

# Spice up your life

Cuisine can tell you a lot about a country's culture, but where do you start? **Laura French** takes us around the world in seven dishes

**I**f food is the key to the heart of a person, it can also be the key to the heart of a place. It can help you connect with locals in a way you might not otherwise, and echo the influences that have made it what it is today. Which is a good excuse to work your way around every dish on the planet.

To whet the appetite, we've compiled a guide to some of the world's best lesser-known dishes, from Jamaican delights to Jordanian delicacies.

## MUSAKHAN, JORDAN

With its smorgasbord of Levantine staples, Jordan has earned itself something of a reputation in the foodie stakes, and for one of its standouts, try musakhan – an aromatic chicken dish flavoured with cinnamon and allspice, topped with caramelised onions. "The chicken is perfectly roasted, the onions are sweet and tender, and the flatbread is bursting with flavour," says Elena Ahmadian, Cyplon Holidays' marketing executive.

For those wanting to make it themselves, suggest a visit to Beit Sitti restaurant in Amman, where guests prepare a four-course meal with three sisters who've kept up a tradition started by their grandmother (from £59 per person, bookable through Cyplon).

## DHOLL PURI, MAURITIUS

Blending French, Indian, Creole and other influences, Mauritian gastronomy is as diverse as it is enticing, with coconut curries, fruity bryanis and fresh seafood

among the stars. But the real highlight is dhol puri, an Indian-style paratha (or pancake-like flatbread) made from yellow split peas and toasted on a tava (griddle). First introduced over a century ago by indentured labourers from eastern India, today it's a popular street food filled with Mauritian specialties such as rougaille – a tomato, garlic and chilli blend – and topped with coriander chutney.

Head to Dewa & Sons restaurant in Port Louis to sample it, or try the Central Flacq Market, where exotic fruits and local delicacies spill out from the stalls.

## MASTELO, GREECE

From hearty moussaka to honey-doused baklava, Greek cuisine is worthy of its crown, with every island showcasing its own specialties.

Among them is Sifnos, whose crowning glory is mastelo, says Dudley der Parthog, Sunvil director for Greece. "It's made of goat or lamb, which is marinated in local red wine and flavoured with dill, then roasted on vine shoots in a special ceramic pot." It's traditionally served at Easter, alongside other island specialties such as revithada, a hearty, slow-baked chickpea stew.

## CHAK-CHAK, RUSSIA

Russian food hasn't always had the best reputation, but that tide is slowly turning – and it's not only about borscht (beetroot soup) and pelmeni ➤

1/2 TEASPOON 2.5 ml



# DESTINATIONS

## FOOD & DRINK | AROUND THE WORLD



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Chak-chak; melktert; feijoada; and ackee and saltfish PICTURES: Shutterstock



(dumplings). In the Tatarstan region, you'll find an array of dishes, from horse-meat sausages (kazylyk) to deep-fried pastries (cheburek), but the most appetising of all are chak-chak – sweet, sticky balls of deep-fried flatbread, soaked in honey and piled high in a mound.

Guests on Intrepid Travel's Russian Real Food Adventure can sample them in a Soviet-style canteen in Tatarstan's capital, Kazan, then try their hand at making them on the 10-day trip from St Petersburg to Moscow (priced from £1,595).

### ACKEE AND SALTFISH, JAMAICA

Think Jamaica, think jerk chicken? The country's national dish is actually ackee and saltfish – salt cod sautéed with onions, peppers, tomatoes, spices and ackee, a buttery, creamy fruit that was first imported from East Africa in the 18th century.

"The dish is served with breadfruit, plantain and dumplings for breakfast or lunch," says Elizabeth Fox, Jamaica Tourist Board regional director. "For one of the best places to try it, suggest The Pelican, which sits on the Hip Strip in Montego Bay and offers an authentic taste of the island."

### MELKTERT, SOUTH AFRICA

It might be the Bs that get the limelight when it comes to South African cuisine – think bunny chow, biltong and bobotie – but give the other letters their due too.

Among the winners on the sweet front is *melktert*, a cream-filled pastry tart made with milk, flour, sugar



### UNUSUAL EATS



**Chocolate con queso, Colombia:** Picture a creamy hot chocolate poured over cubes of cheese until they melt, and you have the perfect Colombian afternoon treat. "It sounds weird, but it works really well!" says Sophie Tomlin, product executive at Latin Routes.

**Figgy duff, Canada:** If the name isn't enough to raise a smile, the taste of this steamed pudding, made with molasses and raisins, should be. The sweet Newfoundland creation is served in slices as part of a traditional Sunday dinner, right next to your veg and turkey.

**Kangaroo, Australia:** You'll find 'roo in all forms Down Under, but for one of the most unusual varieties, try the Australian Heritage Hotel, a historic pub in Sydney, which pairs it with emu on a special Coat of Arms pizza.



and eggs. "It's a favourite among South Africans at teatime, and the perfect sweet treat after a day exploring beautiful Cape Town," says Tammy Ridley, Gold Medal assistant product manager for Africa.

### FEIJOADA, BRAZIL

Whether it's a barbecued meat skewer from a churrascaria or a warm pão de queijo (doughy cheese bread) from a bakery, Brazil has plenty to entertain the palate.

Cream of the crop, though, has to be feijoada, a thick, black, bean stew filled with chorizo and other (more outlandish) cuts of meat. "Typically eaten on Saturdays, this hearty dish originated with African slaves, who used leftovers that were given to them – typically pigs' ears and trotters – to create a stew," says Laura Rendell-Dunn, business development manager for Journey Latin America. "Nowadays, it's eaten all over Brazil and best washed down with a zesty caipirinha." **TW**

## BOOK IT

**Latin Routes** features a tailor-made, 15-day gastronomy itinerary in Colombia from £2,999 per person, including coffee tasting in the Zona Cafetera, a cooking class in Medellín, a food tour on the Caribbean coast and flights. Based on travel in September. [latinroutes.co.uk](http://latinroutes.co.uk)

**Sunvil** offers a week's self-catering at Sifnaika Konakia, Sifnos, from £990 per person, departing September 9 to coincide with the Cycladic Gastronomy Festival (September 10-12) and includes flights and transfers. [sunvil.co.uk](http://sunvil.co.uk)