{rokbox title=|The kitchens of the Colombian Caribbean blend many intense flavors.|}images/stories/turistainternacional/Adondeir/cartagena/gastro-uno.jpg{/rokbox}

The kitchens of the Colombian Caribbean blend many intense flavors / Photo: Carlos Sueskún.

The kitchens of the Colombian Caribbean blend many intense flavors from the wide variety of produce in the fertile soils of the region, in combination with poultry, red meat and river-fresh and salt-water fish and seafood.

Cartagena's cooks naturally start by using local techniques of fried dishes with rice, soups and dressings; but they also adopt things from other climes around the world, such as meat cooked over a low fire, with vegetables, all with delicious and distinctive sauces and strong flavors.

One of the best traditions of Cartagena's cooking is arroz con carne en tabaquito. It is made from diced salted meta with a dressing, mixed in with rice to form a delightful savory dish with a distinctive aroma.

You will find almost everything in the Colombia Caribbean kitchen, with every shade of taste and flavor.

"Pepina"

{rokbox title=|"La Cocina de Pepina" is a typical local restaurant in the Colombian Caribbean.|}images/stories/turistainternacional/Adondeir/cartagena/gastro.jpg{/rokbox}

"La Cocina de Pepina" is a typical local restaurant in the Colombian Caribbean / Photo: Carlos Sueskún.

"La Cocina de Pepina" is a typical Colombian-Caribbean restaurant in the Getsemaní district.

It is an attempt to recreate the tastes of a region known as "Bolívar Grande", now the

Departments of Córdoba, Sucre and Bolívar.

“We cook our way, as we cook at home,” says María Josefina, owner-cook of the restaurant La Cocina de Pepina.

Plantain, yucca, yams and marrows come from the smallholdings that supply the restaurant. “We want to give the products that fed us as children in their true place of honor – they have nothing to envy in the kitchens of other parts of the world”, she says.

The dishes of “Pepina” evoke the age-old customs of the lands around the Caribbean, some drawn from the times when foods were preserved by sun and salt, such as the salazones.

They also serve dishes based on beef, pork or chicken, placed in the sun with salt and spices. Then they are cooked with steamed vegetables and served with yucca, yams or plantains. And since they are not served with soups or rice, they are called “viudas” (“widows”).

{rokbox title=|The best local soups are the sancochos and the mote de queso.|}images/stories/turistainternacional/Adondeir/cartagena/gastro-dos.jpg{/rokbox}

The best local soups are the sancochos and the mote de queso / Photo: Carlos Sueskún.

Rice is very important in Caribbean traditions and is to be found accompanying everyday dishes, combined with black beans, plantain, carrots, yam or onion.

The local favorites are the sancochos and the mote de queso, an old recipe that includes yams, slices of cheese served in grilled aubergines soaked in olive oil.

All these dishes are prepared with sweet peppers, a key ingredient in cooking in the Caribbean, and here they give a special flavor to the delights of “Pepina”

The juices are made from tropical fruit, such as the mamón and the corozo, when in season. Other flavors include water-melon, mango, tamarind, carambolo, peaches and plums.