

# **Mangú and Plantains**

## **Food Exploration by Jeidys Noboa**

### **Personal and cultural significance**

Mangú is a signature dish from the people of the Dominican Republic. Personally, for me it is my favorite dish, it beats any other dish that my culture has to offer, it is the ultimate comfort food, and it serves as one of the best representations of Caribbean culture in the United States. Everyone who knows about mangú will always associate it with the Dominican Republic.

The procurement, preparation, and ingestion methods are very simple. Most grocery stores in my neighborhood carry its key ingredient, plantains, and my mom taught me how to make sure I am picking good ones. Good plantains are nice and green and firm. You can also make mangú with them if they are beginning to overripen -- the dish just becomes sweeter -- but it is best to get them when they are green because the dish is most filling at this state.

I learned to prepare mangú from watching my mother, grandma, and other females in my family make it. The process of making mangú is very simple, which is why I believe it is such a significant dish as well. When it comes to making mangú, all one has to do is peel, boil, and mash the boiled plantains and then pair it with whatever side dishes one chooses. Some sides can include, but are not limited to, fried/scrambled/boiled eggs, fried cheese, fried salami, salami that is made in a tomato sauce, an avocado on the side, and various meats, fish, etc. I will leave a recipe below that showcases one of the ways that I make mangú, but again there is no limit to the possibilities for how to enjoy mangú, nor is there any “right” way to serve and prepare it.

Eating is the fun part, as a kid I was fed mangú from a hand or spoon, sometimes a fork but I am not a fan of those. My most favorite thing about mangú is the taste of all the side dishes with the plantains. The way that the bitterness of the onion from the vinegar it is cooked in and the plantain work together is possibly my favorite part. Next, the texture of the fried cheese is my other favorite. You get a crunchy exterior and a soft, salty interior that also works well with the mashed plantain. The eggs are my least favorite part, but the dish is not the same without it, to me at least. Mangú does not really have a significant smell, to me it just smells like your typical seasoned dish. The taste is also very standard as any other dish in the Dominican Republic. The reason why mangú is so significant to me is because it serves as a great reminder of where home is. I have had this dish in abundance growing up, but when I eat this dish when I visit the Dominican Republic, I get this sensation that I do not get when I eat it in the United States. It is very unexplainable, but what I can explain is that when I eat this, everything feels cozy and nostalgic at the moment.

There is a lot of sociocultural significance to this dish as well. It is very accessible and affordable. The Dominican Republic is an impoverished country but since the plantain is one of our staple crops, it allows for people to buy them in mass quantities for a very low price. Over here in the United states you can usually find them 10 for \$1 and one time I saw them at another grocery store for 17 for \$2. So essentially, you can feed a family of 5 for \$4. The price allows for this sociocultural significance to the people in the Dominican Republic because this staple crop is available for consumption for all of the citizens. Also, it is a very reliable crop to have, there is no dependence on foreign countries for plantains so that makes the availability consistent. In the Dominican Republic, one can acquire plantains from street vendors; it is not

common to buy them at the supermarket because being a street vendor is actually a way of life for a majority of people.

### **History and present-day production and distribution of plantains**

Originally, the plantain was not always edible. The process of natural hybridizing and selective picking allowed for the cultivation of many types of plantain species that were seen to be more favorable due to their nature of being edible, adaptable to climates, and the type of fruit that these different plantain species bore. All of this happened inside of Asia, more specifically south-east Asia/India. Essentially, because of human exploration and colonization, the plantain has migrated from southeast-Asia/India/Indonesia to Madagascar in AD 500, to West Africa in the 14<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> century and to the Dominican Republic in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, thanks especially to the Portuguese. Due to the plantain migrating to the Dominican Republic, this allowed exposure to the rest of the Caribbean/Central America (Robinson and Sauco 2011).

Brazil is now in the lead, producing 3 million tons of plantain a year, most of it locally consumed. Colombia and Ecuador are the main exporters of the plantain. Plantains grow best in tropical weather. Colombia has 1.03 million acres, Mexico has about 164,000 acres, Venezuela 146,000 acres, and Dominican Republic has about 115000 acres (Morton 2013). A fully-grown plantain tree is about 3-4 feet long, the whole tree is cut down when all the plantains on the stalk are still a dark green. For more on plantains and bananas, see

<https://hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/morton/banana.html>.



*Figure 1 Plantain bunch ready to be harvested (photo by J. Noboa).*

### **Making Mangú**

These next few photos illustrate the prepping of the mashed plantains and also the sides that go along with the dish.



*Figure 2 The ingredients, green plantains, red onion, two eggs, and frying cheese. (Photo by J. Noboa)*



*Figure 3 Peel and wash the plantains and then boil them until soft. Add salt and pepper to boiling water for taste. (Photo by J. Noboa).*



*Figure 4 You know the boiled plantains are ready when the water changes from clear to light purple. Also, add some butter to the water and boiled plantains because when it comes to actually mashing the plantains, there will be a butter like taste that is highly preferred by me. It also helps the mashed plantains from getting too hard later on after cooling. (photo by J. Noboa).*

Remove water but save some for later. Mash the plantain with a little bit of butter, salt and reserved water to prevent dryness. Then fry the eggs, cheese, and salami. These are called Los

Tres Golpes (lit. the three hits). Or you can try making Salami Guisado (or salami stew) made of salami, onions, and peppers in tomato sauce. Either way you need to make the onion topping.



*Figure 5 These are the red onions that are sautéed in oil and vinegar. It is very important that they appear a little translucent so that the onion is not too harsh and compliments the mashed plantains and the eggs and fried cheese. (Photo by J. Noboa).*



*Figure 6 This is the final step, after frying the cheese and eggs, they are set aside. The cooked onions are placed on top of the mashed plantains for added moisture that softens the mashed plantains so it does not get too stiff as it cools down. (Photo by J. Noboa).*

## References

Morton, Julia Frances. 2013. *Fruits of Warm Climates*. Brattleboro, VT: Echo Point Books & Media.

Robinson, John C., and Victor Galan Saucó. 2011. *Bananas and Plantains*. Oxfordshire: CABI.