

Traditional ma`adi

Written by Luwam Brhane



“Eritrea, in some respects, was the way I had dreamed all of Africa might be one fine day. Never in my life had I felt a greater sense of community on a national scale. Nor had I seen a place with such wide-open arms and so generous a heart.”

Julia Stewart - Eccentric Graces

As nodded in the previous quote one of Eritrea’s simple yet beautiful tradition is the awesome capability of hosting our guests. We live among people whom strongly believe that guests should be treated as equal as any family member, to make their stay comfortable and cozy. This tradition has been transmitted from generations to generations and it is indeed a part of our culture that we embrace proudly. One thing that it is a bit frustrating to the young generation is that the elderly don’t think you can be full up and they stuff you with food, there is never an end to it, there is always a dish coming right after another dish. And as you all know as people we can never live without our tasty yet simple dishes. As expected the dishes are made out of the most common vegetables and cereals that are easy to cultivate in our specific type of climate.

In many parts of Eritrea the land is very fertile and produces good crops of cereals, peanuts vegetables and fruits. The selection of vegetables and fruits available on the markets is seasonal. Taff is one of the smallest grains in the world. Approximately 150 grains equal the size of a kernel of wheat. taff is considered to have an excellent amino acid composition and lysine levels. One cup of cooked taff contains 387 milligrams of calcium and it has high concentration in protein as well as fiber: a rich source of boron, copper, phosphorus, zinc. It is the main magical element behind the beautiful taste of injera (traditional pancake). It is also eaten as porridge or used as an ingredient of home-brewed alcoholic drinks.

The two staples are kitcha, which is a very thin, baked unleavened wheat bread or pancake and injera, a sort of spongy pancake made from taff, wheat and/or barley, maize or sorghum. While Injera is eaten with stew, usually called zigni, made from whatever is available (meat or fish, vegetables or a combination of the two). A very spicy dish, we also have the mythical Tsebhi is a meat sauté prepared with lamb or beef meat, fresh tomatoes and hot peppers. When it is served several injera are usually put on a tray and the “tsebhi” is poured into the middle.

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And of course shiro, one of the most consumed dishes. It is a delicious porridge made in many different ways with the injera. And many various dishes like: Aicha and Birsan are famous.

Fish consumption is rather low in Eritrea, as Eritreans are traditionally meat-eaters. Even though the Red Sea is home to more than 1,000 species of fish, including tuna, red snapper, kingfish, sardines and other prime food fish.

There are also large stocks of high-value species, such as lobster, crab, oyster, and shrimp.

Once an Italian colony, Italian dishes are also very popular in Eritrea. Most restaurants serve lasagna, spaghetti and other pasta's. There are various Pizza restaurants in Asmara.

The national beverages are called suwa(made of dagusha), a beer-like alcoholic drink, mies, a fermented honey drink, and Araki, a locally made anise-flavored liquor similar to sambuca.

Most meals are eaten at a low table, shared from a large plate with fellow diners and it is always a pleasure to be surrounded by your loved ones while you are enjoying these exceptional tasting dishes.