

Motherland: A Jamaican Cookbook

Melissa Thompson

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Melissa Thompson's enticing Jamaican-inspired cookbook *Motherland* combines a solemn history of the Caribbean island nation with notes about its delicious food and spirited reputation.

The daughter of a Jamaican father and Maltese mother, Thompson grew up in England. Her father made Jamaican food to ease his homesickness; for Thompson, both her father's and grandmother's cooking awakened an ancestral connection and made her feel less displaced in her mostly white, British neighborhood.

Motherland details how Christopher Columbus and his Spanish crew came to the Caribbean seeking gold and soon after began a brutal campaign to dominate the native Taino people. In the 1600s, the barbaric transport of African slaves to Jamaica by the British provided free labor for sugar, coffee, and other agricultural plantations. Like North American slaves, Jamaican forced laborers were given less desirable animal parts to consume. The book's traditional dishes, like slow-simmered Stewed Oxtail and Cow Foot, are testaments to the creative culinary skills of early African Jamaican cooks.

More familiar recipes like Curry Goat, Ackee and Saltfish, and Jerk Chicken are featured, along with Thompson's crisp Cassava Fries and Mango and Grapefruit Salad. Healthy "Ital" or Rastafarian diet offerings tend to be plant-based, like the Red Peas Soup and Apple Coleslaw. Thyme, ginger, and scotch bonnet peppers are mainstays of Jamaican cooking, as well as sweet potatoes, plantains, and coconut milk. For desserts, pears poached in sorrel, or hibiscus, offer a lighter alternative to the often-used red wine sauce; and the distinctive and delightful Tamarind and Bay Caramel Brownies are made with tamarind paste, chocolate, and espresso. Creamy, festive beverages like Peanut Punch can be served with or without rum, along with the bracing refreshment of home-brewed ginger beer.

Spicy, sweet, rich and varied, the recipes of *Motherland* evoke the unique wonders of Jamaica's enduring spirit.

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