

CULTURE IN SUDAN

Cultural milieu

„The key to understanding contemporary Sudanese culture is diversity. Each major ethnic group and historical region has its own distinctive forms of cultural expression.“

The Sudanese Family

Traditionally, the focus for Sudanese people has been the local village or nomadic community. These relatively small communities are made up of extended families based on lineage of male relatives and ancestors. The members of a lineage act in the group's interest, safeguarding territory or forming important ties with other families through marriage. Sudanese extended families include uncles and cousins going back several generations. These family ties determine a great deal about one's life, work and marriage opportunities. Usually a family leader is a respected elder.

For people in the north, who are primarily herders, family status still depends on the size of the herd. In settled villages, certain families hold the rights to own land. In the past, colonial governments sometimes gave powerful positions to certain families. These family groups have gradually become part of the modern political system, but traditional ideas about power and status endure.

Most Sudanese families hold strong traditional values in a rapidly changing world. From everyday meals to formal socializing, such as a wedding feast – in respect of tradition – men and women are usually segregated. Some rural Sudanese families have recently moved to cities, where family and ethnic groups mix at school and work. Upper-class families living in big cities like Khartoum and Omdurman tend to be closely connected to the government, business and the professions.

Food

Sudanese people are very hospitable. Meals are eaten around a large, communal tray on which meats, salads, and sauce dishes are placed. These are eaten with the right hand, using flat bread or Aseedá or Kisra.



Sudanese cuisine is as diverse as its geography and culture.

Central Sudan is perhaps the region that is the most diversified and colorful in its cuisine and dietary habits. This is due to its being a melting pot for the different Sudanese cultures and peoples and to its exposure to external influences, namely; the effect of the British domination during the Condominium period.

External influences on people's dietary habits in Sudan resulted in the inclusion of red pepper and other spices like garlic, in the Sudanese diet. They were brought to Sudan by Syrian traders and Arab settlers from the Mediterranean region who travelled to Sudan during the Turkish rule. These traders and merchants also introduced other dishes such as meatballs and pastries, and introduced varieties of vegetables and fruits not originally known to Sudan.

It is of importance to note that the main staple of Sudanese people is a special type of bread called Kisra (pictured above), made of durra or corn. Kisra is usually eaten with stew and has become the main dish in central Sudan and the entire country as a whole.

Stews eaten with Kisra are made of dried meat, dried onions, spices and peanut butter. Other ingredients such as milk and yoghurt may be added. These are used in preparing a well-known stew called Ni'aimiya, and in the same fashion, dried oca is used in preparing other stews such as Waika, Bussaara and Sabaroag. Miris is a stew that is made from sheep fat, onions and dried oca. Other vegetables like potatoes, eggplants and ingredients such as meat, onions and various spices are used to make different types of stews.

Stews are sometimes eaten with a different kind of dish called Aseed, which is made with wheat flour or corn.

Popular appetizers in Sudan include Elmaraara and Umfitit; made of the innards of sheep such as the lungs, liver and stomach. Onions, peanut butter and salt are added, such appetizers are usually eaten raw.

Popular types of porridges in Sudan are made of wheat, dhukhun (a type of cereal) and dates. They are taken together with milk, sugar and margarine.

Soups are an important component of Sudanese food, the most popular being Kawari' which is made of sheep hoofs in addition to vegetables and spices. There is also Elmussalammiya; a type of soup made with liver, flour, dates, and spices.



Historical evidence has proven that ancient Nubians were the first to discover wheat and through them, the rest of the world got to know about it. In Northern Sudan wheat still remains the staple food and is used to make a well known and main dish called Gourrassa. This dish made of wheat and baked in a circular shape with the thickness and size varying according to preference.

In the eastern part of the country, a popular-sweet dish is the Moukhbaza, made of banana paste.



In the west, tribal groups have adopted different foods derived primarily from milk and dairy products since most of them are cattle breeders. Dukhun is a distinct cereal that is well known in the west. It is used in preparing a thick porridge called Aseedat Dukhun, to which a stew called Sharmout Abiyad is added. Another form of stew is Kawal, which is made from a mixture of plant roots that are left to leaven and dried afterwards.



As for the southern region, the abundance of rivers, lakes and swamps made people dependent on fish for their food. A popular dish is a stew named Kajaik, which is made of dried fish, it is added usually to Aseeda. Sometimes natural margarine is added to the mixture.

Aseeda in some regions is made of Bafra, a plant belonging to the same family of potatoes. A green vegetable called Mouloukhiya is added to the Aseeda with peanut butter. Fassikh is another popular dish. It is made from a certain kind of fish which is left to ferment for some time and then cooked with onions, spices and tomato sauce. Fassikh is known in Egypt but it is eaten raw. It is most probably of Nubian origin, similar to Eltarkeen, which can only be found in northern Sudan.

Beverages in Sudan are typically made from local fruit such as; Tabaldi, Aradaib, Karkadai and Guddaim. Sudanese people are fond of a strong coffee, served from a special 'jug' with a long spout, known as Jabana. The coffee is sweet and often spiced with ginger or cinnamon, and is drunk from tiny cups or glasses. Fruit teas and herbal teas such as karkaday (hibiscus tea) are also popular. In Ramadan (The Muslims' fasting month), a favorite Sudanese beverage is Hilumur, made from corn flour and spices. Other popular drinks include Aabrai Abiyad and Nashaa, which are also made of corn flour.



Embassy of Sudan in Washington D.C.