



Bhutan

Culture

Bhutan was established some time between 2,000 – 1,500 BCE. It is called “Druk-Yui,” the Land of the Thunder Dragon. Bhutan is located in south central Asia in the eastern Himalayas. It is bordered by China to the north and India to the south, east and west. The ancient capital is Thimphu. Bhutan had little from much of the outside world until the late 1950s. Both India and England controlled Bhutan’s foreign affairs until 2007. The government is a constitutional monarchy with a democratic parliament.

The population is approximately 750,000 – 775,000 people. The main ethnic groups are the Sharchops and the Ngalops, who were the original settlers from Tibet. They practice Buddhism. About 25 percent of the population is from Nepal and their religion is Hindu. The primary language is Dzongkha, a dialect from Tibet.

The rugged, primarily mountainous country has climates that range from the hot, humid southern plains and river valleys on the Indian border, to the moderate wood-producing climate in the mid-Himalayan mountains, to the northern great Himalayan regions with very cold climates and glaciers. The rivers run from north to south and create fertile valleys for cultivation.

Most Bhutanese live in isolated villages in the valleys. Bhutan is famous for the “dzung,” fortified monasteries that are religious, art, and cultural centers.

Chief products are wood products, coal, dolomite and limestone.

Cuisine

Rice is a staple of Bhutanese cuisine. Both white and red rice are grown. Red rice is like brown rice but with a nutty taste. Corn and buckwheat are also cultivated. Wheat is used to make noodles. Vegetables include tomatoes, turnips, onions, greens such as spinach, green beans, hot peppers and radishes. Flavorings are used generously and many of the stews and dishes are spicy and hot. Curry, cardamom, garlic, turmeric and ginger are often used. The cuisine includes meats such as beef, chicken, pork, yak and goat, but many vegetarian dishes are popular with the Buddhists.

Beverages include butter tea, beers from cereal grains and rice wine. Dumplings and noodles are popular snack foods. The food of Bhutan is greatly influenced by Indian and Chinese cuisines.

“Ema datshi” is a national dish. It is a spicy stew with green chili peppers and cow milk cheese. Butter and cheese are made from cows and yaks.

“Momos” are popular dumplings stuffed with meat.

“Paksha Paa” is a pork and spicy red chili dish.

“Jasha Maru” is spicy chicken and tomatoes served with rice.

Sources:

Cambridge World History of Food

World Book Encyclopedia

World Almanac and Book of Facts 2017

every culture.com

foodbycountry.com

Photo credit: Linda McElroy



Bhutanese Buckwheat Noodles with Chile and Scallions (Putu) (Tested)

Serves 4 to 6

Buckwheat has long been a nutritious staple of the mountainous Bumthang region, and one of the specialties made from buckwheat flour is this dish of noodles (putu) and scallions.

I've adapted the original recipe by adding in some vegetables to make this a more complete meal. I used asparagus and snap peas, lightly blanched and then tossed into the final dish. Use whatever you have on hand – green beans, bell peppers, peas or corn would be nice as well.

Ingredients

2 bundles (about 7 oz.) dried buckwheat/soba noodles, cooked according to package directions

¼ cup vegetable oil

½ medium red or yellow onion, thinly sliced, then roughly chopped

1 bunch green onions, thinly sliced

1 fresh green chile, serrano or jalapeno, thinly sliced, seeds removed for less heat

1 tsp. soy sauce

Optional: sliced snap peas, snow peas, asparagus or green beans, blanched

Directions

Heat the vegetable oil in a large skillet. Don't skimp on the oil, as it will be the sauce for the noodles. Add the sliced onions and the chile, sauté until the onion is translucent and turning slightly golden.

Add the green onions and stir for 30 seconds, add the cooked buckwheat noodles, soy sauce, and any optional ingredients that you choose to use. Stir until mixed well, add salt and pepper to taste. Add a splash of water if it seems dry. May be served at room temperature or chilled.

Ingredients for handmade buckwheat noodles

2 cups buckwheat flour

½ cup all purpose flour

3 large eggs

½ tsp. salt

Make as you would make regular pasta dough. Run through a pasta machine on the thin noodle setting.

Recipe contribution and photo credit: Linda McElroy

Recipe adapted from: "Return to the Rivers," by Vikas Khanna



National Dish of Bhutan--Ema Datshi (Tested)

Serves 4 to 6

This apparently is known widely as the “national dish of Bhutan.” “Ema” means chiles, and “Datshi” means cheese. The dish consists of simmered chiles, with melted cheese. Hmmm, kind of a take on our nachos, I think. Yum.

In terms of what kind of cheese to use, the possibilities are up to you. I’ve looked at many videos of how to make Ema Datshi, and invariably they use what looks to me like processed American cheese, and typically two to three different kinds of cheese seem to make their way into the pot. I think the most important factor is that you want to use a cheese that melts well and is mild tasting. I used jack cheese, but fontina or brie might be good. You can use cheddar, but don’t use a sharp cheddar as they become rather oily when melted, and definitely don’t use mozzarella, as that tends to be very stringy when it melts.

There is a Bhutanese cheese known as a “churu,” and it is similar in profile to our blue cheese or gorgonzola cheese. It is often found in Ema Datshi, so I included a bit of that as well for a flavor boost. And don’t be afraid of the chile component! You can remove some of the seeds from the chiles for a milder dish. I used a large jalapeno and a large serrano chile, and I removed half the seeds. The resulting dish was pleasantly spicy, but nothing to be afraid of.

It seems that Ema Datshi is eaten as is, straight off the plate. Nowhere did I see any recommendations on how to eat it or what to serve with it. And if you did that you would really enjoy it that way. But to stretch the dish, (which I almost consider a dip), you could top steamed Bhutanese red rice with it, or serve on top of buckwheat noodles, which are also used in another recipe that I’ve posted this month.

I also recommend taking a look at this very short video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gGUe2Msbhmw>, (it's just over two minutes), to get a good idea of how everything should look. I did vary my cooking instructions from what is seen on the video because I found that cooking cheese in the pot for 15 minutes resulted in a lot of cheese sticking to the bottom of the pot. Sad!

Ingredients

1 large roma tomato

2 cloves garlic

1 green bell pepper

1 pasilla chile (optional)

1 large jalapeno pepper

1 large serrano pepper

1 small onion

2 tbsp. butter

4 oz. jack cheese, cut into 1-inch cubes

1 to 2 oz. gorgonzola or other blue cheese

Directions

Slice up all the vegetables into strips. Remove some of the seeds from the chiles for less heat if desired.

Add the vegetables to a saucepan, along with about one-quarter cup of water. Bring to a simmer, and cover and cook over low heat for about 10 minutes, or until the vegetables are cooked.

Add the butter and the cheese cubes by placing on top of the vegetables. Cover the pot and simmer for just a couple more minutes, until the cheese is melted. Remove the lid and stir until combined, pour out onto a platter. Garnish with a few more blue cheese crumbles.

This is delicious eaten right off the platter. Or you can spoon it over Bhutanese red rice, or buckwheat noodles.

Recipe and photo credit: Linda McElroy



Bhutanese Red Rice Pilaf

Bhutanese Red Rice is crunchy, nutty and one of the few rices that will grow in Bhutanese highlands. Thus, it is commonly eaten there. Other rices are also imported from the southern low countries, but red rice is Bhutan's own rice and the mother of many other red rice varieties.

This recipe comes from Laura Kelley, author of the Silk Road Gourmet blog. I have reprinted her recipes as she originally wrote it. She includes perilla seeds in this dish. The perilla is a staple food in many Asian cultures. It's also known as shisho (the leaf) and the seed contains a high concentration of fatty acids—as much as 40-45 percent oil, so you can see that they are highly nutritious. If you can't find perilla seeds, just eliminate them.

She also calls for “finger-hot chiles.” I am not sure what these are, but I would think you could substitute a jalapeno or serrano chile instead.

Ingredients

1 cup uncooked Bhutanese red rice

2 tbsp. butter

1 small to medium onion, minced

3 to 4 finger-hot chiles, minced

1 tbsp. ginger, grated or minced

2 tsp. garlic, minced

Zest of 1 mandarin orange (if unavailable, substitute other orange zest)

1 tsp. salt

½ tsp. Szechuan peppercorns, roasted and ground

1 tsp. perilla seeds, roasted and ground

2 ½ cups water

Directions

Melt the butter in a medium sauté pan. Add onion and sauté 5 minutes or until tender. Add chilies, ginger, garlic, orange zest, salt, pepper and perilla, and stir well. If necessary add a tablespoon or two of water or orange juice to moisten.

Add water and rice and stir well. Heat to a boil and then reduce heat to a high simmer and cook covered for about 30-40 minutes until rice is tender and water is absorbed. Check the rice occasionally, but don't stir too much. When rice is done, let sit covered off the heat for at least 10 minutes.

Recipe contribution from Linda McElroy

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<http://www.silkroadgourmet.com/bhutanese-red-rice/>