

Customs and Cuisine of Uganda

Perhaps you are wondering if they celebrate Christmas in Uganda. Although things are a bit different there at Christmas time, it is certainly celebrated by those who are Christian and those who are culturally so but do not attend a church.

In Uganda Christmas is called Sekukkulu, and it is celebrated on the 25th of December. The day starts with church services; even people who never go to church attend on this day (hmmm, this sounds familiar!). Everyone loves to get dressed up and show off their new finery. After church services everyone is eager to return home so the cooking and feasting can begin.

Everything stops for Sekukkulu. Hospitals start discharging patients to go home except for those who have serious conditions. Most government bureaucrats take their holiday break from almost the middle of December to the second week in January. All official business grinds to a halt. With the arrival of Sekukkulu, the prices of food and other goods become incredibly high and the crime rate also increases.

In Uganda, there is not so much the giving of presents, but the giving of presence. Most people do not have the financial resources to buy gifts such as toys. Instead, the emphasis is on sharing; food, family and new clothes. Children and parents will get a new set of clothes and sometimes shoes, often from the secondhand market, most likely clothing that was first worn by someone in the west. Gifts of food are ideal offerings from friends and relatives. Specialty items that are not available in Uganda such as cakes, biscuits, and soda are all enthusiastically received.

Chicken plays a central role in the Sekukkulu feasting. Starting in October families will identify chickens for the table and start coddling them to make sure that they are nice and fat for their feast. Families that can't afford chicken at any other time will somehow find a way to purchase chickens for Sekukkulu. But if you are a goat you are equally in danger of finding your way to the Christmas table. Goats breed quickly, producing two kids a year, and give lots of milk and manure. For a festive occasion such as Christmas one may be slaughtered for a special meal.

The excitement builds throughout the day, as more and more food gifts arrive from family to supplement the meals already planned. One of the most important dishes prepared for Sekukkulu is "Luwombo." Chicken is smoked, well seasoned and then wrapped in a smoked banana leaf and steamed together with matoke or green bananas. The steaming bananas give the chicken a scrumptious taste. In addition to the Luwombo, different types of meats are cooked as well. You might find goat, pork, and even roast beef in wealthy families, along with sweet potatoes, cassava, and rice. Everybody eats and drinks until they cannot eat any more.

After the feast it is time for storytelling, games, dancing, and singing while drinking soda and snacking on cakes. The celebrating goes on to the wee hours of the morning. Everything is closed on the 26th of December.

In Uganda, just as all over the world, there is a celebratory spirit for family and friends to come together, eat, drink, and rejoice in the fact that they have each other.



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Christmas Traditions in East Africa

Rural houses in East Africa get a bit squashed if relatives come round on Christmas Day - so lunch is often eaten outside.

In Rwanda, people do not decorate Christmas trees, but everyone puts huge banana leaves on the house door to mark the festive season.

Many Christmas presents are homemade toys, like plastic bag footballs, made from bags, banana stems and string.

Relatives often travel long distances to be together and buy special clothes to wear on Christmas Day.

Mango trees are decorated with colorful bells and candles for Christmas. Mangoes also make a tasty treat for Christmas Dinner.

Sources:

[Christmas Uganda Story](#)

[Christmas African Style](#)

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Recipes



Pineapple Rum Smoothie (Pineapple Buganda)

Serves 4

This is a traditional Ugandan recipe for a classic cocktail smoothie made from a blend of pineapple, brown sugar, milk, light rum and ice.

Ingredients

6 ounces fresh pineapple, chopped (save a few pieces for garnish)
¼ cup brown sugar
½ cup 2 percent milk, (or coconut milk, recommended)
½ cup light rum
1 tsp vanilla extract
handful ice cubes
pineapple wedges for garnish

Directions

Combine all ingredients through ice cubes in a blender and process until smooth. Top with pineapple wedge.

Notes: Although the recipe calls for 2 percent milk I personally think it would taste better using canned coconut milk, the unsweetened variety should be fine in this case.

Recipe credit – Celtnet.org

Photo credit – Jessikerakes.com



Ugandan Chicken in Banana Leaves (Luwombo) (tested)

Serves 8

Chicken seems to be the traditional meat to use in this dish, but pork or beef are fine as well. When I made the dish I used pork because that's what I had. If you use chicken, boneless skinless thighs would be preferred as it can withstand longer cooking time.

Ingredients

2 pounds chicken, pork or beef (cut in small pieces)
1 cup unsalted peanuts, finely ground
2 onions, halved, and then sliced crosswise
1 cup sliced mushrooms
4 tomatoes, chopped

1 chicken stock cube
Salt and black pepper, to taste
Banana leaves (parchment or tinfoil will work)
1 smoked fish (optional)
3 plantains, peeled and cut into 1" chunks

Directions

Brown the meat in an oiled frying pan, do this in batches so as not to crown the pan, then remove and set aside. Add a couple tablespoons of oil to the same pan, then add the onion slices and saute for 10 to 15 minutes to lightly caramelize them. Add the mushrooms and cook for 5 more minutes. Next add the tomatoes, chicken stock cube, salt, pepper, peanuts, and the (optional) smoked fish. If necessary, add a little water to form a smooth sauce. Cook to heat through and thicken up just a bit.

Plunge the banana leaves in boiling water to soften them, remove the mid-rib and cut the ends off the leaves to form rectangles. If you buy packed banana leaves, most brands (like Goya) have already removed the mid rib for you. Place a portion of meat and some of the tomato-onion sauce (and smoked meat or fish, if desired) in the center of a leaf. Then add two or three chunks of peeled plantain.

Fold the leaf from the sides then wrap from the ends to make at least a double layer. Tie into a package with oven-proof string then repeat until all the mixture is used up.

Place a wire rack or trivet in the bottom of a large casserole dish then add water to the bottom of the trivet. Place the meat packages on top of the trivet and cover the dish. Bring to a boil and steam the packets for an hour. Remove the packets from the pot and serve.

Note: To see a pictorial on how to make this dish and tie up the packets, visit [What's Cooking in Your World](#) – recipe and photo credit.



Ugandan Banana Bread Pudding Serves 8

Ingredients

6 large, ripe, bananas
8 tablespoons butter, divided into two portions, plus extra to grease the pan
4 tablespoons honey, slightly warmed
1 teaspoon cinnamon
½ teaspoon Kosher salt
4 tablespoons brown sugar
2 cups whole milk

4 eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 tablespoon sugar
6 ounces dried apricot, chopped, soaked in hot water for 10 minutes
4 cups bread, crusts removed, cubed

Directions

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Peel and cut each banana in half lengthwise, then into smaller pieces. Place the pieces of banana on an aluminum foil-lined jelly roll pan. In a small bowl, combine honey, 4 tablespoons melted butter, cinnamon, and kosher salt, drizzle over the bananas. Roast bananas for 12 minutes and set aside. Turn the oven down to 350 degrees.

Generously butter a soufflé dish. Melt the remaining 4 tablespoons of butter and the brown sugar in the soufflé dish. You can place the dish in the hot oven in order to accomplish this task. Remove the dish from the oven and stir to mix well. Place half the roasted bananas on the brown sugar mixture. Toss the cubed bread and remaining roasted bananas, drain and add apricots, then spread into the dish.

Whisk together the milk, eggs, vanilla and sugar until the sugar is dissolved. Slowly pour the milk mixture on top of the contents of the soufflé dish, ensuring that all the bread is covered. Set aside to soak for 25 minutes.

Set the dish in a deep baking tray and pour in boiling water so that it comes halfway up the sides of the soufflé dish. Transfer to an oven pre-heated to 350 degrees and bake for 30 minutes, or until the custard is set and the top of the dish is golden brown in color. Let stand 5 minutes, serve.

Lightly whipped cream, ice cream, or caramel sauce would all be delicious accompaniments.

Recipe source: Contributed by DFW member Alice Krause
