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A vision of Latin America and the Caribbean countries

7 July 2025

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A Sensory Journey through Essential Caribbean Ingredients

Below, discover the core ingredients that every Caribbean kitchen relies on —and the stories they tell.

Foundation Staples: Rice, Yuca & Plantain

These versatile carbohydrates form the backbone of countless dishes, providing both substance and cultural significance.

- Rice

• In Spanish-speaking islands, it's served as plain white rice or mixed with beans (e.g., Puerto Rican arroz con gandules).
• In French territories, it becomes aromatic pilafs infused with local spices.



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- Yuca (Cassava)

• A legacy of indigenous peoples, rich in vitamin C and complex carbohydrates.

• Enjoyed boiled, fried, or ground into flatbreads like casabe.

- Plantain

• Whether green or ripe, plantains adapt to every course.

• Turned into tostones, mofongo, pastelón, or simply roasted and served alongside stews.

From Sea to Plate: Fresh Fish & Seafood

Surrounded by ocean, Caribbean islands celebrate the sea's bounty in every bite.

- Salted Cod (Bacalao)

• A European inheritance, featured in dishes like Jamaican ackee and saltfish or Dominican bacalao guisado.

- Shellfish & Crustaceans

• Conch (carrucho), shrimp, crabs, and lobster appear in spicy stews, ceviches, and street-food fritters.

• Often paired with coconut milk, scotch bonnet peppers, or tangy citrus for depth.

Tropical Fruits & Bold Spices

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Lush fruits and vibrant seasonings give Caribbean food its signature balance of sweet, sour, and spicy.

- Fruits

• Mango, pineapple, passion fruit (chinola), guava, and papaya brighten sauces, salads, desserts, and marinades.

• Their natural acids and sugars counterbalance rich proteins and starchy sides.

- Coconut

• Used as milk, cream, or shredded garnish in savory curries, rice dishes, and desserts like tembleque.

- Spice Blends

• Jamaican “jerk” seasoning—pimento, allspice, thyme, nutmeg, and fiery peppers—is a symbol of cultural fusion.

• Other islands favor cilantro, cumin, annatto, and oregano in their sofritos and marinades.

Beyond flavor, these ingredients deliver key nutrients—potassium from plantains, omega-3s from fish, antioxidants from tropical fruits, and fiber from root vegetables. They also connect us to heritage and place: each preparation tells a story of migration, resilience, and innovation.

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Margarita: The Caribbean Pearl Striving to Regain Its Shine

Just five kilometers from the capital, the vibrant heart of Vincy Mas 2025 is pulsing with music, color, and cultural pride. Known officially as Vincent Mass, the carnival is Saint Vincent and the Grenadines' most iconic celebration—a living archive of the island's indigenous, African, and colonial heritage.

The name itself is a fusion of identity: "Vinci," the affectionate local term for the nation, and "Mas," short for masquerade, a nod to the festival's deep-rooted traditions. While it shares elements with other Caribbean carnivals, Vincy Mas stands apart for its unique blend of resistance, spirituality, and storytelling.



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The origins of the carnival trace back to the island's earliest cultural expressions, shaped by indigenous Kalinago traditions, the Afro-Caribbean legacy of enslaved peoples, and the European colonial imprint—particularly from British and French rule. This convergence has created a celebration that is both festive and fiercely political.

At its core, Vincy Mas is a cultural act of resistance. For generations, it has served as a platform for Vincentians to reclaim space, voice dissent, and affirm identity. From the days of slavery to the post-independence era, the carnival has been a space where freedom of expression is not only celebrated but defended.

This year's festivities, which run from June 27 to July 8, feature a dazzling array of events: J'Ouvert, the pre-dawn street revelry; Calypso and Soca Monarch competitions; Junior Pan Fest; and the grand Mardi Gras Parade of Bands, where elaborate costumes and choreographed performances electrify the streets.

But beyond the spectacle, the carnival is a living classroom. Through calypso lyrics, spoken word, and dance, performers—young and old—share their views on society, justice, and liberation. These performances are not just entertainment; they are oral histories, passed down and reimagined with each generation.

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The Afro-descendant presence is especially powerful. From the rhythms of steelpan to the symbolism in costume design, the African roots of Vincy Mas are unmistakable. They are celebrated not as relics of the past, but as vital threads in the nation's cultural fabric.

As the Carnival Development Corporation (CDC) continues to elevate the festival's profile, there is a renewed emphasis on intergenerational transmission. This year's theme, "Young Voices, Big Vibes," highlights the role of youth in carrying forward the legacy of resistance and creativity.

In a region grappling with climate threats, economic pressures, and cultural homogenization, Vincy Mas remains a beacon of resilience. It is a reminder that joy, when rooted in memory and struggle, becomes a revolutionary act.

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Cha-cha-chá: The Cuban Rhythm That Conquered the World

The cha-cha-chá is one of Cuba's most representative musical genres and dances, as well as a hallmark of popular Latin American music. Its origin dates back to the late 1940s and is associated with violinist and composer Enrique Jorrín, a member of the Orquesta América. Seeking a simpler, clearer alternative to the danzón-mambo, Jorrín created a style with a more pronounced main melody, making it easier for dancers to follow the rhythm.



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According to history, the rhythm emerged when dancers in Havana's ballrooms began marking a distinctive triple step to the music's beat, producing the characteristic sound that gave the genre its name: cha-cha-chá. This step differed from the syncopated movements of the mambo, allowing dancers to follow the rhythm more comfortably. The genre's creation was solidified with the 1953 recording of "La engañadora," considered the first official cha-cha-chá piece. The song quickly became a hit and marked the beginning of a wave of popularity that spread far beyond the island.

The cha-cha-chá was mainly performed by charangas, ensembles made up of flute, violins, piano, bass, timbales, and güiro. This format gave the rhythm its distinctive sound, which soon spread throughout Latin America, the United States, and Europe. Orchestras like Aragón and Fajardo y sus Estrellas helped enrich the repertoire and establish cha-cha-chá as one of the most widespread expressions of Cuban music.

The authorship of the cha-cha-chá was not without controversy. Although Jorrín is widely credited as its creator, some researchers have suggested that the name may have originated from the ballrooms themselves or from promoters who helped popularize the genre, rather than from a single musician. Nevertheless, Jorrín's skill in composing pieces that resonated with the public and facilitated dancing is undisputed.

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Beyond debates about its origin, the cha-cha-chá achieved what few rhythms have: bringing together musicians and dancers from different generations and cultures. Its simple rhythm, combined with catchy melodies, allowed it to become an international phenomenon. Today, the cha-cha-chá remains a symbol of Cuban music, remembered on dance floors and stages as one of the island's greatest contributions to the world's musical heritage.

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La Guaira: History, Nature, and Tourism Potential on Venezuela's Coast

The city of La Guaira, capital of the state of the same name, stands out as one of the most versatile destinations on Venezuela's central coast. Founded in 1589 by Diego de Osorio, this port city combines a rich historical legacy with striking natural landscapes, strengthening its appeal in both national and international tourism circuits.



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Located between the Caribbean Sea and the slopes of the Waraira Repano National Park (commonly known as El Ávila), La Guaira offers a geographic setting ideal for both beach and mountain tourism. Its coastline features well-known beaches such as Playa El Yate, Playa Grande, Camurí Chico, and Los Ángeles. These beaches, with their white sands and crystal-clear waters, provide ideal conditions for snorkeling, surfing, and sport fishing. In terms of natural attractions, places like Quebrada de Tacagua and Bahía de Turiamo are popular among visitors seeking hiking routes, camping spots, or direct contact with wilder landscapes.

La Guaira's historical heritage is equally significant. The city preserves buildings and structures from the colonial period, including the San Carlos Castle, El Vigía Fort, and the Casa Guipuzcoana. These monuments were part of the defensive system that protected the port from pirate attacks and reflect the strategic value La Guaira held during that era. Another distinctive site is the Camino de los Españoles, an old cobbled route that once connected the coast with Caracas and today attracts those interested in historical hiking trails.

The city's cultural offerings include the Armando Reverón Museum, located in the former home of the renowned painter, and the mausoleum of Dr. Knoche, a German doctor known for his 19th-century mummification experiments. In addition, leisure spaces such as La Guaira's boardwalk and the Generalísimo Francisco de Miranda Park provide options for family recreation and local tourism.

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The region's gastronomy, focused on dishes made with fresh fish and seafood, rounds out the visitor experience. Thanks to its strategic location, its variety of attractions, and its potential for the development of ecotourism, adventure sports, and cultural activities, La Guaira is positioned as a key destination within Venezuela's tourism offering.

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Calipso: The Pulse of Resistance and Rhythm Across Afro-Caribbean Culture

More than just festive music, calipso remains a living testimony of Afro-descendant creativity, resistance, and memory. With roots in the Caribbean's colonial past, this genre—shaped by African rhythms and layered with political expression—has evolved into a voice for communities long silenced.

Originating in Trinidad and Tobago, calipso became a tool of communication among enslaved African peoples, a way to circumvent the language barriers imposed by their captors and later to denounce oppression through coded lyrics. Over time, the genre expanded beyond borders, giving rise to variants in Venezuela (El Callao), Colombia (San Andrés), and Costa Rica (Limón).



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Central to its instrumentation are the steel drums, an emblem of resilience. These were born of necessity when enslaved peoples crafted instruments from oil barrels, transforming objects of colonial extraction into vessels of cultural expression.

As the genre grew, so too did its musical palette. Modern calipso ensembles incorporate Spanish guitar, trumpets, saxophones, bongos, and maracas, all while preserving the central heartbeat of African percussion.
“The soul of calipso lies in its stories,” says cultural historian Luisa Moreno. “Each verse carries a testimony—from the everyday joys of life to sharp critiques of exploitation and inequality.”

Its impact goes beyond music. Calipso helped shape national identity projects throughout the Caribbean and Latin America, with carnivals and street festivals becoming stages for both celebration and protest.

As teleSUR has reported from El Callao in Venezuela, calipso there is more than performance—it’s a ritual of memory and resistance, upheld by Afro-descendant communities whose ancestors mined gold in harsh conditions, yet left behind a musical legacy that glitters just as brightly.

Beyond culture, calipso also reaches science and myth. The name was borrowed by NASA and CNES to name their CALIPSO satellite, launched to study Earth’s atmosphere—a nod, perhaps, to the expansive reach of a name rooted in oral history.

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In Greek mythology, Calipso was the nymph who offered refuge and love to the shipwrecked Odysseus on the island of Ogigia, before being forced by the gods to let him go. This mythic resonance underlines how names and stories migrate, echoing the journey of calipso itself—from island coasts to the world's consciousness.

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