

Travel the World without Leaving Your Kitchen

International Cooking Series

A Taste of the Tropics in the Dutch Caribbean Islands

Most of us can passionately describe a delicious recipe or meal that someone in our family has passed down for generations and the ensuing joy of sharing the dish around the table. Exploring, learning, and embracing cultural food traditions, both our own and others', can broaden our perspectives about the history and cultures from around the world. Whether you experience these cultural differences in eating while traveling, while visiting a restaurant in your community, or by preparing them at home, it can help you celebrate the cultural diversity found in all our communities. So, travel the world without leaving your kitchen and experience a taste of the tropics in the Dutch Caribbean Islands.

The Dutch Caribbean Islands of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao are located off the coast of Venezuela. They are part of more than 7,000 islands, including sovereign countries and territories that make up the Caribbean Islands. They are sometimes referred to as the ABC Islands of the Caribbean. Around 1499, Spanish explorer Alonso de Ojeda discovered the ABC islands, and they remained under Spanish control until the Dutch occupied the islands in 1636. The British took control in the early 1800s but the Netherlands took them back in 1816. Today, Aruba and Curaçao are independent countries of the Netherlands, while Bonaire is a special municipality of the Netherlands.





Volcanic activity on the ocean's bottom pushed rocks to the surface to form these islands. Then coral reefs formed around the slowly rising islands and over millions of years these reefs have become part of the topography, making this area a scuba divers' mecca. Aruba was the first of the islands to embrace tourism, bringing in cruise ships in the 1950s. If you visit Bonaire, you will see the distinctive line of white salt pyramids. Curaçao is known for its colonial architecture, including Willemstad, a well-preserved example of a Dutch colonial trading settlement that has been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site. All three islands have national parks that protect a large percentage of their lands. Aruba's Arikok National Park is home to spectacular caves, original Indian rock drawings, and unusual land formations made from lava, quartz diorite, and limestone. On Bonaire, The Flamingo Sanctuary and salt flats protect the south end of the island, while the north end is quite mountainous. Bonaire has a reputation as an ecologically oriented island. On Curaçao, about half the island is left in a natural state but several national parks protect turtle nesting sites. Sailing and boating are popular because it is the main transportation

between islands. Let's explore what these islands have to offer that makes their food cultures unique.

The History of Food

South American tribes migrated to the Dutch Caribbean Islands around 600 AD and found plenty of food to eat. Snapper, grouper, and shrimp were plentiful from the seas; wild hogs were native to the islands; and there was an abundance of tropical fruits and vegetables; guava, pineapple, papaya, plantains, sweet potatoes, cassava, pumpkin, and cashews flourished. In Aruba, you'll find shrimp creole, cornmeal and meat tamales, and rum cake. In Bonaire, you'll find Guiambo, a soup made with okra and plenty of vegetables, grilled fish served with a spicy tomato sauce, and goat or beef stew. In Curaçao, you'll find Keshi Yena, a round of Gouda cheese stuffed and baked with a spicy meat filling, stewed iguana, and coconut patties. It is also the home of Blue Curaçao, a unique spirit made from the dried peel of the bitter orange laraha. Are you hungry yet? These native foods have unique ingredients and flavor combinations, typical of the tropical islands.

Arepa di Pampuna (Pumpkin Pancakes)

Pumpkin pancakes are a traditional dish of Curaçao but every family puts their own spin on them. Add your favorite fall spice or serve with honey.

Yield: 4 servings

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 10 minutes

Nutritional analysis per 2 small pancakes:

210 calories, 4 g fat, 85 mg cholesterol,

450 mg sodium, 34 g carbohydrates, 8 g protein

Ingredients

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup pumpkin puree
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ½ cup milk
- powdered sugar for dusting, if desired
- cooking spray for frying

Instructions

1. In a small mixing bowl, stir the dry ingredients together until combined.
2. In a small bowl, add the eggs and using a mixer, beat the eggs until frothy.
3. In a medium mixing bowl, whisk the pumpkin puree, vanilla, and milk together until smooth.
4. Add the dry ingredients and beaten eggs, all at once into the pumpkin mixture and combine, mixing gently until all the ingredients are blended. Then allow the batter to set for 2 to 3 minutes.
5. Using an electric skillet, set the temperature to 350 degrees F or in a large skillet, over medium



heat, spray the skillet lightly with cooking spray. The skillet surface will be ready for the batter when a few drops of water sprinkled on the skillet dance and disappear.

6. When the skillet is hot, slowly pour 1/3 cup of the pancake batter into the skillet. If the batter is too thick, smooth the top to make a rounded shape.
7. Cook until the edges are dry, and bubbles begin to appear on the surface of the batter, about 1½ to 2 minutes, or until golden brown.
8. Using a wide spatula, flip the pancakes and cook another 1½ to 2 minutes more. Remove from the heat and place on a plate. Cover with a paper towel to keep warm.
9. Spray the skillet and repeat the process until all the batter is used.
10. Serve plain, with a light dusting of powdered sugar, or top with your favorite fruit.

Note: You can use homemade pumpkin puree instead of canned pumpkin puree. The Pioneer Woman has a homemade puree recipe at <https://www.thepioneerwoman.com/food-cooking/recipes/a11184/make-your-own-pumpkin-puree/>. To make the pancakes ahead, cool, and then stack with wax paper, foil, or parchment paper between pancakes. Place in a resealable freezer bag and freeze for up to three months.



Pastechi

Pastechis are pastries stuffed with beef, chicken, tuna, or cheese. Thanks to the Asian influence on the island of Aruba, even chop suey is used as a stuffing. Pastechis are local grab-and-go breakfast and snack favorites. The main ingredient is usually combined with finely chopped onions, green peppers, celery, raisins, cumin, nutmeg, and maybe even hot peppers. While they are traditionally deep-fried, the following version is baked as a healthier option.

Yield: 10 - 12 servings

Prep time: 25 minutes

Cook time: 40 minutes

Nutritional analysis per 3 pastechis:

270 calories, 6 g fat, 80 mg cholesterol,
500 mg sodium, 24 g carbohydrates, 8 g protein

Dough Ingredients

- *½ cup unsalted butter, melted and slightly cooled*
- *¾ cup water*
- *1 large egg*
- *3½ cups all-purpose flour*
- *1½ teaspoons salt*

For egg wash

- *1 large egg, beaten (optional)*

Note: You may use prepared pie dough filling or buy 3½-inch empanada discs from your grocery freezer section, if desired.

Filling Ingredients

- *2 tablespoons oil*
- *½ onion, finely diced*
- *½ red bell pepper, finely diced*
- *3 cloves garlic, minced*
- *½ pound ground beef*
- *½ cup frozen peas and carrots, thawed*
- *2 tablespoons raisins*
- *2 tablespoons prepared yellow mustard*
- *3 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce*
- *3 tablespoons tomato sauce*
- *½ teaspoon salt*
- *¼ teaspoon black pepper*
- *¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper, optional*
- *2 large hard-cooked eggs, peeled, and chopped*

Instructions

To Make the Dough

1. In a large bowl, combine butter, water, and the egg. Add the flour and salt. Stir together until a sticky dough forms. Turn onto a well-floured surface and knead the dough by hand until a smooth ball of dough forms.
2. Wrap in plastic wrap and chill for 2 hours in the refrigerator before rolling out the dough.

Note: The size of your circle to make the pastechis are usually from 4- to 6-inch circles, but the circles could be smaller - from 3- to 5-inches. Use a cookie cutter, glass, or small plate for easier cutting.

To Make the Filling

1. In a large skillet, over medium heat, add the oil and heat until shimmering. Add the onion, bell pepper, and garlic. Sauté until vegetables are soft and onions are translucent, about 5 to 7 minutes, stirring often.
2. Add the ground beef, stirring often and cook until well browned and the meat reaches 155 degrees F, about 5 minutes.
3. Add carrots and peas, and raisins. Stir to combine and cook for 3 minutes.
4. Add mustard, Worcestershire sauce, and tomato sauce. Stir to combine and cook for 5 minutes.
5. Add hard-cooked eggs and stir to combine, adjusting salt and pepper to taste. Chill the filling for at least 30 minutes.

To Make Pastechis

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F after you have filled half the pastechis.
2. Take half the dough from the refrigerator. On a lightly floured board, roll out dough as thin as possible without the dough breaking, about 1/8-inch thick. Using a 4- to 6-inch diameter round cutter, cut out circles from the dough.



3. Place about 1½ tablespoons of filling onto each circle.
4. Using your finger, dip your finger into water and run it around the edge of each circle of dough to moisten it. Fold the dough in half over the meat filling.
5. Using the tines of a fork dipped in flour, press to seal the edges.
6. Place the pastechis onto a parchment-lined baking sheet about 1-inch apart. Repeat until all the dough is gone. (Leftover scraps may be rerolled.)
7. Brush the tops of the pastechis with the beaten egg to aid in browning and bake at 375 degrees F for 25 to 30 minutes, or until golden brown.

Note: Serve with ketchup, mustard, or chili sauce. You can use any cooked or leftover meat in this recipe, such as ground turkey or shredded chicken, beef, or pork. You can make the filling the day before, if needed. Simply warm the filling for 30 seconds in the microwave, in a microwave-safe bowl, before filling the pastechis. You can store unbaked pastechis in an airtight container in the freezer for up to three months. Thaw in the refrigerator and bake according to recipe instructions. Or freeze baked pastechis and reheat in the oven for 15 to 20 minutes at 350 degrees F before serving.

Keshi Yena

Keshi Yena is a traditional Dutch Caribbean casserole featuring melted Gouda or Edam cheese and spiced ground beef and/or chicken. Keshi Yena translates to stuffed cheese. Often referred to as Aruba's national dish, it is also popular in Curaçao. Originally, leftover seasoned meat was added into the empty Gouda cheese rind and baked or steamed. It is a blend of many cultures, including South American, African, Indian, Chinese, and Dutch.

Yield: 4 – 6 servings

Prep time: 15 minutes

Cook time: 45 minutes

Nutritional analysis per ½-cup serving:
450 calories, 14 g fat, 130 mg cholesterol,
1160 mg sodium, 16 g carbohydrates, 34 g protein

Ingredients

- 2 cups cooked chicken or beef, shredded or cut into 2" cubes
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 1 large onion, finely diced
- 1 large green pepper, finely diced
- 2 large tomatoes, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 2 tablespoons raisins
- 1 tablespoon capers
- 1 tablespoon spicy mustard
- 2 tablespoons sweet pickle relish
- 1 tablespoon fresh parsley, chopped
- 1 pound Gouda cheese, thinly sliced

Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.
2. In a large skillet, over medium heat, heat the oil until shimmering. Add onions and sauté until they turn a golden brown, about 5 to 7 minutes, stirring to prevent sticking.



3. Add the remaining ingredients, except the parsley and cheese. Stir to combine. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer for 10 minutes.
4. Using cooking spray, spray a 9-inch round baking dish with high sides or 8-ounce souffle dishes. Line the dish with slices of Gouda cheese, overlapping slightly and reserving some to garnish the top. Pour the meat mixture into the prepared pan and then garnish with the remaining cheese.
5. Bake in the oven for 30 minutes or until the casserole is bubbling and cheese is golden brown.
6. Sprinkle with parsley and serve warm.

Note: Serve with crusty bread slices, cornbread, or your favorite vegetable. This is an extremely salty dish because of the capers and Gouda cheese. Gruyere (94mg) or Swiss (54mg) are both lower in sodium and can be substituted for Gouda (232mg per ounce). You could, however, reduce the cheese to 8 ounces of shredded cheese. Add it into the meat mixture before simmering, reserving 1/3 of shredded cheese for the top to then bake. This will also reduce the calorie count of a serving by 200 calories.

Kabritu Stoba (Goat Stew)

Kabritu Stob is a traditional goat stew, sometimes made with lamb, that originated in Bonaire. The meat is marinated with lime juice and a variety of spices, before available ingredients are simmered together and stewed. The indigenous islanders found a way to turn a once-overabundance of goats into a tender meal. The goat stew is traditionally served with rice or funchi (cornmeal mush).

Yield: 6 – 8 servings

Prep time: 20 minutes

Cook time: 90 minutes

Nutritional analysis per ½-cup serving: 360 calories, 4.5 g fat, 75 mg cholesterol, 1010 mg sodium, 32 g carbohydrates, 27 g protein

Ingredients for Marinade

- 2 pounds goat or lamb shoulder, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1 large lime, juiced, OR 2½ tablespoons concentrated lime juice
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ cup curry powder
- 1 tablespoon allspice
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon ginger
- 1 teaspoon thyme

Ingredients for Stew

- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 1 14.5-ounce can crushed tomatoes
- 1 13.5-ounce can low-fat coconut milk
- 2 cups beef or vegetable broth, low sodium
- 1 large onion, medium diced
- 2 medium potatoes, cubed



Instructions

1. In a large, resealable bag, combine goat, all the spices and lime juice, gently. Using your hands, gently massage the bag until thoroughly mixed. Allow the bag to marinate in the refrigerator for two hours or overnight.
2. Before browning meat, remove it from the refrigerator; drain all liquid and spices, refrigerating the marinade for later use.
3. In a 6-quart Dutch oven or pan with lid, on medium-heat, add 1 tablespoon of oil. Heat to shimmering. Add half the meat and brown, stirring occasionally to brown all sides. Remove browned meat from pot and reserve until later. Add the other 1 tablespoon of oil and heat to shimmering. Brown remaining meat on all sides. Remove browned meat and reserve until later.
4. Bring the heat back up to medium-high. Add onions and sauté until they turn a golden brown, about 5 to 7 minutes, stirring to prevent sticking.
5. Add the meat and reserved marinade back into the pan. Add the remaining ingredients into the stew. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 1½ to 2 hours or until meat is tender. Meat should register at least 160 degrees F.

Note: Serve stew with rice or funchi. Other recipes replace the above spices with 1 teaspoon each of cumin, coriander, paprika, thyme, and oregano plus ½ teaspoon black pepper and ¼ teaspoon cloves.



Funchi (Cornmeal Mush)

This Caribbean staple is a simple cornmeal and water mixture, similar to our polenta in America. Corn was abundant during times of slavery, making it an affordable ingredient. As the mixture cools after cooking, it thickens, making it easy to slice.

Yield: 6 servings

Prep time: 5 minutes

Cook time: 10 minutes

Nutritional analysis per ½-cup serving: 127 calories, 3 g fat, 5 mg cholesterol, 414 mg sodium, 3 g carbohydrates, 2.5 g protein

Ingredients

- *1¼ cups cold water*
- *1½ cups cornmeal, coarsely ground*
- *1 teaspoon salt*
- *1½ cups boiling water*
- *1 tablespoon unsalted butter*

Instructions

1. In a medium saucepan, over medium heat, combine cold water, cornmeal, and salt.
2. Once combined, add the boiling water and butter.
3. Increase the heat to high until the mixture reaches a rolling boil. Once the mixture begins to boil, vigorously stir with a wooden spoon for 3 minutes.
4. Reduce heat to medium and continue to stir until the mixture becomes very stiff and pulls away from the sides of the pan, about 3 more minutes.
5. Remove from the heat and place the mixture in a well-buttered bowl and cover with a service plate or platter.
6. Immediately and carefully flip the bowl over so the plate is on the bottom. Shake the funchi onto the plate and then remove the bowl.

Note: You can slice leftover funchi like French fries and bake or serve right off the plate with eggs and bacon or as an accompaniment to soups and stews. (Recipe compliments of Visit Aruba, <https://www.visitaruba.com/aruba-recipes/funchi-corn-meal-mush/>.)

Sopi Mondongo

Sopa de mondongo is a simmered soup made from tripe and vegetables such as bell peppers, onions, carrots, potatoes, cabbage, celery, and tomatoes, along with the addition of limes or lemons. Beef tripe is the name for honeycomb tripe which is the stomach of a cow. Tripe is also known as chitterlings in some parts of the United States. Don't shy away from this recipe. You can substitute boneless beef round or pork shoulder with delicious results.

Yield: 10 as an appetizer or 6 servings as a soup

Prep time: 20 minutes

Cook time: 30 minutes

Nutritional analysis per ½-cup serving:

65 calories, 5 g fat, 40 mg sodium, 5 g carbohydrates, 1 g protein

Ingredients

- ¼ cup all-purpose flour
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 pound pork or beef honeycomb, cooked until tender
OR boneless beef round or pork shoulder, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 3 tablespoons canola oil, divided
- 1 large red onion, chopped
- 1 teaspoon garlic, mashed
- 3 stems fresh cilantro
- ½ cup celery, chopped
- 1 bell pepper, diced
- 6 plum tomatoes, diced
- ¼ teaspoon oregano
- ½ cup tomato sauce
- 3 large potatoes, peeled, cut into ½-inch cubes
- 1 large carrot, diced
- 2 limes or lemons, juiced, OR 5 tablespoons concentrated juice



Instructions

1. If you are interested in cleaning and cooking the tripe, follow the instruction at the Spruce Eats at <https://www.thespruceeats.com/cleaning-and-cooking-beef-tripe-3030144>.
2. If you are going to substitute beef or pork, in a medium bowl, combine flour, salt, and black pepper. Add the beef and toss to coat.
3. In a large skillet, over medium-high heat, add 2 tablespoons of oil and heat until shimmering. Add meat cubes and cook, turning so that all sides are browned, about 5 minutes total. Remove meat from skillet and reserve for later use.
4. In the same skillet, over medium-high heat, add 1 tablespoon of oil and heat until shimmering. Add onion and garlic and cook, stirring often, until the onions become translucent, about 3 minutes.
5. Stir in remaining ingredients and meat. Reduce heat to a simmer. Cook covered until beef is done (minimum 145 degrees F), about 15 to 20 minutes.

Note: Serve the soup with white rice and avocado for a heartier meal. You can refrigerate the soup for up to five days, tightly covered, or frozen in an airtight container for up to six months.

The traditional recipes of Dutch Caribbean Islands provide an adventure for your taste buds! Exploring your local library or websites and food blogs can provide you with additional ideas for your everyday meals.

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