

Some Dishes from the Seychelles

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Situated slightly below the equator some 1,000 miles off the coast of East Africa, the Republic of the Seychelles is made up of 115 named islands spread over 400,000 square kilometers of ocean. The present total population of some 67,000 souls is said to be a mixture of Africans, Indians, Arabs, Chinese, Malaysians and various combinations thereof, but as always in such mixtures the African admixture appears to be predominant. For more about the country and its people, history, and culture see pg. 144 – 164 of my [Lore of the African Indian Ocean](#).

Aside from its paradisiacal landscapes and friendly people, the Seychelles is known for its **delicious creole cuisine**. While fish and rice along with breadfruit, cassava, and sweet potatoes are the basic staple foods for most Seychellois, the island restaurants and family bistros offer a wide choice of succulent dishes ranging from the familiar to the exotic, including: *bouillon brede* (a kind of spinach soup), *bourgeois grillé* (grilled red snapper), *caille* (turtle meat cooked in its own shell), *cari bernique*, *chatini requin* (shark with chutney (the chutney being made from finely cut or grated fruit or vegetables fried in oil), *coco d'oeufs d'oiseaux* (curried birds' [usually tern] eggs with coconuts), *katkat de poisson banane* (made from fish, bananas, and coconut milk), *millionaire's salad* (so called because, since it is made from the green part of the *palmiste* palm trunk immediately below the leaf shoot, the tree must die to obtain it), and *soupe de tectec*, to name a few.

With Creole, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, French, and Italian, cuisine to choose from, it is said that “even the most demanding of gourmets will find something to excite his or her palate”. Creole cuisine typically blends a magical mixture of fish (barracuda, cordonnier, crayfish, grouper, jack fish, king-fish, lobster, parrot fish, red snapper, shark, shellfish, squid, sword fish, tuna, etc.), fresh vegetables, fruits, and spices (cardamom, chilies, cinnamon, cloves, curry, garlic, ginger, mace, mint, nutmeg and turmeric) to obtain truly mouthwatering meals and chicken, fruit-bat, lobster, octopus, pork, and turtle are often used in conjunction with coconut milk as a basis for many of these dishes.

Other typical Creole preparations include *carri coco* (a mild meat or fish curry with coconut cream), *daube* (fruit stewed in coconut), *rougaille* (a tomato-based sauce used with fish, sausages, or as a side dish), fish marinated in lemon, and *bredes*. There are a number of strange-sounding fruits and vegetables to savor including calabash, *coeur de boeuf* (custard apples), *corassols*, passion fruit, *cochoux choute*, golden apple, *jamalacs*, *palmiste*, and *patole*.

There is a Creole saying that if you eat "bread-fruit" [as you must] you will be compelled to return to the Seychelles one day. Desserts made with coconut, vanilla, and bananas (caramelized) are particularly tasty and one should note that there are 17 different kinds of bananas in the Seychelles.

The Seychelles also offers a wide variety of **alcoholic** and **non-alcoholic beverages**. Non-alcoholic drinks include mineral water and a range of locally produced soft drinks including bitter lemon, fruit cocktail, tonic, and ginger ale. Alcoholic drinks include beers (the local Seybrew and EKU brands brewed under German supervision are said to be excellent), wines (the cheapest of which come from Greece and South Africa), and traditional toddy, *bacca* and *lapuree*.

Toddy (*kalou*), which is typically made from the coconut palm [for which see further], is more readily available in Praslin than in Mahe. The brew ferments quickly and must be consumed shortly after tapping. *Bacca* rum is cane spirit mixed with other additives; whereas *lapuree* has fruit (usually pineapple) as its main ingredient. Though it is said that un-boiled tap water is safe to drink in the Seychelles, I never have tried it and suggest that you do the same.

It is to be noted that though French and English wiped out the giant land tortoises from all the islands except Aldabra, and the Americans all but exterminated the whales which were once a common sight [Victoria was once used as an American whaling port], there still remain over 150 species of reef fish and 30 species of coral to be seen and tasted.

Among the fish which can be seen swimming around in Seychelle waters one finds the dreaded stone fish (sometimes called devil fish and extremely dangerous to humans), the black-barred trigger fish, the Emperor angel, parrot-fish, shrimp-fish, tiger-fish, dog-fish, and butterfly-fish, as well as eighteen varieties of shark including white shark, the hammerhead, the man-eater, the tiger, and the blue shark. Shark by the way, is said to be quite tasty.

During my relaxing stay on the island of La Digue, Michel (the son of Julien Durup) showed me how to prepare seven delightful dishes which you may try to duplicate at home if you wish. These included: 1) *stou-poul a le Michel* (chicken stew as prepared by Michel); 2) *pwason griye* (grilled fish); 3) *pwason griye dan pwalon* (grilled fish in a frying pan); 4) *kari poul* (chicken curry); 5) *salad melanze* (mixed salad); 6) *salad bours* (fish salad); and 7) *diri a le Michel* (rice). As an extra treat let me throw in a salad that his fiancée, Mila, taught me how to prepare which I shall call *salad a la Mila* (salad as prepared by Mila). The corresponding recipes are provided below:

Salad a la Mila

1. Slice raw cabbage into thin slivers;
2. Slice onion;
3. Add salt;
4. Add chicken oil (or other)
5. Add vinegar;
6. Add pepper;
7. Can also add carrot and/or tomato if desired.

Diri

a le Michel

1. Wash rice and rinse three times;
2. Add water and boil (for two cups of rice use three cups of water);
3. For a more luxurious rice (i.e. *diri plo*) add garlic, saffron, salt, onion, oil, curry *pili*, and meat sauce).

Stou Poul

a le Michel

1. Put grease or oil (much more oil than when making curry) in pan and heat;
2. Add salt to cut chicken;
3. Cut up two potatoes;
4. Add salt to hot grease or oil to prevent chicken from sticking in pan;
5. Add chicken to hot oil, piece by piece;
6. Cut up peppers, carrots, one onion, and two tomatoes;
7. Fry chicken well and remove from oil;
8. Fry potatoes in same oil;
9. Put some oil from pan into pot;
10. Place chopped vegetables from 6, above, into pot;
11. Add Brat sauce, garlic, and soy sauce;
12. Add fried chicken and fried potatoes and stir;
13. Add tomato sauce;
14. Add a little water and then cover;
15. Add salt;
16. Add a little water, let boil, and then turn off flame.

Pwason griye dan pwalon

1. Make a sauce using garlic, pepper, soy sauce, Brat sauce, salt, and garlic;
2. Make eight incisive slits on body of a whole fish (four on each side, one underneath, and one on top). Oil fish in slits and then rub sauce into these slits;
3. Place fish in deep frying pan;
4. To make fish hot add a little water;
5. Place sliced onions and tomatoes over fish;
6. reduce heat and cook for fifteen or twenty minutes depending upon size of fish;

Pwason griye

1. Mix garlic, pepper, chopped onions, ginger, cooking oil, Brat sauce, tomatoes, spices, soy sauce, and salt into a vessel;
2. Remove scales and intestines from fish;
3. Oil the grill sheets so fish doesn't stick;
4. Make four slit like cuts on both sides of fish;
4. Put some sauce from "1" above into the cuts;
5. Insert fish between wire grill sheets;
6. Brush fish with sauce and place over fire fueled by dry coconut husks or wood, such that oil drips into flames and scents the rising smoke;
7. Turn over grill from time to time, brushing with very watery concoction made from remaining sauce in "1" above, water, oil, soy sauce, salt, brat sauce, and lemon.

Kari poul a le Michel

1. Cut half a chicken into bits (pieces are cut smaller for curry than for soup);
2. Add large amount of masala powder to chicken;
3. Chop two potatoes and small onions into small pieces;
4. Heat cooking oil in pot;
5. Put potatoes and onions into hot oil;
6. Add garlic and stir;
7. Add soy sauce and stir;
8. Add tomato sauce and stir;
9. Add the chicken which was smeared with masala and stir;
10. Let cook for two to three minutes stirring constantly so that masala sticks to the chicken;
11. Add two cups of water;
12. Cover and boil until chicken is tender;
13. Add more garlic which has been pounded in a mortar [Note that if garlic is overcooked it loses its taste];
14. Add salt after 18 minutes and stir;
15. After 24 minutes add more garlic and salt to taste;
16. Cook for about 6 more minutes and it is ready to eat.

Salad Melanze

Mix sliced green peppers with sliced onions, sliced tomatoes, salt, pepper, and vegetable or chicken oil.

Salad bourse

1. Take out intestines of "bourse" fish and throw fish into wood fire until it is black on both sides (about 20 minutes);
2. Remove burnt skin with knife and dispose of skin;
3. Separate fish from spines and break meat into slivers;
3. Add one sliced onion, salt, and vinegar to fish;
4. Add Wesson oil;
5. Stir with spoon and eat.

Since you can not physically taste the plates I consumed in La Digue, just imagine the best food you've ever eaten and multiply by three. It is only then that you will perhaps come close to appreciating these "memorable delicacies". You must recall that the fish is freshly caught (i.e not frozen), and that the type of fish and variety of spices and seasonings used tend to heighten the taste beyond one's fondest expectations.

While most drinks available in the US are also available on the island of La Digue (wine, beer, whisky, rum, soft-drinks, etc.), they are usually much more expensive. There is, however, one delightful but inexpensive drink not available in the US that is found on this island. That drink – called *trembo* in the Comoros - is called toddy or *kalou* in the Seychelles and can (as in the Comoros) be consumed as a sweet drink when freshly tapped or as alcohol when left for a day. If left un-refrigerated for more than two days it becomes vinegar and can no longer be consumed as a beverage.

To find out where and how toddy is obtained, I visited the home of Luc Tirant whom I met on a previous voyage to the Seychelles in 1989. He introduced me to his father (Octave Uranie) and the two of them lead me to a coconut tree. Octave climbed the ladder and invited me to follow. I climbed halfway up and photographed the *baba koko*, which has been bound tightly with a pink ribbon, and the plastic bottle which is tied to the end so as to receive the precious drops of fluid which fall into it [See photo on pg. 222 in my [Lore of the African Indian Oceans](#)].

After returning to the ground, I asked Luc what the process involved was and he replied:

“In order to get *kalou*, you must first cut a small piece from the extremity (i.e. opening) of the *baba koko* (heart) before it opens. Then, when water begins to come out of it, the skin must be cut away. When this is done, the peeled *baba koko* is bound with a ribbon (as in the aforementioned photo) and a plastic bottle is attached with a rope in such a way that the liquid falling from the cut opening is captured by the bottle. Two times a day (at 0800 and at 1700) the *baba koko* is again cut with a sharp knife and the full bottle is replaced with an empty one. Sometimes two bottles are placed in a tree and thus four bottles are obtained on a daily basis from a single tree. If three buckets are placed in the tree, then we get six bottles of *kalou*. Because we have a large family, we drink what we tap, and there is usually nothing left to sell.