

Tour the World...Gastronomically!

by Mercedes Picot

As I write this paragraph, every large urban centre in North America and Europe is undergoing a radical metamorphosis. Ethnicities who were previously worlds apart are mingling, meeting, mating and reproducing as never before. Facial features from every corner of the world are melding into a fusion of intriguing and beautiful new configurations.

Concurrently, our choice of food is expanding to include a tantalizing and diverse smorgasbord of exotic cuisines. A look inside my fridge or at my collection of take-out menus reflects a multitude of delicious ethnic selections unavailable even a generation ago. The world has arrived at our doorsteps and it's here to stay. Whether or not ethnic cuisine is "haute", it's hot!



As American fast food chains encroach on even the Third World, I revel at the popularity of the growing number of ethnic eateries in my community. At a recent Blues Music Festival, it was a delight to see that the line-up at the Indian food kiosk was five times longer than at all of the usual burger and fries joints.

Is it our quest for the unusual, our appreciation for exotic ingredients, or the watchful eye we keep on those cholesterol levels that keeps us scurrying for curry?

I was once as food phobic as a mid-western farmer myself until, in my late teens, I was initiated into "ethnic". The wonderful friend with the adventurous palate went on to become a world traveler herself and launched me on my personal journey of culinary discovery.

Cultures whose recorded histories span thousands of years have had a great deal more time to reflect on food and concoct delicacies than we have as North Americans. When the dictates of harsh climates or unfriendly agricultural terrain are removed, food can be elevated to a high art and a means by which to ward off illness. Food has been used by many ancient civilizations as far more than a mere means for survival. Each and every food was valued for its unique property to enhance physical and spiritual wellbeing.

We callously take the abundance of food that surrounds us for granted barely noticing the once rare and exotic produce that fill our markets year round. We no longer need to cross any substantial body of water to enjoy Tapas and Sangria or Sushi and Sake.

On your local bookstore or library shelves, cookbooks on exotic cuisine abound in greater numbers than the foreign countries they represent. Bring one home with you or spend some enjoyable time with your PC browsing world cuisine. You just may be motivated to host your very own “Foods of the World” pot-luck at home with friends or with your colleagues at an informal office party.

To get you started in the right direction, I’ve provided a few delicious recipes with a distinctively international flair. Then just pull up your chair to the table and savour the new flavours, aromas, textures, and visual appeal of international cuisine.

Bon Voyage and Bon Appetit!

**28 oz. can plum tomatoes, chopped,
with liquid (or 2 lbs of fresh)**
1 green pepper, seeded & diced
1 red pepper, seeded & diced
4 stalks of celery, diced
2 cucumbers, peeled, seeded, and diced
1 red onion, diced
1 clove garlic, minced
½ cup fresh lemon juice
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
3 cups spring water
¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro
1 tsp. Tabasco sauce
½ tsp. sea salt

Gazpacho Soup

Always a favourite. Combine all ingredients and mix well. You can use a food processor to speed-up the chopping and mixing. If so, add the tomatoes and the olive oil in last by hand to prevent the soup from getting frothy.

Cover and refrigerate for 24 hours. Serve chilled.

Makes about 6 cups

1 medium eggplant, cut into 1” cubes
2 large onions, sliced
3 med. zucchini, cut into ½” slices
2 green peppers, cut into ½” pieces
3 large tomatoes, sliced
1 cup fresh parsley, minced
1 Tbs. fresh basil or
½ tsp. dried basil
4 cloves garlic, minced
½ tsp. vegetable salt
Lemon pepper to taste
1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

Oven-Baked Ratatouille

Layer vegetables in a deep casserole and sprinkle with parsley, salt, basil, and garlic. Sprinkle with vegetable salt and lemon pepper. Chill overnight.

Pour extra-virgin olive oil over vegetables. Bake covered in a 350F oven for 1 hour.

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2 cups green or brown lentils
2 Tbs. Extra-virgin olive oil
2 medium onions, chopped
1 tsp. ginger
1 tsp. coriander
1 tsp. cumin
1 tsp. turmeric
1 tsp. minced fresh garlic
½ tsp sea salt
3 whole cloves
1 - 3" cinnamon stick
¼ tsp. red pepper flakes
1 cup chopped tomatoes (fresh or canned)
1/3 cup chopped shallots
¼ cup fresh chopped coriander

Curried Lentils Coriander

Wash lentils well and drain. In a cooking pot, bring 6 cups of water and lentils to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for about 25-30 minutes until lentils are cooked. Drain.

In a separate pot, warm oil and add onions, ginger, coriander, cumin, turmeric, garlic, sea salt, cloves, cardamom, cinnamon, and red pepper flakes. Cook over medium heat for 10 minutes stirring often, until onions are transparent.

Add tomatoes and drained lentils and simmer for about 3 minutes. Remove cloves, cardamom and cinnamon sticks and add shallots and coriander. Serve hot.

Serves 8

¼ cup water
1 cup onion, diced
1Tbs. fresh ginger, minced
4 cloves garlic, minced
1 cup celery, diced
½ cup fresh shitake mushrooms, chopped
½ cup white mushrooms, chopped
3 cups green cabbage, shredded
1 cup drained bamboo shoots, chopped
1 cup drained water chestnuts, chopped
2 Tbs. tamari
1 Tbs. rice wine or mirin
1 Tbs. honey
24 egg roll wrappers
2 Tbs. dark sesame oil, warmed

Crispy Baked Egg Rolls & Dip

Preheat oven to 400F. Heat water in a wok or heavy skillet until simmering. Add onion & garlic and cook for about 5 minutes. Add celery, mushrooms, cabbage, bamboo shoots, and water chestnuts. Cook until vegetables are soft (about 5-8 minutes). Remove from heat and add tamari, rice wine and honey. Combine well then allow to marinate for about 5 minutes. Place mixture in a colander over a bowl and let drain-off for about 10 minutes.

On a clean counter top, stack egg roll wrappers diagonally. Have a small bowl of water ready. Spoon ¼ cup of filling into center of each wrapper. Brush edges of wrapper with a bit of water. Fold in 2 corners over filling and roll into a cylinder sealing remaining edge by moistening with water. Place egg rolls seam-side down on non-stick baking sheets, leaving some space between rolls. Lightly brush with a bit of sesame oil and bake for about 15-20 minutes turning over once. Egg rolls are ready when they are golden and crispy and are best served immediately.

Dipping Sauce:

Combine all ingredients in a bowl and whisk together. Use for spring rolls.

2 Tbs. tamari or Shoyu
1 ½ Tbs. rice wine vinegar
½ tsp. sesame oil
½ tsp. minced garlic
1 tsp. scallions, thinly sliced

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Golden Sri-Lankan Rice

1 cinnamon stick (3"long)
5 whole cloves
3 cardamom pods, lightly crushed
8 cups of vegetable or chicken broth
1 Tbs. ground turmeric
3 cups long-grain rice
1 cup diced carrots
1 cup golden raisins
½ cup chopped fresh cilantro leaves
½ grated coconut, toasted lightly

Place cinnamon stick, cloves, and cardamom pods in a small skillet. Heat for 2 minutes on medium-high element, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat and place in a small cheesecloth square and tie bundle with string.

Bring broth to a boil in a large pot with the spice bag and turmeric. Add rice and stir well. Reduce heat and simmer, covered until tender (about 15-20 minutes). In the last 5 minutes of cooking, stir in diced carrots and raisins with rice. When rice is tender, drain, reserving ½ cup liquid. Remove the spice bag.

Place rice in a bowl and stir in reserved cooking liquid. Stir in chopped cilantro and sprinkle with toasted coconut. Serve hot.

Serves 10-12

Batter:

¾ cup whole wheat pastry flour
¾ cup buckwheat flour
3 beaten eggs
2 cups milk (cow, soya, or rice, etc.)
2 Tbs. cold-pressed vegetable oil
1 ½ tsp. alum-free baking powder
1 tsp. sea salt

Stuffing:

3 cups low-fat cottage cheese
sunflower seeds

Coulis:

3-4 cups fresh or frozen strawberries

Stuffed French Crêpes with Strawberry Coulis

Whisk together all batter ingredients and set aside for at least ½ hour.

Pour about ¼ cup of batter at a time in a small, oiled, non-stick pan over medium-high heat. Turn once when bubbles come to the surface and edges are slightly dry. Allow crêpes to cool.

Stuff each crêpe with ¼ cup of cottage cheese mixed with 1 Tbs. of sunflower seeds and roll.

Serve with strawberry coulis simply made from thawed frozen or fresh strawberries puréed in a blender or food processor.

Makes 20 – 6 inch crêpes
