

Gastronomy on El Camino de Costa Rica

Gastronomy is, in essence, a cultural expression of a people, and is defined by UNESCO as an intangible and nonmaterial heritage of humanity. In other words, food is an expression of identity that provides a means to maintain continuity in a culture's rites and is an expression of its creativity, and promotes respect among communities thus avoiding ethnocentrism.

Concepts that allow a relationship of food between different environments define what to do in a country define its different regions, as well as its identity, ecology, economics, policies and even its history. The famous French writer Brillat-Savarin said it in his book on gastronomy "Physiologie du goût: the philosophy of taste; where he mentioned that gastronomy is a knowledge and an understanding which was to ensure the survival of humanity through nourishing and adequate food.

For, as well as giving sustenance and energy, the art of cooking is combining flavours and together with talent and creativity. Keep culture alive from generation to generation. Some compare music to gastronomy, being it is the same to

eat as to listen to music because it is a completely personal and individual experience. It also compares the chef to a composer and orchestra director and the recipe to the score, the chefs his musicians and the final dish, is music for the palate. Gastronomically is tied to the identity of a place and allows us to identify and discern from one place from another.

Gastronomy with Identity

Chef Pablo Vasquez Flores, explained that "gastronomical identity" is cultural identity, thus is the DNA of each town and village and that, despite the closeness between countries, each "cuisine" is completely different. Costa Rican gastronomy differs from Panamanian as the French and Mexican and Peruvian and Japanese.

In Costa Rica, due to its tropical location, it has the ideal climate to have a wide variety of products such as fruits, vegetables, grains and countless species for fishing and hunting since the pre-Columbian habitants of the country, allowing for a rich and varied gastronomy. Licentiate Yanory Álvarez Masis in her book "Cocina Tradicional Costarricense 1", explains that, the Costa Rican region, in general

Mesoamerican, had as its base the elements of corn, beans, cacao, pejibaye and many tubers.

Gastronomy of Afro-descendants and the Caribbean Zone

Stage 1 and 2 of El Camino de Costa Rica

With the arrival of the first Spaniards, there was also a wave of Afro-descendants to Costa Rica that came from Senegal, Gambia, Ghana and Benin, who brought their culture: music, dances, language, beliefs and their gastronomy. In this way, three different cultures came together in this single country and it gave rise to Costa Rican cuisine. For example, the birth of gallo pinto Alberto explains.

In the book "Afro-Caribbean food of Costa Rica" gallo pinto is the combination of pre-Columbian Central American beans, with the rice brought by the Spanish prepared in the African style using a lot of spice and is typically eaten for breakfast. Along with the variation known as "Rice'n beans" which is the gallo pinto with red beans prepared with coconut milk, explained this author. Chef Darwin González Monge, a

specialist in this type of Afro-Caribbean food, explained the importance of the culinary roots that his grandfather had taught him and the meaning he gave to each element of the kitchen. González, emphasized the need to understand that it is the land that provides food ingredients and that harvesting from it allows us to better understand the environment in which we live.

Chef Bonilla explained: "We live in a country without gastronomic culture, people are ashamed, and have no idea of products or techniques from their own country "leaving the Costa Rican being far behind the tourism and gastronomical competition". However, there are people who, seek in their own way to offer a cuisine with a Costa Rican essence, where together with the Camino de Costa Rican, will allow hikers to visit different areas, villages and businesses; as is the case of Julio Knight's business, which offers people the opportunity to eat fish from the Barra de Pacuare channels, it is an great example of progress and life improvement for the local community where there are almost no businesses. Knight and his family offer a dish of the day, in typical Costa Rican fashion, and the future looks even brighter as he plans to build more and better cabins. El Camino de Costa Rica is

bringing much needed income and resources to areas not usually open to tourists. Finally, Julio praised the link that his company has with El Camino de Costa Rica and the advantages that it brings with it: "It benefits us to make ourselves known and to have the opportunity to service the tourism that begins to come to the community thanks to El Camino de Costa Rica" And obviously Knight and his business offers it's best to Camino hikers.



Crab Soup – Doña Mari. Adventures of the Caribbean

Indigenous Gastronomy

Stage 3 and 4 of El Camino de Costa Rica

Many of the Costa Rican indigenous peoples have a great connection between their agricultural activities, their beliefs, religious rites, their craftsmanship and their culinary culture.

There are those who work hard to preserve indigenous cuisine in the country, Chef Pablo Bonilla, has focused on the indigenous Bribri, and is working to preserve the roots of these people. Bonilla speaks about the importance of knowing the traditions of a birthplace to combat the ignorance of people that do not know what their ancestors did, what they ate or even how they lived. Bonilla has documented several indigenous recipes and he uses this knowledge to cook incredible dishes using native products and indigenous techniques. He is committed to collecting, documenting and sharing this knowledge. Bonilla dreams that at some point Costa Ricans will become aware of their culinary heritage and feel proud of what Costa Rica has to offer. He hopes tourism will become diversified in the way that other countries have achieved. Chef Bonilla points out that, "about 80% of tourism in Spain is gastronomic and in Costa Rica there is no gastronomic tourism. When will be the day that Costa Rica attracts people not only for its biodiversity, but also for its cuisine?" Therefore his desire to develop gastronomic tourism in Costa Rica.

Alternatively, we must not forget the great influence that came with the arrival of the Spaniards with their unique cuisine now

adapted to ingredients available in the new world. Yanory Álvarez describes that with the arrival of the conquistadors, the cuisines of two different cultures melded and developed into a new Costa Rican cuisine.



Smoked Chicken - a Bribri Tradition

From the Farm to La Mesa / From the Farm to table

Stage 7 of El Camino de Costa Rica

De la granja a la mesa (or as it is known in English “From Farm to Table”) is a food movement that aims to use local ingredients as the main source for restaurants, either directly sourced from the farmers/producers in the area or from their own gardens. The Hotel Casa Turire, works on this concept, where they harvest many foods from their organic gardens for their restaurant, bar and kitchen. The chef of the hotel is from the Turrialba area, and he offers his cuisine using Turrialba area produce, and ingredients from his own garden. Jana Daigle, Hotel Manager, adds that meal courses such as; main

course, desserts, breads and juices are prepared onsite. And that the Hotel Casa Turire offers cooking classes for those interested in learning more about local cuisines.

Turrialba is famous for its production of sugarcane, so the Hotel Casa Turire has decided to develop a special dessert based on this sweet called "tapa dulce" ice cream which, since 2009, has been delighting palates.

At hotel Casa José in Cachi de Cartago, chef José Álvarez, has developed a fusion menu based on typical Costa Rican cuisine, with influences from many regions of the world. His constant search for flavours has made his cuisine a combination of culinary delights, with a focus on healthy foods of the highest quality. The diner at Casa José can order vegetarian, vegan or even gluten-free options. Álvarez takes great pride in the way his dishes are presented, decorations with local flowers and leaves make the dishes works of art.



Casa Turire - Restaurante Casa Jose: Hotel Quelitales

Stage 8 of El Camino de Costa Rica

As we continue along route we near the Tapantí National Park, and arrive at Tapantí Bird watching Ecological Lodge and Tapantí Fungal Farm. Owner Don Martín Jiménez López explains that his lodge has a wonderful view of the Talamanca mountain range and the highest mountain in the country, Chirripo. The Lodge and Farm make a great resting stop as although it is rustic, it has all the services, is peaceful, and has a wide variety flora and fauna. The star produce here is cultivated mushrooms. A great choice for dinner are skewers of mushrooms with onion, sweet pepper, pineapple and chicken, accompanied with a roasted potato and ripe banana stuffed with mozzarella cheese. And if you have any room left, a sweet pineapple dessert with cinnamon. Then wash it all down with a natural lemon, yerba and ginger drink.

Jiménez and his family prove that the vision combined with desire means a superior product. His company, Fungal Tapantí, is yet another great stop on El Camino de Costa Rica. Don Martin notes that El Camino de Costa Rica has

been very important in launching this family project and giving it visibility as part of the services and attractions for Camino hikers thus helping his family business grow.



Mushrooms and skewers

Wellness and Vegetarian Food

Stage 10 of El Camino de Costa Rica

On El Camino de Costa Rica you will experience a variety of Costa Rican flavours that are healthy and balanced. An

example is Verdesana, a shelter located in the province of Cartago near Palo Verde del Guarco, which specializes in healthy tasty vegetarian food. This hostel's philosophy is to promote both the well-being of people and the environment, using products such as lettuce, cucumbers, tomatoes, among others, and eggs from local organic farmers. The owner Juan Carlos González offers an extensive menu for the hiker to choose from. Which makes its connection with El Camino de Costa Rica so special, Juan Carlos mentions, "it motivates us since it promotes the same values as our hostel, and is geared towards the same type of tourist" You will love Verdesana.

Fusion

Stage 9 and 12 of El Camino de Costa Rica

Hiking the El Camino de Costa Rica offers the experience of eating the creations of chefs little known by tourists or visitors to the country; an example is Chef Darwin González de Malanga, an expert in Caribbean fusion food. He cooks for hikers at the Hotel Palenque Tarraz. On a recent Camino he provided tasting of 5 courses, a meal designed to give an

experience for the senses. The first course was an alcoholic drink of pears bathed in cacique and lemon essence, the lemon giving the drink extra zest. The second course was local avocado accompanied with "chips" of malanga (a type of tuber resembling a sweet potato, often called locally a "Tiquisque") that gave a crispy texture to the dish and a unique flavour for the palate. The third course consisted of a typical Caribbean dish, el Rondón, which is a coconut milk soup flavoured with different tubers such as yucca, yams, ñampi and local, fresh seafood (shrimp, mollusc, fish, etc). The fourth course consisted of freshly made tortillas stuffed with beetroot powder and pejibaye mince. Pejibaye mince is a very nutritious fruit that grows throughout the tropics and was part of the diet of the first settlers of the American continent.



Rondón en pan

And finally the last course, a dessert that is created from ingredients that are local and in season. Darwin explains that, in gastronomy, the possibilities are endless and many flavour combinations that do not seem common can work very well, in this case, dessert, which was a combination of mashed potatoes, biscuits, chocolate and some fried fruits combined in a topping for ice cream which was a fitting ending to a great meal.



Dessert Fusion: Mashed potato, chocolate and ice cream

Costa Rica clearly has the diversity of foodstuffs to create a niche of gastronomy that is unique and delicious for adventuresome hikers. Trekking the Camino de Costa Rica provides a fascinating way to experience this food world while also providing an insight into a world of remote communities and indigenous peoples rarely visited by travellers. Hiking and eating along El Camino de Costa Rica is an experience you will never forget.

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