



Ugandan Customs and Cuisine

Ugandan cuisine is quite the melting pot, taking culinary influences from the Arabs, British, and especially India. The Indian traders left their mark on the region as they introduced their curries, spice blends, and breads. The food is not typically spicy, but seasoned with tomatoes and onions to create flavorful, pleasing dishes. Their diet is based on a combination of a starch and a “sauce” at each meal. The starch may consist of Ugali (a type of cornmeal paste) or Matooke (mashed plantain), and is always topped with a sauce or stew made of groundnuts (peanuts), vegetables, or meat.

Although Uganda is home to the largest fresh water lake in the world, the lake has been over-fished, and fresh fish is very hard to obtain unless you live near to the source. But smoked fish can be found quite readily and is often added to a dish containing meat or beans to add complexity and depth. Chicken, beef, goat and mutton are all part of the diet, although among the rural poor meat would not be eaten every day. Cattle are considered a sign of wealth, and not consumed in the everyday diet.

Other commonly found foods include bananas, pineapple, beans, cassava, sweet potatoes, cabbage and spinach. Groundnuts are a vital staple and are most often turned into a sauce. Rice is expensive and not typically consumed.

Most people, except a few who live in urban centers, produce their own food and generally eat two meals a day, lunch and supper. Breakfast is often a cup of tea or porridge.

Indian samosas have been completely assimilated into the local cuisine, and in the larger cities you will find vendors selling these snacks by the roadside, as well as the more regional snack of fried grasshoppers! Tea (chai) and coffee (kawa) are popular beverages. Alcoholic beverages are enjoyed as well, with the majority of wine coming from South Africa. The national drink is waragi, a banana gin.

Millet bread is a main staple of food in northern Uganda. It is usually served with a sauce such as peanut, vegetable or mushroom sauce. Malakwang is a traditional dish made from leafy greens (very close to spinach or kale but tangier) and peanuts. Sim-sim (sesame) is another staple. Roasted sesame paste is mixed into stews of beans and greens and served as a side dish. Boo is a very popular dish. Made with boo leaves (cowpeas), chopped okra, simsim, salt and peanuts, it is served with millet or maize bread.

Culture

Dance is an important part of cultural celebrations. There are a number of dances for courtship, warfare and entertainment. Several important rituals meant to cleanse sites and homes. This was especially important in the aftermath of the coming home for children and adults who were abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army, as many had committed atrocities. Nyono tong gweno (translated as "stepping on the egg") served to forgive people who had returned, a tradition of atonement and purification that is still used.

Etiquette

Shaking hands is the normal form of greeting. Casual dress is considered appropriate in the daytime and evening.

Etiquette is important at family meals. When a meal is ready, all the members of the household wash their hands and sit on floor mats.

Visitors and neighbors who drop in are expected to join the family at a meal.

Normally a short prayer is said before the family starts eating.

Leaning on the left hand or stretching one's legs at a meal is a sign of disrespect.

When the meal is finished, everyone in turn gives a compliment to the mother.

Photo credit: Linda McElroy

Sources: <http://www.everyculture.com>
<http://muzunguinkampala.wordpress.com>
African Women Rising



Ugandan Rolex (Rolled Eggs) (Tested)

The Ugandan Rolex is a very popular snack sold by roadside vendors. It can be consumed at all hours of the day, and you will find the carts selling them everywhere. Think egg burrito.

A freshly made chapati is the usual wrapper for the rolex, but we're using flour tortillas instead for ease and convenience. But you are welcome to make your own chapati if you have the time and skill!

The key to success here is a very light hand with the ingredients. Don't try and cram too much into the eggs. And make sure to dice your vegetables very fine so that they will cook in just under a minute. I'm partial to using Savoy cabbage (if you can find it), because I think it is not as firm as regular cabbage. Most recipes don't specify that though, and I'm sure regular green cabbage will work just as well. I also called for Roma tomatoes because they are meatier, and less juicy than regular tomatoes, but again, use whatever is convenient for you.

I am also including a link to an actual street vendor in Uganda preparing a rolex. Watch and learn! <https://vimeo.com/70917638>

Ingredients for one

- 1 (9-inch) flour tortilla
- 2 eggs
- ¼ tsp. kosher salt
- freshly ground black pepper
- Small handful finely sliced Savoy cabbage
- 1 tbsp. finely diced Roma tomato
- 1 tbsp. finely diced red onion
- 1 tbsp. finely diced green bell pepper
- additional tomato or cabbage for garnish
- optional hot sauce

additional salt

Directions

Heat the tortilla in a frying pan, about 45 seconds per side, to soften and warm. Don't overdo it or the tortilla will be crispy, and you want it soft enough to roll. Set aside on a piece of tin foil large enough to roll up the omelet.

(Note: if you're making several rolexes I would heat all the tortillas at once and keep them warm wrapped up in a dish towel.)

For each rolex, mix the eggs in a small bowl with the salt, cabbage, tomato, onion, and bell pepper. Heat up a frying pan, using a non-stick pan is pretty critical to the success of this operation, and I would advise also adding some additional oil to the pan. Pour in the egg mixture and spread out quickly. Let cook on one side until firm enough to flip, about one minute, depending on the heat of your pan. Flip and cook the other side for about a minute, or less.

Place the warmed tortilla on top of the omelet, and then carefully flip the whole thing over one more time so that the tortilla is on the bottom and receives an extra warming. Remove from pan and place on the piece of foil, or parchment paper, or if you were in Uganda, a piece of newspaper!

If you have any additional chopped tomato or cabbage to use up you could add a bit of that as a raw garnish on top of the eggs and sprinkle on another bit of salt. Add of squirt of your favorite hot sauce if desired. Roll up the tortilla and omelet together and then fold the foil or paper around it.

I think that if you put these into a plastic bag that will help them steam and keep warm until ready to serve. These can be cut in half for more moderate servings, or even thirds. To keep them together and easier to manage you should put a toothpick through each piece.

Recipe and photo credit: Linda McElroy