

Explore South American Cuisine With Us



South America is home to a unique cuisine that blends indigenous foods with European traditions. Try adding an appetizer or two and explore the delightful flavors.

The food of South America is a fascinating melting pot of native and immigrant ingredients and cuisine. Before the Europeans arrived, the indigenous population had learned to terrace and irrigate the steep Andean slopes and raise corn, lima beans, potatoes, sweet potatoes, chili peppers, avocados, peanuts, and chocolate. Each region developed its own traditional dishes.

When the Europeans arrived, they incorporated some of these native dishes into their own cuisine. They brought European livestock and agricultural products such as pigs, cows, chickens, citrus trees, wheat, and almonds, and learned to make their favorite Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese dishes using local ingredients.

With interest in global cuisine at an all-time high, here are some South American specialties to consider:

Arepas

These flat, round cornmeal patties can be stuffed with just about anything—meats, cheeses, vegetables, even leftovers. They can be fried, baked, grilled, steamed, or even boiled. Arepas are a beloved handheld street food in South America, but they're also terrific served two to three to a portion with a complementary dip, as an appetizer, small plate, or shareable.

Empanadas

Popular throughout South America, these savory pastry turnovers are first filled before being fried or baked and then served with a dip. Fillings run the gamut, from meats, seafood, eggs, and cheeses to vegetable mixtures that cater to vegetarian customers. Even low-cost rice- and potato-based fillings can be used.

Ceviche & Tiradito

Raw seafood dishes make perfect appetizers for almost any type of establishment. Ceviche typically consists of cubed pieces of seafood that are cured in citrus juices, onions, chili peppers, and other seasonings. Tiradito is seafood that is cut sashimi style—and said to be introduced by Japanese immigrants to Peru—and then sauced immediately prior to serving.

Chimichurri

The king of Argentinean sauces is an uncooked blend of parsley, oregano, garlic, vinegar, and crushed red pepper, perfect on grilled meats but also used as a table condiment in many parts of South America. Its versatility means it can be used in everything from potato salad to marinades and more.

Parrillada

Meat is king in Argentina and parrillada is a favorite. Basically it's a wide variety of meats that are either grilled or barbecued. In Argentina the meats are often grilled at the table. Parrillada can also be prepared using seafood, then served with garlic butter or other sauces.

Pastel de choclo

This savory Chilean corn pie ranks high among South American comfort foods. It's made of sweet corn that is ground into a paste and then filled with ground beef, chicken, olives, onions, raisins, even hard-boiled eggs. Variations on the dish are many and recipes can be adapted to fit most any geographic or seasonal sourcing supply.

Feijoada

This much-loved stew is eaten throughout South America and is considered the national dish of Brazil. It is made with black beans and either fresh or cured pork—or a combination of cuts including sausage, pork belly, and spareribs. Often cooked in a clay pot, feijoada is traditionally served with rice as well as orange slices and stewed collard greens. It's among the heartiest entrées you could put on a menu.

Pollo en escabeche

A popular South American appetizer, pollo en escabeche is poached and shredded chicken that is "pickled" with olive oil and vinegar. The oil/vinegar mix is seasoned with garlic, onions, and a variety of other seasonings. It's perfect for sharing when served with crackers or bread, but can also be menued as a warm weather entrée.

Moqueca de Camarão

This delicious stew is slow cooked with prawns, coconut oil and coconut milk, and fresh cilantro, with added vegetables including onions, garlic, bell peppers, and tomatoes. Firm, white-flesh fish or other seafood can be used instead of or in addition to shrimp. It is a typical dish from Bahia, but is loved all throughout Brazil.

Tostones

These twice-fried plantain slices are popular throughout South America. After the first frying, the slices are pounded flat and then fried again until golden brown and very crunchy. They are then salted and eaten as a snack, or served as an accompaniment on a plate, as French fries or potato chips might be.

Yuca fries

Made from the edible root of the cassava plant, yuca fries are South America's version of French fries, only they are never cut thin. Rather, the yuca is cut into thick wedges, so that the center remains soft while the outside is crispy. The fries are often served with a spicy pepper or cheese sauce.

Dulce de leche

This ubiquitous South American confection is prepared by slowly heating sweetened milk until it thickens and resembles the color of caramel. The end product is normally used as a sauce, drizzled over a variety of desserts or baked goods. The flavor profile has also migrated into ice cream and other sweets, such as donuts.

Flan

By far the most popular Latin dessert, flan dates back to the Romans. The perfect combination of eggs, cream, and sugar make for a tasty yet simple custard that can be at home on any menu. Though often prepared in single-serve format, flan can also be made in sheets and cut into individual portions.

The information provided is based on a general industry overview, and is not specific to your business operation. Each business is unique and decisions related to your business should be made after consultation with appropriate experts.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Arepas have increased 19.8% on menus over the past four years
- Chimichurri has experienced 52.4% growth since 2016
- Empanadas are loved or liked by 41% of consumers
- Dulce de leche has reached the proliferation stage of the Menu Adoption Cycle, appearing in chain restaurants and mainstream grocery stores

Sources: Datassential SNAP! Arepas (2020); Datassential SNAP! Chimichurri (2020); Datassential SNAP! Empanadas (2020); Datassential SNAP! Dulce de leche (2020)

GET STARTED

- Things to do with chimichurri:
- Whisk into vinaigrette dressing
- Mix with mayo, mustard, or cream cheese as a sandwich spread
- Add to a topping for garlic bread
- Mix it into roasted potatoes or other vegetables
- Fold into scrambled eggs or use it in deviled eggs