

Fact Sheet 17

Traditional Eating Patterns

Traditional eating patterns between countries can vary enormously.

Many of these customs and patterns are studied in the field of Nutrition Anthropology. For further readings visit <http://iilt.ilstu.edu/rtdirks/NUTRANTH.html>

The following are examples of eating patterns as have been described by refugee community members.

Afghanistan

Afghan food is largely based on cereals like wheat, maize, barley and rice (which are the nation's chief crops). Many of the Afghan meals are spicy. Food is often eaten with the right hand, using naan as a scoop.

The most common dish is pulao (steamed rice with raisins and carrot). This is usually served with a side dish of meat, vegetables or beans. The most popular variant is qabli pulao, served with lamb. Soup (shorma) is common, as well as kebabs. Scrambled eggs prepared with tomatoes and onions are a common meal. Eating abundantly demonstrates one's enjoyment.

Foods eaten during Celebrations and Holidays

As the vast majority of Afghans practice Islam, Islamic religious days are always observed.

Eid-e-Qorban is the major festival marking the end of the Haj (the pilgrimage to Mecca) and lasts four days. Tea, nuts, sweets and sugared almonds called noql are served to visitors and guests. Often special sweets and pastries are also prepared. Special dishes are made for Nauroz (New Year):

- kulcha Naurozee – a biscuit made with rice flour
- miwa Naurozee – a fruit and nut compote
- Shola-e-shireen or Shola-e-zard – a sweet rice dish

The preferred meat is mutton, but chicken, beef and camel also are consumed. Kebabs, fried crepes filled with leeks, ravioli and noodle soup are also prepared during special occasions.

Burundi

National Specialties:

- All beans are plentiful in supply, especially red kidney beans. Most people eat beans at least once per day
- Rice is served with nearly everything

- Other staple ingredients include plantains, sweet potatoes, cassava, peas and maize
- Many families can only afford to eat meat a few times per month (meat accounts for 2% or less of the average food intake).
- Fish is more common than meats
- People snack on fruit, cane sugar and groundnuts
- Spicy carrots are a side dish of carrots mixed with mustard seeds and chilli peppers
- Traditionally, Burundian's do not cook many sweet meals or serve desserts with meals.

National Drinks:

- Urwarwa is a homemade banana wine drunk during celebrations
- Primus beer is produced in Burundi, as is impeke, a home-brewed beer made from sorghum, and often drunk through straws.

Food Customs at Ceremonial Occasions

- Beer is an important part of social interactions and is consumed at all important occasions (such as marriage negotiations between families).
- A number of food customs revolved around the treatment of cows, which are considered sacred, e.g. milk cannot be heated, boiled or drunk on the same day that peas or peanuts are consumed. When a cow dies, the family eats its meat and then plants its horns in the soil near the house to bring good luck.

Congo

Typical Congolese meals consist of a starchy food with sauce or stew. Cassava is the principle starch, especially in rural areas. Sometimes it is replaced with rice or corn if it is available. These foods are mainly served as a thick stew or porridge, flavoured with a spicy sauce. If they can afford it, people may add meat or fish to the stew.

Wealthier Congolese may eat three times per day, but most households only eat one meal per day. The main meal was traditionally eaten at midday, but is now more commonly eaten in the evening. This is usually made in the one pot to save fuel when cooking. A bowl of cassava or rice and a bowl of stew is placed on the ground or table, the family gathers around and each person takes a handful of the staple and mixes it with some stew to form a ball.

Although food is often left unseasoned, many Congolese cooks spice their foods with pepper. The basic stew is called mwamba (made with chicken, beef, fish or lamb, browned in oil before stewing). It is eaten with rice, fufu (corn flour dough) or chikwange (cassava prepared in banana leaves).

Other common dishes include:

- Pili pili chicken
- Maboke (freshwater fish cooked in leaves)
- Saka Saka (ground cassava leaves cooked with palm oil and peanut paste)
- Fumbwa (vegetable stew)

Bush-meat specialties include smoked monkey, smoked antelope and grilled crocodile. Other traditional foods include pounded sesame or squash seeds, shish kebabs and plantain dough. Caterpillars, grubs, termites and roasted crickets are considered delicacies in some areas.

Congolese enjoy beers such as Skol and Primus as well as homemade brews. Other drinks include palm wine, ginger beer, banana beer, sugar-cane wine, homemade gin and passionfruit juice.

Food Customs at Ceremonial Occasions

It is traditional that villagers are extremely generous and giving to guests and family members. A family's only chicken or goat is often slaughtered for holiday celebrations, funerals, weddings, and to celebrate births. Traditional beer and palm wine is brewed for these special occasions.

Ethiopia

Ethiopian cuisine consists of vegetable and meat side dishes and entrees, usually a wat (thick stew) served on top of injera (sourdough flat bread). One does not use utensils but uses the injera to scoop up the wat, side dishes and/or entrees. Ethiopian food is very spicy. Berbere is the name of the spicy paste that Ethiopians use to flavour and preserve foods. Wat may be made from beef, lamb, chicken, goat, lentils or chickpeas, and always berbere.

Tibs are meat and vegetables that have been sautéed, and are served normal or special. Special tibs is served on a hot dish with vegetables (salad) mixed in.

Kifto is a distinctive Ethiopian dish that consists of raw (or rare) ground beef marinated in mitmita (a very spicy chili powder) and niter kibbeh (a clarified butter infused with ginger, garlic and several spices).

A soft white cheese (Lab) and little fried snacks (Dabo Kolo) are also popular.

Breakfast Foods

- Firfir or fitfit – made from shredded injera and spices
- Dulet – a spicy mixture of tripe, liver, beef and peppers with injera
- Fatira – a large fried pancake made with flour, often with a layer of egg and eaten with honey
- Chechebsa – a pancake covered with berbere and kibbeh, or spices and honey

Beverages

Tej is a honey wine that is frequently drunk in bars. Katikal and Araki are inexpensive local sprits that are very strong.

Coffee originates from Ethiopia and is a central part of Ethiopian beverages.

Food for Religious and Holiday Celebrations

About half of the Ethiopian population is Orthodox Christian, so during Lent Christians are not allowed to eat any animal products. Instead they eat dishes made from beans, lentils and chickpeas called mitin shiro (mixture of beans and berbere). A vegetable alecha may also be eaten during Lent.

During festive times, such as marriage feasts, kwalima, a kind of beef sausage, is eaten. It is smoked and dried.

Iran

Iranian cuisine is very diverse, with each province featuring dishes and culinary traditions/styles unique to their region. Some examples include:

- Chelow kabab (steamed Persian or basmati rice with meat kabab)
- Khoresht (stew that is served with rice)
- Aash (a thick soup)
- Kookoo (meat and/or vegetable pies)
- Polow (white rice alone or with the addition of meat and/or vegetables and herbs)
- Diverse variety of salads, pastries and drinks

The main Persian cuisines are combinations of rice with meat, chicken or fish and plenty of garlic, onion, vegetables, nuts and herbs.

Essential accompaniments

There are certain accompaniments (mokhalafat) which are essential to every Iranian meal at lunch and dinner. These include:

- A plate of fresh herbs (sabzi)
- A variety of flat breads (naan – sangak, lavash, barbari)
- Cheese (panir) – a Persian variant of feta
- Sliced and peeled onions, cucumbers and tomatoes
- Yoghurt
- Lemon juice

Breakfast

The basic traditional Iranian breakfast includes:

- Variety of flat breads (naan-e sangak, naan-e lavash etc.)
- Butter
- Tabrizi white cheese (paneer)
- Feta cheese
- Whipped heavy cream (sarshir, often sweetened)
- Variety of fruit jams and spreads

Lunch and Dinner

Lunch and dinner consists of a well-balanced mixture of herbs, meat, beans, dairy products, vegetables and rice. Stew over rice is by far the most popular dish. Tea (chai) is the drink of choice on nearly every occasion. A yoghurt drink (doogh) is also quite popular.

Food for religious holidays and celebrations

Now Ruz, the Iranian New Year, takes place on the first day of Spring (March 21) and is probably the most important festival in Iran. An abundance of delicious meals and sweets are served, including Samanu (a pudding made from sugar, flour and walnuts); fruits, nuts, pastries, puddings and tea; Iranian rice cakes; Sabzi Polo (rice dish flavoured with herbs) and on the 13th day of Now Ruz it is customary to eat lettuce leaves dipped in honey and vinegar dressing.