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Haute Cuisine

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Haute Cuisine

It is well known that food brings people together across all continents, tells vivid cultural stories, and serves to create memorable life moments.

their particular 'go-to' ingredients and a look into the history and significance of this genre is fascinating.

Generally speaking, there are foods popular with various tribes in and around Ghana, as well as in the region as a whole. As in many countries, soups and stews are the heart of many meals. Various groups enjoy such warming dishes as Ahenkwan, a soup of palm nuts, Nkatenkwan, a delicious peanut butter soup, and hot pepper soup to name just a few. Cassandra added that, "Different kinds of stews, such as okro stew, and soups are eaten by everyone regardless of tribe, creed, and religious persuasions."

Essential to the cuisine preparation is the asanka, an earthenware dish with ridges inside that comes with a wooden pestle. Similar to a mortar and pestle, it is an essential grinding pot for vegetables and spices when creating soups and stews. It has also been heralded as an eco-friendly cooking and serving vessel used in the art of enjoying an authentic African experience.

Samuel offers a recommendation for a restaurant in Ghana that has an appealing atmosphere, wonderful people, and provides an unforgettable adventure with this cuisine: Azmera. According to Azmera Chef Nana Kodua Asante, "Across West Africa, soup is one of the dynamic dishes we boast of. Today a little Pepper Soup with Snails, tomorrow some Dry Fish Light Soup, or Goat Meat Light Soup. And that's a little bit of how we do things over here; the cultures and tales may be different, but at the heart of it we are still one people connected by this big continent."

Pepper, ginger, garlic blended with onion, nutmeg, curry, and bay leaves are spices that are top of mind when comparing recipes with anyone from the region. Heading back to America, HVV spoke with Chef Eric Adjepong, who is a first-generation Ghanaian-American, and was born and raised in New York City. He was a finalist on Bravo's *Top Chef Season 16* and also a contestant on *Top Chef All-Stars* in the following season.

He revealed to HVV his flavors of choice, and what influences him as a Chef. "My favorite spices

are coriander, nutmeg, and berbere. I also use ginger garlic puree as a base in many of the dishes I cook. Most of my childhood memories around the kitchen start off with the smell of garlic and ginger either being blended or cooked off. It's a base that my mother still makes to this day. Sometimes she'll add an onion to the puree, but it's the perfect base for any sauce, marinade, or vinaigrette."

The West African menu is a cardiologist's dream. Vegetables are a large part of any West African meal. Commonly consumed are black-eyed peas, eggplant, pumpkin and other variants of squash, okra (or okro), and an impressive amount of both farmed and foraged green leafy vegetables.

Baobab leaves, pumpkin leaves, sweet potato leaves, rosella leaves, and cassava leaves are also integral to the meal. While the raw leaves contain cyanide in their natural state, they are blanched in boiling water to remove the toxins before serving. In a West African kitchen, black-eyed peas are the foundation of the popular fried snack called akara fritters.

Starchy vegetables, such as sweet potatoes are often served with meats and vegetables to counteract the spiciness of hot pepper dishes. The tubers and root vegetables are most often boiled and then pounded as in the ubiquitous accompaniment, fufu.

Seafood is plentiful along the coast and can take center stage with such delights as Spicy Peanut Shrimp and Swakili Fish Stew. Often, meats and seafood are combined in the same dish though seafood is one of the most common sources of protein in the region that actually employs nearly one-quarter of the workforce.

Dishes are flavored with dried and smoked fish and sea elements are used to flavor a great many sauces, stews, and other recipes in much the same way that bacon and anchovies are used in other cuisines of the world. Often flaked and fried in oil, or cooked in a sauce base of hot peppers, onions, and tomatoes, along with various spices and water create a delectable and subtle flavor palette.

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Meat has become a larger part of their diet than in the past, and savory dishes such as beef kabobs and meat pies compete with lamb stews and popular street foods such as Afra or Dibi, made with lamb or other bush meats. Street vendors stand ready with this amazingly simple, yet incredibly delectable dish that can be served as an appetizer or main course. Bite-sized pieces of lamb are brushed with oil, salt, and pepper to marinate as a sauce of onions, oil, mustard, salt, pepper, and sugar is simmered. The griddled or grilled meat is cooked to perfection and served with the mustard sauce and a French baguette. Oua!

Suya is a popular and spicy grilled meat kabob that is enhanced with peanuts and is also sold by street vendors as a snack, or served as an evening meal using beef or chicken as the protein in this main dish.

To complete a meal, many popular desserts are derived from the cultural influences of the past as well. Malva is a pudding covered in a creamy, sweet sauce of cream, butter, vanilla and sugar. The pudding is cake-like, much like Sticky Toffee Pudding of British



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fame, and is often flavored with apricot jam.

Tropical fruits, a moist lime cake, and fritters, or what we know as doughnuts, are everyday accompaniments. For celebration days and festivals, wafa is a traditional dessert with a Moroccan influence consisting of vermicelli or couscous, with a savory sauce and a topping of icing, sugar, cinnamon and ground almonds.

It is well known that food brings people together across all continents, tells vivid cultural stories, and serves to create memorable life moments. Adventure awaits those who stray from the beaten menu to explore the nuances of West African cuisine. Let the spice of life include the unforgettable spices of West Africa cuisine in your dining experiences. IV

West Africa, a region also known as the Gold Coast, is ripe with wonderful, rich flavors influenced by the long history of the continent.



PHOTO CREDIT: ANITA RICHARDSON-GRINA



PHOTO CREDIT: CHEF ERIC ADJEPONG