

Feasting and Foraging in Costa Rica is a comprehensive food guide to restaurants, markets, tropical fruits and vegetables, menu translations, ingredients and non-tropical substitutions, and a number of recipes - a must for visitors, armchair travelers, food lovers, cooks and residents.

Feasting and Foraging in Costa Rica, A Comprehensive Food Guide

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Feasting and Foraging in Costa Rica

A Comprehensive Food and Restaurant Guide

By Lenny Karpman MD

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Chapter 1 *OVERVIEW*

Feasting and Foraging in Costa Rica is a nonfiction love story. To those of us who adore well prepared ethnic food, we see museums in markets and history and culture reflected in kitchens and pantries. Few travel experiences are more rewarding than breaking bread with local people, on their turf, sharing their comfort food. Immersing ourselves in a new land and unfamiliar cuisine is like gaining a new intimate friend for life.

After half a dozen trips to Costa Rica and a permanent move there in 2003, I became enamored of such a new intimate friend. The food culture and tropical splendor of Costa Rica became *mi novia*, my lover and metaphorical bridge. I continue to find incredibly diverse ingredients, ageless traditions and gentle people. They are generous to a fault, willing to share their feelings, aspirations, beliefs and recipes. For a year and a half, I wrote weekly food columns and restaurant reviews for an online Costa Rican English language website, AM Costa Rica that had over three million visits per month, mostly from the Americas. The enthusiastic readers of the columns expanded my horizons with insights and opinions.

Among the population in Costa Rica are émigrés from all of Europe and the Americas, parts of the Middle East, Australia, North Africa and most of Asia. Their contributions to Costa Rica's edible cornucopia include *anticuchos*, *antipasti*, *arepas*, *bacalao*, bagels, *carpaccio*, renowned cheeses, couscous, *crêpes*, curry, *dim sum*, dumplings, egg rolls, *falafel*, *focaccia*, fondues, herring, hot dogs, hot pots, *kimchi*, lasagna, lox, meatloaf and mashed potatoes, *paella*, pasta, *pâté*, Peking duck, pizza, *prosciutto*, *sashimi*, *schnitzel*, *shwarma*, *soufflés*, *sushi*, *tiramisu*, locally brewed German style beer and an assortment of imported wines.

The worn cliché that Ticos (Costa Ricans) eat only bland rice, corn and beans demands equal opportunity to expose the fabulous fusion of innumerable succulent tropical fruits, crispy vegetables, abundant meats and seafood, unique local flavors and savory immigrant accents. The cliché was born out of less affluent, more provincial and conservative culinary cultural times – all on the wane.

Costa Rica has oodles of everything that lives or grows – an artist's palate of innumerable colors for the Costa Rican family cook or grand chef to titillate and satisfy the most discerning diners. All you need to see and taste for yourself are time, modest means, adventurous spirit and this annotated road map.

Latin American food culture is fast becoming a trendy major player in the gourmet world. There is hardly a four star restaurant in the United States today that doesn't pair its meat or seafood centerpiece with an artistic *salsa* (sauce) or tongue-tingling citrus-based *mojo* (marinade or baste). Wine stewards may actually match the vintage to the *salsa* or *mojo*. When they are created with fresh ripe mangos, papayas, sour oranges, mandarin lemons, bananas, guavas and pineapples, they elevate dishes to another level. Welcome to *nuevo latino* cuisine, Costa Rican style.

When you taste fresh ripe pineapple, can you return to a can? Not likely. When you make a salad out of fresh Costa Rican hearts of palm, boiled lightly, still crispy like California-cuisine asparagus, you will never be satisfied with the softer, saltier canned variety again.

Can you imagine a salad of tender greens dressed in Seville (sour) orange juice-mango purée-virgin olive oil vinaigrette topped with tiny bits of warm *chicharrones* (pork *confit*)? Consider guava-honey or guava-molasses for a pork roast glaze or baby back rib barbeque sauce or a guava-tangerine salad dressing or banana-lime ice cream or meats tenderized with papaya-laden marinades.

How about a soup-sized bowl of fresh mahi-mahi *ceviche* for about a dollar in a market? Add avocado or mango to your homemade *ceviche*. *Tico* (Costa Rican) *ceviche* begins with

seafood chemically cooked by citric acid from limes, lemons or sour oranges alone or in combination. Next come finely diced onions and sweet red peppers, with or without avocado or mango. The final touches are cilantro leaves and salt and pepper to taste. Are you phobic about hot chili peppers? *Ticos* rarely use them. Even when they pass you a jar of “fiery hot” peppers to satisfy your Mexican or Peruvian expectations, the peppers are fairly mild. On the rare occasions when chilies are liberally added to *ceviche* Peruvian style, cubed sweet potatoes are added as well to offset the heat.

The smell of freshly fried crispy potato chips pervades many markets. A “small” sixty cent bag feeds four. The primary addictive aroma, however, wafts out of myriad bakery doors and windows in nearly every town and neighborhood. A ritual in the “green” (euphemism for “rainy”) season is to dart into a bakery and sip a latte or espresso and inhale a warm pastry until the shower passes. The tariff is pocket change.

Storefronts selling warm snack foods usually display corn flour chicken or meat *empanadas* (turnovers), Chinese egg rolls (*tacos chinos*) and fried chicken pieces in tandem under heating lamps.

Is fried fish really so bad when the basic corn meal batter contains ground pumpkin seeds, pulverized pistachios, cocoa powder, avocado purée, macadamia nut pieces or mashed plantains? There is no better grilled fish anywhere than the local fresh catch. Fillets baked in banana leaf wraps keep in all the juices and flavor.

Spit-roasted chicken is a staple near the equator around the world from Morocco to Tunisia to Syria to Indonesia to the Americas. None has a finer fragrance and flavor than the Tico version, never frozen and roasted over aromatic coffee tree roots.

Ticos have a sweet tooth. They love rich dessert cakes, puddings, tarts, paired fruit pastes and fresh cheese slices, caramel and coconut custards and ice creams. *Sandia* seems more flavorful than watermelon from any other location. Can you imagine a better simple conclusion to a complex meal than ice-cold watermelon or a sorbet of tropical fruit and hot rich coffee?

Do you crave international ethnic variety? In tiny Costa Rica you can sample Argentinean, Brazilian, Chinese (Sichuan and Cantonese), Indian, Italian, Jewish style, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Lebanese, Mexican, Nicaraguan, Panamanian, Peruvian, Philippine, Salvadorian, Spanish, Swiss, Thai, Turkish and international vegetarian cuisines. Yes, and there are fusions.

Restaurants change nearly daily when the chef quits, when the owners move back to Europe or Asia, when the supplier goes out of business, when a bad review destroys the business or when a rave draws more diners than the kitchen can handle. Restaurant reviews can be mercurial. What don't change are the well-crafted recipes from culinary artists in humble or grand kitchens. What they have confided to my friends and me, we will share with you. Let us add recipes to your collection and restaurants to your "must visit" list for Costa Rica.

Lenny Karpman MD
La Guacima, Costa Rica 2007

Chapter 2

Glossary of Ingredients

Abalone (*abulón*) The gastropod in a shell lined with mother of pearl appears on an occasional menu at a hefty price. Abalones come from the Pacific shallows from Oregon to Guatamala.

Acarajé These fritters, made from black eyed peas, probably came to Costa Rica's east coast from West Africa by way of Brazil and Caribbean islands.

Achiote, annatto The golden yellow color of rice, meats, chicken, stew, butter and cheese is often the result of a little added *achiote* powder or *annatto* seed oil. This "poor man's saffron" is from seeds of a tree. In markets, it comes as red orange powder, paste made with vegetable shortening, golden oil with red seeds (*aceite de achiote*) or packets of just the seeds. It imparts a very mild taste of musty nutmeg and pepper. When the seeds lose their bright color, they also lose their flavor. The seeds keep well in a tightly sealed jar in a dark place.

Aceite *Aceite* is the Spanish word for "oil."

Ackee See the fruit chapter, # 4, for details of this tropical Caribbean fruit that looks like scrambled eggs.

Adobo This very common stew from the Philippines is made with chicken or pork in coconut milk under a layer of red-tinted oil. In Mexico, *adobo* is a red sauce or marinade of a purée of *chipotle* peppers and vinegar. In Costa Rica, it is used very sparingly in stews. In Spanish, *adobo* simply means "seasoning" and the term refers to either dry rubs or marinades. Chipotle peppers are often packed in *adobo* sauce.

Agave This family of succulents grow well in Central America, Mexico and the American southwest. *Tequila*, *mescal* and *pulque* are potent alcoholic drinks distilled from plants in this family. Aloe is a family member. The leaves and stems can be baked and eaten.

Agua dulce This drink, served hot or cold, is brown cane sugar dissolved in water.

Ahi *Ahi* is the Hawaiian name for yellowfin tuna, a common inhabitant of Costa Rica's Pacific coast. It is usually filetted, grilled in garlic butter, breaded and fried or served with a white sauce.

Ahumado *Ahumado* is the Spanish word for "smoked." Although some bacon is not smoked and smoked fish is rare, Costa Rican meat and cheese processors do smoke pigs' feet, pork chops, necks, most bacon and a variety of cheeses. Smoked chickens and turkeys appear rarely around holiday time, but they are usually imports.

Al ajillo *Ajo* is the Spanish word for "garlic." *Al ajillo* describes any dish cooked with garlic or dressed with a garlic butter sauce.

A la parilla Typically Argentinean, meats are roasted over glowing coals in a fire pit on a grill. *La parilla* is the name of the grill itself. *A la parilla*, on the grill, describes both the style of cooking and the type of restaurant.

A la plancha *A la plancha* literally means "on the plank." In modern parlance, it refers to searing and cooking on a solid metal griddle or hot plate.

Albóndigas *Albóndigas* are meatballs. Whereas most cuisines add breadcrumbs or milk soaked bread to chopped meat along with the usual egg binder, herbs and

spices, Ticos usually use corn meal instead. The meatballs are often served in soup or with a tomato-vegetable sauce.

Al horno See “baked.”

Allspice (*Jamaica, pimiento gordo*) Brown berries from this evergreen tree taste like a combination of clove, cinnamon and nutmeg, hence the name “allspice.” They have the size and shape of peppercorns. Native to Central America, the center for production moved from the land of the Aztecs, who flavored their chocolate drinks with allspice, to Jamaica, the leading supplier of allspice in the world. My neighbor has a *jamaica* tree growing in his front yard.

Almidón See “yuca starch” in chapter 6.

Americano Bitter Campari, sweet vermouth and club soda over ice are the ingredients of this mixed drink, usually served before dinner.

Ancho The smoky flavored dry poblano chili pepper, the *ancho*, is one of the very few chilies that finds its way into Costa Rican cuisine because it is relatively mild.

Anchovies (*anchoas, boquerones*) Silvery anchovies in olive oil are staples in Spanish *tapas* restaurants. Canned and salted dark brown ones are included in only a few menus, usually with pizza, pasta or in Cesar salad dressing. Native recipes only rarely include anchovies.

Anis seed (*anis*) These licorice flavored straw colored seeds can be found in local markets. The plants grow well from seed in my herb garden and look like paler green dill. You are most likely to encounter the flavor in potato-cheese dishes in local Peruvian restaurants, of which there are many. Anis flavored liqueurs are numerous worldwide, but none seems to be popular here.

Apio This is the word for “celery”, in Costa Rica, but, in other Latin American countries, it is also the word for a knobby root vegetable called “*arracacha*” in Costa Rica.

Appetizers (*antojitos, bocas*) Whimsical little things or bites accompany drinks and may be complementary during Happy Hour.

Apples (*manzanas*) See the fruit chapter, # 4 for details.

Arepas A common first course or snack in Colombia and Venezuela, these cornmeal cakes or buns topped with cheese can be found in a few *sodas* and restaurants in the Central Valley of Costa Rica. The runny white cheese on top or inside the opened bun is similar to French-style *crème fraîche*.

Arepas flour (*masarepa*) The classic corn used to make this flour has very large bland starchy kernels. Among all the varieties of flour in Latin America, it is the only one that is precooked.

Armadillo (*carachupa*) Armadillo used to be a food source in the American Southwest, Northern Mexico, Western China and Central America. During the Great depression, armadillo “Hoover stew” was common in Texas, where the old joke about the chicken crossing the road, went like this: *Why did the chicken cross the road? To show the armadillo it could be done.* It was the main ingredient in more apocryphal than real “road kill stew.” Ultimately, microbiologists showed that armadillos carry Hansen’s bacillus, the bacterium that causes leprosy. Human transmission is not proven, but consumption fell dramatically. There is one restaurant in Fort Worth, Texas and an occasional soda in Guanacaste, Costa Rica that serve it. They are sold in the Masaya Market in Nicaragua. No, I haven’t tasted them, but one came scampering through our open front door one evening with dog in hot pursuit. We removed it outside our fence, away from our pets. In Yunan, China, where

it once was common, it seems to have disappeared according to locals. In rural Costa Rica, when a farmer catches one, the family relishes eating it.

Arracacha, arracacia For details about this knobby root vegetable with parsnip similarities, see the vegetable chapter, # 5.

Arrabiata This Spanish spelling of the Italian word “*arrabbiata*” (angry), is the name of the spaghetti sauce with more heat than any other in Costa Rica. It is made with tomatoes, bacon and chile peppers.

Arroz con Leche See Rice Pudding

Asado criollo The importance of the *asado criollo* (traditional barbecue) in Argentina can be measured by examining the standard device for cooking meat. Unlike Americans with our Webber grills, Argentines like to char flesh in something that resembles real estate: an outsize brick and mortar affair called a *parrilla*. Squatting in the backyard like a guesthouse, it's used for every cut of meat imaginable (including the occasional whole lamb, piglet, or kid). In addition to steaks and ribs, an *asado* may feature kidneys, sweetbreads, *chinchulines* (tripe), and morcilla (blood sausage). After this carnivorous odyssey, the only dessert required is a toothpick.

Asadero This cow's milk cheese melts easily in the oven. In Mexico, it is also called Oaxaca or Chihuahua cheese. It has the mild flavor of a jack cheese and is less salty than white fresh cheeses.

Asapado A soupier version of *paella*, it is called *asapao* in Puerto Rico. It is colored with ancho and usually contains sweet red peppers, onions and garlic.

Atemoya This fruit is a cross between cherimoya and sweetsop. See the fruit chapter, # 4 for details

Atole This ancient Meso-American drink is like a fruit smoothie thickened with corn meal and sweetened with honey.

Avocado (*aguacate*) Avocado is a staple in Costa Rica. See the fruit chapter, # 4 for details.

Ayote For details about this common squash, see the vegetable chapter, # 5.

Babaco This South American fruit is a rarity in Costa Rica. See the fruit chapter, #4 for details.

Bacalao See salt cod in this section.

Bacon (*tocineta, tocino*) Bacon is common in Costa Rica. It is usually salt cured and smoked.

Baked (*al horno*) Baking is less common than in temperate climates because of the unwanted extra heat in a kitchen, be it from a modern oven or old fashion clay or brick beehive. The latter is usually under a roof without walls outside the home and takes center stage for fiestas.

Bananas (*bananos*) See the fruit chapter, # 4, for details.

Barbados Cherries (*acerola*) See the fruit chapter, # 4, for details.

Basil (*albahaca*) It grows like crazy in Costa Rica, but is not a local favorite. Costa Ricans consider it a medicinal herb. Its use is widespread in ethnic restaurants.

Batido Called “*merengada*” in some other parts of Latin America, it is similar to a smoothie, see the drink chapter, # 15, for specifics.

Bay leaf (*laurel en hoja*) Rounded California type bay leaves are sold all over. They are used in soups and stews as in North American cooking and are removed before eating the food they have flavored.

Bean mash fritter (*acarajé*) These Brazilian fritters are made from purée of black-eyed peas, a bean that originated in Western Africa and occasionally visits Tico markets. Caribbean restaurants serve them on occasion.

Beef heart (*anticuchos*) Kabobs of spicy marinated chunks of grilled beef heart are a common appetizer on the menu of nearly every Peruvian restaurant. They are a little chewy with the consistency of chicken gizzards. Argentinean grill/steak houses in Costa Rica also serve charred pieces of rubbery beef heart along with kidney, tripe, blood sausage and sweetbreads.

Beer (*cerveza*) German style beer comes from local breweries Bavaria, Pilsen and Imperial. It may not be up to snuff with Belgian, Dutch or Czech beer, but it is superior to many North American brands. Here, refrigerated beer comes with a glass of ice cubes.

Bell Peppers (*chiles dulces*) Green and riper red sweet peppers are available and inexpensive all year. See the vegetable chapter, #5, for more information.

Black Bean Purée (*muñeta*) As a topping for chips, side dish or filling for *pupusas* or *empanadas*, black beans, mashed, seasoned with garlic, oregano, cumin, salt and pepper in any combination and thinned with oil, are a Tico staple.

Blackberry (*mora*) Very common in Costa Rica, blackberries flavor gelatin, ice cream, jelly, syrup, candy, juices and smoothies.

Black pepper (*pimenta negra*) Standard black pepper comes from Asia. When you see “Jamaican pepper” for sale, it is allspice, not pepper.

Blaff Haitian émigrés to the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica poach red snapper that they have marinated in a spicy sauce of chile peppers, lime juice, garlic and allspice. They call it “*blaff*.”

Boniato This Caribbean sweet potato has dark red-brown skin and off-white flesh.

Bread (*pan*) See chapter 6 for descriptions of bread and bread products.

Breadfruit (*fruta de pan*) See the fruit chapter, # 4, for details on this large starchy fruit and magnificent tree with huge leaves.

Bread pudding (*budín*) Tico bread pudding contains the usual ingredients: milk, bread, eggs, cinnamon and vanilla. Some cooks substitute condensed or sweetened evaporated milk for added richness.

Breakfast (*desayuno*) Fresh fruit, rice and beans, egg or cheese on top, bread and hot coffee are the norm in the rural areas where workers leave the house a little after dawn and don’t return before dusk.

Broth (*caldo*) See the soup section of chapter #3 for more details.

Buñuelo This sugar and cinnamon topped fried pastry is more common in Mexico than in Costa Rica.

Burrito This *tortilla* wrapped package contains shredded pork or beef, cheese, rice, beans, sour cream or chicken in any combination.

Butter (*mantequilla*) *Dos Pinos*, two pine trees, is a largest cooperative dairy for all dairy products in Costa Rica. Their butter is creamy, rich, tasty and not oversalted. Monteverde is smaller but every bit as good. Numar is the brand of local butter alternatives. The company acknowledges that its product is high in saturated fats, but has gone to great lengths to omit all trans fats for health reasons, despite the opportunity for greater profits.

Cacao This tropical evergreen is the source of chocolate. Although it grows in Costa Rica, it is not a major cash crop.

Cajetas These cellophane-wrapped sweets are made from sweetened condensed milk cooked to a fudge consistency, cut into squares and displayed at check out counters virtually everywhere. They can be chocolate, caramel and/or coconut flavored.

Cake (*queque*) Since most Ticos are fonder of sweets than most North Americans, it is not surprising that cake is quite popular. *Tres leches*, three milks, is the names of the most coveted variety, a white cake drenched in sweet evaporated, condensed and whole milk and topped with whipped cream or a sugar and egg-white frosting. Bakeries with cake displays and cakeries abound. Cheese cake is surprisingly common. Other options include pound cake, angel food, chocolate and sponge cake, together with cakes frosted and adorned for all occasions.

Calabazas See pumpkin in the vegetable chapter, # 5.

Caldo *Caldo* is broth or soup. *Caldo de res* is beef broth with chunks of meat, squash, carrot, potato, yucca and corn, often served with a side dish of avocado, onion an

cilantro, all diced and piled to be added to the *caldo* at the diner's discretion. *Caldo verde* is Portuguese green cabbage or kale soup that occasionally turns up on Brazilian menus.

Callaloo A number of similar Caribbean leafy greens and a soup made from any of them are called "*callaloo*." The most common green is from the taro leaf. It is prepared like mustard or collard greens. Look for the soup in Limon or south along the same coast where it is made with greens, coconut milk, fish and lime juice.

Candies (*confites*) The most common kinds are cane sugar, coconut and caramel fudge.

Cane sugar loaf (*tapa de dulce*) Sugar cane is pressed and boiled into a rich brown sap, poured into a mold, hardened into a loaf and sold to homemakers who shave off as much brown sugar as they need for a recipe or to dilute in water for a hot or cold Tico drink called "*agua dulce*."

Capers (*alcaparras*) Not native to the tropics, capers are surprisingly common in Costa Rica, usually imported from Spain. They are often added to Mediterranean salads, Italian antipastos and tomato sauces or sprinkled atop smoked salmon or *carpaccio*.

Caramel cream (*dulce de leche*) *Dulce de leche* is a made from whole milk and sugar cooked slowly with frequent stirring until it turns to peanut butter colored syrup. It can be used like peanut butter on bread, toast or crackers, but is more often used to fill spaces in sweets. When made with goat's milk, rarely in Costa Rica but commonly in Mexico, it is called *cajeta*, the same name as caramel-like candy in Costa Rica. Don't ask for or about *cajeta* in Argentina, where you might be misunderstood. It is the local slang word for "vagina."

Cardamom The plant originally grew only in India and Ceylon. Now it grows in Central America. In the markets, it

comes in three forms, the grayish pod, the dark brown kernels or fine powder. Guatemala is an exporter. Costa Rica is a lesser grower. It is used to flavor Arabic coffee, Indian tea and curries.

Caribbean style cuisine (*comida Caribeña*) The Caribbean coast of Costa Rica is inhabited mostly by English speaking dark and light skinned people originally from the islands throughout the Caribbean, where many are descended from West African slaves. Their cooking reflects a mixture of African cuisine, Caribbean island flavors, seafood aplenty, lots of coconut milk and more spice than the food of the rest of Costa Rica.

Carne seca Similar to jerky, this is the Latin American version of salted beef dried in the sun.

Carnitas Similar in appearance and use to shredded meat but very different in taste and texture, pork is braised until all that is left of the liquid is the rendered fat from the meat. All the flavor has been absorbed and the final bit of fat frying makes the meat crispy.

Carob This tropical tree has long pods that look like leather. The pulp inside is an edible sweet facsimile of chocolate.

Carpaccio Because of the large number of Italians and Italian restaurants in Costa Rica, *carpaccio* has become a standard appetizer on many restaurant menus, not only paper thin slices of beef, but also tuna, salmon, sea bass, octopus and a variety of others. They are most often served with a little extra-virgin olive oil on top with a twist or two of the pepper grinder. Other versions include mustard sauce, aioli, lime juice, capers and onions or plain mayonnaise.

Carrot (*zanahoria*) Tico carrots are enormous, cheap, tasty and plentiful year round. Half carrot and half orange juice is a popular Tico drink. See chapter #5.

Cascabel This is the Spanish name for a child's rattle. It is also the name of a dried red chile pepper whose seeds rattle when it is shaken. Because it is hotter than Ticos like, it is not common here.

Cashew The cashew tree is common in Costa Rica. Locals eat the red fruit, the cashew apple, from which the kidney-shaped seed, which we call the nut, is suspended. See chapter #4 for more details.

Cassareep The juice of the bitter cassava is sweetened with cane sugar and reduced to make syrup that is an occasional component of food along the Caribbean coast. It is similar to the sweet and tart flavor of tamarind.

Cassava This tropical tree is common in Costa Rica. The root is sold in many markets. Toxic unless boiled, the bitter variety is the source of cassareep (above) and the non-toxic sweet variety is the source of tapioca pearls.

Cauliflower (*coliflor*) Cauliflower is grown readily throughout the Americas and seems to be in Costa Rican markets year round. The heads can achieve enormous size here. See chapter #5 for more details.

Celery (*apio*) See the vegetable chapter, #5, for more details.

Ceriman, *monstera* (*piña anona*) See chapter #4 for details of this strange looking tropical fruit.

Chalupa *Chalupa* means "boat" in Spanish. This first course or light main course is an underlying fried corn *tortilla* "boat" upon which are layered chicken, beef or pork, an optional cheese layer and a topping of fresh green salad or cooked vegetables dressed with lime juice and/or mayonnaise.

Chamomile (*manzanilla*) Bunches of stems with leaves and small flowers are used for brewing tea. It is a local favorite.

Chanqueta Stuffed and baked *chayotes*, made with cheese and cream, *chanquetas* actually translate as “old slippers.”

Chayote (*chuchu* in Brazil) This green thin-skinned member of the squash family has a u-shaped invagination that looks like the smile of an elder who forgot to put in his false teeth. The taste is mild, like cucumber and Asian pear. The texture is crunchy. It does well cubed in a salad, boiled lightly like squash, baked or in soups or stews. Like potato and orange, it is a good source of potassium.

Cheese (*queso*) Many different types of cheese are made in Costa Rica. Go to chapter #10 for specifics.

Cheese turnovers (*quesadillas*) The simple form, grilled *tortillas* sandwiching melted cheese, is made with corn *tortillas* in Costa Rica, unlike the Mexican style made with wheat flour *tortillas*. Both kinds usually combine crumbly white fresh cheese with a yellow cheese that melts better.

Cherimoya See chapter #4 for details of this tropical fruit.

Chicasquil The large glove shaped leaf, *chicasquil*, is chopped and cooked much like spinach as a side dish or in a hash (*picadillo*) with other chopped ingredients.

Chicha Fermented corn is the basis of this punch drink which can be golden, slightly alcoholic and beer-like. The Peruvian version uses purple corn and the drink, *Chicha moreada*, looks like a deep burgundy wine cooler with bits of diced fruit floating on top, like *sangria*. *Chicha de maiz* is a punch using local pale yellow cracked corn as a base.

Chicharrónes There are two types, skin and meat. Both are pork, deep fried in rendered pork fat and salted. The meat variety is cubed cut into pieces about two or three inches in any dimension. The pieces of crispy skin are flatter. Both are very popular. Every weekend, *chicharrón* sellers line the roadsides in every small town, boiling pork chunks and skin in large metal hemispheres over wood fires. Even if you usually avoid fats, sample a small piece of the meat for a taste treat.

Chicken (*pollo*) There are probably as many fried or roast chicken eateries per capita in Costa Rica as there are pizzerias in Italy. A two-piece order of fried chicken usually costs \$1.25 to \$1.50 with green plantain *ceviche* and a few warm *tortillas*. Add a fruit drink and you have lunch for \$2 or less.

Chick peas (*garbanzos*) These legumes are sold dry or canned throughout the world. In Latin America, they find their way into soups, stews, salads and as side dishes.

Chilaquiles This cheap menu item in *sodas* is a mixture of sautéed strips of leftover corn *tortillas*, mixed with bits of pork, chicken, beef, cheese, onions, sweet red peppers or any combination thereof. In fancier venues, the ingredients are layered, topped with shredded cheese and run under the broiler.

Chiles Of the two hundred or so types of chilies or chili peppers, only two are part of the Costa Rican parlance, sweet red and green – *chilies dulces*, and spicy – *chilies picantes*. The former are bell peppers that turn red as they mature. The latter are all the dozens that produce heat around the world.

Chile con Queso Mexican restaurants in Costa Rica often serve this yellow cheese and green Chile pepper dip with fried *tortilla* chips.

Chiles Rellenos These cheese stuffed baked or breaded and fried peppers differ from the common Mexican type. Ticos substitute sweet for mildly spicy peppers in the recipe.

Chili con Carne Not part of the typical local cuisine, a decent bowl of *chili* is common fare in sports bars and Tex-Mex restaurants.

Chimichurri This green pesto of cilantro, garlic, olive oil, parsley, vinegar, salt and pepper is one of the mandatory side dish additives for steaks and chops in Argentinean steak houses. It can also be slathered on roasted chicken or grilled fish.

Chimichanga Basically a fried *burrito* wrapped in a corn flour *tortilla*, it is rare to see a *chimichanga* outside a local Mexican restaurant.

Chinese Mustard Greens Savoy cabbage is called “*mostaza china*, Chinese mustard,” in Costa Rica. It is used in soups, stews, salads and as a cooked side dish in a vegetable hash (*picadillo*). It is more popular locally than any other leafy green, including spinach.

Chipotle Jalapeño smoked peppers are called “*chipotles*.”

Chiverre The flesh of this white spaghetti squash gourd is baked, separated from shell and seeds, stripped of a dark bitter internal stripe, mashed, sweetened and used to fill *empanadas* year round, Easter and Christmas pastries and is sold as jam. It is very tasty and mahogany colored.

Chocolate (*chocolate*) Refer back to *Cacao* above.

Chop Suey This western dish of Chinese-style diced meats or seafood and vegetables served over white rice, is a

noodle dish in Costa Rica, similar to chow mein. Unless you order it dry (*chop suey seco*), it will come in a bowl in soupy brown gravy. To add insult to injury, it is often served with sliced white bread.

Chorizo *Chorizo* in Costa Rica is only a little redder and a little spicier than ordinary bland native sausage. If it were not called *chorizo* on the label, you would never guess. Imported Mexican *chorizo* is orange from lots of paprika, fiery hot from chili peppers and savory from garlic and spices. Soft *chorizo* from Spain has the color but not the kick of the Mexican. Cured Spanish *chorizo* is firm, dry and almost like ham.

Chow mein Tico chow mein is more like American chop suey, but is served with crispy fried thick noodles.

Churro This fried long thin donut has longitudinal grooves or twists. The dough is sweet and the outside is covered with cinnamon-sugar. *Churros* are common at street fairs, carnivals and snack stands.

Cilantro (*culantro*) *Culantro* would be the national herb, if one were so designated. Look for it in every sauce, dip, soup, stew or *ceviche*. It is used as parsley would be in North America both for taste and as a decoration.

Cinnamon (*canela*) Bark and powder are used in a variety of pastries, sweets, drinks and even savory dishes. Most of it seems to be of the Mexican type, sweeter and spicier than its East Indies cousin.

Citron This lumpy tart lemon is prized in Israel as a gift for a particular holiday. Its fingered form, “hand of Buddha (chapter # 4),” appears from time to time in Costa Rican farmers’ markets.

Clove (*clavo*) Cloves are easy to find in supermarkets. The distinctive flavor emerges in rice pudding, cakes, a fermented corn drink called *pitarrilla* and a sweet dessert made from a zucchini cousin, *pipián*. Allspice, a fairly common flavor in Caribbean food, can be a source of confusion. Clove does grow throughout the West Indies and Brazil. The famous fish sauce from Vera Cruz, Mexico is clove flavored.

Coconut candy (*cocadas*) Shredded coconut and egg yolk are added to sugar-water syrup and baked until they turn a pale golden color. You can find them alongside the milk fudge squares (*cajetas*) next to the cash register in nearly every small market. Similar sweet spheres covered with shredded coconut are called *bolitas de coco*.

Coconuts (*cocos*) Coconut drinks, ice cream, candies, cookies, milk, cream and Caribbean sauces, soups and rice are well worth a try.

Coffee (*café*) The Colombian government sued Costa Rica in International Court in The Hague because of bumper stickers that read “Juan Valdéz drinks Costa Rican coffee.” Ticos are rightfully proud of their rich mountain grown coffee. Local brands of good quality sell for about \$2 per pound. Volio is my personal favorite.

Comál There are two types of *comáles*, *tortilla* pans. One type is a thin tin hemisphere that looks like an inverted shallow wok. The other is flat unglazed ceramic.

Coriander Cilantro (*cilantro*) Costa Rica’s number one herb is *culantro*. Its seeds were named “*koris*,” bedbugs, by the Greeks and are now called coriander. Powder from grinding the seeds is a component of many spice mixes and curry recipes, but Ticos harvest the plant green before it goes to seed and use seeds mainly for propagation.

Corn (*maiz*) Corn rivals rice and beans as the number one national staple. Corn flour, cornmeal, corn kernels, corn tortillas, corn pudding, corn pancakes, corn on the cob and popcorn are not even the whole picture.

Corn boiled (*elote cocinado*) This Spanish term refers to boiled kernels or ears.

Corn dough (*masa harina*) The similarity of Spanish terms for ground corn products may be confusing, and, at times, appears to interchange. *Masa harina* is moistened dough sold in tubs or packages. A lump of *masa harina* made from finely ground corn flour mixed with water, flattened in a round press and toasted on a grill becomes a *tortilla*. Coarser dough filled with a host of savories and steamed inside a plantain leaf emerges as a *tamal* (tamale). The same dough with different additions fry into croquettes.

Corn flour (*harina de maiz*) Corn flour or meal is more prevalent than wheat flour in Costa Rica. The finest grind is used for breads, rolls, dumplings, turnovers and pastries in similar fashion to wheat flour in North America. Coarser grinds coat foods for frying, are the basis of fritters, cook up into hot porridges and become fillers in hamburgers and stuffing mixtures.

Corn Pancakes (*chorreadas, cachapas*) *Chorreadas* are slightly sweet corn pancakes made without flour. Corn kernels are puréed in a blender with a little milk and sugar to taste. Because local corn has little water content, the purée requires some milk to thin it to the consistency of batter. It also is less sweet than North American corn, so sugar is added to taste. Pancakes are then browned on both sides in a buttered skillet or on a griddle and served hot. The corn kernels in Venezuela are plump and juicy like those in the US. They don't need added milk. Instead they need a little corn flour to keep the batter from being too runny. Their corn pancakes are called *cachapas*. Either can be topped with cheese, sour cream, fruit

compote, eggplant caviar, apple butter, marmalade or maple syrup.

Corn pudding (*masamorra*) When you spy something in local markets and roadside stands that looks like more yellow than usual cheesecake, it is probably dense, sweet, tasty *masamorra*. If you visit the extremely popular La Paz Waterfall Garden Park, the restored old rancho serves free samples.

Corn roasted (*elote asado*) Elote asado is corn-on-the-cob roasted on a grill, common fair at open air festivals.

Corn starch (*maicena*) The dried central embryo of a corn kernel contains starch that, when mixed with liquid, is a potent thickener once the mixture boils. Its uses are the same in the tropics as they are in temperate climes.

Crêpes (*arepas, prestiños*) *Arepas* are unsweetened Columbian-style crêpes, common in Costa Rica. *Prestiños* are sweet dessert crêpes. Recently, crêperies have begun to appear in upscale malls. Their menus usually include savory lunchtime crêpes, sweet dessert ones, waffles, pastries and ice cream.

Croissants These flaky, crescent-shaped yeast rolls, originally from France, have begun to appear in breakfast venues, usually as part of morning egg and cheese sandwiches, and in a few bakeries.

Croquettes or fritters (*croquetas, buñuelas*) With such a plethora of starchy tubers in Latin America, it is understandable that so many are boiled, mashed, stuffed, shaped into a patty and fried as one of dozens of different kinds. Be they Brazilian *acarajés*, Tico *patacones* or *yuca croquetas*, Colombian *fritangas*, Ecuadorian *pristiños*, Peruvian *picarones*, Caribbean codfish cakes or Cuban *boniato croquetas con cerdo* they are all croquettes.

Cumin (*comino*) I associate cumin with cuisines of the Middle East, North Africa and the Asian sub-continent. All of these cuisines are underrepresented in Costa Rica. Nevertheless, cumin is used commonly, albeit in small amounts.

Custard (*flan*) Baked or steamed egg custard is a favorite dessert throughout Latin America, China, France and Spain. The only local variation on standard *crème caramel* is the frequent addition of coconut.

Custard apple See chapter #4 for details of this tropical fruit.

Dessert (*postre*) In small Tico restaurants throughout the country, dessert menus tend to be short and repetitious. They usually include ice cream, *tres leches* cake, *tiramisu*, cheesecake, rice pudding, gelatin and *flan*.

Desayuno “*Desayuno*” is the Spanish word for breakfast.

Dinner (*cena*) The evening meal is not necessarily the main meal of the day, nor does it begin at 9 or 9:30 as in Spain. Mealtime usually begins between 6 and 7:30, a little later on Friday or Saturday nights in restaurants. Multigenerational family meals on Sundays are usually afternoon affairs at home or in restaurants. Many restaurants close at 5PM on Sunday. When the midday meal is the main offering, the evening meal may resemble a North American light lunch of soup, salad, sandwich, leftovers or rice and beans. When dinner is primary, expect appetizers, main course of meat, starch and vegetables, and dessert and coffee.

Dragon fruit, strawberry pear (*pitaya, pitahaya*) See chapter #4 for details of this unusual tasty tropical fruit.

Dressing (*aderezo*) Salads tend to be underdressed. Cold cooked vegetables with a little mayonnaise or lime juice is unfortunately common. Options may include oil and vinegar, pseudo-Russian mayo and ketchup, vinaigrette, ranch or the same cilantro pesto, *chimichurri*, that goes on steaks or chicken breasts. Blue cheese, Roquefort, authentic Cesar and *miso* dressings are uncommon.

Duck (*pato*) A few Chinese markets in San Jose carry authentic lacquered and Peking duck that hang from hooks in the window. Upscale Chinese and French restaurants serve duck. Otherwise, duck is uncommon to rare. The only visible wild duck species in the skies is merganser, and even they are not common.

Durian The slow-growing durian tree produces large green melon-sized ovals covered with fleshy spines. The foul smelling fruit is prized throughout Southeast Asia. Durian trees do grow in Costa Rica, but few have endured the fifteen to twenty year span required to bear fruit.

Eggnog (*rompope*) Similar to North American, the Central American version appears on market shelves in glass bottles, usually in liquor sections.

Eggplant (*berenjena*) The large oval dark purple variety of eggplant is common. See the vegetable chapter, # 5, for details.

Egg Roll (*taco chino*) Egg rolls are common, not only in Chinese restaurants, but also in snack stands throughout the country. The fillings are more likely to be chopped cabbage rather than bean sprouts, and ham rather than roast pork.

Eggs (*huevos*) Eggs are cheap and ubiquitous. In local breakfast *sodas*, they are generally prepared fried or scrambled, often atop *gallo pinto*, rice and beans. Poached eggs, deviled eggs and egg salad are relatively uncommon. Omelettes are

usually limited to cheese, ham or both. Quiches and frittatas appear only in delis, upscale markets and ethnic restaurants. Unfortunately, Tico custom is to cook eggs in a hot frying pan in oil. They are nearly always overcooked - dry scrambled or bottom browned sunnyside up.

Empanada Literally, it means baked in a pastry crust. *Empanadas* are typically hemispheres that range in size from quail eggs to loaves of bread. The most common size would just cover your hand. They can be savory or sweet and vary significantly coast-to-coast and country-to-country. Standard Costa Rican turnovers are made with corn dough, baked or fried and filled with savories – meat, cheese, puréed beans, chicken or potatoes; or sweets – sweetened cheese, *chiverre*, coconut cream or pineapple. For variety, try Caribbean *pati* or Argentinean beef and gravy-filled pastries.

Enchilada This crêpe made of a corn *tortilla* may be filled with chicken, pork, shredded beef or cheese; dressed in tomato sauce; topped with crumbled white cheese and browned under a broiler. The Tico version is chili-pepper free.

En gelatina *En gelatina* means encased in jelly, as in aspic. Aspics and molds are popular neither in Costa Rican homes nor in restaurants. They are uncommon offerings in upper end deli counters where foreigners shop.

En papillote *En papillote* implies that the dish is cooked in a wrapping of foil or parchment paper. Foil wraps are more frequent than parchment, but neither are common here.

Enyucados Eggs and salt added to boiled and mashed yuca make the dough for these *empanada*-cousins called “*enyucados*.” Savory fillings of pork, cheese, beans or chicken, mixed with garlic, onions and/or sweet peppers top small circles of rolled out dough, that are then folded over, pinched closed and fried golden brown.

Escabeche Copied from a popular Spanish dish, *escabeche* is a pickling sauce spooned over lightly fried small fish or tossed with vegetables. It typically contains allspice, bay leaves, chili peppers, diced sweet red peppers and carrots, olive oil, onion rings, salt, sugar or honey, pepper and vinegar. The same marinade can be turned into a dressing for salads, shrimp, cubes of pork and chicken fingers.

Fajitas *Fajitas* are originally a staple of Tex-Mex cuisine. They are the southern border equivalent of Philly steak sandwiches. Tough cuts of beef, e.g. skirt steak, are marinated for many hours in lime juice, oil, garlic, oregano and cumin. Some people add beer or tequila to tenderize the meat. The meat is removed, cut into thin strips that look like small belts, called “*fajitas*” in Spanish. The strips are grilled and added to separately grilled onions and sweet red peppers. The mixture is wrapped in soft warm *tortillas* and eaten like sandwiches.

Fiambres See cold cuts in the meat chapter, # 7.

Fish (*pescado*) Chapter #9 contains descriptions of all locally available fish.

Flauta Shredded meat wrapped in a corn *tortilla* is deep fried until crisp and brown and served hot, topped with *guacamole* and sour cream in most Mexican restaurants. The tubular shape is similar to a flute, hence the name.

Focaccia *Focaccia*, Italian flat bread, is quite common and usually very well made in the dozens of Italian restaurants in Costa Rica. The top is most often drizzled in olive oil and sprinkled with salt and rosemary on its way into the oven.

Fricassee (*fricasé*) Another name for “stew,” the French term appears on menus and in cookbooks on rare occasions.

Fried (*Frito*) Generalizations are always dangerous, but it is fair to say that locals eat lots of fried foods. The big three taste preferences are probably fried, sweet and without heat (no chili peppers). A dish called “*frito*” is not fried. Go on to the next heading for a description.

Frito This holiday stew of pig parts, head and organs is unlikely to grace menu pages. Look to stands with big pots and soup bowls at carnivals and town festivals. It is most popular with older folks, for whom it conjures up fond memories of community events from bygone days.

Garlic (*ajo*) Garlic makes its way into a huge number of dishes including beans, soups, stews, sauces, marinades and dips. Nearly all Tico restaurants offer as a choice for preparation of steak, fish or chicken, a garlic butter sauce.

Gazpacho This cold tomato and vegetable soup is uncommon in native cuisine but enjoys much more favor in Spanish and international restaurants.

Gelatin Flavored gelatin is a Tico favorite. Moms feed it to kids for dessert. Cubes of red gelatin are often added to fruit salad or ice cream. The top of cheesecake may have a thin layer of red gelatin as a cover, and the cake itself is often lightened by the addition of unflavored gelatin to the batter.

Ginger (*jengibre*) Ginger grows in amazing profusion in Costa Rica. It is more popular as an ornamental flower than as an herb, but it is easy to find in most farmers’ markets.

Goose (*ganso*) Geese are not common in Costa Rica. On occasion, they are used as watch animals. Intruders beware. They are loud and aggressive. Restaurants rarely feature them and in my only home experience with one, it was stewed. *Foie gras* is not made locally.

Goosefoot (*epazote*) This dried-leaf potent herb is quite common in Mexico but also appears in very small cellophane packets from California to Panama. The flat sharp pointed leaves are sometimes added to bean dishes to decrease gas. They are a little bitter.

Grapefruit (*toronja*) Yellow, red and thick skinned pommelo are all common in Costa Rica.

Green sauce (*salsa verde*) The green color comes from parsley, cilantro or basil puréed in oil with ground nuts like pesto. The Tico version doesn't often contain basil, which is thought of as a medicinal rather than a flavoring agent. It usually has cilantro, garlic, capers, sieved egg yolks and is poured over fish fillets.

Griddled (*a la plancha*) I have heard that the origin of this term derives from cooking on a wooden plank over coals. Now it means seared on a solid metal grill, or griddle.

Grilled (*a la parilla*) Enormous Argentine style fire pits with rotisseries or parallel bars down to Weber Kettles and small hibachis all coexist under this rubric. When a restaurant sign out front advertises "*a la parilla*," it usually signifies Argentinean steak house. Less often, it refers to barbequed chicken.

Guacamole *Guacamole* is mashed avocado seasoned with lime juice, cilantro, salt and pepper. In Costa Rica, diced sweet red pepper, onion or tomato may be added. It is used as an appetizer with chips, sauce, condiment or side dish.

Guaro *Guaro* is a colorless, cheap, potent, white alcoholic drink consumed mostly by local weekend revelers, in exotic combinations by imaginative bartenders and from hip bottles by impoverished alcoholics.

Guava (*guayaba*) See chapter #4 for details of this tropical fruit.

Guinea fowl (*guineas*) These beautiful birds live wild in the mountains of Costa Rica. Domesticated, they mix easily with chickens and rid the yard and henhouse of ticks. Their eggshells are lighter colored and more asymmetrical than chicken eggs. Unlike chickens, the female is the noisy one, honking like a goose with a kazoo. They are larger than chickens, smaller than geese and are much tougher than either when cooked. They are often stewed or simmered for about an hour in a pressure cooker.

Guinea pig (*cuy*) In the highlands of Ecuador and Peru or in South American restaurants in Costa Rica, gutted guinea pigs, divested of their fur, are deep fried to a crispy golden brown and served intact, teeth and all, on a platter. Don't let the kids see their pets' siblings on your plate. They taste much better than they sound. If you visit Odavalo Market in the mountains above Cusco, locals will direct you to neighboring villages where *cuy* are raised and eaten.

Guineo *Guineos* are green plantains used in festive stews like *frito* (see above).

Habanera *Habanera* means "prepared Havana style," as in *picadillo habanero*, a hash of potato, ground beef, onions, garlic and chili peppers. The incendiary Scotch bonnet chili of the Caribbean is called "*habanero*" in Spanish.

Hamburger (*hamburguesa*) *Ticos* alter hamburgers by adding a slice of ham and a swath of mayonnaise to the burger, along with lettuce and tomato. Grilled or raw onions and ketchup are optional. The buns are the standard soft type, some with white sesame seeds.

Hearts of palm (*palmitos*) Tender inner stems of a number of different palm trees are lightly boiled and salted. As

a side dish or in a salad, they have a delicate flavor and mild crunch. The most common source in Costa Rica seems to be the thorny *pejibaye* palm. In Florida, they come from the state tree, the cabbage palm. Their flavor has been likened to artichoke and appearance to white asparagus shafts.

Honey (*miel*) Fresh local honey and an assortment of standard commercial brands are common. Farmers' markets are the best places to find the former. Among the unusual sweets called honey in Costa Rica are white spaghetti squash honey (*miel de chiverre*) and cane sugar honey (*miel de tapa de dulce*). Either may actually be devoid of honey but bear the name because of similar consistency.

Horchata *Horchata* is a cold drink that looks like a milkshake, but is usually dairy free and low fat. The most common variety is made from rice and flavored with cinnamon. Others are made from nuts, usually almonds, grains or starchy root vegetables that are ground, soaked, strained, flavored and chilled.

Huachinango a la Veracruzana Perhaps Mexico's most famous fish dish, Caribbean red snapper is dressed with a sauce named after the coastal city of Vera Cruz. It contains a fine dice of green and yellow peppers, onions and tomatoes seasoned with clove and cinnamon.

Huevos rancheros, ranch style eggs This classic Mexican breakfast dish is now common all over the Americas. It begins with *tortillas*, hot off the grill or skillet. Next come a pair of fried eggs, usually sunny side up. The final component is red sauce – diced tomatoes, chili peppers, onion and garlic. In Costa Rica, the chili peppers are omitted unless you order *huevos rancheros* in a Mexican restaurant and the sauce may be a little soupy.

Ice Cream (*helado*) Vanilla, rum raisin, strawberry, blackberry, tutti frutti, chocolate, peanut and coconut seem to

be the common local flavors. Generally good quality and low prices make ice cream a favorite.

Jerk In Jamaica, and subsequently along the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica, a paste called “jerk” is used as a marinade, to coat meat, poultry or seafood before cooking or as a baste to be applied during cooking. The usual component parts are these: allspice, chili pepper, cinnamon, garlic, green onion, hot sauce, nutmeg, paprika, pepper, salt, thyme and vinegar. Pork and chicken are the most common meats. As you might guess, chili peppers and hot sauce are used more sparingly, if at all, in the Costa Rican version.

Jerky (*charqui, carne seca*) Sticks of dried meat seasoned with spices similar to the antecedent Jamaican mixture are called jerky in the United States. Sun dried salted slices are *carne seco* in Costa Rica.

Jerusalem artichoke, sun choke (*topinambur*) An uncommon visitor to Costa Rican markets, this tuber is much more prevalent in South and North America, farther away from the equator. It grows better in Canada than in Costa Rica.

Jicama Similar in taste and texture to Asian water chestnuts, these pale brown skinned roots with white flesh are members of the morning glory family. See chapter 5 for details.

Kiwi See chapter #4 for details of the fruit of this tropical vine.

Langosta, Langostino These are the Spanish words for lobster and prawn, respectively.

Lard (*manteca*) These days, you have to read labels. Also sold as *manteca* is all vegetable shortening. The leading Costa Rican brand is Numar.

Lasagna Surprisingly popular even outside of Italian restaurants, Tico lasagna may be made with canned tuna, white sauce, sweet red peppers, green peas and mushrooms.

Leek Leeks are seasonal visitors to farmers' markets, but are not a common ingredient in traditional recipes.

Lemon (*limón*) *Limón* is used interchangeably to denote lemon or lime. Limes are much more prevalent. See chapter # 4 for details on both.

Lemongrass Native to Southeast Asia, lemongrass is available at times in La Garita nurseries and grows well in my herb garden. Its mild lemon flavor is a standard in Thai soups and sauces.

Lima bean A large pale kidney shaped bean, it is most frequently sold dry. Known to the Incas and Algonquins long before Columbus, it is ubiquitous in the Western hemisphere.

Liver (*higado*) Beef and pork liver are more popular in Costa Rica than in the US. Preparations are similar, the most common being pan fried with onions.

Long cilantro, (*recao, culantro largo*) Larger than cilantro leaves, arising singly from a long stem, this herb is much less common and a little more peppery than ubiquitous cilantro. The leaves have sawtooth edges. The stems and leaves are used in salads, soups and stews.

Loquat, Japanese medlar (*nispero*) See chapter #4 for details of this tropical fruit.

Lunch (*almuerzo*) Lunch can be anything from a burger to the main meal of the day. Daily specials usually cost between \$3.50 and \$4 for a large plate of meat (beef in sauce, chicken, pork cutlet or fish fillet), salad, cooked plantain or banana, yuca, rice and beans and a fruit drink or bottled soda.

Macadamia nuts Many people have tried and a few have successfully raised orchards of macadamia trees in Costa Rica for a cash crop. Unfortunately, it takes about ten years for the trees to produce. Although they can grow virtually anywhere that coffee grows, most seem to be along the Caribbean slope, north of Turrialba.

Mahi mahi (*dorado*) This Pacific dolphinfish is great to catch and better to eat broiled, grilled, in lime juice as *ceviche*, raw as *sahimi* or sliced paper thin into *carpaccio*.

Manchego Imported *manchego* Spanish sheep cheese is very popular in Costa Rica (and throughout the world). Local facsimiles are not bad, but don't compare to the Spanish imports.

Mandarin orange (*mandarina*) The Mandarin orange or tangerine is quite popular and easy to grow here. It is sweet and juicy when the skin becomes loose, even if the color is partially green.

Mangos (*mangos*) See chapter #4 for details of this queen of tropical fruit.

Marjoram (*mejorana*) Marjoram is a fascinating herb. It belongs to the greater mint family and is a cousin of oregano, but is much milder and sweeter, particularly when grown in warmer climates. It is a great herb in tomato, lamb and vegetable dishes. Marjoram is an ingredient in many premixed poultry and Italian seasoning packets. It is commonly used in head cheese, bologna and liverwurst. In Germany it is called *wurstkraut*, sausage cabbage, because it is part of so many different sausage recipes. Because it is not very strong, its flavor is best preserved if it is added to any dish in the last minutes of cooking. Sweet marjoram tastes like fruity, aromatic thyme. The same herb, grown in colder climates, becomes an annual rather than a perennial, loses its fragrance and becomes bitter.

The sweet dried leaves are available in most Tico supermarkets, but it seldom appears in local recipes.

Maté This tea, made from the leaves of a type of holly, is a caffeine rich beverage most popular in Andean countries, but available in most Central American cities. You are most likely to find it in Costa Rica in Argentinean restaurants. It may appeal to you when a friendly waiter offers you tea in an ornate silver or gold trimmed gourd or cup and a silver straw. Beware. The tea is bitter and the caffeine content may be enough to cause cardiac rhythm problems e.g. rapid heart rate or extra beats.

Melon pear (*pepino dulce*) See chapter #4 for details of this tropical fruit.

Melons (*melones*) See chapter #4 for details of these tropical fruits.

Merengue (*suspiro*) This egg white meringue, seasoned with sugar and the zest of an orange or lime, is probably the primary dessert in Peruvian restaurants. Upscale Costa Rican restaurants often serve it as well. Some places call it by its Australian pseudonym, “Pavlova.”

Milk fudge (*cajeta*) On the counters of every little grocery, you will see pale beige squares wrapped in cellophane. They are fudge made from milk and sugar, flavored with citrus peel and cinnamon. Most of the steak houses and many other restaurants in Costa Rica are owned or run by Argentineans. Be careful not to ask for *cajeta* in such places. It is slang for “vagina” in Argentina.

Mineral water (*agua mineral*) Tap water is safe to drink but many French and Italian mineral water brands are available.

Mint (*menta*) Mint is a common Tico herb. It grows rapidly and aggressively in herb gardens and existed in many varieties in pre-Columbian Inca and Mayan cuisine. *Menta* is peppermint. *Yerba buena* is spearmint.

Mojo *Mojos* are sauces and marinades that vary from country to country. Most are citrus vinaigrettes with imaginative spice combinations, garlic and tropical fruit purées. They are major players in *Nuevo Latino* cuisine, particularly in the hands of Cuban chefs. *Tico mojos* are usually lime juice, garlic, cumin, cilantro, salt and pepper with or without tropical fruit purée such as papaya, pineapple, mango or guava. For marinades in other Latin American countries, to the same ingredients, chefs add Scotch bonnet, *jalapeño* or *habanera* chili peppers.

Mole In Mexico there are entire families of *mole* sauces containing spices, nuts and seeds. Perhaps the most famous also contains unsweetened chocolate – *Mole Poblano*, a dark rich sauce served on and with chicken and turkey. There are also red and green *moles*. Perhaps Mexico's most famous sauce, this labor intensive multi-ingredient sauce of many herbs and spices, ground seed and nuts and unsweetened chocolate, exists only in Mexican restaurants in Costa Rica.

Mombin (*caimito*) This sweet and delicious plum-like fruit is described in chapter #4.

Morcilla *Morcilla*, a sausage, is uncommon but not unknown in Costa Rica. It is thicker, darker and much more aromatic than other local sausages. Basically it is a pork blood sausage filled with about forty percent rice. The aroma comes from clove, cinnamon and either anis or nutmeg.

Muñeta, frijoles negros molidos *Muñeta* is a mash or purée of black beans. A very common dip with corn chips, see the section on *bocas* in the next chapter.

Mushrooms (*hongos*) The vast majority of mushrooms in supermarkets and farmers' markets are the mundane cultivated white ones. Boletus, chanterelle, oyster and russa mushrooms do grow in Central America, but seldom appear in Tico markets. Keep an eye out for *hongos de maiz*, corn mushrooms. They are actually a paste or purée made from the fungus and the corn kernels it grows on. In Mexico, the paste is called *cuitlacoche*, and is used to fill turnovers or season cream sauces.

Mussels (*mejillones*) A seafood mainstay from Lima to coastal Chile, mussels are a minor player in seafood markets, behind octopus, squid, shrimp and tiny clams.

Napa Cabbage (*mostaza China*) Called Chinese cabbage in Costa Rica, Napa cabbage is used as a fresh salad green, as a cooked green in soups and stews, as a stir fry ingredient with ginger and garlic or as white matchsticks in Sichuan dishes.

Naranjillas, lulos These 'little oranges' are the fruit of spreading shrub, that indeed are orange and round when ripe and taste like tart strawberries. See chapter #4 for more details.

Nopal These fleshy pads of cactus are boiled and sliced. The strips become salad ingredients, more in Mexico, but occasionally in Costa Rica. These are the same cacti that bear prickly pears.

Nougat (*turrón*) Nougat is a sweet made from roasted nuts, honey and sugar. It is a fairly common addition to flan and frozen mousse and is often crumbled over frozen desserts.

Nuevo Latino cuisine Roughly fifteen years ago, Chef Douglas Rodriguez began a culinary revolution. Born in New York of Cuban parents and trained at Johnson and Whales Culinary Institute, he introduced bold fusions of Caribbean, Central American, South American and Mexican tropical fruits,

marinades, sauces and spices in Miami. His trainees, later dubbed the “mango gang,” dispersed the new style throughout North America. You need only consider the successes of his and their restaurants Chicana, Pipa, Calle Ocho and Sol in New York; Alma de Cuba and Pasión in Philadelphia; Mas, Cuatro and National 27 in Chicago; Ceiba in Washington, D.C. and Limon and Destino in San Francisco to appreciate their expanding appeal to gourmands.

Octopus (*pulpo*) *Pulpo* is a common ingredient in all mixed seafood dishes in Costa Rica. It is also mixed with rice, sautéed in garlic butter and shaved into carpaccio.

Okra Uncommon except on the Caribbean coast, this pod is used primarily for its mucilaginous properties in stews, soups or tomato sauces. It may also be battered and deep fried.

Old clothes (*ropa vieja*) *Ropa vieja* literally means “old clothes.” This stew of shredded meat from calf, kid or lamb, green olives, onions, garlic and peppers can be found in Costa Rica on the menus of Cuban restaurants or in the homes of Cuban, Puerto Rican or Venezuelan expats. In some South American countries, *ropa vieja* is a salad of shredded leftover meat and cabbage. There is a Tico version which is an in-the-home meatless soup made with stale shredded pieces of corn tortillas. Tomato, onion, pepper, garlic, cilantro and salt are sautéed in oil and mixed with the tortilla strips which have soaked up enough water to moisten throughout. Milk is added and heated to the simmer. Eggs are cracked open and gently added to the hot chowder so that every bowl gets an egg with firm white and soft yolk.

Onions (*cebollas*) See chapter #5.

Orange (*naranja*) See chapter #4.

Orange pudding (*atol de naranja*) Made from orange juice and pulp, milk, corn starch and sugar, it is sometimes

served in the scooped out skin of the orange halves that sourced the juice and pulp.

Oregano (*oregano*) A common herb in Costa Rican cooking, fresh oregano leaves are often used, even in Tico-Italian restaurants here. In Italy fresh oregano is never used, only the dried crumbled leaves.

Oven (*horno*) Pizza ovens, bakery ovens and outdoor old fashion beehive clay or ceramic ovens are used more frequently, it seems, than modern kitchen ovens, probably because of the tropical climate. Some people even have a separate small out-building for home baking.

Paella There are many versions of *paella*. The dish is Spanish in origin, named after the shallow wide pan with two handles in which its ingredients are cooked. Classic *paella* begins with medium grain rice, saffron, sausage, chicken parts and seafood, usually decorated with strips of red pimento and green peas. In Costa Rica, you can find *paella* in nearly all the Spanish and Peruvian restaurants, although no two are the same.

Palillo In Central America, this yellow coloring agent and mild spice is similar to turmeric, but less costly.

Pancakes (*panqueques*) Go for the local corn pancakes, *chorreados*. They are a little sweet, but delicious. North American pancakes are generally made with simple add-water-mixes and are underwhelming. Maple flavored syrup is quite the bargain here. Another dish worth trying is *panqueques dulce de leche*. These are hot crêpes, spread with slowly cooked sweetened milk until it has a peanut butter consistency. The crêpe is then rolled up like a cigar. You are most likely to find them in fancy B&B's or upscale breakfast buffets.

Pan Bon *Pan bon* is sweet bread, Caribbean style. The recipe includes flour, sugar, cinnamon, vanilla, nutmeg, raisins, baking powder, shortening and crystallized fruit.

Pan de maíz This sweet dense corn bread is honey colored and has the consistency of firm pudding or heavy cheesecake. It is often sold by the slice or kilo in weekend markets.

Papas secas Peruvian dried potatoes have a history that antedates the arrival of the *Conquistadores*. *Chuños*, whole potatoes from the Andes, were frozen outdoors and squeezed free of liquid repeatedly, until they were rock hard and had a shelf life similar to dried beans. Modern freeze dried cooked potato cubes, *papas secas*, can be browned in a skillet and re-hydrated in water before being added to soups, stews and hashes.

Papaya (*papaya*) See chapter #4 for details of this tropical fruit.

Passion fruit (*maracuya, granadilla*) See chapter #4 for details of this tropical fruit.

Patacones, tostones Twice fried coin shaped pieces of plantain come out like thick potato chips. Often served with *ceviche*, seafood, fried foods or dips, they must be salted while very hot or they will be bland.

Pati *Pati* is a spicy Caribbean meat turnover similar to a juicy empanada.

Peach (*melacatón*) See chapter 4 for details of this tropical fruit.

Peanuts (*mani*) Roadside vendors sell large bags of roasted peanuts in the shell. They are also plentiful in markets.

The shelled variety is common as well, with a variety of seasonings.

Pear (*pera*) See chapter 4 for details of this tropical fruit.

Peruvian potato salad (*causa*) In Quechua, the language of Peruvian Andes natives, *causa* means an entire meal. It begins with boiled, peeled cubed potatoes tossed or layered with yellow corn kernels, green and red sweet pepper matchsticks, chopped celery, sliced olives, avocado cubes, cilantro leaves and seafood (shrimp, crabmeat, octopus pieces, sea bass, lobster, etc.) in any combination, dressed with citrus, olive oil, mustard, hot sauce and herbs blended. It is typically served at room temperature or slightly chilled. With contrasting colors, textures and tastes, it truly is an entire meal. You would be hard pressed to find any of the fifteen or so Peruvian restaurants in Costa Rica without *causa* on the menu.

Picadillo, hash The Costa Rican version of hash is predominantly cubed pieces of potato, cooked in a little liquid with ground or diced meat. It is frequently part of *plato del dia*, the daily mixed plate. It looks more like ground turkey chili in Cuba. There are dozens of other *picadillos* of chopped or cubed plantain, papaya, squash, beet leaves, radish, pumpkin, *pejibaye*, *yuca*, *chicasquil* and a host of other starches or vegetables.

Pie (*Pastel*) Savory pies are more popular in Latin America than sweet North American style dessert pies. Turnovers, *empanadas*, are first on any *Tico* hit parade.

Piña Colada Mix coconut cream, pineapple juice and rum. Pour it over ice and garnish it with a piece of tropical fruit.

Pinchos These very small bite-sized *tapas* cost only about thirty cents apiece and consist of no more than a

mouthful serving of potato frittata, tiny *empanada*, cube of Manchego cheese, etc.

Pineapple (*piña*) See chapter # 4 for details of this tropical fruit.

Plantains (*plátanós*) See chapter # 4 for details.

Pinillo This not very common drink is made from corn and cocoa.

Pinto beans These medium sized speckled beans are more widely used in Mexico than in Central America.

Pisco sour This cocktail is probably the national alcoholic mixed drink in both Peru and Chile. It is often on menus of upscale Costa Rican watering holes and occasionally in few restaurant bar lists. The liqueur, *pisco*, is an ancient brandy made from Muscat grapes. The brandy is mixed with lime juice, fine sugar and egg white, chilled and served as is or with additional nutmeg or cinnamon

Plum (*ciruelas*) See chapter #4 for details of this tropical fruit.

Poblano *Poblano* chilis are milder than most and, therefore, occasionally make their way into local food.

Posole, pozole More common in Mexico and Guatemala than in Costa Rica, this rich soup of hominy, pork or chicken, onions and garlic is a weekend or holiday treat. It is usually served with small mounds of diced green chili peppers, cilantro leaves, radishes, lettuce, sliced avocado, crumbled white cheese and/or crispy fried corn chips to be added to the soup at the discretion of the diner.

Pork (*cerdo, lechon, puerco*) My guess is that pork sales outdo beef in Costa Rica. Pork sausage, cold cuts, ham,

chicharrones, chops, ribs, loins and bacon are in every market. Necks, liver, skin, tripe, kidneys and feet can be found in central market butcher shops.

Potato (*papa*) Potatoes are thin skinned, usually yellow inside and firm, similar in texture and taste to Yukon gold. These properties make them perfect for soups, stews, potato salad and hashes (*picadillos*), but not for baking whole. As a side dish, potato is probably fourth fiddle for starch after rice, beans and yuca. Because of unusually high water content, these potatoes can be a challenge for mashing. I suggest that after you boil, drain and skin them, you return them to the heat in a dry pot to remove more moisture, before you add butter and mash them. If you want to add a dairy product, use cream instead of milk, and only sparingly or you will end up with potato paste.

Prestiños Deep fried thin squares of sweetened dough are topped with syrup and eaten as a sweet snack or dessert.

Pudding (*pudin*) Pudding is a common dessert or snack. Rice pudding loaded with sugar and cinnamon is number one. Corn, bread and chocolate puddings follow in popularity.

Pumpkin, green pumpkin, (calabaza) Not like Halloween orange pumpkins, Latin American and Caribbean pumpkins are really varieties of winter squash, many of which have the size and shape of a pumpkin, if not the color. They can be green, yellow, beige, multicolored and striped.

Quesadilla A *quesadilla* is a toasted *tortilla* thin sandwich. First, the *tortilla* is covered with cheese, meat, chicken, beans or a combination. Next, it is topped by another *tortilla* or the original is folded in half and pressed down. Then it is crisped on both sides in a skillet or under a broiler. If two large *tortillas* form the top and bottom, the thin pie is sliced into wedges like a pizza.

Queso *Queso* is the word for cheese of any kind. Locally made fresh white cheese is the hands down country favorite, although American, cheddar, *feta*, *gorgonzola*, *gouda*, *mozzarella*, *palmito* and Swiss are among a host of cheeses made in the Central Valley by *Dos Pinos*, around Monteverde, near Barva or in Turrialba.

Queso blanco This ubiquitous white salty farmers' cheese is sold in blocks. It is fresh white cheese that is a little crumbly and salty. The standard local homemade or mass produced farmers' cheese, it is used in slices with cold cuts or fruits, crumbled on salads soups, inside turnovers or stuffed vegetables or layered in sandwiches and lasagna. Women in their first trimester should avoid it along with feta, camembert, blue and a host of soft white cheeses because of the possibility of getting a type of listeria infection that can cause abortions.

Rabbit (*conejo*) Rabbit can be bought in butcher shops, particularly in larger central markets. It is an uncommon feature on Tico restaurant menus, but not in the homes of Colombian expats, who sauté herb coated pieces in onion and tomato sauce, then add coconut milk to offset the inherent dryness of the tasty meat.

Raisins (*Pasas*) Raisins are common in pastries, stuffing and puddings. Local and imported varieties grace market shelves. There do not seem to be any golden raisins other than California imports.

Recaito This thick green sauce gets its name from one of its ingredients, *recao* (*see below*). It is a purée of onion, garlic, black pepper, sweet pepper and cilantro. *Recaito* is used as a marinade, base for stews and in soup.

Recao *Recao* is a large leaf green herb, more akin in flavor to parsley than cilantro.

Refrescos *Refrescos* are fruit drinks made with juice alone or juice mixed with water, served chilled and/or served over ice.

Relleno It means “stuffed,” as in *chile relleno*, sweet pepper stuffed with cheese, battered and fried or baked.

Ribs (*Costillas*) Small pork ribs are the norm. Large beef ribs can be had in American steak franchises and Argentinean restaurants.

Rice Local rice is long grain and not very starchy. It is a staple mixed with meat, chicken, pork, seafood, fried Chinese style, mixed with beans, in soups and stews, and as sweet creamy pudding.

Ring (*corona*) *Corona* means “crown.” The noun, *corona*, is the name for a ring shaped coffee cake, usually laced with cinnamon and pieces of jellied fruit. As an adjective, it describes anything prepared in the shape of a ring.

Roast (*asado*) Rotisserie roasted chicken over glowing roots from old coffee tree roots, hams and pork loins are the major roasted meats. Of course, there are roast turkeys in expat kitchens on Thanksgiving or Christmas.

Rondon *Rondon* or “rundown” is the Caribbean equivalent of *olla de carne*, a stew of meat and starchy root vegetables more strongly spiced and containing breadfruit.

Rosemary (*romero*) Rosemary grows well in my herb garden and is common in herb markets. Its leaves look like pine needles and the strong flavor is slightly resinous. Since lamb doesn't appeal to native palates and roasted chicken utilizes other more typical herbs, I don't notice the distinctive flavor very often in native dishes. Despite its potency, it is used in white sauces for seafood and inside whole fish before baking, roasting or frying. In a few Lebanese restaurants in San Jose it

makes its mark with lamb. *Foccacia* is frequently sprinkled with rosemary in Italian restaurants.

Roti An émigré from India to Trinidad and Tobago, this flat bread is stuffed like a Mexican burrito.

Russian Salad (*ensalada rusa*) Diced cooked beets tossed with mayonnaise are the basic parts of this common side dish in Tico *sodas*, often as part of the daily special.

Salmon (*salmón*) Imported whole fish, fillets, smoked or canned salmon cost more than local fish, but are easy to find. The bulk of salmon in Costa Rica comes from Chilean waters.

Salmuera More than just salt water, *salmuera* is sea salt which becomes mildly acidic when dissolved in water. In Argentina style steak houses, it is brushed over roasting meats to lessen the fatty taste.

Salpicón This dish is a cold mixed green salad topped with seafood or meat.

Salsa crudo *Salsa crudo* is a sauce made from uncooked ingredients, usually tomato based.

Salsa frita *Salsa frita* is a sauce wherein the components are cooked in hot oil

Salsa oscura *Salsa oscuro* is a dark opaque sauce as opposed to a clear sauce – *salsa claro*, or a white sauce – *salsa blanco*.

Salsa picante Be it a red hot liquid like Tabasco or local equivalent brands (Alfarro, Lizano) or diced red chili peppers and onions in vinegar, *salsa picante* is hot sauce.

Salsa verde See green sauce above.

Salt cod (*bacalao*) You need only read Mark Kurlansky's treatise on the history of cod to realize how important and ubiquitous salt cod has been in the history of the western world. Basque cod fishing forays in North America were probably the first commercial endeavors in the Western Hemisphere. They salted their catch and sun dried the fish on the northern American rocky shores. Cod fish fritters are common in the cuisine along the Caribbean coast. Salt fish, often cod, is partnered with *akee* to make Jamaica's national dish

Sangria Derived from the Spanish word for blood, this drink gets its color from red wine. Add some club soda, diced fresh fruit and ice to the wine, and you have a mildly alcoholic bubbly fruit punch. When you order it in a Mexican restaurant, speak clearly or you may get *sangrita*, a spicy chaser for tequila consisting of lime, tomato and orange juice plus enough Tabasco sauce to tingle your tongue and lips.

Sardines (*sardinas*) Fresh sardines are a treat, but they deteriorate by the end of the day they are caught. If you find them in a morning market as part of the day's fresh catch, have them for lunch pan grilled or pickle them in vinegar for 24 hours as soon as you get them home. To grill them, spray coat or very lightly oil a skillet, crisp them on both sides and enjoy. Flavor them with salt and a little dried thyme before cooking. To pickle them, wash them well and cover with white wine vinegar or Japanese wine vinegar. The following day, pat them dry and dress with cilantro and a little olive oil. Canned sardines are common locally.

Sausage (*salchicha, salchichon*) Local sausages are as bland and mild as British bangers. Even when local varieties are labeled "Italian," "chorizo" or "Polish," they have only a little more flavor.

Scotch bonnet This potent *habanero* chili pepper is the most common type used throughout the Caribbean.

Sesame seeds (*ajonjoli*) White and black sesame seeds are available in upscale markets.

Seville orange (*naranja agria*) See chapter #4 for details of this tropical fruit.

Short ribs (*costillas a la brasa*) From the tail end of the chest wall come these beef ribs with a flat bone, large layer of lean meat and a surface of pure fat. For fat haters, the outer surface can be easily removed, but for flavor and succulence a little should be left behind.

Shredded meat (*carne mechada*) *Mechada* is braised for hours until tender, mixed with its flavored cooking juices, and used to make *burritos*, *empanadas*, *picadillos*, *ropa vieja* (old clothes) and *tacos*.

Shrimp (*camarones*) Shrimp of all sizes are caught, sold and eaten in Costa Rica. Most of the jumbos get exported for profit. The smallest, called “pinkies,” show up in rice dishes and local Chinese food.

Sirloin (*lomo*) Tasty and a little tough, sirloin is a popular local choice, grilled with onions or garlic butter. Tico grass fed beef has an earthier flavor than North American corn fed beef. Because local beef has less fat, it is less “juicy” and, therefore tougher.

Smelts (*pejerreyes*) Smelts are a favorite along the Peruvian and Chilean coast. You can find them on occasion in Costa Rican markets. They average about eight inches long. To prepare them, break the backbone with your thumbnail just above the tail. Give the body a little squeeze between your palms to loosen the innards. Then grab the head between your fore-finger and thumb and pull off the head downwards along the ventral (belly side) surface to the tail, removing the guts along with the head. Snip the fins with scissors. Dredge in three parts wheat flour to one part fine or medium ground corn

meal, salt and fry crispy golden brown to make delicious *pejerreyes arrebosados*. You can prepare sardines, fresh anchovies or any other small fish this way. When they are half the length of smelts (about 4 inches) or less, you may leave the head and insides intact.

Another option is to remove the head and innards as above, layer the smelts in Pyrex dish, salt them lightly, cover them with any white vinegar (my home preference is Japanese rice vinegar) and let them pickle in the fridge for 48 to 72 hours. To serve *pejerreyes en vinagre*, pat them dry, top them with chopped cilantro leaves, splash with a little lime juice and drizzle with a little good quality olive oil.

Sofrito Step one in making a stew throughout the world is to sweat herbs and spices in oil, lard or butter – to make a *sofrito*. In Latin America, garlic, peppers and onions constitute the *sofrito* of choice with or without tomatoes.

Sopa seca Literally, “dry soup,” but how can that be? You probably won’t see it on menus. It refers to leftovers at home, such as rice, beans, pasta or strips of *tortilla*, added to a soupy sauce and boiled until the liquid is absorbed.

Soup (*sopa, caldo*) Soups are described in detail in the next chapter. *Caldo* has two meanings. Generally it refers to clear broth, often prepared from bouillon cubes or powder, but when the name is combined with an ingredient e.g. *caldo de res* or *caldo de pollo*, it is soup with chunks of potato, vegetables and corn on the cob in the soup, in addition to the main ingredient.

Soursop (*guanabana*) See chapter # 4, for details of this tropical fruit.

Stamp and go Caribbean codfish cakes carry this moniker.

Star anis (*anis estrello*) This dark brown star-shaped herb is a mainstay of Chinese cuisine. Its licorice flavor identifies it as one of the spices in Chinese five spice mix. You can find it imported on most spice shelves in Costa Rican markets

Starchy tubers (*arracache, camote, name, ñampi, tiquisque, yuca*) All of these tubers are boiled or baked, used in soups or stews and often found in *olla de carne*, a traditional meat and tuber weekend stew. Many are dried, ground into flour and used for baking or as a thickening agent.

Star Apple (*caimito*) See chapter #4 for details of this tropical fruit.

Star fruit (*carambola*) See chapter # 4 for details of this tropical fruit.

Steamed (*al vapor, sudado*) Rice, *tamales*, seafood, chicken breast and vegetables are frequently steamed.

Stew, ragu (*guiso, cocido, guisado, ajiaco*) Stews seem to be more popular in other parts of Latin America than in Costa Rica. *Olla de carne*, beef and root vegetable stew, is a common weekend dish, but other signature stews are more common in other countries, e.g. *feijoada* (black bean and pork parts) or *vatapa* (coconut meat, yuca flour and palm oil stew) in Brazil, *ajiaca de pollo Bogotano* (Bogotá chicken stew) in Colombia, *ropa vieja* (old clothes shredded beef stew) in Cuba and Puerto Rico, *carbonada de criolla* (beef stew with fruit in it) in Argentina, *carbonada en zapallo* (veal stew with fruit, baked and served in a pumpkin shell) also Argentinean, *birria* (*goat stew*) in Mexico and *cocido de Brasileira*, a hearty one pot stew from Brazil's mountains. Central American corn stew is *guiso de maiz*.

Sticky Rice (*arroz guacho*) Because short grain rice has so much starch, the individual grains stick together. Used to

mop up sauces in Thailand, sticky rice is occasionally employed to make risotto or pudding in Costa Rica.

Strawberries (*fresas*) Smaller, firmer, paler but tastier than North American strawberries, they grow at higher altitudes in Costa Rica.

String beans (*vainicas*) Green string beans that resemble French *haricot* grace the market stalls most months. From September to December, you may find yellow wax beans.

Stuffed or filled (*relleno*) Chili peppers, sweet peppers, cucumbers, squash, pumpkin, beets, zucchini, chicken breast, meatloaf, pork loin and various other butterflied cuts of meat are stuffed and baked *relleno* style.

Stuffed breast of veal or flank steak pocket (*matahambre*) *Hambre* means “hunger” and *mata* is a form of the verb “to kill.” The stuffing is usually well seasoned ground pork or veal mixed with spinach, chopped nuts and diced carrot, onion, celery and sweet pepper. The well sealed meat is usually boiled then roasted. When it is eaten, it kills hunger.

Stuffed sirloin (*lomo relleno*) Similarly stuffed as the entry above (*matahambre*), *lomo relleno* replaces flank steak or veal with sirloin, cuts it thin, pounds it thinner and rolls it up around the stuffing. It is often served cold, sliced, as a party buffet dish.

Sweet potatoes (*camotes* in Costa Rica, *batata* in Colombia, *boniatos* in the Caribbean) Sweet potatoes are a staple throughout Central and South America and the Caribbean. In Central America, the most common variety has purple skin and pale yellow flesh. More common in South America is the kind with rusty red skin and orange flesh.

Sweet potato chips (*camote frito*) Banana chips, yuca chips and sweet potato chips look like thicker white potato chips and are usually more flavorful.

Swiss chard (*acelgas*) Attractive bunches of silvery green Swiss chard appear in the markets periodically. The leaves can be used in salads, cooked like spinach, substituted for *callaloo* in Caribbean cooking or cut up with the stems in *picadillo*, hash. Diced or cross sliced stems go well in soups and stews. A favorite Central American pairing is Swiss chard and garbanzo beans flavored with cumin.

Tacos *Tortilla* sandwiches in North America are often fried and crisp. In Central America, they are usually soft. Fillings include shredded pork, sausage, minced beef, *cabeza* (tongue, cheek and neck meat), beans, cheese, lettuce and tomato, onion, avocado, fish and chicken.

Tamales asados These are baked sweet cornmeal cakes.

Tamales *Tamale* making is a seasonal family affair and art form. Labor intensive, multiple generations of family cooks assemble pork, vegetables and herb fillings in rectangular packets of freshly made corn meal, wrap them in folded plantain leaves and tie them decoratively with reeds or twine. They are traditionally given to neighbors at Christmas, and steamed or simmered before eating. In Colombia and Venezuela, they are called *hallacas* and may contain raisins or olive pieces. In Mexico, they are wrapped in dry corn husks.

Tamarind (*tamarindo*) The pod of this tree has seeds and soft flesh that is both bitter and sweet. The flesh is used to season stews, soups, curries and Worcester sauce. It is sold in markets as dark brown bricks in plastic wrap. . See chapter # 4, the fruit chapter, for more details.

Tangerine (*mandarina*) See chapter # 4, the fruit chapter, for details of this common tropical fruit.

Tapas Originally, small dishes served in bars in Spain quenched the appetites of people whose evening meal often began around 10pm. In time, *tapas* graduated from olives, cheese, ham, omelette slices, small sandwiches, squid, mushrooms, stuffed pimientos and anchovies to become international fusion food on small plates artistically presented and carefully paired with boutique wines.

Tap water (*agua corriente*) Specify *agua corriente* when you want a glass of water in a restaurant or you might get a pricey bottle of imported mineral water. *Con hielo*, with ice, is worth adding to the order, because not all restaurants chill tap water. Costa Rican tap water is safe to drink and ice is fine to use in drinks.

Tarragon (*estragon*) This mildly anis-flavored herb with pretty little yellow flowers grows very well in Costa Rican herb gardens.

Tea (*té*) Black, jasmine and chamomile are the most commonly used teas but hot tea is unusual and ice tea is nearly always sweetened.

Tenderloin (*lomito*) Perhaps the most tender cut of steak available in ordinary markets and restaurants, tenderloin is less tasty than sirloin or marinated cheaper cuts (*churasco*).

Tequila Tequila is the alcoholic drink made from fermented agave juice.

Thyme (*tomillo*) Thyme grows in my herb garden year round and can be found fresh in all the upscale supermarkets. The dried herb is common as well.

Tilapia Originally from Africa, this farm fish is now grown worldwide. In Costa Rica, tilapia appears in *ceviche* and seafood stews, breaded, fried and grilled.

Tiquisque This pink skinned starchy root has no English name that I have found, nor have I ever seen it in North America. It is a frequent ingredient in *picadillo*, a vegetable hash, and in *olla de carne*, a soupy stew of meat and an assortment of root vegetables.

Tiramisu *Tiramisu* is a classic Italian dessert flavored with coffee and almonds. Its base is mascarpone cheese. In even the smallest Tico eateries, if desserts are available, *tiramisu* is usually available along with *tres leches* and *flan*.

Tomatillo Mexico's marvelous green sauces begin with this small green tomato in a husk. Technically a fruit, it appears on occasion in Tico markets. In our cuisine it is seldom used raw.

Tomato Roadside tomatoes are sold in boxes of thirteen for about 80 or 90 cents. They are firmer and tastier than their North American cousins, more like plum tomatoes in taste and texture, less uniform in size, shape and color.

Tongue (*lengua*) Beef tongue is relatively expensive in the meat markets, but is very popular in Tico restaurants and homes. It is typically boiled, sliced and served in a tomato – onion sauce or brown gravy (*lengua en salsa*).

Tortillas *Tortillas* are flat circles of *masa harina*, dough made from cornmeal soaked or cooked in lime water. They are the daily bread of Central America. In Mexico, similar unleavened thin pancakes are more often made from wheat flour than corn, though both types exist in both cultures. They are lightly browned on a dry griddle called a *comal*.

Tostada *Tostadas* are crisp fried *tortillas*, large or small, covered with meat, crumbled cheese, sour cream, mashed beans, *guacamole* or salad in Mexican restaurants. In Tico restaurants, they are the same and are often called

chalupas, but *pan tostada* is toast, and a dip *con tostadas* is a dip that comes with corn chips.

Tortilla soup (*sopa vieja, sopa tortilla*) Very popular in its native Mexico, *Tortilla* soup appears on a number of Tico menus, including the large popular *Rosti Pollo*, *El Fogoncito* and *Huaraches* chains.

Tree tomato (*Tamarillo*) See the fruit chapter, # 4, for details of this tropical fruit.

Tres leches The national cake of Costa Rica, *tres leches*, is a moist white cake made with three kinds of “milk” – whole milk, sweetened condensed milk and evaporated milk frosted with sweetened egg whites. Even if your preference is for low fat and few calories, try at least a bite of someone else’s.

Tripe (*mondongo, menudo* in Mexico, *chinchulines* in Argentina) Costa Rican style tripe is a thick soup, not quite a stew. The tripe is simmered for hours in salted water flavored with carrots, onions, garlic, garbanzos, cilantro, oregano and lime juice until everything is tender. *Chinchulines* are tripe pieces charred on an Argentinean grill.

Trout (*trucha*) Wild (planted years ago) and farm grown trout are fairly common in the mountains.

Tuco When a large piece of beef tenderloin, eye of the round, flank steak, etc. is braised in a hearty tomato sauce, the resultant incredibly rich liquid is called *tuco* and goes great with pasta. If it gets too thick, the addition of a little red wine before re-simmering does the trick.

Tuli machi From neighboring Panama comes this seafood stew made with coconut milk, mashed cooked ripe plantains, collard greens, shrimp, sea bass, crab meat, corn kernels, and garlic.

Tuna (*atún*) Tuna caught on both coasts are processed and canned in Costa Rica and make for components in multiple home recipes including tuna lasagna, tuna empanadas, salads and sandwiches.

Turmeric The yellow powder with a delicate flavor is sold in packets everywhere to add color, but *achiote* seems to be a little more popular as a coloring spice in Latin America.

Turkey (*pavo, guajalote*) Wild turkeys once lived all over North and Central America. Turkey is still a Guatemalan specialty, but it has become uncommon in Costa Rica. Supermarkets carry frozen North American birds for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Turnovers (*empanadas*) *Empanadas* are baked or fried turnovers filled with beans, cheese, potatoes, pork, beef, pumpkin seeds, chicken, in any combination. There are as many variations as there are countries in Latin America. Costa Rican *empanadas* are made from corn flour and usually fried. Argentinean *empanadas* are probably the most juicy and tasty. They are usually made from wheat flour and baked. In Colombia and Venezuela, they are made from precooked corn flour, *masarepa*. When stuffed with brightly colored chopped peppers, onions and tomatoes, they are called “little parrot turnovers” or *empanadas de perico*. Turnovers are *empadas* in Brazil, *patis* in the Caribbean.

Vanilla (*vanilla*) Alone or combined with cinnamon, vanilla flavor is frequent in pastries and puddings. Whole beans come to market on occasion. Supermarkets and small town markets carry real and imitation vanilla liquids.

Vatapa Brazil sends us this thick stew, originally from Africa, made from ground peanuts, yuca flour, coconut meat and palm oil.

Venison (*venado*) Wild and farmed deer exist in small numbers in Costa Rica. Venison is as expensive than lobster or giant prawns in the very few restaurants that carry it.

Water (*agua*) Water is safe, good tasting and healthy all over the country except in a few remote locations, where there tend to be warning signs. New comers and visitors need to remember to actively drink enough to re-hydrate their bodies in any tropical climate.

Watercress (*Berro*) Outdoor markets normally have shade cover. Perhaps it's the tropical heat, but unless watercress is fresh picked, it wilts in a day, even when stored in a glass of water in the refrigerator. When you find it fresh and use it soon, it is great in salads, cold cream soups and on sandwiches.

Watermelon (*sandia*) See the fruit chapter, # 4, for details.

Yuca, manioc, cassava This starchy tuber can be baked, boiled, or fried like potatoes and potato chips or made into flour for making bread, buns or pastries.

Yuca starch (*almidón*) It can thicken gravies, soup or stews in the kitchen like corn starch and works equally well in the laundry room to starch clothes.

Yucca Oh the confusion over the one "C" yuca and the two "C" yucca! In so many books they are used interchangeably, but they are very different. *Yuca* is related to all the other southwestern desert euphorbias including century plants, aloe and the agaves - source of tequila, mescal and pulque, Mexican alcoholic brews. Although seeds, flowers and fruit may be edible, they have nothing in common with the potato-like starchy root with one "C".

Zapallito See the vegetable chapter, # 5, for information about this ridged tubular squash.

Zapote See the fruit chapter, # 4, for details of this tropical fruit.

Zucchini (*calabacín*) I suppose that zucchini grows in gay profusion everywhere in the world except the polar ice caps. The vegetable and a half dozen of its cousins are cheap and plentiful here as well. In the summer squash plethora, it ranks second to *chayote*. See chapter # 5.

Feasting and Foraging in Costa Rica is a comprehensive food guide to restaurants, markets, tropical fruits and vegetables, menu translations, ingredients and non-tropical substitutions, and a number of recipes - a must for visitors, armchair travelers, food lovers, cooks and residents.

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