

Latin-American Christmas Dinners

During this month, people celebrate the Christmas season. I have decided to research the Christmas culinary customs of different cultures in Latin-American countries, and I discovered that all have their respective characteristics and differences. This caused me to reflect on how people tend to group the Latinos/Hispanics in the United States in a homogenous group only because we speak the same language, but we don't even "speak the same language." Even though Spanish is common to everyone, there are many words that are so different in each country that there are many huge misinterpretations.

For example, in Mexico, the word for car is coche, which in Guatemala means pig. In Mexico, the word for bus is camion, and in Puerto Rico it is wawa. There are hundreds of words that differ in different countries in Latin America, and like the language, there are many shades also in customs, ways of dressing, music, festivities, literature, etc. All of these examples have different expressions according to where they come from. Those from Argentina, Colombia and Mexico know that they are different, so when they find themselves in this country, they unite for that which they have in common. But don't let us forget who we are and what makes us be part of our country.

It is very important to express and spread the fact that each Latino in this country has a different country of origin, with their own yearnings and learning experiences. The tendency to group everyone together as Latinos makes us look homogenous and, as a consequence, lose our customs and roots that are so important for us.

This diversity represented in each one of our countries can be seen expressed in the food as a very clear example.

Christmas is celebrated in every Latin-American country, but each one has different things prepared.

I will name some of the representative

Christmas dishes in some Latin-American countries. You can see that they are not only different, but also show an enormous culinary refinement. Countries reserve their best dishes for this Christmas season.

- It is the summer in South America during Christmas, and the whole image of a cold Christmas has a transformation in these countries, specifically in Argentina where people eat cold dishes that include Russian salad, thick tuna fillets with cream of milk, anchovies and capers, as well as some Italian dishes, such as vital tone, which is made with meat in a cooked yolk sauce among other things.

- In Cuba, people eat suckling pork with salad, chicken fricase, yucca with mojo, congri and bananas.

- In Guatemala, the family dinner consists of tamales, which usually are red or black, filled with olives, prunes and raisins, made with pork, chicken or turkey. They also eat baked pork or turkey stuffed with mashed potatoes, carrot salad with raisins and oxtail sauce. They drink hot fruit punch made with apple, prune, papaya, cinnamon, sometimes banana, along with coconut and rum.

- In Mexico, the Nochebuena (Christmas Eve) has many different varieties, but one of the most common ones is a salad made with a base of apples, nuts and celery with cream. Turkey is served along with the classic romeritos, a typical Mexican dish of quelites that is cooked with mole, potatoes, nopales and dried shrimp patties. Also a hot fruit punch made with guayaba, tamarind, prune, sugar cane, apple, cinnamon, tejocote and water is a delicious addition to the dinner.

- In Puerto Rico, we can find one of the most varied displays of food for Christmas Eve. They eat pasteles (cakes), which signify one of the differences in the Spanish language between many Spanish-speaking nations. In Mexico,

pastel means the dessert that is served at birthday parties (cake in English), and in Puerto Rico pasteles are tamales made from a base of green bananas and filled with pork cooked alongside potatoes and sweet peppers, wrapped in banana leaves. They also eat suckling pig that is cooked for seven hours over a wood fire as was done in the past in the Caribbean. Their typical drink called coquito is made with coconut milk, sugar, egg yolk, vanilla, cinnamon and rum. This is like their own version of eggnog but with coconut.

These are but some of the examples from different countries. In conclusion, I see that each country and culture has its own distinct customs and culinary expressions. I have not tasted a lot of these different dishes, and I don't recognize some of the ingredients or terminology. It humbles me and opens my mind when I realize that there is so much to learn from other Latin-American countries, and it reminds me that we all have something to offer to enrich others.

Happy holidays! ♦

