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January, 2021

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Amalia’s Kitchen
by Chef Amalia Moreno-Damgaard

Holiday Ponche
with a recipe for
Fresh Pineapple Hot Holiday Punch

As a much-cherished and sought-after comforting drink by the young and old during the holiday season, ponche is not only enjoyed during Las Posadas, but also at parties that celebrate anything during this joyous time, be it family gatherings or events up to the New Year. ...more

Here are some of the events we will miss attending in person this year ...more

Traditional Guatemalan Candy

To sweeten their meals, indigenous Maya used honey of various species of bees; the nature of sweets changed radically when the Spaniards introduced sugarcane. ...more
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December brings us to the close of 2020, one of the overall strangest and most difficult years for so many. Let us look forward to 2021 with renewed hope and optimism.

There are many events and celebrations happening in December, but this year, most of the processions and other crowd-gathering cultural activities have been cancelled or toned down considerably. With that in mind, our feature pictorial article, *December, a Retrospective* revisits past years events.

If you would like to get into a festive mood check out Chef/Author Amalia Moreno-Damgaard’s piece *Holiday Ponce* to get an excellent recipe for Fresh Pineapple Hot Holiday Punch. This is a traditional drink that is enjoyed by friends and family not only during Las Posadas, but also throughout the season.

For those with a sweet tooth, we delve into the history of *Traditional Guatemalan Candy* and the evolution of the Spanish candy store, from honey to sugarcane.

Our Photo Contest for this month, “Children of Guatemala” is packed with wonderful submissions throughout the magazine. Lastly, we wish each and every one of you a safe and joyous holiday season and all of the best in the coming New Year!

— John & Terry Kovick Biskovich

Using the interactive features

As you turn a page you’ll notice some of the text/images are briefly highlighted. All you have to do is click or tap on them to enter the world of interactivity, including virtual reality tours. Double-tap on a page to zoom in. Click on a page to view highlighted content.

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3rd Place Judges Vote “Children dressed up to commemorate Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe”
La Antigua by Kerstin Sabene
Popular Vote Co-Winner “Intriga”
San Juan La Laguna, Sololá by Álvaro Mendoza
It was the night before Christmas and all through the casa,
Los niños were tucked away in their camas,
Not a creature was stirring – Caramba! ¿Qué pasa?

Los niños were tucked away in their camas,
Some in long underwear, some in pijamas,
While hanging the stockings with mucho cuidado
In hopes that old Santa would feel obligado
To bring all the children, both Buenos and malos,
A nice batch of dulces and other regalos.

Outside in the yard there arose such a grito
That I jumped to my feet like a frightened cabrito.
I ran to the window and looked out afuera,
And who in the world do you think that it era?
Saint Nick in a sleigh and a big red sombrero
Came dashing along like a crazy bombero.
And pulling his sleigh instead of venados
Were eight little burros approaching volando.

I watched as they came and this quaint little hombre
Was shouting and whistling and calling by nombre:
“Ay Pancho, ay Pepe, ay Cuco, ay Beto, Ay Chato, ay Chopo, Macuco y Nieto!”

Then standing erect with his hands on his pecho
He flew to the top of our very own techo.
With his round little belly like a bowl of jalea,
He struggled to squeeze down our old chimenea,
Then huffing and puffing at last in our sala,
With soot smeared all over his red suit gala,
He filled all the stockings with lovely regalos
For none of the niños had been very malos.

Then chuckling aloud, seeming very contento
He turned like a flash and was gone like the viento.
And I heard him exclaim, and this is verdad,
Merry Christmas to all, and Feliz Navidad!
It was the night before Christmas and all through the casa, Not a creature was stirring – Caramba! ¿Qué pasa?

Some in long underwear, some in pijamas,

In hopes that old Santa would feel obligado
malos, A nice batch of dulces and other regalos.

That I jumped to my feet like a frightened cabrito.
And who in the world do you think that it era?

Came dashing along like a crazy bombero.
Were eight little burros approaching volando.

Was shouting and whistling and calling by nombre:
Hato, ay Chopo, Macuco y Nieto!”

He flew to the top of our very own techo.
He struggled to squeeze down our old chimenea,

With soot smeared all over his red suit gala,
For none of the niños had been very malos.

He turned like a flash and was gone like the viento.
Merry Christmas to all, and Feliz Navidad!
2nd Place Judges Vote
“Jugando entre los pétalos”
La Antigua by Guido De León
December is as the song says, “the most wonderful time of the year” and in Guatemala it almost goes without saying.

Beginning on December 7 the season bursts forth with cultural and religious events taking place all over the country, concluding at midnight on New Year’s Eve.

Here are some of the events we will miss attending in person, but we can certainly enjoy this retrospective.

December 6-15 CIUDAD VIEJA FESTIVAL dedicated to the Patron Saint the Immaculate Conception of Mary. It is a social, cultural and religious event with popular activities, the most important “El Convite” a folkloric parade and of course the Virgin Mary Procesion.

On December 7 “LA QUEMA DEL DIABLO” is the ceremony that banishes all evil spirits and cleanses the way for Christmas celebrations.

LEFT photo by Estuardo González
ABOVE photo by Eduardo Andrino
BELOW photo by William Alvarado
The most representative and traditional activities during the Immaculate Conception Festivities at Ciudad Vieja, some of them date back to the Colonial era.

CIUDAD VIEJA’S FOLKlorIC DANCES

photo by Marco Ortiz
The Immaculate Conception Festivities

at La Antigua Guatemala’s Cathedral, with a beautiful procession on the First Sunday of December.

photo by Davo Solórzano
DÍA DE LA VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE

A religious celebration inherited from México.

A small procession leaves La Merced Church, children dress in típica clothing and there are plenty of fireworks.

photo by Erick Chiroy, from Cofradía Virgen de Guadalupe La Merced Antigua Guatemala
LAS POSADAS

A Christmas tradition that begins on December 15.

For 9 days, a small procession recreates the arrival of the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph to Bethlehem, looking for lodging. It is usually organized by a group of nine families, every night it enters a different house.

The traditional beverage Ponche is served after the prayers.

photo by Fray Fernando Ruiz
EL CONVITE DE SUMPANGO

Takes place on December 23, it is a traditional costume dance parade which it is held to close the year. The parade passes through the streets of Sumpango Sacatepéquez.

Photo by Edvin Quisquinay
Alcor
The 25th on the afternoon, in Antigua, there's the procession of “Virgin de la O” from Escuela de Cristo.

The procession carries the image of a pregnant Virgin Mary eight days before the Birth of Jesus.
NEW YEAR’S EVE

The big celebration begins on the 31st in the afternoon, dances, live music, party atmosphere everywhere.

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We will miss the Festival at Calle del Arco this year, but to be sure, the animals will enjoy a peaceful passage into the New Year.
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“Felicidad” Montañas de Huehuetenango
by Héctor Salaverría
Popular Vote Co-Winner

“Me divierto en La Antigua” La Antigua
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La Antigua Galería de Arte is proud to share with you the latest arrivals by Guatemalan artist Oscar Rios.

For Oscar Rios, this is a collection of sculptures and paintings of texturized characters that reflect the sunsets of refugee communities, peasants wrapped up within each other in search and waiting for a new dawn; that harmonizes with the brotherhoods at daybreak, awaiting with caution and reverence the beginning of their fervorous journey.

The work is expressed in the artist’s already ingrained “terracotta” technique giving it life and color with an acrylic palette of sunsets.

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mala area, we encourage you to visit our website and see his collection online at:

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“Return to innocence”
Santa Cruz Barillas, Huehuetenango
by Cristobalina Reyes
1st Place Judges Vote “Untitled”
by German Velasquez
“I’m a Fireman! / Soy bombero”
Guatemala City by Francisco Hernández
“Aires de Noviembre” Aldea San José Pacul, Sacatepéquez
by José Manuel García Díaz
“Mi fotografo favorito” San Miguel Ixtahuacán, San Marcos by Liss Hernández
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When I think of ponche — it’s like rewinding and playing back a treasured memory.

Ponche, or punch in English, is the quintessential holiday drink in Guatemala and other Latin countries. I must say that some of the best ponches I have ever tasted have been at people’s homes during the Dec. 16-24 posada season (Las Posadas), which recreates Mary and Joseph’s pilgrimage in Bethlehem.

As a much-cherished and sought-after comforting drink by the young and old during the holiday season, ponche is not only enjoyed during Las Posadas, but also at parties that celebrate anything during this joyous time, be it family gatherings or events up to the New Year. The symbolic drink bonds Christian tradition and people in a special way.

The hot fruit drink, which varies by maker, can contain from a few to many ingredients. The base is usually fresh pineapple chunks and
dried fruit bits and a traditional combination of mulling spices that are simmered gently until aromatic. It is a magic drink that fills the air with the spirit of the season.

I make ponche at home in the United States to keep the tradition alive and to share my culture with friends and acquaintances. It is that something that I must have to truly feel the warmth and cheer of the holidays that reconnects me to home. I have perfected my ponche recipe through the years while cooking with punch experts like my sister, Gilda, and every time I make it, it’s a déjà vu moment.

Drink ponche hot with piquete (spiked), although it’s not a requirement. Some Guatemalans add aguardiente (fiery water), a popular and low-cost sugar cane-based alcohol, while others may add white rum. I like to add dark or XO Zacapa Centenario for a gourmet touch. While the drink is traditionally served hot, it certainly tastes delicious cold too. Serve it in clear mugs with a teaspoons. Sip it slowly and eat some of the fruit in between for a great sensorial experience.

Many Guatemalan homes make large batches of ponche to enjoy during the entire holiday season and to entertain relatives and close friends who casually drop by during this time. While ponche de piña (pineapple ponche) is the most popular, ponce de leche (milk punch) is equally delicious alone or spiked and another option.

If you are starting to plan your holiday menu, pair it with ponche de piña. I promise that you will not be disappointed. It is as easy as throwing everything into a Crockpot and waiting until the aroma lures you in — as in Bugs Bunny following a scent of carrots!

¡Feliz Navidad
y Próspero Año Nuevo!

PONCHE DE FRUTAS

Fresh Pineapple and Dried Fruits Hot Holiday Punch
By Chef Amalia Moreno-Damgaard
(AmaliaLLC.com)

The aromas that permeate the kitchen when you’re making ponche de frutas scream “Christmas!” You can make this punch with just pineapple or with other fresh and dried fruits. There’s no more festive and scrumptious drink for entertaining guests or serving with Tamales Navideños (Christmas tama
Ponche, is the quintessential holiday drink in Guatemala and other Latin countries. Some of the best ponches I have ever tasted have been at people’s homes during posada season.
les) during the holidays. It keeps for days in the refrigerator.

Serves 4 to 6 people

Bolsita de Especias (Spice Sachet)
1/2 canela stick (Ceylon cinnamon)
1 star anise
6 allspice berries
6 cloves
6 black peppercorns
3 cups water
2 tablespoons sugar
1 cup finely chopped pineapple
1/4 cup diced apples
1/4 cup diced peaches
1/2 cup sliced dried fruits
2 tablespoons raisins
6 sliced dried pitted prunes

Guatemalan dark rum or Indita (Guatemalan sugarcane aguardiente) or other rum of choice (optional).

Enclose all the spices in a 4 by 4-inch piece of cheesecloth. Tie with kitchen twine, leaving a long string. Tie the string to the handle of a medium saucepan and place the sachet inside the pan.

Add the water and sugar to the pan and bring to a quick boil. Lower the heat, cover and simmer until aromatic (about 10 minutes).

Add all the fresh and dried fruits and simmer for 20 to 30 minutes. Taste and adjust sweetness or spices, if needed.

Serve the punch in mugs with bits of fruit and some rum, if you like.

Amalia’s Note
You can make this punch in a Crockpot. Simply combine all ingredients in the Crockpot and set it on high. When the punch is aromatic, adjust the heat to the lowest setting, and let it sit until you’re ready to serve it. The punch tastes even better on Day 2.

Amalia Moreno-Damgaard is an award-winning bestselling chef author born and raised in Guatemala City currently living in the Twin Cities. She provides individuals and companies with a taste and understanding of Latin cultures through healthy gourmet cuisine education, consulting, bilingual speaking and writing and fun culinary experiences.

Her cookbook “Amalia’s Guatemalan Kitchen-Gourmet Cuisine With A Cultural Flair” has won 9 international awards. AmaliaLLC.com
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playaplana.com
Guatemalans love sweets — for proof, just look at the extensive repertoire of delicious candies, sugary preserves and tempting desserts found throughout the country.

To sweeten their meals, indigenous Maya used honey of various species of bees; the nature of sweets changed radically when the Spaniards introduced sugarcane. A guild of confectioners dates to 1613, reflecting the importance of sweet treats to the European palate.

Archives from a 1683 ordination at the Church of La Merced in La Antigua Guatemala document “yemitas and figs made by the primitive hands of the nuns of the Convent of Santa Clara were served ...”

From the monasteries and convents came incredible dishes and even whole meals, catered for those who wished to offer a banquet.
The Spanish sweet tradition traveled to America along with the religious who came to found the convents. In Guatemala, the Spanish candy store was already delicately merged with the Moorish and French, who found inspiration in the exotic and different fruits that grew here. Guatemalan cuisine evolved from Old Continent culinary techniques imbued with different fruits and tastes.

According to the Guatemalan historian Luis Luján Muñoz, the Guatemalan sweetshop inventory can be classified as follows:

1. Sweets of “colación,” made essentially with sugar. This includes edible figurines, such as those made in Esquipulas.

2. Preserves, made with a mixture of sugar and ground fruit, among them coconut, sweet potato, almond marzipan and pepitoria.

3. Crystallized sweets, consisting of fruits cooked with sugar, such as figs, chilacayotes and all seasonal fruit, dating to the ancient Greeks.

4. Desserts, like doughnuts, nugas, torrejas, muffins, jocotes and mangoes in sweet squash, chickpeas in honey, peaches in honey, chamomiles in jam and stuffed. Many of them related to religious or civic festivities.
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Lock-down or not, life goes on in Unidos para los Animales' shelter! New rescues, as tiny as a week old pup, keep coming in and all this costs money. You can help by buying one of my hand-painted face masks! All profits go directly towards Unidos para los Animales' medical bills, operational costs or sterilization clinics.

The masks cost Q60 each and are for the moment ONLY available at Harmony (accessories store) at 5a Calle Poniente # 4, Antigua Guatemala, only doors away from Central Park. Open from 11 am till 2 pm. (No deliveries, cash only)

These high-quality masks are made of two layers of cotton with a double polypropylene filter and disinfected with Lysol, ready to use. They can be hand-washed at least 7 times.

The masks are hand-painted by Carin Steen and each one is unique.

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