasions they do not mind spending a little more. A final stop at the wine store to get some good bottles, and they are good to go.

## Major Foodstuffs

Grains, such as wheat, rice, and corn, constitute the main staple in Italian cuisine. Wheat, both the hard and soft varieties, provides the bulk of dietary calories in the form of flour, bread, pasta, pizza, and such. Breads, both salted and unsalted, vary in size from single-portion breads to big loaves. They are used during meals, and single-portion breads

(*panini*), filled with all kinds of food, are eaten as a snack or a light meal. Leavened dough is also used to make pizza, which can be baked in the oven and simply seasoned with a dash of olive oil, salt, and some herbs or enriched by all kinds of toppings. Pizza can be either eaten at a restaurant, in which case it is round and served on a dish, or bought from shops, where it is cut according to the client's request and sold by the weight.

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***Pappa al Pomodoro* (Tuscan Tomato and Bread Soup)**

1/3 c extra-virgin olive oil

1 medium onion, finely minced

1 stalk celery, finely minced

1 medium carrot, finely minced

1 clove garlic, finely minced

1 tbsp parsley, finely minced

3 c stale Italian bread, crust removed, cut into 1-in. cubes

1½ lb red tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and chopped

3 c chicken broth

Salt and pepper

4 basil leaves, minced

Heat the olive oil in a soup pot over medium heat. Add the onion, celery, carrot, garlic, and parsley, and sauté until the vegetables are soft. Add the bread, and stir for a couple of minutes. Add the tomatoes, let cook for 5 minutes, and then add the warm broth. Season with salt and pepper. Reduce the heat and let simmer, uncovered, till the bread dissolves into a thick, creamy soup. Remove from the heat and allow the soup to rest for 20 minutes. Serve at room temperature, garnishing each portion with a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil and a sprinkling of basil.

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The main Italian staple made with wheat flour is certainly pasta. Fresh pasta used to be made at home, but it is now available in shops. The most common types are fettuccine or tagliatelle, shaped with a knife into long ribbons. Local specialties include *tajarin* (long, flat egg noodles) in Piedmont, *garganelli* (ridged quill shapes) in Romagna, *orecchiette* (ear shapes) in Puglia, *spaghetti alla chitarra* in Abruzzo, and *bigoli* (thick hollow strands) in Veneto. There are also many types of fresh *pasta ripiena,* or filled pasta, such as ravioli, *agnolotti, tortelli,* and tortellini; *lasagne* and cannelloni, rolled squares filled with meat, mozzarella, or vegetables, are also common. Although most *pasta secca,* or dried pasta, is industrially produced, artisanal varieties are also very popular, despite being more expensive. Different shapes of pastas tend to be used with different sauces and condiments according to local tradition or nationwide habits.

Italian rice grains tend to be more rounded and release more starch than varieties from other countries and thus are particularly apt for local recipes. In the north, a traditional way of cooking rice is risotto: The grains are first sautéed in butter and onion until translucent, then hot meat broth is added slowly. The most famous is probably *risotto alla milanese,* cooked with saffron and broth. In recent years, fish-based risotto has also become very popular. In the south, there are fried balls of rice stuffed with various ingredients, like *supplì* in Rome and *arancini* in Sicily. Rice is also widely used in thick soups.

Maize was introduced into Italy in the 16th century. Although corn on the cob is appreciated and corn kernels have found their way into salads, maize is mainly consumed in the form of polenta,



A traditional Italian saffron risotto. (Shutterstock)

similar to American grits, seasoned with various sauces. Other grains used to make pastas or cooked in soups are buckwheat, barley, and *faro,* a whole grain similar to spelt.

Pulses, both fresh and dried, are important in the dietary pattern of Italian populations, the most common being beans, lentils, chickpeas, fava beans, and peas. Pulses are also used in vegetable soups, or *minestre;* other ingredients may include pasta, vegetables, and herbs. When pasta is absent, soups are called *zuppa.* Chestnuts, although a fruit, were used like a legume in the past; that is to say, they were boiled in soups or ground into flour.

Introduced in the 16th century, potatoes can be mashed into a puree, fried, sautéed, boiled, roasted, and baked. The most renowned potato-based dish is gnocchi, little dumplings made by adding flour and sometimes eggs, which are boiled and then seasoned with melted butter and cheese, light tomato sauces, or pesto. Other root vegetables, like beets or radishes, are not common, with the exception of carrots.

Together with legumes and potatoes, vegetables play an important role in Italian dietary patterns. Besides fresh salads, there are onions, garlic, celery, scallions, leeks, eggplant, sweet peppers, chili peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchini, asparagus, artichokes, fennel, chard, spinach, broccoli, broccoli rabe, and all kind of cabbages. Vegetables are consumed fresh, or pickled and conserved in olive oil, vinegar, or salt. Mushrooms and their more expensive relatives, truffles, are appreciated all over Italy. Herbs like oregano, basil, rosemary, mint, bay leaves, and parsley are commonly used to season dishes. Thyme, myrtle, dill, tarragon, and juniper berries are less frequent. Spices such as pepper, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, and saffron are also widely used.

Fruits play a very important role in the Italian diet, eaten all day long as a snack and consumed regularly at the end of every meal. The most common fruits are oranges, tangerines, pears, and apples in winter; strawberries and cherries in spring; peaches, plums, apricots, figs, melons, and watermelons in summer; and persimmons, grapes, and chestnuts in the fall. Tropical fruit is now widely available, especially bananas, pineapples, grapefruit, and coconuts. Almonds, hazelnuts, pine nuts, walnuts, and pistachios are widely consumed; peanuts are massively imported.

Olive trees grow well in the coastal areas of the south, in Tuscany, along the coast of Liguria, and near Lake Garda. Olives are commonly pickled and cured. Varieties of olives differ in size, taste, and growing periods, making the oils deriving from them different. The mixture of olive varieties and the *terroir* (depending on the character of the soil, the weather, exposure to the sun and wind, cultivation methods) determine the character of the final product. Olive oil is a traditionally important cooking fat, together with butter in the north and pork fat all over the country.

Wine, produced in great quantities, often employing local varieties, is a basic component in everyday meals. Wine is still bought in bulk for everyday consumption, but the general appreciation for high-quality wines is growing. Some wine is traditionally fermented into vinegar, a very common condiment; balsamic vinegar, originally produced in Emilia Romagna, is now increasingly popular. Italian spirits are made either by distilling the by-products deriving from the winemaking process or by macerating herbs and fruit in different types of alcohol. The most famous distilled spirit is the grape-based grappa, mostly produced in the north. Beer, some of it produced locally, is also widely consumed.

Consumption of meat has dramatically increased in the past decades. Ways to cook meat include frying, roasting, grilling, boiling, braising, stewing, and sautéing. The most common meats are beef, veal, pork, lamb, chicken, turkey, and less frequently rabbit, duck, goose, squab, mutton, goat, venison, game, and horse. Pork meat is cured and preserved as sausages, salami, and prosciutto (both raw and roasted). Offal is still popular, although the youngest generations are increasingly less willing to consume it.

Fish is widely available, both fresh and frozen. Among freshwater fish, Italians prefer trout, perch, carp, and eels, while the most appreciated saltwater fish are sea bass, gilthead bream, sole, turbot, skate, John Dory, and red mullet. Also very popular are salted codfish and stockfish, which are dried and reconstituted. A special category is the so-called blue

fish, which includes anchovies, sardines, mackerel, tuna fish, and swordfish.

***Aliciotti con l'indivia* (Fresh Anchovies with Escarole)**

2 lb escarole

2 lb cleaned fresh anchovies

Salt and pepper

6 cloves garlic, slivered

2 tbsp dried breadcrumbs

1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil

Slice and salt the escarole, then drain in a colander for 2 hours. Wash and pat dry the fresh anchovies with a paper towel. Rub a 9-inch round baking dish with extra-virgin olive oil. Arrange the anchovies in one layer. Salt and pepper to taste. Distribute a few slivers of garlic over the anchovies and some of the escarole. Repeat layers of anchovies, escarole, and garlic until all of the ingredients are used up. Cover with the breadcrumbs, and drizzle with olive oil. Bake in a preheated 400°F oven for 40 minutes. Serve lukewarm or at room temperature.

Fish—usually sold and served whole, and not filleted—can be grilled, roasted, boiled, stewed, sautéed, fried, steamed, or cooked in aluminum foil. Crustaceans, shellfish, and all kinds of mollusks are appreciated, especially mussels, clams, shrimp, crab, squid, and octopus. Eggs constitute a very important element of the everyday diet, cooked in various ways.

Milk is not as popular as in the United States and is mostly drunk for breakfast. Sour cream and buttermilk are quite rare, while yogurt is increasingly popular. Plain cream is sometimes used in pastry or specific recipes. Hundreds of cheeses are available in Italy, with different flavors, textures, and aromas depending on the area of production, the grass, the habits of the shepherds, traditions, and technical know-how. Industrial cheese is also widely sold. Italians consume cheese by itself or in sandwiches, use it in many recipes, or grate it on top of pasta and soups. The most popular cow-milk cheeses include *parmigiano reggiano, grana padano,* Asiago, taleggio, Gorgonzola, fontina, provolone, mozzarella, and *scamorza;* popular sheep-milk cheeses are scamorza, pecorino Romano, pecorino Toscano, and caciotta.

Italians enjoy both mass-produced brands of ice cream, available in groceries, supermarkets, and bars, and artisanal gelato, sold in shops (*gelaterie*) that are often open year-round. A simple frozen dessert is granita, grated ice flavored with fruit, coffee, or syrups poured on top, while sorbet (*sorbetto*) is made with syrups or pureed fruit.

Pastry shops and bakeries offer a wide choice of pies, cakes, and small pastries, which vary according to the different areas. Many pastries are made of fried dough with different fillings, like *zeppole* in Naples, filled with custard cream. Doughnut-shaped fried pastries are called *frittelle.* Also, the dough for the renowned Sicilian cannoli, filled with a ricotta cheese–based cream, is fried. Baked desserts and pies are also very common, both homemade and commercial. There are many kinds of biscotto (the word means "twice-cooked") and *crostata,* a thin layer of *pasta frolla*—quite similar to shortbread—spread over the bottom of a pan, topped with homemade jam or fruit preserves, and baked. Many desserts use a sort of sponge cake, or *pandispagna,* as a base, like the famous Sicilian *cassata,* filled with a cream made of ricotta cheese, sugar, candied fruits, and pieces of chocolate, covered with a thick frosting of white sugar and decorated with candied fruits.

Several drinks made by infusion or decoction of leaves, grains, or roots in boiling water are commonly used in Italy, the most common being coffee. Other infusions include tea, chamomile tea, linden, mint, and verbena. Chocolate in all forms is also very popular.

## Cooking

Women are usually in charge of food at home, helped by appliances like electric or gas stoves, refrigerators, microwave ovens, and smaller appliances like pressure cookers, frying machines, pasta makers, toasters, mixers, and food processors. Only after World War II, with the massive immigration

toward the industrial north, the growing urbanization, the abandonment of the countryside, and the economic boom, did it become normal for women to work full-time outside the house. Although jobs that left time for cooking and housekeeping were still preferred, over the past decades it has become socially acceptable for women to dedicate themselves to their careers. However, men from older generations still expect the women to do the shopping, the cooking, and the cleaning. Among younger couples chores tend to be shared, especially when it comes to grocery shopping and the kitchen. It has become acceptable for young men to learn how to make at least some simple dishes.

Various dishes and culinary traditions that require intensive and lengthy preparations are slowly disappearing. To respond to these changes, food industries are investing in creating and mass-producing ready-made alternatives that still maintain some connection with the dishes of the past, banking on nostalgia. Curing and pickling vegetables in one's kitchen, or making jams and preserves at home, has become rare, more a hobby than a necessity.

In the past, women were in charge of transmitting their knowledge and experience in all culinary matters to the new generations. There was no desire for new recipes; the main task was to make the best of the limited resources available. Recipes and techniques were transmitted orally and by practical example. A woman with scarce culinary abilities was pitied and frowned on. From the 1960s, most working women had no time to teach their children how to cook, while young women did not want to perpetuate the social order that had forced their mothers into the kitchen. As a result, many young people, especially in urban environments, did not learn how to cook. Then came the 1990s, with the renewed interest in food and wine, finally considered as a major component of the Italian culture and society. People are interested again in learning about food and cooking but this time from cookbooks, magazines, televisions shows, and associations such as Slow Food, which was founded in Italy in reaction to the proliferation of fast food.

## Typical Meals

The triad of meals, breakfast—midday meal—evening meal (*colazione, pranzo, cena*), is the norm all over Italy. Breakfast is often insubstantial, and often adults have only a small cup of coffee or coffee with frothed milk (cappuccino) on their way to work. Children usually have a slightly more structured meal, centered around a bowl of milk, often enriched with coffee, or less commonly tea, accompanied by plain or flavored cookies (biscotti), croissants, cake, slightly sweetened double-baked slices of bread (*fette biscottate*), or simple bread. Due to the scanty quantity of food consumed at breakfast, it is not uncommon to have a midmorning break. Brunch is a new concept in Italy. During the weekend, if people wake up late, they prefer to limit themselves to a coffee and wait till lunchtime for a more abundant meal.

The midday meal usually takes place between 12 and 3 P.M., depending on the area and the season. The traditional midday meal is structured around two main courses, called *primo* (first dish, often a pasta dish or a soup) and *secondo* (second dish, meat or fish, often served together with one or more side dishes, usually vegetables). Everyday meals usually end with some seasonal fruits, more rarely with a dessert, with the exception of ice creams or frozen desserts in summer. In the hot season, people often fix very light meals, with a preference for salads or cold dishes. Today, most people have either a primo or a secondo at midday and have both courses in the evening. A complete meal with primo and secondo, often followed by substantial desserts, also marks weekends and special occasions. Many Italians still consume their lunch at home, making it the biggest meal of the day, but children and people working 9 to 5 eat in canteens or in various kinds of eateries. It is fairly common for workers to bring their own lunches from home, consisting of a cooked dish or of a simple sandwich.

The evening meal, which in the past tended to be lighter, is now acquiring more importance, since it is often the only time of the day when the whole family can sit together. Many opt for either a primo or a secondo or prepare a single dish that includes more

than one element. Some cheese and cold cuts in the fridge can be used to fix a fast, light meal, together with a fresh tossed salad, tomatoes, or other vegetables. With a seated meal, most adults may drink beer or wine.

## Eating Out

Although Italians enjoy cooking and eating their meals at home, and inviting friends and family for meals is a very common custom, eating out at *ristoranti, trattorie,* and *osterie* constitutes an important element in Italian social life. The meaning of these words has changed over time. Now, a ristorante is usually an establishment that offers nice decor, good service, and an upscale menu, while trattorie and osterie tend to provide simpler food and service, at more affordable prices. Restaurants are rarely patronized by persons eating by themselves, with the notable exceptions of tourists, businessmen from out of town, or single men and women who prefer not to cook. Eating a complete meal by oneself is nevertheless considered quite unsatisfying and psychologically depressing. Restaurants thus become places to celebrate birthdays, to have dates, to mark holidays and special occasions, or just to socialize and meet friends.

With the renewed interest in traditional dishes and local ingredients, osterie and trattorie are undergoing a definite renaissance. Also, many ristoranti now offer traditional, regional, and local dishes in a more upscale environment. In this case there is greater attention to ingredients, produce, and wine, with a tangible increase in prices. Other establishments bet on new cooking styles, either by importing foreign models (as was the case for nouvelle cuisine in the 1980s and, more recently, for American steakhouses or Japanese-style sushi bars)



Cafè scene, Portofino, Italy. (Corel)

or by adopting a creative approach toward Italian cuisine.

Beginning in the 1950s, the younger generations found a relaxed and laidback place to gather in the new "American-style" bars, an evolution of coffeehouses, with a more modern decor and a less refined service, but still serving coffee rather than alcoholic drinks and offering a choice of food, pastry, and ice creams. However, many cities still boast elegant coffeehouses, usually more expensive than bars, offering great ambiance and a wider choice of sweet and savory small bites. These are places where clients sit down and take their time chatting with friends, reading, or having dates. They ensure calm and privacy, while bars tend to cater to people on the go, who often consume their drinks and their snacks standing. Nevertheless, bars often have tables and outdoor seating for the summer. The life of Italian bars revolves around coffee and other breakfast drinks, and not so much around liquor and alcohol, although the latter are regularly—and legally—sold in these places. Adults who prefer to have breakfast on the go make a quick stop in their favorite bar and have an espresso, often by itself, but sometimes also accompanied by some croissant or pastry. Most bars sell candies over the counter and offer ice cream and a choice of savory bites. In this case the bar is known as a snack bar and, more recently, as a bar *gastronomia.* The latter often offers cooked dishes at lunch, especially if it is located in an urban center near offices or other workplaces. The average bar displays panini (single-portion breads in different shapes, cut in two and filled with various ingredients), *tramezzini* (triangular, made of *pancarré,* a sort of upscale Wonder bread), toasts, slices of pizza, pieces of focaccia with *salumi* (cured meats), and sometimes salads and fruit salads.

Beside bars, there are plenty of other ways to get food on the go. The tradition of street and market food, although dying, is still present. Nevertheless, people are increasingly skeptical about hygienic conditions and have lost the taste for some of the most traditional street foods. Every area has its own traditions. Street foods are the legacy of a past when hunger and poverty were common for many city dwellers who did not even have a kitchen at home. That is why many traditional street specialties are made with innards or employ the simplest ingredients, like bread, legumes, or fruit.

While home deliveries are still rare, some shops sell ready-made food to take out. They are called *tavola calda* when they offer cooked dishes, and they often have small tables for clients who want to eat on the premises. No service is provided: Customers buy their dishes, often served in aluminum containers, at the counter and bring them to their tables. They are often required to clean up when they are finished. A *rosticceria* specializes in fried or roasted foods that would take too long or be annoying to prepare at home.

Many rosticcerie also use their oven to make pizza, either in large metal pans or directly on the bottom of the oven. This kind of pizza, called *pizza al taglio,* is cut according to the customer's request and sold by the weight. Some shops specialize in pizza al taglio, adding very few fried items to their offer. There are also places that sell pizza à la carte, where customers can sit at their table, order their meal and their drinks from a menu, and be helped by waiters. These places are called pizzeria, a name also used for shops selling pizza al taglio. Until a few years ago pizza was served at the table only in the evening. Many establishments now offer it also for lunch. Besides, many trattorie have diversified their menus by adding pizza.

In the new millennium, wine has become the object of a renewed interest from both connoisseurs



Pizza fresh out of a wooden oven in a pizzeria in Italy. (Shutterstock)

and amateurs. Some specialized shops, called *enoteca,* cater to the needs of a growing public, curious to taste new wines and to know more about a world that until a few years ago was a realm reserved to a few aficionados. These are the direct development of the wine shops that in the past used to sell bulk wine, pouring it into bottles provided by the clients. Many enoteche have an annexed wine bar, which operates under a different business license and is also allowed to serve food to be consumed on the premises. Wine bars constitute an increasingly popular alternative to other types of restaurants, especially for high-end customers who are willing and able to spend nicely on a good bottle of wine and are knowledgeable enough to do so. Partly to meet the burgeoning demand from their clients, partly to make them even more passionate about their products, some enoteche, but above all wine bars, organize tasting meetings and classes.

Beer is also enjoying a growing success, especially among young people. New establishments have developed around this trend, called pubs, using the English word, or *birrerie* in Italian. The decor is usually quite different from that in other restaurants. Wooden tables and benches are prevalent. No tablecloth is provided but only paper towels. The service is basic. Dishes of foreign origin are served, such as sauerkraut with boiled wurst (sausages), hot dogs, hamburgers with French fries, potato salads, and chili con carne. Some pubs also serve salads, pasta, and sandwiches, to satisfy all tastes.

Fast foods appeared in Italy in the late 1980s, among heated public debates. However, foreign chains have often adapted themselves to the local tastes, adding pasta salads and vegetable salads to their menus and even offering beer and wine. Some Italian entrepreneurs found the concept appealing and created chains that operate like foreign fast-food places but serve only Italian dishes and pizza. These kinds of shops are now quite common in and around train and bus stations, airports, and service areas along the highways.

Since 1990, new forms of high-end tourism focusing on food and wine as expressions of local culture and traditions have developed. An *agriturismo* is an enterprise run by a farmer who offers food and lodging to tourists on his property, using the products from the farm and at times organizing recreational or cultural activities.

A relatively new phenomenon is the growth of ethnic restaurants. Chinese restaurants are definitely the most visible and numerous. Besides the Chinese, not many other ethnic restaurants are available: a few "African" establishments (mostly from Ethiopia and Somalia), some Moroccan or more vaguely "Arab" places, as well as some Japanese and Mexican, and very rarely Brazilian. Curiously, French restaurants are a rarity, confirming Italians' attachment to their food traditions, especially against the eternal rivals in culinary matters, the French.

## Special Occasions

Italians tend to find plenty of excuses to make a special occasion of a meal, both cooking at home and going out. Close friends and family feel free to drop by unannounced or on very short notice. As a matter of fact, this is an element that characterizes close social relationships, whereas invitations ahead of time denote that the guests are in an outer circle of friends and family. Also, coffee time after lunch is a favorite time to pay a visit and have a good chat over a steaming cup of espresso.

Sunday dinners often maintain their character as a special meal. The main courses, primi and secondi, usually become more elaborate, and cooks make an effort to prepare more side dishes. Some hosts offer more than one primo and more than one secondo to prove their cooking abilities and to show appreciation for their guests.

Many ceremonies are connected with the Catholic religion, which is still prevalent by far. Even many nonreligious people do not renounce these celebrations. Christening (*battesimo*) is the first occasion to mark most children's lives. In the days preceding the rite, families send out *bomboniere,* little souvenirs parceled up with smooth confectionery sugar-coated almonds called *confetti.* After the christening ceremony, families invite relatives and friends to join them to celebrate the occasion with a meal, often in a restaurant. Also, the first communion and confirmation are marked by family

celebrations, generally big lunches after the ceremony, held at home or at the restaurant. A festive lunch is also organized when a young person takes religious vows as a priest, a monk, or a nun.

Weddings are also celebrated with long, abundant, and sometimes extravagant meals. The menu starts with one or two appetizers, continuing with a couple of primi, if not three, and two or three secondi accompanied by several *contorni* (side dishes). All the dishes are served one after the other, so that guests do not need choose between the two or three primi, or between the two or three secondi, but can have a portion of each. After the main courses, desserts are served. At the end, the wedding cake is brought; the couple is supposed to cut the first slice, while the guests toast to their future happiness with sparkling wine. The cake is brought back to the kitchen, sliced, and served to the guests. The meal, which ends with liquors and coffee, can last a few hours.

Other occasions that are celebrated with food at home or meals at restaurants are birthdays, saint's days (according to the Catholic tradition, every day is dedicated to a specific saint, and the people who carry his or her name are supposed to solemnize that day), and academic and professional achievements.

Catholicism being the traditional religion in Italy, liturgical and religious festivities also marked social times, with holidays that were often connected to specific foods and meals. One of most important holidays is Christmas. At the vigil, in some areas families gather for a "lean supper," that is, with no meat courses. However, the dishes can be numerous, abundant, and delicious, usually pretty much the same year in and year out, changing according to the area. Christmas Day dinner, customarily served in the early afternoon, is dominated by meat. Meat stocks and broth are very common primi, usually with pasta ripiena with meat-based fillings. All kinds of Christmas desserts are served. While in some families it is still customary to make some desserts at home, the food industries produce most of the holiday delicacies, some of which can also be bought from bakeries and pastry shops. Many Christmas desserts are actually derived from bread: *pandoro* from Verona (*pan d'oro* means "bread of gold"), panettone from Milan (*pan di tono,* "important bread"), *pan speziale* from Bologna ("spiced bread"), *panforte* from Siena ("strong bread"), *pan pepato* from Ferrara ("peppered bread"), *pan nociato* from Umbria ("bread with nuts"), *pan giallo* from Rome ("yellow bread"), and *parrozzo* from Abruzzo (*pan rozzo,* "rough bread"). As the names reveal, in time different ingredients were added to the bread to make it more festive, such as spices, nuts, raisins, candied and dried fruits, chocolate, and honey. The Christmas dessert in Naples is tiny balls of fried dough, dipped in honey syrup, arranged in a wreath, and decorated with colored spangles, called *struffoli.* Nougat candy, or *torrone,* is widespread all over Italy; it can be soft or hard, with hazelnuts or almonds, covered in chocolate or with some liquor.

New Year's Eve is celebrated all over Italy with parties and late suppers. The menu varies, but it is quite common to eat *zampone* (minced pork meat with spices, stuffed into the skin of a pig's foot) or *cotechino* (minced pork meat, lard, and skin made into a big sausage) with lentils, which represents money and abundance. Tradition requires that bottles of sparkling wine be opened at midnight on the dot. Many families also have a New Year's Day dinner, whose menus also vary but always feature rich and abundant dishes.

On January 6, the Catholic Church celebrates the Three Kings in a holiday called Epifania. This name




A selection of Italian chocolate Easter eggs in a shop in Rome. (StockPhotoPro)

was corrupted to *Befana,* which is also the name of an old ugly lady riding a broom. Coming down the chimney, she brings sweets, candies, and little presents to the good children and just coal to the bad ones. Children would hang socks and stockings from the hearth (over the stove in modern kitchens), while leaving some food in the kitchen to thank her and to let her get some rest.

For Carnival, the Italian equivalent of Mardi Gras, long strips of crunchy fried dough powdered with sugar (called *frappe, cenci,* or *chiacchiere*) and little fried balls covered in melted honey (*castagnole*) are particularly popular.

For Easter, the egg is the most evident symbol of fertility and renewal, connected to the resurrection of Christ. Boiled eggs to be eaten on Easter Day, often painted in bright colors, were brought to church to be blessed at the midnight mass. Boiled eggs are also used to decorate sweet and savory cakes. Eggs are the main ingredients in many pies. Chocolate eggs are mass-produced, containing little presents for children. All over Italy, the Easter lamb—considered a symbol of Christ sacrificing himself—is served roasted or grilled. In many areas, there is still a tradition of an Easter breakfast, featuring boiled eggs, salami, savory and sweet pies, and chocolate, together with wine. Among the desserts, *colomba* (a leavened cake shaped like a dove and covered with a sugar and almond glaze) is common all over Italy. Many desserts are still homemade, like *pastiera* in Naples (a cake filled with boiled wheat grains, ricotta, and candied fruits and flavored with orange flower water) and cassata in Sicily (the sweet ricotta cheese cake), where making little lambs out of almond paste (*marzapane*) is still a living tradition.

## Diet and Health

Since the late 1950s, there have been radical changes in the amount and the composition of the foods that Italians consume. For centuries, populations around the Mediterranean Sea, including Italians, had to strive against food scarcity, tilling soils that were often less than generous and making do with what they could grow around them. As a consequence, the diet was based mostly on carbohydrates, pulses, and vegetables, with little fat and animal protein.

Then, starting from the end of World War II, even the less-well-off became able to afford a more diverse and abundant diet. Nutrition patterns changed under the influence of new packaging and conservation techniques, industrial mass production, and more sophisticated systems of distribution. A widespread economic development that led to the actual boom in the 1960s allowed many to lead better lives and enjoy a more regular intake of food, even though it often severed the ties to their traditional ways of life, including culinary habits. The daily energy intake passed from slightly below 2,000 calories in the 1950s to almost 3,500 nowadays. Italians are consuming more meat and sugar, and coronary diseases are reaping more victims than ever before, because of fattier and higher-calorie diets. Obesity, especially in children, has become a main concern for the Ministry of Health, which has launched public campaigns aiming to educate the parents and the children themselves to eat better.

At the same time, the whole world seems to have discovered that the way the Mediterranean people had eaten for centuries in their effort to fight hunger actually constitutes a very healthy diet. The international public became aware of the advantages of the so-called Mediterranean diet in the late 1980s, when scientist Ancel Keys and a group of researchers published the results of the survey they had conducted in seven countries. Then, in 1990, the U.S. Department of Agriculture issued dietary guidelines for Americans that become the basis for the 1992 Food Guide Pyramid, clearly shaped by Keys's findings in southern Italy back in the 1950s. However, because of the way the media describe it, it is unclear whether the Mediterranean diet is considered as a cultural and historical construction, as a selection of specific foods, or, more scientifically, as a nutrient profile.

Despite the changes in their dietary patterns, and the regional differences, Italians still tend to eat more carbohydrates, legumes, and vegetables than Americans do. The distribution within these cate-

gories has changed, too: From the 1950s, the growing availability of bread and pasta marked a decrease in the consumption of other cereals considered less desirable, such as barley or rye. Rice and maize maintained a certain acceptance in northern regions. The southern regions traditionally consume larger quantities of carbohydrates and vegetables than the northern ones. With regard to the consumption of different kinds of meat, beef increased until the 1970s, reaching a constant level that suddenly decreased at the end of the 1990s, due to the mad cow scare and other health-related anxieties. In contrast, consumption of chicken, pork, and rabbit is growing, on account of the lower prices of these meats and the fact that Italians now consider them as nutritious as beef.

Dietary rules change during each individual's lifetime. A very special moment for many women is pregnancy. Gaining weight in the months preceding the birth of a baby is not only considered acceptable but even recommended. Most women opt for breast-feeding, considered better for the child, since it creates a closer connection with the mother and provides the child with all necessary nutrients and a better protection against infections and diseases. For this reason, breast-feeding in public is socially accepted.

Up to five months of age, babies are fed exclusively milk or formula. From 5 to 12 months, babies are weaned, and new flavors and foods are introduced into their diet. Between 1 and 3 years of age, the babies are supposed adapt their diet to the adults' habits. The goal is to let babies get used to the taste of real food, since there is no concept of baby food per se. At this point, babies are usually more than happy to start eating what their parents and other adults eat, especially at social occasions when many people are gathered around the table. There are no children's menus in restaurants: Children are supposed to eat small portions of the same dishes the adults are having. Children are often curious to taste adult food, and in many families it is accepted to serve them even tiny drops of coffee in their milk and also wine, often diluted in lots of water.

There is no concept of food for the old. Senior citizens are supposed to eat the way they always did, unless they have specific ailments or suffer from loss of teeth. They continue to drink wine with their meals, to have their coffee in the morning, to season their dishes with salt, and to consume fried food and sweets. Since the calorie intake does not decrease, while retirement implies a less active style of life, it is quite common for older people to gain weight and to suffer from problems connected with high levels of cholesterol in the blood, high blood pressure, and diabetes.

Most physicians in Italy are not particularly interested in matters of nutrition, unless they affect some specific ailments. With the exception of pediatricians, who are definitely more involved in the subject, also because of pressure from mothers, many of them do not even take that subject during their professional training. For this reason, the advice some medical doctors give is quite vague, often based more on common sense than on study and research. Most of the knowledge people get about their food and their nutritional needs comes from less reliable sources: the media. Most television channels, newspapers, and magazine have a section on health, which often deals with food-related issues.

*Fabio Parasecoli*

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# Latvia

## Overview

The Republic of Latvia occupies the central position among what are collectively known as the Baltic States, with Estonia to the north and Lithuania to the south. It shares borders with both Russia and Belarus to the east, and Scandinavia lies to the west, across the Baltic Sea. Latvia is a parliamentary republic divided into 26 districts. Rīga is the capital and the country's largest city. The population is just over two million people, who are mostly Latvian or Russian, with smaller percentages of Belarusians, Ukrainians, and other ethnic groups.

Geography, politics, and religion all factor into Latvia's culture and cuisine. In ancient times, native Latvians held pagan beliefs and fostered close spiritual ties to nature and seasonal life cycles. By the 13th century, German-led crusaders had forcibly Christianized the country. This paved the way for eventual Russian conquest and colonization, rendering Latvia a historical and cultural crossroads between Germanic and Slavic Europe. Latvia has been a member of the United Nations since 1991, following its independence from the Soviet Union. Though Latvia's culture and customs are inextricably linked to its history of occupation, Latvians have retained many of their ancient, pagan practices, as evidenced through their celebrations, folk songs (*danias*), and food traditions.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Imants and Nina Vilcina are newlyweds living in Rīga, and they both frequent the Central Market, one of Europe's largest, located in dramatic hangars once used to house zeppelins. Shopping is done several times each week, as the freshness of food is imperative to Latvians. This is particularly so with fish, one of the country's best-loved resources, which may even be carried home from the market still living, stored in a newspaper cone with a small amount of water.

Meat is also important, and in Latvian homes such as the Vilcinas' people may stock up on various sausages or purchase cuts of pork or beef for making *kotletes*—flattened meat to be breaded and fried. However, dairy is the crucial component in Latvian cuisine, enjoyed in a variety of ways at every meal. The Vilcinas are never without milk, which they consume heartily each morning, along with cottage cheese, and perhaps fresh eggs and tomato or cucumber.

Ingredients for lunches and dinners are also purchased at the market, including more dairy for making rich cream sauces and the Latvian table's ubiquitous sour cream. Today, a wide variety of produce is available at the market; however, staples such as potatoes, carrots, radishes, onions, and dill remain the foundation of Latvian cuisine. Honey and fruit preserves are ever present, as is black tea, which is sometimes flavored with orange rose hips and is always taken with milk.

## Major Foodstuffs

Latvia's climate is temperate, with long, cold winters and short, warm summers. The short growing season has resulted in an emphasis on grains, legumes, and dairy, with fresh vegetables being slightly less



This market in Rīga, Latvia, is held in five enormous hangers that were originally used for building the zeppelin airships. (StockPhotoPro)

common. This has also helped to produce a pragmatic cuisine that is high in fat with few spices and that features the products of resourceful farmers and fishers.

Before farming and agriculture, ancient peoples subsisted on foods that did not need to be cultivated, only gathered, so wild mushrooms and a wide variety of berries may still be found in today's cuisine. In winter months, sausages and salted pork may be stored in cellars, alongside salted cabbage and pickled cucumbers, mushrooms, and herring.

The importance of milk and milk products cannot be overstated, and these have been essential sources of protein and nourishment throughout Latvia's history. Milk is drunk by itself and throughout the day, as are various preparations of cultured and curdled milks. Milk soups are eaten, and sauces are made from cream, served alongside hard cheeses and dishes topped with sour cream. Butter is the most common cooking fat and is spread on bread, though safflower oil and lard are also used.

Spices are few, and flavors uncomplicated, though dishes may feature dill, caraway, black pepper, or white mustard. There were no sources of salt in ancient Latvia. It was obtained through trade and used sparingly, a practice still observed in today's cooking. Condiments include mustard and horseradish, though ketchup has become popular in more recent times. Honey is the preferred sweetener, and fresh honeycomb is a particular delicacy. Natural sweetness is found in a variety of berries, including strawberries, blueberries, loganberries, cranberries, and raspberries.

Potatoes were introduced in the 19th century and may be grown almost anywhere in Latvia; they are extremely popular. Mushroom gathering is a favorite activity, and mushrooms are pickled, boiled, fried, or incorporated into sauces. Turnips, black radishes, linseed, carrots, onions, and garlic are also grown.

Bread is a staple of the Latvian diet, and respect for it is encouraged from early childhood. It is made from either rye or wheat, typically in two varieties: white (oatmeal-colored whole-grain bread) and black (dark, tangy, and sour bread). Other grains include barley, oats, millet, and hemp. Peas and beans are consumed regularly.

Coastal Latvians rely heavily on fish, while freshwater fish caught inland is considered more of a delicacy. The most common species are herring, trout, pike, eel, sprats, and salmon. Red and black caviars are also enjoyed and may be eaten with pancakes. Pork is the most important meat, followed by beef and chicken. Available game may include deer, duck, and goose.

Mineral water and fruit juices are commonplace at mealtimes, as is milk, *rūgušpiens* (a refreshing curdled milk drink), and beer. Tea and coffee are both consumed, the latter often topped generously with whipped cream. Vodka is a staple brought by the Russians, and in summertime Latvians enjoy *kvass,* a mildly sweet fermented drink made from

rye, water, yeast, and honey. A springtime specialty is *bērzu sula*—juice made from birch sap gathered each March.

## Cooking

Latvian cooking is straightforward and uncomplicated, and women have traditionally prepared the meals for their families. Clay pot and hearth cookery were early techniques, followed later by bread ovens. A large pot for boiling and a large pan for frying are the primary implements.

Cold salads of potato, egg, herring, cucumber, and various meats are enjoyed alongside various pickled preparations. Soups and porridges are made from grains, peas, meat, and fish and are often laden with milk. Russian beet soup, or borscht, is eaten cold in the summer and hot in the winter. In addition to its place in soups, fish may be fried, smoked, or salted.

Meat is consumed regularly by most Latvians and may be breaded and fried, boiled into soups, or made into various dumplings. *Belashi* are a popular deep-fried snack of dough filled with beef and onions, as are *pīrāgi* (bacon rolls). Baking is commonplace and produces a variety of breads, pastries, cookies, and cakes, though these tend to be less sweet than their American or western European counterparts. Canning and preserving are methods for enjoying berries year-round. *Kisels* are produced using a technique of thickening a sweet and sour blend of juices with potato flour.



Rīga sprats baked in oil and served with salad. (Shutterstock)

Just before the leaves appear on birch trees in the spring, some Latvians go into the country to make sparkling wine. Sap from the birch tree is filtered and then mixed with raisins, lemon peel, currants, and sugar. The blend is bottled, corked, and sealed with wax to allow fermentation to take place and is then enjoyed three months later.

A unique Latvian specialty that is still popular today is *Rīgas Melnais balzams* (black balsam), a bitter, black drink invented by a pharmacist in the 18th century. The recipe remains a secret, though among the listed ingredients are Peruvian balsam oil, arnica blossoms, raspberry juice, orange peel, oak bark, and wormwood. It is often mixed with coffee or vodka and may be served over ice cream.

## Typical Meals

Latvians usually eat three meals per day, beginning with a moderate breakfast of milk, juice, coffee, or tea and either boiled eggs, sausages, or small sandwiches of cheese, cucumber, and tomato. Lunch is eaten between noon and three and tends to be served hot. It can include fried meat (pork, steak, or chicken) or fish (salmon, trout, cod), potatoes (boiled, fried, or mashed), boiled buckwheat, and salad. Sour cream is the main accompaniment. Alternatively, meat soups may be eaten. Midday drinks may be fruit juice, kefir, milk, tea, coffee, or beer.

After the workday, supper is taken at six or seven. This main meal can vary widely but could consist of soup, cold salads, a hot meal similar to lunch, or occasionally more traditional preparations such as *zivju zupa,* fish soup with potatoes and fried carrots and onions. Another traditional fish dish is *cepts lasis ar plumju kompotu*—fried salmon with plum compote. Gray peas with bacon is a cornerstone of Latvian cuisine, as is the emblematic porridge, *skaba putra,* a sour milk and barley soup that is fermented, then chilled. This may be prepared with pork fat and can contain pieces of meat or herring. Cooking large meals at home is becoming less

common, however, as frozen foods, pizza, and quick sandwiches have become increasingly popular.

***Skaba Putra* (Sour Barley Porridge)**

¼ c finely ground cracked barley

½ tsp salt

2 c buttermilk

2 c milk (whole or skim)

⅓ c sour cream

Pork fat (or bacon), sautéed (optional)

Onions, sautéed (optional)

In a large pot, mix barley and salt with 1 cup water, and slowly bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer for 45 minutes, or until barley is tender and water has been absorbed. Set aside to cool slightly.

Add buttermilk and milk, and stir to the consistency of a thick soup. Cover and store overnight (or up to 12 hours) in a warm place so that the porridge sours slightly. Refrigerate for at least one full day to continue the fermentation, which will intensify over time.

Add sour cream before serving, as well as the optional pork fat (or bacon) and onions.

At the table, certain traditional customs and beliefs are still observed, such as to always offer food to others when eating. The end piece of a loaf of bread is called the "farmer's son," which young women compete for in hopes that they may marry the son of a farmer or one who owns their own home and land. Too much salt in the food means that the cook is in love, and if salt is spilled, there will be a quarrel in the house. If a spoon or fork falls to the ground, a female visitor will appear, and if a knife falls, the visitor will be male.

## Eating Out

Following World War II, many rural Latvians migrated to cities, and mealtimes began to revolve around busy work schedules, causing a decline in home cooking. Cities in Latvia today feature a vast array of European, Asian, and American cuisines, as well as traditional Latvian eateries. Eating out has become more popular in recent times, and with the emergence of pizzerias, Chinese food, and American fast food, there are more choices today than ever before in Latvia. Rural people still primarily cook at home, however.

## Special Occasions

Latvian celebrations follow the rhythms of the seasons according to the solar year in the northern hemisphere and simultaneously reflect the culture's pagan past and its Christian practices. Many traditional foods and beverages carry folk or mythological significance, though these roots have become obscured over time.

St. Anthony's Day, on January 17, is not largely celebrated today, but it was one of the first festival dates on the ancient Latvian calendar. St. Anthony was the patron saint of domestic animals, particularly hogs. The ancient belief was that in order for one's animals to thrive, a hog's head must be cooked and eaten and its bones taken to the forest. The snout was boiled and typically served with apples and cabbage.

Shrove Tuesday is a movable feast day falling between February 3 and March 9 and is the equivalent to the Mardi Gras of certain nations. As the last day before the Lenten fast, it marks the end of the long Baltic winter and is the culmination of a four-day meat-eating period, called Shrovetide. For fisherman, this represents the date by which all nets and other preparations for the season should be made. In the past, if the "net-making fork" was not out of a fisherman's home by this time, a fork would be tied to his back in symbolic shame. Fisherman would also meet with their partners on this day to celebrate the upcoming season over a plate of buckwheat pancakes.

Easter in Latvia is a telling blend of the country's pagan and Christian heritage. It is a celebration of the sun, replete with songs and dances. One traditional preparation for Easter eggs is to blow their contents out through holes poked in the shell into a

communal bowl. After each person has contributed an egg, they are cooked over a large open fire and eaten straight from the frying pan.

Jāņi (St. John's Day) is a summer solstice celebration with pre-Christian roots. It was believed to be a time when people and gods would come together so that Latvians might ask for a bountiful harvest and for their crops and livestock to be protected from witches and devils. Men, women, children, and animals spend this day bedecked in garlands of grasses and flowers, which are saved throughout the year to ward off evil spirits. Jumping over bonfires is done to ensure luck in the coming year. *Ķimeņu siers* is a caraway cheese served especially during Jāņi; it is eaten to the health of cows, while barley beer is drunk to ensure strong horses.

The masked procession of Kakatas begins on November 10 with Martin's Day and culminates around Christmas. Martin's Day is a day to respect the dead, on which, in times past, farmers would kill a rooster, give its blood to their horses, and then cook the bird for dinner. Today, *kekatnieki* are dancing revelers armed with homemade noisemakers. They travel through neighborhoods, wearing costumes representing traditional folkloric figures, such as the bear and the stork. Popular dishes at Martin's are sauerkraut, poultry, and Martini balls—baked balls of cooked peas, bacon, and onions, flavored with hemp. Hemp was once popular in Latvian cooking, but it is now illegal, though hemp-seed butter is readily available.

The Christmas table can include pig snout, pīrāgi, barley sausage, boiled gray peas with bacon, sauerkraut, mulled wine, soured milk, and desserts such as gingerbread and *kringel,* a sweet coffee cake. One should eat nine meals on Christmas Day to assure wealth in the coming year, though this is rarely observed today. If carp is served, the fish's scales are placed into pockets and purses, to ensure money in the new year.

Latvian weddings are associated with an abundance of foods, such as pīrāgi, salads, sweet pastries, fruit, and beer; the meal can also include schnitzel, rolled veal, boiled potatoes, sautéed sauerkraut, and berries with milk for dessert.

## Diet and Health

In combination with a high-fat diet, modernization has led to a decrease in exercise in Latvia and therefore an increased threat of cholesterol-related health issues. Alcohol consumption is high and is one of the main causes of traffic deaths, fires, and crime. Smoking is also common, and illnesses such as emphysema, lung cancer, and asthma continue to present problems.

*Neil L. Coletta*

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# Lithuania

## Overview

The Republic of Lithuania is a northern European country located on the southeastern coast of the Baltic Sea. Lithuania borders Latvia, Poland, Belarus, and Russia's Kaliningrad region, and, across the Baltic Sea, it faces Sweden. Its population is 3.37 million, of which 84.6 percent are ethnic Lithuanians; the remainder includes Poles (6.3%), Russians (5.1%), Belarusians (1.1%), and other nationalities/ethnicities (2.1%). Lithuania is predominantly Roman Catholic with 79 percent of the entire population belonging to the Catholic Church, while other significant religious affiliations include Eastern Orthodox (4.9%), Protestants (1.9%), nonbelievers (9.5%), and other groups.

Despite the seeming cultural homogeneity, Lithuania has four well-defined regions—Aukštaitija, Žemaitija, Dzūkija, and Suvalkija. Each of these regions has distinctive dialects, histories, traditions, and food cultures that persist mostly thanks to the relatively large number of rural and small-town inhabitants (constituting about a third of Lithuania's population), whose local identities continue to be strong and who tend to procure a sizable amount of their own food directly from their land. In Aukštaitija, various pancakes and cottage cheese dishes are most popular, while the inhabitants of Suvalkija tend to eat more smoked meat and potato dishes. Žemaitija is famous for porridges, sour butter, and gruels, and Dzūkija is the place where one finds a lot of mushrooms and wild berries, brined and dried sausages, and buckwheat dishes. Vilnius, Lithuania's capital and the largest city, and Klaipėda, the port city, are the main melting pots featuring cosmopolitan lifestyles and international restaurants.

Lithuanian food tends to be hearty and filling. Meat (especially pork), potatoes, dairy, and dark bread are eaten almost every day in the majority of households. Of vegetarian dishes, pancakes, crepes, and dumplings filled with cottage cheese or berries are common. The most popular fish is herring, but smoked mackerel, salmon, pike, and perch are also well liked. With increasing concerns over health and diet, more fresh fruit and vegetables such as apples, cucumbers, cabbages, and tomatoes are consumed year-round.

Contemporary foodways in Lithuania have been shaped by its geography and history. The country is relatively flat with numerous lakes and rivers and rolling hills in the south. Soils range from rich loam in the north and central plains that are amenable for growing wheat, rye, and root vegetables and for pastures to poorer, sandy soil in the south, where the largest pine forests lie. After the last glacial period around 10,000 B.C., several waves of proto-Indo-European ancestors swept through the region, mixing with the older settlers and introducing their cooking methods, agricultural knowledge, tools, seeds, and, most important, animals domesticated in the Middle East and Asia. During this period Baltic tribes started to milk goats and cows, and since then milk and its products, such as curd, cheese, sour cream, butter, sour milk, and kefir (cultured milk), have been used as the key ingredients in the local cuisine. During the Viking times, Baltic tribes living in contemporary Lithuania's territory

were integrated into the Baltic trade networks and traded honey along with furs for salt and herring. In the 14th century, the Great Duchy of Lithuania was the largest country in Europe, encompassing most of what is now Ukraine, Belarus, West Russia, and part of Poland. As expected, southern and eastern European food cultures such as those of the Tartars and Karaim were brought back and melded into local diets. The most popular street food in Lithuania today, *čeburekai,* large deep-fried donuts typically filled with meat, was adopted from the Tartars, while a special cake made with poppy seeds and consumed on special occasions and another popular street food, *kybynai* (a half-moon–shaped pastry with a filling made of mutton, onion, and cabbage), were borrowed from the Karaim settlers.

Starting from the 15th century, with the spread of Christianity and with Lithuania forming a common state with Poland, local nobles were drawn into the western European cultural sphere and enjoyed fashionable meals prepared by chefs trained in western Europe's capitals, while the peasantry continued to eat poor diets consisting of coarse breads, porridges, soups, various types of dumplings, pancakes, and, on rare occasions, dried or cured meats.

In terms of other cultural influences, the sizable Jewish minority played a key role in Lithuanians' diets throughout the Middle Ages and into the modern era, especially in Vilnius, one of the cultural capitals of eastern European Jews. Jewish foods such as bagels and a potato pie known as *kugelis* have been seamlessly assimilated into the Lithuanian cuisine.

The Columbian Exchange products such as tomatoes, potatoes, and chocolate as well as coffee from Africa reached Lithuania at the end of the 17th century as the country was folded into the Russian Empire. Of these products, tomatoes and especially potatoes were adopted and became local staples by the second half of the 19th century. The adoption of the potato brought a profound change in local diets, as cereal-based meals were replaced with potato dishes. Even today potatoes occupy a central place in Lithuanian food culture with the highest rate of per-capita potato consumption among the European Union countries (2008).

The adoption and popularization of the potato in the late 19th century coincided with the national revival that led to the formation of strong national identities and the establishment of Lithuania as an independent state. Not surprisingly, the most famous national dish in today's Lithuania is a potato dumpling, called the zeppelin. The peculiar name of the dish refers to the oblong shape of the dumpling and its grayish color, and also to the experiences of industrialization in the early 20th century that brought new transportation technologies (e.g., zeppelins, cars, and motorcycles) and communication devices (radios). The short-lived independent state of Lithuania (1918–1940) saw the emergence of a national cuisine and supported its institutionalization with the publication of a number of cookbooks and recipes in popular magazines.

### *Cepelinai* (Zeppelins/Potato Dumplings)

2 large raw potatoes, peeled

2 large peeled and boiled potatoes

1½ tsp lemon juice

1 tbsp salt



Cepelinai, a Lithuanian national dish made from grated potatoes. (Shutterstock)

**For Meat Filling**

2 onions, finely chopped

1 tbsp butter

8 oz ground meat (beef, pork, or ham); or meat can be replaced with cottage cheese, mushrooms, herring, or smoked ham

Salt

Black pepper

Marjoram

Boil a large pot of water. Grate the raw potatoes through a fine grater. Separate the juice by squeezing the grated potatoes dry through a double layer of cheesecloth and collecting the potato juice in a separate dish. Mix the lemon juice into the dry potato mass. Set it aside. When starch settles at the bottom of the dish with the potato juice, in about 5–10 minutes, collect the starch by pouring off the liquid. Then add ½ tablespoon salt, and mix in the potato mass. Mash boiled potatoes and add to the mix.

For meat filling, sauté onions in butter and add to the ground meat. Season with salt, pepper, and marjoram. Mix well.

Take about ½ cup of the potato mix, roll into a ball about the size of an egg, and flatten into a round patty that is about ¼ inch thick. Place a tablespoon of filling mixture in the center of the round, fold over, and seal seam. Roll in your hands until the surface is even by slightly pressing in the middle to make the dumpling into an oblong shape. Gently drop zeppelins into boiling salted water. Make sure all the zeppelins are submerged. Boil for 30 minutes, stirring gently. Remove from water and serve with melted butter and sour cream or fried bacon bits sprinkled on top.

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Due to perennial food shortages under Socialism, only staple foods such as bread, milk, butter, farmer's cheese, root vegetables, organ meats, and occasionally ribs and ground meats were available in stores, while better cuts of meat and sausages quickly disappeared and were saved for special occasions. Most of the population maintained close ties with the countryside or grew vegetables and fruit in private gardens to be preserved and eaten throughout the year. Even today, preserved foods—such as smoked and cured meats, jams, and pickled vegetables—continue to occupy an important role in Lithuanian diets. With the opening of the state borders and globalization of food markets, new cuisines were introduced. Restaurants serving pizza, sushi, tapas, steaks, and Chinese dishes have grown rapidly in Lithuanian cities over the last 20 years.

## Major Foodstuffs

The most important ingredients in Lithuanians' diets are grains/cereals (rye, wheat, buckwheat, some oats), dairy, root vegetables, eggs, meats (especially pork and beef), mushrooms, and berries. In summer cold, sweet, and milk-based soups are popular. Breads are traditionally divided into two types, white bread made with wheat flour and dark bread made with rye or whole wheat or a mix of flours. There are also two types of salads. Starchy salads are a key dish for celebrations and social events; they are made with beets, potatoes, carrots, beans, mushrooms, herring, ham, and fermented cheeses and are dressed with mayonnaise or oil. Green salads are usually prepared in the summer using seasonal ingredients such as cucumber, tomato, shallots, chives, greens, and dill and are dressed with sour milk, kefir, or sour cream. Brand-name salad dressings and vinegar-and-oil dressings can be bought in supermarkets.

Milk is a popular ingredient in and of itself, as are sour cream, butter, yogurt and yogurt drinks, and fermented cheeses. Local cottage cheese, *varškė,* and farmer's cheese with or without caraway are popular and also available smoked. Sugar was a rare and expensive commodity until the third decade of the 20th century when the first sugar beet–processing factory was built. Today, sweet baked goods play an important role in Lithuanian diets. Multilayered cakes with yogurt and fruit fillings and elaborate decorations, rolls filled with jams, fruit pies, and cookies made with cinnamon, ginger, or chocolate can be found in even the smallest of food stores.

Herring is still a popular fish, eaten either as an ingredient in starchy salads, with potatoes, or in a dish prepared with caramelized onions, mushrooms,

and tomato sauce. Among other fish, mackerel, pike, eel, perch, and shrimp can be found frozen in the supermarkets, while salmon harvested in Norway or caught wild in the Atlantic is most often sold defrosted. Eggs are used for cooking as well as hard-boiled or scrambled for breakfast.

Of meats, pork is the most popular, while veal is highly valued but is often too expensive for daily consumption. Many buy ground meat such as pork, beef, or turkey or a mix thereof to prepare cutlets or meatballs for soup. Smoked pig's ears, peas with pork cracklings, and fried dark bread flavored with garlic are favorite snacks with beer. Chicken is well liked and so is turkey. Goat and lamb meats are difficult to come by outside of a few gourmet stores in major cities. Game meat is even rarer.

Mushrooms are popular and used in a wide range of dishes such as soups, salads, and dumplings as well as for sauces or various fillings. Similarly, berries (strawberries, both wild and homegrown; blueberries; raspberries; gooseberries; cranberries; and currants) and nuts have played an important role in Lithuanian diets. Wild berry picking and mushrooming are popular activities among both those living in the countryside and the urbanites. Herbs such as dill, parsley, oregano, and bay leaves are used widely to add flavor to dishes and for marinades. Chamomile, mint, and oregano are also often used for herbal teas. The most popular vegetables are potatoes, beets, carrots, and squash, as well as onions and garlic. Among the locally grown fruits, apples, pears, cherries, and plums are the most popular. Since the early 1990s, with the increase in food imports, tropical fruits and vegetables have been introduced and incorporated into daily diets, including oranges, bananas, and pineapple.

**_Šaltibarščiai_ (Cold Beet Soup)**

*Serves 2*

2 medium-size red beets, boiled and peeled

2 hard-boiled eggs

4 c buttermilk

1 c plain, whole-milk yogurt

4 tbsp sour cream

2 cucumbers, finely chopped

Salt to taste

*For Garnish*

Fresh dill, finely chopped

Fresh scallions, finely chopped

Grate boiled beets coarsely, and chop hard-boiled eggs into cubes. In a bowl mix wet ingredients including buttermilk, yogurt, and sour cream. Add grated beets, finely chopped cucumber, and salt. Mix well. Add chopped eggs. Sprinkle with chopped dill and scallions for garnish. Serve with hot boiled potatoes.

## Cooking

Most of the everyday dishes in Lithuania are produced on the stovetop. Potatoes along with other vegetables are boiled in a pot or cooked in a pan with oil. Searing is used sparingly, mostly for meats. Homemade smokers were popular during the Soviet times, and today, smoked meats including hams, different types of sausages, and fish such as eel and perch are still very popular. Pickled vegetables such as homemade or store-bought sauerkraut, cucumbers, and tomatoes are consumed on a regular basis. Deep-frying is not widespread, except for some sweet products such as *žagarėliai,* "twigs." Grilling is quite trendy and is usually performed by men. The common grilled dishes include grilled chicken and a local version of shish kebabs, or *šašlykai.* Pancakes and crepes filled with cheeses, bananas, or berries are cooked in pans in vegetable oil or butter. Handmade dumplings boiled in water are also widespread.

## Typical Meals

The most important meal is in the middle of the day and consists of meat or vegetable soup and a protein-based main dish such as breaded chicken, beef rolls filled with mushrooms, pork cutlets, beef stroganoff, goulash, boiled sausages, or stuffed cabbage, which would be accompanied by potatoes, pancakes,

or potato dumplings, followed by a dessert. Due to demanding schedules during the day, many are shifting from a midday sit-down meal to having a heavier dinner at the end of the day. Other meals include a breakfast that often consists of an open-faced sandwich made out of dark or white bread with butter and smoked meat such as ham, sausage, turkey, or salmon or farmer's cheese. Oatmeal and breakfast cereal are becoming increasingly popular. During weekends it is common to make more time- and labor-intensive breakfasts such as crepes, pancakes, or dumplings. For breakfast, Lithuanians drink a cup of tea or coffee. In late morning and midafternoon, many share a cup of coffee with sweet or savory snacks with their coworkers or snack at home. The traditional supper is usually light and vegetarian. It may include soup, a bowl of cereal, a potato dish, or dumplings.

## Eating Out

During the Soviet times an important change took place in Lithuanians' eating habits, as many started eating their main meals outside of the household, with coworkers, with friends, or alone, on a regular basis. Factory and office cafeterias became important places for socialization. Today, eating out is usually practiced as a rather expensive leisure activity, not a necessity. The opening of the global markets in the early 1990s, and especially the massive wave of out-migration of Lithuanians to Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States, spurred local interest in international cuisine. New restaurants were opened, including tapas bars, steak houses, Mexican grills, and sushi and sashimi restaurants as well as fast-food chains such as McDonald's. Of these, pizzerias and local coffee shop–type restaurants serving snacks and a limited range of meals are the most popular.

## Special Occasions

The most important celebration in Lithuania is Christmas Eve dinner, Kūčia or Kūčios. The name of the celebration is derived from the dish called *kūčia,* made from grain and pulses. The serving of the dinner starts when the North Star rises on the horizon. Hay is often placed under the white linen tablecloth. In Christian tradition it symbolizes the manger where Jesus was born. It is common to set a plate of food for those family members who passed away in the previous year. Dinner starts with all participants sharing Christmas wafers. Twelve dishes are prepared, both as a symbol of the 12 apostles and as a reassurance that the 12 months of the upcoming year will be plentiful. These dishes include beet soup with mushrooms; fish, including herring and pike; dumplings filled with mushrooms; cold soups made with whole wheat kernels, poppy seed extract, sugar, and water; dried fruit compotes; cranberry pudding; honey; and special Christmas biscuits.

Another celebration, Shrove Tuesday, is accompanied by Carnival and the universal sharing of pancakes. Food also plays an important role in weddings. *Šakotis,* known as *baumkuchen* in Germany, is a tall cake with spikes on the outside and hollow inside, and it is the centerpiece of the wedding table. Bread, salt, and vodka are still widely used as part of the wedding ritual of accepting the bride and groom into the kin. In weddings as at other significant social gatherings in Lithuania, alcoholic drinks are served. Beer is a traditional local drink, especially in the northern region. During the interwar period, the first Lithuanian wine factory was founded and



Vendors bake a giant pancake at a Mardi Gras celebration in Vilnius, Lithuania. (EPA Photo | Petras Malukas)

started producing wines made with berries, apples, and honey. During the Soviet times the old tradition of mead, a fermented honey drink, was brought back. Today's mead is much stronger than the medieval version as it is made using distilled spirits and honey flavoring rather than by fermenting a honey drink. Other distilled drinks include liqueurs with herbal essences such as *Trejos Devynerios* or berry-flavored vodkas.

## Diet and Health

In response to the changing perceptions about healthy diets, since the early 1990s there has been a major change in local cooking methods, moving away from animal fat to vegetable oils. Even in the early 1990s, most of the food was still cooked either in pig fat or, on rare occasions, in butter. Rapeseed oil (canola) was used for frying fish. Today, extra-virgin and virgin olive oil and other vegetable oils have made inroads into everyday diets, and pig fat has disappeared from the supermarket shelves. While there is a widespread perception that fat is not good for one's health, health-conscious eating is mostly practiced by the younger generations, who did not experience the food scarcity in the early Socialist era. As in other places around the world, dieting is usually practiced among young women, who tend to ration their daily caloric intakes following dietary fashions. There is also an increased interest in traditional medicine, especially the use of local herbs' medicinal powers for healing. While such knowledge survived in Lithuania during the early decades of the 20th century, which brought the industrialization and professionalization of medicine, and continued to be practiced in most homes under Socialism, today it is receiving a renewed interest.

*Diana Mincyte*

**Further Reading**

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# Malta

## Overview

The Maltese archipelago is situated in the middle of the Mediterranean, about 58 miles (93 kilometers) south of Sicily (Italy) and 180 miles (290 kilometers) north of North Africa, and covers an area of 122 square miles (316 square kilometers). The two main inhabited islands are Malta and Gozo, while a third island, Comino, mainly comprises a hotel, an ancient watchtower, and a handful of private residences.

The resident population of the Maltese Islands stands at approximately 416,000, which translates to a population density of 3,414 people per square mile (1,318 per square kilometer). This is by far one of the highest densities in the world and is further augmented by the one million plus tourists who visit the islands annually.

Through the ages, Malta has been colonized by many different nations, including the Phoenicians and Romans, the Arabs and Normans, the pan-European Order of the Knights of St. John (also known as the Knights of Malta), the French, and the British, gaining independence in 1964 and becoming a republic in 1974. Its location at the crossroads of mercantile sea routes has made the island a staging post for trade since antiquity. A long history of greeting visitors and adapting to the demands of colonizers has made the Maltese particularly open to novelty and change, also when it comes to food. Malta's proximity to Italy and the strong cultural and commercial ties between the two neighboring countries have also left their mark, which is evident in the Maltese people's affinity for Italian culture, including food. All of this, together with the most recent influence of nearly 200 years of British domain, has molded 21st-century Maltese cuisine and eating habits. Thus, the Maltese diet can no longer be considered typical of the traditional Mediterranean diet but is a mélange of dishes and flavors reflecting a multicultural history.

Slightly over one-third of the total land area in the Maltese Islands is agricultural, made up of arable land or permanent crops, although there is greater agricultural activity in Gozo, which is, in fact, much more rural. About half of the cultivated land is used for fodder crops, slightly less for vegetables, and most of the remainder for vines and fruit trees. The major crops are melons, tomatoes, potatoes, pumpkins, zucchini, and cauliflower. Malta is self-sufficient in fresh vegetables, processed tomatoes, eggs, poultry, pork, and fresh milk and milk products. It produces about a fifth of its food and imports the rest.

The Maltese are predominantly Roman Catholic, although the various associated rituals are practiced to varying degrees. This is also evident in the kind of food eaten. Avoiding meat and meat products on Wednesday and Fridays is perhaps followed only by a minority of elderly people; however, choosing to abstain from certain foods, such as sweets and desserts, for the whole 40-day period of Lent is a common practice among all age groups.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Claire and Karl are a young married couple with two school-age children. Claire is a teacher, and Karl works in a shipping office. The family wakes up around



A selection of local Maltese produce on display in a farming village. (Shutterstock)

6:30 A.M., and breakfast will typically consist of a cup of tea or coffee and toast for the adults and a bowl of cereal with milk and a freshly squeezed orange juice for the children. Sarah, who has just turned 13, will sometimes grab a yogurt or banana on the way out and skip breakfast if she is late for school transport. Jeremy, who is 9, also sometimes skips breakfast and then buys a croissant from one of the little shops just outside his school.

The entire family takes a packed lunch. This usually consists of sandwiches with a cheese or meat-type filling, fruit, and water. Claire will sometimes take a fresh salad, and Karl sometimes opts to buy a *ħobża biż-żejt* from a shop just around the corner from his office. This consists of a hearty, crusty bun, spread with tomato or tomato puree, drizzled with olive oil, and then filled with chopped onions, olives and capers, tuna flakes, butter beans, and a few slivers of chopped lettuce. If Sarah is still hungry, she sometimes buys a cereal bar at the school "tuck shop." School meals are not offered in Malta, though secondary schools have little shops called tuck shops selling a variety of snack foods and drinks.

Claire arrives home first, around 2:45 P.M., followed soon by Sarah and Jeremy. The children are ready for a snack, which may consist of a slice of pizza, a sandwich, a packet soup, or leftovers from yesterday's supper. Claire might join them or just have some tea with a biscuit (cookie) or a yogurt.

Around 4:30 P.M., the three of them may have another tea or coffee. Though biscuits are always available in the food cupboard, sometimes Claire buys traditional teatime sweets, such as *qagħaq tal-ħmira* (soft dough rings with sesame seeds), *qagħaq ħelwien* (hard dough rings with sesame seeds), *biskuttelli* (golden brown Italian biscotti-like fingers), and *biskuttini tar-raħal* (baked rounds with an aniseed flavor topped with a piped pink or blue icing design). The children enjoy these treats, especially as they are great for dunking.

Supper is normally around 7 P.M. Staples on the menu are pastas with different sauces—tomato, white sauce, or pesto—with a meat or fish slant; or meat, chicken, or fresh or frozen fish with some mashed, fried, roasted, or boiled potatoes and raw or boiled vegetables in season.

In the colder winter months the family might have *minestra* (thick vegetable soup), *kusksu* (broad bean–based soup, with miniature pasta balls and ricotta), or *soppa tal-armla* (also known as widow's soup—consisting of potatoes, onions, tomato, cauliflower florets, and an egg or *ġbejniet*—little goat or sheep cheeses—cooked whole in the soup). Claire's mother sometimes makes an extra batch of these traditional soups and shares it with her daughter's family.

In the hotter summer months, the family will often opt for cold salads with a variety of vegetables, tuna or chicken, and pasta or rice. Ever since they bought their own gas-operated barbecue, summer evening barbecues have become more common, with grilled chicken, fish, and meat accompanied by fresh salads being the typical fare.

Whatever the season, fruit will always be offered as dessert with the evening meal. Puddings and other cooked desserts are typically saved for Sunday lunch or other special occasions. Wine is generally also served on the table. The children are allowed to have some mixed with a soft drink, although more often they drink water.

## Major Foodstuffs

Most of the food consumed in Malta is imported. This is not a recent phenomenon. Although through the ages the Maltese are recorded as growing many of their own fruits and vegetables, hunting for wild rabbits or breeding them domestically, rearing goats and sheep for milk and for making cheese, and

starting revolts to safeguard their supply of daily bread, even during the time of the Knights and the British, a lot of the food that ended up in Maltese people's stomachs had been shipped in from abroad and was influenced in one way or another by the kitchens of the colonizers. Nowadays, supermarket shelves are laden with thousands of imported processed food items, yet, luckily, local seasonal fruits and vegetables are still widely available, as is freshly baked bread, fresh fish, and fresh milk and dairy products.

However, if one ventures to the capital city, Valletta, and asks teenagers at random to identify ingredients typical of Maltese cuisine, some would probably find themselves at a loss as to how to answer straightaway. The problem is that they are being less frequently exposed to traditional Maltese ingredients and dishes due to changes in their families' lifestyles, in the availability of foods, and in the restaurants offering certain cuisines. Despite their initial hesitation, the teenagers would eventually likely name one or more of the following: *ħobż tal-Malti* (the local soft, open-textured, "holey" bread, either with a hard crust or, if unleavened, with a softer crust), ġbejniet (little sheep or goat cheeses, served fresh, dried plain, or dried and pickled in vinegar and covered in black pepper), *bigilla* (a brown paste made from boiled, mashed beans, seasoned with olive oil, salt, and red pepper, typically served as a dip), *tadam ċatt* (tasty flat-shaped tomatoes with grooves, often used to spread on fresh bread), *għaġin il-forn* or *timpana* (baked macaroni with a tomato and meat sauce, sometimes encased in pastry), and *stuffat tal-fenek* or *fenek moqli* (rabbit stew or fried rabbit in wine and garlic). They might also mention garlic and onions (especially since these are often chopped and used as a base for sauces, soups, and dips) and olives and capers (which weave their way into many dishes, both traditional and more modern).



Bigilla, a traditional dish found in Malta. (Shutterstock)

***Bigilla***

**Ingredients**

1 lb dried fava beans
6–8 cloves garlic, roughly chopped
2 tbsp olive oil
Juice of 1 lemon
2 tbsp parsley, finely chopped
1 tbsp mint, marjoram, or basil
1 red chili pepper, finely chopped
Salt

Wash the beans and soak for 24 hours in cold water, changing water at least three times.

Cook the beans in a little water for about 1½ hours or until soft. Drain off the excess liquid.

Mash or blend the beans, adding the garlic, olive oil, lemon juice, herbs, chili pepper, and salt.

Serve hot or cold, as a spread on crusty bread or as a dip.

The youth will likely mention the local alternative to westernized fast food—*pastizzi.* These are flaky pastries shaped like diamonds or turnovers and filled with a fluffy ricotta cheese or soft mashed peas. A heavier version—called *qassatat*—is made with short-crust pastry and shaped like a rose. This is sometimes also stuffed with a mixture of spinach and anchovies or tuna.

Interestingly, historians have stated that, for reasons of shared history and proximity leading to trading and other contact, Maltese dishes have similar if

not identical counterparts in neighboring countries. For example, the *kannoli*—pastries filled with sweetened ricotta and candied fruit—are nearly identical to those of nearby Sicily, and the *kapunata*—made with tomatoes, green peppers, eggplant, onions, garlic, capers, and olives—is similar to the *peperonata* and other such dishes found in many southern Mediterranean nations.

Also, for historical reasons, there is a clear British influence on foods still typically eaten in Malta. Potatoes were introduced to the islands as a cash crop by the British (though they were probably first seen locally in the kitchens of the Spanish knights), and they are now a staple food, being used in soups, stews, and pies, and also as an accompaniment to meat and fish dishes. For the latter, roasted potatoes or chips (fries) are the most common formats. Curry powder is often used to spice up sauces and stews. Bread is often buttered; olive oil is not so commonly used for cooking but more so for flavoring.

## Cooking

In keeping with traditional Mediterranean principles, many traditional Maltese recipes involve slow cooking methods. The older generations will swear that soups, sauces, and stews benefit enormously from being simmered for a couple of hours over a low flame, whereas cooking using more modern equipment and utensils results in inferior dishes from the perspective of both flavor and texture.

Well into the early 20th century, Maltese households cooked food in earthenware pots on a *kenur*—a portable stone stove with four raised corners on which a pot could be placed and with a hole in the middle where twigs and thorns (and coal for those who could afford it) were burned as fuel. This was later replaced by a *kuċiniera*—a paraffin-fueled stove—which allowed for easy regulation of the flame. In both cases, the food would be left to cook slowly and gently for hours, filling the house with tantalizing aromas while household chores were carried out.

A habit that was common in the 20th century and still persists in a few villages is that of preparing the food, covering the dish with a clean white cloth, and taking it to be cooked in one of the local bakeries. In the past, this was typically done to cook enough loaves of bread to last the family for a few days or to cook the Sunday lunch. Two dishes still commonly cooked in this communal fashion are *patata l-forn* (layered meat, onion, and potato slices baked in wine), or *mqarrun* or *ross il-forn* (baked macaroni or rice). The dishes cook side by side in one large oven so that the aromas mingle, giving each dish a flavor unachievable in the home oven. For bakers to recognize which dish belongs to whom, each family is given a lead identification tag matching one attached to the dish.

## Typical Meals

Meals in modern households differ quite a lot, often depending on the work status of the main food provider (very often the mother), as well as a multitude of other factors (including food availability and accessibility, culinary skills, and support from elderly relatives). Whatever the circumstances, in most cases a variety of meals are offered, some of which may take a more traditional slant and others a more modern one.

The Maltese are well known for their trait of adaptability—taking what is foreign and giving it their own mark. This likely was also the case with food over the centuries. Many Maltese were employed in the different kitchens of the Knights of Malta's eight Langues (i.e., languages, from Provence, Auvergne, France, Castile, Aragon, Italy, England, and Germany) and later in the households of the British military families stationed in Malta. Their participation in the production of different dishes for these colonizers surely influenced their own repertoire of recipes and dishes cooked at home.

Currently, in households that still present more traditional fare, a meal will typically start with *brodu* (broth), followed by a plate with meat, potatoes, and vegetables cooked in the broth itself, or else steamed on top of the broth as it simmered slowly on the flame. In winter hearty soups, such as minestra, kusksu, or soppa tal-armla, are often served as a one-dish meal. In some cases, these soups may be followed by a slice of bread with *ġobon tal-bżar* (cheese with whole black peppers). Other typical main dishes might be a variety of pies, such as *torta*

*tal-irkotta* (with a filling of ricotta and broad beans), *torta tal-qargħa ħamra* (with a filling of pumpkin and rice), and *torta tal-lampuki* (with a filling of dorado fish chunks, tomato, onion, cauliflower, and potato). A traditional way of using leftover vegetables (such as cauliflower and potatoes) is to use them to make *pulpetti* (fritters) with tuna. Nowadays, these are often served with a fried egg and chips (fries).

A typical meal in a more modern kitchen will consist of roasted chicken drumsticks, roasted potatoes, and some vegetables or a salad. Tabletop grills are common in many households and are used with low-fat cooking in mind. Other typical meals are based on a wholesome pasta dish, such as penne, farfalle, or tortellini with either a tomato and meat (Bolognese-style) sauce or a cream, mushroom, and bacon (carbonara-style) sauce or a simpler sauce with pesto (of which many jarred varieties are available). However, pizzas, burgers, chicken nuggets, and noodles would possibly be the more common fare on the younger generation's daily menu.

In the past, red meat dishes were reserved for Sundays, feast days, and special occasions. Fish and pasta were consumed on Roman Catholic days of abstinence from meat (Wednesday and Friday). These traditions may still be upheld in some households, especially among the older generations; but in most households they are nonexistent (with the exception perhaps of abstaining on Good Friday and Our Lady of Sorrows Day—the Friday after the third Sunday following Easter).

Sunday lunch still holds a special place in many families. As a result, more traditional and perhaps labor-intensive and time-consuming meals are prepared. One such menu may be brodu, followed by timpana, and then patata l-forn. Alternatively, *braġjoli* (stuffed rolled-up beef slices stewed in a sauce of tomatoes, peas, and potatoes) or a similar plain meat stew—*stuffat tal-laħam*—will be prepared. Spaghetti is offered as a starter, over which some of the sauce from the stew is ladled; this is then followed by a plate of the stew accompanied by plenty of crusty bread for sopping up the sauce.

Though fruit is considered the standard dessert in most households, there are a number of traditional desserts that are occasionally prepared, perhaps more so on Sundays or feast days. These include *torta tal-marmurat* (a baked pie with a filling of almonds, candied orange peel, and chocolate) and *pudina tal-ħobż* (a baked pudding using stale bread with apples, raisins, and cocoa among the most common ingredients—though every family has its own secret recipe). A common dessert that shows traces of Malta's past British colonization is fruit trifle comprising layers of sponge cake, blancmange (and almond pudding), and fruit. Some families may also douse the sponge with a shot of vermouth. A typical traditional meal would essentially end with a variety of nuts, such as roasted peanuts, or hazelnuts and walnuts accompanied by dried figs and dates. During the Christmas season, roasted chestnuts are also popular.

## Eating Out

Tourism is one of the major industries in Malta, and, possibly as a result of this, there is no lack of restaurants in Malta. In fact, eating out as a family is a common weekend and special-occasion activity. Recent years have seen a rapid expansion in the range of international and ethnic cuisine restaurants. Apart from the omnipresent Italian restaurants, the islands have also seen an increase in Chinese and Indian restaurants, as well as the emergence of African, eastern European and Baltic, Greek, Mexican, Japanese, and fusion restaurants, to name a few. Fast-food outlets are heavily patronized by Maltese families. Kiosks and take-out places selling kebabs are also becoming popular, especially among the younger generations.

There are still very few restaurants on the islands that offer truly traditional Maltese dishes. Very casual restaurants that offer what is called a typical *fenkata* meal have been around for a few decades. This meal revolves around the traditional stuffat tal-fenek (rabbit joints prefried in garlic and then stewed with onions, tomatoes, peas, potatoes, bay leaf, and wine). The meal may start off with an appetizer, such as crusty bread slices rubbed with tomato and olive oil (similar to the Italian bruschetta), or local *galletti* (water biscuits) served with chunks of ġbejniet or some bigilla for dipping. This is then followed by a plate of spaghetti mixed with some of the sauce ladled out from the pot of rabbit stew.




Restaurants along the waterfront in Marsaxlokk, Malta. (StockPhotoPro)

The main dish is the rabbit stew itself, served with baskets of fresh crusty local bread. Dessert consists of a variety of seasonal fresh fruit. Then the meal ends with roasted peanuts, which all the diners shell at the table.

A recent phenomenon has been the opening of wine bars, particularly in the narrow winding roads of village cores and old fortressed cities. These wine bars offer both local and foreign wines, yet a staple item on their menu is a platter consisting of local traditional appetizers such as the *ħobż biż-żejt,* galletti, ġbejniet, bigilla, and parsley-laced butter beans.

## Special Occasions

The yearly calendar in Malta is punctuated with a number of public holidays, including many special *festa* days linked to the Roman Catholic religion. Although a turkey dinner and Christmas pudding have taken over as the meal for Christmas in many households, several other festa days have retained their associated traditional dish or sweet. For example, it is not uncommon for a family to order a young lamb or kid to be roasted for Easter lunch. Easter also brings with it *figolli* (a sweet pastry filled with an almond paste and generally coated with glacé icing or chocolate). These pastries were traditionally shaped as a lamb or fish, though over the years other less religiously symbolic shapes have emerged, such as butterflies, hearts, and cars.

Carnival is celebrated just before the beginning of Lent—the period of fasting before Easter. *Prinjolata* is a sweet made from cake crumbs, sugar, egg whites, and nuts, coated with icing and decorated with glacé cherries and piped chocolate, which is typically sold as a little mound or by weight and cut from a larger mound during Carnival days.

*Karamelli tal-ħarrub* (carob sweets) are readily available on both Our Lady of Sorrows Day and Good Friday, two days of strict fasting. A very common meal on these days is ricotta-filled ravioli or torta tal-irkotta in observance of the no-meat rule. Either as a sign of respect or perhaps as a show of morbid humor, November 2, which commemorates All Souls' Day, is characterized by shop windows displaying trays of *għadam*—pastries in the shape of bones.

Throughout the year the various churches in the towns and villages celebrate their patron saints. These festivals involve street parades with bands and a statue of the saint carried high on men's shoulders. The main streets and especially the square in front of the church are typically lined with little wooden ornately decorated kiosks selling different types of *qubbajt* (nougat). One can choose from either a soft white nougat containing roasted nuts or a rock-hard, dark brown caramel nougat also containing nuts or sesame seeds. Now and again, one might also find a mobile vendor selling *mqaret.* These are deep-fried diamond-shaped, date-filled pastries served piping hot. Over the years, the festas have become heavily commercialized and westernized, with mobile kiosks selling hot dogs, burgers, kebabs, chips, ice cream, cotton candy, and all sorts of fast food.

## Diet and Health

Since the latter half of the 20th century, Malta has witnessed a shift toward westernized dietary patterns, with an increased consumption of meat, dairy products, and processed high-fat, high-sugar, high-salt foods and a decreased consumption of pulses. Common foods in children's diets are chicken nuggets, burgers, pizzas, and packet noodles, together with a variety of packaged salted snacks, chocolate or jam-filled croissants, and cookies.

In 1988, the "National Nutrient Goals and Dietary Guidelines" document specifically recommended that Maltese eat less meat and consume fish and poultry in preference to beef; replace high-fat dairy products with low-fat alternatives; and eat fewer eggs and more fresh fruit and vegetables and whole-grain cereal products.

Following a traditional Maltese diet would go some way toward meeting these recommendations. For example, rabbit is one of the meats lowest in fat, whereas fish is used in several recipes ranging from *aljotta* (a broth-type fish soup containing rice and some vegetables), to pulpetti, to torta tal-lampuki. Moreover, fresh seasonal vegetables are used, raw or boiled and then cooled, to make vegetable salads, as well as a variety of soups. *Tadam mimli* (stuffed tomatoes), *brunġiel mimli* (stuffed eggplants), and *bżar mimli* (stuffed bell peppers) are three common traditional dishes in which the vegetables are filled either with rice and meat or with rice, tuna, olives, and capers and then baked.

Fruit, which is lauded for its health benefits, is luckily a staple in the diet. Different local fruits are available year-round, including plums, peaches, nectarines, apricots, pears, oranges, tangerines, strawberries, melons, watermelons, and grapes. Some claim that one of the best local fruits is prickly pears, which grow on the side of country lanes. Cut first thing in the morning and peeled after they have been soaked in water to tame the spines, prickly pears are delicious eaten cold from the refrigerator. They come in shades of red, green, and orange and are a feast for the eye when presented on the table in a bowl.

Local grapes are also pressed to make a variety of wines, and the elders insist that a glass of wine daily proffers many health benefits. Interestingly, some local entrepreneurs are using prickly pears, pomegranates, and various herbs to make liquors that all have a distinctive Mediterranean aroma and are marketed with an emphasis on their natural ingredients.

*Suzanne Piscopo*

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# Moldova

## Overview

The Republic of Moldova is a landlocked country that lies between the Ukraine and Romania in eastern Europe. The official language is Moldovan, which many linguists say is the same language as Romanian. The population of Moldova in 2009 was 4,320,748. With 29 percent of the population living below the poverty line, Moldova rates as one of Europe's poorest countries. Moldova gained independence in 1991 after 44 years of Soviet rule. Previous to this, the territory had been annexed into two areas, one Russian and the other Romanian. Consequently, Moldovan food culture shows clear Russian and Romanian elements. Originally, Moldova was part of the principality of Moldova. In the 14th and 15th centuries the Ottoman Empire ruled Moldova. Moldova was also part of an ongoing cultural exchange that has typified eastern Europe from the Middle Ages to the present day. The result is a cuisine that brings together Russian, Romanian, Turkish, Bulgarian, Greek, German, Jewish, and Ukrainian elements. History, agriculture, poverty, and religion all play defining roles in Moldovan food culture.

Fertile land covers most of Moldova's 13,070 square miles (33,851 square kilometers), three-quarters of which are dedicated to agriculture. Agriculture is considered the main pillar of Moldova's economy and accounts for half of Moldova's exports and a third of its labor force. Moldova has supplied food and wine to Russia, Romania, and Turkey at different times in history. Today, Moldova exports produce mainly to nearby countries. Wine is one of Moldova's most significant industries. Grapevines, maize, wheat, and a range of fruit trees and vegetables grow in Moldova's rich soils, and animals are kept for dairy and meat products.

### Food Culture Snapshot

With half the population living rurally and half in urban settings, the variety of foods available is different for these two demographics. What is common is the use of produce markets to buy food. Produce markets are located in most places, from small towns to large cities like Chisinau. Cornmeal will be bought in large quantities to make into a variety of dishes served throughout the day. In a rural setting families grow much of their fruit and vegetables, and animals are reared for meat, eggs, and milk. Flour will be purchased to make pastry and bread. Food items, such as coffee, sugar, salt, and pepper, will be purchased from a supermarket or store. Since the transition to a free market economy, supermarkets selling a wide range of well-known food brands have become common in urban locations.

## Major Foodstuffs

Most of what Moldovans eat is supplied domestically. Historically Moldova supplied the Soviet Union with much of its agricultural products. Today, considering the size of the country, exports are generally high. However, political and environmental reasons have caused fluctuations. For example, wine exports to Russia decreased dramatically in 2006 after Russia placed an embargo on wine imports from Moldova and Georgia. The average size of Moldovan farms is larger than western



A fountain of red wine in Moldova. (Shutterstock)

European farms, which allows for high productivity. The high percentage of foods produced in Moldova has meant that over the period of transition from being a Soviet state, food supplies were more stable than in some other eastern European countries. However, another consequence of this is that the population's food supply relies heavily on the stability of agriculture. This was a major problem in 2007 when Moldovan agricultural productivity dramatically decreased due to drought.

Even though meat features in many Moldovan dishes, it provides only half the dietary protein that cereals do. Cereals are not only the main source of protein but also the main source of dietary energy. The two main cereals grown are wheat and maize. Maize is eaten more frequently and at a higher consumption rate than wheat. Like in the neighboring country Romania, maize has historically played, and continues to play, a central role in the Moldovan diet. The dish *mamaliga* (cornmeal polenta/porridge) is the most common way it is eaten. Wheat is made into bread, which holds a meaningful place in many special occasions. Wheat is also used to make pastry for foods, such as *placinta* (cheese-filled pastry). Wheat bran is used to make a fermented, pickled soup called *bors.* Homemade wheat noodles are commonly used in the popular Moldovan soup *zama* (sometimes called *zeama*) made with chicken and vegetables. Other grains that are eaten less frequently are rice and barley.

Poultry, mainly chicken, and pork are the most widely consumed meats. Chicken is made into a customary Moldovan dish of "jellied chicken." Mutton is used to make *ciorba* (sour soup), *ghiveci* (vegetable stew), or *musaca* (from Greek moussaka). Its use in Moldova is likely a legacy of the Ottoman Empire. Lamb is eaten for Easter and more regularly in southern areas. Beef is eaten to a

lesser extent but is still seen in common dishes like *mititei* (sausage-shaped grilled patties) or bors, and it is more common in regions where the cuisine has been more heavily influenced by Russia. Eggs are also a main source of dietary protein and are served on top of mamaliga, served for breakfast, or used in cooking.

Apples, pears, quinces, apricots, and some berries are grown, and all feature in Moldovan dishes. Fruits often accompany meat dishes and are made into preserves, pickles, pies, and juices. Vegetables are often used to balance meat dishes. Tomatoes, cabbage, sweet and green peppers, garlic, eggplant (aubergine), beans, onions, and potatoes are the most popular. Walnuts and sugar beets are also major crops in Moldova.

Moldovans consume a lot of milk and milk products. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, in 2003 milk accounted for 19 percent of daily protein intake. Milk is produced in Moldova and used to make cheeses, cream, butter, and sour cream. However, many of Moldova's favorite cheeses are made using goat or sheep milk. *Brinza* is a sheep cheese, also common in Romania, which accompanies many Moldovan dishes.

Above all, Moldova is known for its wine production. Even though most of the wine is produced for export, wine is served daily at the table. Moldova has been cultivating grapevines and making wine for 5,000 years. Today, the wine-producing regions located in the south, north, and east grow mainly European grape varieties, along with a smaller quantity of local varieties, such as Rara Neagra, Plavai, and Feteasca Regala. White, red, and sweet wines are made, and due to its similar latitude to France, sparkling wines and cognacs are produced as well. Sparkling wines are commonly drunk at celebrations. Grapes are also used to make juices, and they are eaten fresh or used in cooking.

## Cooking

Moldovan cooking typically balances sour tastes with some spice and aromatic herbs. Women do most of the cooking. Moldovan cooking makes use of many utensils familiar to a European or American kitchen. Kitchens are generally more basic and don't always contain the time-saving tools that are found in the West. Meat is often grilled over charcoal, which is similar to Balkan cooking. The *ceaun* (cast iron pot that is sometimes rounded at the base) is an important element to the kitchen and is used to make soups, stews, and mamaliga. Mamaliga is commonly placed on a wooden board after it is cooked, and then once it has cooled, it is cut into pieces and served.

### *Zama* (Chicken and Noodle Soup)

Zama is a hearty but well-balanced soup made in a ceaun or large pot, and it forms the foundation for many Moldovan meals.

#### Ingredients

1 small whole chicken

Approximately 12 c water

Salt and black pepper

½ medium onion

1 carrot

1 medium tomato

1 medium celery stalk and some of the young leaves, finely chopped

2 c egg noodles (preferably homemade)

3 tbsp lemon juice

3–4 small branches of thyme

¼ c finely chopped parsley

¼ c chopped fresh dill

Wash the chicken, place it in a large pot or deep saucepan, and add water. Season with salt and pepper. Boil on medium-low heat until froth rises to the top. Meanwhile, clean and chop the onion, carrot, tomato, and celery stalk. Using a skimmer, remove all the froth. Then reduce to a simmer, cover, and cook for 40 minutes, or until meat is tender. Remove the meat from the pot, then chop and return to the pan along with the vegetables. Season to taste, then return to a simmer and cook for 10 minutes. Then bring to a boil and add the noodles. Continue cooking for 8 minutes, or until the noo-

dles are just tender. Add the lemon juice, herbs and finely chopped celery leaves. Cover pot and remove from the heat. Let the soup stand for 5 minutes. Serve with cornbread.

Breads, pastries such as placinta (pastries filled with egg and brinza or curd), and pies are all baked in the oven. Baked mamaliga is a popular way to eat cornmeal; it is served topped with brinza, and sometimes with egg, bacon, sour cream, or cottage cheese.

Most rural and some urban houses have access to produce right at their door. The amount of produce available can vary depending on whether it comes from a small vegetable garden, a small plot, or a small semisubsistence farm. Preserving produce for consumption throughout the cooler months is a very common method of food preparation. Fruits are preserved in syrup, frozen, pickled, or made into beverages, either juice or brandy. Vegetables are pickled. Canning is also a popular form of preserving.

## Typical Meals

Meals vary in quantity and variety depending on occupation, income, and location. Breakfast is often light and may include bread, cornmeal porridge, a pastry, eggs or cheese, and usually coffee or tea. For many people lunch is the main meal of the day. Generally lunch will start with soup. There are many different types of soups: ciorba (sour soup), *zama cutia* (wheat soup with honey), bors, and goulash. Soups contain meat, vegetables, herbs, spices, and often noodles, too. A meat dish will usually follow the soup. Meat can be roasted, baked in a pot, or grilled, for example, grilled mititei (sausage-shaped meat patties) or baked chicken. Meat is often accompanied by fruit, such as *torca* (pork stew) with apricots. *Sarmale* (stuffed cabbage leaves) are also common for lunch or dinner, as are jellied chicken, ghiveci (meat and vegetable stew), and fish. Wine is served with most meals.

At the center of most meals is maize. Having been a vital staple in times of food shortage over the last few centuries, it is now an established part of Moldovan cuisine and considered a national dish. Maize in the form of mamaliga is made into bread; it can also be served as porridge for breakfast, as an accompaniment to main dishes, or topped with cheese.

### *Mamaliga* (Polenta)

This dish is well known in both Moldovan and Romanian cuisines, and it is very similar to Italian polenta. There are numerous ways it can be cooked, and it is served as an accompaniment in a variety of ways. This recipe makes it into a bread; therefore, it will be thicker than Italian polenta.

**Ingredients**

3½ c water

Salt to taste

1 c cornmeal

4 tbsp butter

In a ceaun or a pot bring water and salt to a boil. In a steady stream, sprinkle about 2 tablespoons cornmeal into the boiling water, stirring constantly. In the same manner gradually add the rest of the cornmeal while stirring continually. With the heat still on low, add small pieces of butter, one at a time, and continue to stir for about 5–10 minutes more. The mixture will start to separate from the sides of the pot. Flatten the surface with the wooden stirring spoon, remove from the heat, and let rest for 5 minutes. Turn the pot over onto a wooden cutting board to remove the mamaliga. Cut into wedges using a taut string. Serve instead of bread with meat, vegetables, or stew. It can also be served with cheese sprinkled on top. Use either brinza, feta, or a sharp, crumbly cheese.

## Eating Out

There is little tradition of eating out in Moldova The reality is that many people do not have the financial means, even though restaurants and cafés are extremely cheap compared with Western standards. A variety of restaurants and cafés are found,

mainly in the large cities. In Chisinau, Moldova's capital, a number of international cuisines as well as Moldovan food can be found. Food venues range from simple street vendors to fine restaurants. Pizza is ubiquitous in Chisinau, and there are also increasingly more fast-food establishments. In urban settings it is more common to eat out for lunch, when on a work break.

## Special Occasions

Food is central when people gather for all major life events, such as birth, marriage, and death, as well as religious holidays. Also, in times of much poverty and turmoil, food and coming together have been very important for Moldovans. When Moldova was a Soviet state, many of these celebrations were forbidden; however, they are still practiced widely today.

Eastern Orthodox Christianity is practiced by 98 percent of the population. Celebrations and commemorations are common occurrences and involve fasting and feasting. The year is structured by many religious holidays. Christmas and Easter are the most relevant to Moldovan food culture. At Christmastime, as in Romania, pork is commonly eaten. In rural settings, a pig is usually slaughtered especially for Christmas. On Christmas Eve an exchange of food takes place. Children go to the houses of relatives and friends with food parcels, as gifts, containing *lichie/liipi* (cakes, biscuits, unleavened bread), apples, and other sweets. The host, having prepared food parcels, then gives a parcel of food to the children. On the eve of Easter, special food baskets are brought to the church to be blessed. The baskets usually contain chicken eggs painted red, lamb, *pasca* (a round cake made especially for Easter), cheese, and salt. As in many other Orthodox religions, lamb, usually grilled, is eaten on Easter Sunday.

There are over 200 different shapes of ritual bread in Moldova. This bread is similar to *colaci,* which is a braided or cross-shaped sweet bread from Romania, something like challah. Different shapes are used for specific occasions; for example, the figure eight is commonly made for Christmas Eve. Ritual bread is central to ceremonies. At births, deaths, marriages, and christening ceremonies, ritual bread is used at certain points in the ceremony. It is also given to guests. Bread accompanied by a candle is given to guests at "meals for the dead," which take place at intervals for seven years after someone's funeral.

## Diet and Health

Like many other ex-Soviet states, the population of Moldova does not score as well as most western Europeans in many key health indicators. Also, like many other countries dealing with post-Soviet stresses, many of the health issues are related to lifestyle, including smoking, alcohol consumption, and diet. Food shortages are, and have been, a reality for many people and often result in inadequate nutritional intake. An example of this occurred during the recent 2007 drought, which drastically reduced food reserves. This in turn led to a national health problem because the Moldovan population relies heavily on the food it produces.

Even though Moldova produces a large amount of fruit and vegetables and these also feature heavily in the cuisine, at times consumption has been low and nutrient intake poor due to poverty and poor yields. In the time of large collective farms, Moldova had a high use of pesticides and herbicides. There may be environmental remnants from this time, but today produce is often cleaner and more organic, since Moldova now has a low use of pesticides and fertilizers. For many households, the fruit and vegetables that they grow or buy are likely to be of high quality.

*Kate Johnston*

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# The Netherlands

## Overview

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is located in the northwest of the European mainland, bordering the North Sea. In the south the country borders Belgium, and in the east Germany. The Netherlands is a modern, industrialized country and a large exporter of agricultural produce. It has around 16.5 million inhabitants and has been a member of the European Union since 1951. With Amsterdam as its official capital, the government of the monarchy, which was founded in 1830 when Belgium separated, is seated in The Hague. *Dutch* refers to both the inhabitants and the language officially spoken within the country's 12 provinces. Often, and incorrectly, the Netherlands is called Holland, which refers to the (northwestern) provinces of North and South Holland. All 12 provinces have specific characteristics in regard to culture, cuisine, inhabitants, and dialects. The province of Friesland is unique in that, apart from Dutch, Frisian is also an official language. Not only the provinces but also Dutch cuisine originated in the Middle Ages. Due to the moderate climate with cool summers and mild winters, cookery traditionally follows the seasons, and until today dinner centers around potatoes, vegetables, and meat. After World War II the down-to-earth Dutch approach toward cooking changed drastically, and apart from potatoes, staple foods such as rice and pasta started to appear regularly on the dinner table. Vegetables and legumes are commonly boiled in water and remain a more important food choice than meat, fish, or meat alternatives. This is reflected in popular language, as dinner is many times referred to as *agv—aardappel, groente, vlees* (potato, vegetables, meat).

Apart from geography, until late into the 20th century poverty and religion strongly influenced Dutch eating and drinking habits. After the prosperous *Gouden Eeuw* (Golden Age, a period roughly spanning the 17th century), the country was struck by poverty, and as a result the already-existing gap and vast differences in the diets of the rich and poor grew wider. Dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries, segregation, religious freedom, and tolerance became "typical" Dutch characteristics. Toward foreigners and foreign religious dissenters, certain forms of religious freedom and tolerance were practiced, but Dutch citizens who themselves deserted religion or openly practiced otherwise were persecuted and discriminated against. Religious tolerance resulted in many people seeking a haven in the Netherlands, including Jews and French Protestant Huguenots, who could practice their beliefs openly, as well as several new religious sects, such as the Mennonites and Anabaptists. Until the late 1960s Christianity predominated in various forms of Calvinism (the Dutch Reformed Church above all), plus other denominations of Protestantism and Catholicism. Although most of the population was religious, a substantial increase in prosperity, mobility, education, and television sets resulted in secularization but never in a homogeneous nation. Still today around 60 percent of the Dutch population is faithful to religion, including more recently arrived Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists. In the past, the Dutch diet was well intertwined with religion.

Subsequently, a large number of foods and dishes were prepared and eaten according to religious calendars, laws, and requirements. The well-known Dutch expression "fish on Friday," for instance, reflects the Catholic prohibition of eating meat during fasting days.

Central aspects of the economy are agriculture and international trade, which together with industrialization and the ongoing national and global changes strongly influenced postwar cooking. Also, migration and migrants influenced the diet and eating habits. At present approximately 3.5 million inhabitants are of non-Dutch origin. The independence of the former colonies Indonesia (in 1948) and Suriname (in 1975) resulted in a massive influx of expatriates, and as of the 1960s migrants from southern Europe started to join the workforce.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Together with their two-and-a-half-year-old daughter Sophie, Sandy de Roos (38) and Bart van Dijk (45) live in an apartment in a new neighborhood in Amsterdam. Their lifestyle and foodways are typical for many young middle-class cosmopolitan urbanites in the Netherlands. Both are food, wine, and gastronomy enthusiasts and devoted hobby cooks. On holidays and weekends they enjoy eating out in modern and upscale restaurants, as well as visiting food-oriented markets and festivals.

During the week their day starts at around 7:00. Sophie eats her hot porridge followed by a *beschuitje hagelslag* (a Holland rusk with chocolate sprinkles), and she drinks a cup of hot steamed milk. Sandy eats a bowl of cereal with milk. Apart from drinking fruit juice and coffee with milk, Bart breakfasts on slices of bread with either different types of cheeses or cold cuts. After breakfast Bart leaves to work at an advertising agency where lunch is catered between 12:30 and 1:30. Together with his colleagues, Bart lunches on breads and salads. Sandy's lunch many times consists of sandwiches or a roll with melted cheese or cold cuts with a cup of tea. Sophie loves sandwiches of sliced bread with *pindakaas* (peanut butter) and a mug of semiskim milk.

The most important meal of the day is dinner, when the family gathers around the dinner table. On weekdays the cooking is shared by both; the food is prepared in 45 minutes and served around 7:30. For the preparation fresh ingredients are used, as, according to Sandy, these are more appetizing. Boiled, fried, panfried, steamed, or cooked as French fries, potatoes are prepared approximately three times a week. In wintertime, together with vegetables, potatoes are mashed into *stamppot* (hotchpotch). During the week meals vary from mussels with French fries, to Indonesian vegetarian or meat dishes, to Italian pasta, Middle Eastern bulgur, and Moroccan *tajines*. Depending on what's on the menu, supermarkets and specialized or exotic stores are frequented. As during the weekend many times friends are entertained by cooking a three- or four-course dinner with complementary wines, food shopping for leisure consumes more time.

## Major Foodstuffs

The most important dietary staples in the Netherlands are dairy (milk, yogurt, cheese), bread and grains, meats, vegetables, and potatoes. A substantial part of the country's crops, dairy products, and livestock is traded and exported internationally. The country has a moderate rainy climate, and due to its position by the sea, where it can be very windy, the differences in winter and summer temperatures are not great. The draining of land has resulted in an extensive network of waterways, dams, and dikes. The overall flat country has fertile soils on which major food crops such as barley, corn, potatoes, sugar beets, and wheat are cultivated openly. Dutch agriculture is highly specialized and technologically sophisticated, which also applies to the country's intensive livestock and dairy production.

### *Dairy*

The average consumption of dairy is very high. Milk and buttermilk are drunk by all ages, and yogurt and milk-based desserts are consumed on a daily basis. Besides for their butter, the Dutch are renowned for their yellow cheeses from cow milk that are produced in factories and by farmers. Gouda,

Edam, and Leerdammer are among the most popular varieties. Most semihard and hard cheeses have the shape of a small soccer ball or cartwheel and are sold cut in pieces. Whether young, mature, or very old, Dutch cheese is eaten thinly sliced with a cheese slicer for breakfast and lunch and on sliced bread spread with butter or margarine. Cut into dice, Dutch cheese traditionally also serves as an appetizer with drinks. Furthermore, the dairy self-sufficient country exports tons of cheese, butter, and condensed milk.

### *Potatoes and Vegetables*

As dinner centers around potatoes, vegetables, and meat, and the Dutch cuisine and diet very much follows the seasons, the average diet is relatively high in potatoes but also in animal, processed, sweetened, and refined foods. Apart from potatoes a substantial amount of energy and carbohydrates comes from staple foods such as bread, cereals, pasta, rice, and dried legumes.

All sorts of vegetables are available year-round: fresh, frozen, and canned. Potatoes and vegetables such as carrots, leeks, cabbages, and onions are grown in the open fields, but tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, green beans, spinach, zucchini, eggplant, and peppers are often cultivated in greenhouses. Generally, tomatoes, cucumbers, cauliflower, and lettuce are the most consumed vegetables, but in season locally cultivated produce such as carrots, spinach, beans, peas, endive, leeks, onions, brussels sprouts, or one of the various kinds of cabbages is very popular.

### *Fruit*

Particularly in the summer and the autumn many kinds of domestically grown apples, pears, plums,




Alkmaar Cheese Auction, Amsterdam, Holland. (Corel)

strawberries, cherries, and berries are eaten fresh. Imported bananas, citrus fruit, melons, pineapple, grapes, peaches, and kiwis are sold year-round and primarily eaten fresh. Canned fruits such as mandarin oranges, peaches, and apricots are common, and pineapple especially is very popular.

### *Meat, Poultry, and Game*

Although most Dutch do not eat meat everyday, for most of the population meat remains the most important source of protein. Pork and beef, but also chicken, are the most popular meats; in particular, minced meats and easy-to-prepare meats such as sausages, fillets, chicken breasts, and schnitzel (cutlets) are preferred over larger cuts of meat. Veal, lamb, mutton, goat, horse meat, and turkey are also consumed. In autumn and winter, and especially for festive occasions, all sorts of game (rabbit, hare, pheasant, duck, ostrich, and deer) are served. Eggs, cheese, and meat replacements from soy are popular among the small group of vegetarians (2%) and people who avoid meat regularly.

### *Fish*

All over the Netherlands fresh saltwater fish from the North Sea is available, in particular herring; eel, mackerel, and shrimp are also popular. Besides mussels, cod and plaice are also cultivated, and wild "exotic" fish such as salmon, tuna, tilapia, and *pangasius* (a kind of catfish that looks like a shark) are widely consumed. Smoked eel, wild salmon, and oysters are considered a delicacy. Apart from being prepared at home and in restaurants, fried fish and especially raw salted herring are popular street (snack) foods.

### *Spices*

Roasted, ground, fresh, or dried herbs, spices, and flavorings are traditionally common but used sparingly in Dutch cooking. A wide range of so-called typical Dutch as well as exotic herbs and spices are available. These are commonly purchased in supermarkets, grocer's, and specialty stores that also sell all kinds of spice mixtures. Like most herbs and spices, they are sold in small bags, cans, or plastic and glass bottles or containers. Curly parsley, flat celery leaves, and chives are among the most used fresh herbs. Parsley and chives are finely chopped, and parsley is particularly popular for all kinds of soups, salads, and sandwiches. Together with the celery root, celery leaves are primarily boiled and used for *erwtensoep,* a thick soup of dried peas. Due to globalization in the 1960s, foreign fresh herbs such as rosemary, thyme, oregano, basil, and cilantro became popular and nowadays are reasonably common. Most households own a salt and pepper set, and many people use a pepper mill. A number of savory and sweet dishes are traditionally prepared with both whole and ground spices such as cloves, nutmeg, and cinnamon. A dash of nutmeg on vegetables and a bit of cinnamon in desserts, cookies, and apple tarts is quite common. The Dutch spice cabinet also contains varieties of mild or spicy paprika and *kerriepoeder* (curry powder). Also widely available are ready-made dried spice mixtures for a large number of Dutch and foreign dishes such as the traditional *gehaktbal* (meatball), *hachée* (meat stew), fish, chicken, chili con carne, and a large number of potato dishes, rice, and pasta. The use of vanilla pods and cinnamon sticks is common. Typically Dutch are *koek- en speculaaskruiden,* which is a mixture of spices made from cinnamon, coriander, nutmeg, cloves, ginger, cardamom, and dried orange peel, used especially in winter for all kinds of cookies, cakes, and desserts.

### *Condiments*

Apart from a salt and pepper set, favorite condiments are mustard, mayonnaise, vinegar, and Maggi seasoning sauce (a substitute meat extract), as well as sweet and sour pickled gherkins and onions. Popular, too, are tomato ketchup, piccalilli and garlic sauce, and *saté-saus* (peanut butter sauce).

### *Preserving*

Until the beginning of the 20th century, since most of the population was self-supporting, food preservation was a necessity. Common methods used to preserve fish, meats, vegetables, and fruits (for

example, herring, ham, bacon, and apples) were salting, curing, drying, smoking, and sugaring. At the end of the 19th century freezers were introduced and eagerly adopted by households and the growing food industry. Subsequently, mass-produced preserves started to replace homemade produce and a number of traditional preservation techniques.

## Cooking

In the middle of the 19th and the first decades of the 20th century, the interior of the Dutch house started to modernize drastically. Until then most people prepared one-pot dishes on top of a coal stove. After the introduction of gas, electricity, and a separate room for the kitchen, cooking became less time-consuming. Nowadays, middle-class households have modern kitchens that contain at least a four-burner gas range, a microwave, and conventional oven. Also common are a broad variety of electronic household appliances such as a mixer, blender, coffeemaker, espresso machine, toaster, egg boiler, juicer, and water heater.

The standard kitchen equipment is the *pannenset* (set of pans). This collection of saucepans in different sizes is mostly purchased together and traditionally used for cooking potatoes, vegetables, soups, and desserts. Sautéing larger cuts of meat is done in an enameled *braadpan* (casserole). All kinds of flat cast iron and Teflon frying pans with handles are used for the preparation of panfried meats, eggs, and pancakes. Since stir-frying has gained in popularity, most households own a Teflon wok. Typical Dutch kitchen equipment is a potato knife or peeler, a potato masher, and a cheese slicer.

Potatoes, vegetables, and also fruits such as apples and pears are commonly boiled in water with salt or sugar. Meats and eggs are traditionally sautéed in margarine or butter but also in sunflower, olive, peanut, or soy oil, or a combination. Furthermore, lard and bacon are often used for sautéing. The oven is commonly used for baking a traditional *appeltaart* (apple pie), cakes, and cookies but also for savory dishes such as lasagna, pizza, and quiche. Fun cooking and eating together for the *gezelligheid* (sociability) is gaining popularity. In wintertime electric household appliances such as a table wok, grill, or fondue set are put on the dinner table, and in summer more and more people gather around a barbecue or are eating outdoors.

Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are consumed at the dinner table, which is dressed with a cloth, paper, or plastic tablecloth or place mats. Either pans or serving dishes are placed on the table. Soup is eaten from bowls or plates, the main dish is served on flat plates, and dessert is served in separate bowls. The standard tableware is a spoon, fork, and knife. The style of eating is "Continental," with the fork to the left and the knife to the right of the plate. If dinner is followed by dessert, dessert spoons are placed on the table, above the plate. Table manners are influenced by the French; thus, it is considered impolite to chew food with an open mouth, to eat food from someone else's plate, or to leave the table before all have finished eating.

Vast amounts of local and foreign beers and wine are consumed. Although drinking wine has gained in popularity, apart from on the weekend and in restaurants, drinking alcohol or any other beverages at the dinner table is not very common and usually restricted to special occasions.

At present the average middle-class Dutch woman spends around 30 minutes in the kitchen. Inspiration many times comes from a wide range of women's and specialized magazines, daily recipes in newspapers, the Internet, the television, and cookbooks. Shopping for groceries is mostly done once a week, in particular, on Friday and Saturday. During the week women usually do most of the cooking. As cooking and gastronomy have become more popular, many men and middle-class cosmopolitan urbanites engage in food and wine shopping for leisure, especially on the weekend.

## Typical Meals

Since the poverty-stricken 1800s and beginning of the 1900s, the Dutch diet has improved substantially. The year-round availability and variety of food have never been greater. Also, television shows, celebrity chefs, cookbooks, and magazines have added to the development and globalization of domestic cooking

and gastronomy. In the 20th century, together with industrialized foods, new and exotic products, foods, and ingredients increasingly modernized the diet. From the 1960s on, alongside the potato, rice, pasta, pizza, and quiche, a large variety of ingredients and dishes from around the world started to appear on the menu. Although Dutch cuisine and meals always have been internationally oriented, especially the younger (urban) generation prepares meals that can vary from Chinese to Italian, Moroccan to Indian.

For most people the main meal is dinner, but especially the older generation and rural families keep the traditional mealtimes. Around lunchtime they eat a hot meal starting with soup, followed by potatoes, vegetables, and meat, and a dessert. Around 6 P.M. often just a cold light meal of sliced bread with cold cuts and cheese or soup is consumed. This supper is many times followed by a cup of coffee with a cookie around 8 P.M. On Sunday afternoon many families gather around the dinner table or eat in restaurants, where they have either an extensive lunch or brunch or a three-course dinner. Especially during weekends, it is popular to order take-out food from eateries or Chinese-Indonesian restaurants.

During the week, a cold or hot breakfast and lunch are followed by a hot dinner around 6 P.M. Commonly a snack or a cookie is consumed during the 10 A.M. coffee break and 3 P.M. tea break. Both at home, at work, and in the streets, sweet and savory snack foods are very popular. A vast variety of traditional and exotic snacks such as French fries and the *kroket* (croquette) but also Vietnamese spring rolls and Middle Eastern *shoarma* (shawarma—similar to Greek gyros and served in a flatbread) are available in most cities.

Breakfast is generally consumed between 8 and 9 A.M. before people start school or the workday. Apart from convenience products such as cereal, it sometimes consists of oatmeal porridge, but more common are slices of (white or brown) wheat bread that are spread with margarine or butter and jam, sliced cheese, or cold cuts. Most kitchen cabinets and refrigerators contain an ample supply of strawberry, apricot, and other kinds of fruit jams. Popular, too, are pindakaas (peanut butter), *chocoladepasta* (chocolate spread), *appelstroop* (apple treacle), *hagelslag* (chocolate sprinkles), old and young semihard cheeses such as Gouda and Edam, and many types of cold meats and sausages. Also, *beschuit* (rusk) and *ontbijtkoek* (breakfast cake) are typical for breakfast. To drink, orange juice, tea, milk, or coffee is considered suitable.

Eating lunch in a restaurant or eatery is not very common; most people take their own sandwiches to work in a lunch box. The Dutch very often refer to lunch as *boterhammen uit de broodtrommel cultuur* (sandwiches from the lunch-box culture). Between 12:00 and 1:00 schoolchildren and a large part of the workforce consume a few sandwiches, soup, or a snack in a canteen, home, or workplace, or in the street.

The main meal of the day is eaten between 5:30 and 6:30 P.M. Traditionally, dinner is a sequence of three courses: soup, a main dish, and a dessert. Serving soup as a starter has lost its popularity, but dessert is rarely skipped. What is served at dinnertime many times is decided in the supermarket and day by day. Most families use dinnertime as the opportunity to sit, eat, and talk together. Apart from potatoes, vegetables, and meat, a few times each week pasta or rice is prepared. Most supermarkets carry a wealth of convenience desserts ranging from the more traditional (fruit) yogurt, vanilla or chocolate *vla* (custard), and *griesmeelpudding* (semolina pudding) to foreign desserts such as chocolate mousse and *bavarois* (Bavarian cream).

Even though vast numbers of slices of bread and rolls are consumed for breakfast and lunch, the preferred source of carbohydrates is the potato. For every taste and dish there's a Dutch potato. Of the around 90 potato varieties available, the so-called mealy types with a yellowish or red-brown skin are the favorites. Potato types are often given girl's names, such as Bintje, Irene, and Marijke. Potatoes are usually served peeled and boiled. If potatoes are eaten together with vegetables, panfried meat, and gravy, the vegetables are boiled in water and served with a *roomsaus* (literally, "cream sauce," but actually prepared with butter, flour, and milk).

Although eaten all year round, the ultimate Dutch winter foods are stamppot (hotchpotch) and soups of dried beans. In winter, soups with boiled potatoes,

vegetables, meats, dried brown beans, and (broken) dried green peas are popular as *maaltijdsoep* (dinner soup). Well known are *bruine bonensoep* (brown bean soup) and erwtensoep (pea soup).

From fall to the beginning of spring, stamppot is commonly prepared by boiling and mixing potatoes together with vegetables. A few well-known local varieties, such as *hete bliksem* (hot lightning, with apples) and *blauwe bliksem* (blue lightning, with pears), are made with potatoes and fruit. In spring and summer, mixing cooked potatoes with raw vegetables such as endive is also popular. Today, there are numerous recipes for and variations of stamppot, but overall the most traditional versions include endive with bacon and meatballs, *hutspot* (carrots with onions) with *klapstuk* (boiled beef), *zuurkool met spek* (sauerkraut with bacon), and *boerenkool met rookworst* (kale with smoked sausage). Hotchpotch is commonly served with *rookworst* (smoked sausage) and/or fried bacon on the side.

The best-loved stamppot is made with *boerenkool* (kale, or "farmer's cabbage"). This is also a strictly cold-weather dish, as kale is best once the frost has softened the leaves, thus improving their taste. Most kale is purchased finely chopped in plastic bags. As a primitive version of cabbage, kale is certainly not the world's most elegant vegetable. Given its popularity stamppot boerenkool can be considered a national Dutch dish.



Vegetable hotchpotch served directly from the pan. (iStockPhoto)

### *Stamppot Boerenkool* (Kale with Sausage and Potato)

In most parts of the Netherlands boerenkool is prepared in the same manner—by putting the potatoes on top of the kale and boiling these together—but it is eaten with a variety of condiments and in many different manners. The most common way is to serve it with a smoked sausage and fried bacon. Gherkins and/or pickled onions and yellow *Amsterdamse uien* (yellow pickled onions) are popular on the side, and because sour combines well with it, a dash of vinegar is a well-known addition. Mustard commonly accompanies the sausage. Still, some people prefer to serve kale with meatballs or fried sausages or modernize the traditional recipes by putting nuts, little pieces of cheese, duck, and even olive oil into the stamppot boerenkool.

#### Ingredients

2 lb mealy potatoes

1 bunch finely chopped kale

1 tsp salt

1 smoked sausage

5 slices smoked bacon in pieces (optional)

2 tbsp butter

½ c milk

Peel the potatoes, and cut them in half. Place the potatoes on top of the kale in a pot with about 3 cups of water and salt. Put the sausage on top, and cover. Bring to a boil, and boil for about 25 to 30 minutes. Meanwhile, fry the bacon on very low heat. Remove the sausage from the pot, and drain the cooking liquid. Set this aside. Heat milk, add the milk and butter to the potatoes, and mash the kale and potatoes until mixed well. Make sure the stamppot boerenkool remains moist. One by one, add a few tablespoons of the reserved cooking liquid, and if desired some extra tablespoons of butter. Stir in the fried bacon. Serve with the sausage.

Apart from being boiled in water or mixed into hotchpotch, vegetables and fruits are stewed or served pickled. Traditional stewed vegetable side

dishes are red cabbage, endive, Brussels endive, spinach, and leeks. Boiled red beets are sliced and pickled in a sweet and sour dressing with oil, vinegar, and spices. Red cabbage is commonly stewed with vinegar, sugar, cinnamon, cloves, raisins or currants, and pieces of apple. Apples and pears also serve as side dishes. Popular with all ages is *appelmoes* (applesauce), for which apples are stewed with sugar and cinnamon. Pears are boiled in water or red wine, with the peel of a lemon, cinnamon, and sugar.

In spring and summer, fresh vegetables, and especially lettuce, are commonly used for salads that many times also contain thinly sliced tomatoes, cucumber, and small pieces of spring (orange) carrots, red peppers, and onion. Salads are either dressed with *slasaus* (literally, "salad sauce") or a mayonnaise- or yogurt-based dressing with mild (sunflower, soy, or peanut) oil, vinegar, salt, pepper, and a bit of mustard. Olive oil–based vinaigrettes and other foreign dressings are popular. Furthermore, together with easy-to-prepare packages of mixed vegetables for Mediterranean and Eastern dishes, finely chopped mixed vegetables are commonly used for vegetable soups.

Since the 1950s all kinds of minced meat (beef, pork, or a mixture of the two) have become popular and are used for pasta sauces, oven-baked casseroles, and hamburgers but especially for the traditional gehaktbal (meatball). Apart from being served for supper with potatoes, vegetables, and gravy, meatballs are a very popular snack. Ranging from tennis to golf ball size, and served with mustard and white bread, they are always present on the menus of eateries and bars and are sold via snack-food vendors.

Overall, pork and the easy-to-prepare parts of beef and chicken are favorites. Traditionally Dutch butchers divide meat into many more parts than elsewhere. Popular pork parts are *karbonades* (pork chops), *speklappen* (slices of fresh bacon), and *slavink* (minced beef wrapped in bacon), in addition to minced meat. Larger cuts of meats, and especially beef, are prepared on Sundays and festive occasions. Furthermore, *rollade* (rolled meat), hachée (a slow-cooked stew with onions, vinegar, and bay leaf), and (Hungarian) goulash from beef are commonplace. Soup is made from the whole (old) chicken, but for supper panfried chicken parts (legs and wings) and especially the easy-to-prepare breast are far more popular. Eggs are hardly consumed for dinner but are commonly eaten boiled for breakfast or lunch and are also a regular in the *uitsmijter* (literally, "bouncer"—panfried eggs with bacon and cheese on slices of white bread). Especially in autumn and for Christmas, game such as rabbit, pheasant, and venison is prepared. For the more elaborate Christmas dinner, turkey and goose are popular.

Bordering the North Sea, the Dutch eat a lot of fresh and smoked fish. Most notable is the *zoute haring* (raw, salted herring). Although herring is consumed all year round, the herring season begins in June; the first herring of the season is called Hollandse Nieuwe. Herring is served with finely chopped raw onions and gherkins. Although also sold in supermarkets, traditionally herring is bought at outdoor markets and the *haringstal* (herring stall). These vendors also sell the national delicacy smoked eel, sliced smoked salmon, and shrimp, which are often eaten on the spot on a white bread roll. Many kinds of fish are fried on the spot. Furthermore, typically Dutch are *panharing* (marinated fried herring) and *rolmops* (pickled herring), cold and hot smoked herring, and mackerel. Also popular, and considered festive foods, are fish salads with herring, shrimp, or tuna and a mayonnaise-based dressing. Fresh fish such as plaice and cod are commonly filleted and panfried. The most popular crustaceans and shellfish are oysters and cooked mussels, served together with sauces and a French baguette or fries.

Typically Dutch are pancakes and *poffertjes* (silver dollar–sized pancakes). Plate-sized pancakes are eaten as a meal but considered a treat. The classic way to eat them is topped with butter and powdered sugar. There are numerous sweet and savory toppings but most common is bacon and molasses (a dark syrup from sugar beets).

Apart from apple pie, which is typically baked at home, specialty stores and supermarkets carry a wealth of cookies, cakes, and pies. Almost every city has its own pastry; well known are *stroopwafels* (treacle wafers) from Gouda, Deventer *koek* (honey cake), and the *Bossche bol* (chocolate-coated choux pastry filled with whipped cream). Another national

delicacy is licorice, often quite salty compared with that found elsewhere. The annual licorice consumption averages three pounds per person.

Apart from a national cuisine, most provinces have a typical cuisine and local products. The northeastern provinces are known for rye bread, potato dishes, dried farmer's sausages, and the use of mustard. Saltwater fish such as herring, mackerel, and English whiting is eaten all along the coastal area, and the province of Zeeland is famous for mussels, oysters, and sea vegetables such as *salicornia, lamsoor* (*Limonium vulgare,* or sea lavender), and *zeeaster* (*Aster tripolium*—a spinach-like plant that grows in marshes). The southern province of Limburg is known for its *vlaai* (fruit pie), asparagus, and mushrooms.

## Eating Out

With a down-to-earth approach to food, cooking and entertaining guests at home as a leisure activity was neither very common nor well established in the Netherlands until the middle of the 20th century. Eating out foremost was considered a necessity, and it was mostly restricted to eating in hotel restaurants, eateries, bars, and caterers' shops, in addition to snack foods available via street vendors and stalls. In the 1900s and especially in Amsterdam the entertainment industry and eating out as a luxury started to become popular. Besides establishments serving Dutch food, French-style restaurants appeared. Until the late 1960s the quality of the service was of greater importance than the cooking skills of the chef. The upper-middle class often dined in hotel restaurants, and eating out was restricted to weekends and special occasions such as birthdays and other celebrations.

In the 1920s in larger cities such as Rotterdam and Amsterdam a handful of poor Chinese immigrants started selling peanuts on the street, and eventually a few of these vendors started Chinese eateries and restaurants. With the postwar influx of Indonesian expatriates, in the 1960s and 1970s the Chinese restaurants were transformed into Chinese-Indonesian restaurants. By offering cheap foods, and with take-out and dining-room facilities, these restaurants lured Dutch middle-class families into their establishments, especially during the weekend. Today, most Dutch cities and shopping malls have a Chinese-Indonesian restaurant. The growing postwar middle class that was raised on take-out Chinese food still considers dining at *de Chinees* (the Chinese) a festive occasion.

For centuries the French culture and language have been well established and held in high esteem. When France became a popular holiday destination in the 1960s, the country's food and wine started to become available. French cuisine became popular among the more educated middle class via the bistro and cookbooks. In the same period self-employed immigrant entrepreneurs from Greece, Italy, Spain, and Turkey opened eateries and snack bars and started street-vending ice cream. As the Mediterranean became a popular holiday destination, eating Greek moussaka, Spanish paella, and Italian pizza and pasta became popular.

When in the 1970s the first McDonald's opened its doors, American fast food and hamburgers started to conquer the Netherlands. Subsequently, a growing number of American-inspired fast-food chains have opened, and nowadays numerous places successfully sell American pizza, muffins, chocolate chip cookies, and bagels. Ironically, McDonald's offers the Dutch-inspired Mac Kroket.

Numerous restaurant sites and guides reflect the ongoing and growing popularity of eating out and gastronomy. Especially since the 1950s, the number of restaurants and the quality of gastronomy increased significantly, and today both Gault-Millau and Michelin publish special Dutch editions. In these guides the approximately 100 best restaurants are listed. Apart from 2 restaurants with three Michelin stars, there are over 10 restaurants with two stars. Also, a number of Chinese, Japanese, and Indonesian chefs, and even a Surinamese chef, have been rewarded with Michelin stars. Chefs are educated according to the French gastronomic model as introduced by Auguste Escoffier in the early 20th century; especially in the most expensive restaurants, kitchens are organized according to the French model. Cooking is inspired by global gastronomic trends and influenced by the leading

foreign chefs such as Alain Ducasse, Michel Bras, Jean-Georges Vongerichten, Ferran Adria, and Heston Blumenthal. Due to a growing number of ambitious chefs, the quality of Dutch gastronomy is steadily improving.

## Special Occasions

As the prevailing religion and cultural heritage is Christian, traditionally a wide range of typical foods and dishes mark Christian holidays such as Carnival, Easter, and Christmas. Birthdays and a number of other festivities and special occasions, such as Queen's Day, festivals, and fairs, are also times for eating and drinking well and abundantly.

### *New Year's*

For most of the population New Year's Eve starts with *oliebollen,* doughnut balls that are prepared with and without currants and raisins and eaten fresh, lukewarm, or cold, often sprinkled with powdered sugar. Oliebollen and other fritters such as *appelflappen* (apple fritters), *wafels* (waffles), and pineapple fritters are common and often bought at one of the many temporary stalls that start to appear in cities and towns in autumn. Especially in the provinces the postwar generation remains fixed on a vast number of New Year's dishes and customs. These can vary from eating red cabbage to special stamppot (hotchpotch), herring, and rice pudding, or the paying of New Year's calls to neighbors, friends, and family. Instead of sending each other greeting cards, the Dutch spend the first two weeks of the new year visiting each other and serving oliebollen and (alcoholic) beverages.



New Year's Eve in the Netherlands with champagne and the traditional oliebollen. (iStockPhoto)

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**_Oliebollen_ (Doughnut Balls)**

1 c raisins and/or currants
2 c all-purpose flour
1 tsp salt
1 tbsp dry yeast
2 tbsp sugar
2 c lukewarm buttermilk
5–6 c frying oil, such as canola
Powdered sugar

Soak the raisins and/or currants in hot water.

Combine the flour and salt in a large mixing bowl, and add the yeast and sugar. Make a hole in the center, and slowly pour the buttermilk into it. Use a wooden spoon or electric mixer to stir the ingredients into a smooth batter. Put the raisins and/or currants in a sieve, and then pat them dry. Mix them into the batter.

Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and a kitchen towel, and let the batter rise for about an hour and a half in a warm spot. The batter should double in size.

Heat the oil to 350°F. Stick a soupspoon into the oil for a couple of seconds (this prevents the batter from sticking to the spoon), then fill the spoon with the batter. Carefully dip the batter into the oil. Re-

peat this process four to five times, and fry the oliebollen for about 4 to 5 minutes, until golden brown. If necessary, after three minutes, rotate them with a fork. Remove the oliebollen from the oil with a skimmer.

Repeat this step until all of the batter is used.

Put the oliebollen on a plate lined with some paper towels. Serve them hot, sprinkled with powdered sugar.

### *Carnival*

The major rivers, the Lower Rhine, Waal, and Maas, divide the country in two parts, with a largely Calvinist part in the north and primarily Catholic areas in the south, where the beginning of Lent is celebrated with Carnival. Carnival is three days of processions, masquerades, singing, drinking beer, and feasting. At the end of Carnival on Tuesday night, called Vastenavond, pancakes, sausages, and cakes are consumed, as the next day, Ash Wednesday, starts a period of 40 days of fasting, and Vastenavond offers a last chance to eat meat, eggs, and dairy products.

### *Easter*

Easter, the most important religious holiday, is celebrated with eggs and breads. Before Easter, to mark the end of the fast that started on Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday is commemorated. On Palm Sunday children walk in procession to church carrying sticks that are decorated with sprigs of boxwood, candy, eggs, and a bread rooster on top. *Het Paasontbijt* (Easter breakfast) is the most abundant breakfast and the culinary highlight of the religious calendar year. For Easter, shops, houses, and dinner tables are abundantly decorated with yellow flowers, branches of trees, decorated eggs, chickens, rabbits, and other signs of spring and fertility. In elementary schools and at home, vast quantities of boiled, colored, and chocolate eggs; *paasbroden* (raisin breads); jams; cold cuts; cheeses; and smoked salmon are consumed. Prominent at the Easter breakfast table are round matzo. The Dutch spread the unleavened Jewish Passover flatbread with butter and sprinkle it with sugar.

### *Queen's Day*

Established in 1885, Queen's Day became a national holiday of unity and togetherness. In honor of the queen, most cities organize children's games, concerts, flea markets, and fireworks. Many times the festivities are organized by the local *Oranje vereniging* (Orange society), a group that supports the Dutch monarchy, which is also known as the House of Orange. Orange became the national color, and for Queen's Day and national sports events, many people nowadays are dressed in orange. Apart from commercial "orange" products, orange candies, cakes, beverages, and snack foods are sold. Best known are the orange tompouce (literally "Tom Thumb," this is pastry filled with custard) of the department store HEMA and *Oranje Bitter* (a liqueur).

### *Fairs*

Once a year most cities and towns have a fair. Fairs are held particularly in summer and during holidays, and they are traditionally organized on market squares, except for in western Friesland, where the fair traditionally is held next to the local bar. At most fairs beer is consumed in vast amounts. Apart from all sorts of attractions, fairgoers eat *kaneelstok* (literally, "cinnamon stick"). These sticks are sold in all kinds of flavors such as cinnamon, licorice, and cherry at stalls that sell candy (*Oud-Hollands snoepgoed*). A regular feature is also the *gebakskraam* (stall that sells baked goods), and many times there are special vendors for cotton candy and popcorn.

### *Sint Maarten and Sinterklaas*

From November until the end of the year, an abundance of *speculaas* (spiced cookies), biscuits, pastry in the shape of letters, chocolate and marzipan figures, *borstplaat* (fondant), and other seasonal specialty sweets, pastry, and confectionery becomes available. On November 11, especially in

northwestern parts of the country, on the night of Sint Maarten (Saint Martin) children walk the streets with lanterns they have made. Knocking on doors and singing songs, they are rewarded with all kinds of sweets and candy. Around a week later Sinterklaas (Saint Nicolas) arrives by boat from Spain. "Who behaves sweet gets candy, who behaves bad gets salt" is a line from one of the many songs children sing for Sinterklaas. From his arrival until his departure on December 6, Sinterklaas and his aid, *Zwarte Piet* (Black Pete), hand out lots of specialty sweets and confectionery such as *pepernoten* (spice nuts), *taai taai* (literally, "tough tough"; chewy little cakes), marzipan, confections, chocolate coins, and letters from the alphabet. The highlight of the visit is on December 5, when children receive presents.

### *Christmas*

For the two-day celebration of Christmas, houses are decorated with Christmas trees and lights. On the night of December 24 and on the morning of December 25 many people attend a church service. Baked goods such as *kerststol* (a Christmas loaf with dried fruits and almond paste), *kerstkransjes* (spiced cookies with almonds), or a *kerstkrans* (pastry filled with almond paste) are served. After days of shopping, preparation, and cooking, on the first day of Christmas, most people dine lavishly at home. The 26th, the second Christmas day, is often spent visiting family and friends. In wintertime, if the weather permits, outdoor skating becomes a national sport. On the ice, stalls sell *koek en zopie* (cake and a hot punch that is a mixture of beer and rum), hot chocolate, pea soup, hot smoked sausages, and cakes.

### *Birthdays*

In the past, beschuit (rusk) was considered a rich man's delicacy, but nowadays they are handed out to celebrate a newborn. For the occasion the fragile twice-baked round rusk is spread with butter and sprinkled with pink (for a girl) or blue (for a boy) *muisjes* (literally, "mice," this refers to aniseed sprinkles). One's birthday is celebrated by treating family and friends to cake, drinks, and food, rather than being treated oneself, which is the origin of the expression "Dutch treat." Special breads and cakes in the shape of the biblical figures Abraham or Sarah are presented to people who turn 50. Also typically Dutch is a "do not feel like cooking" party. Nowadays, a pizza or Chinese, Thai, or Surinamese takeout or delivery is ordered, but on days when women do not feel like cooking, they usually prepare pancakes or serve ready-made French fries.

## Diet and Health

In the Netherlands, traditionally, nutritional value is considered more important than gastronomic pleasure and the palatability of food. Before and after World War II, many middle-class women were educated in domestic science at schools. Apart from home economics and hygiene, these schools taught and advocated a frugal diet with a high nutritional value. The schools published highly popular cookbooks that greatly influenced domestic cooking and future generations of domestic cooks.

At the same time, so as to prevent chronic diseases, the Dutch government's food policy started strongly focusing on health and food-safety issues. Due to food shortages during World War II and the need to feed the nation, historically the Dutch government and governmental organizations are well enmeshed with the local food industries and factories. Nowadays, a healthy diet is often advocated via media campaigns that promote the consumption of national agricultural produce and industrial products.

During the postwar era, Het Voedingscentrum (the Nutrition Center) became the most important and best-known governmental organization for nutritional information for citizens. Connecting scientific insights with a healthy diet and the daily practice of consumers, in the 1950s it successfully developed a food classification system that informs the general population on how to eat healthy and safely. Nutrition information is provided through *De Schijf van Vijf* (the five disks), via which the so-

called whole food assortment is divided. It is comparable to the U.S. Food Pyramid. Depending on the group, the focus is on the amount of dietary fiber, saturated fat, energy, and/or specific micronutrients contained in the food products.

In comparison to other European countries, there are considerable differences in dietary patterns and consumption. Although during the postwar period, the availability of foods and food consumption were subject to drastic changes, the Dutch diet remains relatively high in potatoes but also in animal-derived, processed, sweetened, and refined foods. The consumption of vegetables and fruit is similar to the rest of Europe.

The average Dutch citizen is living a longer and a healthier life than in the past. Like elsewhere in the Western world, consumers are tempted by a huge variety of foods available in a growing number of places and in advertising. Subsequently, the pleasures and palatability of food are becoming more important, but today the risks of chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and obesity, and campaigns that focus on health and food safety, remain dominant issues in the minds of Dutch consumers and food policy makers.

*Karin Vaneker*

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# Norway

## Overview

Norway occupies the western part of the Scandinavian Peninsula in the north of Europe. It has a long coast on the Atlantic, high mountains, large forests, rivers and valleys, fjords and glaciers, and only 3 percent arable land. With 4.8 million inhabitants spread out over about 118,000 square miles (305,000 square kilometers), Norway has the lowest population density in Europe after Iceland. Only 2.5 percent of the population is working in agriculture, whereas most of the workforce is in the service sector. The standard of living is very high, and life expectancy is 83 years for women and 78 years for men.

Norway is a monarchy with a democratic constitution and a parliamentary system. Norwegian is a Germanic language in the Indo-European group. Among the aboriginal Saami population, different dialects of a language in the Finno-Ugric group are spoken. Eighty percent of the population belongs to the national Lutheran church, which has dominated in Norway since the 16th century.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Jon and Kari Anderson live in the Oslo region and have two children, Katrine (14) and Fredrik (12). Both parents work outside the home, and they try to concentrate shopping on weekends in one of the big supermarkets. But Kari takes most of the responsibility for both the shopping and the preparation of meals. For weekdays they buy ground meat, sausages, frozen fillets of cod, potatoes and carrots, and bottled sauces. For weekends, pork chops or chicken breasts are popular, particularly in the summer when they are barbecuing in their little garden. Sometimes they buy a pizza to eat with their kids in the evening. They buy mostly coarse-grain brown bread, brown and yellow cheese, salami, and liver paste for breakfast and supper. They also buy apples and bananas and encourage the children to eat more fruit instead of potato chips, pastry, and sweets. To drink they buy milk and coffee, and occasionally beer, and sometimes they go to the state monopoly store and buy a bottle of wine for Saturday night.

## Major Foodstuffs

In the area of ingredients available in the Norwegian kitchen, some aspects seem relatively stable, for example, the high consumption of bread, potatoes, milk, and coffee. But a closer look reveals rapidly changing patterns, for example, in the choice of different breads and curdled milk products and in the preparation of potatoes. More important is the increasing variation in fruits, vegetables, and spices. Many ingredients were not on the market only a few decades ago: Some of them were hardly known at all, others were considered exotic foods, consumed only during vacations or on business trips to foreign countries.

Bread is still the fundamental foodstuff: dark bread from rye, as well as white bread and a lot of cookies and biscuits from wheat. One general tendency is to use more whole-grain flour than before. The traditional Norwegian *flatbrød*—unleavened, flat, thin, and crisp breads—and *lefse*—soft, thin breads—are rarely baked at home anymore but are instead produced by small local bakeries. A special small variety

of the soft bread is *lompe,* partly used for coffee with a cheese or jam filling but above all known as a wrapping for hot dogs instead of bread.

Fresh meat plays a much more important role than earlier, when preserved products were more common. As a result of growing wealth the consumption of meat has risen since the latter part of the 20th century. There has been a strong increase in pork and chicken consumption, but whole cuts of beef and mutton hold a higher prestige. Reindeer meat from the domestic reindeer flocks owned by Saamis in the northernmost areas is very popular, but the products are rather expensive and not easily available. The total consumption of game per person is of minor importance, but this meat is highly appreciated in the cuisine, above all, red deer, moose, and ptarmigan (similar to partridge). Even if the consumption of preserved meat has dropped, such products are still produced and appreciated, for example, *fenalår,* cured leg of lamb.

Norway has rich fishing grounds with unpolluted water. Of the total ocean fish caught, the most important for human consumption is the Atlantic cod, other codfishes, herring, mackerel, and different flatfish. Sprat (*brisling*) is sold canned in oil under the name of sardines. Of shellfish, prawns or shrimp are very popular, crab and lobster are caught along the coast in summer, and blue mussels and other crustaceans are farmed. Fish farming, which has developed into a big industry since the last part of the 20th century, has made trout and salmon, exclusive products in the past, available to everybody. The catches of high-quality wild salmon in Norwegian rivers are minimal compared with the farmed salmon.



Smoked salmon on bread, a Norwegian delicacy. (Shutterstock)

Fish is sold fresh, frozen, canned, or preserved using old methods. The dried cod from Lofoten (*stokfish*) and the salted and dried cod from the west coast (*klipfish*) are widely exported. A special preservation method is fermentation, which gives the fish a certain soft consistency and a strong aroma. In the valleys of eastern Norway there are lakes and rivers with trout and other fat freshwater fish well suited to such fermentation (*rakefisk*).

Consumption of milk, both fresh and cultured, is very high in Norway, today with emphasis on low-fat products (skim and semiskim). The most common cheeses are the yellowish semihard or hard cheeses of Swiss and Dutch types made from cow milk. The traditional *gammelost* ("old cheese"), produced without the use of rennet, is semihard, with a grainy texture and a brown or dark brown color, often with a pungent flavor reminiscent of ammonia. Another traditional cheese, produced by boiling whey, is the brown cheese (*gjetost*), looking like a small brick. Today, the whey is boiled with cream and milk from cows and goats, so the cheeses are fattier and have a richer, sweet, caramel-like taste.

There has been a sharp rise in vegetable consumption. The rough climate and short seasons made it difficult to grow certain plants in Norway, and the most common were turnips and rutabagas. During the 19th century potatoes conquered the central place in the Norwegian diet, which they still hold.

Partly due to campaigns by the health authorities there has also been a general increase in the consumption of fruits, in particular, fresh fruits. Apples are the most consumed of homegrown fruits. Among the citrus fruits oranges are by far the most important product and are eaten fresh. Oranges are also important in the juice and the marmalade industry. The most appreciated tropical fruit is the banana, with about as large a consumption as apples.

Norway is a coffee-drinking nation; tea plays a very small part in the daily diet. There has been a strong increase in the sales of carbonated soft drinks, but there is also a growing market for uncarbonated

bottled water, surprisingly enough in an area where water can be drunk from the tap almost everywhere.

Many different beers are produced in Norway, mostly of the pilsner type. There is also a wide selection of beers with a low alcoholic content and in recent years of types with no alcohol at all. This is necessary since driving under the influence of alcohol is severely penalized. Drivers are considered to be under the influence of alcohol if the amount of alcohol in their blood is more than 0.2 per thousand. The characteristic strong alcohol drink is *akevitt,* distilled from potatoes and spiced with caraway seeds.

As producers of beers and spirits, Norwegians have traditionally consumed these drinks to a much higher degree than wine. But in recent years the most characteristic change in alcohol consumption is the increasing part played by imported wines. Norway has a long history of state intervention and control of the importation, production, and distribution of alcoholic beverages. Retail stores selling beverages with high alcoholic contents for off-premises consumption are run by the state monopoly, Vinmonopolet.

## Cooking

Most existing cooking methods in Western cuisine are used in Norway: boiling, frying, roasting, baking, grilling, poaching, steaming, sautéing, deep-frying, stir-frying, and so forth. The tendency over the last 150 years has been a decrease in the traditional boiling and an increase in frying and roasting.

Several dishes are still boiled, particularly highly appreciated traditional one-pot dishes. Even if boiling primarily was applied to preserved meat, some fresh meat dishes are also boiled, for example, *fårikål,* a dish with alternating layers of cabbage and chunks of lamb shoulder, sprinkled with peppercorns.

A lot of Norwegian cooking is done with ground meat; in fact, more and more dishes are based on this ingredient. Meatballs are today regarded as a national dish, but ground meat has also met with new types of dishes from abroad, many of them introduced through fast-food culture: taco shells, pitas, pizza crusts, lasagna, and others. These dishes are particularly popular with the younger generation and with children, partly because they represent something new and partly because they may be eaten without the traditional staples and garnishes of potatoes and vegetables, some of them also without a knife and fork.

The cooking of fish differs according to the kind of fish, the size of the fish, the region, the season, and the day of the week. Whole fish, poached or baked, is particularly popular on Sundays. Steaks of cod, halibut, salmon, and many other fish are also poached, as well as baked or steamed. Steaks of halibut, monkfish, and salmon are fried like beefsteaks. In northern Norway "saithe steak" is particularly popular, made from a fillet of saithe that is dredged in flour, fried, and served with browned onion slices, just like the old-fashioned beefsteaks. Fish soups are also widely used; most famous among them is the Bergen recipe:

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### *Palesuppe* (Bergen Young Saithe Soup)

Many Bergen citizens will insist that the stock has to be made from the entire fish, not only the trimmings, and that a little veal stock should be added to round out the flavor. Some insist that the vegetables have to be cooked separately, and some that the soup is not complete without small fish balls. There are many ways to make a Bergen fish soup, but one common denominator is the *rømme,* the sour cream.

If saithe is not available, other fishes of the cod family may be used. Instead of or in addition to celeriac, parsnip or leeks may be used.

3 lb young saithe (pollack)
3 pt water
1 tsp salt
2 medium-sized carrots
1 parsley root
1 knob celeriac (celery root)
1/3 c flour
1 1/3 c milk
½ c rømme (sour cream)
Chives

Clean and wash the fish, and remove the gills and the eyes. Cut the head in two, and put it in a pot

with the tail. Pour in cold water and salt, and bring to a boil. Cut the rest of the fish in slices an inch thick, add to the pot, and let them simmer for a few minutes, then put them aside. Strain the stock. Cut the vegetables into ½-inch dice, and let them boil 5 minutes in the stock. Whisk flour smooth in cold milk, and beat it into the boiling stock. Let it simmer for 5 minutes. Whisk in the sour cream, and sprinkle finely chopped chives over the soup, if desired. Serve the soup first, then the fish with boiled potatoes.

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Ground-up fish is used to make a lot of cakes, balls, and puddings. One-third of all fish dishes served on weekdays are based on ground-up fish. Even if more and more people prefer to buy these products canned or frozen in the supermarkets or fresh at the fishmongers, some enthusiasts continue the old tradition, people along the coast in particular, who do a lot of sport fishing. The fish is ground up in a food processor or in a mortar if a coarser dough is preferred. Codfishes and monkfish make cakes of a light color; saithe, mackerel, and herring make darker and generally coarser cakes.

Since the 1980s there has been an explosion in the sales of barbecues, from the simplest types to big garden installations. Even in a region with such unstable weather conditions, grilling has conquered a unique position in summer cooking. On sunny afternoons and evenings, the aroma of grilled meat (and the stench of fuel) is floating in the air from gardens, terraces, and balconies all over Norway.

In some regions in the north, the Saami population had their own culinary traditions, based on the special conditions of a nomadic life. Today, most Saami people live like other Norwegians, in houses with all possible modern equipment and with access to all sorts of food and cooking methods. Many Saami, however, have continued some of the old culinary traditions, and even outside Saami circles, several of the dishes are popular. The Saami based their food on three products: reindeer meat, reindeer milk, and fish from the rivers and lakes. But they added berries and certain wild plants and thereby got the necessary vitamins. The Saami never roasted their meat. They boiled most of it, often with the offal or other parts of the animal, such as heart, lungs, liver, tongue, udder, marrow, bone, and even blood. Some of the most tender parts were dried or smoked and are considered delicacies today, for example, smoked leg of reindeer. Dried or smoked heart and boiled tongue were cut in fine slices and are still eaten this way, even served in restaurants.

## Typical Meals

The Norwegian morning meal is generally based on bread, prepared as a so-called open sandwich, made with butter or margarine and various toppings and spreads. Jams and marmalades are common, cheese is a standard spread, and there are pots with herrings in brine or in different spicy mixtures, or cans of mackerel in tomato sauce and sprat in olive oil. Cod roe and other caviar substitutes are also widely used. Cold cuts of salami and other cured sausages are popular besides boiled or cured ham and liver paste.

An increasing number of people eat packaged cereals with yogurt. Eggs are fairly rare on weekdays, but on Sundays a boiled egg or fried egg with bacon may be served. Fruit is not common except in the form of canned orange juice. Coffee stands out as the number-one morning drink. Coffee is also taken at irregular intervals between meals and snacks during the day. Milk is, according to a survey, the breakfast drink for half of the Norwegian population.

Midmorning or afternoon is the time for a light snack, for example, a sweet pastry. Fruit, ice cream, chocolate, peanuts, or potato chips may also be eaten as a snack. For people constantly on the move, such as taxi drivers, truck drivers, messengers, and couriers, the gas stations offer more and more tempting combinations of coffee with hot or cold snacks.

In Norway most people have a cold lunch, often a lunch pack brought from home or a salad or sandwich bought in a canteen or in a café. Only 6 percent eat two hot meals a day. The hot meals very often consist of only one course: a main component of meat or fish, accompanied by potatoes, vegetables, and a sauce. Ground meat and fish are very popular, fried as cakes or balls. Fish is eaten about one out of four days. Rice and pasta are increasingly

substituting for the potatoes. Most vegetables are boiled, and carrots are the most popular for dinner. Many dinners also consist of a one-pot dish or a pizza, combining different animal and vegetable ingredients.

***Fårikål* (Mutton-in-Cabbage)**

2 lb lamb or mutton, preferably from the shoulder or breast

2–3 lb cabbage

2 tbsp whole black peppercorns

2 tsp salt

2 c water

Cut the meat into pieces 2–3 inches square. Rinse the cabbage, and cut into small chunks. Put the fattiest pieces of meat in the bottom of the cooking pot, then cabbage over them, and so on in alternate layers. Sprinkle salt and pepper between the layers. Pour in boiling water. Bring to a boil, and let simmer in 1½–2 hours or until the meat is tender. Serve with boiled potatoes.

Some people keep the peppercorns in a perforated metal container or in a cloth, but much of the charm is in picking the peppercorns out of the cabbage. With the warnings against too much animal fat in mind, one may cut away some of the fattiest parts of the meat.

With hot meals, most people drink water or soft drinks, and to a lesser degree milk and hot beverages. Alcoholic beverages are drunk by only 12 percent of Norwegians on Sundays, 7 percent on weekdays. It seems, however, that this is changing; there is a strong increase in the consumption of wine.

Typical dinners vary according to the occasion and day. Everyday dinner is usually eaten in the kitchen around 5 P.M. from Monday through Thursday. This meal might consist of minced-meat patties, meatballs, meat casserole, or sauce Bolognese, served with boiled potatoes, pasta, or rice. A weekend evening meal might be served in the "cozy corner" of the living room around 8 P.M. on Fridays and Saturdays. Typical dishes are tacos, enchiladas, hamburger, pizza, risotto, lasagna, or something similar. Sunday dinner is served in late afternoon, perhaps in the dining room. Common dishes are homemade meatballs or cabbage rolls with boiled potatoes and boiled root vegetables.

One special form of hot meals eaten at home is the dish delivered to the door or picked up at a take-out outlet. According to a recent Norwegian study, 9 percent of the population eats such hot meals delivered to the door (for example, Chinese, Indian, pizza) at least once a month. A little more, 13 percent, eat food bought at a take-out outlet. But there is a striking contrast between the generations. About three-quarters of the population over 60 years of age never eat this kind of food, compared with 28 percent of the younger group between 16 and 24 years.

The ideal of a family meal is strongly implanted. A family meal is a hot meal eaten in the home in the company of all the other family members. Most Norwegians eat most of their meals in their own home, and approximately half of the population eats all their meals at home. The house is, in other words, the dominant location for Norwegian meals, a different situation from that in the United States, where far less eating takes place in the home.

## Eating Out

Eating out does not constitute an important part of Norwegian food consumption or social life. This may partly be explained by historical factors. The country never had the broad restaurant tradition found from the early 19th century on in many European countries with a strong urban culture and a wealthy bourgeoisie. People who had to travel through the country had inns at their disposal along the roads, and, later, hotels grew up in urban centers along the ever-expanding railways. There were also a lot of beer cellars and wine cellars and other watering holes of varying quality and social status, mainly for men, and later also cafés and bars, but most of the important eating was done in the home, as it still is.

However, important changes have taken place in recent years. For most Norwegians, a meal in a fine restaurant is still something special, but more and



A fancy restaurant in Asker, Norway. (Shutterstock)

more are eating out and a greater proportion of the disposable income is spent in cafés and restaurants than ever before. There is a wide choice of alternatives: top gourmet restaurants, cafeterias, hamburger restaurants, and so on. There is, however, a difference in the purpose of eating that also decides the choice of place. In most cases people eat out for practical reasons, out of necessity, because they have to be away from home, not out of a wish to enjoy food.

Most professional people eat their lunch away from home, and they constitute an important segment of the eating-out population. Most people who eat their meals at work or school do so in a cafeteria or, in smaller enterprises, in a room specially designed for lunch and coffee breaks. In a study from 2007, only 4 percent of respondents said they were eating lunch in a café or restaurant once a week or more.

Eating out in the evenings may also be related to work, such as dining with business associates or visitors from abroad, but for most people an evening dinner in a restaurant with family or friends is a treat, often a celebration of an important event. One reason for this is that restaurants are expensive, with a combination of high prices for ingredients, good wages to staff, high taxes, and the service tips included in the total amount on the bill. This is particularly true of the finer and more exclusive restaurants. Young people, couples without children, and single men and women, who eat out often as part of their leisure time and who have been instrumental in prolonging the nightlife by several hours, choose also among the more inexpensive bars and cafés that have grown up in cities and towns in recent years.

The younger generation are among the most frequent visitors to restaurants, when all types of establishments for eating out are considered. A survey found that a very high number of people under 25 years of age eat in pizza restaurants or buy snacks in kiosks, but in the finer restaurants they represent a smaller portion of the customers, whereas people 40 years old and up represent well over the average, and their part is increasing.

Gourmet restaurants and other exclusive restaurants are easy enough to distinguish from the rest, and so are many of the fast-food venues, hamburger restaurants, and pizza restaurants. But between these two groups there are a lot of different concepts, with food of varying quality, and it is difficult to put them

into distinct categories. The food they offer at relatively moderate prices is a mixture of traditional home cooking (sausages, meatballs, meat patties, fried battered fish), traditional restaurant dishes (steaks, Wiener schnitzel, cutlets, poached fish), and dishes more recently integrated into Norwegian food culture (pasta, pizza, hamburgers).

A difficulty in classification is that the total restaurant picture is changing, so a typology based on people's perception of different restaurants and the part they play in their lives is more helpful. When people must have something to eat and don't have much time, they frequent fast-food restaurants and kiosks. When it is important to meet and spend time with friends, cafés, pizza restaurants, and ethnic restaurants are chosen. Sometimes Norwegians want something innovative, surprising, or untraditional, for example, organic food, vegetarian dishes, or new and unknown dishes from abroad or from the local area. Finally, for a unique eating venue, when a complete break with everyday life and food is expected, and price is subordinated to the desire for an extraordinary experience, a gourmet restaurant is chosen. Places for drinks, alcoholic or nonalcoholic, hot or cold, are also changing. There are new types of pubs and beer cafés, wine bars, and coffee bars.

In Norway a lot of old seaside hotels, fjord hotels, and mountain hotels have been made into modern establishments with classy restaurants and facilities for conferences and seminars. Many of these restaurants have tried to make their reputation through an excellent cuisine, but they know that quality is not enough; they have to offer something special, a combination of international and local cuisine. In one such hotel in Norway, the cook Arne Brimi in the 1980s developed "nature's cuisine," inspired by French cooking techniques but using Norwegian ingredients, often ignored in classic urban restaurant gastronomy.

The "gourmet" restaurant is an expression from recent decades, when Norwegian cooks have won prizes and awards in Europe, for example, in the competition Bocuse d'Or initiated by French star chef Paul Bocuse. The president of the European Bocuse d'Or, Norwegian chef Eyvind Hellstrøm was the first Scandinavian with two Michelin stars.

## Special Occasions

Food has always played a prominent part in the celebrations of rites of passage in the family as well as in the annual festivals based on the secular or the religious calendar. The most important holiday associated with food is Christmastime. Never is so much emphasis put on food and on old habits and customs from the 19th century and earlier.

The weeks immediately before Christmas are filled with baking activity; sweet breads, buns, cakes, and cookies have to be ready when the Christmas bells toll. The small, hard cookies made from an unleavened dough of rye flour, honey, and strong spices (pepper nuts) are popular, as are cookies baked in irons with geometric patterns or fried in liquid fat.

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***Berlinerkranser* (Norwegian Berlin Wreath Cookies)**

2 boiled egg yolks (8 minutes)

2 raw egg yolks

½ c sugar

1½ c flour

9 oz butter

*Glaze*

2 egg whites

Pearl sugar

Crush the boiled egg yolks, mix them with the raw yolks, and blend to a smooth paste. Beat in the sugar. Work in flour and soft butter, but handle the dough carefully. Chill in the refrigerator. Make the dough into rolls about 1/3 inch thick and 5 inches long. Shape them into wreaths. Brush with lightly whipped egg whites and sprinkle with pearl sugar (coarse sugar). Put them on a baking sheet and bake in oven for about 10 minutes (350°F).

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Few people eat fish as their main dish on Christmas Eve, but some still eat lutefisk (mainly in the north) or fresh cod (mainly on the south coast). Lutefisk—dried cod softened in a solution of water and lye and then boiled—plays, however, an important part in

the pre-Christmas season in the whole country and is served in restaurants and private homes from late October on.

Another traditional dish, porridge, has also changed in form and function throughout history. Since Christmas was a special feast, the grain was supposed to be of better quality than the daily barley or oat flour. Rice was very exclusive but became the rule among the elite in the 18th century, and around 1900 the price of rice was so low that rice porridge became a common festive dish among most people, particularly on Christmas Eve. It used to be strewn with ground cinnamon and sugar, and a lump of butter was put in the middle. A newer dessert variety is served with a red sauce made from berries.

December 24, Christmas Eve, represents the real climax of the season. The social element is still considered as the most important part of the celebration. The extended family gets together, several generations are present, and they distribute Christmas gifts and enjoy the typical Christmas food. The main Christmas meal is served in the late afternoon. Between half and two-thirds of the Norwegians, mainly in the eastern part of the country, eat roast pork rib. The rind is cut up in a pattern of one-inch squares with a sharp knife that cuts through the rind without going into the fat underneath. The goal is to make the rind crackling crisp with a golden color.

In the communities along the western coast of Norway dried and salted (and in some places smoked) rib of lamb is eaten, and in recent decades this Christmas dish has been taken up in other parts of the country, either for Christmas Eve or for one of the other Christmas dinners. The rib is cut into single pieces that must be soaked in water for about 24 hours to soften the meat and drain it of salt. The meat is ready after about two to two and a half hours of steaming, depending on the age of the animal.

New Year's Eve has no set menu. Turkey has become one of the most popular dishes for this evening. Lobster and seafood in general are increasingly popular, as either a starter or a main dish. A special festival cake built as a tower, the *kransekake,* is also often served on this evening.

The old festival drink is beer, well suited to the fatty and salted foods, often followed by a shot or two of akevitt. The temperance movements gained a strong position in the last part of the 19th century, and this led many families to abstain from all alcoholic drinks. Bottled carbonated soft drinks and fruit juices were drunk instead.

For many people most holidays have lost their original connections with the Christian religion. The Shrovetide bun (*fastelavnsbolle*) is the only important culinary remnant of the "Carnival," the last "fat" days before Lent, the fasting period before Easter. The bun is made from sifted wheat flour and filled with whipped cream and raspberry jam. Confectioners' sugar is sprinkled on the top. Some people still bake their own Shrovetide buns, but all bakeries provide them, and consequently they are easy to get.

The most important saint's feast takes place on June 23, celebrating St. John the Baptist. June is a very special month in this region with its long, "blond" nights. In the northernmost areas the midnight sun shines for a shorter or longer time depending on the latitude, but even in the south the night lasts no more than a couple of hours. The feast often includes dancing and, along the coasts, enormous bonfires. In Norway traditional fare at this time is cold cuts of cured meat and *rømmegrøt,* the sour cream porridge

Initiation rituals to important new stages in a person's life are marked with different ceremonies. Except for weddings, most of these celebrations are rather low-key family occasions. Even the funerals, once big events, have been replaced by a simple get-together after the funeral ceremony has taken place.

A wedding may also be a very simple event, a civil ceremony followed by a lunch for the closest friends, the maid of honor, and the best man. But traditional "romantic" weddings on Saturday afternoon are still extremely popular, with brides in white in the church or the city hall, followed by a big banquet in a restaurant or a hotel, or perhaps at home if there is enough room but then with food served by a catering firm.

## Diet and Health

Norwegians are increasingly aware of how important a healthy diet is to prevent serious diseases, for instance, cardiovascular diseases and cancer, which account for the majority of deaths for both men and women. Public campaigns encouraging reductions in the intake of fatty foods and recommending a more substantial consumption of vegetables have made some progress. In general, the diet has improved since 1990, but Norwegians still eat too little greens, fish, and whole-grain bread and too much fat and sugar.

Health authorities recognized the basic problems in diet and nutrition early on. They have made efforts to influence food consumption and eating patterns in accordance with the scientifically elaborated norms for a healthy diet. Norway was one of the first in the world to have an official nutrition policy, established in 1975.

Today, the rapid growth in the food-processing industry has led to an increased demand for legal measures to guarantee certain nutritional standards. The technological development within food production has created new processes and made new additives necessary. One consequence is problems with hygiene and the presence of certain toxic bacteria, for instance, salmonella.

Since 1960, health authorities have worked systematically to reduce the intake of fat and, more particularly, to reduce the percentage of fat in the total energy intake. According to the official recommendations a maximum of 30 percent of the total energy intake should come from fat. There has, in fact, been a real reduction in fat intake since the mid-1980s, from about 40 percent down to about 35 percent, or a little less. Since 2000, there seems to have been no further reduction. This means there is still a long way to go before the ideal goal of 30 percent is reached.

The most important sources of fat in the food consumed by Norwegians are milk and milk products, meat and meat products, and various sorts of household fats, margarine in particular. There has been an increase in the consumption of meat over the last decades, but at the same time, there has been a reduction in the consumption of margarine and in the use of lard and tallow in cooking. The fat intake from milk products has been relatively stable. Fats from milk and butter play a far less important part than before, but the consumption of cream and cheese is up.

According to the Nordic Nutrition Recommendations, people should not get more than 10 percent of their total energy from sugar. The actual percentage has decreased in recent years but is still as high as 14 percent, partly a result of an extraordinarily strong increase in the consumption of sweet carbonated drinks, fruit juices, and confections.

There is clear evidence today supporting the hypothesis that consumption of fruits and vegetables



A young girl eats fresh raspberries in Norway. (iStockPhoto)

has a protective effect against diseases such as cancer, coronary heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. Fruits and vegetables have a high content of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and dietary fiber. A doubling of the consumption of vegetables is assumed to reduce the risk of cancer and cardiovascular diseases substantially. Increased intake of fruits and vegetables may also have an extra effect in replacing less favorable foods in the dietary pattern.

Between 1999 and 2007 there was an increase in the yearly per-capita consumption of fruits from 152 to 189 pounds (69 to 86 kilograms) and of vegetables from 132 to 141 pounds (60 to 64 kilograms). However, Norwegians still are not eating enough vegetables, particularly as the highest increase was for tomatoes and cucumbers, that is, vegetables with a high water content. Authorities recommend more fiber-rich vegetables and deeper-colored vegetables. The increase in fruit consumption is primarily due to an increase in the intake of fruit juices.

The consumption differs within populations. Women eat more vegetables, fruits, and berries than men. The consumption is higher in the old-age groups than in the young. Men and women with a higher education eat more fruits and vegetables than people with less education. This has to be taken seriously both in the way educational campaigns are run and also politically in price policies. The increase in the price of fruits and vegetables is high enough to discourage certain low-income groups.

The consumption of potatoes has declined during the last decades. But the health authorities are not so much concerned with the total amount of potato consumption as with the way potatoes are consumed. Today, an increasing amount of potatoes are sold as French fries, chips, and other processed potato products. In Norway only half of the potato consumption is of fresh potatoes. The processed products have high amounts of unhealthy saturated fat.

Campaigns for increased consumption of fish have been going on for several decades. There is clear evidence that high consumption of fish has beneficial effects on health. The main reason is the content in fish of omega-3 fatty acids, even if the contents of iodine, selenine, and vitamin D are also considered important. Omega-3 fatty acids from fish reduce the risk of fatal coronary disease (sudden cardiac death).

Fish is the main dish about seven times a month in Norway, but only 21 percent of the population eats fish three times a week. The consumption of fish is lower than that of meat and far below the recommended quantity. The value of the high consumption is also to some extent reduced because fish is often eaten with saturated fats (margarine, butter).

Experts recommend an increase in the intake of carbohydrates, primarily from whole-grain foods. In addition to vitamins and minerals whole-grain cereals provide natural dietary fiber. A high consumption of such cereals seems to have a beneficial role in reducing the risk of coronary heart disease and a protective effect against the development of hypertension and diabetes. Cereals are the most important source for dietary fiber. Even if more than half of the intake of cereals consists of whole-grain products, the intake is below the recommendations from health authorities.

There is a very high awareness in Norway of the importance of adequate intake of vitamins and minerals, and in some foodstuffs vitamins and minerals are added, to make sure the population gets the necessary amount. In general, a varied diet will cover the necessary intake, and the increased consumption of fruits and vegetables has helped in recent years. But the reduced consumption of fish and increased sugar intake work in the opposite direction.

Most Scandinavians eat too much salt, about 10 grams a day. Too much salt increases the blood pressure and may be a contributing factor to heart disease and stroke. Whereas consumption of meat and fat partly is dependent on individual choice, this is not the case with consumption of salt. How much salt is added during cooking or at the table is not so important, when 75 percent of the salt intake comes from industrially produced foods. This means that the higher the consumption of convenience foods, the higher the intake of salt, and to reduce salt involves far more drastic changes in the food habits.

*Henry Notaker*

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# Poland

## Overview

Located in central and eastern Europe, Poland has a unique cultural identity that is due in large part to its turbulent political past. Poland's political borders have shifted, dissolved, and reformed frequently over the last 1,000 years. The story begins in the 9th and 10th centuries, when the group known as the Polians began to dominate the land now known as Poland. In 966 A.D., Mieszko I of the Piast dynasty established a state in the western part of modern Poland at a time when other Slavic groups were beginning to form identifiable states. The next major event in the history of Poland was the royal marriage of a Lithuanian grand duke and a Polish princess. The resulting unified Polish-Lithuanian state would prosper for the next 400 years. Neighboring countries, specifically Austria and Russia, took advantage of decline and internal strife. In 1795, as a result of a series of partitions, the political designation of Poland was dissolved and not fully restored until the end of World War I. World War II saw another division, this time between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. After the war, the Polish state was again restored, though as a Soviet vassal. Finally, in 1989, Poland's dependence on the Soviet Union ended, and the country emerged as a completely independent, democratic state with an open, free market economy.

As could be expected, the populace of Europe has changed throughout history, infused with new residents from conquering armies, forced immigrants, and willing relocators from all over the world. Ethnic Poles are the descendants of the founding population, the Slavic group known as the Polians, who adopted Christianity at the same time they established their statehood. In the 13th and 14th centuries, military alliances and battles expanded the boundaries and infused the population with Germanic people. During this time protectionist policies allowed Jews to thrive within Poland's borders. Both of these ethnic groups were mainstays of the population until World War II during the 20th century. Throughout Poland's history, Russians, Lithuanians, Prussians, Ukrainians, and other ethnic groups passed through or settled within Poland's borders. However, shifting borders and political movements of people in Europe, specifically during World War II, have led to a population that today is among the most homogeneous in the world—98 percent are Poles. Similarly, about 95 percent are Roman Catholic. Despite its varied past—or perhaps because of it—Poland today has a distinct and recognizable cultural heritage, including a unique and strong food culture.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Like so much of Polish culture, traditional foodways fit nicely into the lives of modern Poles. Maria and Tomasz Jablonski are office workers in Warsaw, where they live with their four school-age sons. They shop for their food in both traditional open-air markets as well as shiny, new supermarkets. In both kinds of stores, they are able to choose from an abundance of produce, meats, dairy products, and other foodstuffs produced in the fertile lands of Poland and all over the world. The Jablonskis are a young family living in a major urban center, so the food they eat is both traditional and new, Polish and foreign. Polish food culture

has always been compatible with new and diverse flavors, ingredients, and dishes.

The family eats their breakfasts of fresh bread with wild berry jam and farmhouse cheeses together each morning at home. Most days they will pack a lunch of smoked meat sandwiches to eat at work or at school. They may, on occasion, dine out for this late-morning meal, similar to lunch in other cultures. The cafés serve cold sandwiches and salads, hot soups, and grain dishes; both typically Polish and ethnically diverse foods are available in restaurants.

Each afternoon, the Jablonskis return home after work, school, and other activities to the biggest meal of their day. Dinner is typically eaten in the late afternoon or early in the evening, much earlier than the third meal of the day in most cultures. This meal, more than any other, is where the diversity of the modern Polish diet is revealed. Traditional meals include hearty soups and stews, meat with vegetables and potatoes, and pierogi. While all of these are enjoyed in traditional Polish preparations, they also can incorporate ingredients and flavors introduced from outside Poland.

## Major Foodstuffs

Poland's physical geography is as diverse as the history of its political and social geography. The terrain includes three mountain ranges, four major rivers, a Baltic shoreline with three active ports, many lakes, and plenty of forest; at least half of its land is arable for food production. Interestingly, even while Poland was a Communist state, most of its food was produced on small, private farms. Post-Communist changes in the agriculture of Poland include the consolidation of smaller farms into fewer, larger farms and the modernization of tools and techniques. What has remained the same, though, is the fertile soil, moderate climate, and diverse geography that allow Poland to produce the ingredients of a rich cuisine.

Throughout Poland, there is an abundant variety of foodstuffs that are the foundation of the national cuisine. Wheat and other grains, poppies, mushrooms, root vegetables, fruit, domesticated animals and wild game, dairy, and fish are all part of the agricultural bounty of the temperate climate and fertile soil of Poland.

A wide variety of grains and cereals are available that feature heavily in Polish food culture. Among the cereals grown and used in Poland are rye, buckwheat, barley, oats, lentils, and millet. The grains are used to make breads. Sourdough rye and pumpernickel are especially popular and traditional varieties of bread. Grains are also used in a popular porridge dish called kasha (*kasza*) and as an ingredient in sausage and stuffing.

The cool, temperate climate of Poland is suitable for growing many vegetables, especially cole crops such as kohlrabi, cauliflower, turnips, and cabbage. Other common vegetables grown and enjoyed in Poland are beets, carrots, onions, cucumbers, beans, peas, tomatoes, and potatoes, an ingredient that features in many traditional meals.

Like people in any place that experiences cold winters when plant food is not readily available, Poles have had to learn how to preserve vegetables for the lean times. The favorite method for doing so in Polish food culture is pickling. In fact, the taste for the sour flavor of pickling brine is so great that Poles actually make a pickle soup. Pickled vegetables accompany many dishes in Polish cuisine. Pickled cabbage, or sauerkraut, is the most common, but Poles also enjoy pickled cucumbers, beets, cauliflower, fish, and mushrooms.

In addition to the fertile farmland that Poles use to grow the grains and vegetables that are so important to their cuisine, various geographies throughout the country are suitable for raising a number of different animals including pigs, cattle, sheep, goats, and poultry. Popular preparations for Poland's favorite meat—pork—include breaded cutlets (*kotlet shabowy*) and prune-stuffed roast loin (*shab z sliwkami*). Other roasts of beef, lamb, duck, and goose are also popular. Additionally, regions with heavy forests are populated by game animals that have long been hunted and incorporated into the food culture. Today, game meats like rabbit, pheasant, and boar are more commonly enjoyed in restaurants than prepared at home.

Poles are quite fond of smoked meat in general. In fact, smoke-cured bacon is more common than its salt-cured cousin. Even the meat preparation Poland is known for, kielbasa, is often smoke-cured. *Kielbasa* is actually the generic word for sausage in

Polish, and there are many traditional varieties to be found throughout the country. Sausage is usually eaten cold in Poland, and as pork is the favorite meat in Polish cuisine, most sausage is made entirely or partly of pork. Common varieties include a juniper berry–flavored beef and pork sausage called *mysliwska,* blood sausage with pork and buckwheat called *kiszka*, and a long, thin pork sausage called *kabonosy.* Sausage could be eaten by itself, but it is also a common ingredient in dishes like pierogi, stuffing, and sandwiches.

Domesticated animals in Poland are also raised for their milk. Depending on the region, the milk may come from cattle, sheep, or goats. Poles are fond of the sour flavor of fermented dairy, so sour milk, buttermilk, Polish-style yogurt (kefir), and especially sour cream are quite common in the Polish diet. Sour cream turns up everywhere in Polish cooking. It is used to garnish roast meat, dress salads, thicken soups, bind cakes, flavor kasha, and more. One would be hard-pressed to find a food that a Pole would not enjoy more with at least a dab of sour cream. The varieties of cheeses that are made in Poland vary by region, but one that is common to all Polish cooking is farmer's cheese, or fresh cheese curds made with sour milk. This is the cheese used in cheesecake, cheese fillings, and Polish cheese soup (*polewka z serwatki*).

Foraging, especially in the heavily forested regions of Poland, has always been common. As a result, wild mushrooms and honey are popular ingredients in the cuisine. Mushrooms are used in meat dishes, pierogi, kasha, and sauces. Dried mushrooms are generally available in markets. Popular varieties found in Poland and used in the cuisine are the bolete (*borowik*), morel (*smardz*), milky cap (*rydz*), and golden chanterelle (*kurka*). Wild honey is used to sweeten breads, cakes, and other pastries. It is also fermented into wine (*miod pitny*) and distilled into honey liqueur (*krupnik*).

Poland's many rivers and lakes, as well as its Baltic Sea shoreline, provide an abundance of fish. From the freshwater lakes and rivers, Poles enjoy fish like perch, bream, whitefish, European catfish, salmon, and tench (*lin*), a minnow-like panfish. From the Baltic Sea come flounder, carp, herring, eel, cod, and salmon.

In Polish cooking, a few herbs flavor many of the recipes. Of course, dill, which is used throughout eastern and central Europe, is the most popular herb and is found in just about every Polish kitchen. Many Polish recipes call for parsley. Poles prefer root parsley, which is very versatile because both the leaves and the root of the plant can be used as flavoring. Other common herbs in Polish cuisine include caraway seeds and marjoram, an herb related to oregano though with a subtler and earthier flavor. Juniper berries are utilized in meat sauces and marinades, as they are a great complement to the rich, gamey meats that are still very popular in Poland. Finally, in the grain fields throughout Poland, red poppies are cultivated for their seeds, which are used extensively in Polish cooking, especially in desserts.



A butcher in Poland makes kielbasa by hand. (iStockPhoto)

## Cooking

Cooking in Poland is traditionally done by women. It is through the lineage of mothers teaching daughters and daughters-in-law traditional recipes and foodways that Old Polish cuisine has survived a tumultuous and tenuous history. While the flavors of Polish cuisine are complex, the techniques and ingredients are simple. Time and care are the most essential ingredients in good Polish cooking. Slow-roasting meat and fish, pickling vegetables, souring milk and cream, kneading breads and pastries, and stuffing sausages are all techniques that infuse foods with rich flavors.

## Typical Meals

While Poland strongly identifies with the rest of modern Europe and the West, it emerged from Communism with a desire to retain what was uniquely Polish about its culture. As a result, Poland's culture and the lifestyle are a mix of traditional practices and modern conveniences. Life in Poland is not primitive or old-fashioned, but a strong sense of traditions and culture remains.

As was always the case in Poland, most people enjoy four meals a day. As Poland has always been an agrarian economy, mealtimes align with the rhythms of a farm. A typical day begins early with a breakfast, called *sniadanie,* which usually consists of bread with butter and jam, as well as cold meats and cheeses. Most people drink coffee or tea with this meal. This meal is typically eaten at home, before work, just as it would have been eaten in the home before leaving for work in the fields on a farm.

Later in the morning, workers will break for what is generally considered a second breakfast (*drugie sniadanie*). Similar to a lunch in other cultures, this meal consists of a small breakfast that is eaten with coffee, tea, or milk. Unlike a lunch in other countries, the second breakfast is eaten in the late morning and is the smallest of the three meals of the day. It derives from the practice of farmers breaking from their work in midmorning to enjoy a quick snack in the fields.

The third meal is the largest of the day. Dinner (*obiad*) is the meal eaten after work, in the late afternoon. Again, this is slightly different from what is done in the United States and other countries, where dinner is an early evening meal. In Poland, the practice of eating earlier again derives from a farm culture where workers would return from the fields famished and ready to eat as early as 3 P.M. Today, it is usually eaten closer to 5 P.M. A dinner will usually consist of three courses, starting with a hearty soup or stew. Next, diners will enjoy meat and potatoes or pierogi. As is typical in many European cultures, the entrée will be followed by a salad. If dessert is served, it is usually cake with coffee or tea.

In the traditional farm culture of Poland, people likely went to bed with the sun, so even today in smaller villages it is impossible to find food for sale in restaurants after 8 P.M. However, most people will have a fourth meal later in the evening, usually in their homes. This fourth meal, called *kolacja,* is very similar to the early breakfast, with emphasis on cold meat instead of the bread and jam.

Since the fall of Communism, when cultural heritage was suppressed, Poles have taken a renewed interest in their traditional foods. There is a now a whole movement within Polish food culture called old Polish cuisine (*kuchnia staropolska*), emphasizing traditional and sometimes forgotten foodstuffs, recipes, and traditions. Polish food is in many ways typical of all Slavic cuisines, but it is also heavily influenced by other cuisines, particularly Austrian, Hungarian, Russian, Jewish, and German cooking. Poles enjoy little dishes, or appetizers, called *zakaski,* as do Russians. The prevalence of sour cream and dill is also a taste borrowed from Russia. Sausage, potatoes, and sweet and sour flavors found in Polish recipes are familiar to Germans. Paprika is the hallmark of Hungarian cuisine and is also common in Polish recipes. Honey cakes, jellied carp, and other fishes were introduced to Polish cuisine from Jewish culture. And, of course, cakes and pastries come to Poland by way of Austria.

These influences have melded with existing foodways and transformed to create a distinctly recognizable Polish food culture. Among the dishes considered quintessentially Polish are various soups and stews, smoked meats, sausages (kielbasa), pasta



Pierogi, traditional Polish dumplings. (iStockPhoto)

dumplings (pierogi), grain-based dishes (kasza), fish dishes, and pastries. The beverages traditionally enjoyed in Poland include beer and vodka.

Hearty soups play a central role in Polish cooking. Hunter's stew, called *bigos,* is considered by many to be the national dish of Poland. Bigos is traditionally served as an appetizer but may also be eaten as a main course.

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***Bigos* (Hunter's Stew)**

**Ingredients**

½ lb pork shoulder, cubed

½ lb beef chuck (or other stew meat), cubed

½ lb veal, cubed (optional; increase quantity of other meats to ¾ lb if not using veal)

3 medium onions, coarsely chopped

¼ c tomato paste

2 lb Polish sauerkraut

Water

About ½ lb *boczek* (Polish pork belly), chopped (salt pork or bacon may be substituted)

½ lb, or 1 foot of links, kielbasa (Polish-style sausage), chopped

1 c reconstituted dried mushrooms (reserve soaking liquid for stew)

2 stock cubes (not actual stock, as that would be too much liquid)

Peppercorns

1 bay leaf

1 tbsp caraway seeds

10 pitted prunes, chopped

1 c red wine

In a very large pot, brown pork, beef, and veal over high heat, and set aside. Put the onion, tomato paste, and sauerkraut in the pot and just barely cover with water. Bring to a simmer, turn the heat way down, and add all the meats, the boczek, the sausage, the mushrooms and soaking liquid, stock cubes, peppercorns, bay leaf, caraway seeds, and prunes. Simmer on very low heat for 1 to 1½ hours. Stir occasionally. Add red wine, and simmer for another 2 to 3 hours. Turn off the heat, cover, and place in a cool place. The next day, reheat and serve in individual bowls with sour cream.

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While Poles enjoy vegetable barley, pea, fermented rye (*zurek*), beer (*zupa piwna*), pickle (*zupa ogorkowa*), and other soups, beet soups are the most popular and common in Polish cooking. Hot beet soup (*barszcz*) was traditionally made with fermented beet juice, but today it is often soured with citrus or vinegar.

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***Barszcz* (Beet Soup)**

**Ingredients**

2–3 lb beets, plus 2 large beets

2 qt warm water

1 slice rye bread

1 clove garlic

1 medium onion, chopped

1 stalk celery, sliced

1 lb butter

1 lb mushrooms

1 tsp salt

1 bunch parsley, chopped

2 tbsp sour cream

**To Ferment Beet Juice**

Peel and dice beets, setting 2 aside for later. Place in a covered dish with warm water and rye bread. Place in a warm place to ferment for 10 days.

**To Make Soup**

Sauté garlic, onion, and celery in butter in a medium pot until onions are transparent. Add 2 reserved beets, mushrooms, salt, and parsley to pot, and cover with water. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to simmer, and cook until beets are soft. Pour contents of the pot through a strainer into another pot. Retrieve beets from the strainer and grate into strained beet stock. Just before serving, add 1 pint fermented beet juice. Serve in individual bowls with 2 tablespoons sour cream.

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Another popular beet soup is *botwina,* made with baby beets and their greens. This is usually prepared in early summer when beets are young and small. In summer, Poles eat a cold beet and raw vegetable soup called *chlodnik.* Another iconic Polish dish is stuffed pasta called pierogi. Pierogi are usually half-moon shaped and may be filled with anything including mushrooms, potatoes, onions, sausage, and farmer's cheese. The dish is served with sour cream, sautéed onions, dill, or broth. It can be served as a main dish or a side.

The grains that are abundantly grown in Poland are used in a number of ways that are central to Polish cooking. For example, most meals feature porridge—grain-based dishes called kasha, or kasza. These may be served as a main dish, side dish, or part of a thick, hearty soup. Buckwheat kasha is the most popular variation, but Poles also enjoy dishes of this sort made with barley, lentils, millet, and corn.

Cabbage rolls, called *golabki,* are a signature Polish dish that includes many of the foodstuffs of the cuisine. Cabbage, pork or beef, and barley are the standard ingredients of this dish.

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***Golabki* (Cabbage Rolls)**

**Ingredients**

1 medium onion, minced
2 tbsp butter
1 lb ground beef
1 lb ground pork
2 c barley or rice
2 eggs
1 sprig fresh thyme (or 2 tsp dried thyme)
Salt and pepper to taste
2 c pureed tomatoes
1 c chicken stock
1 head green cabbage, core removed

Sauté the onion in butter until translucent. Remove to a large bowl and cool. Add the ground meats, barley, eggs, thyme, salt, and pepper to the sautéed onions, and mix well.

Mix the tomatoes and stock, and add salt and pepper. Place about ¼ of the sauce in the bottom of a large baking dish.

Remove 10–12 whole leaves from the cabbage, and boil in salted water for about 5 minutes, until just wilted. Remove the leaves to a colander, and rinse them with cold water to stop the cooking process. Press the large vein on the back of each leaf to make it flush with the surface of the leaf. Lay a cabbage leaf out on a work surface, vein side down, and put about ¼ cup of meat mixture in the center of the leaf. Fold the bottom of the leaf up over the filling, fold each side in, and roll the leaf up over the mixture. Be careful not to roll up the cabbage tightly around the mixture as the barley will expand as it cooks.

Place all of the cabbage rolls, seam side down, tightly into the baking dish. Pour remaining sauce over the rolls. Cover and bake for 2 hours. Add stock to the dish as needed to keep it from drying out as the barley will soak up liquid as it cooks. Serve hot with sour cream.

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Poland has developed its own repertoire of delicious desserts. The most well-known Polish cake is a bundt cake called *babka*. Another popular dessert is *mazurek,* a flaky crust topped with nuts, jam, or poppy seeds. Glazed doughnuts called *pączki* are filled with rose marmalade or plums and are especially popular during Lent. Polish cheesecake has a unique texture and taste because of the famous farmer's cheese used in its making. Poland has its own spin on cream-filled puff pastry that is popular throughout eastern and central Europe.

Like most of the rest of the world, Poles enjoy coffee and tea; however, in Poland, tea is the more popular of the two. Polish vodka is a traditional beverage that is still enjoyed in Poland today. Beer, especially pilsner style and other lagers, is also brewed and drunk in Poland. A popular beverage that is somewhat unique is fruit stewed in sugar water, called *kompoty.*

Like any cuisine, Poland enjoys regional variations that are the result of history and geography. However, it should be noted that the country is

not that large, so the cuisine throughout Poland is similar, with regional specialties. Great Poland is the region in the western part of the country that is the original hub of Poland since its inception in the 10th century. The region is a flat, lowland river basin that is known for its fertile soil and has always been a major agricultural center. Because this region had been consumed and colonized by Prussia, German influence on the food here is especially strong. Some of the regional specialties include soft sausage (*kielbasa tatarowa*) and sweet and sour pork and prune soup (*kwasna*). The southeastern part of the nation, called Little Poland, consists of fertile lowlands, plus highlands, valleys, and the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. The longtime home of shepherds, dairy—specifically cheese—is an important ingredient of the regional food culture. Two in particular are *oszczypek,* an aged, ewe-milk cheese, and *bryndza,* a soft, salty cheese. Kefir, a milk product similar to yogurt, also features in many of the dishes of the local cuisine. Silesia, or Slask, in the southwestern part of Poland, is the country's largest industrial area. Heavily influenced by Prussian and Austrian inhabitants throughout its history, Silesia is known for German-style dishes like mashed potato dumplings (*kluski slaskie*), sour wheat soup (*zurek stryszewski*), and potato pancakes with goulash (*jadlo drwali*). Silesia is also the major brewing region of Poland. Pomerania lies in northwestern Poland along the Baltic Sea and is heavily influenced by its proximity to the sea. Regional specialties include herring and cream (*kartofle w mundurkach*) and tench (lin). Mazovia and Podlaise lie in the east-central part of Poland. This region has the least arable land in the country, though it is heavily forested and therefore suitable for hunting and foraging. Wild honey, green-capped mushrooms, and wild game are important ingredients in the region's cuisine. Signature dishes include cabbage rolls (golabki), tripe with vegetables and cream sauce (*sastka warsawska*), and potato pancakes with sour cream (*placki ziemniaczane po mazowiecku*). The region is also known for a sweet, wild grass–flavored vodka called *zubrowska.* Masuria and Warmia are located in the northeastern part of Poland on the border with Russia. Like Mazovia, they are heavily forested. The area contains many lakes, so freshwater fish like perch, salmon, and tench are common ingredients in local recipes. Regional dishes include baked perch and bacon (*okon po mazursku*) and creamed carrots with dill (*marchew po mazursku*).

## Eating Out

Today, there are dining-out options for every taste and budget, especially in urban areas of Poland. As Polish food culture has always been about comfort and family, it is typical for diners to choose a seat or table in a restaurant rather than being seated by a host. Similarly, diners tend to take their time eating and drinking in Polish restaurants, so meals can last several hours.

Most Poles eat breakfast at home, so most restaurants, even those that serve breakfast food, don't open until 9 A.M. In addition to formal and more home-style restaurants and cafés offering full menus of traditional and neo-Polonaise cuisine, there are restaurants throughout Poland that serve Italian, French, Asian, and even American-style cuisine.

A unique kind of dining facility in Poland is the *bar mleczny,* or milk bar. Inexpensive food can be found at canteen-style facilities. These are often still state subsidized, so everyone from workers on break to tourists to homeless people can be found eating in milk bars.

## Special Occasions

As most of the people living in Poland are Roman Catholic, important celebrations are traditional church holidays. Easter, of course, is the most important feast day, around which Poles have developed a rich food culture. Food has become part of the rite of Easter in Polish culture. The formal food ritual begins the day before Easter, on Holy Saturday, with a ceremony called Swieconka, or the Blessing of the Basket, in which some of the foods that will be served on Easter are brought to the local parish to be consecrated by the priest. The blessed foodstuffs include butter sculpted into a lamb's shape, cross-shaped Easter bread, smoked meats, salt, horseradish, and hard-boiled eggs. The ceremony includes a blessing

for cakes and breads, one for meats, and another for eggs. Each item holds a symbolic meaning, the most important of which is the egg, representing the Resurrection. It will be the first thing eaten at the Easter feast. The meal begins with a ceremonial Sharing of the Egg, or Dzielenie Sie Jajkiem. A hard-boiled egg is divided and shared with everyone present, who in turn share well wishes with one another. Most Poles will have fasted for the 40 days of Lent and spent all morning at mass, so the Easter feast that follows is eagerly anticipated. The hungry feasters arrive home from church to a traditional spread that includes all of the items consecrated the day before, as well as many others. To accommodate morning worship, most of the foods at the feast are prepared ahead of time and are served cold. The meal will feature colored eggs, sausages, ham, smoked bacon, yeast cakes, pound cakes, poppy seed cakes, and the butter or sugar lamb. In addition to the cold spread, the feast will feature Polish Easter soup (zurek).

The other important feast day in Polish food culture is Christmas. As for most Europeans, the major Christmas celebration occurs on Christmas Eve. On the day before Christmas, Poles will fast until the evening star—the Star of Bethlehem—rises. At this point, a feast called *wigilia* begins. Traditionally, this is a meatless feast and is served in 13 courses representing the 12 apostles and Jesus. Not every family can pull off a 13-course feast, so tradition allows for any odd number of courses. Conversely, the number of guests seated at the meal should be an even number.



Pickled herring with olives and onion on a festive Christmas table in Poland. (Shutterstock)

Much like the Sharing of the Egg at Easter, the Christmas Eve meal begins with thin wheat wafers called *oplatki* that are distributed to all the diners. Each guest offers a blessing and piece of wafer to the rest of the diners. The foods served at the Christmas Eve meal include pickled creamed herring, smoked salmon, caviar, pickled vegetables and mushrooms, dried fruit compote, clear beet soup (*barszcz z uszkami*), a fish dish, sauerkraut, noodles, and grain-based dishes.

## Diet and Health

Traditional Polish food is rich and heavy. Foods are thickened, flavored, and garnished with dairy, especially sour cream. Meats, including fatty sausages, are daily staples of the national diet. And hardly a dinner is served and eaten without potatoes, pierogi, or both. Time was that most people worked hard to produce the food they ate, and they needed the fat, calories, and protein these foods afforded to survive.

However, modern Poles are not unlike people in the rest of the Western world. They no longer toil each day in the fields. Most Poles are now office and factory workers and don't need the high fat and calories of their culture's traditional diet. Also, most Poles are as concerned with fitness as they are with health; they value thin waistlines more than hearty meals. So Poles now eat much less meat than they once did, and their consumption of sour cream and dairy is also down.

Interestingly, though, many elements of traditional Polish cuisine are quite compatible with a modern, healthy diet. For example, in the middle of the last century, the kasha that had long been a staple in Polish diets started to fall out of favor as an old-fashioned, peasant food. Recently, it has experienced a resurgence in popularity due to the increased concern Poles have about dietary fiber and health. Similarly, the traditional cooking oil made with the rapeseed grown on Polish farms is high in the unsaturated fats favored for keeping unhealthy cholesterol levels down. Also, Polish yogurt called

kefir has been rediscovered and is gaining popularity among health-conscious Poles.

*R. J. Krajewski*

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# Portugal

## Overview

The Republic of Portugal lies at the southwestern corner of continental Europe and includes the autonomous regions of the Madeira Islands and Azores, which lie hundreds of miles to the west and southwest, respectively. Continental Portugal is bordered on the north and east by Spain, while its 1,114 miles of Atlantic coastline beckon westward and southward. At a latitude of 39°30′N, it enjoys a temperate climate. It is one Europe's smaller countries. Having a total area of 35,503 square miles (92,090 square kilometers), it is slightly smaller than the state of Indiana. It is poorer than most fellow European Union member nations, though its standard of living has risen considerably since the country attained European Union membership in 1986.

Fewer of Portugal's 10.4 million citizens live in urban areas than in other European Union countries: only 63 percent, compared to the European Union average of approximately 77 percent. Many still make a subsistence living from fishing or from small family farms. But industry and technology are growing at a rapid rate, and the Portuguese share a deep pride in their country, its history, and its heroes.

In earliest historic times, Portugal's mainland, which is surrounded on its northern and eastern borders by its larger neighbor Spain and situated at the western edge of the Iberian Peninsula, was settled by various groups. The earliest settlements were established by the Phoenicians in the third century B.C. Later, Romans, Celts, Germanic tribes, Visigoths, and Muslim North Africans also settled in Portugal. Even today, one will encounter a greater number of fair, blond, blue-eyed Portuguese in the northern part of the country than in the southern part, where more have darker skin and hair, though the general population is fairly homogeneous. Immigrants from Portugal's former African colonies and an influx of Brazilians and western and eastern Europeans have added to the mix in recent years. The national language is Portuguese, and although religious freedom is guaranteed by law, most citizens are Roman Catholic.

From the Romans came the roots of Portugal's language, its olive groves, and viticulture. From the Moors came almonds, sugar, art, and architecture. Under the leadership of ambitious royals, Portuguese sailors discovered valuable new sea routes throughout the world and gained riches for their kings and country through the trading of spices, Asian goods, and African slaves. Until the 1400s, Arabs ruled the Indian Ocean trade. It was Portugal's Prince Henry (1394–1460) who envisioned a possible sea route to India and, toward this end, established a naval school at Sagres around 1418. There, sailors were trained in navigation, astronomy, and mapmaking. Swift-sailing Portuguese caravels were dispatched in every direction in a quest for sailing routes to the Spice Islands and the treasures of Africa and the Far East.

Successful explorations by Bartholomeu Dias (ca. 1457–1500), Vasco da Gama (ca. 1469–1524), and Pedro Álvares Cabral (ca. 1460–1520) and subsequent conquests in Africa, India, the Americas, and the Far East brought Portugal fabulous wealth. They also paved the way, navigationally speaking, for Spain's future explorations, led by Christopher Columbus (1451–1506), Vasco Núñez de Balboa (1474–1519), and Ferdinand Magellan (1480–1521). Magellan, a Portuguese sea captain hired by Spain to seek a naval

passage around the world, was killed en route, but his goal of global circumnavigation was completed by his crew and proved the theories proposed at Sagres.

These courageous explorers first opened global trading routes toward the exchange of goods and ideas that has continued to the present, as well as an era of Portuguese colonization in Africa, South America, and Asia. But it was Portuguese traders who first introduced many of the New World plants, animals, and African and East Asian herbs and spices that flavor its own cuisine and that of the entire world today. Portuguese traders monopolized the trade in cinnamon, nutmeg and mace, pepper, grains of paradise (a peppery spice from the West Coast of Africa), and other spices.

Under weak leadership over the following centuries, Portugal lost its prominence and wealth. To this day, in Portuguese cabarets and clubs, the *fado,* a national type of ballad, can be heard. It echoes ancient Arabic and North African tones and is at once sadly haunting and melancholic. It has been likened by some to the American blues, in that it reflects the common people's collective sensibility, or *saudade.* The word is difficult to translate but roughly means a melancholic longing for those things that make the soul complete. One place where the Portuguese do find and celebrate fulfillment today is at the table, in the love of family and good food that reflects the country's illustrious past and all the world's flavors.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Eduardo and Vitoria de Oliveira Beirão live in a flat in Oeiras, near the coastal bay formed at the mouth of the Tagus River. Eduardo is a pharmaceutical researcher, and Vitoria works part-time in marketing for a computer firm. They have two school-age boys, aged 7 and 10. They enjoy seaside sports as well as their proximity to Lisbon, which can be reached in less than half an hour by car or public transportation.

Vitoria learned to cook from her mother and grandmother, whom she helped in the kitchen as the eldest daughter with four siblings. She enjoys cooking with the wide variety of fresh produce and seafood available in Oeiras. She most frequently shops at a well-stocked supermarket, where, when Eduardo is traveling on business, she sometimes picks up prepared foods such as mild pepper-roasted chicken for herself and the boys. She also frequents small specialty shops, where she buys salted cod and specialty produce, and a local bakery whose fresh-baked breads and *pastéis de nata* (custard tarts) are family favorites.

On weekends, when Eduardo is home, the family enjoys barbecuing sausages and *sardinhas* (sardines) on their small patio in good weather or goes to a favorite café near the park or beach to meet friends. Holidays as well as some feast days and birthdays are generally spent with Vitoria's family at her parents' home outside Lisbon, when large midday meals are enjoyed. Most of Eduardo's family lives near Porto, Portugal's second-largest city, which is several hours north by car or train, and visits with them are less frequent.

Eduardo eats lunch at his company's cafeteria, as do the boys at their school. Their evening supper, served around 7:30 or 8 P.M., is the main meal at home. It is lighter, without as many courses or as large portions as Vitoria and Eduardo grew up with during their own childhoods, mainly because help is more expensive and not as readily available, food costs are higher, and the family's lifestyle is more active. But Vitoria still enjoys making traditional soups, and she freezes extra portions to keep on hand.

In its 2001 national population census, the average Portuguese family consisted of 2.8 persons, very near the average of 2.4 for all European Union countries. Larger families that include several generations may sometimes live in the same home, however, particularly in rural areas or where unemployment is high.

Women's traditional roles have eased over the past several decades as increasing numbers of them have gained employment and increased economic equality. Still, it is generally the wife and mother's responsibility to see to all things domestic, including all homemaking and childrearing tasks. Although the father remains the traditional head of the family, the family home remains the mother's domain, and food shopping and home cooking are a woman's job. Meal preparation is taken seriously because the Portuguese have a choice of high-quality, fresh ingredients, and they enjoy long meals that feature many simply prepared, delicious traditional dishes.

## Major Foodstuffs

Mainland Portugal is divided into three parts: northern, central, and southern Portugal, with district divisions within each of these. The Madeira Islands and Azores are politically autonomous, with their own regional governments. Of Portugal's 35,503 square miles of land, about 30 percent is arable. Current efforts by the government, tourist industry, and private groups aim to identify specific regional specialties in order to enhance marketing and promote gastronomic tourism.

Major food crops include almonds, corn, olives, potatoes, rice, tomatoes, and wheat. Commercial and independent fishing produce a great variety of Atlantic fish and shellfish for Portuguese tables, most notably sardines and tuna. Codfish, long a staple of the Portuguese diet, is now imported principally from Norway and Iceland due to threats to the sustainability of the Atlantic's Grand Banks fisheries. Beef, poultry, lamb, and pork are raised in Portugal. Still, given the area and climate, the country's agricultural production lags behind the European Union average, due to the need for increased agricultural education and modernization of farming practices.



Fresh mussels, a traditional Portuguese dish, in Cataplana. (iStockPhoto)

*Caldo verde,* Portugal's closest thing to a national soup, hails from northern Portugal's Minho region. Trout, salmon, and lampreys thrive in the Minho's rivers, and the latter are prepared in a popular regional rice dish, *arroz de lampreia.* Other specialties from the area include *caldeirada de peixe,* a hearty fish soup made with the day's catch of firm white fish; *canja,* a brothy chicken soup with rice, lemon, and mint; *arroz de pato,* a duck and rice dish; and *bacalhau à moda de viana,* one of the country's favorite salt cod offerings, with onions, white wine, and cabbage.

In the Douro and Trás-os-Montes regions, also to the north but below the Minho, one will see miles of vineyards, for the Douro is the home of port and other Portuguese wines. In addition, however, there will be cattle and pig farms in the rugged Trás-os-Montes, and smoked ham and sausages from the region are superb. Specialties from these regions include *cozida à Portuguesa,* a meat, vegetable, and sausage soup that is considered to be another national dish; *tripas à moda do Porto,* tripe with chicken, *chouriço* (a spicy sausage), and beans; *arroz com lebre,* or hare with rice; and *bolo de castanhas,* a chestnut cake.

In the Beiras region of central Portugal there will be egg cakes and pastries, ham, sausages, and the world-famous Serra da Estrela, a raw ewe-milk cheese. Kid or goat may be served roasted, and a sunken but delicious sponge cake, *pao de-ló,* is a frequent dessert.

In the Estremadura, also in central Portugal and with an Atlantic coastline, fish of all kinds will be prepared. *Escabeche,* or marinated and preserved fish such as sardines, mackerel, or tuna, is popular. Shellfish soups and caldeirada de peixe are common fare. The salt cod specialty here is *bacalhau à brás,* a casserole of shredded dried salt cod with French-fried potatoes and scrambled eggs.

The Ribatejo region is a rich agricultural land where melons, tomatoes, rice, olives, olive oil, market garden produce, livestock, figs, and, of course, grapes are grown. Some of the area's specialties include pork sausages and smoked ham, eel, potato cakes, and dumplings made with cornbread.

In the coastal Lisbon region, fishing, rice growing, and salt panning are the primary agricultural endeavors. Pastries here are most tempting, and national favorites that hail from the area are pastéis de nata, or egg-custard tarts.

In southern Portugal, there is the Alentejo district. Olives, olive oil, wheat, wines, oranges, and wild boar come from this area. Specialties include *requeijão,* a breakfast of ricotta cheese and honey cake, sausages, and cheese; chicken empanadas (pies or turnovers); *açorda à Alentejana,* a garlicky bread soup flavored with coriander, olive oil, greens, and eggs; *carne de porco à Alentejana,* another nationally favored dish of pork with clams and coriander that is steam-cooked in a hammered copper *cataplana,* a pan that itself looks like a clamshell.

In the southernmost region of the Algarve, where tourism has taken over and culinary internationalism prevails, fewer and fewer traditional dishes are found. Still, there is excellent seafood to be found, with grilled sardines at their peak, as well as clams, oysters, mussels, squid, and octopus. Arabic-influenced sweetmeats such as *morgados,* made of almonds and figs, can be found in local confectioners' shops.

For home cooking, the Portuguese pantry is well supplied by farmers' markets, specialty shops, and, in larger towns and cities, supermarkets or even hypermarkets. Among the ingredients commonly used are *bacalhau* (salt cod) and a variety of other fish and shellfish; meat and poultry; bread; olives and olive oil; rice and beans; herbs and spices; eggs, butter, and cheese; potatoes, vegetables, and fruits; and condiments.

Salt cod is said to be prepared in 100 ways in Portugal. Other fish and shellfish are extremely popular as well. Sardines, tuna, squid, red mullet, swordfish, sea perch, cuttlefish, eels, octopus, prawns, lobster, and clams can be bought fresh in fish markets. Rabbit, ham, pork sausages (chouriço and *linguiça,* the latter a thinner version of the former), and blood sausage (*morcelas* or *chouriços de sangue*) are cooked in various ways, as are chicken, turkey, and duck.

Bread and potatoes are traditionally served at every meal. Bread is usually a wheat loaf with a chewy crust, though in the Minho, cornbread, *broa,* will be served. Bread is used in soups as well as at the table. Potatoes are kept on hand or grown throughout the year in home gardens or farms. Kale is also a popular home garden crop and is used in the national soup, caldo verde. Rice is kept on hand for use in soups, stews, and desserts. Goat and ewe-milk cheeses are served frequently as appetizers, in sandwiches, or with fruit at the end of a meal.

Among condiments, olive oil is by far the most popular. It is served, usually along with wine or cider vinegar, to flavor soups, fish, and salads. *Piri piri,* a red pepper sauce, is often available for seasoning. Honey is harvested in the Alentejo, and the home cook from that region may often substitute it for sugar in sweet desserts. Herbs and spices most commonly found in Portuguese kitchens include salt and pepper, saffron, cumin, curry powder, paprika, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, allspice, rosemary, garlic, coriander, mint, bay leaves, parsley, sage, oregano, and red chili peppers.

The home cook will most often use garlic and onions in her cooking but also prepare pumpkins, squashes, carrots, cauliflower, onions, kale, spinach, green beans, broad beans, turnip greens, and tomatoes for use in a variety of soups or dishes or to accompany meats and fish. With its mild, temperate climate, and the semitropical Madeira Islands and Azores nearby, Portugal produces many fruits for home cooks to purchase in season throughout the year. These include grapes, apricots, peaches, plums, figs, oranges, lemons, strawberries, cherries, pineapple, and bananas. Chestnuts, peanuts, pine nuts, and walnuts are served in dishes and eaten out of hand.

Pastries can be purchased from many bakeries and tea salons; they are often very sweet and egg-filled. Today's home cook will buy them mainly for special occasions. Wine is used in cooking and is commonly served with lunch and dinner. Beer is also a popular beverage. Espresso, coffee, and tea are widely enjoyed throughout the day. Mineral water is also kept on hand for serving with meals.

## Cooking

Most kitchens are fairly small and basically equipped, with cookstoves powered by natural gas, propane, or electricity. Decades ago, ovens might not even have been found in the home kitchen; in rural homes a *forno* (wood-burning outdoor oven) was instead located in the yard behind the kitchen. For this reason, many dishes are boiled, fried, stewed, or pan-braised on the cooktop. Today, modern appliances may be found throughout the country. Modern kitchens with the latest amenities may be found in newer construction or in renovated older homes in more affluent areas.

Long cooking methods such as simmering or braising are required for the success of many Portuguese dishes. Many popular dishes that are served daily in most homes are soups and stews that have been allowed to cook slowly so that flavors develop fully. If salt cod is to be used in a dish, and it often is, it must be soaked in water, usually overnight, with the water being changed at least twice to remove the salt before cooking. Meats may be roasted, grilled or stewed, and cooked in soups. Chicken, or *frango,* that is marinated in a piri piri (hot pepper) marinade and then grilled, is a popular dish. Fish are usually grilled, oven-roasted, or panfried and are often cooked in soups as well.

For roasting and simmering, earthenware cooking dishes are used as well as metal pots and pans. A small earthenware spirit-burning grill may be used to cook chouriço or other sausages atop the table. Some mixing bowls and stew pots may also be made of earthenware. The cataplana, a clamshell-like hammered copper-clad pan, is particular to Portugal. It can be likened to a pressure cooker of sorts, as it allows dishes to be slow-steamed to completion. It is most often used in preparing shellfish and rice dishes.

In traditional home cooking, salads are not served as often as cooked vegetables. They are usually simple combinations of lettuce, tomatoes, and sliced onions served with olive oil and wine or cider vinegar. Egg desserts are popular and are often made with a curd made from egg yolks cooked with sugar syrup. *Membrillo,* or quince paste, similar to that in Spain, is made by slowly stewing quinces with sugar, then pouring the mixture onto a plate until it congeals into a solid gel, owing to the fruit's high pectin content.

Dinnerware utensils, especially at fine restaurants but also in some homes, may include fish knives and forks.

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**_Caldo Verde_ (Kale and Potato Soup)**

*Serves 12*

12 oz chouriço or linguiça sausages

1 large bunch kale

2 tbsp olive oil

1 large onion, chopped

2 cloves garlic, minced

3 large russet potatoes, peeled and diced into large pieces, to yield 3 c

2 large (49-oz) cans chicken broth

½ tsp freshly ground pepper

Score each sausage lengthwise with a sharp paring knife, and peel off and discard its casing. Cut the sausages lengthwise in half, then slice crosswise into ¼-inch-thick slices. (They'll be half-moon shaped.) In an 8-quart soup pot, sauté sausage slices slowly until lightly browned, stirring often. Drain off the fat that renders out, and wipe excess from pan and sausage with paper towels. Remove sausage to a plate.

Strip green leaves from hard stems of kale, and discard stems. Chiffonade leaves (cut into thin strips). This should produce about 2 quarts of shredded greens.

Add oil to pan, and sauté onion until translucent, then add garlic and continue sautéing for another minute or two. Add kale, and stir-fry for a minute or two until the leaves begin to wilt. Add potatoes, chicken broth, sautéed sausage, and pepper. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer, covered, at least 30 minutes. With back of spoon or potato masher, mash potatoes to thicken soup. Remove lid and continue simmering for about another ½ hour. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

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## Typical Meals

*Pequeno almoço,* or breakfast, will be a quick, light meal. For most people, it is just a piece of bread or buttered toast accompanied by coffee with milk. Many people stop at a bakery or café to get a quick cup of coffee and a roll on their way to work. A full breakfast with rolls, cheese, fruit, butter, and preserves, and perhaps dry cakes, will usually be found only in a hotel.

For *almoço,* or lunch, the traditional three-hour break at midday in which a hearty meal can be enjoyed at home or in a restaurant still occurs for some. Today's workers, however, often have less time to take for lunch, but even so, that time is spent eating. Lunch may include soup, meat and sometimes seafood, potatoes or occasionally rice, and a vegetable or small, simple salad. Beverages will be wine and mineral water. At a small workers' restaurant, there will usually be a fixed-price menu of the day in addition to à la carte choices, and tables may be shared by strangers. At home, it is customary for the meal to be served with bread and to end with a simple dessert such as fruit and cheese, followed by coffee.

*Jantar,* or dinner, will be another hearty meal. It is served late, perhaps not quite as late as in Spanish homes, but from 7:30 or 8 P.M. until perhaps 10 P.M. In many restaurants, however, especially on weekends, dining begins around 10 P.M. Dishes similar to those at lunch will be served, and they will be accompanied by wine. Dessert, if served, may be followed, perhaps, by a glass of port or *aguardiente* (brandy).

Weekend dinners are an important time for family to gather for long meals. Meals take time because the Portuguese not only enjoy their food but also view mealtimes as a social occasion, even with family. Meals are not hurried, and everyone participates in the conversation.

## Eating Out

Dining out can mean anything from stopping at a café or teahouse, or even a fast-food restaurant, of which there are an increasing number, especially in the larger towns and cities, to dining at a *típico* (traditional restaurant) or a multistarred restaurant. Only the more expensive restaurants take reservations; for all others, service is on a first-come, first-served basis.



Chicken piri-piri (peri-peri) with french fries, served in a restaurant in Albufeira, Portugal. (iStockPhoto)

At an *adega,* or wine cellar, there may be a small restaurant where the proprietor's wine will be served with local fare. These may be open only on weekends or seasonally, or for special events. Cafés serve coffee from morning until late at night or into the early morning hours. They may also serve lunch and light snacks. The most common type of coffee ordered throughout the day is *uma bica,* a small espresso. *Casas* or *salons de chá* (teahouses) serve tea, coffee, juices, and soft drinks as well as pastries and snacks. They are popular for morning or late-afternoon breaks. *Pastelarias,* or pastry shops, also sometimes serve similar offerings, but they may have a greater range of pastry choices.

Inexpensive to moderately priced restaurants include *casas de pasto* (diners), *cervejarias* (beer houses), *churrascarias* and grills (barbecue restaurants), *fumeiros* (smokehouse taverns, mainly found in the Alentejo district), and *marisquerias* (seafood restaurants). Full-service restaurants and típicos (regional specialty restaurants) range in price from moderate to expensive.

## Special Occasions

Many festival days throughout the year require special foods and/or feasting at community gatherings

or with family. On Dia de Ano Novo, or New Year's Day, the family gathers for dinner and shares a *bolo rei,* or king's cake, which has been purchased from a bakery. In this favorite spiced fruit bread, a prize token or fava bean will have been baked. The person who gets the prize supposedly has to provide next year's bolo rei.

Carnival is held on Shrove Tuesday, toward the end of February, or 40 days before Easter. Similar to Rio de Janeiro's Carnival or Mardi Gras in New Orleans, it is celebrated with floats, parades, dancing, and costumes, especially in Lisbon, the Algarve, and Funchal on the island of Madeira. Seafood and cozida á Portuguesa are popular at this celebration. For Páscoa (Easter), the family gathers for favorite traditional dishes. This might include a roast piglet, lamb, or kid, or casseroles and breads with eggs baked into them.

In June, several summer saint's days are celebrated with *festas,* or festivals: São Gonçalo, Santo António, and, finally, São João. The latter two are the larger, more widely celebrated feast days, with roast kid or grilled sardines being special treats.

Natal (Christmas) is the biggest family festival of the year. On Christmas Eve, families gather for a traditional dinner of salt cod, boiled potatoes, bitter greens (kale or turnip greens sprinkled with olive oil and vinegar), and hard-cooked eggs. Seafood such as octopus with rice or fried salt cod fritters may also be served, along with *vinho verde,* the spritzy young wine of the most recent vintage, and special desserts such as *arroz doce* (rice pudding with cinnamon), honey cakes, or doughnut-like fried cakes.

Two-thirds of all weddings take place in a church. They are followed by a festive gathering of family and friends. The dinner to follow will often be a feast, both for the eyes and for the digestion. Although these vary according to means and region, a wedding reception might feature a cocktail hour with wine or *vinho spumante* (sparkling wine) and hearty appetizers, many of which will feature seafoods and shellfish. The wedding party and guests will be seated, and dinner will follow, possibly beginning with soup such as caldo verde, followed by a fish course, then a meat course. A wedding cake will be cut, and other desserts and pastries are served as well. At a celebration following a baptism, vinho spumante, hors d'oeuvres, cakes, and pastries may be served in the family home.

## Diet and Health

Although the Portuguese eat a basically Mediterranean-style diet, it tends to be heavy in carbohydrates and sugar. Egg-based desserts are common, and a day's food intake may be more than what is required. The diet is varied, with adequate protein and vitamins from many vegetables and fruits. Although fish is eaten often, many Portuguese may



Sliced traditional Portuguese Christmas cake, called Bolo Rei, made with candied fruits. (iStockPhoto)



Fishing bounty from Portugal's waters. (Corel)

consume excessive amounts of cholesterol from eggs and saturated fats in meats. Portugal's men have a lower rate of death by heart attacks than those in other European Union countries but a considerably higher rate of strokes.

*Pamela Elder*

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# Romania

## Overview

Romania is situated in the region of eastern Europe and is considered part of the Balkans. It is bordered by Bulgaria to the south, Serbia to the southwest, Hungary to the west and northwest, Moldova and Ukraine to the north and northeast, and the Black Sea to the east. The total area of Romania is 59 million acres (23.8 million hectares), of which 60 percent is dedicated to agriculture. Romania was formed after the joining of Walachia and Moldavia in 1859. However, it wasn't recognized as a nation-state until 1878 after the Russo-Turkish War, which saw Romania as a Russian ally and resulted in Romania's freedom from the Ottoman Empire. Romania was a Warsaw Pact state under the sway of the Soviet Union until 1989, when Communism was overthrown. The population in 2007 was 21.5 million. The main ethnic minorities are Hungarian, German, Romani (Gypsy), Jewish, and diverse Slavic populations. A large population of Romanians lives outside of Romania, mainly in Serbia, Moldova, Ukraine, the United States, Canada, and Australia. Romanian food culture has been shaped over time by these historical, social, and geographic features.

The most distinctive trait of Romanian food is its diverse origins. Romanian food, on the one hand, is a mix of Balkan, Turkish, Greek, and Eastern influences and, on the other hand, has been influenced by western Europe, namely, French cuisine. It is heavily grounded in peasant cooking and its eastern European location. Many foods and food habits are shared with its neighboring country, Moldova. Variations in regional foods can be detected and are explained by the fact that different ethnic groups throughout history have traversed or occupied the territory of modern-day Romania. For example, in Transylvania, clear Germanic and Hungarian influences can be perceived, and in the north a Russian influence is evident.

A history of occupation as well as times of political instability has played a key role in Romania's food culture. Roman colonists settled in the area in 106 A.D. and left their mark on many facets of Romanian culture, including food. From the 14th century, the Ottoman Empire had a significant impact on Romanian cuisine, and for many years Romania was its main food supplier. The Turkish influences that can be seen today include a fondness for sweet pastries, the practice of eating appetizers (meze), and foods like pilaf, meat patties, stuffed grape leaves, caviar, coffee, and many introduced spices and vegetables, as well as the cooking utensils used to prepare these foods.

The Soviet occupation also played its part in shaping Romanian food culture. This took the form of the restructuring of a largely peasant agrarian society into a centralized economy, characterized by large cooperative farms. Many food customs were undermined in this period, and obtaining basic nutritional requirements became the focus. However, in the face of food crises, Romanians have upheld a strong sense of food traditions that can be seen today. The aftermath of Communism and the opening of Romania to a free market economy have been the most recent influence on Romanian food culture. This influence manifested initially in the struggle to obtain enough food as the restructuring of

agriculture and the economy took place and then, in recent years, in the appearance of many Western food trends.

With 86 percent of the population following the Romanian Orthodox Church, religion has significantly shaped Romanian eating habits. Fasting and feasting make up the rhythm of the year and influence choices of what is eaten when. Today, however, like other aspects of Romanian food culture, the practice of traditions, such as fasting, is more common among the rural population than for urban dwellers.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Romania has seen an immense shift in shopping and eating habits since the transition from a centralized market economy to a free market economy in 1989. These changes are most evident in the urban setting. International supermarket chains and fast-food establishments have entered Romania. Convenience foods, such as precooked meals, have become more popular among working city residents, replacing home-cooked traditional foods. There is evidence to suggest that Romanian food habits, along with those of other former Communist nations, will move toward a more western European pattern. However, in Romania there exist two different patterns of food shopping and eating, the rural and the urban.

Stefan and Ana Radu live in a middle-class neighborhood in Bucharest. They both work full-time; Stephan is employed by Transelectrica, and Ana works for an information technology company. Once bills have been paid, food purchases account for over half of their income. These days they have a variety of places to buy their food. They split their shopping between supermarkets and more traditional small shops and open-air markets. For fresh fruit and vegetables they go to the open-air market. From supermarkets or sometimes even larger hypermarkets (as they are called in Europe), they purchase coffee, milk, and wine; sometimes precooked meals for dinner; condiments; cornmeal for *mamaliga* (corn porridge/polenta); some canned foods; meat (mainly pork); and sugar. Bread is bought from a bakery to have for breakfast as toast with jam and coffee. Some mornings a pastry and Western-style coffee are purchased on the way to work. A small amount of their food, mainly *tuica* (plum brandy), some wine, and occasionally meat, comes from relatives who live in the country.

Petar and Elena Ionescu live in the Apuseni Mountains in the region of Transylvania; Petar is 56 years old, and Elena is 54. They live with their son, Emil, and his wife, Daniela. They are both practicing members of the Romanian Orthodox Church and spend more than half of the year fasting. Almost half of their food is either produced by them or exchanged with neighboring farms. Their farm consists of two cows that provide them with milk. The milk is drunk fresh or with coffee, or served cold on mamaliga for breakfast, and it is sometimes used in cooking and is also made into cheese, cottage cheese, or sour cream, which is used frequently in their meals. The Ionescus sell their milk at a local street market and sometimes direct to customers from their farm. They keep chickens that provide them with eggs, which they eat boiled or made into an omelet for breakfast or made into baked mamaliga for lunch or supper. For nonfasting days, their meat comes from the chickens they raise, which may be made into a *ciorba* (sour soup) and served for lunch or supper. They also purchase pig meat from a nearby farm and on special occasions buy a whole suckling pig to roast. As they live in Transylvania, where sheep are herded, they sometimes purchase mutton as well. They grow most of the fruit and vegetables they eat, including apples, plums, potatoes, cabbage, peppers, onions, garlic, tarragon, and dill; the rest is bought from a nearby market. Sugar, cooking oil, coffee, and occasionally soft drinks and beer are bought from a small local shop. Cornmeal is purchased to make into mamaliga, which is eaten frequently at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Bread is purchased from a bakery or made for special occasions. Much of their day revolves around food procurement and the cooking of food. All meals are made at home and are generally quite time-consuming. Plums from their farm are used to make tuica (plum brandy), and other fruits are made into jams and *dulceata* (sweet preserved fruits). Wine is bought in bulk directly from a local vineyard, and either wine or tuica is served with most meals.

## Major Foodstuffs

With more than 60 percent of its land dedicated to agriculture, Romania is fundamentally an agrarian



Farm produce market, Baia Mare, Romania. (Corel)

society. The percentage of people employed by agriculture has decreased since 2000. However, farming is still an important means of existence for many Romanians. Nearly half of the population live rurally, and 79 percent of agricultural land is used by fully or semisubsistent households.

Cereals have always been a major foodstuff for most Romanians. Cereals account for over half of the dietary calories the population consumes, especially in rural areas. Apart from cultural reasons for the high consumption of cereals, the other main motive is economic. Romania is a country in transition from a Communist regime to a free market economy. With this transition has come a removal of food subsidies that has created fluctuating food prices. The result is a decrease in real income for most of the population and an increase in the percentage of income spent on food. On average, spending on food accounts for half of household expenditures. Thus, cereals provide a cheap source of daily calories.

Wheat and maize are the main cereals both produced and consumed in Romania. In households today, cereals are mainly consumed in the form of bread (most commonly made of wheat flour) and mamaliga. Bread is central to Romanian culture and is divided into ritual bread (*colaci*) and regular bread. Maize, in the form of mamaliga or cornbread (*turta de mamaiu*), was for a long time the dietary staple of most Romanians. Today, the consumption of wheat has increased and is more or less balanced with maize consumption. There are some demographic differences in the consumption of wheat and maize. In the rural population, maize features more heavily than for the urban population, who are generally exposed to more Western foods.

The dairy industry is Romania's largest agricultural activity in terms of both value and quantity. Only a small portion of the milk produced is exported. Consequently, Romanians use a lot of cow milk. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, domestic consumption of whole milk in 2007 was 58 gallons (220 liters) per capita, whereas in the United Kingdom, the population consumed 33 gallons (124 liters) per capita. Milk is used in the form of sour cream, cottage cheese, *telemea* (a traditional Romanian cheese made from either cow, buffalo, or sheep milk). Milk is used in cooking, in coffee, and for breakfast, or it is drunk fresh. Some other milks, such as sheep and buffalo, are used but to a lesser extent. Sheep are raised in the north and west of the Carpathian Mountains. Sheep milk is used to make typical Romanian cheeses, such as *cascaval* (a hard, sharp cheese like Italian *cacciocavallo*) and *brinza* (a younger white cheese).

Fertile soils and a temperate-continental climate allow a wide range of fruit and vegetables to grow. Many fruit and vegetables have been grown in Romania for a long time. The cultivation and consumption of many fruits and vegetables dates as far back as the Roman period. In the past, Romania provided Europe with a significant amount of its food. Today, exports are low compared to other European nations. Vegetables are grown mainly for domestic use and include potatoes, beets, cabbage, eggplant, peppers, onions, and tomatoes, among others. Vegetables are ubiquitous in Romanian cooking, and this is perhaps a legacy of Turkish rule and Balkan influences. It may also be a result of the tradition of fasting in Romania, which prohibits the consumption of meat and meat products on specific days of the year.

Orchards cover much of Romania, especially in the south of the Carpathian Mountains. Plums, cherries, peaches, nectarines, apricots, pears, melons, and apples are grown here. In the 1930s Romania was responsible for a significant export of plums and walnuts. However, today, Romania's exports are very low. Therefore, most fruits are used domestically

and are popular in the form of preserves, syrups, and spirits. Plums are used to make tuica (plum brandy) as well as *cozonaci* (sweet bread).

Meat consumption in Romania has fluctuated in relation to social circumstances. It is still fairly low compared to the European average. Pork is the preferred meat for most Romanians. It is used on festive occasions, especially at Christmas, as well as being consumed regularly. Romania produces some of its pig meat; however, it is one of the country's largest food imports. Poultry, mainly chicken, is quite popular, especially among the peasant population, who often rear their own chickens. Beef is consumed to a lesser extent, although there are regional differences. Beef is eaten more frequently in the north of Romania. Other animal products eaten regularly include eggs, a small amount of mutton, and animal fats, which are used for cooking.

The Danube Delta is the second-largest delta in Europe after the Volga. The majority of the delta lies within Romania, with a small part in the Ukraine, and provides a rich source of seafood. Sturgeon, pike, carp, tuna, bream, perch, mackerel, and sterlet are all found here. Herring and mackerel are commonly eaten, often pickled, and there is a long history of eating caviar, which dates back to the Ottoman era.

In Romania wine is often served with meals. Grapes are grown mainly in the eastern part of the country and include common international varieties, such as sauvignon blanc and cabernet sauvignon, as well as indigenous varieties, such as Feteasca Alba, Grasa de Cotnari, and Feteasca Neagra. The Romanian sweet wine, *cotnari,* is compared to some of Europe's finest wines. However, tuica is Romania's national drink and is served for special occasions as well as with daily meals. Much of the tuica drunk is homemade. *Palinca,* a stronger twice-filtered plum brandy, is also commonly drunk. Soft drinks have become a popular beverage since the opening of Romania to the free market economy. Milk is also consumed fresh, especially in rural areas, where people produce much of the milk they use.

Much of Romanian food is characterized by the use of sour ingredients. Sour cream is abundant in Romanian cooking and can be served on top of mamaliga or with crepes, stewed meat, and *bors* (sour beef soup). Sometimes sorrel or sour cabbage is added to food or used as a side dish to give it a sour tang. Spices are also frequently used, especially paprika, although there are regional differences in the strength and frequency of use.

## Cooking

As with Romanian food culture in general, cooking was largely shaped by social circumstances and the customs and culture of different peoples. For example, the commonly eaten Romanian grilled meats have their origins in techniques introduced by Gypsies, who were slaves in the kitchens of the nobles up until the 19th century. A French style of cooking is evident and is a result of the culinary exchanges between France and Romania in the 19th century. During this period, many Romanians traveled to France to learn about French cuisine. Bucharest became known as "the little Paris" after French influences swept through the city in the 19th and 20th centuries. Buildings were designed by French architects, and many French restaurants opened their doors. In the 19th century French cooks were brought into many aristocratic kitchens. However, it was the Ottoman Empire that was responsible for introducing many common cooking implements as well as the use of the spices that are prevalent today.

For much of Romania's history there has been a large peasant population. This has influenced styles of cooking and the types of implements used as well as the cultural value of hospitality, which centers around the kitchen. Traditionally, women are the main cooks both in their homes and for occasions involving the community. Today, the kitchens in Romania vary from a very rustic style to standard modern ones. However, they are generally more straightforward and simple compared to the western European standards.

Soups, stews, and mamaliga are made either in a deep pot on the stovetop or in a *caldare* (large pot) on an open fire. Mamaliga is stirred continuously with a wooden spoon or stick called a *facalet* while the cornmeal is added. A typical peasant kitchen traditionally consists of an open fire in the center,

over which the mamaliga can be cooked. Mamaliga may be placed onto a wooden board, eaten hot and served directly onto plates, or left to cool and sliced. Mamaliga is also sometimes baked in the oven with cheese. Some dishes, such as pilaf, make use of both the stovetop and the oven. Foods such as *cascaval pane* (breaded cheese) are fried in a pan, although baking and grilling are more common.

In a rural setting, ovens may be wood fired inside or outside the house, or they may be standard electric or gas ovens. The oven is used widely in Romanian cooking for baking *sarmale* (stuffed cabbage leaves), *ardei umpluti* (stuffed peppers), *morun pescaresc* (baked sturgeon), and *budinca* (baked savory or sweet puddings) and for roasting meat. Breads and cakes, both ritual and daily, are baked either in regular ovens or in special wood-fired bread ovens. *Colac* molds or bread tins are used to shape the colaci, the most common ritual bread used for special occasions in Romania. The bride's colaci is ritually prepared by the groom's mother or the bride's mother, or the marriage godmother. It is often knotted or circular (special molds are used), and it is decorated with motifs.

Grilling is a common way to cook meats. The Romanian mixed grill is a popular dish containing the ubiquitous *mititei* (sausage-shaped patties of pork and/or beef) served with grilled pork ribs, pork chops, sausage, and, sometimes, grilled pig kidneys, liver, and brain. As in many other eastern European and Balkan countries, Romanians have a tradition of cooking outdoors. Temporary or permanent structures are made to roast meat, sometimes a whole pig or lamb over a wood fire. The men traditionally do this. Fishermen living near the Danube Delta sometimes cook *uha* (fish soup) over an open fire.

Preserving has its place in Romanian cooking, allowing seasonal produce that is harvested to be eaten throughout the year. Vegetables are often pickled in vinegar and served alongside meats. Fruits are made into syrups, jams, or dulceata. A traditional Romanian kitchen is well stocked with dulceata to serve with coffee in anticipation of the arrival of guests.

Stuffing is a common cooking method in Romania. Vegetables such as peppers, cabbage, mushrooms, and grape leaves are filled with rice, meats, and spices. One of the most common Romanian dishes is sarmale, or stuffed cabbage leaves. This dish is commonly found in other Balkan cuisines but holds a special place in Romanian cooking and is usually accompanied by mamaliga.

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### *Sarmale cu varza* (Stuffed Cabbage Leaves)

#### Ingredients

1 large savoy cabbage
2 tbsp olive oil
2 onions, finely chopped
2 stalks celery, finely chopped
1 tbsp white rice
½ c hot water
1½ lb ground beef, veal, or pork
1 tbsp parsley, finely chopped
Salt
Pepper
½ tbsp paprika
5 fresh tomatoes, coarsely chopped
3 tbsp tomato paste
Juice of half a lemon
2 cloves garlic

Break off the cabbage leaves, and cut out the hard spine of each leaf. In a large pot, bring to a boil enough water to cover the cabbage. Immerse cabbage in salted boiling water. Cover and cook over medium-high heat for 5 to 10 minutes. Gently remove leaves as they become tender. Drain well; let cool and dry.

In a large frying pan over medium heat, add oil, onions, celery, and rice, and sauté until light golden brown; add hot water and cover, allowing the rice to absorb the water. Remove from heat and let cool.

In a bowl, mix together the meat, parsley, salt, pepper, paprika, and the rice mixture. Lay out the cabbage leaves on a wooden board, reserving the small leaves. Place a spoonful of the meat filling in the center of a cabbage leaf. Fold the right-hand side of the leaf over

the filling, then roll from the base to the bottom of leaf, then with the index finger gently tuck the left-hand side of the leaf into the cabbage roll to make a nice neat roll. Repeat until all meat is used up.

Chop the small cabbage leaves and any leftovers, and place half in the bottom of a casserole dish along with half the tomatoes. Arrange cabbage rolls tightly on top of the mixture in a casserole dish, seam side down. Then sprinkle the rest of the cabbage and tomatoes on top. Dilute the tomato paste in 4 cups of water, add the lemon juice and garlic, and pour over the rolls. Cover and bake for 1 hour at 325°F. Serve with sour cream and mamaliga.

## Typical Meals

Typical meals in Romania need to be divided according to two demographics: urban and rural. There are vast differences between urban and rural meal patterns in terms of what is eaten and the manner in which it is eaten. The rural population is characterized by a more traditional eating pattern. Since 2000, the urban populations have been increasingly exposed to foods typical of the West. Breakfasts in an urban setting are generally light and consist of a coffee, either Western or Turkish style, a pastry or toast, and less frequently a boiled egg or omelet. Yogurt and breakfast cereals have also become more popular recently. In a rural setting, the breakfast is more substantial. A typical rural household may serve hot mamaliga with cold fresh milk, or breakfast could consist of wheat bread, eggs made into an omelet or boiled, vegetables, cold meats, and cheese. Turkish-style coffee is common here.

Romania is still largely a religious nation, with 86 percent of the population identifying themselves as members of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Fasting is a central part of the religion, which has dramatically shaped the culture of Romanian meals. Today, it is not practiced as widely in urban settings. Up to 192 days of the year, meals without meat, dairy, or eggs must be eaten, and fish can be eaten only on some days.

Lunch has traditionally been the most important meal of the day. It is usually eaten in the early afternoon but can vary between 1 and 4 P.M. In its complete form, lunch will consist of four courses. However, not all Romanians will partake of all four courses daily. Where people live and what their financial situation is will affect what and how much is typically eaten. Today, many people employed in urban centers do not have the time or the financial capacity for such lunches.

Lunch regularly starts with a glass of tuica, which is drunk with snacks called *mezea* (from the Turkish *meze*). The mezea was introduced by the Turks and means a selection of light foods that are accompanied by a beverage. The Romanian mezea often features up to eight items. Most commonly found on the mezea plate is mititei, small sausages or sausage-shaped patties of pork and/or beef that are grilled. Other mezea items include cheese, such as cascaval, telemea, and brinza, which are sometimes cooked or served as fresh slices; *pastrama* (dried cured meats, typically made with beef or mutton); caviar, which is popular; fish served in a variety of ways; ham; preserved vegetables; salads; and fruits. Often the mezea are followed by a soup course. Ciorba is the most common soup in Romania. Ciorba is a sour soup made in a variety of styles with many different ingredients and sometimes topped with sour cream. There is *ciorba de burta* (with tripe), *ciorba de perisoare* (spicy and made with meatballs), *ciorba de legume* (with vegetables), and more. Soup may be followed by mamaliga and sarmale (stuffed cabbage leaves) or a meat or fish dish. Either Turkish or



Decorated Easter eggs in a basket displayed for sale at a Romanian country fair. (iStockPhoto)

Western coffee is served with a dessert. Desserts tend to be sweet pastry, such as baklava or *papanasi* (cheese- or cream-filled pastry), *clatite* (crepes), *cozonac* (sweet bread served at Easter), or *kuros kalacs* (large donuts). Supper or dinner is often lighter than lunch and is eaten around 9 P.M.

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***Mititei* (Grilled Sausage Rolls)**

Mititei is one of the most common Romanian foods. They can be served as part of a mezea, in the center of a mixed grill of meats, or as a main dish.

9 oz minced pork
9 oz minced beef
1 onion, finely chopped
2 garlic cloves, crushed
½ tsp baking powder
¼ tsp thyme
1 tsp paprika
Salt and pepper
1 slice white bread, moistened with a little water
1 tbsp olive oil, for frying
3 tbsp chicken or vegetable stock

**Method**

Combine all the ingredients, apart from the olive oil and stock, together in a large mixing bowl. Knead for about 5 minutes. The ingredients must be very well combined. Let the mixture sit for at least 1 hour. Divide the mixture into small handfuls, and roll into small sausage shapes. Brush with oil, and grill on a barbecue or fry in a pan for 10–15 minutes. Turn them several times during cooking, and baste with a little stock to keep them moist, if you like. Serve with pickled vegetables and salad or as an appetizer.

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Typical meals change from region to region, revealing some of Romania's history as well as that of its neighboring countries. In Transylvania there is a distinct cuisine that reflects the history of its inhabitants: Hungarians, German Saxons, and Romanians. Foods are commonly flavored with tarragon, dill, lovage, savory, mustard, and horseradish. A Germanic influence can be seen in dishes like *knodeln* (dumplings), bratwurst (beef or pork sausages), and *auflauf* (baked pudding). In the regions of Maramures and Moldavia in the north and northeast of Romania, a Russian influence is evident in the greater use of beef as in dishes such as bors (beef soup) and *galusti* (Russian *galoushki,* or dumplings). Foods are generally spicier in the Banat region. In the Danube Delta region, meals typically feature a lot of fish.

Mamaliga is still considered the national dish by many Romanians. It is a versatile food, often served on the side of meat or vegetables or topped with cheese and sour cream. It is served either hot or cold and for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. It is made by cooking cornmeal with water (sometimes milk) and salt and is similar to Italian polenta. Mamaliga is commonly known as a peasant food, since during much of the 19th and 20th centuries, peasants, who made up the majority of the population, ate mamaliga on a daily basis.

## Eating Out

A culture of eating out was prevalent among travelers and the elite in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Many accounts of foods in Romanian restaurants, inns, hotels, and cafés in the 19th century came from travelers, who noticed the diversity of cultural influences. They also noted sophistication and a cosmopolitan choice in large cities and good simple fare in the country. Throughout history Bucharest was a rich melting pot of cuisines and was the location where restaurants first opened in the first half of the 19th century. Many other food establishments and food merchants proliferated in Bucharest at this time. French, Romanian, and German restaurants were found, alongside Turkish and Greek cafés and street vendors, wine merchants, and bakeries. Even though the Communist regime saw the closing of many restaurants, today Bucharest is a thriving multicultural culinary destination.

For a lot of Romanians today, eating out is a luxury and reserved for special occasions. With many people struggling to provide basic food requirements, there is not much left in the budget for dining out. In many rural settings, in the past and

at present, eating out means eating at the house of family or friends, since there is a strong culture of home cooking. However, there is a growing pattern, in large cities, of Romanians working longer hours in order to increase their income. The result is that people have less time to cook at home and may rely on take-out food or sometimes restaurants for dinners. Fast-food outlets are becoming popular, which is demonstrated by the increasing number of McDonald's, Pizza Hut, KFC, and other less-known outlets. The small upper class in Romania has the opportunity to eat out more frequently. Large cities provide many options for eating out in restaurants and cafés. People living in or visiting Bucharest can choose from a range of international cuisines as well as Romanian when they eat out.

## Special Occasions

In Romania, food is strongly linked to life transitions and celebrations, especially weddings, births, and deaths, and to religious holidays. In these contexts, food holds significant symbolic meaning for people. The most common foods of traditional ceremonies are colaci (ritual bread), cake, honey, milk, eggs, and wine or tuica. Where religious holidays are concerned, periods of fasting are broken with the preparation and eating of certain meats.

Ritual bread, known as colaci or *colac,* is a fundamental element of all Romanian customary events. The making of the bread as well as the breaking of bread, looking through the central hole in the bread, and the kissing of bread are all significant activities seen in traditional ceremonies. Colaci is usually circular or ring shaped and often adorned with motifs, such as flowers, birds, and the cross, or with fresh basil. In the context of a wedding, colaci, known as bride's colaci, is often pleated, and considerable time goes into its decoration. It is a principal symbol within the wedding feast and sometimes sits in the center of the wedding table. Ritual bread features at significant moments throughout the wedding, which can last up to three days.

Weddings today are varied, from traditional long weddings to more modern, simplified, and shorter occasions. However, key foods are still commonly used. Sarmale (stuffed cabbage) is commonly part of a wedding feast. In traditional settings chicken features in a ceremonial part of the wedding called *horea gainii* (the song of the hen). The cook brings out a roasted chicken that is adorned with greenery and plates of bread, and then a series of songs and theatrical interactions follows. Toasting is also a very important part of the wedding and is usually done with wine or tuica. Sour soup, ciorba, is frequently served on the final day of three-day weddings to revive revelers.

In a funeral setting, colaci with a coin baked into it is sometimes placed in the coffin. In some regions small colaci are given out to the guests. The traditional food at a funeral is *coliva,* which is a cake made specifically for funerals. Coliva is made from boiled wheat, sugar, honey, and pounded nut kernels. Wine or contemporarily tuica is used in funeral settings and is drunk by the mourners as well as offered to the dead. A funeral meal often takes place preceding the funeral.

The traditional Romanian year is characterized by periods of fasting and feasting. In the Communist era many of these patterns were disrupted; however, many traditions relating to food are still practiced, especially in rural settings. At its strictest, fasting can occupy 192 days out of the year. This includes 40 days leading up to Christmas, six weeks leading up to Easter, and Wednesdays and Fridays, along with other religious saint's days. Fasting is less common today, but many of the food traditions associated with the breaking of fasts are still practiced. At Christmastime a whole pig is roasted. In a rural setting the pig may be slaughtered and roasted on an open-fire spit; otherwise, it is cooked in an oven. Cozonac is a ceremonial sweet bread that is eaten at Christmas and Easter. Easter is followed in a traditional Eastern Orthodox manner. The most important food traditions include painting chicken eggs, usually in red; making and eating *pasca,* a traditional Easter cake; eating lamb; and bringing foods to church in baskets to be blessed.

## Diet and Health

Many Romanians who lived through the Communist period and its aftermath know too well the

close relationship between food and health. In the harshest years of the regime, food shortages were a part of daily life. Under the presidency of Nicolae Ceausescu from 1967 to 1989, money was being spent on the development of grand buildings, and food was being exported to pay off debt, while programs such as the Rational Nourishment Commission were implemented to hide the fact that there was not enough food for the nation. Understandably, today, many Romanians view health and nutrition campaigns with suspicion. The Communist period continued to influence health in Romania even after the expulsion of Ceausescu and the opening of Romania to a free trade economy. From the early 1990s Romania had to completely rebuild systems of health care and food production and distribution. Subsidies that had been in place for many foods were removed. Real incomes were low, and food prices high. In the mid-1990s more than half the population lived below the poverty line, and many households spent as much as 70 percent of their income on food. All of this had a negative impact on the health of much of the Romanian population. Low life expectancies and high levels of diseases related to lifestyle have been reported for much of the period after the collapse of the Communist regime.

The situation today has largely improved. However, the health of Romanians, and people living in many other former Soviet states, is still below the European Union average, based on a number of health indicators. Diet plays an important part in this. Romania has registered a high number of diseases that relate to poverty and inadequate nutrition. Many studies indicate that poor diet and alcohol and tobacco consumption, particularly among men, have contributed to poor health in Romania. The high consumption of fats and oils and calories of low quality from the point of view of nutritional standards is likely to be a contributing factor.

Fruit and vegetable consumption in Romania has fluctuated and at times has been considerably lower than the recommended daily intake. This is partly due to issues of food scarcity and high prices and partly due to the style of the cuisine. While vegetable intake has increased in recent years, the percentage of potatoes that contribute to this has, too. The higher consumption of potatoes and cereals as major caloric items means that intake of many vitamins and minerals is reduced. Low fruit and vegetable intake, according to the World Health Organization, is one of the leading factors in many of the health issues faced by Romania today. However, the produce that is eaten is normally fresh, since much of it is produced locally, and it generally contains low levels of chemicals because of the high costs of herbicides and pesticides.

*Kate Johnston*

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# Russia

## Overview

Once considered a gastronomic wasteland, Russia's remarkable and delectable cuisine again is finding its way onto the world stage through commerce, travel, and media coverage. Moscow is becoming a center of culinary innovation in the early 21st century, quickly erasing bitter images of the empty food shelves and state-run restaurants of the Soviet era. Centuries of scarcity, deprivation, and hardship have shaped Slavic culinary aesthetics. Therefore, Russians approach every meal with an unrivaled gusto and sincere appreciation—be it beer and crayfish, or champagne and caviar.

Russia is an inscrutable land on many levels, beginning with the sheer quantity and quality of available foodstuffs. The size of its territory, the variety of its ethnic groups, and its stark history challenge the imagination. The 19th-century Russian Empire included Ukraine, the Baltic nations, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Siberia. The nation was blessed with an abundance of fish from its waters; fruits and nuts from the southern regions; endless variations of grains and hearty breads; the wild game of the forest; and the rewarding berries and mushrooms of the woods. These ingredients remain in Russia today to form the basis of its extraordinary cuisine.

The Russian Federation is the political remnant of the Russian and Soviet empires. Geographically, the Russian Federation stretches from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean and spans 11 time zones. Siberia alone makes up 10 percent of the earth's inhabited landmass. Culturally, however, Russia is larger still, extending beyond its imperial boundaries via Russian-language media, established trade patterns, and the presence of its military on the former borders of the Soviet Union.

The 2002 census counted 160 different nationalities in the country, although Russians comprise almost 80 percent of the 145.2 million total citizens. Kazan Tatars number almost six million citizens, making them the second most numerous nationality. Other ethnic groups in Russia that exceed one million people include Ukrainians, Bashkirs, Chuvash, Chechens, and Armenians. This demographic diversity allows Russians to claim most any dish as their own national foods, such as pilaf, dumplings (*pelmeni*), eggplant "caviar," or Baltic herring. Incomes and lifestyles in Russia are very stratified, especially since the fall of Communism in 1991. Social stratification is the single most important factor in understanding Russian society throughout its history.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Sergei and Katya Aleksandrov are a well-to-do married couple in their late thirties living in a suburb of Moscow with their twins, Sofia and Vassili, who are three years old. Katya works part-time as an accountant, and Sergei sells cars through one of Moscow's larger dealerships. Their combined incomes allow them to employ a full-time nanny to care for the children and help with housekeeping. Their salary also allows them to eat better-quality food and to afford occasional imported European gourmet items, but their core food choices are very mainstream and representative of the larger population. Russians are very particular about their diet and expend much energy in the acquisition



A woman makes pelmeni, a traditional Russian dumpling, by hand. (iStockPhoto)

and preparation of food. Russians, on average, spend more than one-third of their income on food, a much higher amount than in Britain or the United States.

At a minimum, the Russian pantry will always have potatoes, carrots, onions, butter, and sunflower oil. No traditional dish can be prepared without these basic ingredients. Ketchup, mustard, and spicy horseradish are popular as condiments, and mayonnaise is always on hand for use in traditional Russian potato salads. No spices are really necessary save for salt and ground black pepper, although some families, like the Aleksandrovs, like to experiment with Asian ingredients and various spice mixes.

For the parents, breakfast is dominated by bread and dairy, specifically, traditional Russian soft farmer's cheese, *tvorog,* mixed with sour cream and honey. The children eat freshly prepared hot cereal. Popular varieties of hot cereal include oatmeal, cream of wheat, and porridges made from buckwheat, barley, or millet. Hot sweet black tea is the preferred breakfast drink, although sometimes adults prepare instant coffee. The twins drink whole milk.

During the day, Katya and Sergei eat lunch at work. Most large offices have their own cafeterias with a selection of hot dishes, sandwiches, and salads. The nanny makes a hot lunch for the children, often one of the following dishes: vegetable or chicken noodle soup, meatballs with mashed potatoes, beef stew, or chicken cutlets. All main dishes are accompanied by bread and fresh tomatoes and cucumbers. Lunch concludes with a snack of fresh fruit.

Generally, everyone gathers for the main meal of the day around eight o'clock in the evening. Katya is a good cook with a well-developed repertoire of dishes that are hearty yet quick to prepare. Even with full-time help at home, Katya prefers to do most of the cooking herself. She always prepares cereal in the morning, which can take up to an hour (there is no instant oatmeal), and she makes the majority of family dinners. Sometimes the leftovers are served for lunch the next day.

Almost daily the family purchases bread, both wheat and rye, and fresh vegetables such as cucumbers, tomatoes, and dill fronds, parsley, and green onions. Broccoli and cauliflower have only recently become staples of the Russian diet. Pickled vegetables are enjoyed year-round, and cabbage, carrots, and beets dominate the winter menu. The family consumes fruits regularly until the season changes: strawberries, cherries, raspberries, apricots, and peaches in the summer; apples and melons in the fall; and oranges, apples, grapes, and bananas in winter and spring.

The Aleksandrov household would grind to a halt without sour cream and kefir (fermented milk). The amount of milk and milk products Russians consume is surpassed only by the quantity of bread they eat, whether they are city dwellers or country folk. Where the cow is sacred in India, it is part of the family in Russia. Cattle provide some of the products most dear to Russians—milk, cream, fermented drinks, cheese, butter, yogurt, sour cream, and ice cream. Dairy products are the largest segment of Russian agricultural exports after sunflower oil, namely, condensed milk and

cream, yogurt, butter and milk fats, sour milk, cheese, and curds.

The Aleksandrovs' main protein choices are usually beef, pork, lamb, and chicken. The family enjoys smoked fish as an appetizer. Another important kitchen ingredient is ground beef. The Aleksandrovs use it to make meatballs and cutlets, stuffed vegetables, and the gem of Russian cuisine, pelmeni, similar to ravioli or Chinese dumplings. In a pinch, store-bought frozen pelmeni with sour cream make for a modest dinner. The Aleksandrovs, unusual for a Russian family, have recently sworn off any kind of processed meats—sausages, hams, salami, and so on. Sausage is a daily staple of the Russian diet: for breakfast with cheese and bread, as part of a lunch, as a snack, and for appetizers. Initially, the Aleksandrovs were prompted to forgo sausage in response to their son's suspected allergic reactions, but after a while they realized that they did not miss it much and felt better without it. For a typical Russian family, several types of sausage would be among the daily food purchases.

Approximately twice a month, Sergei does bulk shopping in METRO, which is similar to warehouse stores in the United States. He buys grains, dried pasta, tea, coffee, sugar, household supplies, basic toiletries, and some canned goods. Like most Russians, the Aleksandrovs use few canned or prepared foods. They buy all their meats, dairy, fruit, and vegetables fresh on a daily basis. Usually Katya buys whatever is needed for the day on her way home from work. Produce is frequently purchased at roadside stands. Occasionally, the family will make a weekend trip to a large farmers' market for a larger selection of produce, fresh dairy, and meats.

## Major Foodstuffs

The foods generally associated with Russia include hearty breads; fresh, smoked, and cured sausages; and winter vegetables such as cabbage, beets, and potatoes. Although the beverage that immediately comes to mind with Russia is vodka, the national drink is actually tea. Russians today without difficulty consider all the following foods to be part of their cuisine: Baltic herring and rye breads, Pacific salmon, Siberian ferns and pine nuts, Asian dumplings, Korean pickled vegetables, Central Asian pilaf, shish kebabs from the Caucasus, Romanian *brynza* (feta cheese), Bulgarian peppers, and eggplant from the Middle East.

Throughout the seasons, the markets present an amazing variety of foodstuffs. Starting with the unprocessed or bulk section, the pantry traditionally contains a selection of grains and flours; pulses and dried beans; vegetable oils sold in reused plastic bottles; walnuts, almonds, and pistachios; macaroni and vermicelli for soups; rice; and dried apricots, raisins, and dates. The vegetables, in order of quantities sold, include potatoes, cabbage, carrots, tomatoes, cucumbers, beets, turnips, and radishes. Besides apples, pears, and berries, most fruits come from the southern regions or are imported. Though rarely perfect in shape, marked with minor external blemishes, and small in size, most of the fruits and vegetables have a vibrant and distinctive taste.

Pickled garlic, peppers, and cucumbers are almost always locally produced and homemade. Most markets have a Korean food section with prepared dishes of spicy pickled vegetables and fish. In the dairy-products section, vendors sell sour cream, fresh cheese (tvorog), aged cheeses, yogurt, and kefir by volume in recycled glass bottles or larger plastic containers.

Grains—specifically, rye, buckwheat, barley, oats, millet, and wheat—are the main staples. Cereals (seeds of cultivated grasses) are of central importance to Russia, so much so that they in many ways define the national cuisine. They form the basis for the delectable breads, filling gruels, savory pies, pancakes (*bliny*), and dumplings.

Bread buttresses the Russian diet, symbolizing sustenance and hospitality. Russians consume an amazing two pounds of bread per person a day. It is the ubiquitous delight of every meal. The very word for hospitality, *khlebosol'stvo,* derives from the roots *khleb* (bread) and *sol'* (salt), which were traditionally presented to guests as a sign of welcome, warmth, and generosity. In almost-endless varieties, most tables are graced with slices of both white wheat bread and dark rye or black bread.

Kasha, or boiled buckwheat groats, is a Russian cultural superfood, and it is difficult to overrate the symbolic importance of a food that has nourished

a people for more than 1,000 years. It can be boiled with milk or water, prepared sweet or savory, and served for breakfast or as a side dish. Smaller groats are often used to make a more liquid kasha with only milk. Buckwheat kasha can be prepared with almost anything mixed in—eggs, pork, pork fat, liver, onions, mushrooms, fruits, cheese, and so forth. The first buckwheat varieties originated in parts of Siberia and China. As the largest consumer of buckwheat worldwide, Russia is also the number-one producer of the crop. Today, kasha can refer to almost any porridge made from any groats, such as cream of wheat, rice pudding, hot oatmeal, or less commonly barley or millet porridge.

Pies (*pirogi*) in Russia come in a dizzying array of preparations and presentations. The dough can be leavened or not, salty or sweet. Pies can be round, square, triangular, open, closed, large, small, or fully enclosed like the classic salmon *kulebyaka* (*coulibiac*—a complex pastry with salmon, spinach, and rice), for example.

Bliny, one of the few Russian foods known internationally, are small pancakes a little larger in size than a compact disc (five to six inches in diameter). They are a traditional dish at the spring equinox folk festival, Maslenitsa, perhaps symbolizing the sun with their round shape. The yeast batter is what makes the taste and texture distinctive. Piled high with a pat of butter between the pancake layers, bliny provoke a festive reaction. Though traditionally made with buckwheat flour, wheat-flour bliny are now more common.

Macaroni and vermicelli are made from wheat flour and are commonly added to soups. Buttered macaroni is a common side dish that may be served with any meal. The most famous Slavic pasta dishes are pelmeni and *vareniki,* boiled, filled dumplings. Vareniki are usually larger and often half-moon or triangular shaped, and they come from Ukraine. During the summer, vareniki are filled with cherries, plums, or berries. They can also be made with potatoes, mushrooms, soft cheese, cabbage, and meat. Pelmeni and savory vareniki are generally topped with melted butter or sour cream, but vinegar, mustard, and ketchup are also possible additions.

Russians have a hearty appetite for vegetables, usually served in soups or separately as a pickled dish. Cooked vegetables are also a main component of many salads. Fresh salads are generally made with sliced cucumbers and tomatoes, not leafy greens. Turnips, cabbages, radishes, and cucumbers are considered traditional Russian vegetables. Carrots, onions, and garlic provide the flavors for many savory dishes. One salad that incorporates almost all the customary Russian vegetables is *vinegret* (made from potatoes, pickled cabbage, and beets in oil).

Potatoes, after bread, sustain the population. The most common and preferred method of preparation is peeled boiled potatoes, garnished with butter, dill, and sour cream. Fried potatoes, similar to home fries, are also widespread. They become exceptionally enticing when fried with bacon and mushrooms.

Russia and cabbage are inextricably bound, and rightfully so. No self-respecting Russian can survive long without fermented or sour cabbage (*kvashenaya kapusta*). Cabbage is an extremely versatile vegetable, great in soups, stews, salads, stuffings, and side dishes. The sulfurous scent of cooked cabbage seems to permanently saturate most modern apartment blocks in Russia. Cabbage soup (*shchi*) rates among the most popular national dishes.

Cucumbers, especially the pickled variety, also have a special place in the Russian culinary psyche. Russian pickled cucumbers, like sauerkraut, are pickled in brine and not vinegar. Fresh and pickled cucumbers are added to many hot and cold dishes. It is not uncommon to find salads that contain both pickled and fresh cucumbers.

Whereas potatoes, cabbages, and cucumbers are essential components of the Russian table, mushrooms create magic in the meal. Mushrooms, or *griby,* are neither plants nor animals, but Russians would swear they have a soul. Many civilizations, including the Slavs, have relied on mushrooms for medicinal purposes, and mushroom hunting in Russia remains a national obsession. Considering the expanse of forest and the assortment of mushrooms, many a lazy day can pass in search of the perfect mushroom patch.

The turnip (*repa*), rutabaga (*bryukva*), and red beet (*svyokla*) form the rearguard of traditional Russian vegetables. Turnips, often pureed or cooked together with meat dishes, were the staple crop of northern Russia until well into the 18th century. Beets were better known in the area of Ukraine, although they are now firmly established as part of the Russian culinary repertoire. The most famous dish from beets is borscht, a beef-based soup with beets, cabbage, and bell pepper.

Countless other vegetables are grown on private plots or at the dacha (small vacation house). Tomatoes, squash, zucchini, radishes, bell peppers, peas, green beans, cauliflower, and leafy greens add color and zest to the Russian table. Many vegetables, especially eggplant, are made into spreads or a "caviar," which is a cooked mixture of vegetables with tomatoes, onions, garlic, oil, and vinegar that preserves well.

Fruit production is difficult in northerly climes. Therefore, apples, pears, and forest berries are the most common fruits in Russia. Many other fruits are brought in from the southern regions, particularly peaches, cherries, plums, and melons. Watermelons from Astrakhan on the Volga River delta near the Caspian Sea compete with those from Central Asia and the Caucasus in Russian markets. The best melons, however, are imported from Central Asia, along with grapes, dried apricots, and raisins.



A Russian delicacy, borscht, is a beet root soup served with sour cream. (Shutterstock)

Berries and cherries are the quintessential fruits of Russia. The sour cherry (*vishnya*) and the black cherry (*chereshnya*) are the most common varieties. The bountiful assortment of berries is similar to that of Scandinavia, Canada, and the northern United States. Popular varieties include the raspberry (*malina*); the gooseberry (*kryzhovnik*); the cranberry (*klyukva*); the berry known variously as the lingonberry, bilberry, huckleberry, and whortleberry (*brusnika*); the blueberry (*chernika*); the rowanberry or ashberry (*ryabina*); and currants—red, black, and white (*smorodina*). The delicious strawberry (*klubnika*) and the wild strawberry (*zemlyanika*) are a special treat. The berries can be eaten raw as well as frozen or dried for later use. But more often than not they are made into rich preserves, jams, and jellies used in desserts and to sweeten tea.

Fish is most commonly served as a smoked, cured, or salted appetizer. Salted Baltic herring (*sel'd'* or *selyodka*), by far the most abundant and popular, is found in many cold salads or served plain with oil and onions. A mixed platter of cold smoked fish (*rybnoe assorti*) served as appetizers may include thin slices of eel, mackerel, sturgeon, whitefish, turbot (*paltus*), shad, and salmon.

Other familiar fish are prepared by panfrying, broiling, or baking, such as salmon trout (*forel'*), carp (*sazan*), perch (*sudak* and *okun'*), cod (*navaga* and *nalim*), flounder, northern pike (*shchuka*), and catfish (*som*). Caviar, or fish eggs, is the product most often associated with Russia. The familiar dark or black caviar comes from three particular species of sturgeon: *beluga, osetra,* and *sevruga.* The larger, bright red-orange caviar is roe harvested from the Siberian salmon (*keta*). It is considerably less expensive than black caviar. Recently, trout roe has become a popular addition to the caviar line in Russia.

A family of freshwater fish, abundant in rivers, lakes, canals, and reservoirs, the roach fish (*vobla*) is perhaps the most humble yet emblematic Russian fish. Salted and dried, it is sold in every market. Paired with beer, it is analogous to the American combination of nuts and beer. Nothing promises a

better evening than several whole dried vobla laid out on a newspaper tablecloth.

It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of meat in the Russian diet. Whether meat is served as an entrée or an appetizer, or simply a frankfurter or a sausage, no meal is considered fully satisfying without some form of meat on the plate. Russia is among the world's leading producers, consumers, and importers of meat. Beef, pork, poultry, and mutton—in order of preference and consumption—constitute the primary protein types. Shish kebabs (*shashlyk*) are the ideal method for preparing any meat or poultry in Russia. Marinated meat threaded onto metal skewers is slowly grilled, roasted, and smoked over the gentle heat of charcoal embers.

In addition to shashlyk, beef is generally prepared as fried or baked individual cuts, as part of soups and stews, or as mincemeat for meatballs or various fillings. *Zharkoe* is a stew of roasted meat, potatoes, and vegetables, traditionally baked in small earthenware pots for hours on the Russian hearth. Sautéed ground beef patties, *kotlety,* are perhaps the most common meat dish. Ground beef is mixed with breadcrumbs and diced onions and panfried. *Frikadelki,* from the German *Frikadellen,* are small meatballs simmered in broth. Ground meat mixed with onions also creates the common fillings for *pirozhki* (dumplings), *golubtsy* (cabbage rolls), and *chebureki* (Crimean Tatar fried meat pies).

Internationally, Russia is probably best known for its sausages. Although the brunt of foreign jokes and derision, Russian *kolbasa* can rival the finest Italian salami and German wurst in quality. Sausage is generally made from both pork and beef. Rows of fresh sausages, liverwurst, frankfurters, and links fill store display cases. The most prevalent is the cured sausage—smoked, dried, or both. Ham (*vetchina*) is the most common cured pork product. Among the most flavorful, however, is *buzhenina,* salted and smoked pork loin. The Ukrainian love for pork has made its way into Russia in the form of *salo,* cured pork backfat.

The primary herbs in Russian cuisine are parsley and dill (*pertrushka* and *ukrop*). They are found on almost every table in a variety of guises: as a dish of whole stalks, an ingredient in most salads, an added flavor for soups and stews, and a garnish for these same dishes. Bay leaves and sweet paprika are often added to soups and stews. In making many Central Asian or Caucasian dishes, cilantro (fresh coriander) is essential. Seasonings are minimal; usually only salt and black or red (paprika) pepper are used in cooking and also found in shakers on the dining tables. Anise, allspice, cloves, cinnamon, and nutmeg are sparingly applied to some pastries and baked goods. Sweeteners traditionally include honey, jams, jellies, and dried or preserved fruits. The most common condiments are mayonnaise, sour cream, butter, vinegar, horseradish, mustard, ketchup, and a couple of Georgian spicy sauces. Mayonnaise is found in every sort of Russian salad, sometimes mixed with sour cream. Horseradish (*khren*) is grated and mixed with vinegar and served with meat dishes.

In marketing terms, Russia and vodka are inextricable. In reality, however, tea retains the title of the Russian national drink. Beer is the trendy and affordable beverage of choice of the younger generations, while traditional drinks such as *kvas* (made from fermented rye bread), *kisel'* (made from berries), *sbiten'* (made from honey and spices), and mead (*myod*) still hold an important, if not purely symbolic and nostalgic, place in Russian culinary thought and action. Tea (*chai*) is consumed at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. It is served in the afternoon and as a late-night drink. Russian tea, with lemon and sugar cubes, is served piping hot in porcelain cups with saucers or in glasses with metal holders. It is usually strong and well sweetened with sugar, or perhaps jam and honey. Everyone drinks tea. Even children learn from an early age to enjoy it, no doubt because it is often served with chocolate, candy, wafers, cookies, or other pastries.

## Cooking

The kitchen is the principal domestic space for a Russian woman. A great part of her day is spent at the market looking for products, preparing the raw ingredients, cooking, and cleaning. Without the convenience of electric kitchen appliances, Russian women exert tremendous effort in basic kitchen

preparation work. Despite the arrival of processed foods and semiprepared dishes in the 1990s, Russians have taken to them with caution. Whether they distrust foreign products or simply prefer to cook from scratch is open to debate, but the fact is that almost all food is still made at home using only fresh ingredients. This is a time-consuming task, one that only increases as the summer draws to an end. In addition to their daily workload of meal preparation, women are also expected to pickle and preserve fresh produce to last throughout the winter months. Fruits and vegetables are purchased at the height of the season to ensure the best price. Some are eaten fresh, but most are dried, pickled, or preserved.

The staples of the Russian pantry include flour, salt, sugar, and tea. Rice, macaroni, and cereal grains are common dry goods, the culinary term for all items that do not require refrigeration. As living space is always a rare commodity and refrigerators are exceedingly small, many apartment dwellers also use their balconies for food storage. With nine months of cool or cold weather a year, the balcony offers an ideal area for keeping overflow items. Freezer space is even smaller, and most families cycle through their fresh food supplies within a week. Russians forgo putting leftovers into Tupperware or other storage containers, instead placing the cookware or serving dish in the refrigerator.

As most people in the former Soviet Union live in apartments, the kitchen occupies a very small space in terms of total square footage. In the early years after the revolution of 1917, large city houses were transformed into communal apartments, where several families would share the residence, including a kitchen and bathroom. By the 1980s, after a tremendous two-decade-long effort to house its citizens, most of the Soviet population lived in single-family apartments. The standard kitchen equipment is a sink, a gas stove, and a small refrigerator. Most of the preparatory work is done on the kitchen table since counter space is limited or nonexistent. Some wealthy families have added dishwashers if space permits, but in general, all dishes are washed by hand.

The brilliance of Russian women lies in their ability to produce delicious and healthful food with crude cookware and shoddy supplies. The most indispensable kitchen tool in the Russian kitchen is the manual meat grinder. It is used to make ground beef and fillings for pies and pastries. The main cookware generally includes a large stockpot for soup, a cast iron skillet for fried foods, a tea kettle, and perhaps a baking dish. Knives, also made of aluminum or soft steel, quickly dull, no doubt because they also function as a hammer and can opener. Spatulas and cooking utensils are either wood or aluminum. Daily dishware is simple, and the fine china is brought out only for special occasions.

## Typical Meals

The quintessential Russian lunch or dinner contains bread, soup, and hot tea. Bread is required at every meal and is placed on a plate or in a basket in the middle of the table and covered with a cloth or paper napkin. At the end of the meal, tea is regularly offered in china cups with saucers.

Breakfast can be as modest as bread and tea, or as elaborate as yesterday's dinner leftovers such as salads, pickles, fish, and cold cuts. More often than not, most Russians enjoy a simple open-faced sandwich of cheese, ham, or salami with hot tea and a boiled or fried egg. Coffee, generally instant, is also popular, and serving juice in the morning has been on the rise in recent years. Consumption of fermented dairy drinks such as kefir (fermented milk) and *prostokvasha* (sour milk) generally correlates to the age of the individual. Boiled eggs, omelets, and fried eggs are some of the more familiar offerings. Also exceedingly common, especially for children, is some sort of hot cereal, such as kasha—oatmeal, rice pudding, cream of wheat, and buckwheat. Among the first choices for sweet offerings are tvorog (farmer's cheese) mixed with sour cream and sugar and three types of pancakes—*syrniki* (made with tvorog), bliny (thin), and *olad'i* (thicker). Still, day in and day out, the overwhelming majority of Russians simply have tea and bread for breakfast, perhaps accompanied by cheese or tvorog.

Lunch generally occurs around noon on weekdays and may be served as late as two o'clock on the weekends. Many people eat lunch at work since numerous large companies and institutions have their

own cafeterias. In some new, more prosperous offices, lunch is catered. Since women often work outside the home, few men go home for lunch even if they have the opportunity. Lunch usually consists of soup as a first course (*pervoe*); a protein (meat or poultry), a starch (potatoes, rice, pasta), and a salad, sometimes with *kompot* (a dried or fresh fruit infusion) to drink, as the second course (*vtoroe*); and tea and dessert as the common third course (*tret'e*).

Dinner is served around seven in the evening, after people have had time to come home from work. The mother, or a grandmother if she lives with the family, prepares the meal. Generally it follows the same pattern as lunch: soup, a meat dish and a starchy side, finished off with tea and something sweet for dessert. The ubiquitous bread basket adds bulk and calories to the meal. Potatoes—boiled, mashed, fried, or part of a salad—serve the same satisfying function. The usual condiments for pork, beef, or chicken are ketchup, mustard, or horseradish. Hot dogs, without a bun, are a common dish, with green peas, potatoes, macaroni, or rice served on the side.

Common salads include "vinegret" or the Russian salad (*oliv'ye*) of boiled and diced potatoes and carrots, peas, pickles, and chicken, mixed with mayonnaise. Beets in oil with a hint of garlic make a superb salad, side dish, or garnish. The most universal salad, however, is made from freshly shredded cabbage, perhaps with carrots or a touch of onion, dressed with oil or mayonnaise. Fermented cabbage in salt, less stringent than sauerkraut, is made at home and always ready for the table. Cabbage can also be the primary ingredient for filling savory pies (pirogi) or smaller baked pastries (pirozhki). Mushrooms, when in season, are equally adaptable, being served as the main course, used for fillings, or eaten pickled. The most familiar appetizers are dill pickles and lightly brined cucumbers, but any pickled vegetable can stand in. Cheese, sardines, smoked fish, or cold cuts are the standby appetizers (*zakuski*) on a daily basis. The vegetable menu is generally limited to cabbage, cucumbers, tomatoes, beets, cauliflower, squash, and eggplant.

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### Potato and Mushroom Pirozhki

Pirozhki (sing. *pirozhok*) are the smaller, individual-sized cousins of the larger Russian savory pies, pirogi. Pirozhki are a baked or fried dough with any number of fillings. They may be served with soup and stews or eaten as a snack or appetizer. Some of the more common contents are meat, mushrooms, buckwheat, potatoes, liver, cheese, eggs, and cabbage.

#### Filling

6 small potatoes

1 large onion, medium dice

1 lb mushrooms, chopped

6 tbsp butter

3 tbsp tvorog or thick yogurt

3 tbsp dill, chopped

Salt and black pepper to taste

#### Dough

3 c all-purpose flour

½ tsp baking powder

½ tsp salt

1½ sticks butter

3 egg yolks

½ c sour cream

1 tbsp water

#### To Make Potato Filling

Peel and cut potatoes evenly into large cubes. Boil in salted water until tender. In a separate pan, sauté onions and mushrooms in 4 tablespoons butter. Combine potatoes with tvorog and mash in 2 tablespoons butter, leaving the potato mixture chunky. Mix with sautéed onions, mushrooms, and dill. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

#### To Make Dough

Mix flour, baking powder, salt, and butter until the dough is mealy. Whisk 2 egg yolks and the sour cream together. Add the liquid to the flour mixture until it forms a rich dough. Chill the dough for at least one hour.

Preheat oven to 375°F. Flatten a piece of dough to make a 3-inch circle. Put a tablespoon of filling in the center. Press the edges together to seal them, creating a football shape. Place the pirozhok on a

buttered cookie sheet, seam side down. Make an egg wash with the remaining egg yolk and water and brush on pirozhki with a pastry brush. Bake in the upper third of the oven for 15–20 minutes or until golden brown. Serve while still warm.

## Eating Out

Once stereotyped as the land of shortages and sausage queues, Russia now presents an exceptional opportunity to explore dining out as an intersection of economics and culture, of consumption and national identity. From white-tablecloth restaurants to cafeterias to street food, the culinary influences of Russia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia play off each other to create a dynamic restaurant scene. Eating out in Russia is a major event—fun, fascinating, and full of surprises, mostly pleasing ones.



Big plate with red and black caviar, seafood, and vegetables at a Russian restaurant. (iStockPhoto)

The types of restaurants in Russia can be roughly divided into a few sectors: exclusive restaurants and private clubs, international cuisine, fast-food chains and cafés, restaurant chains, independent midrange restaurants, and, the latest arrivals, coffee shops and beer halls. After European and American businesses' initial entry into the market, Russian companies quickly countered to dominate urban offerings. Prevailing trends include more midrange restaurants for the ever-expanding middle class, while new fast-food outlets are offering more Russian dishes in response to market demand. Restaurants are also an attractive area of investment for successful Russian businessmen seeking to diversify their holdings. International cuisine ranges from typical European fare (Italian and French) to the Asian options of Chinese, Japanese, Thai, and even Tibetan.

Russian restaurant menus follow a typical format: cold appetizers, hot appetizers, a first course (usually soup), a second or main course, garnitures or side dishes, and desserts. An extensive list of alcoholic beverages is common, including vodka, Crimean wine, brandy, and champagne. Whiskey, gin, and beer and wine from abroad are making major inroads into the beverage market. Many menus even contain sections for cigarettes and cigars.

Until recently, menus varied little. The meal begins with zakuski, literally "small bites," which are both hot and cold hors d'oeuvres. The cold appetizers often include sturgeon black caviar and salmon red caviar, pickled and fresh vegetables, a dish of assorted smoked or cured fish, assorted cold cuts, mushrooms, and beef tongue with horseradish.

The first course (pervoe) is invariably a hot soup of borscht, cabbage soup (shchi), or boiled dumplings in broth (pelmeni). Main courses of beef, pork, chicken, lamb, and fish—baked, boiled, braised, or fried—are most common. Desserts in a typical restaurant may include fresh fruit or berries, ice cream, and a pastry or two. Sponge cake and simple chocolate candies are also fairly common. Tea and coffee are served as the final course.

## Special Occasions

Ask Russians what their favorite celebrations are, and the answer varies little: New Year's, May Day

holidays, and birthdays. For children, the birthday party is the most important festive occasion of the year, rivaled only by New Year's. Even during the Communist reign of the 20th century, religiously devout people in the Soviet Union celebrated their holidays, be it Easter, Ramadan, or Passover. Religious holidays have now rebounded, yet many secular Soviet ones remain deeply embedded, too. The Russian Orthodox Church still retains the older Julian calendar system to mark the main periods of feasting and fasting. Christmas, therefore, is celebrated on January 7; it is second only to Easter in religious significance.

The typical Russian celebratory meal requires much planning and preparation. The region is well acquainted with famine and hardship, and consequently feasts are intensely appreciated. Finding all the necessary ingredients, not to mention budgeting for them, demands great sacrifice and scheduling. The hosts of a family celebration may spend a week or more getting ready for the big day. The hosts intend not only to impress their guests but also to ensure an unforgettable experience. The table, decorated with a white tablecloth, is usually wholly covered with small plates of appetizers (zakuski), salads, cold cuts, pickled vegetables, and bread. Selections of vodka, wine, or champagne are proudly displayed. The finest crystal and china, usually stored in the living-room cabinets, are dusted and shined for maximum pageantry. Once everyone is seated, a glass is raised in honor of the host or honored guest. Diners help themselves to the hors d'oeuvres, and the plates are passed family style. The evening is often a noisy affair as dishes clang, music or television drones in the background, conversation builds, and more toasts are offered and accepted. A main hot course follows the toasts. Hot tea with dessert completes the evening.

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***Grechnevye Bliny* (Russian Buckwheat Pancakes/Crepes)**

2 c buckwheat flour

4 c milk

1½ packages dry active yeast

2 tbsp sugar

5 eggs, separated

4 tbsp unsalted butter, melted

1 tsp salt

2 c all-purpose flour

Mix buckwheat flour with 1 cup cold milk. Then stir 2 cups of warm milk into the flour mixture. Mix in the yeast and only ½ teaspoon of the sugar. Cover and set aside in a warm place for 30 minutes. Blend the egg yolks with the remaining sugar, melted butter, salt, and all-purpose flour until smooth, and add to the buckwheat mixture. Adjust consistency with remaining milk. Cover and set aside for 45 minutes. Fold whipped egg whites into the batter a little bit at a time. Drop 2–3 tablespoons of batter onto a hot, buttered skillet. Cook for 1½ minutes; flip and cook other side for 30–60 seconds. Serve with the usual garnishes of sour cream, fish, jam, caviar, tvorog, and so forth.

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Maslenitsa has become the Russian equivalent of Fat Tuesday or Mardi Gras, the pre-Lenten festival of Shrove Tuesday, arriving in February or March, depending on the Easter date. In general, Maslenitsa is a holiday of gluttony and excess that dates to the pre-Christian era. The pancake (*blin*) represents the sun, and dozens of bliny are consumed throughout the week. Bliny are eaten with liberal amounts of butter, sour cream, caviar, smoked fish, and jams. They are made with buckwheat or wheat flour, or a mixture of both, with yeast or baking soda as the leavening agent. Orthodox Christianity adopted this holiday, and it was given an additional meaning as the last week before Lent.

During the seven decades of the Communist experiment, all holidays celebrated the glory of labor as well as specific professions, special days of Communist history, and memorials to war, particularly World War II. The grandest of contemporary holidays in Russia is New Year's Eve, which has become a combination of the Christmas and the Western New Year's holidays. New Year's is considered a family holiday, and the table features all the favorite and traditional Russian dishes, including a wide array of appetizers, salads, and bread. A standard




Perestroika allowed western companies to venture into Russia. McDonald's was a huge success when it opened in Moscow on January 31, 1990. (Hulton Archive | Getty Images)

menu often includes red and black caviar, *salat oliv'ye, salat vinegret,* trays of assorted smoked fish and cold cuts, and pickled cucumbers and other brined vegetables. By the time the main course arrives, hunger has long since passed. Dessert and tea are obligatory at the end of every festive meal, and New Year's is no exception. The meal usually runs up to and beyond the stroke of midnight. Right before the clock strikes 12 at midnight, a toast with vodka, wine, or brandy is raised to the old year—an appreciative farewell. The first toast of the new year is made with champagne, proclaiming, "With the new year comes new happiness" (*s novym godom, s novym schast'em*).

## Diet and Health

In Russia, food is not only treated as a source of nourishment and fuel but also valued for its preventative and curative role. Eating healthfully keeps a body fit and free of disease. Should they fall ill, Russians have numerous cures using a wide range of foods and medicinal herbs. The variety, purity, and freshness of food in Russia unfortunately are not enough to ensure proper health. Despite the conscious and continual efforts of mothers, wives, and grandmothers to feed and care for their families, health has generally deteriorated since 2000. Food, however, is only one part of the equation for good health.

Russians have several health-related problems in common: a short life expectancy, cardiovascular disease, and general nutritional deficiencies, as well as high rates of tobacco and alcohol use. Specific nutritional problems include the lack of affordability of certain healthful and essential food items, the suspect quality of some foodstuffs, and the absence of public awareness of what constitutes a healthful and balanced diet. Much of the overall decline in health, without a doubt, may be attributed to the social and economic disruptions since 1991. The Soviet experiment can be credited with improving the general diet of the lowest economic classes but not until well into the 1960s.

Quantity and freshness have priority over quality and finesse on the Russian table. Although restaurants and cafés are numerous in the big cities, hearty homemade meals are the ideal both in the countryside and in urban areas. A well-balanced meal should have a main course of fish or meat for flair, a starch (potatoes, pasta, or rice) for energy, and vegetables (often in the form of a cooked vegetable salad) for vitamins. Soup and tea are the bookends of a meal. Dessert would make it complete in the minds of most Russians. At least one hot meal a day is crucial to maintaining good digestion and health. Lunch, according to an earlier Russian tradition, was the main meal of the day. A light lunch is usually taken at work. The daily menu of most Russian families includes a meat or sausage dish. Therefore, the typical diet is very high in protein and animal fat, mostly from low-quality processed, smoked, or cured meats. Most people consume dairy products (usually fermented) daily, including cheese, dairy drinks (kefir, prostokvasha, *ryazhenka*), farmer's cheese (tvorog), and, more recently, yogurt. The most common vegetables are potatoes, cabbage, onions, tomatoes, and cucumbers. Vegetables are almost always cooked (and often overcooked), except for tomatoes, cucumbers, and radishes, which are used in fresh salads.

*Glenn R. Mack and Asele Surina*

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# Saami

## Overview

The Saami are an indigenous people of northern Scandinavia. The names *Sami, Sàmi, Saame,* and *Lapp* have all been used to describe the Saami, although the last of these is considered derogative. There are nine different recognized Saami languages, which fall into three main groups—eastern Saami, central Saami, and southern Saami—and are all of the Finno-Ugric language family. The Saami call the territory they live in Sapmi; it is sometimes referred to as Lapland or Fennoscandia. It spans four countries (northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula of Russia) and is part of the Arctic Circle. Sapmi is not officially recognized by the nation-states within which it exists. There are strong indications that the Saami have lived and managed resources in this territory for at least 2,000 years. There are approximately 70,000 Saami: 35,000 in Norway, 17,000 in Sweden (2,000 in Stockholm), 5,000 in Finland, and 2,000 in Russia. There are also Saami living in Canada and the United States. Rights to resources and land continue to shape the food culture of the Saami.

The Saami have developed a cuisine linked strongly to nature. The conditions in which the diet has evolved include a harsh arctic environment, where winters are cold, snow covers the land most of the year, and the sun is absent for two months in the far north. The Saami are commonly known as reindeer herders, and traditionally this along with hunting and fishing has been the primary food activity of the Saami. For centuries the Saami have led a seminomadic lifestyle following reindeer on their seasonal migrations, but today fewer Saami are herding.

In contemporary society many Saami live in modern housing and have access to a variety of foods and cooking methods, and often their eating habits are influenced by the cuisines of the dominant countries as well as the impact of globalization on agriculture and food production. Yet tradition still plays a key role in defining a specifically Saami food culture, and often those who lead a more urban lifestyle still have links to Sapmi and their cultural heritage.

## Food Culture Snapshot

A typical Saami family will differ in what they buy to eat depending on where they live and their occupation. A Saami family living in the urban environment of Stockholm has all the conveniences and variety of foods that large European cities offer. This family would typically shop and eat in a similar way to other non-Saami living in Stockholm. A typical reindeer-herding family, in contrast, has stocks of reindeer meat to eat daily. The meat is obtained from their reindeer and is eaten fresh after slaughter, and the rest is preserved. After the slaughter period, the family relies on stores of frozen and dried or smoked reindeer meat throughout the year. Reindeer herders are generally self-sufficient with supplies of reindeer meat, elk, and fish, but they will buy in other supplies such as potatoes, onions, salt, coffee, sugar, barley, milk, and flour. Reindeer meat can be bought in supermarkets throughout Sapmi and large cities in Norway, Sweden, and Finland; it is

usually bought in frozen slices to be made into sautéed reindeer or reindeer stew.

In coastal areas fish are either caught or bought directly from fishermen or frozen from a supermarket. In the past many Saami who fished also farmed, which provided a good supply of vegetables and dairy for their diet. Today, many foods that are available in large international cities in Scandinavia can also be bought in supermarkets in the north, but sometimes prices are high.

## Major Foodstuffs

The landscape of Sapmi is environmentally varied, and because it spans four countries, it is also culturally varied. Changes in the dietary staples correspond to the environmental and cultural changes in territory. The Saami diet has traditionally been high in animal protein and fat, and low in carbohydrates. Reindeer-herding Saami still have a diet characterized in this way. Many other Saami have adopted a diet similar to that of the Scandinavian countries they live in. There is a commonly held assumption that reindeer meat forms the basis of protein consumption among the Saami; however, for many, protein is obtained from fish as well, especially for the people living in coastal areas, who get most of their protein from fish. The protein intake of the urban population is more balanced between fish and meat. Inland Saami consume meat, predominantly reindeer, as their main source of protein.

Reindeer meat is a central component of the Saami food culture and is symbolic for the culture as a whole. Even though not all Saami consume it today, reindeer meat is a dietary staple for reindeer herders and many other Saami. Currently only 10 percent of Saami make their living from reindeer herding, yet it is considered an important industry, since reindeer are well suited to the arctic environment and provide the main meat source here. The Saami have undertaken nomadic reindeer herding since the early 1600s; prior to this time, instead of herding, they hunted reindeer. Today, many herders use modern technology such as helicopters and snowmobiles to manage their herds, which has significantly changed the food culture associated with a nomadic life. Reindeer herding is an exclusive Saami right in Sweden and Norway but not in Finland. In Russia, where approximately two and a half million of the world's three million reindeer live, many different indigenous groups undertake reindeer herding. Even though a large population of Saami lives in cities (Stockholm has the greatest concentration, with 2,000 Saami living there), people living in cities often have links to relatives who herd reindeer. In traditional practices the entire reindeer is used: Skins and furs can be used for clothes; the flesh, innards, marrow, blood, bones, milk, and linings for food; and bones for implements.

Many of the coastal waters, in particular, the Atlantic Ocean and Barents Sea, offer a rich source of fish that Saami and non-Saami both eat. Fishing was once a means of subsistence, but today, many Saami who live along the coast are employed outside of the fishing industry. Salmon, trout, char, whitefish, grayling, burbot, pike, and cod are all commonly eaten. Inland, there are many lakes, rivers, and marshes, which also provide a rich source of fish. The Tenojoki and Tornionjoki rivers offer a good source of salmon, a fish commonly found in the Saami cuisine. In traditional practices roe from freshwater fish are dried and then used by soaking them in water when needed. In the past fish offered more than just food for many Saami, who in the Middle Ages often paid their taxes using dried fish.

Due to climatic conditions agriculture is extremely difficult in Sapmi territory. However, attempts have been made by Norway, Sweden, and Finland since the mid-1600s to promote agriculture in the north. At best, the growing season is 110–120 days when the temperature is above 41 degrees Fahrenheit (5 degrees Celsius): Short, warm summers with six weeks of continuous sunshine allow some crops, mainly barley, potatoes, oats, turnips, and fodder, to grow. Any other cereals, such as wheat, must be brought in. Potatoes continue to form a major dietary staple for coastal, inland, and urban Saami. Most Saami who have been farmers in coastal Norway and northern Finland learned quickly to rely on a mixed economy and also undertook hunting, fishing, and berry picking, or today buy foods from supermarkets to supplement their subsistence.

Traditionally, fruit and vegetables have not featured heavily in the meals of the Saami. Potatoes, some root vegetables, sorrel, and angelica have complemented meat and fish. Berries have always offered the Saami a good local source of vitamins and minerals and have been a major element of the diet. Berries such as the cloudberry, lingonberry, bilberry, and crowberry continue to be used and are also a source of income. Berries harvested and consumed include the lingonberry, crowberry, blueberry, bog whortleberry, cloudberry, cranberry, rowanberry, raspberry, juniper berry, wild strawberry, bilberry, and arctic bramble. Today, globalization has led to an increased variety of fruit and vegetables available and consumed throughout Scandinavia.

Milk from reindeer was used traditionally to supplement meat and fish as a protein source. Reindeer milk can be made into cheese and used in cooking, and it can be mixed with cloudberries and frozen to form a type of ice cream that preserves both the cloudberries and the milk. It is a good clotting agent and traditionally is used in a dish called *juobmo* (*juopmu*), which combined sorrel with reindeer milk to form a thick souplike dish. Today, joubmo is sometimes made using cow milk and sweetened with sugar and served as a dessert. Today, the milking of reindeer is not common. The movement toward agriculture in the 1950s resulted in a small economy of cow and goat milk in parts of northern Norway and Finland. The Saami through much of the 20th century used goat and cow milk.

Coffee is a major beverage for most Saami; it is consumed in large quantities and is typically very strong. Reindeer herders survive long hours looking after reindeer by drinking coffee. Coffee was traditionally and sometimes still is served with reindeer cheese instead of milk.

## Cooking

Today, most Saami live in modern housing, and cooking is done in modern kitchens. Equipment, cooking methods, and access to foods reflect a Scandinavian lifestyle. Traditional Saami society was based on the *siida* system. The siida consisted of a number of families working together to procure food. The traditional Saami kitchen is part of the *goatte,* a tepee-like construction. The hearth is in the center of the area, and a cauldron is suspended from the roof. The smoking of meat sometimes takes place here. Men and women both undertake cooking activities. Traditionally, women were in charge of baking the bread and the overall preparation of daily household meals, and men were in charge of preserving and boiling meat. Today, men largely do the reindeer herding and husbandry, and women tend to manage activities surrounding the household.

Fire plays an important role in traditional Saami cooking. A stone slab or wooden board is placed by the fire for baking bread or cheese bread and for grilling fish. Thin cheese bread is made with cheese and potato and is eaten either hot with cloudberries or cold with hot coffee.

**"Cheese Bread"**

**Ingredients**

2 gal unpasteurized milk

1 tbsp potato flour

1 tbsp salt

1 tbsp liquid rennet

**Method**

Heat the unpasteurized milk to 100°F. Mix potato flour with a small amount of milk, and add with salt and rennet to the heated milk. Stir for 1–1½ minutes, and leave to curdle for about ½ hour. Make a few slits in the curd with a ladle or long knife and leave for 10 minutes to let the whey rise to the surface. Then break the mixture up into small pieces and let stand to allow the whey to collect on the surface. Skim off the whey.

When the curds have formed a cake of cheese, pour onto a wooden cheese board with holes in it, to allow the whey to drain. Bake the curds at 500°F until the surface turns a speckled brown. Turn the cheese over onto a second cheese board, and bake the other side the same way.



A Saami woman cooking over an open fire in Lapland, Finland. (StockPhotoPro)

Pots and frying pans are useful utensils in Saami cooking because of the large amount of boiling and frying done. Reindeer meat is most commonly boiled or fried. Thin frozen pieces of reindeer meat are often fried in a saucepan with brown sauce. A more traditional method still practiced today is carving thin slices from a frozen shoulder and frying them in a saucepan over a fire or on a stovetop.

Preserving plays a big part in Saami food preparation. Reindeer meat, fish, and sometimes cheese are smoked, salted, dried, or frozen. Historically, preserving has been necessary to provide food supplies throughout the year. Today, many households have freezers where meat can be stored, but in the past the low temperatures and snow provided a natural freezer. Meat is often smoked or dried in small hutlike constructions off the ground and outside the house or on drying racks. Dried reindeer meat is commonly taken to eat while herding reindeer. Dried meat is also boiled with barley to make a soup. Blood is boiled or made into sausages occasionally. Entrails from reindeer and fish are more commonly boiled than fried.

Spoons used for eating porridge, soup, or milk-based foods are traditionally part of the Saami kitchen. They are made from either silver or antlers, and they are typically shaped with a wide curve and uniquely decorated. Other traditional kitchen utensils include a reindeer-milking bowl; a coffee-carrying bag; a brass coffeepot; and a cauldron or pot.

## Typical Meals

Defining a typical Saami meal and eating pattern today is difficult since many Saami live like the rest of the population in Norway, Sweden, Finland, or Russia, and there are also regional and seasonal differences in Saami meals. On the coast, fish is the main component of daily meals and is often accompanied by potatoes. Meat is more widely available

today, but traditionally in northern coastal Norway it was reserved for holidays and Sundays. Porridge was a typical meal well into the 20th century, sometimes cooked with berries. In the Kola Peninsula of Russia, for breakfast, some Saami eat salted or smoked fish, or sometimes fish mashed with berries to form a type of porridge. Fish is a major part of a meal in the summer and spring for Saami who herd reindeer. Salmon, arctic char, whitefish, trout, and pike are cooked, poached, or fried for dinner and also smoked or salted. It is common to find coffee brewing on the stove or fire for consumption throughout the day.

Saami who eat reindeer meat as their main protein source often eat it daily. The way it is consumed changes with the seasons. After slaughtering, the meat is eaten fresh, and then it is frozen, dried, or smoked. Reindeer meat is often accompanied by potatoes, berries, or barley and is either sautéed or boiled and made into a soup or gruel. A typical meal, especially for herders, is sautéed reindeer. It is often served with lingonberries or cowberries and mashed potato.

**Sautéed Reindeer**

**Ingredients**

Butter or oil for frying

Reindeer, thinly sliced (This is easier when the meat is frozen. Reindeer can be bought in frozen pieces or shaved off a frozen shoulder piece.)

Water or beer

Mashed potatoes

Lingonberry jam (available in Ikea) or crushed cowberries in sugar

**Method**

Melt butter or oil in a pan. (Reindeer was traditionally sautéed in reindeer fat.) Add the reindeer slices, and stir so that the meat does not stick together. Put the lid on, and simmer until cooked. Add some water or beer to the pan at the end, and let reduce to a sauce. Serve with mashed potatoes and berry jam.

## Eating Out

The practice of eating out that is typical throughout much of North America and western Europe today is not part of traditional Saami food culture. Historically, eating out was more likely to involve communal eating as part of the siida system that organized nomadic existence.

Saami living in major cities like Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Helsinki have access to a wide range of dining options from typical Western fast-food venues like McDonald's to the many lunchtime restaurants of Sweden. Similarly, large towns across the northernmost parts of Scandinavia offer a wide range of restaurants serving everything from Nordic fare and pizza to Thai food, a more recent arrival. Traditional Saami foods are also easy to come by in many towns and cities across the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, and Finland. Some restaurants and cafés serve typical national dishes alongside local Saami dishes, with reindeer featuring heavily on the menu. There are also many tourist attractions surrounding Saami food, such as eating traditional meals in a goatte, or reindeer herding, fishing, or hunting; however, there is controversy over the authenticity of some of these attractions and the benefit to Saami people.

## Special Occasions

There are many festivals, holidays, and events in modern Saami culture. Saami and non-Saami share some special occasions, like midsummer, Easter, and Christmas. There are other occasions that are particular to the Saami culture, such as the Saami National Day on February 6. Food is a part of celebrating all of these occasions.

Many special occasions celebrated by the Saami relate to the seasons and nature. Easter is especially important since it marks the change in seasons from the harsh winter months. The time of the year when the reindeer are slaughtered also marks a special occasion when fresh meat is eaten. The bone marrow along with the tongue has for a long time been considered a delicacy. After the reindeer are slaughtered fresh meat is boiled with the bones, and the

marrow is eaten. The liver is also eaten at this time, along with blood balls, which consist of milk, flour, blood, and salt.

## Diet and Health

The Saami belief system is heavily linked to nature and features shamanism and the use of medicinal plants. Today, however, shamanism is not commonly practiced, and most Saami rely on the national health system. The World Health Organization acknowledges that many indigenous populations, including the Saami, often have a higher risk of health problems, and this is partly due to social inequalities. In the case of the Saami, sociopolitical rights are closely linked to territory and resources and thus to food and health. Resources and rights to land have been issues at the heart of reindeer herding, fishing, and hunting for centuries. The outcomes for Saami people today are different in the different countries. Policies relating to the Saami have influenced their diet and well-being through herding and hunting restrictions, land disputes, and cultural oppression.

The Saami traditionally have a diet high in animal protein and fat and low in carbohydrates. Fruit and vegetable intake is low even compared with Swedish and Norwegian populations, who are already known to consume low quantities. This type of diet is contrary to most national dietary recommendations, yet there are reported low levels of coronary heart disease in Saami populations who live off a more traditional diet; it is suggested this could be partly due to a high diet of reindeer meat. Reindeer meat has high levels of α-tocopherol and selenium and has a fatty acid composition likely to aid cardiovascular protection. Berries have high levels of vitamins and minerals and are important in areas where the sun does not rise for some months of the year.

Environmental pollutants affect the food chain that many Saami rely on. A major health problem occurred in 1986 after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Dangerous radioactive substances were scattered across parts of Europe, including Scandinavia. Lichens, which form the basis of the reindeer diet, absorbed high levels of radioactive substances and in return had a major impact on the Saami diet and reindeer consumption. The Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program has recorded a decline in radioactive substances caused by past nuclear disasters but is concerned about other pollution risks in the arctic food chain.

*Kate Johnston*

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# Scotland

## Overview

Scotland, a part of the United Kingdom, covers 30,414 square miles (78,772 square kilometers) of land and encompasses roughly 6,214 miles (10,000 kilometers) of coastline, 2,423 miles (3,900 kilometers) of which constitute the mainland coast. Geographically, Scotland can be divided into roughly three main regions: the Highlands, the Central Lowlands, and the Southern Lowlands. Scotland also includes upward of 800 islands, with 130 of them inhabited. The Shetland and Orkney Islands to the northeast, and the Inner and Outer Hebrides to the west, include most of the populated islands. Glasgow and Edinburgh are Scotland's largest cities and centers of government and culture. Of its 5,116,900 inhabitants, roughly 1.2 million reside in the Greater Glasgow metropolitan area, and almost 500,000 reside in Edinburgh.

Geography and climate historically have played a significant role in the Scottish diet. Rivers and the coastline supply countless varieties of fish, seafood, and edible seaweeds; the Highlands supply game as well as the barley for hundreds of whiskey distilleries; the southwestern region is known for its dairy farming; and the Lowlands supply much of the nation's soft fruits and vegetables.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Ron, Sarah, and their four-year-old daughter Fiona live in the town of Peebles in the Scottish Borders. Ron is a veterinarian, and his wife, a former schoolteacher, stays at home to care for Fiona. Their diet and eating habits are representative of middle-class, educated Scots.

Ron and Sarah start their day at 7 A.M., with porridge or a bowl of cold cereal, bananas, toast and butter, and hot tea. Their daughter usually prefers a soft-boiled egg, toast "soldiers" (strips of toast) to dip in the yolk, and a mug of warm milk. The family typically eats breakfast together before Ron leaves for his practice around 7:45. At 10 A.M., Ron often takes a short break to enjoy a cup of tea with his assistants before returning to his rounds. Sarah likewise often enjoys a midmorning break, taking her daughter with her to a local coffee shop where she meets with other young mothers and their children. While Sarah drinks a mug of coffee and talks to friends, Fiona has a hot cocoa and biscuit (cookie). Around noon, Ron takes a 45-minute lunch break, often eating a cheese and cucumber, or cheese and cress, sandwich that he brings from home, along with a bag of crisps (potato chips) and an apple. He drinks a half-liter of mineral water with his meal. Sarah eats a similar meal at home with Fiona.

Sarah begins dinner preparation around 4 P.M., often making two meals: one for her daughter and one for her and her husband. Like many families, they refer to their dinner meal as "tea" unless they are having a rare "dinner party" later in the evening for friends. Fiona likes many of the foods her parents have later for their dinner, including mashed potatoes with butter, roast chicken, macaroni and cheese, or pasta with cream sauce and peas, but oftentimes Sarah prepares a simple tea for her daughter of porridge and milk with bananas, or toasted cheese and ham with carrot sticks and applesauce. The family generally avoids sweets, but on special occasions, Sarah might make a pudding (a generic

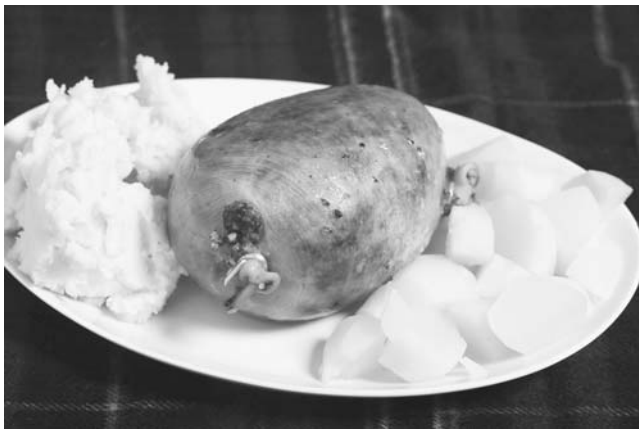
word for a dessert) or buy a pastry from a favorite baker and give her daughter a small serving. Raspberry tart is Fiona's favorite.

Fiona's tea is at 5:30, and while she eats, Sarah prepares the rest of her and Ron's dinner, often cooking the main dish in the oven and keeping it warm until their teatime around 6:30, after Ron has returned home and the two have had a moment to sit down for a glass of wine while talking and watching Fiona play. They eat a green salad almost every night and follow it with a main dish such as pasta and mushrooms, lentil soup, grilled lamb chops with sautéed spinach, or roast chicken with carrots and potatoes. When Ron and Sarah entertain friends for dinner, they start with an aperitif and an appetizer such as pâté and French bread in the living room around 7:00, and then proceed to their formal dining room for a more elaborate meal that will include a soup, a salad, a main dish, and pudding. Sarah's favorite company dish is baked salmon with a teriyaki glaze and rice pilaf, along with fresh-steamed Asian vegetables, particularly snow peas and bok choy. To commemorate his family's Highland heritage, Ron likes to follow such dinners by serving *cranachan,* oftentimes considered Scotland's national dessert: a parfait-like concoction made with a soft cheese called crowdie, sweetened lightly with heather honey, accented with malt whiskey and toasted oatmeal, and folded in with fresh raspberries. Coffee, whiskey, and a cheese selection with oatcakes follow.

For reasons of health and economy, Ron and Sarah limit eating out to three to four times a month, often traveling into Edinburgh to take in the lively restaurant scene. Italian or Indian restaurants are Ron and Sarah's favorite choices. When Ron is particularly late at his practice or Sarah has volunteer work, Ron will sometimes stop at their neighborhood fish-and-chip shop to pick up a fish supper (fish, chips, and peas) for the sake of convenience.

## Major Foodstuffs

In spite of its small geographic size, Scotland's numerous microclimates and landscapes result in an extraordinary diversity of raw foodstuffs, many of which are exported throughout the United Kingdom and Europe and also find their way into Scotland's most famous specialties. Scotland's mild summers allow for optimal production of both barley and oats. Barley has been Scotland's main cereal crop since Neolithic times; the Romans are thought to have introduced oats. Roughly 35 percent of the country's barley is malted for whiskey production, while 55 percent is used for animal feed. In remote areas, including the Highlands and Orkney, some people still use barley flour to make bread, and Orkney is known for its *bere*-meal bannocks, a griddle cake or scone made with a variety of barley known as bere. Oats remain a popular staple throughout Scotland, with many older people eating slow-cooked porridge with milk and a dash of salt for breakfast and oatcakes with cheese for a snack. Younger people often eat instant porridge, made by emptying a serving-size packet of oats into a bowl and heating it in the microwave with water. Oats are used to make drop scones (pancakes), *skirlie* (fried oatmeal and onions), and bannocks and are a key ingredient in several of Scotland's best-known dishes, particularly haggis, a savory blend of sheep's pluck (heart, liver, and/or lungs) and oatmeal boiled in a sheep's stomach or, more likely today, in a synthetic casing. Oatmeal is also an ingredient of black pudding (a sausage of oats, suet, spices, and pork blood) and white, or mealy, pudding (a sausage of oats, suet, spices, and onion). Although wheat production is limited in Scotland because of the climate, many



A cooked haggis with diced turnips and mashed potatoes—the traditional "tatties and neeps" of a Burns supper. (Shutterstock)

Scots prefer breads, cakes, pies, and biscuits made of wheat flour.

**Oatmeal Biscuits**

1 c unbleached white flour

½ tsp sugar

½ tsp salt

¼ tsp baking powder

1 c old-fashioned rolled oats

5 tbsp vegetable shortening

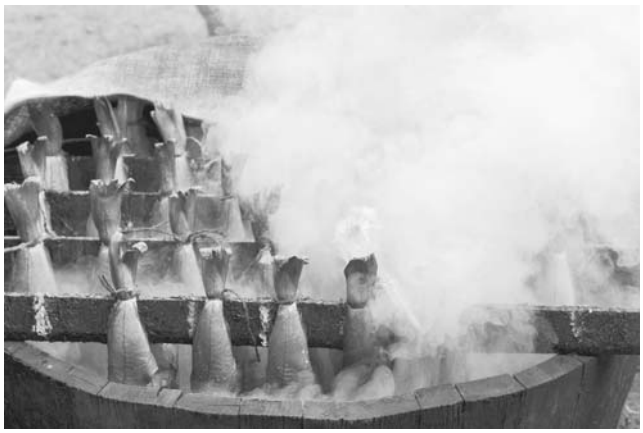
¼ c heavy cream

Water to mix

Preheat oven to 400°F. Sift the flour, sugar, salt, and baking powder together in a large bowl. Add oats. Add vegetable shortening. Rub the shortening into the flour and oats. Add heavy cream, and stir lightly. Add ice water until dough is pliable but still stiff. Roll out to 1/8 inch thick. Prick dough all over with fork tines. Cut into squares, and place on a greased baking tray. Bake approximately 12 minutes until brown and crisp. Best topped with butter and a dollop of jelly or marmalade or served with Scottish cheeses.

Scotland's rivers, lochs (lakes), and coasts provide some of the highest-quality fish and seafood in the world. The nation is best known for its salmon, trout, herring, langoustines, oysters, and mussels. Scotland's Arbroath smokies (smoked haddock) have been awarded Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status by the European Commission (meaning the name is legally protected) and are highly sought after by locals and food connoisseurs alike. Several varieties of seaweed, including dulse and kelp, are staples in northeastern coastal communities, as well as throughout the Western Isles, Inner and Outer Hebrides, the Northern Isles, Orkney, and Shetland.

Before the Clearances of the mid-1700s, Highland clans survived by eating venison, game birds, wild boar, and dairy products from their domesticated livestock. They supplemented their diet with wild foods such as nettles and brambles (blackberries) and with the kale, onions, and leeks that families planted in their *kailyards* (garden plots). Today, many Scots still eat venison, both wild and farmed, along with hare and rabbit. Butchers also sell pheasant, grouse, and partridge when these birds are in season, for those who can afford it. Hunting and fishing are both popular sports.



Pairs of golden brown haddock hanging on metal rods over a barrel of burning hardwood and being smoked in the traditional manner of Arbroath smokies. (Thomas Langlands | Dreamstime.com)

Scotland is also renowned for its domesticated meats, with Scotch beef having been awarded PGI status in 2004. Aberdeen Angus, Scotch Shorthorn, Galloway, and Highland cattle are esteemed breeds, and many of Scotland's roasts and rich stews depend on Scotch beef for their depth of flavor. The nation's highest-quality lamb comes from crossbred sheep, with Cheviot one of the most important breeds. The southwest is distinguished for its dairying industry, and the by-products of cheese and butter have been used to feed pigs. The distinctive rolled Ayrshire back bacon is created from Great White premium-grade pigs that are raised in part on these dairy by-products.

Up to World War II, many Scots produced their own butter, milk, and cheese, particularly crowdie, a pot cheese still popular in the Highlands. Today, the bulk of Scotland's dairy farming is situated in Dumfries and Galloway, where pastureland is abundant. Artisanal cheese making has been revived due to the efforts of individuals intent on saving or resurrecting Scotland's culinary traditions. Bonchester

and Kelsae cheeses from the Borders; Caboc, a cream cheese from the Highlands; Dunlop from Ayrshire; Dunsyre Blue and Lanark Blue from Lanarkshire; Orkney farmhouse cheeses; and cheddar-style cheeses from the Isles of Mull and Iona are only some representatives of a thriving artisan cheese industry. Ice cream became an established part of Scottish culinary culture in the 19th century when Italian immigrants who settled in Glasgow and Edinburgh sold it first from carts and then from cafés. Scotland continues to be known for high-quality ice cream, and due to the health of their vast dairy herds, ice cream from Orkney, Dumfries, and Galloway is particularly esteemed.

Over half of Scotland's soft fruit comes from Perthshire. Raspberries—considered Scotland's national fruit—as well as strawberries, currants, gooseberries, brambles, and tayberries (a cross between a raspberry and a blackberry) are consumed throughout the United Kingdom. Many Scottish desserts blend soft fruits with cream or crowdie. Much of the country's vegetable production extends south from Lothian, through the Borders and into the southwestern region. The Solway Firth benefits from the Gulf Stream, resulting in milder temperatures. Overall, the Scottish climate lends itself to growing potatoes, onions, leeks, turnips, rutabagas, and cabbages, with these vegetables raised both on industrial and small-farm scales.

Contemporary Scottish cooks showcase the bounty of these native foods while celebrating the Norwegian, English, French, Dutch, and Italian influences that have defined this country's cuisine since the 9th century. The taste for salted, dried fish and mutton, the prevalence of cabbage in many dishes such as *kailkenny* (a savory mashed potato and cabbage dish), and recipes for pickled herring are vestiges of Viking influence, evident in the Northern Highlands, the Hebrides, Orkney, and Shetland. Scottish food also owes much to French influence in both technique and dishes, the result of the Auld Alliance formalized in 1295 when Scotland and France united against English invaders. Hotchpotch (a vegetable soup), for example, is similar in composition and name to the French *hochepot.* Italian restaurants are among the most popular restaurants in Scotland and have been so for many decades running.

Seasonings remain straightforward and simple if one is preparing traditional Scottish specialties. Mace and nutmeg are used in a variety of sweet and savory dishes, from white sauces to puddings. Salt and pepper are the most frequent spices, with garden herbs such as thyme, parsley, sage, rosemary, savory, and chives gracing any number of dishes. Scots also prefer the sharp-sweet taste of native berries, such as rowan, as an accompaniment to game dishes.

## Cooking

Up through the mid-18th century, Scots cooked by boiling food in a pot or baking it on a griddle. They preserved food by salting, drying, smoking, or pickling. Many Scottish foods, including *clootie* pudding (a sweet flour-and-suet pudding boiled in a cloth), porridge, haggis, bannocks, *cullen skink* (dried haddock and cream soup), and *tattie scones* (potato pancakes), continue to be prepared according to these ancient methods. In addition to boiling food in a pot or baking it on a griddle, today's cooks also fry, sauté, braise, grill, broil, and bake foods in an oven, on a cooker, or in a microwave.

In addition to an electric or gas cooker, oven, and microwave oven, a typical Scottish kitchen includes a sink, a refrigerator and freezer combination unit, and sometimes an electric dishwasher. People also use a variety of countertop electrical appliances, including toasters, mixers, blenders, drip coffeemakers, teakettles, and food processors. For those with large gardens (yards), an outdoor barbecue grill is also common.

From the 1990s on, the sale of convenience foods has spiked. The British Council notes that frozen meals, take-out meals, and boxed dinners (such as macaroni and cheese) were worth £11 billion in 2001 and estimated to grow by 33 percent throughout the decade. A wealth of shortcut products, such as prewashed lettuces and preshredded cheese, have cut the average time that a person may spend preparing a meal down to around 13 minutes. These trends reflect practices in the entire United Kingdom.

## Typical Meals

Traditionally, Scottish women were in charge of shopping for food, cooking it, serving meals, and cleaning up. That strict gender demarcation has waned, and in many homes, men are likely to be involved in some or all of these tasks. Contemporary Scottish families often keep diverse schedules, with teenage children and their parents working various shifts and/or involved in an assortment of daily commitments that make it hard for them to cook and eat all of their meals together. Therefore, it is difficult to describe a typical Scottish meal. But there are some commonalities. Most Scots consume three daily meals: breakfast, lunch, and dinner (which might also be called "tea" or "supper"). They likely take a midmorning and midafternoon break for tea or coffee and a snack. Breakfast can range from a substantial meal to little more than a cereal bar, as can lunch. However, most Scots treat dinner as the day's most important and substantial meal.

Many Scottish families attempt to convene around the table for dinner, where they help themselves to a variety of foods, with meat often the main course and vegetables and a starch such as rice, pasta, or potatoes as sides. Many people end the meal with a sweet as well, perhaps a chocolate, a slice of cake, or a tart. Over the decades, however, as tastes have widely diversified and many Scots have become more health conscious, dinners might no longer feature meat, or meat plays a secondary role. Roughly 5 percent of adults in the United Kingdom identify themselves as vegetarians, with countless more limiting meat in their diets to as little as once or twice a week.

While most people drink hot tea or coffee for breakfast, their lunch and dinner might be accompanied by a wide range of beverages, from water and fruit juices to soft drinks, particularly Irn-Bru, a bright orange soda reputedly flavored with iron. Spirits such as wine and whiskey are more likely to be consumed with dinner than with lunch.

Aside from these general features of Scottish meals, what people eat and when they eat it depends on their tastes, ethnicity (especially recent immigrants), knowledge about nutrition, age, and affluence. Because of upward mobility and the nature of a global economy, people often move throughout the United Kingdom, and increasingly throughout Europe, on the basis of where they work. Fluidity of movement disrupts or challenges regional customs as well as distinctive regional food traditions. Furthermore, irrespective of geographic location, most Scots have access to a staggering variety and quantity of food, much of it name-brand, prepackaged, and sold in nationally recognized supermarket chains. Seventy percent of Scotland's food retailing is done in five of these chains.

The following are examples of typical meals of families living in Scotland's Central Lowlands, a region where the population density is the highest. For those who eat breakfast at home, cold cereal and milk, instant porridge, or toast is common. Orange juice is universally popular at breakfast, as is coffee or tea. Commuters might eat in transit, buying a *buttery* (roll) and cup of coffee or tea, or a breakfast sandwich of fried egg and bacon placed inside a bap (a soft floury roll). On weekends, breakfast might be a more substantial affair, with some enjoying a "fry up," or full Scottish breakfast that includes eggs, bacon, *lorne* sausage (a square sausage slice of minced beef and pork), black pudding, tattie (potato) scones, grilled tomatoes, baked beans, toast, and hot tea or coffee.

Noonday lunch often consists of no more than a sandwich, a Scotch pie (a hot pie of minced beef and gravy), a pizza slice, a salad, a kebab, or a small order of chicken tikka masala (roast chicken curry). Many workers pack a lunch to eat at work, or they order a meal in a work canteen. Others purchase something ready-made from a take-out place or sandwich bar. Occasionally, people make time for a more elaborate restaurant lunch, particularly if the meal involves business. Those remaining at home often pause around noon and eat a sandwich or snack. Primary-school children eat a prepared lunch at their cafeteria, while older children might leave the grounds to find lunch at a take-out shop.

The dinner hour (anywhere from 5 to 7 P.M.) remains an important meal, and families will often

attempt to eat together if possible. Typical meals include minced beef simmered in gravy and served with mashed potatoes and peas, poached salmon with rice and a side salad, grilled sausage with fried potatoes and brussels sprouts, pasta with sautéed mushrooms, a cheese omelet with steamed vegetables, or vegetable-lentil soup and whole-grain rolls. Likewise, a variety of ethnic foods are as typical on a Scottish dinner table as would be more traditional fare, perhaps even more so. Scots often cook or bring in ready-made Asian foods such as stir-fried shrimp, beef pad Thai, or lamb curry. Italian food, such as lasagna, minestrone soup, and spaghetti, is also popular.

## Eating Out

As Europe's first industrialized nation, the United Kingdom was also the first to see its traditional culinary customs give way to consumption patterns that ultimately defined other western European nations. Thousands of rural people throughout Scotland migrated to large industrial centers to find work in factories and shipyards, and in doing so they gave up the space, time, and effort necessary to raise and cook much of their own food. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the streets of Scottish towns and cities were thronged with food venders selling an extraordinary variety of cheap, filling food, from eel pies to thick slices of steamed currant-studded pudding. Many 19th-century Italian food venders were so successful selling fish and chips and ice cream that that they could leave their barrows and food stalls to build restaurants, cafés, and ice cream parlors. By the 20th century, Scotland had become a restaurant nation, catering to citizens and visitors alike. Of roughly 3,500 restaurants in Scotland, 330 are Italian. Indian and Chinese immigration to Scotland has also made a strong mark on the country's restaurant scene, with over 400 Indian and 350 Chinese restaurants scattered throughout the country.

Scotland's restaurant history has also been influenced by its ties to France. The art of French pastry and confectionery making, the interest that the French have long given to haute cuisine, and the restaurant culture that has defined Paris since the 1700s have all directly influenced Scottish gastronomy. In the 1800s, Edinburgh was as renowned for its fine bakeries as were Paris and Vienna. Many of Scotland's finest restaurants today champion the nation's abundance of high-quality fresh ingredients by showcasing them in sophisticated dishes that blend Scottish tastes and French culinary technique.

Edinburgh's oldest and most respected pubs and restaurants were initially coach stops that served meals and offered overnight accommodations to travelers. The Grasmarket District houses some of the capitol city's oldest continuing pubs and restaurants, including the White Hart Inn and the Beehive Inn, both from the early 1500s. Glasgow likewise has a famous and established restaurant history, with some of its oldest dining establishments likewise originally coach inns. Sloan's, in Glasgow's city center, was originally Morrison's Coffee House, dating from 1797, and is reputed to be on the site of the city's oldest eating establishment.

While Indian, Chinese, and Scottish-French fusion food are all popular, Scotland's restaurant culture still centers largely around the fish and chip shops, or "chippies" as they are commonly known. Italian and Jewish immigrants often established themselves in Scotland by mastering the art of frying haddock and cod in batter alongside thick wedges of potatoes. The "fish supper" (fried fish, chips, a side of mushy peas) remains for many Scots the most common and popular fast food, and several chippies have become internationally famous. Chippies also sell black and white puddings, Scotch pies, sausages, and, more recently, deep-fried Mars bars. Also very popular are Chinese and Indian take-out places and kebab stands.

Tourism enhances the Scottish restaurant business. Many hotel restaurants have become chief purchasers of traditional Scottish foods, such as oysters, mussels, and venison, that had in earlier times been produced almost exclusively for export. Creative Scottish chefs champion all manner of Scottish foodstuffs, and their consistent purchase of locally prepared gourmet cheeses, sausages, ice creams, and other specialty items in turn helps a now-thriving culture of farmers' markets and a cottage food industry.

## Special Occasions

Scottish holidays and special occasions often involve an abundance of food. Scots' generosity toward their guests hearkens back to the days of clans, when chieftains plied visitors with food, drink, and good will. The most important holiday is Hogmanay, or New Year's Eve. Prior to the street parties leading up to the New Year, many Scots eat a celebratory dinner with friends and family. No one dish stands out as traditional, but the time of year lends itself to hearty dishes such as steak pie or lamb stew. Shortbread, oatcakes, an array of cheeses, smoked salmon, and rich puddings are often also on offer. Wine, whiskey, and ale are popular libations. "First footing" (meaning the first person to step over the threshold) occurs after midnight and lasts into the New Year. Many communities still hold to the tradition of considering it good luck when a dark-haired male is the first through their door, bearing gifts of shortbread and whiskey.

Although Christmas was not traditionally a significant holiday, it is now one of the most popular. Christmas dinner often includes roast turkey, "kilted pigs" (*chipolata* sausages wrapped in bacon), dressing, mashed potatoes and gravy, and a variety of side dishes, perhaps *clapshot* (potatoes and turnips layered or mashed together), as well as buttered kale. Mince pies, fruitcake, gingerbread, and plum pudding are English foods also associated with the Scottish Christmas feast.

Burns Night, on January 25, is another important Scottish holiday. Started in 1801 to commemorate the birthday of Scottish poet Robert Burns, the holiday quickly built momentum and is currently celebrated worldwide by Scots, who pay homage to Scotland and its most famous bard. Upon being seated for supper, someone is selected to read Burns's "Selkirk Grace": "Some hae meat and canna eat, / And some wad eat, that want it, / But we hae meat, and we can eat, / Sae let the Lord be thankit." The first course is a Scottish soup, perhaps cock-a-leekie (chicken, leeks, and prunes) or a Scotch broth of lamb neck meat, barley, dried peas, onions, leeks, and root vegetables. After the soup is cleared and side dishes of *bashed neeps* (mashed turnips) and *champit tatties* (creamed potatoes) are placed on the table, it is common for a piper to "pipe in" the haggis with bagpipes. The host then recites Burns's "Address to the Haggis," after which he plunges a knife or dagger into the steaming pudding, cutting the shape of St. Andrew's cross in the top. A celebratory sweet, typically cranachan, ends the supper. Whiskey is the beverage of choice, as guests make toasts and recite favorite poems by Burns. Restaurants, fraternal organizations, and individual families throughout Scotland participate in this event, with butchers taking orders for haggis several weeks in advance of the supper itself.

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***Cranachan***

⅓ c medium oats

1¼ c heavy cream

¼ c heather honey (warmed)

5 tbsp whiskey

6 oz fresh raspberries

Toast oats on a heavy baking tray for roughly 8 minutes at 400°F until lightly toasted. Cool and set aside. Whip cream until soft peaks form. Slowly add honey and whiskey as the cream thickens. Fold in the oatmeal. In four parfait glasses, put a tablespoon of raspberries at the bottom, add the whipped cream mixture, top with some more raspberries, and finish



A Burns Night supper of Cock-a-leekie soup, eel pie, smoked salmon and shortbread cookies. (Paul Cowan | Dreamstime.com)

off with more whipped cream and raspberries. Chill thoroughly.

While Burns Night is celebrated throughout Scotland, Up-Helly-Aa is Shetland's most important holiday, replete with traditional Shetland foods. This midwinter celebration is held in Shetland's capital, Lerwick, but communities throughout Shetland hold their own smaller festivals. Up-Helly-Aa involves burning a life-size wooden replica of a Viking longboat, thus commemorating Shetland's Nordic heritage. The blaze begins roughly at 8 P.M., after 800 or so local men dressed as Vikings proceed through the street carrying the boat to the town center. "Attending the halls" takes place after the burning, when residents and tourists alike go to the many parties for feasting. *Reestit mutton* (a dish of dried, reconstituted mutton), homemade mutton soup, Shetland bannocks, and oatcakes are common fare.

Weddings and birthdays are influenced by English as well as western European traditions and customs. Cake is the most important food for both events, with candles placed on top of a birthday cake to symbolize the celebrant's age. Wedding cakes are often white with white icing, although the bride and groom's personal preferences now take precedence over tradition. Because of earlier United Kingdom laws that stipulated a couple marry before noon, the wedding reception is still often called the wedding breakfast, irrespective of the time of day it occurs. Along with cake and champagne, many couples offer their guests a lavish buffet or a sit-down banquet. The bride and groom might choose to invite their families and friends to partake of the loving cup, or *quaich,* as it is called in Gaelic. Whiskey or wine is poured into the large two-handled bowl or cup (often a family heirloom), and a minister or friend blesses the couple, who drink from the cup first, and then the families and guests, who pass the quaich and take a sip in honor of the couple.

## Diet and Health

A strong social welfare system ensures that few in the United Kingdom go to bed hungry; however, a lack of education, cooking skills, and limited access to affordable, healthy food does mean that a significant portion of the population suffers from malnourishment. The government estimates that in 2005, 30 percent of patients admitted to hospitals or nursing homes were clinically malnourished. In Scotland specifically, eating habits are the second major cause of poor health after smoking.

Scotland's early industrialization not only made it more difficult for people to grow, store, and cook their own food but also altered people's understanding of their relationship to the land. The vestiges of that legacy are evident in the Scottish love of takeout, restaurants, and ready-made meals and in their penchant to eat quickly. An alarming number of Scots give set mealtimes or well-balanced meals little, if any, priority. People simply eat when they are hungry; they eat what tastes good, what is cheap, and what is readily available. While 40 percent of



In front: homemade pickled vegetables with carrot, cucumbers, peppers, cauliflower, and horseradish. Behind: red peppers in mustard and chopped roasted red peppers. (Goran Andjelic | Dreamstime.com)

the Scottish population consumes fried food two or more times a week, a mere 10 percent eats whole wheat bread. Soft drink consumption has also gone up for both men and women. Younger Scots might have no more than a quick juice-type drink for breakfast, a package of crisps and a sausage for lunch, and a microwaved Scotch pie with chips for dinner, again with a soft drink or a beer.

An aggressive effort is underway to educate the public about the dangers of malnutrition and the importance of eating vegetables, fruit, lean meat, and whole grains. The 1991 white paper, "Towards a Healthier Scotland," has set a number of goals aimed at stopping Scotland's rapidly increasing obesity and incidence of type 2 diabetes, including doubling its citizens' intake of whole-grain breads, whole-grain breakfast cereals, and consumption of fruits and vegetables.

*Andrea Broomfield*

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# Serbia

## Overview

The landlocked Republic of Serbia is located in central Europe on the Balkan Peninsula, bordered by Hungary to the north, Romania and Bulgaria to the east, the Republic of Macedonia to the south, and Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro to the west. Serbia has had a tumultuous history punctuated by foreign invasions, economic instability, political battles, and disputed land battles between Serbia and other former Yugoslavian states including Kosovo and Montenegro. On June 5, 2006, Serbia claimed independence, and, consequently, the state of Yugoslavia was dissolved.

Serbia has an estimated population of 11 to 12 million people; however, all data dealing with population are subject to considerable error due to the dislocations caused by military action and significant political instability. In mid-2003, Serbia's population was estimated at 10.5 million people, with 50 percent residing in urban areas and 40 percent living within rural areas. Serbia has an ethnic Serb majority with the country's population also including substantial minorities of Hungarians, Roma, Albanians, and Bosniaks. There is also a substantial number of refugees and internally displaced persons, many of them ethnic Serbs from the former war zones of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. Belgrade is the capital of Serbia and is the largest city in the country, with an estimated population of 1.5 to 2 million. It takes its name, which translates as "white fortress," from the large stone walls that enclose the old part of the city. It is in the north of the country, on a cliff overlooking the meeting of the Danube and Sava rivers.

Consistency and growth in food production, processing, and distribution and in food-safety control are real challenges in the process of Serbian economic development, with the food industry making up 60–80 percent of primary agricultural production; the favorable natural and climatic conditions represent a solid basis for agricultural development. Climate and geography have a significant influence on Serbian food production. Serbia has a continental climate of cold, dry winters and warm, humid summers with well-distributed rainfall and a long growing season, as well as mountainous terrain. This facilitates extensive cereal production as well as fodder crops to support intensive beef and dairy production. The fertile plains of Vojvodina supply much of the nation's grain and sugar beets, while the hilly central areas of Serbia specialize in dairy, fruit, and livestock. Key foodstuffs include grain, cotton, oilseeds, maize, sugar beets, wheat, potatoes, chicory, grapes, plums, vegetables, tobacco, olives, rice, and fodder. Livestock include sheep, cattle, and goats.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Bojan and his wife, Ljiljana, have been married for 14 years and live in the town of Novi Sad, near the Danube. Bojan works as a policeman, while Ljiljana, like the majority of Serbian women, is responsible for all domestic duties, including cooking.

Breakfast is usually taken early, around 6–7 A.M. Before breakfast Bojan and Ljiljana will almost always have a black coffee called *Turska kafa*. With breakfast they will have either tea, milk, or juice and *rakija* (clear

spirits)—both of which are homemade and in which Ljiljana takes great pride. These accompany several pastries or bread served with butter, jam, yogurt, sour cream, and cheese, accompanied by bacon, sausages, salami, scrambled eggs, and *kajmak* (clotted cream).

Ljiljana prepares the family lunch between 10 and 11 A.M. Lunch predominantly consists of three courses—soup, a meat-based dish, and a dessert, which in most cases will be a baked cake or pastry such as baklava. Dinner is eaten between 8 and 10 P.M. and consists of many of the same foods eaten at breakfast, unless, of course, dinner is a celebration, in which case Ljiljana and her husband will prepare a proper meal (similar to that taken at lunch).

## Major Foodstuffs

The swift collapse of the Yugoslav federation has been accompanied by bloody ethnic warfare, the destabilization of republic boundaries, and the breakup of important inter-republic trade flows, resulting in serious impingements on the development of a sustainable food industry in Serbia. Consequently, current food production in Serbia is variable, closely following fluctuations in political and economic stability. Largely, Serbian food-production levels meet both direct consumption and demand from the food-processing industry, with sufficient surpluses to allow for exports. However, the low standard of living and purchasing power of the Serbian population prevent significant growth in demand for agricultural products and foodstuffs.

Despite impingements on growth, the agri-industries represent one of the most important economic footholds in Serbia, accounting for approximately 35 percent of the gross domestic product in 2005, with agricultural production at 14.5 percent and the food-processing industry at 20 percent. Crop production dominates the gross agricultural product (58%) with livestock production at 42 percent.

With well-distributed rainfall, Serbia has a long growing season for the production of fruit, grapes, and cereals as well as for livestock and dairy farming. The fertile plains of Vojvodina produce 80 percent of the cereals and most of the cotton, oilseeds, and chicory; Vojvodina also produces fodder crops to support intensive beef and dairy production.

## Cooking

Serbian cuisine is largely heterogeneous with heavy Mediterranean (Byzantine/Greek), Oriental (Turkish), and Hungarian influences. The cuisine is varied because of the turbulent historical events influencing the food and people, with each region having its own subtle peculiarities and differences in traditional dishes.

A number of foods, notably pickled fruits and jams, are made at home in Serbia. Accompaniments such as rakija (fruit brandy), *slatko* (fruit or rose petal preserves), jams, jellies, various pickled foods (notably, *kiseli kupus,* or sauerkraut), *ajvar* (eggplant and pepper relish), and even sausages are all homemade.

Different dishes made with beans are popular, as well as peppers and sour cabbage (sauerkraut) leaves stuffed with ground meat, rice, and spices (*sarma*). There are various salads: The most popular, *srpska,* is made of tomatoes, peppers, onions, and dressing; the variation with cheese is called *sopska. Pitas* are made with many fillings, salty or sweet, the most common sort being *gibanica* (pita leaves filled with cheese, cream, and eggs); those filled with paprika, cheese, and sour milk (yogurt) are also a popular cooking choice both at home and in local restaurants. Peppers are a common ingredient in many dishes.

Meat is eaten in all forms (boiled, fried, roasted), in many kinds of dishes. Traditional sausages and meat-based dishes are made of pork, beef, mutton, kid, or chicken, all of which Serbs prefer roasted on a spit. Fish is also popular, and regions along the Danube are famous for their fishermen's pots (*alaska corba*).

The national dish, called *cevapcici,* is a small meat patty, highly spiced and prepared on a grill. Other Serbian specialties include *proja,* a type of cornbread; gibanica, a thin, crispy dough often filled with cheese and eggs; sarma, cabbage leaves filled with meat; and *djuvéc,* a vegetable stew. Pita (a type of strudel) and *palacinke* (crepes) are popular desserts. After a meal, coffee is prepared in the Turkish

style, boiled to a thick, potent liquid and served in small cups.

Family meals play an important social role in Serbian culture, with food preparation having a strong part in Serbian family tradition. Families, depending on their economic standing, will pay between 8 and 40 dollars per day on food, and the women are generally responsible for preparing meals. Food preparation often involves daily trips to the markets, with many families visiting markets after 11 A.M. to find cheaper foodstuffs, before the markets close.

Families and friends use the meal as a celebration feast and an opportunity to exchange ideas, celebrate friendships, and often sing traditional Serbian folk songs. Daily meals are often improvised in a simple manner, with lunch (the main meal) consisting of maize bread and cottage cheese, and two or three types of pork sausages with peppers, onions, and boiled eggs. Slatko and sweet bread is also common.

Celebration meals or meals for special occasions tend to be copious and consist of numerous dishes from entrée-style soups in winter to cabbage salads during summer or the sopska salad—a salad of tomatoes, cabbage, and cheese. Main dishes generally consist of grilled meats cooked on wood fires and fish such as carp, perch, and trout from the rivers of Serbia.

## Typical Meals

Serbian cuisine is heavily influenced by Greek and Croatian cooking. Despite these strong influences, Serbian food items and dishes have evolved, achieving their own culinary identity. Food preparation is a strong part of the Serbian family tradition. Serbia has its own gastronomic tradition founded in processing of milk into white cheese and kajmak (a kind of cream cheese similar to clotted cream). Other specialties include proja (cornbread), *kacamak* (corn-flour porridge), gibanica (cheese and kajmak pie), *prsuta* (local smoked ham), čvarci (cracklings), and *pihtije* (meat aspic). Staples of the Serbian diet include bread, meat, fruits, vegetables, and dairy products.

The majority of Serbians consume three meals daily, breakfast, lunch, and dinner, with lunch being the largest, following Mediterranean fashion. In rural areas, up to five meals are consumed particularly during the exhausting summer work in the fields. Breakfast generally consists of eggs, meat, and bread, with a dairy spread called kajmak. Lunch is the main meal of the day and usually is eaten at about 3 P.M. in the afternoon. A light supper is eaten at about 8 P.M.

Serbs eat a lot of wheat bread, made with or without yeast. Bread is the basis of all Serbian meals and is part of everyday meals as well as special celebrations and when hosting guests. Although pasta, rice, potatoes, and similar side dishes have entered everyday Serbian cuisine, bread is still served with these meals. Bread is often made in the home or purchased from bakeries and shops; making bread at home using barley, millet, and rye is more common in Serbian rural households. A traditional Serbian welcome is to offer guests bread and salt. Bread also plays an important role in religious rituals. Some people believe that it is sinful to throw away bread regardless of how old it is.

The national food of Serbia is cevapcici. This caseless sausage is made of minced meat, which is grilled and seasoned. Many Serbian dishes comprise various sorts of meat such as lamb, pork, and veal.

### *Cevapcici* (Sausage)

1 lb minced lamb
1 lb minced pork
1 lb minced veal
3 cloves fresh garlic, peeled and finely chopped
1 large onion, peeled and finely chopped
Salt to taste
2 tbsp freshly ground black pepper
3 tbsp hot Hungarian paprika or sweet paprika
1 tsp freshly grated nutmeg

Mix together lamb, pork, veal, garlic, chopped onions, salt and spices until thoroughly combined. Roll meat mixture into a long, ¾-inch cylinder. Cut links at 4-inch intervals. Or you can use a sausage extruder. Place on a plastic wrap–lined plate, cover

with more plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 1 hour to firm. Panfry in a large nonstick frying pan for 8 minutes, turning frequently until brown on all sides. Serve with yogurt sauce.

**Yogurt Sauce**

1 pt plain yogurt

Juice of 1 lemon

½ cucumber, peeled, grated, and drained for 1 hour

2 cloves fresh garlic, peeled and crushed

Salt and white pepper to taste

Combine all yogurt ingredients in a bowl. Serve immediately with cevapcici.

## Eating Out

Dining out in Serbia is considered a serious opportunity for social bonding and a feast, with Serbs having a strong passion for eating meat in as many ways as they can think of cooking it. A typical restaurant meal might begin with kajmak—a salty cream cheese spread—on bread. This is followed by smoked meats such as ham and meat preserves such as jellied pork and garlic. For the main course, the most popular dish is meat patties, grilled and served with onion and mixed vegetables. This is usually accompanied by vegetable dishes such as chopped tomatoes with onion and cheese. Fish dishes are rare and are significantly more expensive given that the fish has to be brought in from the coastal regions. Dessert is usually a choice of fresh fruit, sweet pastries, and cakes.

## Special Occasions

Food plays a central role in the cultural life of Serbians, particularly during ceremonial occasions such as Christmas, Easter, religious holidays, and weddings. The Christmas feast is an elaborate occasion. On Christmas Eve, people eat Lenten foods (no meat or dairy products) and drink hot toddies (warm brandy with honey). The following day, the meal generally consists of roast pork and a round bread called *cesnica*. On Krsna Slava, a family's patron saint's day, another round bread, called *kolac,* is served, as well as *zito,* a boiled, sweetened wheat dish. For Easter, boiled eggs are a traditional food. The shells are dyed and decorated in elaborate patterns.

"Wedding feast cabbage" is a special dish consisting of large chunks of cabbage mixed with many different kinds of meat and spices, which is boiled for many hours. On feast days or special celebrations an abundance of different dishes are prepared and can include cheese, kajmak, boiled eggs, and ham (smoked or dry), which are all served as starters. These dishes may be followed by soups such as the famous Backa soup, which is made with four kinds of meat. Vegetable dishes made of string beans, potatoes, and cabbage are very popular. Dessert includes a variety of cakes accompanied by *slivovica* (plum brandy), served hot or cold depending on the season; local wines; homemade fruit juices; and coffee.

## Diet and Health

Since the early 1990s Serbia has undergone considerable demographic, economic, and nutritional transitions that compromised the population's food supply, especially for low-income socioeconomic groups. Reliable food production, processing, and distribution and food safety are real challenges in the development of the Serbian economy. Consequently, during the last decades many demographic, social, economic, and political changes influenced the food supply as well as dietary patterns in Serbia and resulted in a nutrition transition with an increase in the number of noncommunicable diseases. These have been the leading causes of morbidity, disability, and mortality for decades. The available data clearly indicate that smoking, hypertension, and physical inactivity as well as obesity are responsible for the greatest mortality burden, contributing 5.5 percent of total years of life lost in males and 7 percent in females. Diet represents one of the most relevant lifestyle risk factors contributing to the double burden of diet-related noncommunicable

diseases. Overweight and obesity represent important public health challenge in Serbia.

Prevention of nutrition-related disorders is one of the major concerns of the Ministry of Health. There are several health-promotion and prevention programs in which regulation of body weight is an important issue; therefore, prevention of overweight and obesity is included as one of the high-priority objectives. According to the findings of the 2006 Serbian Health Survey, based on the body mass index (BMI), 38.3 percent of adult Serbians had an optimum body weight, while one in two adults in Serbia was overweight or obese (54.5%), with 36.2 percent categorized as pre-obese and 18.3 percent as obese.

In 2005 the Ministry of Health set up an expert task force to develop the "Nutrition Action Plan for the Republic of Serbia." Key objectives of this action plan with respect to diet and health include ensuring a safe, healthy, and sustainable food supply and promoting healthy nutrition for all age groups. The key focus is to stop the increasing tendency toward obesity in children and adolescents, to eliminate micronutrient deficits across the population, and to monitor dietary habits.

The most frequent intestinal infectious diseases in 2006 in Serbia were diarrhea and gastroenteritis (44.55%) followed by bacterial intestinal infections (26.51%), bacterial alimentary intoxications (12.06%), and salmonellosis (9.41%)

*Katrina Meynink*

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# Slovakia

## Overview

The Slovak Republic has the unique distinction of being the geographic center of Europe and one of its youngest countries. Roughly halfway between the North Sea and the Urals, the Mediterranean and the Arctic seas, this country has had many different political borders and has been influenced politically and culturally by both eastern and western Europe.

A tumultuous political existence has strengthened cultural markers in the region. The Slovak nation, whether recognized politically or not, has a strong connection with language, cuisine, and religion. Slovak foodstuffs and cooking are upheld and cherished as an emblem of its people and deeply tied into folk sentiments. As the country is increasingly integrated into the European Union, the foodscape is also rapidly changing. This "meat-and-potatoes" cuisine is being supplemented with imported foods through the marketing and Western supply chains of multinational food retailers.

Slovakia's high mountains extend across its northern border with Poland. The Danube River forms the border with Austria. The Czech Republic borders Slovakia in the northwest, and the Ukraine in the east. The southern low hills and plains that border Hungary offer rich farmland for raising livestock and growing grains as well as for a strong regional viticulture.

The Slovak Republic has been a parliamentary democracy since 1993, when it broke with the Czech Republic following the Velvet Revolution in 1990. Due to conservative leadership following the breakup, Slovakia was slower to warm to relations with western Europe. Not until a pro-Western government was elected in 1998 did Slovakia start to track into becoming a member of the European Union. The country joined the European Union in May 2004; it has been a member of the Schengen area since 2007 and adopted the Euro at the opening of 2009. The opening up of the borders to the West has rapidly changed the foodscape. More Slovaks are commuting across borders, more students are traveling to the West to study, and more foreign workers are moving into the small country. As such, the foodstuffs that are available and being consumed are becoming more similar to those of western Europe.

While the larger cities in western Slovakia are becoming more cosmopolitan, the remote and inaccessible mountain towns remain set in traditional foodways. In central Europe, Slovakia has the most people living in rural areas. Forty-five percent of the people live in towns of 5,000 or less, and 14 percent in villages of 1,000 or less. Many Slovak dishes are tied to folk traditions of the rural regions, which are celebrated with performances of song and dance troupes in traditional dress. Regional dishes are served, such as stuffed cabbage rolls from the east, Hungarian goulash from the south, and schnitzel from the west.

Slovakia is ethnically uniform with 85.5 percent considering themselves Slovak, 9.7 percent Hungarian, 1.7 percent Roma (although some estimates put that number closer to 10%). The country is 69 percent Roman Catholic and 9 percent Protestant. There are 3,000 Jews who still remain in the country, reduced from a population of approximately 120,000 before World War II.

Each cuisine is tied closely to ethnicity. The birth of the Slovak consciousness was tied up in the revolutions in the mid-19th century. Pan-Slavism was a dominant philosophy at the time. Aiming to rebel against the Hungarian political influence, religious leaders, philosophers, and poets helped to codify the Slovak language through literature, song, religion, and other cultural markers. Cuisine is a cultural marker by which Slovaks have also made themselves ethnically distinct.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Katerina and Martin Jurov live in a village of less than 1,000 people in the central southern hills of Slovakia. Martin works as a wine inspector for the government among the local vintners in the wine-growing region. The couple owns a single-family home sitting on approximately one acre of land.

Katerina's food sources come from a combination of products grown at home, grown by her friends and neighbors, purchased in the small village market, and purchased in a large supermarket about 15 miles away. The Jurovs have a large vegetable and fruit garden as well as a small barn where they raise a few pigs a year. Their sons live in the capital, Bratislava, and in the United States. Katerina spends time in both places and eats a wide range of food from around the world, but she likes traditional Slovak meals, too.



A man makes wine using a traditional method in Slovakia. (Shutterstock)

## Major Foodstuffs

Slovak cuisine is extremely seasonal and follows the harvest through the winter months with different foodstuffs. Using simple ingredients many hearty dishes are made that are appropriate to the season. For example, in the northern hills people gather mushrooms and dry them to add to soups throughout the year. Beets, peppers, peas, and cucumbers are popular vegetables.

Local fruits, such as apricots, walnuts, cherries, Italian plums, and apples, are abundant in farmers' markets during the harvest. Imported fruits are very popular as many people remember the managed food systems under Communism, which deprived people of tropical fruits throughout the year. Today, these fruits, such as pineapples and mandarin oranges, are cherished and eaten year-round.

Although the number of vegetarians is growing, meat and poultry are still nearly ubiquitous on the dinner plate. Beef, turkey, lamb, and chicken are popular, but pork makes the most regular appearance on the plate. The sausage, *kolabasa,* is used in soups and served with brown bread as pub fare. Roasted pork is served with stewed stone fruits and dumplings, and ham is a common topping on pizza. Bacon is also a common topping for dumplings and *pirogues* (stuffed dough pockets). It is also served in breakfast breads like *pagačik,* which is made from lard and bacon bits.

Staple starches are potatoes, rice, and wheat breads. Potatoes are used in dumplings, soups, and latkes (a fried potato pancake). Rice is not native to the country, but it is very popular. It is served beside roasted meats and usually prepared with Vegeta, a spice mixture made of onion, garlic, parsley, and chicken

flavoring. Wheat is found in pastas and breads in the region. Brown and rye breads are served with sausages and soups, but a dietary staple is *roshky.* These are small, oblong-shaped buns made from bleached white flour. They are served beside cold meats or are stuffed with hot dogs for snacks.

Fats used in Slovak cooking are mostly canola oil, lard, and butter. While lard was the traditional fat, many health-conscious cooks have turned to olive oil and other healthier fats in their cooking.

Slovakia produces a wide variety of regional cheeses. Cheeses have become an important folk-heritage item for which producers have gained political protection under European Union geographical status. The most popular of these cheeses are *bryndza* and Slovensky Oštiepok, a smoked sheep's cheese. A popular dish is *vyprazene syr,* or fried cheese. This is a small block of hard cheese such as Gouda that is breaded and deep-fried and served with sauce.

## Cooking

Home processing is still widely practiced to preserve the flush that a harvest brings. Many city dwellers have weekend cottages with small kitchen gardens, and rural villages are composed of single-family homes with large yards. The produce from these kitchen gardens is seasonally consumed as well as preserved as jams, pickled vegetables, smoked meats, and alcohol. Equipment for preserving and processing foods is kept in these weekend homes.

Slovaks have a few pieces of equipment that are essential to traditional cooking. When the American company Kmart opened in 1993 in downtown Bratislava, the company allocated three yards of space to displaying meat grinders to accommodate Slovak cooks. They also carried special tools to grind poppy seeds and nuts for filling pastries. A special *halušky* strainer to make the small potato/wheat dumplings is also unique to the region.

Vegetables were traditionally processed or pickled for consumption, but with the rise in Western retailing, many vegetables and salads are now served fresh. Most meals in restaurants are served with some shredded cabbage with vinegar, a radish, and some corn.

Slovaks are very careful to not waste food, and processing fruit into alcohol is another means of preserving excess food. Slivovica and *jablakovica,* eaus de vie from plums and apples, are the most commonly made liquors. Despite being illegal, many distilleries exist in private homes. Some towns have set up local distilleries for people to process their own mash. Furthermore, in the western hills, the people make homemade wine, usually in soda bottles, to be consumed at everyday meals. Although home beer brewing is not as common, manufactured Slovak beers are popular at home and in pubs.

In the ethnically Hungarian south, the dishes are spicier, with hot paprika adding heat. Goulashes, pepper salads, and Tokaj wine are common. Although Hungary has the reputation as the major wine producer in the region, the Tokaj wines produced in the Hungarian areas of Slovakia are rivals to those of the southern neighbor. This is a white wine with a distinctly musky sweetness.

The Roma (Gypsy) population has a cuisine that is difficult to describe as the Roma exist in several different economic strata within the Slovak state and have very diverse eating habits. Most Roma live in various states of poverty. Slovakia has had a dubious human rights record in its policies aimed at the Roma populations, and this ethnic group tends to be underrepresented and given little attention in official reports. Some Roma families are fully assimilated to the foodways of modern Slovakia, shopping, eating, and celebrating within the mainline traditions, but some settlements in underdeveloped Roma villages in the east do not have modern kitchens. The cooking is done mostly in a pot over an open fire with cabbage, potatoes, and roasted meats as dietary staples, supplemented by fresh fruits and sweetened tea.

## Typical Meals

Breakfast starts early, with hot coffee and tea served with cold cereals, muesli, bread, butter, and ham. Lunch is the largest meal of the day, and it is customary to take this in two courses. Soup is served as a first course followed by a larger plate with a meat, a starch, and maybe a vegetable. It is common



Traditional Slovak food—dumpling (halusky) with sheep cheese (bryndza), bacon, chives, onion, and Zincica. (iStockPhoto)

to sit together as a company or a group to take the meal. Dinner is smaller and consists of only a bowl of soup or a sandwich served around seven or eight in the evening.

Slovaks have an unofficial national dish, *bryndzové halušky,* which is tied into the shepherding traditions of the mountainous north. This dish is composed of dumplings made of potato and wheat flour, topped with lardoons (small strips or cubes of pork) or bacon, onions, and an unpasteurized sheep-milk cheese, bryndza. This cheese won European Union geographical status in 2008 as a regional food of Slovakia.

***Bryndzové Halušky* (Dumplings)**

*Serves 4*

**Ingredients**

2 lb russet potatoes

⅓ c milk

2 eggs

1 tsp salt

1 c flour

½ lb bryndza cheese (or feta)

⅓ lb bacon or lardons, cubed

1 tbsp oil

Equipment: Large pot, wooden cutting board or specialized halušky strainer

Boil water in a large pot.

Peel the potatoes, and grate them into a bowl. Mix with milk, eggs, and salt. Add flour in spoonfuls until a stiff dough forms, and knead into a ball.

Method 1: On a wet cutting board spread out dough. With a knife cut off small ½-inch pieces into the boiling water.

Method 2: Push dough through a halušky strainer into boiling water.

Boil for 4–5 minutes, until the dough comes to the surface. Scoop the dumplings out of the water. Fry the bacon until crisp. Caramelize the onion. Top dumplings with bryndza cheese, bacon, and onions.

## Eating Out

The restaurant culture died during the 75 years of Communism, but it is growing back at a fast pace. Although Slovakia has a number of pubs and restaurants in many towns, it is uncommon for families to go out to dine together. The family meal is usually eaten at home. People will congregate with friends and coworkers to go to a pub or a restaurant.

Today, the streets of Bratislava are lined with Mexican, Italian, Chinese, and vegetarian choices catering to the many tourists and business travelers to the city. But smaller towns may have only a pub, which will serve a simple meal. All of this is changing with rapid globalization. With the opening of the borders, the migration of its peoples, and integration of Western supermarkets, there will be a lot more change to come into the region in the future. But for now, the foods and foodways of the Slovak republic are tied to the rich traditions of a people attached to their mountainous home.

## Special Occasions

Celebrations and banquets in Slovakia are multicourse sit-down dinners. Weddings are large affairs with the celebration lasting all day into the next morning. It is traditional for a family to have

a special pig slaughter for the occasion, preparing sausages for the guests.

The Slovak Christmas is similar to that of its northern neighbors in the Czech Republic. A traditional carp meal will start at the Christmas market, where the family will buy a 10–20-pound carp from a pool in the market. The fish is then kept in the bathtub for several days before Christmas Eve, when it is then roasted or fried and served with potatoes and *kapusnica,* a spicy cabbage soup. Dessert is *vianočka,* a braided yeast cake.

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***Kapusnica***

*Serves 10*

2 tbsp lard

2–3 medium onions, diced

1½ lb fresh pork (a fatty cut), cubed

2 tbsp sweet paprika

1 tsp caraway seeds

1 small ham hock

2 lb sauerkraut

2 8-in. kolabasa (Polish sausage), sliced into small rounds

3–4 garlic cloves, pressed

1 full handful dried mushrooms

10–12 prunes

2 diced apples

2–3 grated potatoes

1. In a large pot heat the lard over medium heat until it melts. Add onions. Cook until translucent.
2. Add fresh pork with paprika and caraway. Cook until the meat is browned. Cover with water, add the ham hock, and simmer for ½ hour.
3. Add sauerkraut and cook another 15 minutes.
4. Add kolabasa, garlic, mushrooms, prunes, and apples, and simmer for 1 hour.
5. Add potatoes, and cook another 15 minutes until soft.
6. Serve this immediately, or let it sit for a day while the flavors fully develop. Serve with warm rye bread.

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Many Slovak families in villages or with ties to villages have performed a *zabjiacka.* In this ceremony, a family or community comes together to slaughter a pig. The whole animal is used. The fresh meat and tenderloin will be eaten in the coming days, but smoked sausages made from the pig, as well as the lard, can sustain a family for months. These ceremonies take place during the late fall and winter so the slaughter can be done outside without the need for refrigeration.

*Brelyn Johnson*

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# Slovenia

## Overview

A part of central Europe, the Republic of Slovenia is situated at the crossroads of the Alpine, Pannonian, and Mediterranean areas. Prior to its independence in 1991, it had been a part of the state known for decades as Yugoslavia. The current population of Slovenia amounts to 2,053,740 people inhabiting an area of about 7,722 square miles (20,000 square kilometers). With over 90 percent of its population being Slovene, Slovenia is a not a multicultural country. Autochthonous Slovenes also live in the neighboring countries of Italy, Austria, and Hungary; about 500,000 Slovene immigrants live in other parts of the world. Since 57 percent of the population is Catholic, 2.3 percent Serbian Orthodox, and 2.4 percent Muslim, religion does not play a key role in the life of many Slovenes.

In the first half of the 20th century, Slovenia was predominantly agrarian, with most of its population living in the countryside and tilling the land. Larger towns were scarce. Although the gradual industrialization after World War I changed this situation to a certain extent, 66 percent of Slovenes still worked in agriculture in 1921. At present, their number amounts to only around 4 percent.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Marko, Alenka, and Tina Novak are the members of a Slovene family living in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia. Marko and Alenka are university graduates, while their 14-year-old daughter Tina is in the ninth grade. At approximately 7 A.M. the family meets for breakfast. The first common meal of the day, breakfast is usually prepared by Alenka. It consists of bread or toast spread with butter and jam, or with honey, and occasionally the bread is eaten with salami and cheese. Tina usually eats muesli, cornflakes, or another cereal with milk or yogurt. While the parents drink coffee with milk, the daughter drinks fruit tea or juice.

Between 10 and 11 A.M., each family member eats a light meal. Marko and Alenka eat at their workplace, and Tina, like all students, eats a school lunch. This meal usually consists of a sandwich or a roll with yogurt, milk, or juice. Sometimes they also eat a piece of fresh fruit such as an apple, a pear, or an orange.

The principal meal in Slovenia is lunch. After returning from work and from school, Marko, Alenka, and Tina have lunch together, which generally takes place around 3:30 or 4 P.M. It is mostly prepared by Alenka, with occasional assistance from Marko and Tina. Lunch is made up of several warm courses. Many times it starts with a vegetable, beef, or chicken soup. The main course usually consists of either pasta with meat or vegetable sauce; potatoes with fried meat or with cutlets and gravy; or risotto with chicken meat or with mushrooms. Consumed simultaneously with the main course, the most common salad is made with lettuce or with radicchio; in the summer, the salad can be made from tomatoes, cucumbers, or green peppers while in winter it is mainly made from sauerkraut or pickled garden beets. Lunch occasionally ends with fruit or with dessert such as ice cream, fruit salad, or pudding topped with whipped cream.

In Slovenia, dinner is a less important meal than lunch. Each member of the family usually eats it separately, mostly around 8 P.M. Dinner customarily does not consist of warm dishes; instead, it is often bread

with different spreads or with cheese, ham, or salami, combined with tea, fruit, or yogurt. Alenka occasionally prepares foods from her childhood that are very popular with her family: milk rice or groats; cornmeal with milk or coffee substitutes; pancakes with jam; or *Kaiserschmarrn* (a light, eggy pancake, shredded and served with fruit preserves).

In recent years, the family has tried to eat more wholesome foods. Marko frequently buys foodstuffs, particularly vegetables and fruit, in an open-air market where vendors sell their organically grown food. Family members eat less sugar, especially white sugar, and less animal fats. Dishes are often prepared with olive or rapeseed (canola) oil. They try to include sea fish, for instance, mackerel, cod, or sole, in their weekly menus at least once; the fish are usually fried or grilled. With the exception of bread, fruit, and vegetables, which are bought daily from smaller grocery stores, the family habitually purchases food in large supermarkets once a week. Believing that homegrown food is tastier and of higher quality, Alenka, Marko, and Tina are especially glad to be able to obtain certain vegetables and fruits from their country relatives.

## Major Foodstuffs

Until the 1960s, Slovene farmers worked the land for their own household needs, primarily to feed their families and less to market their crops. Until this time food culture in Slovenia was still very much geographically differentiated, and staples were not yet being bought in stores. According to ethnological classification, there were traditionally four major types of food culture in Slovenia. The eastern, Pannonian type was based on crops like wheat and buckwheat. Meals made from wheat and buckwheat flour consisted of different types of pasta, leavened pies (which were often filled with cottage cheese), and breads. Dishes were flavored with sour cream and cottage cheese, red pepper powder, or poppy seeds. Abundant crops of pumpkins, not grown anywhere else in Slovenia, yielded excellent pumpkin oil, which was widely used in cooking.

The northern, or Alpine type, was typical for the hills, mountains, and forest areas of the north. With the exception of corn and buckwheat, its harsh climate does not provide adequate conditions for agriculture but is suitable for animal husbandry and alpine dairy farming. The food culture of this region was thus based mainly on dairy products such as milk, sour milk, curd, and cheese and on corn and buckwheat mush. Venison, which was rarer in other parts of Slovenia, could also be found on the tables of local households. Game meat was also cured and made into sausages and other meat products.

In central Slovenia, farmers planted tuberous vegetables such as potatoes and turnips. Buckwheat and millet porridge, boiled in water or milk, was prepared frequently, as were cabbage and turnips. This was the first Slovene region to include the potato in its daily meals, starting in the 19th century. Prepared in a number of ways, potatoes quickly became very popular.

With its warm Mediterranean climate and karstic soil (limestone with many fissures), western Slovenia's food culture was much like that in neighboring Mediterranean countries. The barren soil, not rich enough to produce cereals, is suitable for raising sheep and for growing olive trees and certain kinds of vegetables and fruits: tomatoes, zucchini, chicory, figs, *kakis* (persimmons), and pomegranates; farmers also grow many different types of grapevines. Among the most frequently consumed foods, usually included in most meals, were polenta, which substitutes for bread; thick vegetable soups called minestrone; vegetable and meat sauces; fish; and the widely used olive oil.

Changes in the traditional food culture were introduced gradually and were connected with the growing mobility of the rural population. More perceptible changes started to take place at the end of the 1950s, and especially in the 1960s, when the rising standard of living in Slovenia resulted in an increase in its population's purchasing power.

During this period people gradually stopped baking their own bread and certain other foods themselves. Instead of making sauerkraut and sour turnips; sour milk, cream, and cottage cheese; meat products (for example, several varieties of sausages made from pigs raised and butchered at home); and

beverages such as apple cider, made from homegrown apples, people purchased these foods from stores. Like bread, which was obtained in bakeries and grocery stores, people increasingly bought meat products, for instance, salami, sausages, and cold cuts; dairy foods, such as yogurt, sour cream, and whipping cream; industrially made pasta; rice; pastries and other sweets; and industrially made beverages such as beer, mineral water, and other soft drinks, particularly sodas.

At present, Slovenes' food culture mainly consists of bread and farinaceous products, potatoes, meat and meat products, and dairy products. Vegetables, pulses, and fruit are less important. Slovenia has over 100 varieties of bread, prepared by large as well as family-owned bakeries. Wheat flour is an ingredient of pasta whose many kinds are either handmade or made by machines, for example, certain types of dumplings such as *žlikrofi, krpice,* and *fuži;* and noodles. There are also other popular and widely consumed wheat-based dishes, for instance, *mlinci* (dried pancakes), crepes, the Kaiserschmarrn, different strudels, and the so-called *gibanice,* leavened pies with a variety of fillings. The once widely popular porridge and mush, which in the past represented the basic Slovene dishes and were prepared from buckwheat, millet, and cornmeal, are now seldom consumed.

The potato was first used in the first half of the 19th century as a food for human rather than animal consumption, but it was already widely popular by the end of that century. Slovenes prepare it in a number of ways. It can be cut into pieces and boiled; mashed; roasted; prepared as French fries; or cooked as home fries, namely, boiled, sliced, and then fried with onions, which is by far the most popular potato dish in Slovenia.

Until approximately the 1920s, most Slovene families consumed meat and meat products only on rare occasions, generally on Sundays and holidays. The meat served at those times was inexpensive, for example, the meat of home-raised rabbits and pigs or store-bought beef. Due to their high price, venison, veal, and poultry were far too expensive for most people. Many families reared one or two pigs, which were butchered in wintertime to provide a supply of meat, meat products, and lard. A variety of sausages—for example, blood sausages, liverwurst, the *pečenice* (sausages that are boiled and then fried), hams, prosciuttos, stuffed stomachs, salamis, and bacon—were also made. Equally important was the preparation of lard, particularly of cracklings and minced lard; as a substitute for meat, these were used in the preparation of all daily meals. Due to a higher standard of living and animal farm factories, which in the 1960s brought meat prices down, meat-consumption patterns changed considerably. Many Slovene families now eat meat several times a day. Eaten frequently, pork and various processed pork products (for example, sausages, spareribs, the shoulder blade, prosciuttos, salamis, and the like) are still very popular. There is also an increasing consumption of poultry, particularly chicken and turkey meat, whereas beef, veal, and venison can be found on Slovene dining tables more rarely.

Fish was less prominent in the diet of Slovenes. Until the 1930s, freshwater fish, for instance, trout, sheatfish, *huchen* (in the salmon family), pike, barbell, and carp, was consumed almost throughout the Slovene territory. Along the Drava and Cerknica Lake, barbell and carp were also dried to be eaten in winter. Inhabitants of the coastal region of Primorska ate mostly sea fish, particularly sardines, European anchovies, mackerel, codfish, and tuna. First preserved in salt, the fish were kept in stone receptacles or dried to be used in winter, when they were prepared in a sauce. After World War II, sea fish became widely popular throughout Slovenia, partly due to a growing interest in, and the promotion of, healthy nutrition.

In the past, milk and dairy products were more important ingredients of meals than they are today. Most milk is now consumed for breakfast and with a light snack before noon. The consumption of yogurt and whipping cream has generally increased. Sour cream and cottage cheese, which are also eaten with bread, are used to prepare many Slovene dishes such as dumplings and strudel. Slovenia also produces butter and a variety of cheeses; two of them, the *mohant* (semisoft, yellowish, and pungent) and the *tolminc* (similar to Swiss cheese), were each given the status of products with the designation of origin.

As in the past, vegetables and fruit play no major role in the food culture of Slovenia. Legumes, particularly broad beans, lentils, kidney beans, chickpeas, and green peas, which were once eaten very frequently, were no longer grown in large quantities after World War II. By far the most frequently consumed legume of today, the kidney bean is one of, or the principal, ingredient of soups, sauces, and salads. Prepared with fat, it is eaten together with sauerkraut and potatoes. Salad is eaten frequently, particularly iceberg-type lettuce, but also spring lettuce, lamb's lettuce, endive, and radicchio. Slovenes often eat kale, sauerkraut, and turnips in wintertime. In the period after World War II, Slovene menus started to include vegetables that had come to Slovenia from other parts of Europe, for example, tomatoes, green peppers, cauliflower, broccoli, eggplant, zucchini, spinach, and *mangelwurzel* (a kind of beet).

Written reports on fruit growing and fruit consumption date from as far back as the 17th century. Mentioned are apples, pears, plums, cherries, sour cherries, peaches, apricots, walnuts, quinces, currants, and gooseberries. Just as important were forest fruits, particularly raspberries, huckleberries, strawberries, and mushrooms. While most of these fruits used to be dried or boiled, they are increasingly eaten fresh. The consumption of other fresh fruits, such as imported oranges, tangerines, clementines, and bananas, is equally on the rise.

Spices were already used when the Slavs settled the territory of present-day Slovenia. In the late Middle Ages, spices used for seasoning were the following: garlic, onions, juniper berries, anise, celery, cumin, capers, mustard, mint, lovage, rue, parsley, bay leaves, and cress. More affluent families were already using expensive imported spices such as cinnamon, pepper, saffron, nutmeg, cloves, and ginger. However, until the middle of the 20th century, Slovene homemakers generally seasoned dishes with domestic herbs, most of which were grown in their own gardens or yards: yarrow, basil, parsley, cumin, marjoram, chives, tarragon, thyme, sorrel, chervil, onion, and garlic.

In the more distant past, Slovenes drank mostly water, sometimes also beer, mead, and cider. It was not until modern times that wine and hard liquor became more widely drunk. Richer families also drank coffee, hot chocolate, and tea. Until the middle of the last century, Slovenes ordinarily drank only what they had at home, for example, water, homemade cider, and cheap homemade wine. After that period, the consumption of store-bought beverages, particularly beer, mineral water, sodas, and juices, has been steadily increasing. Since the 1960s, coffee has become widely popular among Slovenes.



A delicious cake with apple, curd, and nuts named Gibanica. (iStockPhoto)

## Cooking

Before the introduction of kitchen stoves and with the exception of the western part of the Slovene territory, where food was cooked over an open hearth, food was generally cooked in ovens. The clay pots used for this purpose could be placed on a sill in front of, or next to, the stove door and pushed into the stove itself when necessary.

By far the simplest way of preparing food was boiling; it was also the least expensive because it required neither lard nor cooking oil. Needing less attention, the simmering food also enabled the homemaker to do other chores. Since most homemakers also worked in the fields and tended farm animals, the finished dishes could easily be reheated upon their return. In certain areas local homemakers prepared food solely in the morning before

leaving for the field or the family vineyard. When family members returned home the food was ready to be reheated and served. Some of the most common dishes, prepared in this manner at least until the middle of the 20th century, were gruel, mush, barley, dumplings, boiled potatoes, cabbage, turnips, soups, and sauces. Farinaceous foods, for instance, *zlivanka* (a type of cottage cheese cake), Kaiserschmarrn, leavened pies, and dumplings, were baked in the *pekva,* a clay baking pan, or in pans. Meat and meat products such as blood sausages, the pečenice, and the *mavžlji,* which were made of chopped pork or intestines and wrapped in pork membrane, were also prepared in the pekva but were consumed on very rare occasions.

Frying was not as popular as boiling and baking. Employing lard, either plain or mixed with minced meat, homemakers generally made roast potatoes, cabbage, cold mush, polenta, and occasionally offal, for example, liver. In a small part of the Slovene territory, food was cooked in kettles, suspended on a chain, over an open hearth; some dishes were baked under a large lid called the *čepnja.* Separate pieces of meat or even whole animals were spitted and roasted; this traditional way of cooking has been preserved up to the present.

First introduced in more affluent Slovene households in the middle of the 19th century, wood- and coal-burning stoves became very popular after World War I. Such modern stoves and greater availability of cooking oil, which made baking and frying cheaper and more accessible to most households, made it possible to more often prepare the dishes that up to the 1960s were made mostly on holidays. Today, the most popular types of kitchen stoves are electric and gas ranges and electric ovens. Electric or gas barbecue grills, pressure cookers, deep-fryers, and electric bread makers are also widely used.

## Typical Meals

Due to their great variety it is extremely difficult to describe the daily meals typical for Slovenia in the past and in the present. Meals varied according to regions, the financial and social position of households, and their rural or urban origin. Generally speaking, Slovenes eat three meals a day: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Students also eat a light meal at school, while some adults consume it during their working hours. The principal meal is a hot lunch, which is the heaviest meal of the day. Dinners are generally more modest.

In the past, farmers' breakfasts usually consisted of mush or polenta with milk or sour milk and ersatz coffee made of barley. Some families also ate boiled potatoes or mush and sauerkraut. This breakfast did not significantly differ from the one eaten by poorer urban dwellers, who had mostly corn mush or bread, and ersatz coffee. White bread was consumed only in wealthier families, who also ate rolls and croissants; butter, jam, and honey; and at times eggs, cold cuts, and cheeses. The usual morning beverages in these families were coffee or cocoa.

In the second half of the 20th century, breakfast started to change significantly. The main ingredients of breakfast have become bread or rolls spread with butter or margarine, jam, or liver or other kinds of pâtés, or topped with salami, sausage, or cheese; eggs are eaten occasionally. Ersatz coffee has been replaced by real coffee or tea. Some people now include in their breakfast various kinds of cereal, yogurt, and fruit. While breakfast used to be eaten very early in the morning, it is now consumed between 6:30 and 7:30 A.M.

In the past, farmers used to eat lunch at noon. It consisted of different kinds of soups and starchy dishes made from potatoes, sour turnips, kidney beans or fava beans, barley, millet, or buckwheat. These might be made into porridge or dumplings, or some other variety of mealy dishes, for example, zlivanka or *kvasenica* (both are a type of cottage cheese cake). In the summertime they ate salad greens. Meat was eaten sparingly. During the period of heavy farming chores, homemakers served smoked pork. In towns, less-well-to-do families ate potato or vegetable soups with Kaiserschmarrn, dumplings, or strudels; sometimes they ate mush or potatoes served with sauerkraut or turnips. In prosperous families, soup was always followed by a main course consisting of meat dishes such as cutlets, boiled beef, or roast meat, served with potatoes or rice, bread dumplings, pasta, or vegetable side dishes

such as peas, cauliflower, spinach, or asparagus and salad. These meals always ended with dessert.

In the present, Slovene families have lunch upon returning from work, which is between 3 and 4 P.M. Since lunch is their main meal, all family members try to eat it together, which owing to the many obligations of adults and children alike is becoming increasingly difficult. Lunch is usually made by the mother. It consists of soup made from beef or chicken, potatoes, kidney beans, or kohlrabi. Soup is followed by the main course, which can be stewed meat, goulash, fricassee, cutlets, or ragout made from minced meat, and so on. Meat is served with pasta, potatoes, or rice and with a salad. Once very popular, mush, polenta, and porridge are now very seldom seen on Slovene dining tables. They have been replaced by new dishes and ingredients, particularly those that have been taken over from Italian cuisine and have become very popular: pizza, tortellini, lasagna, and gnocchi, all served with a variety of sauces. Some urban families also like Asian food.

Dinner has always been less important than lunch. Farmers used to eat dinner after they had finished their chores and returned to their house at dusk. Their dinner often consisted of dishes such as corn or buckwheat mush, boiled potatoes served with sauerkraut or turnips, salad, pumpkins prepared with flour and lard, or porridge made from millet boiled in milk. Poorer urban families ate mush with ersatz coffee; kidney bean or potato salad; or grits made with milk. Well-situated urban families ate bread, sausage, eggs, cheese, crepes, omelets, or rice pudding.

Family members now often eat dinner separately. It usually takes place between 7 and 9 P.M., depending on their hunger or when they were able to return home. Their dinner generally consists of bread with a variety of spreads or with salami, cheese, or ham. It can also be yogurt, a salad, or at times also pancakes or milk pudding.

## Eating Out

Roadside inns have offered simple dishes and beverages to passing merchants and travelers since ancient times. Sources from the Middle Ages to the 18th century bear witness that the food offered to the guests in inns was bad, tasteless, and quite expensive. More important than the food was the sale of drinks, mostly wine and low-quality beer. At the beginning of the 18th century these two commercial areas were separated. This was due to an increase in road and river traffic, and in trade. The construction of the South Railway from Vienna to Trieste in the period between 1846 and 1857 significantly influenced the development of the catering trade in the Slovene territory.

Dishes that were being offered in Slovene inns before World War II were typical of the so-called Viennese cuisine. Important were novel meat dishes, among which goulash and cutlets, particularly the Wiener schnitzel, were the most popular. Lunch at an inn noted for its "good plain family cooking" consisted of the following dishes. To start there were soups such as beef soup with homemade noodles, pea soup, soup with groats or liver dumplings, or perhaps cauliflower, spinach, or tomato soup. Then there would be meats, such as roast pork, veal, venison, Wiener and Parisian schnitzel, fried or roast chicken, capon, roast turkey, goose, or duck. Side dishes included potatoes, especially fried, mashed in skins, or French fried, which appeared at the beginning of the 20th century; boiled or stewed rice; fried potato rolls or bun dumplings; and salad. Guests could also choose among different puddings, Kaiserschmarrn, crepes with homemade jam, stewed fruit, and so on.

Certain foods were also sold in the street. Street vendors offered rolls with cooked sausages, particularly frankfurters, and rolls with sausages made of horse meat or of grilled meat, for instance the *čevapčici* (meat patties) and the *ranjii* (roasted skewered meat).

Among the most popular restaurants since the mid-1970s are those that serve Italian food, particularly pizza and lasagna. In the last decade and a half, a segment of the Slovene population started to frequent restaurants serving Chinese, Indian, Thai, and Mexican food.

## Special Occasions

Until the middle of the 20th century, the food culture of the Slovene population depended on the days of the week. While Slovenes generally observed the

fast on Fridays, their Sunday diet was richer than during the week, with the meals usually including food that was pricier and of better quality. The same can be said of festive foods served on holidays; those that celebrated the end of difficult farm chores, for example, harvest and vintage; and those prepared when farmers butchered their pigs in wintertime. In contrast, birthdays and name days ordinarily did not require any special food; the only exceptions were weddings and sometimes baptism feasts.

Families tried to include in their Sunday meals richer meat dishes and farinaceous desserts generally not eaten on weekdays. Although there were people who ate meat, for example, sausages, spareribs, or ham, even for breakfast, meat dishes were generally served only for lunch and dinner. A typical Sunday lunch started with a meat soup, usually a beef broth with homemade noodles or with grits or liver dumplings. The main course could be the beef that had been boiled to make the soup, for instance, or smoked pork with horseradish; prosperous families also ate roasted veal or pork, tenderloin, or fried chicken. The homemakers baked dessert, for example, a bundt cake, an apple or cottage cheese strudel, or a leavened pie with filling. Dinner often consisted of food that had been left over from lunch: leftover pieces of cold roast or chicken, a salad, and dessert. Many Slovene families still eat very similar dishes on Sundays.

Christmas and Easter have always been among the most important Slovene holidays. Christmas preparations started several days ahead of time with the making of Christmas bread, cookies, and the *potica* (nut roll). This was also the time when most Slovene families butchered a pig to have an abundance of fresh meat and sausages for Christmas and New Year's celebrations. The day before Christmas was traditionally a fast day that was devoutly observed. During the day, people ate only legumes, vegetable soups, or mush; some of the more affluent families had fish. On Christmas Eve, meat was allowed once again, particularly after families returned from midnight mass. Traditionally it was either blood sausages or the pečenice, or roasted pork; the urban middle class sometimes ate fish such as boiled trout or fried carp. The festive meal ended with the potica



Potica, or nut roll pound cake, with walnuts. (iStockPhoto)

(a roll filled with nuts, poppy seeds, or a chocolate filling, more rarely with a carob, hazelnut, or coconut filling), homemade festive cookies, and fruit bread. Fasting is generally no longer observed, and new dishes have become a part of Christmas menus: for example, beefsteak tartare; French salad, which is a mixture of diced potatoes, peas, cucumbers, eggs, and mayonnaise; and sponge and layer cakes.

Another important Slovene holiday is Easter. Traditionally, the foods consumed on Easter have not changed for centuries. Families prepare a basketful of Easter food, the so-called *žegen.* The žegen consists of boiled or baked ham, or of the *šoblek* (filled pork stomach) in alpine regions, or prosciutto in Istria; homemade sausages; white bread made with or without milk; horseradish; and the *pirhi* (boiled colored eggs). Traditional Easter pastries are the potica, the *ptički,* and the *menihi* (small pasties made from leavened dough made of fine flour). A typical Easter dish from central Slovenia and Primorsko is the *aleluja.* Made of dried turnip peels, the aleluja evokes the memory of the time of severe famine during the Easter of 1529.

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***Aleluja***

**Ingredients**

1 lb dried turnip peels

1 c flour (for example, buckwheat)

¾ qt water

4 tbsp lard with bacon cracklings

Salt

Wash turnip peels, and soak them in water for 3 days; the water needs to be changed every day. Boil them, then strain and chop. Add them to salted water or to water in which the Easter ham was boiled. When the water starts boiling, add flour. Make a hole in the middle, and pour in hot lard and cracklings. Serve immediately.

## Diet and Health

In the past centuries, the main preoccupation of the Slovene population was to ensure enough food, which, despite the meager means generally available for its purchase or cultivation, had to be prepared in a way that would provide enough energy for the heavy physical work that was required daily. Not much attention was paid to health or special diets. The two general exceptions were childbirth and severe illness. New mothers and the sick were given special food and beverages to restore their health as soon as possible so that they could return to work.

After a woman had given birth, her family had to provide adequate quantities of wine to renew her strength and vigor. The habit of giving wine to new mothers has been documented throughout the Slovene territory. She was also given a loaf of good white bread and a hen for hen soup, which was believed to possess special powers. Another dish recommended for new mothers and for those who were sick was the *tirjet.* It consisted of slices of white bread first dipped in wine and whisked egg and then fried.

Those who had problems with constipation were given pieces of dried pears or prunes soaked in water; equally recommendable were horseradish, which is a strong purgative, and lukewarm whey. Diarrhea was fought with dried huckleberries, dried pears, the *prežganka* (soup made from water and browned flour), and water in which unhusked wheat had been boiled for several hours.

Those who were anemic had to purify their blood with raw meat, particularly horse meat, fresh sauerkraut, and turnip shoots. Certain plants and vegetables, for example, dandelion, watercress, elder shoots, and wormwood buds, were believed to help as well. In case of dropsy, swooning, bronchial disease, nerves, and worms, folk medicine advised substantial quantities of garlic. Onions helped cure pulmonary diseases, colds, and rheumatism.

Today, interest in a healthy diet has increased primarily due to a growing number of articles in the printed and electronic media. According to experts, Slovenes consume too much fat, sugar, pork, and alcohol and too little fruit and vegetables. In view of this, the Ministry of Health has organized different activities and programs to promote the consumption of fruit, vegetables, and unsaturated fats.

*Maja Godina-Golija*

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# Spain

## Overview

Spain is a country with a remarkably diverse landscape and climate, from the mountainous snow-capped north to the arid plains of La Mancha to the hot Mediterranean climate of the south, plus the Balearic Islands and Canary Islands. This climate has shaped not only the type of plants and domesticated animals that flourish but also the cooking techniques, mealtimes, and nutritional status of the population.

The culinary culture of Spain is understood through the various peoples who have settled or invaded the Iberian Peninsula through its long history. The original inhabitants may be represented by the surviving Basque culture, whose language and dominant blood type are completely unrelated to those of any other European group, who from prehistoric times utilized the native flora and fauna. Herbs that still grow wild fit the general Mediterranean flavor profile of seasonings and include oregano, thyme, rosemary, and garlic. Spain has also been suggested as a separate independent site of domestication for the fava bean, which is still eaten commonly and featured in stews like the Asturian *fabada.* While wild deer populations have dwindled in the ensuing millennia, wild boar is still highly prized, as are rabbit and hare, not to mention the bounty of shellfish enjoyed along the coasts, which were rigorously exploited by the native inhabitants in prehistoric times.

The first major civilization that settled southern Spain was the Phoenicians, who came originally from what is now Lebanon. After having settled in northern Africa they set up trading posts in Gadir, founded in 1104 B.C. (modern-day Cadiz), and Cartagena, which was named for their African trading hub Carthage. The Phoenicians introduced one of the single most important ingredients in Spanish culture—the olive. Although these probably arrived much earlier, the Phoenicians also brought with them eastern Mediterranean wheat and most likely cattle-rearing techniques, which provided meat from sheep, goats, and cows as well as dairy products. Olives, wheat, and cattle products form the core of Spanish cuisine as they do throughout the Mediterranean.

There were also ancient Greek settlements on the northeastern coast of what is today Catalonia, and evidence suggests that it was the Greeks who introduced the cultivation of grapes and, of course, wine to Spain. Almonds also date to this period as well as cultivated fruits. Celtic groups also settled in Spain in what is today known as Galicia, whose name is cognate with both Gaul (modern-day France) and Wales. Northwestern Spain is thus distantly related also to the Irish and Scots. The tradition of curing hams has often been ascribed to the Gauls, although there is no historical evidence that they were the ones who invented the process.

Thereafter, Spain was conquered by the Romans, who apart from building major metropolitan centers—such as Italica, the remains of which lie outside Seville, replete with amphitheaters, baths, and waterworks—also introduced the large-scale slave-operated plantations known as latifundia. Spain not only supplied much of the empire with food but also was known for certain specialty products such as *garum*—a fermented fish sauce used extensively

in Roman cooking. Agricultural authorities such as Columella were Spanish, not to mention writers like Seneca as well as several emperors.

The Romans also encouraged migration to Spain from throughout the empire, and in the case of Jews forced them from their homeland in the province of Judaea after the destruction of the second temple in 70 A.D. For the next millennium and a half Jews would comprise a significant part of the population. They were easily identified by their food practices, in particular, their abstinence from foods considered unclean by kosher dietary laws, namely, pigs, rabbit, and shellfish. There still exist dishes in Spain ultimately descended from Jewish cuisine, particularly stews based on chickpeas, originally called *adafina,* which would have been cooked on Friday night before sundown for consumption the following day on the Sabbath, when fires were not allowed to be lit.

Christianity was another important introduction in late antiquity. Although official dogma and a liturgy had not yet been settled, Christianity introduced a wide variety of fasts and feasts. Eventually these became a set calendar of holy days during which abstinence from meat and meat products was commanded, most importantly during the period of Lent. Asceticism, the conscious denial of bodily pleasures, including food, as an act of penance, became a cultural ideal, though perhaps practiced rigorously only by the holiest of people. The celebration of the Eucharist in the form of bread and wine meant that cultivation of grapes and wheat was required, and it was often monastic communities who carried out these activities in periods of turmoil and social unrest in the wake of the collapse of Roman rule.

With the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, the Visigoths, a Germanic tribe from central Europe, invaded and set up a kingdom eventually centered in Toledo. Although they never displaced the local inhabitants, they did introduce Germanic taste preferences, such as that for beer, which is very popular in Spain to this day, although one might find that surprising in a Mediterranean culture. A good picture of Visigothic cuisine can be found in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies,* a mostly fanciful dictionary of the origins of words that inadvertently reveals many popular ingredients. For example, Isidore believed that the word *malum* (apple) derived from the word *malus,* meaning "evil," in Latin and thus explained the apple as the original fruit of the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden.

In 711 the Visigothic Kingdom was conquered by Moors from northern Africa who not only pushed much of the Christian populations far to the north in small, relatively weak kingdoms but also introduced Islam, which has its own variety of fasting (during Ramadan) and dietary laws—abstinence from pork and alcohol. Many Christians and Jews stayed behind and adopted Arabic as their language. For many centuries the three religions coexisted in relative peace in what is known as *convivencia,* exchanging ideas, especially scientific and medical knowledge, as well as recipes. The center of Moorish culture was the flourishing city of Cordoba, not only the largest and most splendid city in Europe at the time, but also a center of learning. The Moors introduced many new foodstuffs, the names of which in modern Spanish are all directly derived from Arabic. Thus, there are artichokes (*alcachofas*), eggplants (*berejenas*) and spinach (*espinacas*), lemon (*limón*), rice (*arroz*), and sugar (*azúcar*). They also used techniques of irrigation and intensive cultivation (especially for fruits), which were well beyond any developed elsewhere in Europe.

Very gradually the small Christian kingdoms in the north, Leon and Castille, Aragon, Navarre, and the County of Catalonia, began to reconquer land from the Moors in a process that took several centuries, the Reconquista. Timed precisely with the Crusades, this was seen not only as a way to gain territory but also as a kind of holy war against the infidel, which especially sought to regain the ancient capital of Toledo. While not complete until the fall of Granada in 1492, the Spanish kingdoms now found themselves ruling over a heterogeneous population of Jews and Muslims as well as culturally Arab Christians called Mozarabs. At times there was peace and continued interchange, at other times

forced conversions and persecution. In fact, the Inquisition was founded primarily as an institution to uncover less than thoroughly converted "New Christians," or *conversos,* who might still be lighting candles on the Sabbath or keeping their kosher laws in private. Otherwise, the Middle Ages were a vibrant period in Spanish culinary history, and cookbooks were produced such as the *Libre de Sent Sovi* and eventually another by Rupert of Nola. Medieval Spanish cuisine followed some trends popular throughout Europe, including the heavy use of spices such as pepper, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, and ginger imported from Asia; vinegar- and sugar-laden sauces thickened with breadcrumbs; and the use of almond milk and rose water. These were in fact largely inherited from Islamic cuisine, but they would have a permanent impact on Spanish food. Some dishes descend directly from this period, like *escabeche,* fish that is fried, then preserved in vinegar and spices and served cold.

Probably the most important event influencing Spanish cooking, if not the entire world, was the discovery of the Americas by Christopher Columbus in 1492. He was, of course, not trying to discover anything new but sought a west-bound route to Asia across the ocean, which was then thought to be one ocean. This was intended as an easier route than that discovered by the Portuguese, which went around the southern tip of Africa, across the Indian Ocean, and ultimately to the spice islands in what is now Indonesia. Had there been no American continents, Columbus's plan would have made perfect sense—and he knew, as did everyone, that the world is round. It was only the earth's circumference that he miscalculated, and to his dying day Columbus believed his discoveries lay somewhere slightly east of China. Moreover, the long delay of his enterprise was due to the fact that Ferdinand and Isabella were busy conquering Granada and then subsequently expelling the Jews (Sephardim), most of whom went to live under Ottoman rule in Turkey and Greece and through northern Africa.

The introduction of tomatoes, peppers, squash, beans, and, although they took a long time to be adopted, potatoes would transform Spanish cuisine. From Mexico also came chocolate, which became the preferred drink for the Spanish nobility and thereafter for everyone. Most important, it was sweetened with sugar, grown increasingly in the Caribbean by African slave labor. By the end of the 16th century Spain controlled the first global empire, including most of the Caribbean, Mexico, and Peru as well as the Philippines in Asia and much of Italy as well as the great Portuguese Empire in Africa, India, and Asia after the crowns had been united under a common ruler from 1580–1640.

The 17th century may be considered the golden age of Spanish cuisine. Even though much of the land was depopulated through emigration or natural attrition, the royal court was then the most splendid in Europe and indeed set culinary fashions everywhere. Grand cookbooks by royal chef Francisco Martínez Montiño were published as well as lesser ones like that of Domingo Hernández de Maceras. The quintessential dish of this period is the *olla podrida* (which literally means "rotten pot," or in French *pot pourris*), a wild combination of tongue, lamb, pigeons, sausages, chickpeas, turnips, chestnuts, and other ingredients stewed down into an indistinguishable but utterly delectable stew. Recipes appeared in English, Italian, and French cookbooks as well. This age came to an end only after two civil wars in midcentury and the failure of both the economy and the Hapsburg progeny. A war of succession fought by several European powers ultimately put a French Bourbon on the throne, but it left Spain, ironically, a relatively backward and impoverished nation, as it would remain into the 20th century. The only major cookbook published in this era was by Juan Altamiras, and it was reprinted throughout the 19th century.

The invasion of the French in the 19th century left the country in turmoil and gave its colonies in South America a chance to win independence. Civil war in the early 20th century ensured that Spain would continue to be impoverished. It would not be until the second half of the century that Spain would emerge among the modern industrialized nations of Europe and once again become a world power economically.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Alicia Rios was born in 1943 and grew up in Madrid; although she never suffered from hunger, she was very conscious of the misery and repression around her through the dictatorship of the Franco era. Her father was a geologist from Zaragoza in Aragon who would bring special foods home from his field trips, bought directly from farmers and fishermen. His family would send them cherries and peaches from the mountains in the north, thick red wines from Cariñena and Somontano, and vegetables from the banks of the Ebro. Her mother came from the Costa Blanca, specifically from a village named Benissa near Alicante, where she grew citrus trees, grapes, white and black figs, and melons, as well as tomatoes and eggplants, in a garden near the sea. She also kept chickens and rabbits. Here, there were as many different paellas as there are days of the year, changing from season to season, incorporating whatever mother earth had to offer.

With this love of food Alicia went on to work in vegetarian restaurants and eventually opened her own macrobiotic restaurant, La Biotika, in 1978, followed by Los Siete Jardines in 1982, both in Madrid. She was married in 1970 to a man from Andalusia, from whom she learned a whole new repertoire of traditional bourgeois cooking. He passed away in 1999.

Today, she runs a company of food-performance art (Ali&Cia) that stages edible cityscapes around the world. Participants from neighborhoods throughout the city contribute a building or block made entirely out of foods from their own ethnic traditions, and the events culminate when the whole city is consumed.

She lives by herself in Madrid. Around 9:30 A.M. she eats a breakfast of mostly fresh fruits and porridge with walnuts, a single date, honey, and a dash of extra-virgin olive oil. At 3:30 or 4 P.M. she eats lunch, which starts with raw vegetables, followed by a *potaje,* a kind of solid soup with fresh cod, chickpeas, vegetables, and sometimes lentils or meat. This is accompanied by whole-grain rice, a glass of wine or beer, and some cheese for dessert, after which she takes a brief siesta. She rarely goes out for tapas with friends, as most Spaniards do, but waits for dinner, which may include a vegetable soup, fish, or an omelet with bread, olive oil, and ham, and perhaps some tomato. She also likes intense dark chocolate.

## Major Foodstuffs

The staple grain of Spain has always been wheat, despite the cultivation of barley, oats, and other grains throughout history. Wheat is used foremost in bread, which forms the basis of practically every meal in some form, and Spanish cuisine is unthinkable without it. Interestingly, bread is usually served directly on the table rather than by putting it on little plates, nor is it served with butter. In Catalonia it is often toasted and flavored with garlic, salt, a drizzle of olive oil, and tomato, which is cut and rubbed directly onto the bread, which constitutes a kind of signature regional dish called *pa amb tomàquet.* Wheat also features in rolls (*roscas*), many pastries, fritters, and pies (empanadas). The soft interior crumbs of bread are used for *migas* (fried crumbs) and as a thickener in gazpacho, which is a direct descendant of medieval soups, with the addition of tomato. The Spanish also eat noodles, especially the *fideos* of the east coast, which are thin, short lengths like spaghetti, cooked in a skillet like rice for paella in a dish called *fideuà.*

Rice is another important grain, and the technique for cooking it by frying in oil first and coloring it with saffron as in the classic paella ultimately goes back to medieval Arab cookery and is related to the pilaf and *biryani* introduced from as far away as India. The rice grown here, however, is mostly short-grained; the most revered are called Calasparra and Bomba. Paella recipes vary widely across Spain, though the classic version comes from Valencia. Paella may include shrimp and clams, a spicy sausage called chorizo, beans, and chicken. The classic version should not include fish, though, but rather rabbit and snails. What constitutes a proper paella is a hotly debated topic, and most people would distinguish this kind of mixed paella from a seafood paella. Whatever the ingredients, it must be cooked on a large metal *paellera* pan, preferably outdoors over a fire of vine cuttings. The dish should not be stirred as it cooks, but the rice is left

to gradually absorb the liquid, which results in a crispy layer at the bottom of the pan, said to be the best part.

Corn is less important historically and was used mostly for cattle feed, but today Spain is a major producer and importer of corn. Much of this still goes into fodder, corn oil, or other industrial products, but there are some cornbreads, notably in Galicia and Asturias, but most Spaniards seem to dislike corn or consider it a food of poverty or only a porridge for babies (*maizena*). This may be due to the fact that corn that has not been nixtamalized (treated with lime—the mineral calcium hydroxide) does not supply a full range of nutrients, as it would in a Mexican tortilla, and may lead to pellagra if it forms the staple starch.

Potatoes are certainly not as popular as elsewhere in Europe, but they do feature in the classic Spanish tortilla. This word merely means "little tart," and the Mexican corn tortilla simply adopted the Spanish term. In Spain it is basically thinly sliced potatoes and onions fried in olive oil, then drained and mixed with just enough eggs to hold them together. The potato and egg mixture is then returned to the pan, cooked on one side until light brown and then flipped over using a plate and cooked on the other side. It is not really an omelet per se but closer to a frittata, though perhaps the literal translation, "little cake of potatoes," is just as good. It can also be served cold or put on bread for a sandwich.



Spanish chef preparing traditional Spanish seafood paella. (iStockPhoto)

Beans are and always have been central to Spanish cuisine. The first types used were fava beans, black-eyed peas, and other *Vigna* species that are native to Africa. Lentils and chickpeas were introduced from the Middle East, and all other beans that are today classified in the *Phaseolus* genus come from the Americas and include kidney beans, lima beans, black beans, pinto beans, and so on. Spaniards do not generally distinguish these, and many varieties from the Americas are believed to have always been grown in Spain. Beans are featured in soups and stews, often with sausage in many regional classics, or they are served cold marinated in oil as an appetizer.

Spanish cuisine makes great use of vegetables, especially those introduced by the Moors—asparagus and artichokes, spinach, and eggplant in particular. These are usually sautéed or mixed into other dishes, but with the exception of spinach, they can also be grilled and marinated and served cold or battered and fried in fritters. Many vegetables like lettuce, endive, cucumbers, and carrots are served raw in salads. Turnips are often featured in cooked stews like *cocido* or olla podrida, as are mushrooms. To lend flavor, countless Spanish dishes include onions and garlic. Among the New World vegetables the tomato is the most important, but peppers and zucchini are also important, all of which are featured in cooked recipes. Along with these, olives are perhaps the most ubiquitous of Spanish appetizers. Depending on the variety they may be picked just as they begin to turn black, then lightly cracked and soaked in successive changes of water for about a week until the bitterness is gone, then brined with herbs and garlic. But green and completely black olives are also popular, as are capers, the bud of a shrub. Along with olives they are used in cooked dishes as well.

### *Salmorejo Cordobes* (Cold Pureed Salad)

This recipe is a thicker version of the popular gazpacho, often served with ham and bits of hard-boiled egg on top. It can be made in a food processor but is much more fun to make in a big mortar, pounded with a pestle. This should not have any water added and is essentially a cold pureed salad.

*Serves 2*

4 or 5 perfectly ripe tomatoes

2 slices stale peasant bread with crust removed

1 clove garlic

½ c extra-virgin olive oil, preferably Spanish

A dash of vinegar

2 thin slices ibérico or serrano ham

1 hard-boiled egg

Start by pounding the tomatoes in your mortar or whizzing them in the food processor. Add the bread, torn into small pieces, and garlic, and continue pounding until you have a smooth consistency. Drizzle in the olive oil; you can add more if you like. Add salt and pepper, and a dash of vinegar to taste. Pour the thick soup into wide bowls, and cover with shreds of ham and thin slices of egg.

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The most popular fruits in Spain include apples, grown mostly in the Celtiberian north. Quinces are also popular; they must be cooked, most often in the form of *membrillo,* a solid quince paste that is served with cheese. Citrus fruits like lemons and oranges are grown widely in the south largely due to Arab influence. There are also dates, figs, and pomegranates. The former are also dried, along with peaches and apricots, which are also made into jam. Among nuts, almonds are perhaps the most important, and one typically finds a plate of salted almonds, especially the delicate thin-shelled *marcona,* which have a higher oil content than U.S. almonds, alongside a plate of olives and perhaps some cheese as a favorite snack. But there are also walnuts, hazelnuts, and pistachios as well as pine nuts, which are used often as a garnish with raisins in traditional Arab-influenced dishes. Chestnuts have also been very important historically as a starchy ingredient in stews, and today they are candied.

The most common meats used in Spain are beef, including the meat of bulls that have been killed in bullfights; lamb and mutton; and especially pork. The Spanish have a particular reverence for ham, especially *serrano* and above all else the *jamón ibérico de bellota,* for which the pigs are allowed to eat acorns, which gives their flesh an incomparable nutty flavor. Such hams are always served raw and thinly sliced, much like Italian prosciutto, but quite distinct. Many bars feature a whole ham fixed to a stand from which thin slices are carved to order. Pork is also used to make sausages ranging from spicy chorizo to varieties made from the pig's head or even blood as in the case of *butifarra.* Although familiar cuts of pork provide everyday fare, among the pinnacles of Spanish cuisine is the whole roasted suckling pig, associated mostly with Castile.

Poultry is also popular: chicken, turkey, and smaller game fowl like pigeon and quail. These can be sautéed, stewed, fried, made into broth, or featured in more complex mixed dishes. Rabbit is also very popular and used much like chicken, though its flavor is quite different.

Along with meat, dairy products are important in Spain, above all else cheese. Many types of cheese are eaten frequently, made from either cow, sheep, or goat milk. Manchego made from sheep is the most familiar in this country, but there is also Mahon from Minorca, Zamorano from Castile, Idiazábal from the Basque region, Tetilla from Galicia (in the shape of a woman's breast), and Cabrales, a pungent blue cheese.

Fish is also loved by the Spanish, traditionally eaten fresh along the coasts and rivers and more often cured and transported inland. Dried salted cod is one of the most unique; called *bacalao,* it is actually fished in the North Sea or Newfoundland, or it may be merely dried on the coast of Norway as stockfish. Bacalao provided protein during times of fasting when meat was forbidden, and it is used in many dishes such as *bacalao alla vizcaína* or codfish *pil pil,* which is made with oil, garlic, and chili peppers and served in a little clay dish. Preserved fish are also popular. Anchovies are often marinated in vinegar (*boquerón*) rather than salted and preserved in oil as in Italy. Tuna also is cooked and preserved in oil or dried (*mojana*) and eaten thinly sliced like ham. Fresh fish are also eaten everywhere today, along with squid and octopus, as are shellfish such as shrimp, crabs and langoustines, clams (including the distinctive narrow razor clam) and tiny cockles, sea urchins, conch, oysters and mussels, and



A variety of Spanish cheeses. (Shutterstock)

scallops. As the symbol of Saint James (Santiago), the patron saint of Spain, scallop shells were used by pilgrims as a kind of souvenir. Although people along the coast consume shellfish fresh, especially in tapas bars known for their seafood, most Spaniards are also happy to eat these canned and keep a stock in their cupboard.

For flavoring cooks in Spain use a wide array of herbs and spices common throughout the Mediterranean like parsley, thyme, oregano, rosemary, and basil. Fennel seeds and cumin are also used as well as imported spices like cinnamon and cloves. Saffron is the spice most readily associated with Spain, which colors dishes bright yellow. It is the stamen of a crocus flower, meticulously picked by hand, which until recently was the most expensive flavoring in the world until vanilla overtook it. Another spice that has gained recent attention abroad is *Pimentón de la Vera,* a smoked paprika that comes in sweet and bitter varieties and lends a beautiful deep flavor and color to cooked dishes.

Wine is central to Spanish culinary culture, ranging from deep ruddy Rioja and Ribera del Duero to light effervescent *cavas*—the Catalonian equivalent of champagne. But wine grapes are grown practically everywhere throughout Spain, from the far western Galician coast to Alicante on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. There are also a number of specialty wines, the most celebrated of which comes from Xeres and Sanlúcar de Barrameda on the southern tip of Spain, popularly known as sherry. These are made using the *solera* system whereby the barrels are exposed to air and oxidized and constantly refilled as the content evaporates. Then they are fortified with alcohol, making them stronger and more durable than most other wines. They can be either bone dry (fino) with a woody aroma and sometimes even a hint of brinyness to medium amontillado and oloroso and sweet versions known outside Spain as cream sherry.

Spain also produces distilled liquors such as brandy, anise (flavored with the seed of the same name), and absinthe, which is made from the herb *Artemisia absinthum.* Until very recently the active component thujone was believed to be toxic and was outlawed in most of the world, though not in Spain. It is traditionally taken by putting the alcohol into a special glass on top of which sits a perforated spoon and a cube of sugar. Cold water is drizzled on top, which creates a *louche,* or swirling green clouds in the glass.

There are other unique Spanish drinks such as *horchata* made from tiger nuts—actually the tuber called *chufa* (*Cyperus esculentus*). Since the 16th century Spaniards have been avid drinkers of chocolate, made not as it was among the Aztecs with chili peppers and various flowers, but sweetened and flavored with cinnamon. It has been proposed that chocolate was an ideal drink for the Spanish nobility, whose cultural ideals included indolence and the life of leisure, as compared to the northern countries, whose Protestant work ethic led them to drink coffee. In fact, both drinks contain caffeine,

and Spaniards are as avid coffee drinkers as any people in the world. As elsewhere in the world, there is also a great variety of mass-manufactured soft drinks.

## Cooking

In Spain, many pots and pans are still made of clay. There are many advantages apart from affordability and beauty. Low-fired earthenware ceramics cook food differently, mostly because the heat is evenly distributed and gently retained rather than directed powerfully from below, creating hot spots that may burn as with modern metal pots. Moreover, food must be cooked gently, so although it takes longer, the flavor is ultimately deeper and richer rather than seared or scorched. Such pans will range from small, flat, shallow pans called *cazuelas* to covered *ollas* for soups or stews to large stewpots called *pucheros.* The cazuela can be placed directly over a gentle fire for cooking with oil or placed in the oven, and it doubles as a serving vessel as well. Other unique vessels include the *porrón,* a glass decanter for wine with a long, straight spout that pours a thin stream of liquid directly into the mouth, and also the bota, a goatskin bag seasoned with pitch on the interior, which is also used to squirt wine into one's mouth.

The mortar and pestle is also an essential Spanish implement and can be made of ceramic, stone, or olive wood. It is used to make cold soups like gazpacho as well as sauces like *allioli,* an emulsified garlic sauce.

A typical way to begin a recipe is with a *sofrito* or *sofregit* in Catalan. It is chopped onions and garlic cooked slowly in olive oil with tomatoes and sometimes other vegetables like red or green peppers. This is then used as a base for soups or stews, or it can be used in fillings for empanadas or even to cook fish like snapper or tuna in a pan.

Stewing is a common and economical technique that takes little more effort than assembling the ingredients and letting them cook slowly together in a pot. The *cocido Madrileño* is a typical example, though unlike most stews, the broth or caldo is served first, sometimes with cooked rice or noodles in it, separate from the vegetables, which are served second, and the meats, served last, arranged on a platter. The typical base is chickpeas along with vegetables like cabbage, carrots, potatoes, and turnips. With these an array of meats are cooked such as pork belly, fresh chorizo sausages, morcilla blood sausages, beef shanks and other soup bones, and a stewing hen.

Sautéing is probably the quickest and easiest cooking method, with ingredients merely placed in a pan with olive oil or rendered lard. Deep-frying is also popular for small fish or vegetables covered in batter and fried. Grilling is used most often for small fish like sardines and sausages as well as vegetables. Roast meat is very highly appreciated, whether small cuts, joints, or whole suckling pigs or lambs; roasting is best done beside an open flame, slowly turning on a spit, but it can also be done in a wood-fired oven. Normally this would be used for baking bread, but traditionally many dishes were simply cooked in an open red earthenware dish, placed directly in the *horno* until crispy and browned.

Before modern canning technologies, food would often be salted and dried for preservation or kept in oil. The former include not only hams and sausages but also dried vegetables like peppers, fish, and legumes; practically anything that could be preserved was, as a means of survival.

Spain is also home to some of the most avant-garde experimental cuisines to be found anywhere, most notably in Ferran Adrià's famed elBulli, often recognized as the best restaurant on earth. Here, one will find scientific instruments used to cook, to deconstruct and reconstruct food into new and exciting forms. Although these techniques have not had a great impact on household cooking, they have become popular in restaurants worldwide and are beginning to be used in homes. The *sous vide* method in which food is gently poached at a low temperature, vacuum sealed in a plastic bag, may soon become familiar.

## Typical Meals

Spaniards eat a very small breakfast, or *desayuno,* that usually consists of nothing more than coffee or hot chocolate and maybe a piece of bread or pastry,

if anything. It can be eaten at home or quickly at a bar on the way to work. The equivalent of the American breakfast is *almuerzo,* eaten before noon and usually consisting of coffee and a bread roll, but it can be something a little more substantial, and even be accompanied by wine. In the past farmworkers would eat a larger meal in the morning to fortify them for the day of work ahead.

On holidays people may eat a midafternoon snack of tapas, but normally they wait for lunch, or *comida,* eaten around 2 or 3. This is a full meal and can contain several courses and last a few hours. Traditionally people would go home to eat lunch, and they would take a siesta afterward in the hottest part of the day, but increasingly they go out to restaurants and then go back to work. A *merienda,* or snack, may be eaten, mostly by children, late in the afternoon between 5 and 7, mainly because dinner is eaten so late. For the same reason people often go out for tapas (the meal being called *tapeo*) after work, between perhaps 7 and 9. This meal will almost certainly include an aperitif like sherry, wine, or beer, plus several little plates that can include absolutely anything. In Spain the place where tapas are eaten is not a restaurant but more like a bar, and one stands. Commonly the tapas are served with napkins, which are tossed on the floor, and after a crowd passes through the tapas bar, it may look like a disaster hit.

Dinner, which can be as late as 11 P.M., is usually a smaller meal eaten at home with family members, in structure much like lunch. On holidays, however, it can be a much larger meal, eaten out. It will also consist of several courses with soup or salad to start, a meat or fish main course, plus a dessert such as flan or cake but just as often merely a piece of fruit.



An assortment of Spanish tapas on a cold buffet. (Shutterstock)

## Eating Out

Restaurants in Spain range from simple neighborhood joints to Michelin-starred white-tablecloth restaurants. elBulli was rated the best restaurant in the world for several years in succession, and the economic upsurge of Spain has meant that people eat out a lot and demand high-quality food at every type of dining establishment. Spain is currently at the forefront of what is popularly known as molecular gastronomy, cooking using scientific implements, new combinations of unusual ingredients, and plates arranged in novel and surprising ways. Many Spanish chefs dislike this term, though, preferring to call what they do simply *nueva cocina* (new cuisine). Sometimes recipes in such restaurants are variations on traditional dishes, perhaps deconstructed, but just as often they depart completely from traditional Spanish food. Like all food trends there are many imitators whose foams, colloidal suspensions, edible menus, and the like are pale imitations of the real innovators.

Restaurants are open for full meals both late in the afternoon and very late in the evening, and formal multicourse meals are served at both seatings. The Spanish love to eat out and socialize, whether at tapas bars, taverns, *fondas* (a kind of informal restaurant), cafés, or proper restaurants. Quite recently one also finds ethnic restaurants serving Chinese, Indian, Italian, or Turkish food; these may also offer a take-out menu. There are now some fast-food chains and pizzerias, but they are not as successful as elsewhere in Europe, nor can they compete with the local tapas culture.

Tapas bars are a thriving business throughout Spain and can get extremely crowded, with people standing elbow to elbow, packed in like sardines, at the best sites. Spaniards usually visit such bars in the early evening, going in groups, and often hitting

several spots in one tapeo. One will find olives and lupins everywhere, as well as pickled vegetables on skewers (*banderillas*), little ceramic dishes of shrimp or fried squid, and slices of toast with tomato, cheese, ham, or blood sausage, but there can also be more substantial dishes that must be eaten with a fork, like cooked seafood, vegetables, or *patatas bravas,* which are fried potatoes served with spicy tomato sauce or garlic mayonnaise. The most renowned tapas bars are found in Andalusia in cities like Seville. The word *tapas* literally means "covers" and may derive from a piece of paper that covered a glass to keep out flies, or hold a little snack. Or it may mean a cover to the stomach when one drinks alcohol. Traditionally one would pay per plate, which were counted by white marks made on the wooden bar. Each plate holds only a few bites, and if one wants a larger portion one orders a *ración.* In the Basque country tapas are called *pintxos* (from the word for toothpicks, used to hold the little mouthfuls together) and nowadays may include wild experimental combinations of exotic ingredients.

## Special Occasions

Spain is a largely Catholic country, though increasingly it is becoming secularized. Traditionally this has meant fasting on Fridays, during the entire season of Lent (40 days leading up to Easter, minus Sundays), and, for the especially devout, for the vigils on saint's days, Advent, and several other holy days. To fast in this case meant abstention from meat, cheese and dairy, eggs, and any animal products, like lard for cooking. In much of Spain this was not a terrible hardship as there is abundant oil for cooking, bounteous fish and vegetables, and especially legumes. But it did mean forgoing many favorites like ham and sausages, and in rural and mountainous regions fasting periods could be austere.

The Spanish have also been known for centuries for their parsimonious diet, subsisting on much less food than other Europeans, largely because of the heat. This, at least in the minds of foreigners, was compounded with their intense religiosity, sparing use of alcohol, and preference for many small meals scattered through the day rather than large, hearty, and substantial meals. While there may be some truth to this, the Spanish do have many celebrations. The tradition of Mardi Gras, or Carnival, a huge festival of excess preceding Lent, was abolished in the course of the Catholic Reformation in the 16th and 17th centuries. There have been revivals recently, though, which are essentially street festivals, bereft of their original religious purpose. While these are not as raucous as those of New Orleans or Rio de Janeiro, many Spanish towns manage to throw a big street party.

Street festivals are also popular during the *feria,* or bullfighting season, when stalls line the streets and people cook big pans of paella, grill sausages, and serve various kinds of street food, beer, and wine. There is usually loud music playing and flamenco dancing. The feria was originally solely a religious holiday, though, held during Easter week, or during Advent preceding Christmas. Christmas Day, like elsewhere, is an occasion for a big, formal sit-down meal at home with relatives. Special cookies are made as well as marzipan, nougats (turrón), and crumbly cakes like *mantecados,* which melt in the mouth. Candy and presents arrive on Twelfth Night, or the Feast of the Epiphany, January 5–6, when a king cake (*roscón de reyes*) is served, containing a bean or little ceramic baby. Whoever finds it is crowned king for the day.

Saint's days are also holidays; that commemorating Saint John (San Juan) on June 24 is popular,



A pile of mantecados and polvorones, typical Spanish sweets. (Shutterstock)

as is traditionally Saint James' (Santiago) the next day. As in the rest of the Hispanic world, All Saints' Day is also celebrated, by eating chestnuts, candies in the shape of dead men's bones, puffy *buñuelos* (doughnuts), and other pastries. Likewise rites of passage—baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals—are celebrated with festive foods.

## Diet and Health

Much of Spain would until recent decades have been included among those people who ate a so-called Mediterranean diet, consisting of a small amount of animal protein, many fruits and vegetables, healthy oils (predominantly olive), and fish high in omega-3 fatty acids. This was not the case for mountainous parts of Spain and in particular the north, but in general the Spanish diet was parsimonious and healthy, though political turmoil certainly did add its share of poverty and malnutrition. With economic prosperity, Spain can now be said to share with other nations the problems of hypertension, obesity, diabetes, and a diet relatively high in saturated fat, salt, and processed sugar. Cardiovascular disease is on the rise. This is compounded by an increasingly sedentary lifestyle, with people working at desks in an increasingly service economy and fewer people performing manual labor. Even agriculture, which a mere generation ago would have been physically very demanding, has been mechanized on par with industrial-scale farming in the wealthiest of countries. Ironically, the Spanish are also increasingly health conscious, and manufactured foods specifically designed for maintaining an ideal body weight, as well as low-calorie and low-cholesterol foods, are now commonly seen in grocery stores.

*Ken Albala*

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# Sweden

## Overview

Located on the peninsula of Scandinavia, the Kingdom of Sweden is one of the largest countries in Europe. Approximately 9.3 million people share a land with many natural resources, forests, mountains, rivers, lakes, and shorelines; Sweden has harsh winters in the north and mild weather in the south. Sweden is one of the least densely populated countries in Europe, and about 80 percent of its inhabitants live in cities, mostly in Stockholm, the capital, on the coast of the Baltic Sea; Malmö, in the southernmost part of the country; and Gothenburg, on the west coast. The climate varies considerably from north to south due to the country's shape, and thus the foodstuffs available to Swedes in different parts of the country also vary greatly. Sweden is divided into three general areas: Götaland in the south, Svealand in the middle, and Norrland in the north, each with its own culinary traditions, strongly influenced by climate, geography, and available foodstuffs. These three areas are in turn politically divided into 21 regions or counties characterized, in part, by their own local gastronomy.

An important aspect of Swedish culture and tradition in general is the Lutheran or Protestant heritage, even though very few Swedes regularly attend church activities. However, the strong Lutheran heritage, more specifically the belief in "not craving more than one needs," has clearly marked Swedish culinary traditions, which may appear simple to foreigners since herbs and spices have been sparingly used. At the same time, there has been a tendency to embrace foreign dishes, which has led to an increase in the variety of herbs and spices on offer, while more traditional Swedish menus are enjoyed during holidays and on special occasions. Since the 1960s, when pizza became a major Swedish dish, Middle Eastern kebabs, Chinese, and more recently Tex-Mex–inspired foods have been incorporated into mainstream Swedish food consumption.

## Food Culture Snapshot

A mainstream family living in downtown Stockholm, the Nyströms consider themselves open to new tastes while maintaining their families' traditions. Sanna and David both work full-time, like most Swedes, and have one 10-year-old daughter, Lisa. Their neighborhood has several supermarkets in which Sanna and David buy most of their food. Several new bakeries sell sourdough bread, which has recently become very trendy; it is expensive by Swedish standards, and the Nyströms seldom buy the bread, but they love the smell that surrounds the bakeries. In the area there are also many coffee shops, all offering take-out *caffe latte* and lunches; however, during weekdays it is almost impossible to get a seat since they serve pasta, pie, and salad lunches that are very popular. Both Sanna and David go out to eat on workdays, even though a few coworkers have lunch boxes with them. The Nyströms spend little time shopping for food and cooking during the week.

Sanna, David, and Lisa usually start their day with a complete breakfast. They are similar to other Swedes who follow the Swedish National Food Administration's food pyramid and nutrition advice. They believe that a good breakfast is important and thus often eat oat porridge with low-fat milk and lingonberry jam, a

glass of fruit juice, and coffee or tea. Sometimes they have packaged cereals or toast with boiled eggs. The Nyströms do not worry about lunch since Lisa, like all children in Sweden, is served a free lunch at school. The school lunch menus are varied and include regular Swedish and international dishes, milk, bread, and salad. Since most parents work full-time, children are offered a midafternoon snack in the Child and Youth Center that is located near the school and where Lisa regularly spends her afternoons. Sanna and David arrive home around 6 P.M. and take turns making dinner. They both love food, cookbooks, and watching food programs on the television but lack the time to make elaborate recipes so they settle for ready-made meals or quick and easy dishes such as boiling potatoes and warming frozen fish fingers or Swedish meatballs in the oven.

On Saturdays, the Nyströms visit a nearby farmers' market and purchase different kinds of vegetables. Popular choices are beets, which they boil and eat with melted butter and salt; salad greens, such as spinach; and trendy vegetables, for example, *ramsoms* (a wild relative of chives), which have become very popular. Sanna, David, and Lisa eat lunch at one of the numerous restaurants that serve food from different cultures; a favorite is Lebanese food, but they sometimes purchase take-out sushi. Often, they prepare dinner at home and love to try out new recipes of modern Swedish home cooking, which are quicker to make than more traditional ones.

## Major Foodstuffs

Sweden has only 5.93 percent arable land, while the rest of the country is comprised of forests, lakes, mountains, and coastlines. Fish and seafood, especially salmon and shrimp, are inexpensive; wild game is a traditional part of Swedish home cooking; locally grown vegetables are available during the summer months but otherwise are imported, along with fruits and meat.

Sweden's most important grain crops are wheat, rye, barley, and oats. Barley is mostly used for animal feed, but wheat and oats are a part of Swedish daily fare. A very popular breakfast is oatmeal with berry jams and milk, and wheat flour is used in creamy gravies and pastries. Rye is an indispensable ingredient in Swedish *knäckebröd,* or crispbread. Rye and oats also are combined or used as the main ingredient in breakfast porridges. Sugar beets are also cultivated in the southern part of the country. Sweden is practically self-sufficient regarding sugar because of the processing of sugar beets into refined sugar. Swedes consume the most candy and sweets in the world.

Potatoes are a favorite crop in Sweden, even though the yield is not large enough to feed the whole population, and, therefore, a certain percentage is imported. Potatoes are often divided into several categories according to when the potato is harvested and the best use for it. Fresh, early summer potatoes are a must on all Swedish tables during the summer. They are small and their skin is so soft that they do not have to be peeled; just washing the dirt off is usually enough. Starchy potatoes are mostly used in mashes; less starchy, firmer varieties are often boiled or sautéed. These are more frequent during the fall and winter months.

Other root crops frequently used in Swedish cuisine are carrots, rutabagas, and beets. Carrots are often just grated and served as a salad on the side. Rutabaga mash is a traditional Swedish side dish and is sometimes mixed with mashed potatoes. Boiled summer beets are popular with butter and salt, while fall and winter beets are preserved in brine and consumed throughout the year.

All sorts of cabbages are available year-round in Sweden. Spring cabbage, with its tender leaves, is used for making *kåldolmar,* the Swedish interpretation of eastern Mediterranean dolmas. Filled with minced meat and served with creamy gravy, mashed potatoes, and lingonberry jam, this dish is one of the most important in Sweden. Cabbage is also used for making *skånsk kålsoppa,* a winter soup with homemade broth and salted pork. Red cabbage is a delicacy from southern Sweden and is irreplaceable on the Christmas table.

Pork may be the most commonly used meat in Swedish households. Many different varieties of pork sausages are eaten, such as the thick *falukorv* (Falun sausage, similar to bologna), a favorite of children, and the *isterband,* made of pork, rye, and

potatoes. Pork steaks appear regularly on Swedish tables, and bacon and salted pork are used to flavor different soups, such as the popular *ärtsoppa* (yellow pea soup), traditionally eaten on Thursdays. Beef is also eaten regularly even though it is more expensive than pork. Swedish *köttbullar,* the traditional meatballs now available throughout the world at IKEA restaurants, are made of one part minced pork and one part minced beef, depending on one's budget and taste. Swedish meatballs must be served with gravy, potatoes, and lingonberry jam.

Wild meats are a staple in the northern parts of Sweden and have seen a comeback in more urban areas. Supermarkets now have different cuts of wild boar, elk, moose, and deer for sale, so Swedes do not have to go hunting to be able to prepare wild game stews, hamburgers, and steaks. Hunting is a common fall activity, and Swedish homes often have very large industrial freezers in which to preserve the game. Even in urban households, the standard refrigerator does not include a small freezer but is placed beside an independent freezer of the same size.



A young girl eating a delicious winter meal of Swedish meatballs, served with mashed potatoes, gravy, and lingonberry sauce. (iStockPhoto)

Several dairy products are part of Swedish daily meals. Milk is a compulsory drink for children and is also used in porridges. Cheese in Sweden is most often made from cow milk and is very popular. Many different varieties, such as *västerbottenost,* a strong aged cheese from northern Sweden, and the mild *hushållsost,* literally "home cheese," are easily available throughout the country. *Messmör* (whey butter), a spread, and *messost* (whey cheese), a cheese, are both made from milk whey, butter, and sugar and are a must on crispbread. Cream with different quantities of fat is used almost every day in Sweden. "Cooking cream" makes gravies creamy, sour cream is used in dips and cold sauces, and whipping cream is irreplaceable in *pannkakstårta,* an easy-to-make birthday pancake cake that originated in Norrbotten (North Bothnia) and is now very popular everywhere in the country.

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### *Pannkakstårta* (Birthday Pancake Cake)

*Makes 12–15 medium-sized pancakes*

#### Ingredients

1 c wheat flour

½ tsp salt

2½ c milk

3 medium eggs

3 tbsp butter

In a large bowl, blend the wheat flour and the salt. Add 1¼ cup milk, and beat until the dough is smooth. Add the rest of the milk, and beat again. Add 1 egg at a time, beating well before adding the next. Melt 2 tablespoons butter, and blend it into the batter. Set aside for 30 minutes.

In a large frying pan, melt 1 tablespoon butter on medium heat. Pour approximately ¼ cup batter into the pan, and fry for about 1 minute, then turn

over and fry until golden brown. Put aside to cool on a plate.

**For the Cake**

2 c whipping cream

Sugar to taste

1½ c berry jam or fresh berries of your choice

In a bowl, whip the cream, and add sugar to taste. Place one pancake on a cake plate or other serving dish, spread some berry jam or fresh berries on the pancake, and top with 2 tablespoons whipped cream. Cover with 1 or 2 pancakes and repeat the process until all pancakes have been used. Decorate with whipped cream and fresh berries. Serve cool.

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Fish is eaten at least once a week in Sweden, preferably on Tuesdays, and may be prepared in many different manners. Fish casseroles are often served in schools, and fish fingers with mashed potatoes are a children's favorite. Herring, both pickled and fried, has been an important staple in Sweden and is often eaten with potatoes and crispbread. Seafood, mostly shrimp and crayfish, is inexpensive. A delicacy that is available once a year is *surströmming,* fermented herring, served with bread and sometimes potatoes with a glass of milk on the side. Fish roe is also common in Swedish households, mostly in the form of *kaviar,* which, even though the names are similar, does not have anything in common with Russian caviar. Swedish kaviar is a spread eaten on bread with cheese and cucumber slices or on boiled eggs, and it may be used in fish sauces or sour cream seafood dips.

Sweden produces several kinds of alcoholic beverages, of which the most well known is Absolut vodka. Vodka and *akvavit,* the "water of life" made from potatoes, are irreplaceable on holidays. They are served with meals, cold, in small glasses, and are drunk in one shot, followed by a sip of beer. Akvavit is flavored with different kinds of spices, for example, dill, coriander, and caraway seeds; many Swedes make their own spice blends that they add to unflavored akvavit, which is then left to steep for several weeks.



Pickled herring served with tomato, cucumber, and lettuce. (Shutterstock)

Favorite nonalcoholic beverages are *saft,* a berry or fruit concentrate; water flavored with cucumber, lemon, or orange slices; tea; and coffee. Swedes are some of the world's biggest consumers of coffee, and the *fika,* coffee break, is compulsory in most workplaces in the country, where workers take coffee breaks twice a day. There are many varieties of coffee in Sweden: espresso, cappuccino, café au lait, and regular brewed coffee. Coffee shops are found on almost every corner in cities. Coffee and tea are often accompanied by an American-style muffin (called *muffins*), brownies, or more traditional Swedish pastries.

Desserts and sweets, cookies, cakes, and pastries are very popular in Sweden. Many recipes have French origins, though they have been adapted throughout the years. Others are originally foreign, such as Italian *pannacotta* (cooked sweetened cream solidified with gelatin), which is now sold in portion-sized containers in most supermarkets. A favorite in Sweden is *ostkaka,* which is very different from its literal translation of "cheesecake": It is a pudding or curdlike cake of cream, sugar, egg, almond, and bitter almond, served warm with cloudberry jam and sometimes whipped cream.

## Cooking

Swedish cuisine has a rural heritage that is simple though time-consuming. Boiling, frying, and baking are the most commonly used techniques, and,

in summer, barbecuing meats, vegetables, and fruits has become very popular during the last few years. Most stoves and ovens are electric, though a few households have older gas-fueled stoves, which are becoming quite popular in higher-income households. Microwave ovens are found in almost all Swedish homes and workplaces, where fully furnished kitchens are often available to workers. Preserving food by pickling, drying, and smoking is part of the rural heritage, and the techniques originally became popular in order to store foodstuffs during the harsh winter. Nowadays, foods from all over the world are available in most supermarkets, and preserving food is not necessary. However, the tradition of picking wild berries and mushrooms and preserving them is still very much alive today in Sweden.

## Typical Meals

Since Swedes are very health conscious, they believe in starting the day with a good breakfast consisting of at least a couple slices of bread, preferably crispbread, with ham, cheese, and some cucumber slices. Sometimes breakfast consists of boiled eggs or oatmeal porridge with berries or jam and milk. Adults drink tea or coffee, while children often have a cup of hot cocoa.

Lunch is an important meal and is usually eaten around noon. Depending on the day of the week, since Swedes maintain the custom of eating fish on Tuesdays and soup on Thursdays, restaurant lunch menus vary from Thai noodles, sushi, and Swedish meatballs as well as a vegetarian alternative dish to more traditional fish casseroles, yellow pea soup and Swedish pancakes, or light salads or pies. Submarine sandwiches are also popular lunch choices.

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***Ärtsoppa* (Yellow Pea Soup)**

*Serves 6*

*Preparation: 2–3 hours*

**Ingredients**

6½ c dried yellow peas

8½–12 c water

1 lb salt pork (or bacon)

2 tsp dried marjoram or thyme

Cull and rinse the yellow peas. Put in a large bowl and cover with water. Leave to soak overnight. Drain the soaking water, and put in a large pot. Cover with 8½ cups cold water, and bring to a boil. Skim. Slice the salt pork or bacon into 1-inch cubes. Add to the soup and cover. Boil on medium heat until the peas feel tender and the soup is creamy, about 2 hours. Skim often and remove any pea shells. Add dried marjoram or thyme, and serve in bowls with some spicy sweet mustard on the side.

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Around 2:30 P.M., it is common in Sweden to eat fruit or have a coffee break with something sweet, which may be a couple of cookies or a pastry.

Dinner on weekdays is regularly simple, with many ready-to-heat dishes or take-out foods available. Many Swedes with tight schedules choose to cook during weekends instead. However, some dishes, such as *korv* (sausage) stroganoff with rice and all sorts of meats (beef, pork, chicken) fried with vegetables and often noodles, a Thai- and Chinese-inspired cooking method, are popular weekday meals.

Swedes are very interested in cooking, and weekends are reserved for trying new recipes or creating new menus. Weekends start on Friday evenings, when taco dinners or fajitas are a popular choice. On Saturdays and Sundays, recipes from all around the world are cooked. In urban areas, it is not unusual to make Korean *bibimbap* (rice topped with vegetables and slices of meat) or Peruvian ceviche (raw marinated fish) to share with friends. Traditional Swedish meals are often reserved for holidays.

## Eating Out

Swedes often eat out, in particular in cities, where many restaurants serve weekday lunch menus. Also, there are many popular street stands that offer hot dogs, hamburgers, and kebabs that share their customers with McDonald's and Burger King. Most

pubs and local bars offer similar menus, of which steak and fries is often the most inexpensive choice, even though they also often serve Swedish home cooking such as *pytt i panna,* a hodgepodge of potatoes and meat leftovers sautéed with onions and served with fried eggs. However, dining out in Sweden is often expensive at regular restaurants, which are often led by well-known chefs, who during the last few years have been inspired by traditional Swedish home cooking to create modern versions of their grandmothers' recipes. Many restaurants specialize in fish and seafood or garlic-based dishes, while others concentrate on serving wild game or vegan food.

As Swedes are very interested in foreign foods, there are many restaurants that have Middle Eastern, Chinese, Korean, Thai, American, Greek, Indian, and Pakistani menus. One of the most popular choices for eating out with friends is restaurants that serve Spanish-inspired tapas.

## Special Occasions

Sweden has a Christian heritage, and therefore Swedes celebrate Christmas, Easter, and All Saints' Day. However, Christian celebrations have been influenced by pre-Christian customs and sometimes foreign traditions, which have contributed to create very Swedish holiday festivities.

Christmas is very important in Sweden, even though it is no longer expected for families to celebrate Christmas Eve or share a meal on Christmas Day. Many younger Swedes celebrate with friends or travel abroad during the holidays. Nevertheless, some traditional Christmas customs are irreplaceable for many Swedes. In early December, restaurants begin to serve the traditional *julbord,* Christmas table, which includes many if not all of the compulsory Swedish Christmas dishes. Swedish meatballs, Christmas ham, red cabbage with raisins, several kinds of pickled herring, smoked salmon, sausages, cheese, crispbread, and boiled potatoes are just some examples of the wide variety of dishes on the Christmas table. Almost all employers invite their staff to a Christmas lunch or dinner consisting of the traditional Christmas table. However, during the last few years new menus have become popular, and it is not unusual to share a Pakistani- or Lebanese-inspired Christmas table. Sweets are also very important during the holidays, and many children bake Swedish *pepparkakor,* gingerbread cookies, at school or at home. These are a must on the festival of Lucia, which celebrates the Italian Saint Lucia as the one who brings the light, on the early morning of December 13.

The Christmas table is a variation of the traditional Swedish smorgasbord that also is a part of the summer festival of *midsommar,* or Feast of St. John, celebrated in late June on Midsummer's Eve. Everywhere in Sweden, people celebrate summer by singing and dancing around a Maypole decorated with flowers and share a meal that consists of a great variety of herring, salmon, and shrimp dishes, the irreplaceable meatballs and boiled spring potatoes, lots of beer and akvavit, and bowls of strawberries and cream for dessert. The festivities begin around noon and stretch well into the night.

Summer is the most important season in Sweden due to the climate, which is cold and very dark through the long winter months. Therefore, starting in early June, fresh produce is a treat, and Swedes look forward to celebrating summer with strawberries and cream cakes, a favorite on summer birthdays; rhubarb pie with vanilla cream; and fresh greens. Summer is also the time for connecting with



Gingerbread cookies, often found in Swedish homes at Christmastime. (Shutterstock)

nature, and it is common to spend as much time as possible outdoors, eating most meals in gardens and on balconies. Swedish forests are rich with many kinds of berries, and families often spend their summer days picking berries and mushrooms. Fishing is also a favorite summer activity, and it is not unusual to see fishermen in downtown Stockholm, which has many good fishing spots.

In August the *kräftskiva,* crayfish party, is celebrated outdoors and in the company of family and friends. The menu is simple: lots of crayfish with dill flowers, crispbread and cheese, and akvavit and beer. The idea is to have a shot of akvavit for each crayfish claw on one's plate and to sing one of the many traditional songs before downing the shot. As the theme is crayfish, the table and its surroundings are decorated with paper tablecloths, napkins, carton plates, bibs, and plastic glasses, all decorated with crayfish and crayfish-related themes, and one or several paper lanterns representing the man-in-the-moon is hung from tree branches.

For Easter, Swedes decorate their homes with twigs and bright-colored feathers, and their children, both boys and girls, dress as *påskkärringar* (Easter witches who according to old Swedish beliefs congregated on the evening before Good Friday) and go out trick-or-treating. The Easter bunny usually makes an appearance on Easter Sunday, and both children and adults receive or trade as presents large cardboard eggs filled with candy and other sweets. Traditionally, Easter is celebrated by eating a variation of the smorgasbord, with cold shrimp, fish, and egg dishes and occasionally a lamb roast. In recent years, other dishes have become popular, and nowadays each family may create their own Easter menu; some may have Tex-Mex food, while others might make Vietnamese spring rolls.

## Diet and Health

Swedes are very health conscious; many work out regularly and make mindful choices about the foods they eat. A lot of people are vegetarians or vegan, and others avoid red meat and pork. Recently, eating foods with a low glycemic index has become very popular, and many restaurants now offer at least one dish with a low glycemic index.

A few years ago, a journalist published a book about additives and preservatives, and Swedes were shocked about the high content of unnatural ingredients in their favorite foods. Therefore, many Swedes now check the ingredients on packaged foods and try to avoid those they do not consider natural. A chain of supermarkets has taken advantage of this trend and is now marking "real food" to make it easier for their customers to find more natural products.

Another important trend is the strong movement toward organic and locally produced foods, which takes up a large part of the media discussions. Many cookbooks that deal with organic, regional, local, and unprocessed foods are published every year in Sweden. Food blogs are also very popular, and there are several that have organic and natural food as their favorite subject.

Sweden has a strong rural tradition, and many Swedes have a passion for nature and everything related to growing and cultivating plants. In many cities people may rent a small patch of land for growing their own food, and it is common for those who do to spend several days at a time in their lots, which most often have a small shed in which to spend the night. Recently, growers have organized small local markets, which have become very popular, in which they sell their surplus. Many who do not have access to arable land grow vegetables and even fruits at home, and it is common to see balconies in Sweden overflowing with cherry tomato plants and different kinds of herbs.

*Gabriela Villagran Backman*

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# Switzerland

## Overview

Switzerland is located in central Europe, landlocked between Italy, France, Germany, Austria, and Liechtenstein. The country is divided into three regions—the Alps, the Jura, and the Central Plateau—and 26 cantons. German, French, Italian, and Romansch are the country's four official languages. Its 7.6 million inhabitants are 65 percent Swiss German, 18 percent Swiss French, 10 percent Swiss Italian, 1 percent Romansch, and 6 percent of other origins. Immigrants are numerous in Switzerland, having come most recently from the Balkans. Serbo-Croatian is now the fourth most spoken language in the country, and 4.3 percent of the population is Muslim, compared to about 42 percent Catholic and 35 Percent protestant. The country's quality of living is high, and the average life expectancy is about 80 years.

Much of the country consists of mountains (the Alps cover 65 percent of its surface, with the Jura making up another 12 percent), with its highest peak, the Dufourspitze, towering at 15,203 feet. Many lakes adorn the landscape—the largest are Lake Geneva, Lake Constance, the Lake of Neuchâtel, and Lake Maggiore—which makes for a diet rich in fish specific to each lake and region. About a third of the country's land is farmed.

Switzerland's public transportation is abundant and efficient. The country boasts one of the world's densest rail systems, ranging from intercity express trains that go from Zurich to Geneva, with two stops in between, in about three hours to regional trains that cover medium-size towns, connecting them to larger urban areas. Postal cars serve smaller towns and mountain villages, while boats connect cities around lakes.

What the Swiss cook and eat is still very much influenced by the ingredients found in each region, but immigration, travel, and a large variety of prepared foreign foods available in supermarkets have diversified the Swiss palate. A Chinese hot pot is as likely to be the centerpiece of a dinner among friends as cheese fondue is. Stores close at 6:30 P.M. on weeknights and 4:30 P.M. on Saturdays, and they are closed on Sundays. Convenience stores in major train stations sell a variety of foodstuffs, including fresh fruits and vegetables, allowing commuters to shop on their way home.

Rustic dishes that contain high-calorie foodstuffs, such as potatoes, cheese, pasta, and sausages (sometimes all together), and seasonal vegetables are most typical of Swiss cuisine. These long-standing traditional foods date back to a time when most Swiss worked outside, on farms, in forests, or in the mountains.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Marc and Valérie Münster live in Bern, the Swiss capital, in the top-floor apartment of a three-story house converted into office and residential space near the center of town. Marc is half Swiss German, but they both grew up in the French part of the country and moved to Bern after he finished his master's degree in geology and she her doctoral degree in law. Marc works an hour away, in Bienne (Biel), as a director and area manager for a company that educates corporations and individuals on sustainable development. Valérie works for the government in Bern, as a legal officer,

and travels often. They became parents in September 2009 and as a result reduced their work schedules. Marc now stays at home on Wednesdays, while Valérie does so on Tuesdays and Friday afternoons. They are committed to eating local, seasonal foods and buy mostly Swiss-grown products, organic if possible.

Like many Swiss people, their refrigerator is on the small side, so they tend to shop several times a week for quantities of food sufficient for a day or two of meals. They mostly purchase vegetables, cheese products, rice, and pasta, limiting their meat consumption to a couple of times a week. The vegetables they buy are fresh and seasonal rather than frozen, even when shopping at the supermarket, with the exception of dried green beans, a popular Swiss product. They cook dinner every night but sometimes resort to the high-quality prepared foods that are widely available in Swiss supermarkets, such as premade *rösti* (a potato pancake), premade tart dough for savory tarts, precooked vegetables, and jarred sauces.

Like most Swiss urban areas, Bern is still surrounded by agrarian land and farms, even if housing developments are also prevalent in the countryside. Farmers come to the farmers' market that takes place in front of the Federal Palace and in nearby streets every Tuesday and Saturday morning. The Münsters shop there every Saturday morning, unless they are out of town, purchasing vegetables, meat, and cheeses to use during the week, and flowers. They typically buy a variety of sausages (some of which are ground on site at the market by the butcher once they pick their meat) from the region, both fresh and cured. Local cheesemongers offer both regional specialties, such as Belper Knolle (a spreadable cheese flavored with garlic and pepper), and cheeses that come from other parts of Switzerland.

In addition to cheeses of all sorts, dairy products such as yogurt, milk, and cream figure prominently in the Münsters' refrigerator. They purchase plain or Greek yogurt to mix with cereals and muesli in the morning, and fruit-flavored yogurts to eat at the end of a meal. They rarely purchase or make dessert for weeknight meals, preferring instead to eat a yogurt and a fruit. They also frequently purchase chocolate bars, which they'll eat as an afternoon snack or after dinner.

The Münsters make their own sparkling water with a Soda-Club. They drink it throughout the day and with lunch and dinner. They drink tea and coffee with breakfast and an espresso after a meal. They often have a beer—usually from Appenzell—before or with dinner on weeknights. On weekends or when friends visit, they serve Swiss wines, which they purchase directly from the producers during tastings in Valais.

## Major Foodstuffs

Each canton has its own preferred and most well-known foodstuffs, some of which are not available in other regions and might even be the specialty of only one or two producers. Other products that originated in one particular location are available—and loved—in the whole country.

True to the country's image abroad, cheese is a major Swiss foodstuff. Swiss people consume dozens of varieties of cheeses, however, not just Emmental (what is called Swiss cheese in the United States). Gruyère is usually available as salted, semisalted, mild, aged, and from the pastures (made while the cows were pasturing in the mountains in the summer, which makes it distinctly fruity). Sbrinz is another hard cheese that is eaten raw or grated onto dishes that are then cooked. Tilsiter has a softer texture that is closer to that of Emmental. Vacherin Mont d'Or comes from the canton of Vaud, but its distinct round pine box appears in cheese cases everywhere throughout the winter. It is made from lightly cooked milk and has a pale orange rind. It is eaten raw but also baked in its box with garlic and white wine until melted. Tête de Moine, from the Jura, is a round cheese that comes with its own stand and blade that turns around the top of the cheese (the *girolle*) and allows the diner to "shave" it into flower-shaped portions. Tomme Vaudoise is a small, round, soft cheese originally from Vaud that is eaten raw or baked (often breaded in the latter case). Many Swiss eat a piece or two of cheese before or in lieu of dessert on a regular basis. Cheese is also baked, melted, grated, and incorporated into other dishes, allowing for endless variations and preparations.

While cuts of meats such as steaks and roasts are expensive and as such eaten sparingly, sausages

feature prominently on the Swiss table. Raw, cured, or smoked sausages, such as the *St. Galler Bratwurst* (a boiled veal sausage that is roasted or grilled), *Landjäger* (a smoked beef and bacon sausage eaten cold), and *longeole genevoise* (a raw pork sausage that includes lard in its composition), are often served alongside röstis or another starchy dish. *Cervelas* is among the country's most beloved foods. This beef-and-pork boiled sausage is a staple of the Swiss barbecue, grilled both in backyards and at campsites. It is also prepared raw in salads, with potatoes, or on its own in the typical *Würstsalat* (sausage salad). A cold-smoked pork and cabbage sausage made in the canton of Vaud is cooked and served with boiled leeks and potatoes, in a typical dish called *papet vaudois.* Sausages of all kinds are as available at local butchers (most towns still have one) as they are in larger supermarkets, which often have a meat counter. Butchers also have stands at farmers' markets.

*Bündnerfleisch* is one of the most prized Swiss meat products. Legs of beef are cured in salt and spices for several weeks, before being air-dried for 10 to 15 weeks, during which they are also pressed so as to extract moisture. It is traditionally made from cows raised in Switzerland, but cheaper versions, for which the cows are raised abroad, have appeared on the market in recent years.

Thanks to its numerous lakes and rivers, fish figure prominently in the Swiss diet. Perch fillets are one of the characteristic dishes found all around Lake Geneva in the summer. The small fillets are breaded, fried, and served with a squeeze of lemon and French fries. *Ombles-chevaliers,* also from Lake Geneva, are mostly eaten poached with a white wine and cream sauce. Lake and brook trout abound. Blausee Bioforellen, located on the Blausee in the Bernese Alps, are the only organically farmed trout in Switzerland. Its highly acclaimed varieties include rainbow, river, and salmon trout. *Feras* are found in most parts of Switzerland, including the Tessin, where they are sautéed and served with a vegetable marinade, and St. Gallen, where they are served with an onion and tomato sauce.

Grains, such as rice, polenta, oats, wheat, and spelt, are popular both as side dishes and as vegetarian main dishes. Polenta and risotto are traditional to Tessin, the Swiss-Italian canton, but appear on all tables. Most of the oat consumption comes as part of *Birchermüesli,* the traditional Swiss breakfast cereal mix. Potatoes are also used in large quantities, to make dishes such as rösti, potato gratin, and *spätzli* (ragged noodles made from a thick batter).

Bouillon cubes (most likely to be Knorr or Maggi brand) are a staple of the Swiss pantry. While some cooks undoubtedly make their own stocks, many use this shortcut for dishes such as soups, risottos, and stews. Maggi Würze, a sauce similar in color and flavor to soy sauce, is also a frequently used seasoning. A weeknight dish that most children eat consists simply of small macaroni pasta doused in Maggi Würze.

Bakeries and pastry shops abound in Switzerland; no small town is without its fresh bread supply, even if it takes the form of a bread depot where a baker from another town drops off bread for sale (at a convenience store, for example). In larger towns that have several pastry shops, each will often distinguish itself with a specialty. As a result, it is not unusual for customers to frequent several stores depending on what they need. Typical sweets found in the pastry case include *carac* (a ganache tartlet covered in green fondant and adorned with a chocolate pastille more typical of the French part of Switzerland), flaky pastries called mille-feuilles, *baba au rhum* (cylindrical sponge cakes doused in rum), fruit tartlets, and chocolate slices. Most shops also sell petits fours, and the more sophisticated ones add chocolates to their offerings.

Many pastries and cakes retain their origin in their name even though they are available elsewhere. The following are among the most popular ones, available both in mass-produced versions in supermarkets and in independent pastry shops. *Appenzeller Biberli,* a lightly spiced dough shaped as a round or a rectangle and filled with almond paste, is a specialty of Appenzell that makes its way into all treat bags given out for St. Nicholas or Christmas (alongside cookies, chocolates, mandarins, and peanuts in their shells). It is available in supermarkets year-round, but pastry shops often make it just around the holidays and press its top in a special mold that adorns it with a St. Nicholas



A baker is Switzerland makes chocolates by hand. (Shutterstock)

or other seasonal design, for example. Carrot cake (*Rüeblitorte*) is a specialty from Aargau, while Zug is known for its kirsch-flavored cake (*Kirschtorte*). Kirsch is a clear spirit derived from cherries. Walnut tart, from the Grisons (*Engadiner Nüsstorte*), is widely popular around the country. All supermarkets sell mass-produced, snack-size ones, while pastry shops throughout the country make their own version, which consists of *pâte sablée* (a sweet crumbly pastry crust) and a mixture of walnuts and honey. Some versions are open-faced and others completely enclosed in dough. Pear bread (*Birnbrot*) from Glarus has also made its way to the rest of the country; its filling includes pears, kirsch, nuts, and spices, encased in *pâte brisée. Basler Leckerli,* originally from Basel, is a hard cookie made from a dough that includes honey, candied citrus peels, and spices.

Fruit syrups, either commercial or artisanal, are popular throughout Switzerland. Elderberry, raspberry, and black currant are among the preferred flavors for these concentrates of fruits and sugar. Because only a small amount of syrup is mixed with water, it is a favored alternative to sodas.

Rivella is among Switzerland's best-known drinks. The soda, whose classic version is Rivella Red, contains milk serum, as well as herb and fruit extracts. Its lighter version, Rivella Blue, was the first low-calorie soda in Europe. Rivella Green (green tea–flavored) and Rivella Yellow (with soy serum rather than milk serum) are more recent and not as widely consumed. Sinalco, a German soda that is the oldest European soft drink, is also a popular beverage, as are Coca-Cola products.

Swiss wines are an important feature of the country's gastronomy. Swiss people drink wine with food rather than on its own. Hot, spiced wine is a staple of street fairs and community events in the winter. The Valais, a canton in southwestern Switzerland, benefits from a warm and dry climate that makes it ideal for wine production (it is also one of the top fruit-producing regions). As such, its wines represent 40 percent of the total Swiss production. Fendant (a white wine made with Chasselas grapes) and Dole (a blend of Pinot Noir and Gamay) are its most well-known wines, but other varietals, such as Sylvaner and Petite Arvine, are gaining in popularity. Chasselas, Pinot Noir, and Gamay are also the varietals most found in Vaud and Geneva, while Merlot is most abundant in Ticino, the other three top wine-producing cantons in Switzerland. Blauburgunder is a reputed Pinot Noir from the Grisons.

## Cooking

While their reliance on ready-made products has increased, the Swiss still cook regularly. The Swiss kitchen does not include many appliances and gadgets. A handheld blender, for soups and purees, and a handheld electric whisk are more common than countertop appliances that would perform the same duties. A food processor will typically be the largest appliance in the kitchen, tucked away until needed. Many typical Swiss dishes, as well as weeknight meals, require few special techniques and can be made in one pot. Chopping onions or shallots and garlic might be the most complex task a cook will accomplish while making dinner. Many households will, however, own a fondue *caquelon* and a raclette oven—used for melting cheese, which is scraped onto toast.

Swiss cooking uses the standard techniques of the Western kitchen, including sautéing, boiling, roasting, braising, and grilling. A number of Swiss dishes are stewlike and as such are cooked for a long time on the stovetop. The oven is much used for gratins and baked goods.

Betty Bossi is an essential cooking partner in Swiss kitchens. This fictional woman represents a culinary empire that includes monthly magazines, cookbooks, utensils, and food products. The recipes range from classic Swiss dishes and their modern interpretations to international cuisines and focus on specific dishes, such as cakes. Even if they do not subscribe to the magazine, most Swiss cooks own at least one Betty Bossi cookbook. Many "family" recipes also have their origin with Betty Bossi.

Because eating out is often expensive and apartments are usually of comfortable size, even in cities, Swiss people frequently invite each other over for dinner. A weeknight dinner after work will be simple, such as a *Zürcher Geschnetzeltes* (a veal stew from Zurich), a cheese or onion tart with a salad, or pasta. A weekend meal will include appetizer, or at least hors d'oeuvres to enjoy with a beer or a glass of wine, and dessert, often homemade, but a cake from a nearby pastry shop might also make an appearance.

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**Zürich Veal Stew**

*Serves 4*

All-purpose flour

⅔ lb veal cutlets, sliced by hand

½ lb veal kidneys, sliced by hand

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Unsalted butter

4 shallots, finely chopped

⅔ c sliced white mushrooms

1 c dry white wine

1 c heavy cream

*Beurre manié* (recipe follows)

1. Lightly flour the cutlet and kidney pieces, and season with salt and pepper.

2. Heat butter in a pan over medium-high heat. Add the cutlet pieces, and cook until golden brown, 6 to 8 minutes. Remove to a plate and set aside. Repeat the process with the kidney pieces.

3. Add more butter to the pan, and add the shallots. Cook until translucent, 3 to 4 minutes. Add the mushrooms to the pan, then deglaze with the wine. Return the meats to the pan, then add the cream and stir in the beurre manié until completely incorporated.

4. Season with salt and pepper, and cook until the stew comes together as a creamy mixture. Serve over rösti, spätzli, or rice.

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***Beurre Manié***

½ c flour

½ c butter

Prepare the beurre manié by working the flour into the butter with your hands.

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Baking is as essential to the Swiss cook as knowing how to prepare meat and vegetable dishes, particularly during the holidays. The Swiss exchange homemade cookies for St. Nicholas and/or Christmas, so ovens see a flurry of activity in December. Many typical cookies include almond or hazelnut flour, which are available in all supermarkets. During the year, much of the baked goods include fruits and are eaten with coffee or tea in the afternoon and as dessert. Children often assist with the baking process, helping to perpetuate family traditions. Most people buy bread at their local bakeries but still make *Butterzopf* (*tresse*), a bread that looks like and has a texture similar to challah, on weekends.

Gardens are a popular feature of the Swiss landscape. Residents of the country or the suburbs often grow small plots of vegetables and might have a fruit tree (apple, pear, or cherry) in their backyard. Most towns and cities rent plots to apartment dwellers, who garden after work and on weekends. Neighbors often benefit from their generosity in July and August, when even a small plot results in bountiful crops of zucchini, tomatoes, greens, and fruits such as blackberries, currants, and *mirabelles* (a small, yellow plum). Blackberries and wild strawberries grow alongside less trafficked roads and in the mountains, becoming part of the menu



A small garden in a Swiss village and the Matterhorn. (iStockPhoto)

for people out on a stroll. Foraging also applies to mushrooms, which appear in many Swiss dishes, such as meat stews or on their own in a cream sauce and served over bread, for example. Much of these homegrown and foraged vegetables and fruits are cooked right away, but they are also canned (whole or processed into sauces or jams, for example) to be eaten throughout the year. While younger generations do not can as much as their parents and grandparents, food-preservation methods nonetheless are important.

## Typical Meals

While not always perfectly so, typical Swiss meals tend to be fairly balanced. A green salad is often served after the main dish, which can be as simple as a vegetable gratin. The Swiss still cook many of their evening meals at home, and as such they like simple, healthful dishes that can feed the whole family with a minimum of fuss.

Coffee, tea, and milk are equally popular for breakfast. Many Swiss households own coffee machines (Nescafé being the most popular brand), which they use in the morning and throughout the day. Nearly all workers take a coffee break at some point in the morning and in the afternoon, often going to a café or cafeteria to sit down with a coffee or espresso. Most major cities now have at least one Starbucks, but coffee on the go is nowhere near as available or popular as it is in the United States. Typical mealtime beverages include still or sparkling water, often mixed with fruit syrups, and wine. Beer is drunk more frequently separate from meals, outside of the home on a weekend afternoon or before dinner when coming back from work. A digestif, most often in the form of a fruit- or herb-based schnapps, such as kirsch, Williamine, or

Appenzeller, often appears at the end of a weekend or special-occasion meal.

*Café complet* (the French term is used in all languages) is a long-standing staple weekly meal in Switzerland, now often enjoyed on a Sunday night. While its name comes from coffee and that beverage or chicory was likely served, with much milk, in earlier decades, that is no longer always the case. The meal centers on bread and various types of cheeses and spreads, with no cooked items.

When making desserts, fruit- and custard-based preparations prevail among Swiss cooks. *Süssmostcreme* is a classic dessert, originally from Thurgau and mostly found in the German part of the country, that is made with apple juice, eggs (whole or yolks only depending on the versions), cream, and sugar. Crème brûlée and mousses are equally popular at home and in restaurants. Fruit tarts and cakes appear on the Swiss table at least weekly. High-quality prepared doughs are available in the refrigerator (rather than the freezer) cases of supermarkets and can be used immediately, which allows cooks to have dessert ready in minutes once they cut up fruits and spread them over the dough.

Swiss people get up early and often get to work by 8 A.M. Many sit down for a breakfast consisting of bread and jam or cereals, but others will eat a croissant on the go or wait until the morning break to have a yogurt and a fruit. When not working close enough to go home for lunch (the lunch break lasts at least one hour), Swiss workers will eat the prix fixe menu offered by a nearby, inexpensive restaurant or their company's cafeteria. Plenty of shops offer sandwiches, savory tartlets, and hot dishes to go. Because of increased commuting time, many Swiss people don't get home until 6:30 or 7 P.M., but they still take the time to cook. As a result, dinner most often consists of a hot meal, even if it is a simple one that makes use of shortcuts. A weeknight dinner often includes a salad, which is served after the main dish, and fruit for dessert.

## Eating Out

Switzerland boasts nearly 19,000 stand-alone restaurants and about 4,200 restaurants located in hotels. Half of all meat products eaten in Switzerland are consumed in restaurants. The high volume of tourists, particularly in larger cities and in mountain towns, is partially responsible for such a large number of eateries. While take-out places and cheaper ethnic eateries (often of the fast-food type) have gained in popularity over the last 20 years, a dinner out is still something that is enjoyed at most once a week, because restaurants tend to be expensive. Many Swiss also work away from home and might eat at their company's cafeteria or in a café at lunchtime. Smaller villages will have at least one tavern, where locals will stop for coffee in the morning and afternoon and beer or wine in the evening—but often after eating at home. Many of the larger taverns, some of which also offer rooms to rent, often have a rustic bar on the first floor and a more formal restaurant upstairs.

It is possible to eat in restaurants that are several hundred years old. The Hotel les Armures in Geneva, whose restaurant offers Swiss specialties, dates back to the 17th century. Landgasthof Löwen, in Heimiswil, is a tavern and inn that dates back to 1340. Their emphasis on typical dishes does not close this type of restaurants to the younger generations, who eat this type of food just as they will sushi and other more contemporary fare in trendier settings.

Pizzerias are extremely popular, thanks to their flavorful yet affordable offerings. Most are still owned by Italian immigrants, who represented the largest immigrant group for more than 100 years, until immigrants from the former Yugoslavia began arriving in larger numbers in the 1990s. Pizzas are available for takeout or delivery in most cities (albeit with limited options), but most people still go out to eat them.

While they do not allow for full meals, pastry shops are an integral part of Swiss eating-out habits. No weekend stroll would be complete without a stop for coffee or tea and a pastry at one of the town's shops.

## Special Occasions

The uninitiated might not find special-occasion meals to be much different from regular ones. The

ingredients are simple; some more expensive cuts of meats might be used when cooking for a special occasion at home, for example, but seasonal vegetables and a start will accompany it.

Raclette and fondue are not reserved for special occasions, but they are not exactly typical meals that would be consumed weekly either. They are the occasion of a gathering, even if it is a casual one on a Saturday night. Many Swiss households own a raclette oven (an electric contraption that has room for eight small, square, nonstick cheese holders) and an earthenware fondue pot (a caquelon), but people still often enjoy those foods out, at one of the many rustic restaurants and inns that serve them throughout the country. The type of cheese used for raclette bears that name. It is available in supermarkets in vacuumed-sealed packages or freshly sliced from the local cheesemonger. The type and blend of cheeses used for fondue varies from region to region. A classic combination is the half-and-half (*moitié-moitié*), which features an equal quantity of Vacherin and Gruyère and is typically associated with the canton of Vaud, even if available in other regions.



A quaint and cozy scene of bread being dipped into cheese fondue in front of a fire. (Shutterstock)

### Cheese Fondue

*Serves 4*

If you are a real garlic lover, you can also add a clove—thinly sliced or finely minced—to the fondue itself, for a more pronounced taste.

1 clove garlic

¼ tsp cornstarch

⅔ lb Gruyère, cut in small cubes or grated

⅔ lb Vacherin, cut in small pieces (or substitute a soft, ripe cow-milk cheese)

⅓ c dry white wine, preferably Fendant

1 tbsp kirsch or more to taste

Freshly ground white pepper

Plenty of thick-crusted peasant bread, torn or cut in pieces

1. Rub an earthenware fondue pot with the garlic clove.

2. Dissolve the cornstarch in a couple of tablespoons of the wine. Place the Gruyère and Vacherin in the pot, and add the wine, the dissolved cornstarch, and the kirsch.

3. Place the pot on the stovetop over medium-low heat, and stir with a wooden spoon until the cheese melts and everything forms a homogeneous mixture.

4. Light a container of Sterno canned heat or chafing gel, and place in the appropriate receptacle in the fondue burner stand. Place the fondue pot on the stand. Make sure that the cheese doesn't come to a boil. You can control the heat dispersed by turning the cover of the burner to open or close its ventilation holes.

5. Dip the pieces of bread into the fondue by placing them on long-handled forks. Once you finish the

fondue, be sure to allow the last thin layer of cheese to crust up and form a *religieuse*. You can remove it by poking it with your fork—if you are lucky it will come out in one piece, but otherwise just enjoy the pieces you manage to get.

For special occasions, the Swiss tend to purchase desserts at the local pastry shop rather than make their own. While cakes are not heavily frosted, the ones found in most bakeries for special occasions have buttercream frosting in flavors such as chocolate, coffee, and vanilla. They can also be covered in marzipan. Guests might bring petits fours, to enjoy with coffee and a digestif after the meal.

Several dishes are served for Carnival (usually in February), such as the *Basler Mehlsuppe,* a soup made of roasted flour typical of Basel, and beignets and fried doughs of all kinds. The Bern onion fair features plentiful onion dishes. A chocolate cauldron filled with marzipan vegetables celebrates Geneva's liberation from the Savoyards every December 10, in an occasion called *l'Escalade.*

## Diet and Health

Like many European countries, Switzerland has seen its obesity rate rise over the last 20 years. According to the Federal Office of Public Health, 37.3 percent of Swiss adults have a body mass index greater than 25, which makes them overweight. One out of five children is overweight—a number that has quintupled in 20 years. A decline in physical activity, as both work and leisure become more sedentary, and a diet of high-calorie foods rich in fats and sugars are to blame.

Generally, however, the Swiss lifestyle offers a better work-life balance than other Western countries. While freelancing is not very common, employees can often reduce their work schedule once they start having children or to pursue side activities. Having more time at home means that people cook full meals and bake often. Even the larger cities are close to mountains and lakes, so outdoor activities are part of the everyday life of most Swiss citizens, from a simple walk or a multiday hike at high altitude to boating and skiing.

Grains and dairy products appear frequently on Swiss tables, as do vegetables. Because of its cost, meat is typically not consumed daily. Many still take the time to sit down for breakfast, which includes muesli or bread slices with jams rather than sweet pastries. This makes the Swiss diet a generally balanced one.

*Anne Engammare McBride*

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# Ukraine

## Overview

Ukraine is a large eastern European country. Its territory covers 233,090 square miles. It is bordered by Russia, Belarus, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, and Moldova, as well as the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. The Dnieper, the Dniester, and the Buh are the three major rivers in Ukraine. Ukraine is a unitary republic divided into 24 provinces (*oblast*s) centered around large cities. Its population of just over 46 million people consists of ethnic Ukrainians (77%), Russians (17.3%), Moldovans, and Romanians (0.8%). There are also significant minorities of Belarusians, Bulgarians, Tartars, Jews, Armenians, and Greeks. This diversity is also reflected in Ukrainian cuisine, its ingredients, and its culinary techniques. Ukraine, throughout its history, has been subject to numerous invasions and domination by foreign powers. These influences also led a diverse and multirooted culinary tradition.

Religion also plays an important role in Ukrainian culinary traditions. Of those Ukrainians who are religious, 76 percent are Ukrainian or Russian Orthodox Christians. Eastern-rite Catholics make up 8 percent of the religious population, while Roman Catholics and Protestants make up 2 percent each. Less than 1 percent of the population is Jewish or Muslim. Under Soviet rule, religion was strongly discouraged, and today over half of Ukrainians claim to be atheist or to belong to no faith. Despite this, religious holidays and holiday dishes remain popular.

## Food Culture Snapshot

Oleh and Viktoriya Shevchuk are a young couple living in Kiev, the capital of Ukraine. Oleh owns a small construction company building summer homes outside of Kiev. Viktoriya is an economist working for a private bank. They have no children. Their eating habits have been shaped by both traditional and Soviet foods that their parents served at home, as well as modern influences. Being middle class has allowed the Shevchuks to travel to western Europe and to Mediterranean resorts. They like the gourmet foods they sampled while traveling. Since they both have busy work lives, the Shevchuks also like the new convenience foods that are available in Ukrainian supermarkets.

The Shevchuks live in a typical "bedroom" district of Kiev, on the left shore of the Dnieper River. Like most other people living in the countries of the former Soviet Union, their sources of food are the supermarket, small local shops, and farmers' markets. The Schevchuks shop together at the markets and supermarkets. As they return home after work, they make small, everyday purchases of bread, cookies, and soft drinks at the small local shops. The Shevchuks own a car and once a week drive to the nearest large supermarket, which is a part of the MegaMarket chain. There, they stock up on porridge grains, convenience foods like instant noodles, and cold cuts, milk, and eggs. Since they are young and have had greater exposure to the western European diet, the Shevchuks purchase many items that are not traditionally Ukrainian such as dry breakfast cereal and yogurts. At the Levoberezhny

market, which is not far from where they live, the Shevchuks shop for vegetables and fresh meat. Just like their parents, they try to maintain good relationships with specific stall owners, who then supply them with the better and fresher vegetables and cuts of meat.

## Major Foodstuffs

Ukraine was traditionally seen as the breadbasket of eastern Europe, and it continued to play this role under Soviet rule. Unlike the relatively cold and poor-soiled terrain of its northern neighbors, Russia and Belarus, Ukraine's land was able to support a wheat-based cuisine. Millet and rice play a popular but secondary role. Rye and oats are much less important as grains in Ukrainian culinary traditions, but sourdough rye breads are also common. Various breads, cakes, and filled and plain dumplings are all usually made of wheat flour, sometimes in combination with milled buckwheat.

Vegetables and legumes are also very important to Ukrainian cookery. Beets are the most iconic and popular of the vegetables used in Ukrainian cooking, providing a key ingredient in its most well-known dish, a rich soup known as *borsch.* Beans and lentils are used in soups but are also mashed and served mixed with fats or in combination with other vegetables. Carrots, tomatoes, pumpkins, potatoes, and corn are also very important in Ukrainian cuisine. In western Ukraine, where the influence of Balkan cuisine is quite strong, corn is a major source of starch in the form of a local version of polenta known as *mamalyga,* which is often eaten with a salty sheep-milk cheese. Potatoes are not as common as is in the cuisine of Russia, or especially Belarus, but they still are very popular and commonly presented as a side dish, often in combination with other vegetables or even fruit. Potatoes are also used to obtain starch for use in jellied desserts. Onions, turnips, and cabbage are also important, with cabbage used either raw, fermented, in soups, or stuffed and stewed. Eggplants were seen as "foreign" in the distant past but have now become quite common in Ukrainian cuisine.

Meat is also a popular ingredient. Pork is the most common meat for Ukrainians. As in other traditional cuisines, every part of the pig is used. Lard, or *salo,* is particularly common in Ukrainian food. It is cooked or preserved, often through salting or smoking. Lard is used as an ingredient or as a fat for frying. Many Ukrainian dishes, including doughnut-like desserts, are fried in rendered lard. Lard is used with other meat ingredients to make them moist. Eating pork became an important source of national and religious identity because, in the early-modern era, Ukrainians constantly fought the Muslim Turks and Tartars. Beef became popular only in the late 19th and 20th centuries, since buffalo (traditional bovines in Ukraine, not to be confused with the American bison) were beasts of burden rather than sources of meat. In the west and the south of Ukraine, lamb is a common source of meat as well. Ukrainians do not eat horse meat, but Ukrainian Tartars still use it as an ingredient in their traditional dishes, usually served only on holidays. Chickens, turkeys, and ducks are also eaten in Ukraine. Fish, especially carp, is a popular ingredient for soups and is also prepared in aspic. Herring, salted or marinated, is a popular appetizer, often associated with Jewish Ukrainian cooking. In the south, on the Black Sea and Sea of Azov coasts, saltwater fish is caught in great variety.



Borsch soup served in a glass dish. (iStockPhoto)

Eggs are also commonly used in the rich dishes of Ukraine. They are either fried plain or prepared as rich, multi-ingredient omelets. Eggs are also an

important ingredient in dough for dumplings and holiday breads and pies. Milk is used as a base for soups or a liquid for boiling dumplings. It can be soured and drunk or made into other drinks and cheeses. Cottage cheese, *tvaroh,* is popular throughout the Ukraine, while *bryndzia,* or feta cheese, is popular in the west and in the coastal south of the country.

Fruits such as apples, pears, plums, and cherries are eaten fresh or cooked in drinks and desserts. Berries, such as strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, and currants, are also popular ingredients. Watermelons and an endless variety of other melons are eaten as desserts, preserved, or used in main dishes. Fruit can also be used in savory dishes such as soups and condiments. Sunflower seeds are popular in many dishes but are also eaten roasted as a snack. They are also used as a major source of sunflower oil, which is very common in Ukrainian cooking.

Ukrainian food is not particularly spicy but is quite flavorful. Onions, garlic, dill, caraway seeds, anise, mint, and red and black pepper, as well as bay leaf and cinnamon, are used as common spices and flavoring agents. Vinegar is also a common condiment.

## Cooking

Ukrainian dishes tend to be fairly complex, including multiple ingredients that surround, modify, or amplify one central ingredient. This is particularly well illustrated by borsch, the world-renowned soup that became symbolic of Ukrainian food in general. Borsch can contain up to two dozen ingredients in addition to beets, the definitive ingredient of this soup. Borsch is generally based on pork or beef stock, to which other ingredients are added. In some cases, when borsch is prepared in the style of Odessa (a southern port city) or Poltava (a city in central Ukraine), a goose or chicken stock is used. Ukrainian cuisine, unlike Russian food, favors sautéing (*smazhennie*) ingredients before they are introduced into other dishes. Beets are either sautéed or baked before being placed in the stock. Vegetables—carrots, parsnips, tomatoes, and sometimes turnips—are also sautéed and then added to the soup. All ingredients are added in a particular and usually precise order, depending on the recipe. Kievan borsch recipes included beet *kvass* (a fermented malted beverage). Poltava-style borsch is made with goose and wheat-flour dumplings. Chernigov-style borsch features apples, tomatoes, beans, and squash, while Lvov-style borsch, influenced by the cuisine of the Austrian Empire of which it was once a part, has sautéed frankfurter sausage added to it just before serving.

While borsch is perhaps the best-known Ukrainian dish, the cuisine also includes *kulesh,* a somewhat less famous but nonetheless traditional soup. At its most basic, kulesh is a millet, potato, and lard soup-porridge, originally meant to be prepared in the open field. It is very filling and easy to prepare. Since it was developed by the mobile Cossack warriors, kulesh can be prepared from various ingredients on hand. When moving over long distances by water, Cossacks could replace the potatoes and millet with underwater tubers of river plants, and lard could be replaced with almost any other protein.

### *Kulesh* (Millet, Potato, and Lard Soup)

Boil 6 to 8 cups of water with 2 teaspoons of salt. Once the water boils, add half a cup of millet and cook until done. Cube 6 potatoes, add them to the porridge, and cook for an additional half hour. Meanwhile, fry 2 or 3 finely chopped onions in about 5 ounces of *speck* (or other dry-cured smoked ham). Once the potatoes are ready, add the onions, speck, and a tablespoon of chopped parsley to the soup, and cook for an additional 5 minutes before serving.

Ukraine has a great variety of flour-based dishes. Slavic practices, and possibly even some Turkish influences, have mixed to create Ukrainian dumplings: *vareniki,* similar to Polish pierogi. Ukrainians fill vareniki with cherries, sweet or savory cottage cheese, sautéed onions or *shkvarki* (fried poultry or pork skin cracklings), and fat. Almost any filling can be used, including potatoes, liver, cabbage, beans, or sweet fruit and poppy seeds. *Pampushki* are very small buns made of raised yeast dough that can be made from buckwheat or wheat flour and then either

boiled or baked. They are often served with butter or oil and garlic-flavored sauce as an accompaniment to borsch. *Halushky* are a typically Ukrainian dish, but similarly named and prepared dishes are known in the rest of eastern Europe. The simplest recipes are boiled squares of dough served with butter, oil, or lard. The dough can also be mixed with cottage cheese, potatoes, and apples.

### *Halushky* (Dumplings)

Make a thick dough from 3 cups flour, 2 eggs, 1/3 cup water, and 1 teaspoon salt. After kneading the dough let it rest for 15 to 20 minutes under a towel, and roll it out to a thickness of a little less than half an inch. Cut into small squares. The cut halushky should rest for another 20 minutes to dry. Then drop into boiling salted water. They should be ready when they float to the surface. They should be eaten hot with butter, fried speck or bacon, or melted lard and cubed ham.

Milk and eggs are important components in Ukrainian cooking. Milk is usually simply drunk or soured into yogurt-like drinks and cottage cheese. A typically Ukrainian milk dish is *ryazhenka.* This is a thick, sour milk that was baked first. This caramelizes the milk sugars, giving ryazhenka a color like café au lait and a lightly sweet-sour flavor. Eggs are traditionally made into *yaishni,* rich omelets with cream or sour cream and flour, with many other ingredients. Hard-boiled eggs can also be baked in sour cream or chopped, mixed with raw eggs, and fried into patties.

Meat in the past had been eaten mostly on holidays, but in the years after World War II it became much more common. Meat, particularly pork, is usually prepared in two stages: first sautéed, then stewed with vegetables and flavorings. Lard may be used as a frying fat. Water, broth, or kvass can be used as a stewing liquid. *Shpundra* is an exemplary dish of this kind: Small cubes of pork are fried in lard and then stewed in kvass with beets. Meat rolls or cabbage rolls stuffed with meat are common preparation techniques as well, producing dishes called *zavivantsy.* German and Polish culinary practices have introduced pattylike dishes of finely chopped ingredients including meat (especially pork) or vegetables, mushrooms, and eggs. Since traditional cuisines call for every part of the animal to be used, Ukrainians prepare *kendiukh,* the stuffed stomach of a pig, filled with spiced and finely chopped head meat. Poultry, whether chickens, ducks, geese, or even turkeys, is commonly made into broths and soups and often stewed with sour cream sauce or together with rice, or halushky. Sausage is a common way to preserve meat. *Kovbasa,* homemade sausage, is made soon after the slaughter of pigs. Cleaned intestines are filled with chopped meat, lard, salt, garlic, and pepper. These sausages are either fried or smoked in ovens. Sausages are preserved by packing them into clay jars and sealing them with lard. *Kyshka,* blood sausage, is also made, as is headcheese (*zeltz*).

The fish served in Ukraine varies by region due to the country's geography. In the north and center of Ukraine, river fish, particularly carp and pike, are popular. In the south, along the Black Sea coast, saltwater fish are more common. Everywhere, salted or marinated herring is popular as an appetizer. Southern Ukrainian cuisine is well known for fresh sea fish that is fried and served very simply with a side of potatoes. Northern and central Ukrainians use a mixture of river fishes to make soups, fried fish, or fish served in aspic.



One of the most popular dishes in Ukrainian cuisine (*salo*), smoked salted pork fat with garlic and bread. (iStockPhoto)

Vegetables are common in the fertile Ukraine. They can be prepared as side dishes with meat or made into soups. Many vegetables are often mashed and dressed with onions, poppy seeds, oil, and vinegar, and served as a main course or an appetizer. Beans, beets, and squash can be prepared as "caviars" of this type. Mashed potatoes mixed with mashed beans and poppy seeds are called *tolchonka.* Vegetables can also be prepared with grains such as wheat berries, millet, or rice to make rich porridges. Finally, vegetables are often preserved in salty or spiced brines. Almost every vegetable can be preserved this way, and Ukrainians are fond of salted tomatoes and cucumbers, and even salted watermelons. Mushrooms are picked in the woods and are dried, pickled, or eaten fresh. Mushrooms are made into soups and can be fried and served with potatoes.

Fruit and berries—apples, plums, strawberries, raspberries, gooseberries, and many others—are often eaten plain. They are added to savory dishes, especially borsch, or served with meats. Fruit and berries are made into the traditional sweet dishes *uzvar,* fruit *kholodets,* and fruit *babki.* Uzvar is made of meticulously cleaned fruit (fresh or dried) and raisins boiled in water and sweetened with sugar or, more traditionally, honey. Spices, such as cinnamon, cloves, and lemon zest, are used to flavor uzvar. The whole mixture is cooked until the fruit is soft and then chilled to thicken the dish. Kholodets is made of fruit, sugar, and spice syrup mixed with pureed fruit and then chilled. Fruit babki are essentially fruit puddings made of mashed fruit mixed with eggs and flour, baked, and eaten while still warm. Fruit is also often made into a jam or *povidlo,* a thick fruit butter most traditionally made out of plums. Sugar is usually added toward the end of cooking the fruit, letting the povidlo remain light-colored.

Ukrainian desserts can also be made out of dough and then either baked or fried and served with a sauce or a topping. Baked pastries are usually made with choux pastry (a light, airy dough made with butter, water, flour, and eggs) rather than yeast-risen dough. These include *bubliki,* small bagels of choux pastry that are baked and topped with powdered sugar. *Puhkeniki* are doughnuts that are either fried and smothered in jam or filled with jam and then fried and topped with powdered sugar. *Shuliki,* simple cookies made of sweet dough with poppy seeds and honey, are broken into pieces and allowed to absorb a sauce of poppy seed, milk, and honey. *Korzhiki* are a slightly thicker version of shuliki, or they can be made with hazelnuts and just served plain. Simple fried cookies, *verguny,* are extremely popular in Ukraine and, like borsch, have many regional variations. They are made of thick, sweet dough made with the addition of rum, brandy, or vodka. The dough is rolled out thinly, cut into small strips, and fried in melted lard. When ready, the cookies are dusted with powdered sugar and can be eaten hot or cold. *Solozheniki* are another common dessert, consisting of light, rich pancakes wrapped around a filling and then baked under a meringue. The pancake dough is runny and made with more milk and eggs than flour, while the fillings tend to be made of one of the traditional Ukrainian ingredients of fruit, fruit jam, or poppy seeds.

Traditional Ukrainian beverages can be divided into alcoholic and nonalcoholic varieties. Vodka, known as *horilka,* has been popular since the 17th century. It is often flavored, most commonly with honey and hot pepper. The Crimean Peninsula is well known for its wines such as the Masandra variety. *Medovukha,* or mead made from fermented honey and water, is an ancient beverage common across Europe and still popular in Ukraine. Beer (*pyvo*) is also very popular among Ukrainians. Nonalcoholic beverages include the traditional fermented kvass, which can be made out of a single or multiple ingredients including bread, beets, and fruit. Yeast is added to the warm mixture, which is then allowed to ferment. Tap water often is seen as unsafe, so most Ukrainians either boil the water they drink or consume the many mineral waters on sale across the country. Tea and coffee are popular beverages, as are more recently introduced sodas, including many of those consumed in western Europe and the United States.

## Typical Meals

Breakfast (*snidanok*) in Ukraine traditionally tends to be fairly filling, but this has been changing. Dishes

mixing grains and fats are common. These could include buckwheat-flour- and lard-based *lemishky* (a gruel) or buckwheat cooked as porridge with the addition of butter. Farina and oatmeal are also common breakfast porridges. Various egg dishes, whether elaborate yaishni omelets or just eggs boiled or fried sunny-side up, are commonly eaten. French toast is a popular dish, usually served with savory toppings such as meat or cheese, rather than sugar or jam. Meat dishes such as frankfurters or meat patties are often served for breakfast. Sandwiches with sausage, cheese, pâtés, or other toppings are well liked. Ryazhenka and cottage cheese, or cheese fritters, are popular breakfast dishes made with milk. Milk itself, as well as buttermilk, and tea or coffee are commonly served as breakfast beverages. In recent years, yogurts and dry cereals have become more popular, particularly among younger Ukrainians.

Lunch (*obid*), the midday meal, was traditionally the main meal of the day, but with new work schedules this distinction has often been transferred to supper (*vecheria*). The main meals of the day are likely to include a soup, a main dish, and a dessert, and sometimes also an appetizer. As with every meal in Ukraine, bread is an important accompaniment. While vegetables play an important part in Ukrainian cuisine, salads of raw vegetables are less common. They are served as an appetizer, often made of cabbage or tomatoes and cucumbers dressed with salt, pepper, oil, and vinegar. Other appetizers could be salted or marinated fish such as herring or anchovies; marinated mushrooms or vegetables; or rich salads with meat and potatoes dressed with mayonnaise. The appetizer course can be accompanied or even replaced by a shot of vodka (*horilka*). Winter meals usually include a borsch or cabbage soup, such as *kapusniak,* or other soups made with grains or mushrooms. Chicken broth with rice or noodles is also popular, as are soups made with milk and pasta. If in the past a rich soup or stew and bread would be the only food served at an everyday lunch, today there is often a meat-based main dish, served with starch side dishes. Most common today are meat-based stews (especially made with pork) and fried patties (*bitkil*). These are served with a porridge (especially buckwheat), macaroni, or rice. The stews can also be accompanied by halushky or pampushki. Desserts, depending on the meal, can range from a simple *kompot* (fruit compote), uzvar, or *kissel'* (sweetened juice thickened with starch, with fruit added) to fancier pastries, creams, or cakes. Drinks that are served with dinner could be the traditional kvass, mineral water, or soda, with coffee or tea accompanying dessert. The lighter evening meal is often similar to breakfast. Porridge, eggs, and fritters (meat or vegetable), as well as tea served with cakes, cookies, or preserves, round out the meal.

Modern Ukrainians now have lives scheduled around work patterns similar to those in western Europe or the United States, and their meal patterns have also changed. Many snack foods are now sold, including chips, popcorn, and puffed corn (like corn pops, salty and sweet), as well as the more traditional roasted sunflower or pumpkin seeds. Convenience foods, such as instant soups or noodles, have become the normal midday meal for many students and office workers.

## Eating Out

Eating out has increased over the course of the 20th century. Traditionally, Ukraine had some country inns where simple meals were served along with alcohol. In the 19th century, Ukrainian cities acquired more restaurants in the European sense as well as Russian-style *traktiry,* or roadside inns with simple restaurants. In the Soviet era, eating outside the home was encouraged, and communal cafeterias sprang up both in the cities and attached to plants and collective farms. The most recent development has been the appearance of fast-food restaurants such as McDonald's.

The communal canteens and restaurants mixed traditional Ukrainian dishes with those from the rest of the Soviet Union. Ukrainians, when eating out, often expect this mixture of cuisines on the menu, which is likely to include Russian caviar appetizers, grilled meats from the Caucasus, and pilafs from Central Asia. French-influenced dishes such as mushrooms baked in cream sauce (*julliene*) have become iconic for fancy restaurant meals. Even plain canteen-served foods are drawn from many ethnic

traditions. An example of an ethnic food served in a canteen would be the Tartar-influenced *azu,* or roasted beef served with a tomato-based sauce and pickles.

Modern Ukraine has fewer Soviet-style canteens and many more cafés serving light foods along with teas and coffees. Fast-food restaurants are very popular. McDonald's and other international chains share space with Ukrainian-owned fast-food establishments that often serve traditional foods such as vareniki (stuffed dumplings) or *bliny* (little pancakes). Simple snack bars selling hot dogs and drinks are often located around major public transportation stops. Beer pubs serving Ukrainian and international beers have become very popular. Kebab stands have become common in large cities, as they are in the rest of Europe.

## Special Occasions

Bread, like in other Slavic cultures, is considered sacred and is used to commemorate important life events, with some special breads tied to specific occasions. In the distant past, bread baking was a ritual occasion and seen as a sacred act. Even today, when welcoming guests, Ukrainians serve bread and salt as a sign of hospitality. In addition to special breads, other ritual dishes are made to commemorate many holidays. *Paskha,* the rich Easter bread, is made out of yeast-raised wheat dough, with eggs, milk, and spices, especially ginger and saffron. Western Ukrainians tend to decorate the paskha with dough ornaments such as a cross and keep it low and round, while the Russian-influenced eastern Ukrainians make paskha into a tall but plain glazed bread. This bread is not eaten until it has been blessed in church with other Easter foods during the Easter service. The Easter meal is also the time to serve *babka,* a rich bread made with eggs, raisins, sugar, and spices, which usually includes lemon zest, saffron, and vanilla. Elaborately painted eggs (*pysanki*) are an important part of Ukrainian Easter. Other rich egg and meat dishes are served during Easter, a major ritual feast. Shuliki cookies are the traditional food for church holidays (such as the Feast of Transfiguration) that are celebrated in August.



Traditional decorated Easter basket lined by an embroidered towel, with Easter bread, ham, and eggs. (iStockPhoto)

The Christmas season is a major occasion for ritual foods. On Christmas Eve, meat and milk are not allowed, so the supper that evening is a collection of vegetable and fish-based dishes. Beans or peas are mashed and dressed with onions, garlic, and oil. A meatless borsch flavored with kvass is served, as well as a sauerkraut soup (kapusniak). Porridges, stewed fruit, and dumplings with poppy seeds are also served. The meals on Christmas Day itself are very rich and include roast meats, rich borsch, fried homemade sausages (kovbasa), and *studenets,* meat set in jellied aspic and served cold. Symbolically connecting the meal to the birth of Jesus in a manger, hay is spread under and on the table. As the Christmas season is symbolically connected with the life cycle, certain foods served on Christmas are also served during funerals. Most commonly, these foods include *kalach,* a round, braided bread symbolizing

the cyclical nature of life, and *kolyvo* or *kutia,* a dish of boiled grains with poppy seeds and honey. The grains and seeds allude to death, rebirth, and the harvest. Finally, fish dishes, especially carp, are a traditional part of Christmas suppers. As caroling, or *koliaduvannia,* is a common Christmas tradition in Ukraine, the carolers are rewarded with gifts of food: pastries, pancakes (*oladky*), or even whole sausages.

Weddings, with their connections to fertility, are an occasion for special breads and other foods. The *korovai,* primarily a wedding bread, is made of a rich egg dough with sugar and spices for flavoring and color. It is circular in form and has decorations made out of dough on top of it. The bride and groom go around it and are then given pieces of it to eat. In some regions of Ukraine, other traditional breads are used. In the west, *dyven* is a rich bread shaped into a circle or a wheel that is carried by the bride. She looks through it to see a bright future. In other regions, small buns called *shyshky,* or pine cones, are baked, as is *lezhen',* a long bread made with eggs and a coin baked in.

Soviet holidays such as the New Year and Victory Day, celebrating victory during World War II, are important for many Ukrainians. Festive foods introduced during Soviet rule include the *oliv'ie* or *stolichniy* salad, a mixture of potatoes, peas, carrots, and meat dressed with mayonnaise. At family picnics, at summer houses, or on beaches, many Ukrainians like to grill marinated pork or lamb shish kebabs (*shashlyk*).

*Anton Masterovoy*

## Diet and Health

Many younger Ukrainians see the traditional Ukrainian diet of starchy foods along with fatty pork as unhealthy. Today, the population of Ukraine, like that of the rest of Europe, is heavily urbanized. The traditional diet, created to restore the strength of people engaged in heavy farm labor, is no longer relevant to modern work and life. Indeed, in the 20th century, a diet rich in fat and carbohydrates, along with industrial pollution, heavy smoking, and drinking, has contributed to a rise in cardiovascular disease among Ukrainians. Ukrainians also argue that the traditional diet was varied and natural and should be retained instead of consuming industrially processed and imported foods. Pollution from the 1986 nuclear disaster at Chernobyl is also a major concern.

Ukrainians retain many traditional folk remedies for various disorders, as modern medicine is poorly funded and often seen as corrupt. Herbal teas are used to soothe a system out of order. Chamomile tea is used in case of a stomachache. Black tea with honey and lemon is used to soothe sore throats. Alcohol, honey, garlic, and even hot milk are seen as medicinal for many respiratory disorders. Strong-smelling herbs and garlic have been seen as not only medicinal but also useful for scaring away evil spirits. These beliefs have been retained in the Ukrainian countryside and were resurrected after the fall of the Soviet Union.

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# About the Editor and Contributors

**Ken Albala,** Editor, is professor of history at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California. He also teaches in the gastronomy program at Boston University. Albala is the author of many books, including *Eating Right in the Renaissance* (University of California Press, 2002), *Food in Early Modern Europe* (Greenwood Press, 2003), *Cooking in Europe 1250–1650* (Greenwood Press, 2005), *The Banquet: Dining in the Great Courts of Late Renaissance Europe* (University of Illinois Press, 2007), *Beans: A History* (Berg Publishers, 2007; winner of the 2008 International Association of Culinary Professionals Jane Grigson Award), and *Pancake* (Reaktion Press, 2008). He has co-edited two works, *The Business of Food* and *Human Cuisine.* He is also editor of three food series with 29 volumes in print, including the Food Cultures Around the World series for Greenwood Press. Albala is also co-editor of the journal *Food Culture and Society*. He is currently researching a history of theological controversies surrounding fasting in the Reformation Era and is editing two collected volumes of essays, one on the Renaissance and the other entitled *The Lord's Supper.* He has also coauthored a cookbook for Penguin/Perigee entitled *The Lost Art of Real Cooking,* which was released in July 2010.

**Julia Abramson** has visited France on a regular basis for more than 25 years to study, research, travel, and eat. She has published essays on aspects of food culture from vegetable carving to gastronomic writing and is the author of the book *Food Culture in France.* Abramson teaches French literature and culture and food studies at the University of Oklahoma, Norman.

**M. Shahrim Al-Karim** is a senior lecturer of food service and hospitality management at the Universiti Putra Malaysia. His research interests include food and culture, culinary tourism, food habits, and consumer behavior. He received a BS in hotel and restaurant management from New York University; an MBA from Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia; and a PhD in hospitality and tourism from Oklahoma State University, United States.

**E. N. Anderson** is professor emeritus of the Department of Anthropology, University of California, Riverside.

**Laura P. Appell-Warren** holds a doctorate in psychological anthropology from Harvard University. Her primary focus of research has been the study of

personhood; however, she has also studied the effects of social change on children's play. She has done research among the Bulusu' of East Kalimantan, Indonesia, and among the Rungus Momogon, a Dusunic-speaking peoples, of Sabah, Malyasia. In addition, she has traveled widely throughout Arctic Canada. She is the editor of *The Iban Diaries of Monica Freeman 1949–1951: Including Ethnographic Drawings, Sketches, Paintings, Photographs and Letters* and is author of the forthcoming volume entitled *Personhood: An Examination of the History and Use of an Anthropological Concept.* In addition to her current research on cradleboard use among Native North Americans, she is a teacher of anthropology at St. Mark's School in Southborough, Massachusetts.

**Heather Arndt-Anderson** is a Portland, Oregon, native who draws culinary inspiration from many world cuisines but prefers cooking from her own backyard. She is a part-time natural resources consultant and a full-time radical homemaker; in her (rare) spare time she writes the food blog *Voodoo & Sauce.*

**Michael Ashkenazi** is a scholar, writer, and consultant who has been researching and writing about Japanese food since 1990. In addition to books and articles on Japanese society, including its food culture, he has written numerous scholarly and professional articles and papers on various subjects including theoretical and methodological issues in anthropology, organized violence, space exploration, migration, religion and ritual, resettling ex-combatants, and small arms. He has taught at higher-education institutions in Japan, Canada, Israel, and the United Kingdom, directing graduate and undergraduate students. He is currently senior researcher and project leader at the Bonn International Center for Conversion in Germany, with responsibility for the areas of small arms and reintegration of ex-combatants. He has conducted field research in East and Southeast Asia, East and West Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.

**Babette Audant** went to Prague after college, where she quickly gave up teaching English in order to cook at a classical French restaurant. After graduating from the Culinary Institute of America, she worked as a chef in New York City for eight years, working at Rainbow Room, Beacon Bar & Grill, and other top-rated restaurants. She is a lecturer at City University of New York Kingsborough's Department of Tourism and Hospitality, and a doctoral candidate in geography at the City University of New York Graduate Center. Her research focuses on public markets and food policy in New York City.

**Gabriela Villagran Backman,** MA (English and Hispanic literature), was born in Sweden and raised in Mexico and the United States; she currently lives in Stockholm, Sweden. She is an independent researcher, interested in food studies, cultural heritage, writing cookbooks, red wine, and the Internet.

**Carolyn Bánfalvi** is a writer based in Budapest. She is the author of *Food Wine Budapest* (Little Bookroom) and *The Food and Wine Lover's Guide to Hungary: With Budapest Restaurants and Trips to the Wine Country* (Park Kiado). She contributes to numerous international food and travel publications and leads food and wine tours through Taste Hungary, her culinary tour company.

**Peter Barrett** is a painter who writes a food blog and is also the Food & Drink writer for *Chronogram Magazine* in New York's Hudson Valley.

**Cynthia D. Bertelsen** is an independent culinary scholar, nutritionist, freelance food writer, and food columnist. She lived in Haiti for three years and worked on a food-consumption study for a farming-systems project in Jacmel, Haiti. She writes a food history blog, *Gherkins & Tomatoes,* found at http://gherkinstomatoes.com.

**Megan K. Blake** is a senior lecturer in geography at the University of Sheffield. She has published research that examines the intersections between place and social practices. While her previous work focused on entrepreneurship and innovation, her recent work has examined food practices and family life.

**Janet Boileau** is a culinary historian who holds a master of arts degree in gastronomy from Le Cordon Bleu Paris and a doctorate in history from the University of Adelaide.

**Andrea Broomfield** is associate professor of English at Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kansas, and author of *Food and Cooking in Victorian England: A History.*

**Cynthia Clampitt** is a culinary historian, world traveler, and award-winning author. In 2010, she was elected to the Society of Women Geographers.

**Neil L. Coletta** is assistant director of food, wine, and the arts and lecturer in the MLA in gastronomy program at Boston University. His current research includes food and aesthetics and experimental pedagogy in the field of food studies.

**Paul Crask** is a travel writer and the author of two travel guides: *Dominica* (2008) and *Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique* (2009).

**Christine Crawford-Oppenheimer** is the information services librarian and archivist at the Culinary Institute of America. She grew up in Ras Tanura, Saudi Arabia.

**Anita Verna Crofts** is on the faculty at the University of Washington's Department of Communication, where she serves as an associate director of the master of communication in digital media program. In addition, she holds an appointment at the University of Washington's Department of Global Health, where she collaborates with partner institutions in Sudan, Namibia, and India on trainings that address leadership, management, and policy development, with her contributions targeted at the concept of storytelling as a leadership and evidence tool. Anita is an intrepid chowhound and publishes on gastroethnographic topics related to the intersection of food and identity. She hosts the blog *Sneeze!* at her Web site www.pepperforthebeast.com.

**Liza Debevec** is a research fellow at the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovene Academy of sciences and arts in Ljubljana, Slovenia. She has a PhD in social anthropology from the University of St. Andrews, United Kingdom. Her research

interests are West Africa and Burkina Faso, food studies, Islam, gender, identity, and practice of everyday life.

**Jonathan Deutsch** is associate professor of culinary arts at Kingsborough Community College, City University of New York, and Public Health, City University of New York Graduate Center. He is the author or editor of five books including, with Sarah Billingsley, *Culinary Improvisation* (Pearson, 2010) and, with Annie Hauck-Lawson, *Gastropolis: Food and New York City* (Columbia University Press, 2009).

**Deborah Duchon** is a nutritional anthropologist in Atlanta, Georgia.

**Nathalie Dupree** is the author of 10 cookbooks, many of which are about the American South, for which she has won two James Beard Awards. She has hosted over 300 television shows on the Public Broadcasting Service, The Food Network, and TLC. She lives with her husband, Jack Bass, who has authored 9 books about the American South and helped with her contribution to *Food Cultures of the World.*

**Pamela Elder** has worked in food public relations and online culinary education and is a freelance writer in the San Francisco Bay area.

**Rachel Finn** is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in various print and online publications. She is the founder and director of Roots Cuisine, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the foodways of the African diaspora around the globe.

**Richard Foss** has been a food writer and culinary historian since 1986, when he started as a restaurant critic for the *Los Angeles Reader*. His book on the history of rum is slated for publication in 2011, to be followed by a book on the history of beachside dining in Los Angeles. He is also a science fiction and fantasy author, an instructor in culinary history and Elizabethan theater at the University of California, Los Angeles, Extension, and is on the board of the Culinary Historians of Southern California.

**Nancy G. Freeman** is a food writer and art historian living in Berkeley, California, with a passion for food history. She has written about cuisines ranging from Ethiopia to the Philippines to the American South.

**Ramin Ganeshram** is a veteran journalist and professional chef trained at the Institute of Culinary Education in New York City, where she has also worked as a recreational chef instructor. Ganeshram also holds a master's degree in journalism from Columbia University. For eight years she worked as a feature writer/stringer for the *New York Times* regional sections, and she spent another eight years as a food columnist and feature writer for *Newsday*. She is the author of *Sweet Hands: Island Cooking from Trinidad and Tobago* (Hippocrene NY, 2006; 2nd expanded edition, 2010) and *Stir It Up* (Scholastic, 2011). In addition to contributing to a variety of food publications including *Saveur, Gourmet, Bon Appetit,* and epicurious.com, Ganeshram has written articles on food, culture, and travel for *Islands* (as contributing editor), *National Geographic Traveler,*

*Forbes Traveler, Forbes Four Seasons,* and many others. Currently, Ganeshram teaches food writing for New York University's School of Continuing Professional Studies.

**Hanna Garth** is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles. She is currently working on a dissertation on household food practices in Santiago de Cuba. Previously, she has conducted research on food culture, health, and nutrition in Cuba, Chile, and the Philippines.

**Mary Gee** is a medical sociology doctoral student at the University of California, San Francisco. Her current research interests include herbalism and Asian and Asian American foodways, especially with regards to multigenerational differences. Since 1995, she has actively worked with local and national eating disorders research and policy and advocacy organizations as well as for a program evaluation research consulting firm.

**Che Ann Abdul Ghani** holds a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in linguistics. She has a keen interest in studying language and language use in gastronomy. She is currently attached to the English Department at Universiti Putra Malaysia. Her research interests range from the use of language in context (pragmatics) to language use in multidisciplinary areas, namely, disciplines related to the social sciences. She also carries out work in translation and editing.

**Maja Godina-Golija** is research adviser at the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, Scientific Research Centre of Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

**Annie Goldberg** is a graduate student studying gastronomy at Boston University.

**Darra Goldstein** is Frances Christopher Oakley Third Century Professor of Russian at Williams College and the founding editor-in-chief of *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture.*

**Keiko Goto,** PhD, is associate professor at the Department of Nutrition and Food Sciences, California State University, Chico. Dr. Goto has more than 15 years of work experience in the field of nutrition and has worked as a practitioner and researcher in various developing countries. Dr. Goto's current research areas include food and culture, child and adolescent nutrition, sustainable food systems, and international nutrition.

**Carla Guerrón Montero** is a cultural and applied anthropologist trained in Latin America and the United States. She is currently associate professor of anthropology in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Delaware. Dr. Guerrón Montero's areas of expertise include gender, ethnicity, and identity; processes of globalization/nationalism, and particularly tourism; and social justice and human rights.

**Mary Gunderson** calls her practice paleocuisineology, where food and cooking bring cultures alive. Through many media, including the sites HistoryCooks.com

and MaryGunderson.com, she writes and speaks about South and North American food history and contemporary creative living and wellness. She wrote and published the award-winning book *The Food Journal of Lewis and Clark: Recipes for an Expedition* (History Cooks, 2003) and has authored six food-history books for kids.

**Liora Gvion** is a senior lecturer at the Kibbutzim College of Education and also teaches at the Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Environment at the Institute of Biochemistry, Food Science and Nutrition Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

**Cherie Y. Hamilton** is a cookbook author and specialist on the food cultures and cuisines of the Portuguese-speaking countries in Europe, South America, Africa, and Asia.

**Jessica B. Harris** teaches English at Queens College/City University of New York and is director of the Institute for the Study of Culinary Cultures at Dillard University.

**Melanie Haupt** is a doctoral candidate in English at the University of Texas at Austin. Her dissertation, "Starting from Scratch: Reading Women's Cooking Communities," explores women's use of cookbooks and recipes in the formation and reification of real and virtual communities.

**Ursula Heinzelmann** is an independent scholar and culinary historian, twice awarded the prestigious Sophie Coe Prize. A trained chef, sommelier, and ex-restaurateur, she now works as a freelance wine and food writer and journalist based in Berlin, Germany.

**Jennifer Hostetter** is an independent food consultant specializing in writing, research, and editing. She has degrees in history and culinary arts and holds a master's degree in food culture and communications from the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Italy. She also served as editorial assistant for this encyclopedia.

**Kelila Jaffe** is a doctoral candidate in the Food Studies Program at New York University. Originally from Sonoma, California, and the daughter of a professional chef, she has pursued anthropological and archaeological foodways research since her entry into academia. She received a BA with distinction in anthropology from the University of Pennsylvania, before attending the University of Auckland, where she earned an MA with honors in anthropology, concentrating in archaeology. Her research interests include past foodways, domestication, and zooarchaeology, and she has conducted fieldwork in Fiji, New Zealand, and Hawaii.

**Zilkia Janer** is associate professor of global studies at Hofstra University in New York. She is the author of *Puerto Rican Nation-Building Literature: Impossible Romance* (2005) and *Latino Food Culture* (2008).

**Brelyn Johnson** is a graduate of the master's program in food studies at New York University.

**Kate Johnston** is currently based in Italy, where she is an independent cultural food researcher and writer and a daily ethnographer of people's food habits. She

has a degree in anthropology from Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia, and a recent master's degree in food culture and communication from the University of Gastronomic Sciences, Italy. She was also editorial assistant for this encyclopedia.

**Desiree Koh** was born and raised in Singapore. A writer focusing on travel, hospitality, sports, fitness, business, and, of course, food, Koh's explorations across the globe always begin at the market, as she believes that the sight, scent, and savoring of native produce and cuisine are the key to the city's heart. The first and only female in Major League Eating's Asia debut, Koh retired from competition to better focus on each nibble and sip of fine, hopefully slow food.

**Bruce Kraig** is emeritus professor of history at Roosevelt University in Chicago and adjunct faculty at the Culinary School of Kendall College, Chicago. He has published and edited widely in the field of American and world food history. Kraig is also the founding president of the Culinary Historians of Chicago and the Greater Midwest Foodways Alliance.

**R. J. Krajewski** is the research services librarian at Simmons College, where among other things he facilitates discovery of food-culture research, especially through the lens of race, class, and gender. His own engagement with food is seasonally and locally rooted, starting in his own small, urban homestead, much like his Polish and German ancestors.

**Erin Laverty** is a freelance food writer and researcher based in Brooklyn, New York. She holds a master's degree in food studies from New York University.

**Robert A. Leonard** has a PhD in theoretical linguistics from Columbia. He studies the way people create and communicate meaning, including through food. He was born in Brooklyn and trained as a cook and *panaderia-reposteria* manager in the Caribbean; his doctoral studies led him to eight years of fieldwork in language, culture, and food in Africa and Southeast Asia. In the arts, as an undergraduate he cofounded and led the rock group Sha Na Na and with them opened for their friend Jimi Hendrix at the Woodstock Festival. Leonard is probably one of a very few people who have worked with both the Grateful Dead and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which in recent years recruited him to teach the emerging science of forensic linguistics at Quantico.

**Jane Levi** is an independent consultant and writer based in London, England. She is currently working on her PhD at the London Consortium, examining food in utopias, funded by her work on post-trade financial policy in the City of London.

**Yrsa Lindqvist** is a European ethnologist working as the leading archivist at the Folk Culture Archive in Helsinki. Her research about food and eating habits in the late 1990s, combined with earlier collections at the archive, resulted in 2009 in the publication *Mat, Måltid, Minne. Hundraår av finlandssvensk matkulur.* The book analyzes the changes in housekeeping and attitudes toward food. She has also contributed to other publications focusing on identity questions and has worked as a junior researcher at the Academy of Finland.

**William G. Lockwood** is professor emeritus of cultural anthropology at the University of Michigan. His central interest is ethnicity and interethnic relations. He has conducted long-term field research in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Croatian community in Austria and also among Roma and with a variety of ethnic groups in America, including Arabs, Finns, and Bosnians. He has long held a special interest in how food functions in ethnic group maintenance and in reflecting intra- and intergroup relations.

**Yvonne R. Lockwood** is curator emeritus of folklife at the Michigan State University Museum. Her formal training is in folklore, history, and Slavic languages and literatures. Research in Bosnia, Austria, and the United States, especially the Great Lakes region, has resulted in numerous publications, exhibitions, festival presentations, and workshops focused on her primary interests of foodways and ethnic traditions.

**Janet Long-Solís,** an anthropologist and archaeologist, is a research associate at the Institute of Historical Research at the National University of Mexico. She has published several books and articles on the chili pepper, the history of Mexican food, and the exchange of food products between Europe and the Americas in the 16th century.

**Kristina Lupp** has a background in professional cooking and has worked in Toronto and Florence. She is currently pursuing a master of arts in gastronomy at the University of Adelaide.

**Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire** is a lecturer in culinary arts in the Dublin Institute of Technology. Máirtín is well known as a chef, culinary historian, food writer, broadcaster, and ballad singer. He lives in Dublin with his wife and two daughters. He was the first Irish chef to be awarded a PhD, for his oral history of Dublin restaurants.

**Glenn R. Mack** is a food historian with extensive culinary training in Uzbekistan, Russia, Italy, and the United States. He cofounded the Culinary Academy of Austin and the Historic Foodways Group of Austin and currently serves as president of Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts Atlanta.

**Andrea MacRae** is a lecturer in the Le Cordon Bleu Graduate Program in Gastronomy at the University of Adelaide, Australia.

**Giorgos Maltezakis** earned his PhD in anthropology with research in cooperation with the Institute Studiorium Humanitatis of the Ljubljana Graduate School of the Humanities. His dissertation was on consumerism, the global market, and food, which was an ethnographic approach to the perception of food in Greece and Slovenia.

**Bertie Mandelblatt** is assistant professor at the University of Toronto, cross-appointed to the departments of Historical Studies and Geography. Her research concerns the early-modern French Atlantic, with a focus on commodity exchanges at the local and global scales: Her two current projects are the history

of food provisioning in the Franco-Caribbean and the transatlantic circulation of French rum and molasses, both in the 17th and 18th centuries.

**Marty Martindale** is a freelance writer living in Largo, Florida.

**Laura Mason** is a writer and food historian with a special interest in local, regional, and traditional foods in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. Her career has explored many dimensions of food and food production, including cooking for a living, unraveling the history of sugar confectionery, and trying to work out how many traditional and typically British foods relate to culture and landscape. Her publications include *Taste of Britain* (with Catherine Brown; HarperCollins, 2006), *The Food Culture of Great Britain* (Greenwood, 2004), and *The National Trust Farmhouse Cookbook* (National Trust, 2009).

**Anton Masterovoy** is a PhD candidate at the Graduate Center, City University of New York. He is working on his dissertation, titled "Eating Soviet: Food and Culture in USSR, 1917–1991."

**Anne Engammare McBride,** a Swiss native, food writer, and editor, is the director of the Experimental Cuisine Collective and a food studies PhD candidate at New York University. Her most recent book is *Culinary Careers: How to Get Your Dream Job in Food,* coauthored with Rick Smilow.

**Michael R. McDonald** is associate professor of anthropology at Florida Gulf Coast University. He is the author of *Food Culture in Central America*.

**Naomi M. McPherson** is associate professor of cultural anthropology and graduate program coordinator at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan Campus. Since 1981, she has accumulated over three years of field research with the Bariai of West New Britain, Papua New Guinea.

**Katrina Meynink** is an Australia-based freelance food writer and researcher. She has a master's degree in gastronomy through Le Cordon Bleu and the University of Adelaide under a scholarship from the James Beard Foundation. She is currently completing her first cookbook.

**Barbara J. Michael** is a sociocultural anthropologist whose research focuses on social organization, economics, decision making, and gender. Her geographic focus is on the Middle East and East Africa, where she has done research with the pastoral nomadic Hawazma Baggara and on traditional medicine in Yemen and is working on a video about men's cafes as a social institution. She teaches anthropology at the University of North Carolina Wilmington and has also worked as a consultant for several United Nations agencies.

**Diana Mincyte** is a fellow at the Rachel Carson Center at the Ludwig Maximilian University-Munich and visiting assistant professor in the Department of Advertising at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Mincyte examines topics at the interface of food, the environment, risk society, and global inequalities. Her book investigates raw-milk politics in the European Union to consider the production risk society and its institutions in post-Socialist states.

**Rebecca Moore** is a doctoral student studying the history of biotechnology at the University of Toronto in Ontario, Canada.

**Nawal Nasrallah,** a native of Iraq, was a professor of English and comparative literature at the universities of Baghdad and Mosul until 1990. As an independent scholar, she wrote the award-winning *Delights from the Garden of Eden: A Cookbook and a History of the Iraqi Cuisine* and *Annals of the Caliphs' Kitchens* (an English translation of Ibn Sayyar al-Warraq's 10th-century Baghdadi cookbook).

**Henry Notaker** graduated from the University of Oslo with a degree in literature and worked for many years as a foreign correspondent and host of arts and letters shows on Norwegian national television. He has written several books about food history, and with *Food Culture in Scandinavia* he won the Gourmand World Cookbook Award for best culinary history in 2009. His last book is a bibliography of early-modern culinary literature, *Printed Cookbooks in Europe 1470–1700.* He is a member of the editorial board of the journal *Food and History.*

**Kelly O'Leary** is a graduate student at Boston University in gastronomy and food studies and executive chef at the Bayridge University Residence and Cultural Center.

**Fabio Parasecoli** is associate professor and coordinator of food studies at the New School in New York City. He is author of *Food Culture in Italy* (2004) and *Bite Me: Food and Popular Culture* (2008).

**Susan Ji-Young Park** is the program director and head of curriculum development at École de Cuisine Pasadena (www.ecolecuisine.com); project leader for Green Algeria, a national environmental initiative; and a writer for LAWEEKLY'S Squid Ink. She has written curriculum for cooking classes at Los Angeles Unified School District, Sur La Table, Whole Foods Market, Central Market, and Le Cordon Bleu North America. She and her husband, Chef Farid Zadi, have co-written recipes for *Gourmet Magazine* and the *Los Angeles Times.* The couple are currently writing several cookbooks on North African, French, and Korean cuisines.

**Rosemary Parkinson** is author of *Culinaria: The Caribbean, Nyam Jamaica,* and *Barbados Bu'n-Bu'n,* and she contributes culinary travel stories to Caribbean magazines.

**Charles Perry** majored in Middle East languages at Princeton University, the University of California, Berkeley, and the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies, Shimlan, Lebanon. From 1968 to 1976 he was a copy editor and staff writer at *Rolling Stone* magazine in San Francisco, before leaving to work as a freelance writer specializing in food. From 1990 to 2008, he was a staff writer in the food section of the *Los Angeles Times*. He has published widely on the history of Middle Eastern food and was a major contributor to the *Oxford Companion to Food* (1999).

**Irina Petrosian** is a native of Armenia and a professional journalist who has written for Russian, Armenian, and U.S.-based newspapers. She is the coauthor of

*Armenian Food: Fact, Fiction, and Folklore* and holds degrees in journalism from Moscow State University and Indiana University.

**Suzanne Piscopo** is a nutrition, family, and consumer studies lecturer at the University of Malta in Malta. She is mainly involved in the training of home economics and primary-level teachers, as well as in nutrition and consumer-education projects in different settings. Suzanne is a registered public health nutritionist, and her research interests focus on socioecological determinants of food intake, nutrition interventions, and health promotion. She has also written a series of short stories for children about food. Suzanne enjoys teaching and learning about the history and culture of food and is known to creatively experiment with the ingredients at hand when cooking the evening meal together with her husband, Michael.

**Theresa Preston-Werner** is an advanced graduate student in anthropology at Northwestern University.

**Meg Ragland** is a culinary history researcher and librarian. She lives in Boston, Massachusetts.

**Carol Selva Rajah** is an award-winning chef and food writer currently based in Sydney, Australia. She has written 10 cookbooks on Malaysian and Southeast Asian cuisine. Her book *The Food of India* won the gold award for the Best Hardcover Recipe Book at the prestigious Jacob's Creek World Food Media Awards.

**Birgit Ricquier** is pursuing a PhD in linguistics at the Université Libre de Bruxelles and the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium, with a fellowship from the Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique (FNRS). The topic of her PhD project is "A Comparative Linguistic Approach to the History of Culinary Practice in Bantu-Speaking Africa." She has spent several months in central Africa, including one month in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a member of the Boyekoli Ebale Congo 2010 Expedition and two months of research focused on food cultures in Congo.

**Amy Riolo** is an award-winning author, lecturer, cooking instructor, and consultant. She is the author of *Arabian Delights: Recipes and Princely Entertaining Ideas from the Arabian Peninsula, Nile Style: Egyptian Cuisine and Culture,* and *The Mediterranean Diabetes Cookbook.* Amy has lived, worked, and traveled extensively through Egypt and enjoys fusing cuisine, culture, and history into all aspects of her work. Please see www.amyriolo.com, www.baltimoreegypt.org, and diningwithdiplomats.blogspot.com for more information and further reading.

**Owen Roberts** is a journalist, communications instructor, and director of research communications for the University of Guelph in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. He holds a doctorate of education from Texas Tech University and Texas A&M University.

**Fiona Ross** is a gastrodetective whose headquarters is the Bodleian Library in Oxford, United Kingdom. She spends her time there investigating the eating foibles of the famous and infamous. Her cookery book *Dining with Destiny* is the

result: When you want to know what Lenin lunched on or what JFK ate by the poolside, *Dining with Destiny* has the answer.

**Signe Rousseau** (née Hansen) is Danish by birth but a long-term resident of southern Africa and is a researcher and part-time lecturer at the University of Cape Town. Following an MA in the Department of English and a PhD (on food media and celebrity chefs) in the Centre for Film and Media Studies, she now teaches critical literacy and professional communication in the School of Management Studies (Faculty of Commerce).

**Kathleen Ryan** is a consulting scholar in the African Section of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia. She has carried out research in Kenya since 1990, when she began a study of Maasai cattle herders in Kajiado District.

**Helen Saberi** was Alan Davidson's principal assistant in the completion of the *Oxford Companion to Food.* She is the author of *Noshe Djan: Afghan Food and Cookery;* coauthor of *Trifle* with Alan Davidson; and coauthor of *The Road to Vindaloo* with David Burnett; her latest book is *Tea: A Global History.*

**Cari Sánchez** holds a master of arts in gastronomy from the University of Adelaide/Le Cordon Bleu in South Australia. Her dissertation explores the global spread of the Argentine *asado*. She currently lives in Jacksonville, Florida, where she writes the food and travel blog *viCARIous* and is the marketing manager for a craft brewery.

**Peter Scholliers** teaches history at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and is currently head of the research group "Social and Cultural Food Studies" (FOST). He studies the history of food in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. He co-edits the journal *Food and History* and is involved in various ways in the Institut Européen d'Histoire et des Cultures de l'Alimentation (Tours, France). Recently, he published *Food Culture in Belgium* (Greenwood, 2008). More information can be found at http://www.vub.ac.be/FOST/fost_in_english/.

**Colleen Taylor Sen** is the author of *Food Culture in India; Curry: A Global History; Pakoras, Paneer, Pappadums: A Guide to Indian Restaurant Menus,* and many articles on the food of the Indian Subcontinent. She is a regular participant in the Oxford Food Symposium.

**Roger Serunyigo** was born and lives in Kampala, Uganda. He graduated from Makerere University with a degree in urban and regional planning, has worked in telecommunications, and is now a professional basketball player for the Uganda National Team. He also coaches a women's basketball team (The Magic Stormers).

**Dorette Snover** is a chef and author. Influenced by French heritage and the food traditions of the Pennsylvania Dutch country, Chef Snover teaches exploration of the world via a culinary map at her school, C'est si Bon! in Chapel Hill. While the stock simmers, she is writing a novel about a French bread apprentice.

**Celia Sorhaindo** is a freelance photographer and writer. She was the editor of the 2008 and 2009 *Dominica Food and Drink Guide* magazine and content manager for the Dominica section of the magazine *Caribbean Homes & Lifestyle*.

**Lyra Spang** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Anthropology and the Food Studies Program at Indiana University. She has written about food, sex, and symbolism; the role of place in defining organic; and the importance of social relationships in small-scale food business in Belize. She grew up on a farm in southern Belize and is a proud promoter of that country's unique and diverse culinary heritage.

**Lois Stanford** is an agricultural anthropologist in the Department of Anthropology at New Mexico State University. In her research, she has examined the globalization of food systems both in Mexico and in the U.S. Southwest. Her current research focuses on the critical role of food heritage and plant conservation in constructing and maintaining traditional foodways and cultural identity in New Mexico. In collaboration with local food groups, she is currently developing a community food assessment project in the Mesilla Valley in southern New Mexico.

**Aliza Stark** is a senior faculty member at the Agriculture, Food, and Environment Institute of Biochemistry, Food Science, and Nutrition at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

**Maria "Ging" Gutierrez Steinberg** is a marketing manager for a New York City–based specialty food company and a food writer. She has a master's degree in food studies from New York University and is a graduate of Le Cordon Bleu. Her articles have appeared in various publications in Asia and the United States.

**Anita Stewart** is a cookbook author and Canadian culinary activist from Elora, Ontario, Canada.

**Emily Stone** has written about Guatemalan cuisine in the *Radcliffe Culinary Times,* and she is at work on a nonfiction book about chocolate in Central America. She currently teaches journalism and creative writing at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, China.

**Asele Surina** is a Russian native and former journalist who now works as a translator and interpreter. Since 1999 she has worked at the Institute of Classical Archaeology at the University of Texas on joint projects with an archaeological museum in Crimea, Ukraine.

**Aylin Öney Tan** is an architect by training and studied conservation of historic structures in Turkey, Italy, and the United Kingdom. Eventually, her passion for food and travel led her to write on food. Since 2003, she has had a weekly food column in *Cumhuriyet,* a prestigious national daily, and contributes to various food magazines. She was a jury member of the Slow Food Award 2000–2003, with her nominees receiving awards. She contributes to the Terra Madre and Presidia projects as the leader of the Ankara Convivium. She won the Sophie Coe Award on food history in 2008 for her article "Poppy: Potent yet Frail," presented

previously at the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery where she's become a regular presenter. Currently, she is the curator of the Culinary Culture Section of Princess Islands' City Museum. She is happy to unite her expertise in archaeology and art history from her previous career with her unbounded interest in food culture.

**Nicole Tarulevicz** teaches at the School of Asian Languages and Studies at the University of Tasmania.

**Karen Lau Taylor** is a freelance food writer and consultant whose food curriculum vitae includes a master's degree in food studies from New York University, an advanced certificate from the Wine and Spirits Education Trust, and a gig as pastry cook at a five-star hotel after completing L'Academie de Cuisine's pastry arts program. She is working toward a master's degree in public health while she continues to write, teach, test recipes, eat, and drink from her home in Alexandria, Virginia.

**Thy Tran** is trained as a professional chef. She established Wandering Spoon to provide cooking classes, culinary consultation, and educational programming for culinary academies and nonprofit organizations throughout Northern California. Currently, she is a chef instructor at the International Culinary Schools at the Art Institute of California–San Francisco and Tante Marie's. She is also the founder and director of the Asian Culinary Forum. She co-authored *The Essentials of Asian Cooking, Taste of the World,* and the award-winning guide, *Kitchen Companion*.

**Leena Trivedi-Grenier** is a Bay-area food writer, cooking teacher, and social media consultant. Her writings have appeared in *The Business of Food: Encyclopedia of the Food and Drink Industry, Culinary Trends* magazine, and the *Cultural Arts Resources for Teachers and Students* newsletter and will be featured in several upcoming titles by Greenwood Press. She also runs a food/travel/gastronomy blog called *Leena Eats This Blog* (www.leenaeats.com).

**Karin Vaneker** graduated from the AKI Academy of Visual Arts in Enschede, the Netherlands. She later attended Sint-Lukas Hoger Instituut voor Schone Kunsten in Brussels, Belgium. She has written for numerous Dutch newspapers and magazines, specializing in trends and the cultural and other histories of ingredients and cuisines, and has published several books. Furthermore, Vaneker has worked for museums and curated an exhibition about New World taro (L. *Xanthosoma* spp.). At present she is researching its potential in domestic cuisines and gastronomy.

**Penny Van Esterik** is professor of anthropology at York University, Toronto, where she teaches nutritional anthropology, advocacy anthropology, and feminist theory. She does fieldwork in Southeast Asia and has developed materials on breast-feeding and women's work and infant and young child feeding.

**Richard Wilk** is professor of anthropology and gender studies at Indiana University, where he directs the Food Studies Program. With a PhD in anthropology from the University of Arizona, he has taught at the University of California,

Berkeley; University of California, Santa Cruz; New Mexico State University; and University College London and has held fellowships at Gothenburg University and the University of London. His publications include more than 125 papers and book chapters, a textbook in economic anthropology, and several edited volumes. His most recent books are *Home Cooking in the Global Village* (Berg Publishers), *Off the Edge: Experiments in Cultural Analysis* (with Orvar Lofgren; Museum Tusculanum Press), *Fast Food/Slow Food* (Altamira Press), and *Time, Consumption, and Everyday Life* (with Elizabeth Shove and Frank Trentmann; Berg Publishers).

**Chelsie Yount** is a PhD student of anthropology at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. She lived in Senegal in 2005 and again in 2008, when performing ethnographic research for her master's thesis at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, on the topic of Senegalese food and eating habits.

**Marcia Zoladz** is a cook, food writer, and food-history researcher with her own Web site, Cozinha da Marcia (Marcia's Kitchen; www.cozinhadamarcia.com.br). She is a regular participant and contributor at the Oxford Symposium on Food and History and has published three books in Brazil, Germany, and Holland—*Cozinha Portuguesa* (Portuguese cooking), *Muito Prazer* (Easy recipes), and *Brigadeiros e Bolinhas* (Sweet and savory Brazilian finger foods).

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