

Traditional Foods of Guatemala

With over 16 million inhabitants, Guatemala is the most populous country in Central America. As such, this tropical nation boasts a diverse array of traditional foods. Indigenous ingredients once cultivated by the ancient Maya mix with new items and techniques imported during Spanish colonial rule.



History

Indigenous Mayans grew maize and beans as diet staples. Centuries later, the Spanish arrived and conquered all of Central America. Spain's rule over Guatemala lasted from the 1500s to the 1800s, allowing time for the integration of typical Spanish ingredients such as citrus fruits, olive oil and garlic. The modern period following Guatemalan independence has not seen much change in terms of cuisine. Production facilities have advanced, but many locals still make their food by hand using primitive methods.

Guatemalan Geography and Agriculture

Guatemala's equatorial location guarantees that the country's lush valleys and jungles receive ample rainfall and warm sunlight, making for a fertile setting in which to cultivate a wide range of agricultural produce. Common crops in Guatemala include bananas, cocoa, coffee and sugar. Deforestation has posed problems in recent times, but the nation remains one of the primary producers of coffee and plantains.

Traditional Guatemalan Food

Guatemala does not have a single standout national dish, but several foods feature in everyday diets. Almost all dishes include some form of black beans, white rice and corn tortillas. Breakfast often combines the aforementioned elements with scrambled eggs and fried plantains. Fresh fruit such as mangoes, papayas, bananas and pineapples are also enjoyed. Guatemalan coffee is world-renowned.

Lunch and dinner also revolve around tortillas, rice and refried beans with meat and vegetables rounding out the meal. Meats, typically chicken and beef, are sauteed in chili sauce or boiled in savory stews. **Pepián**, a thick meat and vegetable stew, is prepared in the highland town of Antigua. **Pepián** is one of the oldest dishes in Guatemalan food heritage, borne out of the fusion of the Spanish and Mayan cultures. It is also quite possibly the most famous Guatemalan stew.

Meat and Poultry

The Guatemalan diet is fairly meat-heavy, with many beef caldos (stews) and soups. Bistec, grilled or fried beef, and churrascuro (charcoal grilled steak) are very popular. Dishes like burritos or chile rellenos also are made with beef or pork. Chicken is a major staple and in some rural regions is served with the feet still attached. **Pepián de pollo** is a spicy chicken stew made with tomatoes, cinnamon, peppers and pumpkin seeds. Another local dish is **Kak-ik**, a traditional turkey soup made with chile peppers and coriander.

Seafood

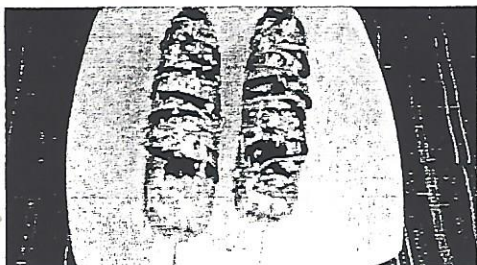
Seafood is abundant in Guatemala's coastal regions, especially on the Atlantic side. Lobster, shrimp and fish are grilled or fried. On the Caribbean coast, the plentiful fish and coconuts are combined with tomatoes, banana and cilantro to make a spicy stew called **tapado**. Tapado is basically a seafood stew cooked in a coconut broth.

Snacks

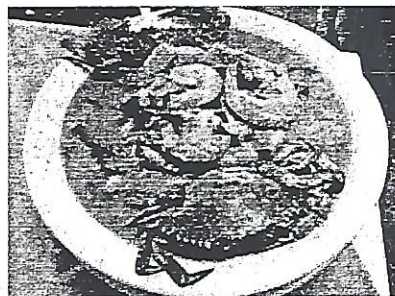
Many foods are sold by vendors from streetside carts. **Elotes** are grilled fresh ears of corn coated with a mixture of cheese, lime juice, chili and mayonnaise or butter. Fresh fruits are popular. Skewers of sliced green mangoes are sprinkled with chile and lime for a tart and refreshing afternoon treat. Empanadas, meat or potato stuffed pastries, can be found everywhere, as can tacos, tamales, nachos and crispy tostadas, often served with guacamole.

Guatemalan Beverages

Locals typically prepare their coffee weak and sweet with a little milk. Fruit juices abound, typically made from fresh concentrate mixed with water or milk, and fruit shakes, or licuados, are popular across Latin America. **Gallo**, the national beer, has the same cultural sway here as major brands found in the United States. Those looking to try something stronger may enjoy **Quetzalteca**, a potent raw cane spirit. Tap water in Guatemala may cause upset stomach or infection so most stores and restaurants offer bottled water and purification tablets for tourists.



Elotes



tapado



quetzalteca

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Contesta las preguntas. You do not need full sentences.

1. Name 4 common crops grown in Guatemala.

2. What typical ingredients did the Spanish introduce to Guatemala?

3. How does Guatemala's location affect their agricultural production?

4. What is the most famous Guatemalan stew? _____

5. In what part of Guatemala is seafood abundant?

6. Name some snacks that are sold by vendors in carts.

7. How do locals typically prepare their coffee?

8. Why do most stores and restaurants offer bottled water?

9. Name several fruits that are popular in Guatemala.

TRUE/FALSE:

- 10. Indigenous Mayans grew maize and beans as diet staples. _____
- 11. Almost all dishes include some form of black beans, rice and corn tortillas. _____
- 12. Kak-ik is a popular Guatemalan stew. _____
- 13. The Guatemalan diet does not include a lot of meat. _____
- 14. Gallo is the Guatemalan national beer. _____
- 15. Spain's rule over Guatemala lasted from the 1500s to 1800s. _____
- 16. Chicken is sometimes served with the feet still attached. _____

Define the following:

- 17. Pepián _____
- 18. Elotes _____
- 19. Tapado _____
- 20. Kak-ik _____
- 21. Churrascuro _____

