Louisiana offers you regional cooking at its most unusual and best

Gumbo, jambalaya l'acadien, redfish court bouillon—try every one of them when you visit Louisiana, for they are masterpieces of regional cooking. These particular dishes are examples of what is usually referred to as Creole cooking from the southern, more European part of the State. This distinctive and subtle cuisine has developed through the centuries into one of the great cooking styles of the world. All parts of Louisiana, however, have great food and feature local specialties.

It is said that Creole cooking originated when the wives of the early French settlers discovered that Louisiana could not offer them the traditional ingredients to which they were accustomed—flour, vegetables, spices and herbs. Carrying the iron pots they had brought with them from the Old World, these unhappy ladies went in a body to complain to Governor Bienville. His shrewd housekeeper, Madame Langlois, saved the day. She volunteered to teach these housewives cooking secrets she had learned from the Indians. She introduced them to native dishes and herbs in what was probably the first cooking school in the New World, and they soon learned to use their French cooking skills to prepare and improve on them.

The Spanish, too, put their mark on Creole cooking, and Negro cooks added an exotic African touch. All this art has been used through the years on the bounteous produce of Louisiana—the magnificent seafood and shellfish; vegetables such as mirliton, yams, okra and cushaw; excellent game and meats of all kinds; and a luscious array of fruits and berries.

Many great restaurants in the State—some of them world famous—specialize in Louisiana cooking, which varies from area to area. You can also eat beautifully in little out-of-the-way cafes offering you the specialty of that particular region, which may be Spanish, Hungarian, Italian, as well as native. But the best eating of all is in those homes where the old iron pot has been passed down for generations. There, the making of a roux—the butter, browned flour and stock base essential in so many Louisiana recipes—is an art carefully passed on from mother to daughter.

To give you an idea of the range of gourmet pleasures awaiting you in Louisiana, a few typical recipes collected from all over the State are offered here for you to try. May they whet your appetite to visit Louisiana... and taste for yourself!

Crayfish Bisque

Perhaps the most distinctive and famous Louisiana food is crayfish, which natives pronounce “crawfish.” It is more tender than lobster, more delicate than shrimp, and has a unique flavor all its own. In the spring, whole families go out crayfishing on the bayous in a way that has been traditional for centuries. These delicious shellfish are now raised commercially and are an important Louisiana industry. Here is a recipe for a great soup with true Creole flavor. It takes time to make—but most delicious Louisiana dishes do.

Crayfish Preparation

15 pounds live crayfish

1/2 cup salt

Wash crayfish and parboil in salted water for 10 minutes. Clean tails, set meat aside; remove fat from heads and save for bisque. Clean heads thoroughly, rinse in cold water, drain, and reserve for stuffing.

Bisque

1/4 cup flour

1/4 cup salad oil

1/2 total crayfish tails

2 large onions, minced

2 stalks celery, minced

1 lemon, sliced

1/2 cup parsley, minced

1/2 cup green onions, minced

1/2 total crayfish fat

1 bell pepper, minced

4 cloves garlic, minced

3 quarts hot water

1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce

1 bay leaf

Combine flour and salad oil over low heat, stirring constantly to make a brown roux. Add onions, celery, bell pepper and garlic, cook until wilted. Add hot water and blend well. Season with salt, pepper and lemon slices; add crayfish fat and bay leaf, cook for 1 hour. Remove bay leaf. Add crayfish tails; cover pot and cook 15 minutes longer. Add stuffed heads (see below), green onions and parsley. Cook another 10 minutes and serve over steaming rice. (Continued on next page).
STUFFED CRAYFISH HEADS

3/4 total crayfish tails, ground
3 tablespoons butter
2 large onions, minced
3 stalks celery, minced
1 large bell pepper, minced
4 cloves garlic
2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
1 tablespoon black pepper

Saute onions, celery, bell pepper, garlic in butter. Add ground tails and cook 5 minutes. Add salt, pepper, Worcestershire sauce, lemon juice, parsley, thyme, shallots and crayfish fat. Add bread which has been soaked in water. Simmer 10 minutes, stirring constantly so as not to burn. Stuff heads with dressing, pack tightly. Bake in moderate oven 350 degrees for 15 minutes. Set aside. Place in a shallow dish. Add parsley and shallots, stir lightly with fork to mix once more. Cover for 5 minutes longer, serve hot. Serves 8.

NATCHITOCHES MEAT PIE

You pronounce it “NACK-uh-tush,” and it’s the oldest city in the Louisiana Purchase. This delicacy, which was once sold on the streets by little Negro boys from the nearby Cane River Plantation country, was invented long before modern refrigeration. So early cooks used to store prepared ones in large crocks of homemade lard. Despite their widespread popularity, they are now sold by street vendors only during the colorful Natchitoches Christmas festival.

FILLING

1 pound ground beef
1 1/2 pounds ground pork
2 tablespoons flour
1 tablespoon shortening

Make a roux of shortening and flour; add other ingredients and salt and pepper to taste. Cook thoroughly and let cool before placing in dough.

PASTRY

4 cups flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
2 eggs

1/2 cup melted shortening (do not substitute cooking oil)

Mix flour and baking powder, add shortening, then eggs. Add enough milk to make a stiff dough. Roll very thin.

Use a saucer to cut circles of dough same size as saucer. Fill half with meat mixture. Fold dough over, dampen edges with water and crimp with fork. Fry in deep fat until golden brown. Makes 18 pies.

CAJUN JAMBALAYA

“Cajun” is the affectionate name given the French Acadians who settled in Louisiana after they were exiled from Canada. Even today in the Evangeline Country, around St. Martinville, Lafayette and New Iberia, you’ll hear French spoken almost as frequently as English. This is rice country, and it’s no surprise that this Louisiana staple is the basis of jambalaya, a skillful blend of shrimp and other seafood, game, chicken, several meats or whatever you may have. Of course, native seasoning gives jambalaya its special delight. It’s a great party dish, but you have to cook it in an iron pot to get the real bayou flavor.

1 3-pound fryer
1 large bell pepper, minced
salt and pepper
1 pound smoked sausage or ham, diced
1 clove garlic, crushed
3 cups water
1 1/2 teaspoons salt
1/2 teaspoon thyme
1/2 cup chopped parsley, minced
3 cups peeled and diced tomatoes
1/2 teaspoon Tabasco
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
1/2 cup melted shortening

Cut chicken into serving pieces. Season with salt and pepper. Melt shortening in a heavy iron pot or heavy aluminum pot. Fry chicken until brown; remove from pot, set aside. Make roux by adding flour to drippings and stir until light brown. Add sausage, which has been parboiled and drained, or ham. Then add cooked chicken, onions, bell pepper, tomatoes, garlic and shrimp. Cook, stirring constantly, for about 10 minutes. Add 3 cups water, salt, thyme, Tabasco and black pepper. When water boils, pour in raw rice. Let mixture come to a boil again, stir thoroughly to combine all ingredients. Cover and simmer 30 to 45 minutes, until rice is tender. Add parsley and shallots, stir lightly with fork to mix once more. Cover for 5 minutes longer, serve hot. Serves 8.
**CHICKEN FILÉ GUMBO**

It's partly a stew, partly a soup—but entirely Louisiana. an inheritance from Africa and the West Indies. "Gumbo" was the African name for okra, which can be used as a thickening agent in this spicy mixture made from game, seafood, fowl, meat, or a combination of them all. As frequently used as okra is the famous filé, a powder made of sassafras. In the old days, Choctaw squaws gathered the leaves, pounded them, passed the powder through fine hair sieves, and brought the filé into New Orleans' French Market twice a week. Be sure the filé is added last, after the pot has been removed from the fire, or it will string.

3 to 4 pound stewing hen*, well seasoned
1 pound smoked pork sausage
½ cup cooking oil
3 quarts hot water
1 large onion, minced
½ cup celery, minced
½ cup bell pepper, minced

Pour oil into a heavy skillet; brown the cut-up and seasoned chicken in hot oil, remove and set aside. Make roux by adding flour to hot oil and stirring constantly over low fire until brown. Add onions to roux and wilt. Transfer roux to a large soup pot. Add chicken, celery, bell pepper, garlic, bay leaf, Worcestershire, Tabasco, salt and pepper to taste. Stir until vegetables are wilted; add hot water. Simmer 1 hour, add sausage, remove bay leaf, simmer 1 more hour. Add green onion and parsley, let simmer 10 minutes. Add filé just before serving and serve over hot rice in a soup plate. Serves 10-12.

*Wild game such as ducks, doves, quail, squirrel or rabbit may be substituted. One pint of oysters may be added in the last 10 minutes.

**Louisiana food a challenge for the Governor's Lady**

Mrs. John J. McKeithen, who is from Columbia, in the northern part of the State, carefully supervises all the meals prepared at the Governor's mansion.

"It's hard for me to pick out a favorite recipe, but around our home, delicious Mayhaw Jelly is one of our extra-special favorites. Mayhaws are a small, scarlet fruit of the apple family and are abundant in North Louisiana. It just doesn't seem spring until the mayhaws have been gathered and the kitchen is fragrant with their blossom odor. I know you may not have mayhaws in your part of the country. But this delightful Jelly—served with hot biscuits or hush puppies—is just another reason to come visit us here in Louisiana."

"We have to entertain a lot," says she, "and I'm always conscious that our out-of-state visitors are expecting the very most from Louisiana cuisine. Of course, Creole cooking is famous throughout the world, but I want our friends to know that food all over the State is delicious too. So I always try to balance our menus with some of the spicy dishes from the southern area and those equally good foods we serve at our farm in Columbia."

**MAYHAW JELLY**

Cover mayhaws with water, approximately 4 cups; boil about 10 minutes. Pour off juice into a bowl, strain through a cloth (diaper serves nicely). Cover again with water, boil 10 minutes, pour off juice once more. Use this in correct proportion for recipe below.

**JELLY PROCEDURE**

4 cups juice
1 box Sure-Jell

Combine Sure-Jell and mayhaw juice, bring to a boil, add sugar and boil briskly for 1 minute. Set off burner and let stand 1 minute. Skim. Pour into scalded jelly jars, cover with paraffin. Let cool before storing.

Yields approximately 4½ pints jelly.
Gourmets from all over the world travel to Louisiana to enjoy the great restaurants here. Of course, those in New Orleans are the most famous since many have been extolled in books, movies, articles, and gourmet guides. But visitors can find superb meals in restaurants throughout the State—whether they dine in a sophisticated patio... in one of the splendid old mansions that serve the plantation dishes of the past... or even in little side-of-the-road cafes specializing in the food of the region.

For further information, write

Louisiana Tourist Development Commission
P. O. Box 44291, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804