

Customs and Cuisine of Tanzania

By Linda McElroy, curator

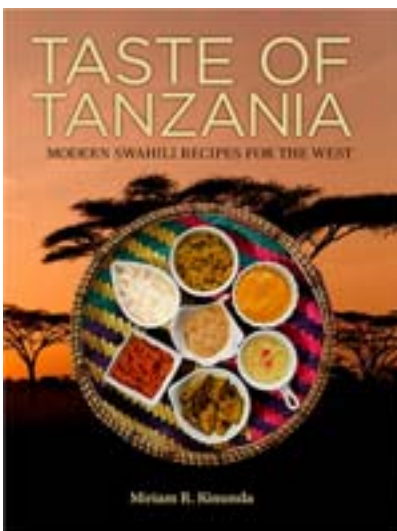
Tanzania is located on the east coast of Africa and is known for its tropical beaches, great lakes, huge game areas and majestic snow-capped Kilimanjaro. The native language spoken there is Swahili. "Hakuna Matata," anyone? Popularized by the Lion King, its English translation means, "no problem," or "don't worry, be happy."

Food throughout much of East Africa is similar, but if a dish contains coconut or bananas you can be sure it is of Tanzanian origin. Ugali, a type of thick cornmeal porridge is the major staple. The Ugali is used as a "spoon" to scoop up other components of the meal. Food is consumed using the right hand, and hands are washed before and after the meal. Your meal is taken seated upon a mat; so loose, comfortable clothing would be appropriate.

Tanzania sits at the crossroads of the spice trade routes from India. You may have heard of the Spice Islands, well that would be the island of Zanzibar and other smaller islands just off the coast of Tanzania. In particular, the islands produce cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon, and black pepper. *Pilau masala* is a unique spice blend that combines the above-mentioned spices, and is used in many rice and stew recipes, giving Tanzanian dishes a distinctive flavor.

Dessert is always a fresh fruit of the region, and honey and coconut are often consumed with fruit, especially with pineapple or mango.

The outdoor market of Dar Es Salaam is quite the experience. Vendors crouch beside their stands selling all manner of fruits and vegetables, chickens, live pigeons, fish and spices. You will also find many mysterious potions for sale, ranging from claims to cure one of snake bite to getting rid of an unwanted lover. OR if the opposite effect is intended, you can buy brightly colored powders which you would sprinkle on your lover's Ugali in order to make them more amorous!



The people are friendly and hospitable, and a guest is shown great honor. It's hard to leave Dar, and when the time comes you say regretfully, "Kwa heri ya kuonana." (Farewell, 'til we meet again.)

Sources: www.africa.upenn.edu and [Taste of Tanzania, cookbook](#)

What's new?

We're introducing a new feature! Our recipe curator, Linda McElroy, will test a recipe each month and share her experience with all. Linda selected a Mango and Coconut Tart, adapted from a traditional Tanzanian recipe. Check out the recipe with Linda's commentary and detailed instructions on our blog. (The recipe will also appear in a search for Tanzanian recipes.)



Greens in Peanut Sauce (Kisamvu)

Serves 4-6

Kisamvu is just another word for cassava leaves, but you can substitute spinach and the taste is a very good approximation. The flavor of *Kisamvu* is slightly nutty (more so if you add the full amount of peanut butter), with a creamy softness, thanks to the addition of coconut milk in the end (the coconut milk hints at the Indian influence that perseveres in Tanzania even today). It would make a great side dish with chicken and rice.

Ingredients

1 red bell pepper, sliced
3 carrots, diced
1 red onion, sliced
1/4 cup vegetable oil
2 bunches spinach, cleaned and sliced very thinly
1/4-1/2 cup natural peanut butter, to taste
1/4 cup coconut milk
salt & pepper
crushed peanuts for garnish

Directions

Heat the oil in a large, wide skillet and fry the pepper, carrot, and onion until softened. Check a couple of carrots and make sure they are tender before you proceed.

Next, stir in the peanut butter. Mix until it coats the veggies evenly, then add the spinach. Cook down the spinach, then stir in the coconut milk, salt, and pepper.

You can continue cooking to dry it out somewhat (this would be more traditional), or serve it wet, as this recipe depicts.

Notes and Instructions

- To finely shred spinach: take several leaves of spinach and roll them up lengthwise into a tube. Now it's easy to thinly slice with a large knife, don't try to use a paring knife, it's too small. You can also use the stems, chopped fine. Just make sure to remove the root end.
- You can freeze any leftover coconut milk in ice cube trays. When frozen pop them out and put into a Ziplock bag. One cube equals 2 tablespoons milk.

Recipe source: <http://globaltableadventure.com/2013/06/07/recipe-greens-with-veggies-peanuts-kisamvu/>



Coconut Chicken with East African Flavors (Ku Ku Paka)

Serves 8-10

Ingredients

1/4 cup oil
2 medium onions, thinly sliced
4 large garlic cloves, minced
3 tablespoons very finely chopped or grated fresh ginger (2 inch piece)
1 tablespoon ground coriander
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 teaspoon chili powder
2 teaspoons salt
1 cup crushed tomatoes

4 pounds bone-in chicken thighs (about 12 thighs), skin removed & trimmed of fat
2 jalapeno peppers finely chopped (seeds and membranes discarded)
1 can unsweetened coconut milk (shake well before opening)
Lemon wedges (to serve on the side)

Toppings (choose your favorites)

½ cup chopped peanuts
½ cup chopped cilantro
½ cup raisins
Sliced bananas browned in a little butter

Directions

Heat oil in a large pot or Dutch oven over medium heat until hot but not smoking. Add onions and cook 5-7 minutes until softened and starting to brown. Add garlic and ginger and stir for 20 seconds. Add dry spices and stir for 20 seconds. Add chopped tomatoes and chicken thighs. Cook, stirring, for 5 minutes to cook spices and flavor the chicken. Add coconut milk and chopped jalapeños. Stir to mix. Bring to a boil, then lower heat, cover, and simmer 30-35 minutes, until chicken is cooked through. Let chicken sit for a few minutes. Excess fat will rise to the surface and you can skim some of it off with a spoon.

Serve in deep bowls with basmati rice, lemon wedges and an assortment of toppings.

Notes and Instructions

This very same dish can be prepared using fish filets. Prepare the base and simmer 20 minutes. Slip fish filets into the pan and nestle into the sauce, and simmer on low heat until done.

Recipe source: <http://www.panningtheglobe.com/2012/12/10/coconut-chicken-with-east-african-flavors/>



Cabbage Salad (Kachumbali)

Serves 4-6

Mirian Kinuda, author of Taste of Tanzania blog says, "This is the one salad most Tanzanian kids know and love. Traditionally raw cabbage is used for this dish. However, I prefer to slightly fry the cabbage in a little olive oil first."

Ingredients

2 Roma tomatoes, cut in ¼" thick slices

1 small head of cabbage, sliced very thin (Napa or savoy would be good choices)

1/2 medium red onion, sliced very thin

1 small handful cilantro leaves

juice of one lemon

1/4 cup olive oil

salt to taste

Directions

Mix all ingredients in a large bowl, garnish with more cilantro.

Notes and Instructions

For a milder flavored onion, soak the slices in cold water with a bit of salt for 15 minutes, rinse and drain, dry well.

Recipe source: [Taste of Tanzania, cookbook](#)



Mango and Coconut Tart (Tested*)
Serves 8

Ingredients for the crust

- 1 1/4 cups roasted macadamia nuts
- 1 1/4 cups sweetened shredded coconut
- 1 cup shelled pistachio nuts
- 3 tablespoons brown sugar
- 2 egg whites

Coconut cream (*can be made five days ahead*)

- 2 1/2 cups whole milk
- 1/2 cup sweetened shredded coconut, toasted
- 2 egg yolks
- 1 whole egg
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons corn starch
- pinch of salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 4 tablespoons chilled butter

Fruit Topping

- 1 large mango, peeled and sliced
- 2 tablespoons jam to glaze the tart, apricot is nice

Directions for the crust

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Combine the macadamia nuts, coconut, pistachios and brown sugar in a food processor and process until the nuts are all finely chopped; transfer to a bowl. Whisk the egg whites with a pinch of salt until they become foamy. Fold the egg whites into the nut mixture and let sit for a few minutes.

Grease a [9" tart pan with removable bottom](#) and add nut mixture to the pan. Press mixture onto the bottom and up the sides. Place tart shell in the oven on a cookie sheet and bake until crust is puffed and beginning to brown, about 20 min. Remove from oven and allow to cool 5 minutes before carefully removing the pan sides. Transfer to wire rack and allow to cool completely.

Directions for the Coconut Cream

In a heavy bottom saucepan heat the milk and the toasted coconut until bubbles form around the edges and milk is steaming. Turn off heat and let the milk steep, covered, for 20 minutes. Strain into a large measuring cup or bowl and throw away the coconut (you should have 1 1/2 cups of milk left).

Place egg yolks, whole egg, sugar, cornstarch and salt into a bowl and whisk. Pour the warm milk into egg mixture, whisking the whole time so eggs and milk blend together. Return this mixture back to the saucepan and set over medium heat. Bring to a boil, whisking all the while. Boil for at least two minutes to cook the cornstarch and ensure a smooth pastry cream. You will see large thick bubbles popping. Remove from heat and stir in vanilla and butter, one tablespoon at a time. If it looks lumpy you can strain it again. Pour into a container and press a piece of plastic wrap on the surface to prevent a skin from forming. Cool, then refrigerate until ready to fill the tart shell.

To assemble the tart, whisk the chilled coconut cream thoroughly to loosen and spread onto the baked and cooled tart shell. Top with mango slices. To glaze the tart warm up a couple of tablespoons of the jam with a bit of water until it is spreading consistency. If the jam is lumpy or has bits of fruit in it, strain, and then brush onto the mango slices.

Recipe adapted from: <http://whatscookinginyourworld.blogspot.com/2012/01/day-177-tanzaniamango-and-lime-curd.html>