

CUISINE & THE FOOD-SAVVY TRAVELLER IN

SPAIN & LATIN AMERICA:

PART 1

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A Brief History of Food in Spain and Latin America

Food in Spain has been influenced by a number of different peoples over the centuries. Perhaps the greatest early influence came from the Moors (an archaic term used to refer to Arabs, North Africans and other groups), who invaded the Iberian Peninsula in 711. One of their greatest

legacies in cuisine is perhaps their light seasonings such as the quintessential saffron (*azafrán*), rice (*arroz*), both found in paella, as well as the introduction of fruits and nuts into meat and fish dishes such as *conejo con salsa de almendras* (rabbit with almond sauce). A lot of food in Spain and indeed other major

parts of the world has been greatly influenced by ingredients from the Americas. Tomatoes, quinoa and cacao were all brought back from the New World and incorporated into Spanish, and indeed world cuisine. These classic world-famous staples require no examples!



Gazpacho with nuts sprinkled on top - A clear Moorish influence...



Colombian Ajiaco - corn & potatoes from the Americas... cream & garlic from Europe...



chillies from the Americas

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A lot of food in Latin America has experienced a similar evolution. Indigenous people have lived in the Americas for 13,500 years – possibly a lot longer - and foods which they have cultivated and continue to cultivate form the basis for many dishes (indigenous and non-indigenous) in the region. Examples include the corn found in tortillas in Mexico

and Central America, the plantain from the fried snack or accompaniment known as *patacones* or *tostones* found all over the Americas, and of course the humble potato (*papa*) and its million variants found in Peruvian dishes such as ceviche, a dish of raw fish marinated in lemon juice and *papas a la huancaína*, a potato-laden dish with a tasty sauce. Europeans arrived in the Americas from 1492 onwards,

and they influenced a lot of the early forms of Latin American cuisine. For instance, in Mexico, the early European presence contributed a lot of cooking techniques such as frying. The new arrivals also introduced a number of ingredients to the continent, such as the onions found in *ají*, a Colombian hot sauce (as well as in countless other dishes), and various spices such as cumin (*comino*), which can be found in numerous Colombian and Mexican dishes.



Guatemalan food chains can be found all over the Americas

Finally, what summary of the history of Hispanic food would be complete without addressing the influence of contemporary western food on these diets? Fast food has influenced a range of foods in Latin America, from *arroz con coca cola* (rice with Coca Cola!) in Colombia, to the range of large multinational companies such as McDonald's, and

even smaller, local interpretations of typical fast food such as the Guatemalan-formed fried chicken restaurant, *pollo campero*, which can be found all over Latin America.

So there you have it: who could imagine a Spanish paella without the Moor and New World-influenced rice, tomatoes or saffron? Or a Mexican *chilli con carne*

without the indigenous influenced tortillas and the onions and spices of Europe and Africa? And who could imagine a plantain without the oil used to make a delicious *patacón!*



Ceviche from Peru

Next up, traditional foods and customs in ...Spain and Latin America