



Panamanian Cuisine Experience

by Cynthia Winter-Pond

When I was asked if I would be interested in writing an article for the monthly publication of the PanCanal Alumni Association Newsletter, I was a bit apprehensive, then I said to myself, why not, the best of writers had their start somewhere, so, here goes my take on my Panamanian Cuisine straight from my heart (because I wouldn't have it any other way). You need not be a food critique to enjoy, savour and acknowledge the fact that Panamanian Cuisine is the best, a fusion of Latin, West Indian and Indigenous flavors. In this article I will mention some of the most traditional entrees, appetizers, salads, deserts, and fruits you should try on your next trip to Panama.



PATACONES
(fried green plantains)

On May 6, 2009, I had the opportunity to go back to my homeland Panama. Even though the trip was as a result of a very sad occasion, I decided that this trip would be different. Instead of spending the usual two weeks, I decided to stay an entire month in order to enjoy the company of family and friends; and primarily to spend time with my mother, who by the grace of God, turned 93 years old on July 17.

Panamanians are still until today a very nice, warm, fun, and welcoming group of people. Absolutely everyone wanted to invite me over or out to breakfast, lunch or dinner. No matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't resist. For example, my cousin Felicia, at the urging of my mother, prepared the most mouth watering dish ever, *Stuffed Fried Fish with Coo-coo* and a *Cucumber Salad*. Oh my, it was so delicious! Not to be out done, my sister's friend Mirna "Queen of the Frituras" came over and delighted us with her famous *Ojaldre*, *Frituras de Bacalao* and *Bofe* I have tasted in a long time. Before the night was over, Mirna and Dilcia convinced my sister Olga to make *Sauce*. Not because she is my sister, but Olga does make the best *Sauce* ever! Then, another one of my sisters Elena Levy topped it all off with her fabulous fruit cake which she makes every year for the Christmas Holiday.



Stuffed Fried Fish with Coo-coo

After a long and hot morning of shopping around for a host hotel for our upcoming family reunion, we converged at Manolo's Restaurant. At Manolo's, I had *Butterfield Shrimp*, *Patacones* and *Salad*. Then our dear friend Lee surprised us with a large bowl of "*Mamones/Guineps*," picked from the tree in her backyard. Now, most of you that have been to Panama can identify with the feeling that no trip there is complete without a visit to Chimborazo for a plate of their *Signature Fried Corvina*, *Patacones* and *Onion Salad*.



GUINEPS



As you know Panama's weather is very humid and the sweltering heat had me searching the streets frantically for the almost extinct "Raspao Man". As luck will have it, I finally found one of Panama's most famous *Raspao* vendors right across the street from the passport agency. For those of you who are not aware, it's a known fact that this *Raspao* man has put his children through college from the proceeds of his *Raspao* sales, at .50 cents per *Raspao*. Can you imagine how hard he had to work and still does? So, I finally ordered my *Raspao* with all the works: grape flavoring, condensed milk, malted milk powder topped with sugar cane syrup, all for the price of .50 cents. It was YUMMY!



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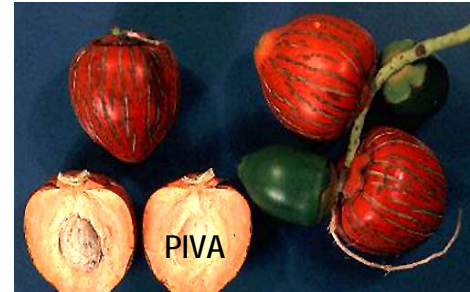
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My Panamanian Cuisine search and adventure did not end there. During one of our periodic visits to Los Pueblos, we stopped by the Super 99 to buy freshly made *Bollo* and *Piva*. Needless to say, I peeled back the corn husk wrapping of the *Bollo* and started savouring mine before the car could leave the parking lot. Then the "Paleta Man" who passes right in front of my mother's house did not escape, by the time we were finished with him, he had to go back down the hill to replenish his cart!



My favorite *Paleta* is "Coco". I also enjoyed *Ceviche* at the restaurant located at the Miraflores Locks; hot Tamales which were sold at the stand located in the side street across from the Juan Diaz Cemetery; and fresh *Baked Bun* sold by Carmela Gobern, editor of the Cybernews.



Now that I've caused your mouth to water just thinking about all the delicious food our country has to offer, be sure to enjoy them to the fullest on your next trip to Panama. Remember to try all the great food mentioned in this article. Panama is truly "Puente del Mundo y Corazon del Universo." *Go forth and enjoy our good eats!*

About the Writer:



Cynthia Winter-Pond was born the eight of nine children (6 girls, 3 boys) at Gorgas Hospital on the former Canal Zone to Eleanor Dyer Winter and the late Julian A. Winter Samaniego. She grew up in the town of Santa Cruz on the former Canal Zone, where she attended Santa Cruz Elementary and was a member of Girl Scout Troop #33 and President of the Silver Teens all girls Social Club. Her family later moved to Pedro Miguel. She graduated from Paraiso Jr. Sr. High School Class of 1971 with a Diploma in Commerce. She then attended the University of Panama where she pursued a degree in Business Administration.

On January 27, 1977 she migrated to the U.S. and resided briefly in Virginia and California. She then moved to Miami Florida where she currently resides. She loves living in Miami because of the Latin influences and it reminds her of life in Panama as well. Since 1977 Cynthia worked for various companies. In 1980 Cynthia started working for one of the major phone companies in their Multi Lingual Department as a 411 Operator, Accounting Clerk, Customer Service Specialist and Collections Specialist. Cynthia retired in December 2007 after 27 years of service. Since her retirement, Cynthia volunteers twice a week at the Baptist Hospital South Florida in their Discharge Call Manager's Office, making follow-up calls to discharged patients both in English and Spanish. She volunteered for Habitat for Humanity "Women Build" project on June 6, 2009. She also participated in the Cancer Relay for Life Walk which is held at the Baptist Hospital in March every year. Cynthia will be participating in the American Heart Association Heart Walk in October, in memory of her late brother Alfredo S. Winter who passed away on May 2, 2009 of a massive heart attack. She currently serves as a Class Ambassador for PanCanal Alumni Association representing Paraiso High School Class of 1971.

Cynthia enjoys spending time with her daughter Keisa & son in-law Oscar, her son Michael, family and friends. She is always organizing family reunions and family oriented events. She is also Queen of the Red Orchid Diva, Red Hat Society Chapter. Cynthia owns three online stores, and she also own and operate CKM Cookies and Cakes, a business she run from her kitchen. Her best selling item is the Canal Zone French Cookies, a cookie formerly sold in the grocery stores and club houses on the Former Canal Zone. Lastly, when she grows up she would love to be like Maya Angelou or Bea Smith!