

Bolivia September 2016



Bolivian Style Arroz a la Valenciana (Tested)
Serves 6 to 8

This rice preparation can be served as a side dish, or top it with a fried egg for a complete meal. If you choose to use beef, make sure to select a tender cut, not stewing beef, which takes longer to cook. If you are using chicken, thighs are a good choice because the dark meat stays moist. If you use ham, ask the guys at the meat counter for a ½-inch thick slice, which you can then dice up. (I used ham because it was easy, and I was very happy with the outcome.) Or, of course, for a vegetarian dish, simply omit the meat. Whatever ingredients you use, be sure to dice the meat and vegetables small enough so that they will be done at the same time the rice is finished cooking.

I've adapted this recipe from a video that is posted on the site "Bolivian Cookbook," and I've streamlined the process so that it can be made in one skillet. If you don't have a large enough skillet to accommodate all the ingredients together, use a 4-quart sauce pan to finish the dish.

Ingredients

2 cups long-grain white rice
2 tbsp. oil, divided
3 red potatoes, diced (about 1 ½ cups or 8 oz.)
1 small red onion, diced (about 1 cup or 4 oz.)
1 large carrot, diced (about 1 cup or 4 oz.)
2 garlic cloves, chopped
2 plum tomatoes, peeled and diced (about 1½ cups or 4 oz.)
1 tsp. oregano
½ lb. meat, diced into small cubes (beef, chicken, or ham)
Salt
Pepper
½ cup frozen peas

Directions

Rinse the rice until the water runs clear; drain well. Line a sheet pan with paper towels and spread the rice on the paper towels to dry.

When you are ready to begin, heat a large non-stick frying pan over medium-high heat and pour the rice into the dry (no oil) frying pan. Discard the paper towels. Stir the rice for a couple of minutes until the grains start to take on a toasty color. Transfer the rice from the frying pan to the same sheet pan you just used to dry the rice.

Using the same frying pan, heat 1 tablespoon of oil until it shimmers, then add the potatoes, onion, carrot, and garlic. Sauté this mixture for about 3 minutes, or until the onion becomes translucent. Add the tomatoes and the oregano. Sauté for another minute or two, until the tomatoes start to release some of their juices. Pour this vegetable mixture on top of the rice on the sheet pan.

Return the frying pan to the stove over medium-high heat and add the remaining tablespoon of oil. When your pan is sufficiently hot, add the cubes of meat. Let the meat sear on one side to develop some color, then stir the pieces around to finish browning, but do not cook through.

Add 4 cups of hot water to the pan with the meat and bring to a boil. Add the vegetables and rice, season with salt and pepper, and top with frozen peas. Cover with a lid and simmer for 20 minutes. Turn off the heat, remove the lid, and fluff the rice with a fork. Pop the lid back on for another 10 minutes to finish steaming the rice.

In Bolivia this dish would be topped with a fried egg.

Recipe adapted from: <https://boliviancookbook.wordpress.com>

Photo credit: Linda McElroy



Pique Macho (Tested)
Serves 4 to 6

This dish is as fun as it is deliciously interesting. The parts of the dish can be separately prepared and presented buffet style in separate platters, bowls, and serving containers, and your guests can build their own platefuls of their favorite combinations and garnishes. Generally, a bottom layer of potatoes is first topped with a scoop of the meat topping, ideally with a spoonful of the meat juices included. A layer of salad is then added, and on top of the salad, the garnishes are applied, including ketchup and mayonnaise, which really help to bring the whole mess together, and the all-important hot sauce.

For the meat ingredient, any tender lean beef will do. I used sirloin steak tips from Trader Joe's and they were perfect. Although the hotdogs I used were great in this dish, you could class things up a bit by substituting sausage links. Use beer as the liquid in the meat topping if you would enjoy drinking the rest of it while you finish preparing your ingredients, or you can just add water if you'd rather not have leftover beer (never a problem in my house). For the French fries, you can substitute Tater Tots, which stay crispy longer than French fries, or new potatoes, quartered and roasted in the oven with just a little olive oil, salt, and pepper. My choice of beverage here would be an icy cold beer, served in chilled glasses.

Meat Topping

Ingredients

4 uncured beef hotdogs, sliced on a sharp diagonal (about 8 oz.)

1 lb. beef, such as sirloin steak, cut into bite-size cubes

1 clove garlic, smashed

Salt

Pepper

Pinch of ground cumin

½ cup beer or water

Directions

Heat a large non-stick frying pan over medium heat. When hot, add the hotdog slices and brown on one side. You should not need to add oil as the hotdogs will release some fat. Turn and brown the other side, remove from the pan, and set aside.

There should be a film of oil left in the pan, but if not add a drizzle of oil to the pan and heat. Add the beef cubes and the garlic, browning the meat on one side. Turn and brown the other side. Season aggressively with salt and pepper, and add the ground cumin. This browning process should take anywhere from 4 to 5 minutes, depending on the level of heat.

Stir the hotdogs back into the pan. Add the beer. Reduce the liquid over the heat for just a minute; you will want some juices left in the pan to keep everything moist. Pour the meat and the juices into a serving bowl.

Salad

Ingredients

1 large tomato, sliced in thin wedges, or 1 cup cherry tomato halves

1 small red onion, sliced very thin (3.5 oz. or 1 cup)

½ of a large red or green pepper, sliced very thin (about 3 oz.)

1 tbsp. cider vinegar
1 tbsp. vegetable oil
Salt

Directions

Mix the tomato, onion, and peppers with the vinegar and oil; add salt to taste. Place in a separate serving bowl.

Potatoes

1 (24-oz.) bag of frozen French fries
Bake according to the directions on the bag. Slide onto a platter to serve.

Garnishes

Hard-boiled eggs, cut into wedges
1 jalapeno pepper, sliced very thinly in rounds (optional)
Ketchup
Mayonnaise
Hot Sauce
Place each garnish in separate container for serving

Serve ingredients separately and ask guests to serve themselves.

Recipe adapted from: <https://boliviancookbook.wordpress.com/main-dishes/pique-a-lo-macho-pique-macho/>

Photo credit: Linda McElroy



Sopa de Pan (Tested)
Serves 6 to 9

“Oh wow,” my tastebuds sighed, after I had my first bite of this. “Bread soup” is the literal translation, but I think of this as a cross between a bread pudding and pizza. It is easy to make, and vegetarian. I highly recommend this recipe.

In Bolivia, the type of bread used for this dish is Pan de Arani. Ciabatta is a good substitute and works well because the crust is soft and the loaf is relatively flat. I used a loaf of Trader Joe’s half-baked ciabatta, cut into 12 slices. You could also use a baguette with a soft crust, sliced on a sharp diagonal. And either jack cheese or mozzarella cheese will work here. You could also try halloumi cheese, which doesn’t really melt and is more like the cheese they would use in Bolivia.

I think you could assemble most of this dish the night before and bake it the following day, although I haven’t tested that method. If you do, I recommend pouring the remaining milk over the bread just before baking so that the bread doesn’t become too soggy. I used a combination of 1% milk and half-and-half; if you use only low-fat milk you may end up with a watery dish. Use an 8 or 9-inch square baking pan to bake this dish. If your pan does not have a non-stick coating, you may want to grease it a bit first.

Ingredients

1 tbsp. vegetable oil
1 medium red onion, sliced thinly (about 8 oz. or 2 cups)
2 Roma tomatoes, sliced in julienne strips (about 8 oz. or 2 cups)
1 large green pepper, sliced thinly (about 8 oz or 2 cups)
1 tsp. salt, divided
Black pepper, freshly ground
2 cups milk
1 (8 oz.) loaf of ciabatta bread, sliced thickly (¾-inch thick slices)
½ lb. jack cheese, sliced into 12 thick slices

Directions

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Heat the oil in a large frying pan. Cook the onion in the oil for 2 minutes, then add tomatoes and peppers and cook for 5 to 8 minutes. Add ½ teaspoon of salt and a few grinds of black pepper. If the mixture seems dry, add a splash of water and cover with a lid to create some additional moisture. The onion should be soft, the peppers should still be slightly crisp, and the tomato will be mostly dissolved. Set mixture aside to cool a bit.

Pour the milk into a bowl and dissolve the remaining ½ teaspoon of salt in the milk. Dip six bread slices into the milk and lay them, cut side facing up, into the baking pan. Layer with half of the vegetables and half of the cheese. Repeat the layering with soaked bread, then the remaining vegetables and cheese. Pour the remaining milk on top.

Bake until the cheese starts to become golden, 25 to 30 minutes. Let the dish rest about 15 minutes before serving. This allows time to cool and for any remaining milk to soak in.

Recipe adapted from: <https://boliviancookbook.wordpress.com/main-dishes/sopa-de-pan/>

Photo credit: Linda McElroy



Baked Milk Custard (Leche Asada)

Serves 6 to 8

Nothing could be easier than this dessert. It is similar to flan, but without the fuss of caramelizing sugar. You don't even have to heat up the milk. Just mix all of the ingredients together and bake. While the picture shows the top nice and brown, you may not be able to achieve quite the same result in your oven. No matter, it will be delicious either way.

Ingredients

5 eggs
3/4 cup sugar
2 cups whole milk (don't use low-fat milk)
1 tsp. vanilla extract
Cinnamon

Directions

Preheat oven to 350. In a large bowl whisk the eggs until well combined and creamy. Gradually add the sugar and continue whisking until the sugar is completely dissolved, then pour in the milk and keep whisking. Stir in the vanilla extract. Pour through a mesh strainer to remove any bits of stringy egg white.

Pour the mixture into six to eight oven-proof ramekins, or you can bake this in one large baking dish, about 1½ quart size. Place the ramekins into an oven-proof baking pan. Place the pan into the oven and pour boiling water into the pan until the water reaches halfway up the ramekins.

Bake for 25 to 35 minutes, depending on the size of your ramekins, or 60 minutes for one large baking dish. To check if the custard is baked properly, give one of the ramekins a gentle shake. The custard should appear mostly set on the edges, with just a bit of quiver in the middle. Pierce one carefully with a wooden toothpick. If the skewer stays clean, the custard is ready. Remove

from oven and water bath and let cool completely. Serve chilled with a sprinkle of cinnamon on the top.

Recipe slightly adapted and photo credit: <http://www.limaeasy.com/peruvian-food-guide/typical-desserts/leche-asada>



Customs and Cuisine: Bolivia

Favorite foods

Sopa de Mani (peanut soup)

Sopa de Mani is a deliciously satisfying soup that is typical of Cochabamba, Bolivia. This soup is typically based in a rich beef or chicken broth that is carefully mixed with pureed peanuts to create a decadently creamy texture. Diced potatoes and pasta give the dish its body. This soup is finished with sautéed vegetables and a vibrant combination of cumin and ahi, a local chili pepper. For some extra oomph, salty fried potatoes are sprinkled on top.

Salteñas

Salteñas are an all-day favorite in Cochabamba, Bolivia. These delicious variations on the empanada are stuffed with a mix of vegetables, a stew like broth, and seasoned beef, chicken, pork or soy. They come in two varieties: sweet or spicy. Coca-Cola is a must to wash these down.

Api con Pastel

Api is a lip-puckering breakfast drink made from purple and yellow hominy corn, anise seeds, clove and lots of sugar! *Pastel* is deep fried sweet dough empanada filled with salty *Menonita* cheese—a favorite in Bolivia. The mouthwatering combination of *Api* with the salty bang of *Menonita* cheese is the cornerstone of Cochabamba-style breakfast.

Pique Macho (See this month's Proven Platter for a recipe!)

Bolivians consider this dish the world's greatest expression of meat and potatoes. Pique Macho is a sultry combination of perfectly seasoned beef cubes, sausages and sliced hot dogs served over a bed of crispy potato fries and finished with julienned bell peppers and locotos, a fiery hot chili known to make people a little crazy! This dish is always served in heaping portions and shared among friends and family.

Cultural Rituals, Festivals and Celebration

K'oa – Offering to Pachamama (Mother Earth)

In Bolivian Andean culture, this traditional practice is an act of reciprocity to Mother Earth (Pachamama) for her blessings and protection. Celebrants burn aromatic leaves, fragrant herbs, scented paper, decorated incense squares (typically myrrh and frankincense), decorations and candies over a bed of smoldering coals. Some celebrants also include a llama fetus, an offering of appreciation for Mother Earth's abundance. The K'oa is often used to bless new homes, cars, businesses, construction projects, and much more. On the first Friday of every month, the pace of life slows as celebrants consecrate the K'oa with prayers and songs of thanksgiving. As sundown approaches the streets are filled with the K'oa's wonderfully sweet scent.

The Festival of Urkupiña

This is Bolivia's largest festival in honor of the Virgin of Urkupiña. Hundreds of thousands of people from all parts of Bolivia descend on Cochabamba each year to honor the Virgin Mary with highly decorated and choreographed traditional dances. The dances last for days and culminate in a final procession to the Shrine of Urkupina. It is believed that the harder participants dance, the more blessings they will receive. A fascinating part of Urkupina is Alacitas, a festival of miniature things, where people buy miniatures of everything they'd like to have during the coming year. They pile these miniatures on the back of a small figure called the Ekeko, a god-like figure who will carry their goods into their futures.

All Saints Day

Four days before Nov. 1, families who have suffered a recent death begin preparing hundreds of breads in the shape of ladders, horses and babies. They also prepare pastries, candies, fruits, cheeses and wines. To complete this assortment, they prepare one special dish, such as spicy chicken or a beef-based pasta dish. The families prepare a banquet at the grave of their loved one and offer prayers to the saints. It is said that the greater the banquet, the more blessings will be showered on the recently departed loved one.

It is believed that the deceased family member returns to the world of the living on Nov. 1 to partake of the table set for them and remains among the living until midnight on Nov. 2. Throughout the day of Nov. 1, many people – especially the homeless – go to the cemetery and offer prayers in exchange for a bread, fruit or glass of wine from the departed's table.

Source: A Breeze of Hope Foundation