



Banana Nut Strudel (Tested)
Serves 8

Bananas feature prominently in desserts in East Africa, and in particular you will often see recipes for banana fritters (zitumbuwa). As delicious as this sounds to me, it's not a very convenient item to bring to a potluck dinner. They must be served hot and fresh out of the oil, making it a time-consuming process, not to mention somewhat dangerous if you've had a glass of wine!

I wondered if I could come up with a baked fritter, when I came across a recipe for bananas baked in phyllo pastry. This sounded like a good compromise between a fried fritter and the baked fritter I was trying to create. It's convenient too, you can bake them ahead of time and rewarm before serving, or you can assemble and freeze them, and bake them right from the freezer. If you can't rewarm them before serving, don't worry. I've had them after they have been out of the oven for several hours and they were still completely delicious.

Ingredients

2 bananas
8 phyllo pastry sheets
8 tablespoons chopped nuts, any kind of nut you like, preferably toasted
8 tablespoons melted butter
Cinnamon sugar to sprinkle

Directions

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

Cut the bananas in half crosswise, and then cut each piece in half lengthwise.

Lay the sheet of phyllo in front of you with the long end facing you. Brush the right half of it with melted butter, sprinkle with a few nuts and cinnamon sugar. Fold the

left half over this side. Now you will end up with the shortest side of the pastry facing you. Brush again with melted butter, a few nuts and cinnamon sugar. Place the banana about 2" from the edge and fold the edge over it, fold in the sides, and continue to roll up.

Place on a baking try with the seam side down, brush again with more melted butter on the bottom to seal the seam and on the top, and sprinkle with cinnamon sugar. Bake at 375 for 20 minutes.

Slice in half on the diagonal, and serve with caramel or chocolate sauce, ice cream, or fresh berries.

Recipe and photo credit: Linda McElroy (inspired by "The Last Course" by Claudia Fleming and Melissa Clark)

Around the World Appetizer Party

Malawi: [Banana Nut Strudel](#)

Bolivia: [Turnovers/Salteñas](#)

Guatemala: [Beet and Cabbage Tostadas](#)

Bhutan: [Cheese Dip/Ema Datshi](#). I recommend serving this dish with sliced baguette to dip into the cheese.

Afghanistan: [Yogurt Marinated Chicken Kebab](#)

Peru: [Turtles/Chocotejas](#)

Cambodia: [Spicy Chicken Wings](#)

Malawi Customs and Cuisine



Located in southeast Africa, Malawi is affectionately known as “The Warm Heart of Africa.” It shares its borders with Zambia, Tanzania and Mozambique. The major topographic feature is Lake Malawi, a freshwater lake that is home to hundreds of species of fish.

Maize is one of Malawi’s most important crops. After harvest, maize is typically ground up into flour, which is then used to make Malawi’s most popular dish, nsima, a thickly-mashed maize porridge dish so relied upon by Malawians that it is not uncommon to see people eating variations of it for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. It is eaten with the hands and used to scoop the side dishes of vegetables and meats, called relishes.

Relish, known locally as ndiwo, is mostly added just for flavoring, with the starch always being the bulk of the meal. In the poorer regions of Malawi, the relish is usually comprised of only vegetables (typically cassava leaves, sweet potato leaves, bean leaves, pumpkin leaves, cabbage, mustard leaves, rape leaves, or kale leaves), but in the wealthier areas, meat is used (goat meat is popular).

Lake Malawi is the third largest lake in Africa and is abundant with fish. The main types of fish are chambo, a large white fish (and an AGE Africa staff favorite!), Usipa, a sardine-like fish and Mpsa, a salmon-like fish. Meat, usually beef and goat, is made in stews and eaten with nsima (another staff favorite!).

For dessert, Malawians may enjoy the local plain doughnut, mandasi, and they frequently wash their meals down with tea. Tea is one of Malawi’s major crops, so it is consumed

regularly. Malawian tea is thought to be some of the best in the world.

Cultural Rituals

Weddings are very important to Malawians, as they bring together families in a tight bond for the rest of the couple's lives. After informing family members and local chiefs of the upcoming nuptials, the families gather at the home of the bride-to-be to meet each other and make the engagement official. Villagers who live near the bride-to-be's family host two large celebrations, one the night before the announcement with plenty of food and drink; and the second on the day of the engagement which includes a ceremonial exchange of chickens. The bride's family receives a cockerel and the groom's family a hen, symbolizing a union between the families.

During the celebration, there are tests of the new family members. An uncle representing the bride's side of the family is presented with a lineup that includes the groom and a few of his friends. The uncle has to show that he knows the man by choosing correctly. However, the groom must pick his own wife-to-be from a line-up of female family members who are dressed in traditional Malawian zitenje (colorful cloth) dresses. He better guess correct or face the jeering and laughter of her aunts and his mother-in-law!

Holidays

The three major national holidays are Independence Day, July 6, Republic Day, July 6, and Constitution Day, May 18. Independence Day celebrates the end of the British colonial status in 1964, Republic Day commemorates the formal Declaration of the Republic in 1966, and Constitution Day celebrates the drafting of the first constitution as a democratic society in 1995. Mother's Day, October 16, is also very important to Malawians, being designated a national holiday.

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