

A Costa Rican flavor



Written by

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Attention readers: You might be a fan of Costa Rican food and you may not know it.

“A lot of places that are called Mexican might combine Costa Rican cuisine on the menu, and that’s understandable,” said Anthony Ewing of Maplewood, the founder of the EthnicNJ.com website, a go-to source for ethnic cuisine in the state. “They might feel customers are more familiar with Mexican dishes. The Costa Rican rice and beans is called gallo pinto, and it’s very traditional, and it might be confused with the Mexican rice and beans.”

Gallo pinto is usually served as a morning meal with eggs or a meat.

Costa Rican food is “really about the ingredients,” Ewing said. “It’s sort of like Mexican food but without the spiciness. There’s a lot of beef because beef is a staple in Costa Rica, and a lot of seafood and chicken, too.”

Liviette Weber, a native of Costa Rica and the owner of Delicias De Mi Tierra on West Main Street in Bound Brook, also known as

Tierra del Sol, said that Costa Rican cuisine is very organic.

“In my county, almost all the food is vegetables and fruit,” Weber said. “Almost everything like that.”

Delicias De Mi Tierra’s version of the Costa Rican olla de carne, or beef soup, is a filling treat full of carrots and plantains, set off with a tasty broth and tender meat.

“It’s cheap, solid food, and you get nice servings for breakfast and lunch,” Ewing said of Costa Rican food in general. “It’s working man’s food.”

Surf Taco of the Jersey Shore incorporates elements of Costa Rican fare into its concept of coastal cuisine, said Erik Blaum, general manager of the Red Bank Surf Taco.

“The thing about Costa Rican food is it’s always fresh — fresh fish or fresh vegetables and fresh chicken,” said Blaum, a former resident of Costa Rica. “It’s not

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spicy, but you can add your own spice, and it's always delicious. It's very healthy to eat. When I was down there I was in really good shape — I was surfing, too, but the food is very healthy and really tasty, too.”

A Costa Rican burrito at Surf Taco has rice, beans, jack and cheddar cheese, lettuce and pico de gallo and it plays very agreeably on the senses.

People in New Jersey are searching out Costa Rican food.

“It comes from people traveling. Then, where you go, you want to bring that back with you,” said Michael Courtney, operations manager for Surf Taco. “You want to relive the experience.”

It's starting to become easier to obtain Costa Rican specialties here in New Jersey, Courtney said.

“We used to bring back a couple of cases of the Lizano table salsa when we used to travel to Costa Rica, but now we've found a couple of outlets that sell it up here,” Courtney said.

The Republic of Costa Rica is a country in Central America. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates there are 117,500 Costa Rican-born Americans, according to 2007 numbers. Many live in New Jersey, with Bound Brook, Raritan, Summit, Somerville, Manville and Red Bank having significant communities.

“We have a lot of Costa Ricans come in, but

we get a lot of everybody,” said Weber of the clientele at Delicias De Mi Tierra.

Justin Burgos is a Bound Brook resident of Puerto Rican descent, and he's a regular at Delicias De Mi Tierra.

“They have great hospitality,” Burgos said. “And great food.”

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Head cook Maria Nunez chops vegetables in the

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kitchen of Delicias De Mi Tierra. / STAFF PHOTO:
KATHY JOHNSON

Chances are there's a Costa Rican food spot near you:

The Banderas
41 Park Ave., Summit
908-277-1669
Delicias De Mi Tierra
407 W. Main St., Bound Brook
732-560-7146
Maplewood Deli
1628 Springfield Ave., Maplewood
973-762-2274 or www.maplewooddelicostarica.com
Surf Taco
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