



Culinary Institute  
of America

# Latin American Cuisine



# Learning Objectives

- Identify the common ingredients of Latin America.
- List the specialty cooking equipment of Latin America.
- Identify select flavor profiles of Latin America.
- Discuss the variations in cuisine in the different regions of Latin America.
- Prepare a variety of dishes representative of the regions of Latin America.

# Latin America

- Cultural region where Romance languages spoken (Spanish, Portuguese)
- Sometimes refers to all the Americas south of the US
- Originally home to many indigenous peoples, including advanced civilizations
- Colonized by Europeans, who imposed their culture, language
- African slaves imported as laborers



# Latin American Cuisine



- Highly racially, ethnically, and geographically diverse
- Mixture of New and Old World:
  - Inhabitants
  - Ingredients
  - Techniques
- Terrain, climate, isolation fostered:
  - Cultivation of different crops
  - Development of different cuisines

# Columbian Exchange

- Widespread transfer of plants, animals between the Americas and Afro-Eurasia
- Followed voyage of Columbus in 1492
- American crops became important around the world
- Old World crops became important in the Americas



# Latin Flavor Profiles

## **Lime + Fresh or Dried Chiles**

- Found in Mexican cuisine
- Sometimes cilantro, cumin, epazote

## **Tomato + Cumin + Chile**

- Basic flavor of Mexican red sauces
- Chocolate sometimes added

## **Coconut Milk, Dried Shrimp, Malagueta Chiles, Avocado, Ground Nuts**

- Common to Brazilian cooking



# Latin America Staple Ingredients



taro root,  
bananas,  
bell peppers,  
mango,  
avocado,  
papaya,  
starfruit,  
dried habañeros,  
malaguetas,  
tomatillos,  
plantains,  
chipotle en adobo,  
tamarind,  
pepitas

# Latin America Staple Ingredients

cilantro,  
corn,  
tomatoes,  
dried epazote,  
cornmeal,  
Mexican chocolate,  
jalapeños, poblanos,  
Anaheim chiles,  
potatoes,  
kidney beans



# Annatto (Achiote)

- Seed of the tropical annatto tree
- Light, delicate flavor
- Slightly sweet, peppery
- Used in southern Mexico and the Yucatan with all proteins
- In Yucatan, ground into a paste with other spices



# Seeds and Herbs



- **Epazote:** used in bean dishes, tastes like anise
- **Mexican Oregano:** stronger flavor, used in highly spiced dishes
- **Pumpkin Seeds/ Perpititas:** delicate flavor intensified when roasted and salted
- **Hoja Santa/ Pepperleaf:** aromatic leaf used for herbal tea, to wrap foods, added to soups and stews
- **Sesame Seeds:** nutty, slightly sweet flavor
- **Cilantro:** lends fresh, clean flavor to highly spiced foods

# Fresh Chiles

- **Small fresh chiles**
  - Generally hotter
  - Adds bright, intense flavor (*picante*)
- **Larger fresh chiles: generally milder**
  - Generally milder
  - Sliced into strips, cooked, tossed with other ingredients
  - Often stuffed with rice, beans and cooked
- **Storage:** refrigerate, lightly covered, will last several weeks



# Dried Chiles



- Most common: Ancho (dried poblanos), chipotle (smoke-dried jalapeños), pasada, guajillo, pasilla, habaño
- **Smaller chiles:** usually hotter, puréed into a sauce to add spice
- **Larger chiles:** usually milder, used to provide sauce's substance and flavor
- Often toasted to enhance the flavor, bring out essential oils

# Corn

- One of the first cultivated plants
- Aztecs called corn the “first mother and father, the source of life”
- A staple in modern Latin America
- Used in ceremonies
- 100% utilization
  - Husks for wrappers
  - Silk made into tea
  - Kernels dried, made into masa
  - Eaten out of hand
  - Cob for animal feed



# Beans



- Traditionally planted with corn and squash
  - Corn stalks support the growing beans
  - Squash plants suffocate weeds
  - Beans added nutrients to the soil
- Good source of protein, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals
- Incomplete protein (corn + beans = complete)
- Served at most meals
- Common varieties: black beans, white beans, pinto beans, red kidney beans, chickpeas

# Meat, Seafood, Poultry

## Meat

- **Pork:** Spanish influence, lard from rendered fat
- **Beef:** Prevalent in southern parts of South America
- **Goat, Lamb**
- **Organ Meat, Offal:** not only eaten but celebrated

## Seafood

- Mussels
- Salmon
- Sea Bass
- Shrimp
- Snapper
- Squid

## Poultry

- Chicken
- Duck
- Turkey



1. Liver



2. Heart



3. Kidney



4. Tongue



5. Tripe



6. Sweetbreads



7. Intestines



8. Gizzards



9. Testicles



10. Brain



11. Blood, Bones, Skin



12. Lung

# Wrappers



Food commonly eaten out of hand in some form of wrapper:

- **Dried corn husks:** soaked in water and used for tamales
- **Banana leaves:** large, pliable leaves for rice, vegetables, meat, fish, and tamales
- **Hoja Santa:** flavorful, aromatic leaf for imparting flavor
- **Corn/ flour tortillas:** for burritos, chimichangas, enchiladas, fajitas, quesadillas, tostadas
- **Dough:** for cheese, meat, or vegetables, often fried

# Cooking Equipment

## Comal

- Thin circular griddle
- Used to cook tortillas, roast chiles

## Metate

- Grinding stone: made from sloping piece of volcanic rock (looks like 3-legged stool)
- Muller: stone roller that does the grinding
- Used to make masa dough from skinned, cooked corn kernels
- Used to grind cocoa, cane sugar



# Cooking Equipment



## **Molcajete**

- Mortar made from volcanic stone
- Tejolote: short stubby pestle
- Used to grind ingredients

## **Tortilla Press**

- Masa traditionally shaped into tortillas by hand
- Made from cast iron with 2 round metal plates, hinged together

# Cooking Methods

## Pre-Colombian Exchange

- Less meat, animal fat
- Poaching
- Steaming
- Dry-roasting
- Fire-roasting
- Pit-roasting

## Post-Colombian Exchange

- More meat, animal fat (butter, lard)
- Deep-frying
- Pan-frying



# Mexico

- 10<sup>th</sup> most populous country
- Cradle of civilization: Olmec, Maya, Zapotec, Teotihuacan, Aztec
- 9 distinct geographic regions
- Much of land incompatible with agriculture
- Diverse climate with temperate and tropical zones
- Ethnicity a mix of indigenous and European peoples



# Mexican Cuisine



- Aztec/ Mayan foundations
  - Used very little cooking oil/ fat
  - Plant-based diet with corn, beans, and squash at its heart
  - Incorporated insects
- Most foods boiled, steamed, eaten raw
- After the Spanish conquest, consumption of meats, fat, and rice increased

# Mexican Flavor Profile

- Lime juice, tomato, garlic, onion
- **Chiles:** fresh and dried; sweet and hot
- **Spices:** cinnamon, clove, allspice, cumin, anise, black pepper
- **Herbs:** cilantro, epazote, oregano, marjoram
- Basic seasonings enhanced through pre-preparations
- Charring, dry roasting, toasting, frying



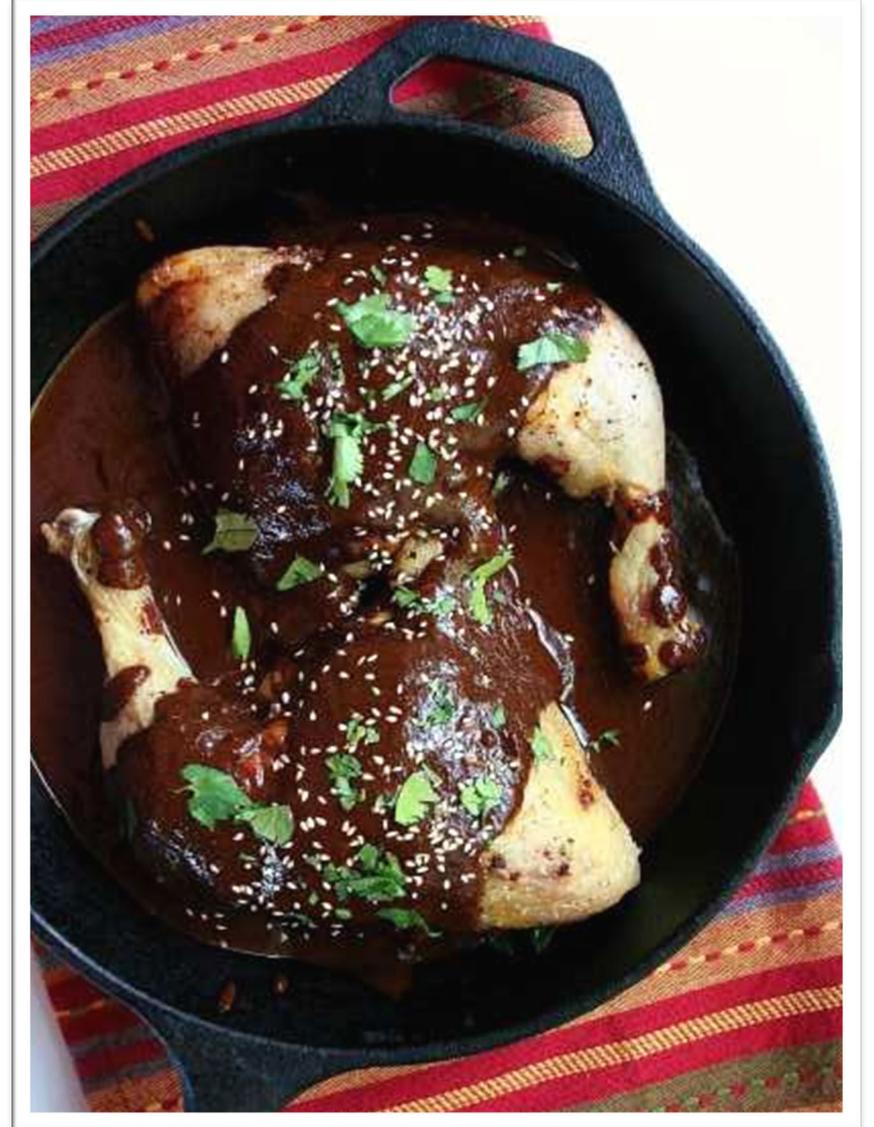
# Popular Dishes



- **Birria:** stewed goat or pork in thick, spicy tomato broth
- **Cochinita Pibil:** baked marinated pork seasoned with annatto paste, bitter orange juice, and other spices
- **Cocido:** stew with beef, pork, chicken, garbanzos, and vegetables, seasoned with cilantro and *hierbabuena*

# Popular Dishes

- **Huachinango a la Veracruzana:** red snapper in a spicy tomato sauce
- **Mole Poblano:** rich, thick sauce made from many ingredients including spices and chocolate
- **Pozole:** thick, hominy-based soup with hunks of pork, tomato, cilantro, and garbanzos



# South America

- Most of population lives near the coast
- Sparsely populated interior
- Western regions: dominated by Andes Mt.
- Eastern regions: both highlands and lowlands, rivers
- Mostly tropical climate
- Cultural/ ethnic mix of indigenous, European, African peoples

Argentina  
Bolivia  
Brazil  
Chile  
Colombia  
Ecuador  
Guyana  
Paraguay  
Peru  
Suriname  
Uruguay  
Venezuela



# Guyana, Andean Subregion

## Guyana

- Guyana and Suriname
- Agriculture: rice and sugarcane
- Cuisine more closely related to Caribbean

## Andean subregion

- Venezuela, Columbia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia
- Geographical feature: Andean Mountains
- Agriculture: coffee, cacao
- Cuisine heavily influenced by Peru's Incas
- Nutritious grains: quinoa, amaranth
- Coastal areas: fish, beans, plantain
- Inland areas: meat, rice, potato



# Brazil



- Region unto itself (42% of S. America)
- **Agriculture:** coffee, sugarcane, coconut, wheat, maize, rice, soybeans, bananas, citrus, grapes
- **Creole:** mix of Portuguese, West African influences
- **Flavor profile:** coconut milk, dried shrimp, malagueta chiles, avocado, ground nuts
- **Dende:** flavored West African oil

# Southern Region

- Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay
- Agriculture: wheat, corn, potatoes, fruit, sugarcane, and wine grapes
- Very few inhabitants before European settlers. Little indigenous influence on cuisine
- Much land devoted to pasture for livestock (cattle, sheep, pigs, llama)
- Meat-centric with Italian and Spanish influences
- Argentinean beef prized around the world



# Popular Dishes



- **Sancocho:** stew of meat, potatoes, yuca, plantain, squash, corn (Columbia)
- **Feijoada Completa:** stew of black beans cooked with smoked tongue, corned spareribs, dried beef, bacon, sausages; served with rice, farofa (Brazil)
- **Pebre:** sauce made of onions, garlic, vinegar, olive oil, chile, and coriander (Chile)
- **Churasco:** grilled meat sliced thin, grilled over open fire (Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay)

# Caribbean Influences

- Cuisine differs from island to island
- Depends on which influences most prevalent

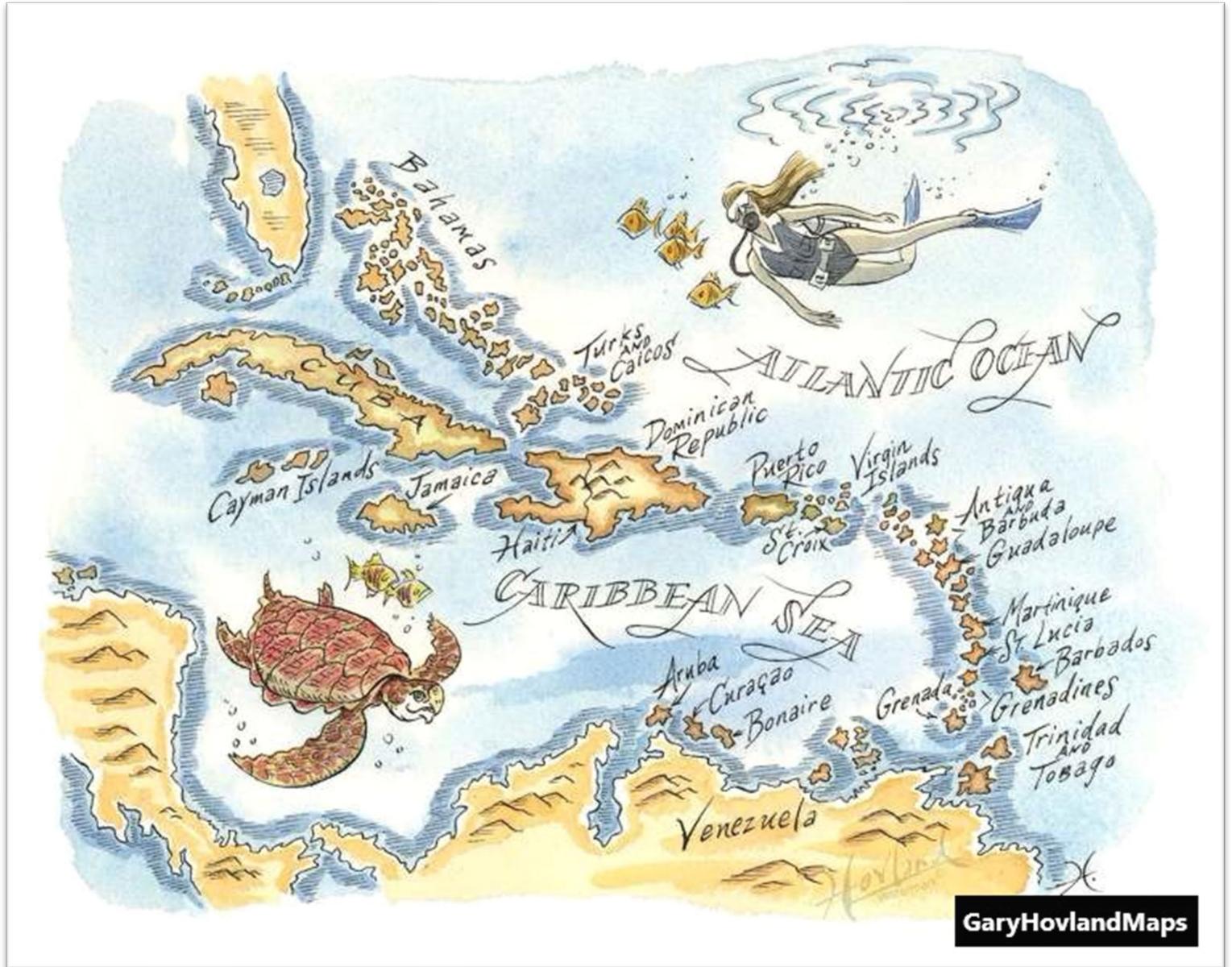
## Indigenous People

- Arawaks introduced *barbacoa* (barbeque)
- Caribs began spicing their foods heavily with local chiles (jerk)
- No real cultivation
- Hunted/ gathered fruit, roots/ tubers, seafood, cassava, papaya, pineapple, yam, iguana, boar



# The Caribbean

- 10° north of the Equator to the Tropic of Cancer
- From Trinidad to Cuba
- Complex of Islands and small cays surrounded by reefs



# Caribbean Influences

Africa  
France  
Spain  
Middle East  
Indonesia  
Holland  
Portugal  
Britain  
China  
India



**Foreign Imports:**  
ackee, breadfruit,  
callaloo, chickpeas,  
cilantro, coconut,  
coffee, curry,  
eggplant, garlic,  
ginger, lime, mace,  
mango, nutmeg,  
okra, olive, onion,  
orange, pigeon  
peas, plantain, rice,  
sugarcane,  
tamarind, taro, tofu

# Popular Dishes

- **Jerk:** fiery marinade used mostly on chicken, pork. Meat grilled/ smoked over allspice wood, leaves, berries
- **Curry:** usually goat or chicken cooked in spices (like Indian curry but adds allspice)
- **Callaloo:** stew of callaloo leaves and okra; may include coconut milk, seafood, chile peppers; often served as side or sauce



# Popular Dishes

- **Hoppin' John:** stew of rice and beans (often black-eye peas); ubiquitous throughout the region
- **Ceviche:** raw fish/ shellfish marinated in citrus juice, salt, chiles





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Any Questions?