

Caribbean Cuisine

Can you see yourself sitting on a deck chair, relaxing and sipping a Caribbean rum punch, thinking about the sweet potato cake and jerk chicken you will have tonight? After all it is Carnival time.

Caribbean cuisine is a fusion of Spanish, French, and African cuisine. These traditions were brought from the many homelands of this region's population. The original Caribbean diet was based on fish, meat, yams and fruit. Food was spiced with mainly lemons and hot peppers; they remain key ingredients to Caribbean food.

During the 16th century it was the start of colonial settlement in the Caribbean. And so, the British, French, Spanish, Dutch and Portuguese colonists introduced their own cooking styles. During the Colonial Caribbean period slaves were imported from Africa to work on the sugar cane plantations and Afro-Caribbean cuisine came to light. The slaves mainly ate sweet potatoes, cassava, breadfruit and plantain; these foods remain staples of the Caribbean diet. During the 1830's slavery was banned and Indian immigrants were brought from India and China to the islands. They mainly introduced curried meats and rotis (flour pancakes wrapped around a meat and potato curry). The Chinese introduced noodles, chow mein and rice. Rice today remains part of the staple diet.

There has been a decline in the amount of Caribbean takeaways in the UK. Caribbean foods are available from supermarkets and specialist shops, but what would you expect to buy at a Caribbean takeaway? Jerk chicken, ackee and saltfish, patties, carrot juice, doubles, meat rotis, fried snapper and peanut punch.

A taster of some Caribbean foods:

Ackee: it is a fruit that is eaten as a vegetable. The soft flesh is yellow in colour and looks like scrambled egg when cooked. Ackee is usually fried in oil.

Jerk: it is a unique Jamaican spicing method used for the preservation, seasoning and cooking of chicken or pork, which is traditionally cooked over a flame

Doubles: doubles got its name from how it is made. It is made from two rounds of fried dough, which is also known as 'bara' and is filled with curried chickpeas and served with a spicy sauce

Cou-cou: is a cornmeal and okra mixture

Pepperpot:: is a traditional stew made with pork, beef and/or lamb, it is flavoured with chillies, thyme and peppers and thickened with cassareep (a preservative made from grated cassava and flavoured with cinnamon and brown sugar). Pepperpot is served with boiled rice or bread

Plantains: means "potatoes of the air", they are also known as cooking bananas. Plantain is a type of banana plant; they are more starchy than sweet and must be cooked before eaten. Plantains are eaten boiled, grilled or fried.

Yams: Although they look alike, yams are not even distantly related to the sweet potato. Yams are generally sweeter than sweet potato and these tubers can grow over seven feet in length.

Condensed milk: it is evaporated milk combined with sugar, and is typically canned.

Carrot juice: is a favourite condensed milk sweetened carrot juice.

Vanilla essence, almond essence, nutmeg and cinnamon are used as flavouring

Saltfish: salted, dried fish, usually cod, though other fish (such as mackerel can be used.
Saltfish is an integral ingredient in Jamaica's national dish, "saltfish and ackee"