

## La Cocina Cubana

### Menú

Cuban meals are enjoying good company and sharing the art of cooking. Start your evening out with some lively music, beverages, and appetizers. By the way, if you're looking to diversify your music collection, iTunes has a great compilation of Cuban music: iTunes Essentials > Genres & History > Afro-Cuban.

#### Cocteles [Beverages]

- Mojito
- Mojadita [Virgin Berry Mojito]

#### Entremeses [Appetizers]

- Croquetas de Jamón [Ham Croquettes]
- Frituras de Calabaza [Butternut Squash Fritters]

Once you're ready to move to the main portion of the meal, serve the salad, entrée(s), and side dish(es) at the same time, buffet-style. There's no need to clear off the appetizers or opening beverages – just keep piling on the food.

#### Ensalada [Salad]

- Ensalada Típica con Aguacate [Salad with Avocado]

#### Platos Principales [Entrées]

- Sofrito [Base for the entrées]
- Fricasé de Pollo [Chicken Stew]
- Ropa Vieja [Shredded Flank Steak in a Tomato-based Sauce]

#### Platos Acompañantes [Sides]

- Yuca con Mojo [Cassava with a Garlic and Citrus Relish]
- Crema de Plátano [Creamed Plantain Soup]

Desserts have a significant place in Cuban cuisine, in part because of the broad selection of available fruits and, of course, its abundant sugar cane industry. Due to limitations on ingredients, tonight's dessert options will stick to locally available ingredients. Bring the dessert out after the main section of the meal is cleared.

#### Postres [Dessert]

- Boniatillo [Sweet Yam Dessert]
- Arroz con Leche [Rice Pudding]

\*Present this menu at  for a 10% discount on the featured beverages.\*

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### Mojito

The Mojito is a popular alcoholic Cuban beverage. According to lore, this was Ernest Hemingway's personal favorite while in Cuba.

Yield: 6 servings

Source: Adapted from José "Pepe" Bernardo and <http://www.cubaheritage.com>.

#### Equipment:

- sturdy pitcher
- 6 highball glasses, or similar
- wooden spoon
- strainer

#### Ingredients:

- 1 bunch fresh spearmint leaves
- 6-8 tablespoons of sugar, to taste
- 2 limes
- 1 cup white rum
- 6 cups club soda
- 6 cups crushed ice

#### Preparation:

Wash and stem the mint leaves. Reserve 6 whole sprigs for garnish. Combine the mint leaves and sugar in pitcher. Using the tip of a wooden spoon, mash the mint leaves and mix with sugar to extract the mint oils. (The mint leaves should only be bruised to release the essential oils and should not be shredded.) Squeeze in juice of 1 1/2 limes and rum. (The recipe can stand several hours ahead at this stage; however, expect some discoloring in the mint leaves if you make the mojitos more than 20 minutes ahead.) When ready to serve, gently stir to mix and add club soda. Strain into glasses filled with crushed ice. Stir and garnish with 1 sprig of mint.

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Mojadita

The Mojadita is not a standard drink, just a whimsical non-alcoholic alternative to the mojito.

Yield: 1 serving

Source: Adapted from José "Pepe" Bernardo's Virgin Berry Mojito and <http://www.cubaheritage.com>.

Equipment:

- sturdy pitcher
- highball glass, or similar
- strainer
- wooden spoon

Ingredients:

- 4 fresh (or defrosted) raspberries
- 2 lime wedges
- 4 fresh spearmint leaves, 1 mint sprig
- 2-3 teaspoons of sugar, to taste
- crushed ice
- club soda

Preparation:

Wash and stem the mint leaves. Reserve 1 mint sprig for garnish. Combine the mint leaves and sugar in a pitcher. Using the tip of a wooden spoon, mash the mint leaves and mix with sugar to extract the mint oils. (The mint leaves should only be bruised to release the essential oils and should not be shredded.) Squeeze in 1 lime wedge. Add berries, mashing until well mixed. (The recipe can stand several hours ahead at this stage.) When ready to serve, gently stir to mix and add club soda. Strain into a glass with crushed ice. Stir and garnish with 1 lime wedge and 1 mint leaf.

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Croquetas de Jamón

Croquetas (pronounced kro-KAY-tas) are a traditional appetizer served at social gatherings, especially birthday parties and holiday celebrations. These can be made with any meat, but you're more likely to find ham or chicken variations. Serve these along with your beverages at the social beginning of your dinner.

Yield: 2 dozen

Source: [http://www.foodnetwork.com/food/cda/recipe\\_print/0,1946,FOOD\\_9936\\_5556\\_RECIPE-PRINT-FULL-PAGE-FORMATTER,00.html](http://www.foodnetwork.com/food/cda/recipe_print/0,1946,FOOD_9936_5556_RECIPE-PRINT-FULL-PAGE-FORMATTER,00.html)

Ingredients:

- 4 tablespoons butter
- ½ cup finely minced onions
- ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons flour
- 1½ cups milk
- salt
- black pepper
- ¼ teaspoon nutmeg
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped parsley
- 1 tablespoon dry sherry
- 12 ounces ground smoked ham (ready-to-eat or “deviled” ham)
- 2 eggs, mixed with 1 tablespoon water
- 1 cup bread crumbs
- vegetable oil for frying

Preparation:

In a large sauté pan, melt the butter on low heat. When the butter is melted, add the onions and sauté on low to medium heat for about 2 minutes, or until translucent and soft. Season with salt and pepper. Turn heat down to low. Gradually, stir in the flour to make a roux. Cook for about 1 minute and remove from the heat. Whisk in the milk to form a smooth sauce. Return to low to medium heat and cook until the sauce is thick and creamy. Season with salt, pepper, nutmeg, parsley, and sherry. Stir in the ham. Mix well and cook for 4 to 5 minutes on low heat. Pour the mixture into an 8 by 8½ inch baking pan and cool in the refrigerator so that the mixture will be easy to handle. Refrigerate for 2 to 3 hours or until well chilled. In a small mixing bowl, beat the eggs with water until frothy and pour into a medium bowl. Combine the bread crumbs and flour in a second bowl. Season the mixture with salt and pepper. Using your hands, shape the ham mixture into a log about ¾-inch thick. Using a knife, cut the logs into 1½ inch lengths. Dip the logs in the egg wash, letting the excess drip off. Roll the logs in the seasoned bread crumbs. Place the logs on a baking sheet and cover with plastic wrap. Refrigerate the logs for 2 to 3 hours. Once you're ready to fry the croquetas, preheat the fryer. Fry croquetas in the hot oil, a few at a time, until golden brown, about 3 to 4 minutes. Remove croquetas from the oil and drain on a paper-lined plate. You can serve croquetas with a side of fresh lemon juice and parsley garnish.

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Frituras de Calabaza

Frituras are a popular appetizer made most often with root vegetables, plantains, or squash. Some frituras, such as the one presented in this recipe, has a mashed up ball of cooked vegetable breaded and fried. In other variations, the raw vegetable is grated, seasoned, and only then cooked in hot oil. Serve these along with your beverages at the social beginning of your dinner.

Yield: 6-8 servings

Source: Adapted from the recipe by the Federation of Cuban Women (Federación de Mujeres Cubanas) [www.embacubalebanon.com/cuisine013.html](http://www.embacubalebanon.com/cuisine013.html)

Ingredients:

- 2 lbs butternut squash
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 4 tablespoons sugar
- 4 tablespoons flour
- vegetable oil for frying

Preparation:

Preheat oven to 350F. Cut squash in half, then remove and discard seeds. Place the squash flesh side down on a cookie sheet and bake approximately 30 minutes. Scoop out squash flesh and purée. Gradually, mix in butter, salt, sugar, flour, and egg. Once you're ready to fry the frituras, preheat the fryer. Separate the mixture into tablespoon sized discs. Fry frituras in the hot oil, a few at a time, until golden brown, about 2 to 3 minutes. Remove frituras from the oil and drain on a paper-lined plate. You can serve frituras with a side of fresh lemon juice and parsley garnish.

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Ensalada con Aguacate

Yield: variable

Source: dressing recipe at [http://icuban.com/food/ensalada\\_tipica.html](http://icuban.com/food/ensalada_tipica.html)

Ingredients:

- lettuce (variety of your choice)
- watercress
- *ripe* tomato wedges
- red onion, sliced thinly
- radishes, sliced thinly
- *ripe* avocado
- ½ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup white vinegar
- ¼ cup fresh lemon juice
- 4 cloves garlic, mashed
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper

Preparation:

Wash and cut all vegetables and tomatoes. Slice avocados

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1Hbpt3wcu4>) and a sprinkle a few drops of lemon juice, to prevent browning. Place the salad in the refrigerator to chill. Use a mortar and pestle to mash the garlic with the salt and pepper. In a small bowl, add the olive oil, vinegar and lemon juice to the crushed garlic. Whisk together thoroughly. (You can also use a blender to emulsify the oil and liquids.)

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### Sofrito

A sofrito is not eaten alone; it is a savory *base* used in many Cuban main course recipes. In order to make the entrées, you will need to make a sofrito beforehand. Without a sofrito, the main course dishes may be lacking in depth. Most families have a signature recipe for a sofrito, but it generally includes garlic, onions, green bell peppers, and a combination of herbs and spices. This is usually made well in advance of the meal to allow the herbs and spices to blend. The sofrito can be made and stored in an airtight container, refrigerated, up to 5 days or so beforehand.

Source: Adapated from <http://www.tasteofcuba.com/sofrito.html>

#### Ingredients:

- 21 cherry tomatoes, chopped (or 8oz can of tomato sauce)
- 2 green peppers, diced
- 2 large onions, diced
- 8 to 10 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 bay leaf
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- ¼ to ¾ cup sherry, to taste (optional)

#### Preparation:

Over medium heat, sauté onion, garlic, and peppers in olive oil. Once the onions become limp, add tomatoes, bay leaves, and cumin. (Optional: Add sherry.) Allow to simmer and boil down on very low heat. Remove from heat and allow to cool. Once cool enough, blend. Set aside until ready to use in the recipe. (If storing for a number days, place in an airtight container.)

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Fricasé de Pollo

Yield: 6-8 servings

Source: Adapted from a recipe provided by Sonia R. Martinez, cookbook author and freelance food writer. Sonia states the recipe's origins are unknown, "Not sure. I've had this recipe a long time."

Ingredients:

- sofrito, following instructions in recipe
- 4 lbs chicken fryer cut in 8 pieces
- ½ cup sour orange juice (¼ cup juice of a lime and ¼ cup juice of an orange)
- salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- 1 small can petit pois (English peas or green peas)
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- ½ cup raisins
- ¼ cup sliced pimiento filled olives
- 1 tsp capers
- 1 cup dry sherry wine
- 1 lb potatoes, peeled and quartered

Preparation:

Make a sofrito. Marinade chicken pieces in garlic cloves, citrus juice, onion and bell pepper for at least one hour. (I like to marinade in the fridge overnight.) Heat oil and brown chicken. Add ¼ cup of sofrito, onion, pepper and citrus from the marinade. Add tomato sauce, raisins, olives, capers, Sherry, salt & pepper. Add water to cover the chicken. Add the potato pieces in the last 20 minutes of cooking. Add the can of small peas just before serving. "Wonderful over fluffy white rice."

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Ropa Vieja

“Ropa vieja” translates literally to “old clothes,” which comes from the shredded beef’s resemblance to clothes being laundered.

Yield: 6-8 servings

Source: Adapted from <http://www.tasteofcuba.com/ropavieja.html>

Ingredients:

- sofrito, following directions from previous recipe
- 2½ lbs flank steak, cut in strips
- 5 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 5 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 large onion, diced
- 1 green pepper, diced
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 (8 ounce) can tomato sauce
- 1 cup water

Preparation:

Make sofrito. Heat 3 tablespoons of oil in a skillet on medium, brown meat on all sides. Remove from skillet, add remaining oil to skillet, stir in garlic, onion and green pepper and cook until translucent. Stir in black pepper, browned meat, tomato sauce, water and sofrito. Simmer, covered, until meat is tender and shreds easily, about 1 hour. Serve on top of rice.

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Yuca con Mojo

Yuca is a starchy, stringy root. It translates to cassava, not yucca, which is a relative of the cactus. The “mojo” here is not the same as the “mojito”; this is a garlic and citrus relish that goes on top of the root vegetable.

Yield: 6-9 servings

Source: Adapted from a recipe by Mary-Anne Durkee

Ingredients:

- 3 pounds yuca, peeled, and cut into 3-inch sections
- ¾ teaspoon salt, divided for use
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- ½ small onion, minced
- 6 garlic cloves, minced (fresh, not powdered or from a jar)
- ½ cup fresh grapefruit or lime juice
- ¾ cup fresh orange juice
- ½ tablespoon chopped fresh parsley

Preparation:

Place yuca in cold water to cover, add ½ teaspoon of salt, and bring to a boil. Reduce to a simmer and cook, covered, until the root is easily pierced with a fork. If the yuca is fresh, you may need to cook at a low boil for 90 minutes. If the yuca is frozen, it may need only 20 minutes of boiling. Meanwhile, heat olive oil on low. Once the oil is heated, add minced garlic. The idea is to infuse the oil with garlic, not necessarily to ‘cook’ the garlic. You don’t want the garlic to get brown. If so, start over. Once your oil is infused with the garlic, add citrus juices. It’s fine that the color will change. Take the oil off the heat and pour into a heat-proof bowl. Add minced onion and parsley. Once the yuca is so tender it is easily pierced with a fork, drain the yuca. Pour the mojito on top and serve.

Note:

Although you might find fresh yuca at general grocery stores, local Asian grocery stores may have this root frozen or fresh. I would ask for “cassava.” The yuca should be boiled until it gets mushy. The frozen is pre-boiled, so you probably need only boil for 20-30 minutes. In the event you can’t find yuca, replace with potatoes. Boil potatoes for approximately half an hour or bake in the oven (covered in vegetable oil at 375F for 1 hour) and top with mojo.

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Crema de plátano

Yield: 6 servings

Source: Raul Oteiza, who got it from [www.turbana.com](http://www.turbana.com)

Ingredients:

- 4 plantains (green), peeled and cut into rounds
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 2 small onions cut in half
- 4 garlic cloves finely chopped
- 4 cups chicken stock salt and pepper to taste
- 3 bay leaves
- 1 cup heavy cream (or whole milk)
- 1 small package of plantain chips for garnish (optional)

Preparation:

In a medium saucepan heat the oil and sauté the chopped onions and garlic for a few minutes. Add the plantains and cook until golden brown, stirring occasionally. Add the chicken stock, salt, pepper, and bay leaves and bring to a boil. Lower to a simmer and cook until the plantains are soft. Transfer the mixture to a blender or food processor and blend until the mixture is creamy and smooth. Put the mixture back into the saucepan and add the heavy cream (or milk). Bring to a slow boil for about 8 minutes. Season to taste. Serve in a soup bowl and garnish with plantain chips (optional).

Note:

For tips on plantains, see [http://latinfood.about.com/od/latincaribbeancuisine101/a/about\\_plantains.htm](http://latinfood.about.com/od/latincaribbeancuisine101/a/about_plantains.htm)  
As an alternative, you can leave out the milk and add a few squeezes of lime, to taste.

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### Sopa de Calabaza

Yield: 6-8 servings

Source: Adapted from José "Pepe" Bernardo and <http://www.cubaheritage.com>.

#### Ingredients:

- 1 cup apple juice
- 1 *ripe* plantain, peeled and cut into 1/4 inch slices
- 3 cups chicken (or vegetable) stock
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp ground white pepper
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 2 tsp ground coriander
- 2 large onions, dried
- 4 tbs butter
- 1 butternut squash (approximately 3 pounds)

#### Preparation:

Preheat oven to 350F. Cut squash in half, then remove and discard seeds. Place the squash flesh side down on a cookie sheet and bake approximately 30 minutes. While the pumpkin is baking, melt the butter over medium heat in a large soup pot. Add the onions, coriander, cumin, pepper, and salt. Cover and cook until the onions are soft, about 20 minutes. Add the chicken stock and bring to a boil. Add sliced plantain. Cover and reduce heat. Simmer ten minutes. Remove squash from oven and allow to cool. Scoop out squash flesh, breaking it into small pieces. Add apple juice and simmer for ½ hour. (At this point, you can taste the soup along with a bite of the squash and adjust the spicing.) Pour soup through a strainer, reserving the liquid in a large pot. Process in a food processor, return purée liquid to pot.

#### Note:

This recipe would normally use a vegetable known in Cuban only as “calabaza,” which translates to “pumpkin.” However, the orange Halloween-style pumpkin doesn’t have the kind of flavor you’d need for this recipe, so the butternut squash is used. For tips on plantains, see [http://latinfood.about.com/od/latincaribbeancuisine101/a/about\\_plantains.htm](http://latinfood.about.com/od/latincaribbeancuisine101/a/about_plantains.htm).

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Boniatillo

Boniatillo is a sweet made from the plain, gray, or white boniato (sweet potatoes). It is called “camote de Puebla” in Mexico and Mexican stores.

Yield: 6-8

Source: Raul Oteiza

Ingredients:

- 1½ lb boniato, peeled and cut into large chunks
- 2 cups water
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 cinnamon stick
- peel of 1 lime, white pith removed
- 3 large egg yolks, lightly beaten
- 1/4 cup dry sherry
- ground cinnamon for garnish

Preparation:

In a large saucepan over medium heat, boil the potatoes in lightly salted water to cover until tender, about 20 minutes. Drain the potatoes and puree them in a blender or food processor fitted with a steel blade. In a large saucepan over medium heat, heat the water, sugar, cinnamon, and lime peel, stirring constantly, until the syrup reaches the soft-ball stage (250°F), on a candy thermometer, about 15 minutes. Reduce the heat to low, carefully remove the cinnamon and lime peel, add the pureed potatoes, and cook 6-8 minutes, stirring constantly, until the paste is thoroughly blended. Remove from the heat, add the egg yolks, and mix well. Return to low heat for 2-3 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from the heat, mix in the sherry, and allow the paste to cool at room temperature, 10-15 minutes. Transfer the mixture to a serving bowl or individual dessert dishes, cover, and refrigerate at least 2 hours. Sprinkle with cinnamon and serve cold.

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Arroz con Leche

Yield: 8 servings

Source: Cocina Criolla by Nitza Villapol

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup white rice
- 1½ cups water
- 1 small piece of lemon peel
- 1 small cinnamon stick
- 4 cups milk
- 1 cup sugar
- ¼ tsp salt
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- cinnamon powder

Preparation:

Boil the water, lemon peel, and cinnamon stick. Add rice. As soon as the rice begins to boil, turn down the heat, stir, and cover. Cook until soft, about 20 minutes. Add the milk, salt, vanilla and sugar. Cook at medium-low heat, uncovered, until it gets thick and rice has absorbed most of the milk. Stir once in a while so it will not stick. Fish out the cinnamon stick and pour into a bowl or several individual bowls and sprinkle with powdered cinnamon.