



Culinary Institute
of America

Central American Cuisine



Learning Objectives

- Identify the geographical boundaries of Central America.
- Describe the common characteristics of Central American cuisine.
- Distinguish the culinary traditions of Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Belize.
- Prepare Central American-style dishes using standardized recipes.

Central America

- Panama
- Costa Rica
- Nicaragua
- Honduras
- El Salvador
- Guatemala
- Belize
- Mexico



Jennifer Thermes

Central American Cuisine



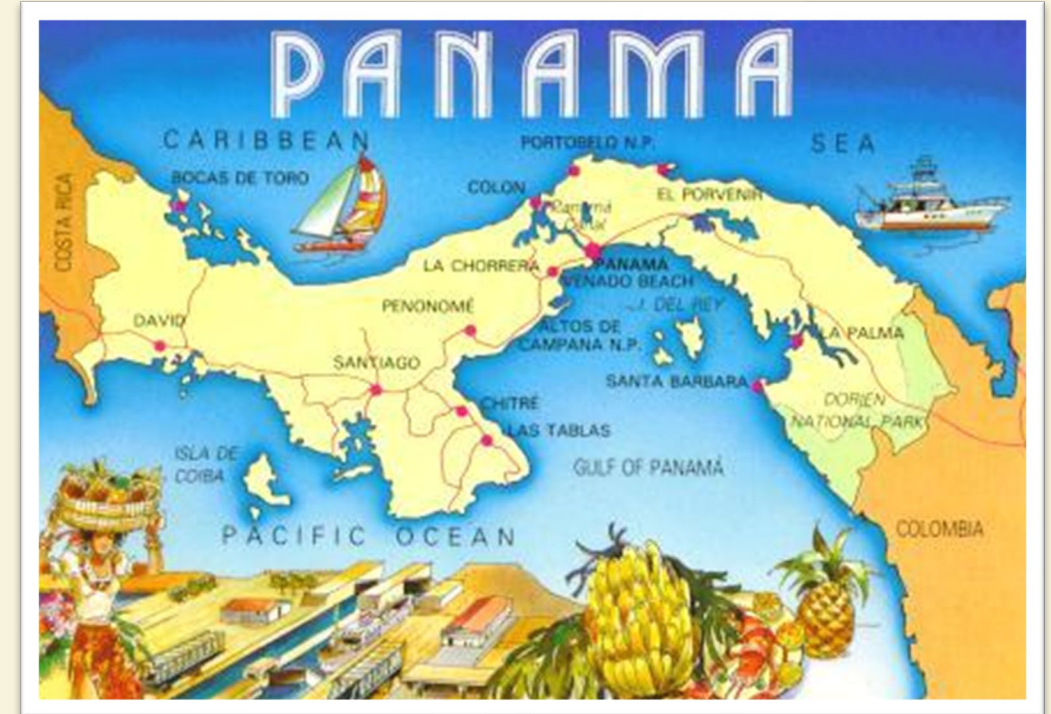
- **Pacific Coast:** indigenous, Spanish influences
- **Caribbean Coast:** indigenous, African influences
- Diverse topography, climate
- Staples like corn, beans, peppers, potatoes originated here
- **Corn flour:** for tortillas, pupusas, tamales
- **Beans:** fiber-rich source of protein
- **Chiles:** dried, toasted, ground; seasoning for many dishes

Central American Pantry

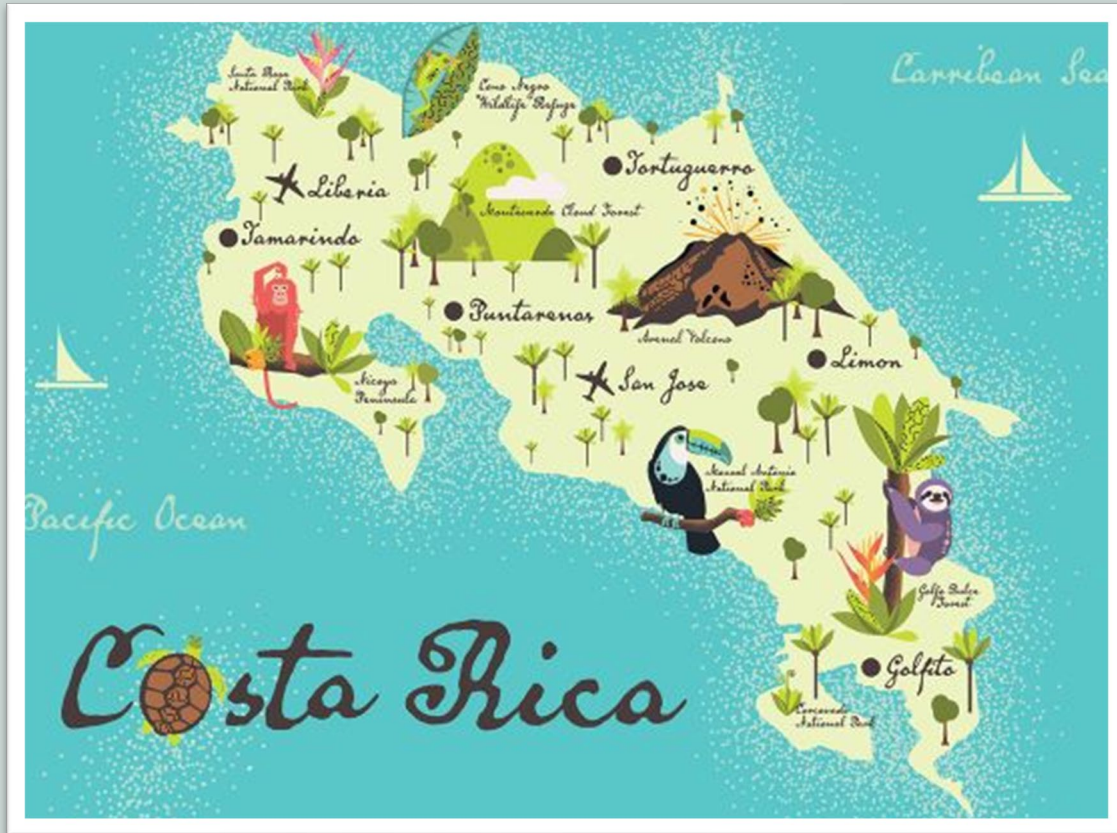
Breads, Grains:	Cornmeal, Masa Harina, Rice, Wheat
Vegetables:	Cabbage, Chayote, Chili Peppers, Corn, Garlic, Huitlacoche (corn fungus), Mushrooms, Nopales (cactus pads), Onions, Plantains, Potatoes, Hominy, Radishes, Tomatillos, Tomatoes, Yuca, Zucchini
Beans:	Black Beans, Pinto Beans
Fruits:	Avocado, Bananas, Coconut, Guavas, Limes, Mangoes, Oranges, Pineapples, Strawberries, Tamarind, Watermelon
Nuts, Seeds:	Almonds, Pumpkin seeds, Sesame Seeds
Meat, Poultry, Fish:	Beef, Chicken, Goat, Pork, Shrimp, Snapper, Turkey
Dairy:	Cheese, Cream, Eggs, Milk, Sour Cream
Sauces, Condiments, Oils:	Coconut Milk, Honey, Vinegar, Butter, Corn Oil, Lard
Spices, Herbs:	Achiote, Chocolate, Cilantro, Cumin, Dried Chiles, Epazote, Oregano
Beverages:	Beer, Chocolate, Coconut Juice, Coffee, Mezcal, Tequila

Panamanian Cuisine

- Spanish, indigenous, African influences
- Canal zone is a crossroads of the world, exchanging plants, animals, culture
- **Biodiversity:** Large variety of tropical fruits, vegetables, herbs
- **Seafood:** crab, lobster, squid
- **Meat:** stewed chicken, pork, beef
- **Spices:** *achiote* seeds, *aji chombo* pepper, *culantro* (not cilantro)

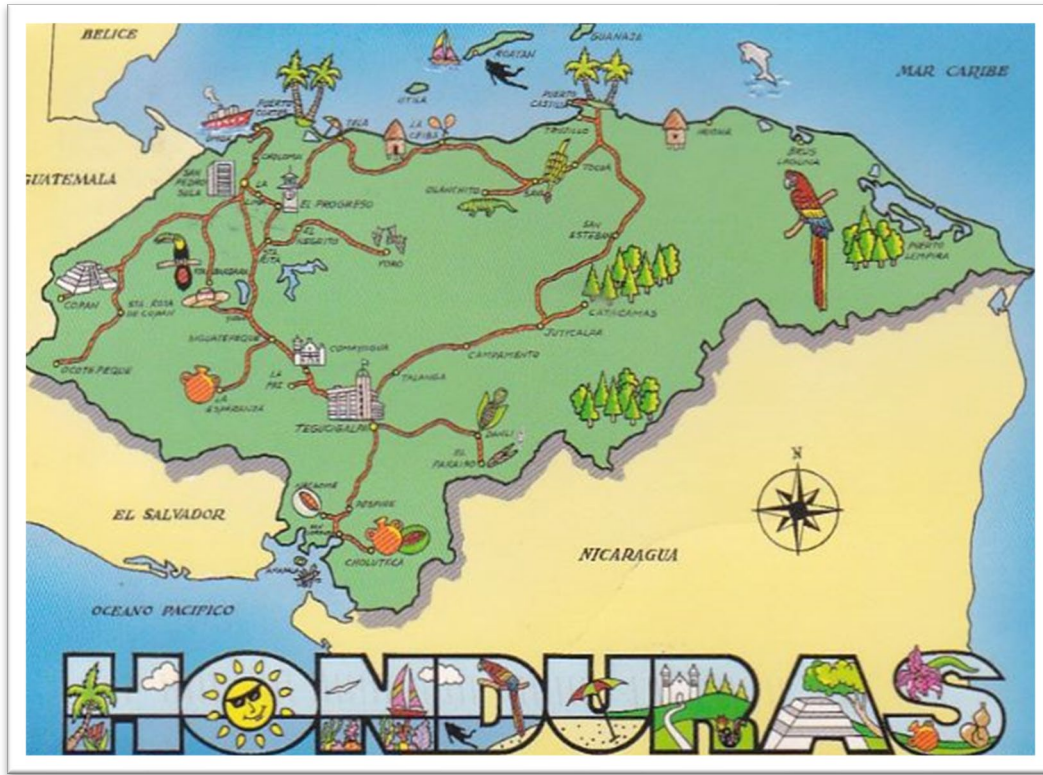


Costa Rican Cuisine



- Mild flavors, fresh, healthy
- Food-centric culture
- **Indigenous influence:** tamales, tortillas
- **Caribbean coast:** coconut milk, fish, seafood
- **Meat:** lean beef, pork, chicken
- **Staples:** Rice + beans, plantains, corn, potatoes, fruits, vegetables

Honduran Cuisine



- Indigenous, Spanish, Caribbean, African influences
- **Dairy:** white cheese (*queso fresco Hondureño*); cows introduced by Spanish colonizers
- **Coffee:** largest coffee producer in Central America, sweet flavor profile with regional variances
- **Seafood:** conch, fish, shrimp, lobster
- **Staples:** coconut, plantains, cabbage

Salvadoran Cuisine

- Indigenous, Spanish, African influences
- Heavy use of pork, seafood
- **Loroco**: herbaceous, aromatic edible flower, added to flatbreads
- **Relajo**: spice mix of bay leaf, achiote, chiles, cumin, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds
- **Staples**: thick corn or rice tortillas, squash, Worcestershire sauce



Fry Jacks



- Small triangles or half-moons of dough, quick-fried until golden
- Popular Belizean staple
- Served for breakfast with scrambled eggs, refried beans, bacon, sausage, cheese
- Served with lunch dishes like rice and beans, stewed chicken

Rice and Beans (*Gallo Pinto*)



- Translates to “spotted rooster”
- Mild heat, fresh flavors
- **Ingredients:** bell peppers, cilantro, onions, coconut milk, chiles
- Served for breakfast with a fried egg or as a side for lunch/ dinner with meat or fish
- **Costa Rica:** served with sweet and savory *Salsa Lizano*
- **Nicaragua:** with red beans

Chicken/ Vegetable Stew (*Sancocho*)

- Hearty, vegetable-packed stew
- Ingredients vary by region
- **Protein:** chicken, beef, goat, pork, fish
- **Ingredients:** chicken, onions, garlic, cilantro, oregano, vegetables, spices
- Eaten at family gatherings, special occasions
- Served with fried plantains, white rice, pigeon peas



Honduran Typical Meal (*plato típico*)



- Variety of foods prepared separately, served together
- Lunch is biggest meal of the day
- Very filling, well-balanced, varying textures, flavors
- **Mains:** rice, beans, tortillas, marinated + grilled meat, salad
- **Extras:** sour cream, white cheese, avocado, cabbage, limes, Honduran salsa (*chimol*)

Filled Flatbreads (*Pupusas*)

- Simple corn or rice flour dough stuffed with filling, then griddled
- **Fillings:** cheese, meat, seafood, vegetables, beans
- Crisp on the outside, soft and gooey on the inside
- Served with pickled slaw (*curtido*)
- Staple of Salvadoran cuisine
- Light meal or snack, eaten by hand





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Any Questions?