

Melanesian Lap-Lap

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Lap-lap is the Melanesian dish of Vanuatu par excellence. You may be able to sample it at the market, but it is only at big festivals, or with a local family where - sitting on hand woven mats – you will you be able to savor the real thing in its true splendor.

In order to make this delicacy, the various root-vegetables (manioc, taro, or yam) used in making lap-lap are grated into a thick paste and placed on taro leaves. This paste is then soaked with coconut milk (i.e. grated coconut squeezed and mixed with water) and, on special occasions, meat or fish is added.

Leaves are carefully wrapped around the mixture and tied with vines to make little parcels. These parcels are then placed among the stones in a bush oven (a hole in the ground where volcanic stones made red-hot from wood-fire are placed) and covered with banana leaves, damp gunny bags, and earth where they are left to bake.

After around three hours have passed, the oven is opened and the parcels are placed on banana leaves. The parcels are then opened and the lap-lap is picked up with the fingers and eaten hot. There are many kinds of lap-lap which are named according to: a) whether local spinach has been added; b) the type of meat (pork, beef, veal, chicken, flying fox), fish, or seafood used in its preparation; and c) the type of paste (there is a sweet variety where banana rather than root-vegetables serve as the paste).[For photos of the preparation of lap-lap paste from banana & its consumption at a Big Nambas feast see pg. 185 – 186 of my Lore of Melanesia].