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SALTFISH

Not Just Rice & Peas

Celebrating Windrush in Devon



Saltfish Origin

Saltfish is the Jamaican term for salt cod, which originates from the unforgiving rough seas of Northern Europe and Eastern Canada. The Portuguese, Normans, Breton and English fishermen are noted for adopting this technique of curing fresh fish with salt from the Basque fishermen in Newfoundland in the cod rich Grand Banks in the late 1500s.

How it arrived in the Caribbean

The Trans-Atlantic slave trade between Europe, West Africa and the Americas introduced salted cod fish to the Caribbean islands as inexpensive food to feed growing multitudes of enslaved Africans, who were forced to work on the sugar plantations. It is believed that saltfish arrived in Jamaica about the same time as the ackee, around 1725.



How it's cooked and prepared

Saltfish is soaked overnight in cold water to extract most of the saltiness, then boiled in water (refreshed if necessary to remove excess salt). It's cooked in oil with sliced onion, scallions (spring onions), tomatoes, Scotch bonnet and flaked saltfish, then simmered. The addition of boiled ackee transforms this unlikely mixture into Jamaica's national dish.

Interesting facts

Drying/curing is the oldest known method of preserving food. During the Triangular Slave Trade between West Africa, Britain and its Caribbean colonies in the 18th and 19th centuries, saltfish was a good source of protein for the enslaved Africans, and the curing process increased its shelf life for them to endure the long voyage as well as in the hot, humid climate of the Caribbean.

So as a direct result of the Slave Trade, saltfish became a staple in almost all Caribbean islands and subsequently cuisines in the kitchens and restaurants of Jamaica.



Jamaican breakfasts, with saltfish

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