

## Sierra Leone Food

By Kristy Hauver

Food in Sierra Leone takes a very traditional role. They have their base food, seen as a necessity, rice. In the eyes of many in Sierra Leone, "If I haven't eaten rice today, then I haven't eaten!" They have a variety of other foods available, but rice is by far the staple of the society. In the street markets you can purchase all the plentiful produce of the area: cassava, fruits, and even seafood. The rice being their main food has many ways to be prepared, as well as a variety of toppings and sauces for it. The toppings are made from the local resources usually some combination of potato leaves, cassava leaves, hot peppers, peanuts, beans, okra, fish, beef, chicken, eggplant, onions, and tomatoes. The people also look toward bones for sustenance. The thin bones, especially chicken bones, prove to be fairly easy access to the sweet marrow inside.

The local fruits are often found in the street markets; most plentiful are the mangoes, oranges, pineapple, and papaya. These are often viewed as snack food, and the rice is viewed as 'real food'.

The local 'bars' will sell that is called *poyo*. This is a sweet, slightly fermented palm wine from the tops of palm trees. The bars are only in some towns, and are often a gathering place for men. Women experience many disadvantages in this culture, and although are not banned from attending bar gatherings, it is highly discouraged.

As seen in many other cultures around the world Sierra Leone has its fair share of 'urban legends' as we would call them. In some villages and families these legends or taboos can circulate about certain foods. Usually they can be attributed to a law or tradition handed down by previous generations. Usually these taboos are about not consuming a certain food, or oil, but can be as extreme as not eating a food that has been prepared in a certain manner. There are also the religious beliefs that can relate to food. Most of the population in Sierra Leone is Muslim, which in its self can be a contributor to the taboos circulating their food traditions.

Food also plays large roles in gatherings and celebrations. The type of food present and the portions will depend upon the type of gathering. Almost all large gatherings demand a large portion of rice to be prepared; usually enough for the entire party to eat until they are full, and occasionally a portion is also prepared for ancestors as an honor to their memory. Again religious traditions also play a role in the types of food served at celebrations, or gathering of mourning, Mende Muslims, for instance, will mark a burial ceremony with *lehweh*, a ball of rice flour mixed with water and sugar, served with a kola nut on top.