

Top Chef Favorites:

By LISA SIM
Epoch Times Staff

Nestled in the jungles of the Yucatan, Mexico, near the Chichen Itza Mayan ruins is yet another preserved part of history—the Hacienda Chichen & Yaxkin Spa. It is an eco-resort and Mayan spa in the heart of the jungle, with several cottages you can choose from. The main house is a classic colonial hacienda built by the Spaniards in 1523.

The architecture will amaze you. With its classic period furniture and fixtures, you feel like you are in a time warp straddling the Spanish elite of luxury with the Mayan beauty of nature. These two worlds intermingle with ease at this incredible boutique resort.

Another equally important part of Mayan culture preserved at this famous institution is the culinary aspects of Mayan cuisine. Chef Josue Cime is the food historian who will lead your taste buds through Yucatan history.

Chef Cime's interest in cooking goes back to his youth, he explains. "When I was only 14 years old, I would watch my grandmother Beatriz Correa Chet, as she and others were busy in the kitchen. I would watch, fascinated by what they were preparing."

His grandmother, seeing his interest, would take the different spices and put them in her hand. She would then show them to Josue to let him smell and taste them, he says, so he gradually became familiar with them all.

In the Yucatan culture, it is usually the women who do the cooking, but the ladies of the community could see Josue's longing to help. So when he was 18 years old, they initiated him into the arts of Mayan meal preparations. He learned the secrets of moles (sauces) and the blending of special herbs from the jungles. His talents began to shine through the community.

Josue soon began to help cook at big community parties and became known as an excellent cook. Since he was so eager to get into the kitchen, he took a job at the Hacienda Chichen & Yaxkin Spa as a dishwasher. They spotted his talents and moved him to be a cook.

"It was here at Hacienda Chichen & Yaxkin Spa that I was taught the art of cooking fine food. A famous chef from France's Le Cordon Bleu came here to help the community. She had a lot of Mayan cooking experience and wanted to share and exchange recipes. She taught me for five years the arts of fusion and exquisite French cuisine. I shared some of my secrets as well," Josue reminisces.

Chef Josue Cime uses all these talents, from his grandmother's ancient knowledge to the modern-day fusion techniques of combining tastes and cultures. He expresses this in a wonderful marriage of Mayan pumpkin mole with tender chicken satay by combining the best in Mexican and Malaysian cuisine. This dish is just one fine example of his technique. It is perfect in taste in texture.

Cime's presentation is top-notch,

and his art of using garnishes not just for color or design but also for subtle flavor enhancing is exquisite. His creations are masterpieces of delicate balance.

In a famous Mayan dish called the "Arm of the Queen" he adds his expertise in garnishing and using herbs to make this simple polenta dish shine like never before. Hard-boiled eggs, pumpkin, and tomato sauce, with new added spices and flavors, just dance. The presentation is a work of culinary art.

Chef Josue Cime has the fortune of being surrounded by the Mayan jungle, which to most indigenous people is like a vast supermarket of opportunity. Hacienda Chichen & Yaxkin Spa also has its own organic gardens lush with herbs, vegetables, and fruits.

With all these fresh ingredients only a few steps away from the kitchen, what could make a chef happier? Chef Cime respects all of this and in turn gifts them to his diners.

Besides being a talented chef, Cime is a fine chocolatier in the ancient Mayan tradition. He is also an excellent, patient teacher and offers culinary classes at the Hacienda Chichen & Yaxkin Spa.

If you happen to be traveling in the Yucatan area of Mexico, make plans to stay at Hacienda Chichen & Yaxkin Spa. Say hello to Executive Chef Josue Cime and travel back in time through Mayan culinary flavors.

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Executive Chef Josue Cime shares some of his special recipes:

MAYAN CHOCOLATE RECIPES

Hacienda Chichen Executive Chef Josue Cime, an indigenous Maya chocolatier who loves rich, deep bittersweet chocolate, cherishes this family organic chocolate sorbet recipe. The recipe truly requires top-quality Kakaw (cocoa powder) to reach its fullest aroma and richest flavor. The quality of the cocoa powder makes all the difference when it comes to nutrition value since it is filled with antioxidants and mood-smoothing polyphenols. A great recipe to enjoy after a day of stress, this is an exquisite, easy-to-make gourmet treat!

GOURMET MAYA CHOCOLATE SORBET

Makes about a quart of sorbet (1 liter)

- 7 ounces (200 grams) raw unbleached sugar
- About 2 1/4 cups (555 ml) fresh water
- About 2 1/2 ounces (75 grams) organic unsweetened chocolate or Maya Kakaw (a top-quality cocoa powder will do)
- Pinch of salt (for a real Mayan taste, add a pinch of dried red chili)
- 6 ounces (170 grams) minced organic bittersweet dark chocolate
- 1/2 teaspoon pure organic vanilla extract

Place raw sugar, Kakaw, and salt in a large, deep saucepan. Slowly add the water while whisking the dry mixture together to make a uniform, thick mixture.

Cook over a gentle heat and frequently stir the mixture to retain its uniform texture. Bring to a boil but don't let it foam; simmer for 45 minutes and remove from heat.

Before cooling, add the finely chopped chocolate and whisk until melted; then, stir in the pure vanilla extract and up to 3/4 cup of fresh water to create a soft-body mixture.

Smooth mixture in a blender for half a minute, for gourmet lightness. If you use an ice-maker, follow its manual; otherwise, try Chef Cime's method for making sorbet by hand. Here is how he does it:

FREEZE & MIX HAND-METHOD:

You can use this method to make any sorbet.

Pour mixture in any wide freezer-proof container and cover it tightly with a lid to avoid ice crystals and freezer burn. Place in the coldest side of your freezer for about one hour (or a bit more until the mixture is solid outside but not ice-hard).

Break the semi-frozen mixture and place it in a blender until it creates a smooth ice-frozen texture; then return it to the freezer following the same care when done the first time, to avoid ice crystal formation. Repeat three or four times, same steps from freezer to blender, until forming a uniform thick sorbet texture; repeat procedure every half hour or before mixture hardens.

When the sorbet achieves its final smooth texture, place it in an airtight container in the regular cool part of your freezer. Sorbet will remain smooth if properly handled between servings. Just make sure the mixture does not melt or over-freeze.

TIKIN XIC: MAYAN GRILLED FISH RECIPES

Yucatan is known for its many meals marinated with achiote paste, a rich mixture of dried annatto seeds, herbs, and peppers. It can be bought at any Latin market or online. The paste's rich burnt-red color comes from the annatto seed powder, which give this dish its distinctive taste and aroma.

This recipe is a "grill party favorite" among Maya people; Chef Josue Cime serves it regularly at Hacienda Chichen & Yaxkin Spa.

Exotic Mayan Cuisine With Executive Chef Josue Cime



'ARM OF THE QUEEN': A classic Mayan dish skillfully prepared and presented by Executive Chef Josue Cime. Polenta-type meal, pumpkin, eggs, tomato sauce, and chaya (a vegetable similar to kale) make this dish filling and nutritious.

LISA SIM/THE EPOCH TIMES

MAYAN GRILLED FISH

- 12 ounces achiote paste (you can buy it online or in a Mexican market)
- 4 fresh fish fillets (your choice fish such as grouper or red snapper with skin)
- 2 fresh, ripe red tomatoes, sliced
- 1 large organic white onion, sliced
- 1 fresh, organic green bell pepper, sliced
- 4 fresh or dried epazote leaves (you can buy them online or in a Mexican market)
- 1 banana leaf (cut in four wrapping size squares you can get at Mexican market)

- 1 teaspoon virgin oil
- 1 small orange, juiced (buy orange that is tart and not too sweet)
- 2 limas or limes (juice and a bit of the zest)

Mayan Cuisine Note: You may substitute Yucatan's limas for any sweet lime citrus fruit available in your area; Maya cooks use sour oranges instead of sweet oranges, but mixing lime and orange will achieve a similar sour-lightly-sweet taste. Also, Chef Josue Cime recommends you grow your own epazote, *Chenopodium ambrosioides*, in your herb garden since it is a popular herb in Mayan cuisine and has many healing

properties when taken as a light herbal tea.

How to Prepare: Blend the achiote paste with the orange and lime juices; add a bit of water to make a smooth, thick paste to marinate the fillets with on both sides.

Place each marinated fish fillet in its own banana leaf square; top each fillet with a slice of tomato, green bell pepper, onion, and an epazote leaf; then wrap and tie with a thin banana fiber (from center of leaf).

Heat your grill well and then place each wrapped fillet carefully to avoid direct fire; best if cooked with a lid in light-medium heat for about 5 minutes. Serve wrapped with grilled veggies or organic green salad.



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