

(Trini "puff" flower at the Fowl Trust)

I missed you guys.

I said I needed a day. I probably should have said a week.

It's now been two weeks since I've written so I hope you're ready for the dish. For starters, I have to divide my post on the **Taste of Trinidad & Tobago** into 3. Why you ask? Well, I, over here, living in the daily frenzy of playing chef, cooking instructor, fashionista, writer and over-ambitious business woman, didn't pack until the morning of my trip and I still had to get my nails done. All this to say, I forgot the most important thing back at home: my camera's charger! Not my shoes as you'd figure!

And what's a good story on food and excursions without any pictures?

I had only 22 minutes left on it and only got 66 pictures out of it! Needless to say, I was furious! I harassed the PR rep and gave her the pity face. It worked and she let me use her camera for the remainder of the trip. And one of the other journalists was kind enough to take an abundance of beautiful shots of everything we did and offered to send me a full CD (do you know Victoria Riccardi? She was the 3rd writer-very cool). Now, I'm having to be patient as both went on to a 2nd destination while I made my way back to Atlanta. I'll get all the pictures next week. Ergo, two or even three posts on my trip in order to share everything with you. You'll be so delighted, all this will be a wash. Pictures here, I was able to take myself.

I'm learning how to be patient. I enter my suite at the Hyatt Regency Trinidad and instantly remember why I chose to become a travel and food writer in addition to all the other Jamaican-esque "jobs" I hold. Fortunately, they all mix really well and one doesn't survive without the other. In *my* mind, anyway. My shower was right smack in the middle of the suite! Right! No door to be knocked on, just frost strategically wrapped around the mid-section of the stall to avoid potential peeping from the one that WASN'T with me on this trip. The first food indulgence: coconut and coco-chocolate (white and milk) macaroons at my bedside, quietly waiting to be eaten up in matter of seconds. Roasted coconut shavings lay the foundation for these most delicious "bon-bons" I've had in a long time.

Second day treats were dried fruits and nuts in a cool glass tube. Third day treats consisted of tamarind balls, molasses balls, green grapefruit balls (in Spanish we call it "fruta bomba" shells) and fudge. And the fourth day were more coconut macaroons! If I weren't entertained by the burger cook-off on Food Network, I might have called in room dining and asked for 5 pounds of this stuff, all to sit in the steamy bath and nibble on it until the drops of hot water hurt.

I called a certain ex and requested his presence. All I needed to have given him was 24 hour notice.

Next time. Our tour guide, Andrew, took us to our first resto stop. A hole in the wall turned out to be the best food I had all weekend! Mario's Inn & Catering has a single mission: to feed the Parliament.

Special arrangements were made, allowing us to have the entire dining room to ourselves. On the plate: curry goat and chicken, roti or "*buss up shot*" (translation: busted shirt because the roti is all torn up), chana (chick peas), tamarind and spicy mango chutney, cole slaw and spicy pumpkin puree. Sweet Jesus!!! I thank God for good cooks and damn good food!

Though I didn't know our group any longer than 12 hours, I wasn't embarrassed at all to be the only one to make two plates! One to eat, one for the picture. So here is what I devoured in all of 5 minutes. Not the prettiest plate, but the best dish I swear I had all weekend. Fine Indian dining on Friday night, gourmet restaurants on Sat. and home cooking, known as *Sweet Han'* on Sunday. And yet, hole in the wall got major kudos.

Let me talk about the mango chutney for a minute. Look to the top right of the pic. You know the dark stuff. Orgasmic. Simply irresistible. A **ménage-a-trois** between smokey, tangy and spicy, this side dish was a beautiful surprise. I've something similar but nothing quite like this. The mango seed makes it real experience with its stringy texture, but the kick of the hot sauce (which I can't remember right now) elevates it to a whole other level. I inquired about its ingredients and learned it has "geera", or cumin, giving it that smokey and sexy flavour, hot sauce and tamarind. It was heavenly. I'd spread that stuff on anything. I'd shower in it. I'm going to do all of us a favor and figure out the recipe so I can cook and share! So now that I've gotten the painful part out of the way, on to the SUPER FUN STUFF!!

GIVE-AWAYS AND RECIPES!!!

I'm so sorry I don't have a pic to share with you (think bright yellow, semi-soupy sauce, super aromatic), I just received a picture from the maker of this *CURRIED PLANTAIN* as prepared by the executive Chef of the Hyatt (whom I interviewed), will make you crawl under your bed until your best friend gives up on begging for some. I almost asked to Ziplock it and freeze it until I left. But that would have been tacky, right? And, possibly being black listed from being invited to do another press tour is not an option. I sadly saw the server take away 3 big hearty bowls of this, all to become compost. S.I.C.K (and ppl in Haiti eat mud patties). I'm going to fix it for dinner tonight, and then I'll share my pic and my own rendition of the recipe. Make it! Eat it! And then tell me all about it! Share your pics too! I want to report to the generous chef how many of my readers really enjoyed his dish! This might land me an invitation to gratuitously go back.

CURRIED PLANTAIN

Ingredients:

- 1 *tbsp vegetable oil*
- 1 *small white onion, chopped*

- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 hot pepper, seeded and chopped
- 1 tbsp yellow curry
- 1/2 tbsp masala
- 1/2 tbsp geera (see note above)
- 1/2 tbsp tumeric
- 2 tbsp shadon beni, chopped (shadon beni is similar to cilantro, so use it instead if you can't find it)
- 1/2 lb plantain, peeled and cut
- 1 cup coconut milk
- salt and pepper to taste

Preparation: Heat oil in a saute pan and add onion, garlic and pepper. Saute for a few minutes. Mix in the curry powder with massala, geera and tumeric. Add 1/4 cup water and add it to onion. Cook until dried. Add plantain, turning well to coat with the curry mixture. Add the coconut milk, stir and bring to boil. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Turn heat down on low, cover and cook until plantain is tender or for about 10 minutes. Serve with chopped up cilantro or shadon beni.

And now for the tangible goodies! woo hoo! I went to the local farmer's market and had a ball! I won't be able to share details and pics until next week, but in the meantime, I gladly offer some fabulous spices I picked there and at the local grocery store! All these spices were found in foods I ate, so I can speak for them, though none are new to my cooking or palette. **This is how it goes: if you can tell me what the national dish of Trinidad/Tobago is and what are the two major ethnic groups on the dual island, you will get:**

Trini Curry, Amchar Massala and whole seed Geera! And an added treat I'll throw in a pack of Mauby! Mauby is a popular Caribbean drink made of bark and other spices such cinnamon and star anise. Boil it in water, add sugar and let cool. Drink either hot as a tea or cold for a summer cool refresher! I will mail these great spices to the first two to comment and answer correctly. I'll contact you for your mailing address. Make sure to include your email.

NEXT POST YOU'LL FIND:

Making cocoa from real cocoa beans! Eating Indian in T & T Homemade honey from a local mass producer MORE GOODIES TO GIVE AWAY! (think tamarind, candy, and ???) Feel free to make your way over to my travel blog where I give a shorter but descriptive account of the non-food related activities on my trip: [A New Place In Life](#). See ya!

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