

## Chapter Eight

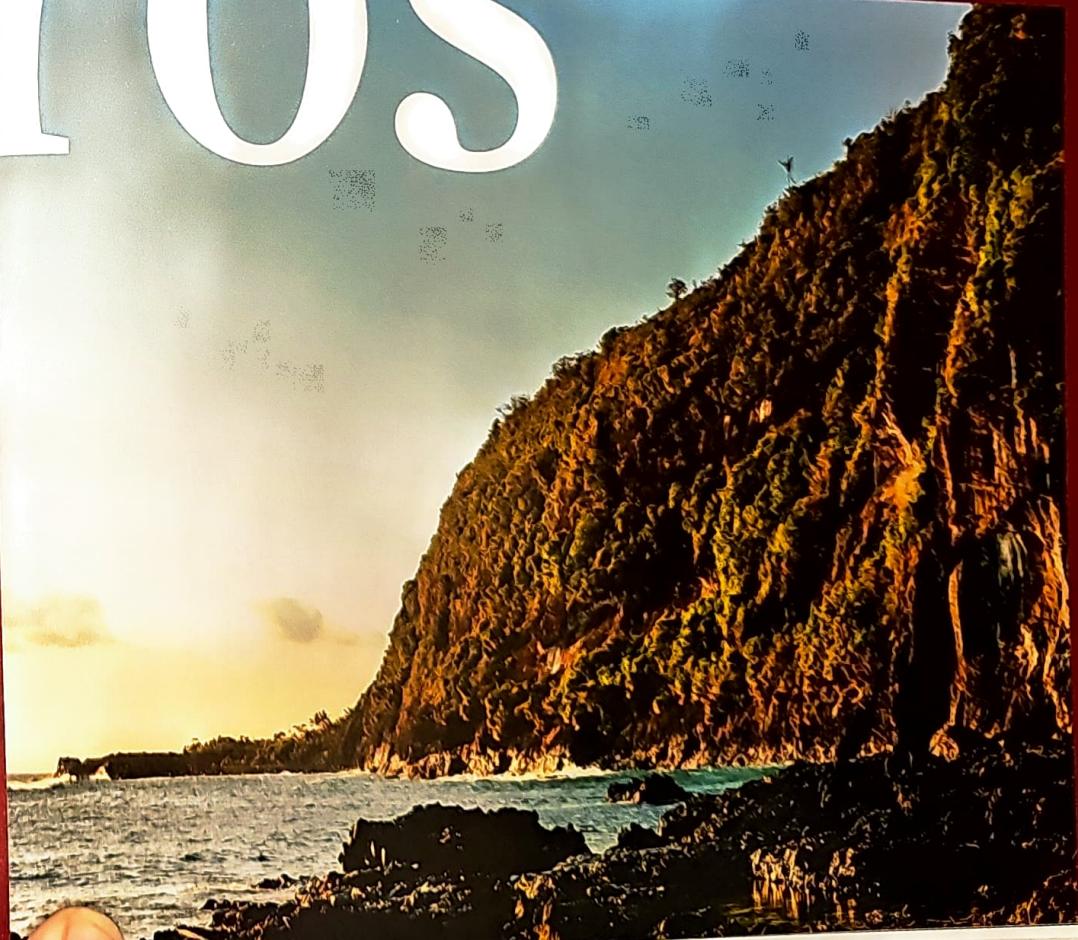
# Comoros



- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 260 Sweet Pea Soup with<br>Coconut and Ginger  | 269 Grilled Lobster Tails<br>with Vanilla Sauce              |
| 263 Ambrevades au Curry<br><small>CURRIED PIGEON PEAS</small>                                      | 270 Sweet Vermicelli<br>Noodles with<br>Cardamom and Butter  |
| 264 Roti ya Houma Pampa<br><small>SALT COD WITH TOMATOES<br/>AND ONIONS</small>                    | 272 Ma Zakia's Roho<br><small>COMORIAN WEDDING SWEET</small> |
| 266 Ma Mariama's M'tsolola<br><small>FISH, YUCA, GREEN PLANTAIN,<br/>AND COCONUT MILK STEW</small> | 273 Watermelon Juice<br>with Lime, Ginger,<br>and Mint       |



# ros



# Sweet Pea Soup with Coconut and Ginger

Coconuts are widely available throughout Comoros, and you will find them used in all sorts of dishes, including soups like this one, which is both easy to make and impressive to serve. The coconut milk not only offers the soup great flavor but also makes it very creamy without using any dairy, adding it to the list of wonderful vegan recipes in this book, such as Ma Gehennet's Shiro (Ground Chickpea Stew, page 45) and Kunde (Black-Eyed Peas and Tomatoes in Peanut Sauce, page 127).

**SERVES 4**

- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 1 small yellow onion, finely diced
- 2 tablespoons minced ginger
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more as needed
- 2 cups water
- One 13.5-ounce can full-fat unsweetened coconut milk
- One 10-ounce package frozen peas
- Small handful of cilantro leaves, for serving (optional)

Warm the oil in a medium saucepan set over medium heat. Add the onion, ginger, garlic, cayenne, and salt to the saucepan and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onion is softened, about 10 minutes. Add the water and the coconut milk and increase the heat to high. Once the mixture comes to a boil, reduce the heat to low and add the peas. Cook just until the peas are bright green and tender, about 5 minutes. Puree the soup using an immersion blender or in the jar of a regular blender. Season the soup to taste with salt and ladle into bowls. Top with cilantro leaves, if you like. Serve immediately. Leftovers can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to a few days and rewarmed in a pot set over low heat (stir while you heat).





# Ambrevades au Curry

(CURRIED PIGEON PEAS)

What we know as pigeon peas in the United States were first cultivated in India thousands of years ago, and they have since found their way to many countries. Known as toor dal in Hindi, gandules throughout Latin America, gungo peas in Jamaica, kardis in Malawi, and ambrevades in French, pigeon peas are a staple of so many cultures. This dish, eaten all over Comoros, takes its name from the French language (a leftover of such a long French hold on the country) and its flavors from the spices and coconut ubiquitous in Comoros. It's an affordable, filling dish that makes for a lovely side or a main meal served over rice. You could do plain rice or something even more flavorful like Bariis (Basmati Rice Pilaf with Raisins, page 87). While pigeon peas are readily available in grocery stores, if you can't find them for any reason, feel free to substitute black-eyed peas.

SERVES 6

- 3 tablespoons canola oil
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 2 teaspoons ground turmeric
- ½ teaspoon ground cardamom
- 2 medium vine-ripened tomatoes, coarsely chopped
- Kosher salt
- Two 15-ounce cans green pigeon peas, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup full-fat unsweetened coconut milk

Warm the oil in a medium saucepan set over medium heat. Add the cumin, turmeric, and cardamom and cook just until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add the tomatoes and a large pinch of salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until the tomatoes are nearly dry, about 5 minutes. Add the peas and coconut milk, bring the mixture to a boil, then reduce the heat to low, cover, and cook just long enough to infuse the peas with all the flavor, about 5 minutes. Season the peas to taste with salt and serve hot. Leftovers can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to a few days and rewarmed in a pot set over low heat (stir while you heat).

# Roti ya Houma Pampa

(SALT COD WITH TOMATOES AND ONIONS)

Fresh cod that has been preserved with salt and air-dried for a time is known as salt cod. It is not dissimilar from other salted, dried proteins like prosciutto, country ham, and all types of jerky. You can find salt cod all over the world (unsurprisingly, it travels well!), and it's a great thing to keep in your pantry, since it's an affordable way of incorporating flavor and protein into your meals and a great way to enjoy fish if fish is not regularly available where you live. Note that you need to plan ahead a bit when preparing it. The cod needs a very long soak before you cook it so that it isn't too salty or too tough to eat. Look for salt cod in the seafood department of your grocery store (it's often in the refrigerated section) or at your local seafood store.

SERVES 4

- 1 pound boneless salt cod (sometimes labeled saltfish, bacalao, or baccala)
- 3 tablespoons canola oil
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon ground turmeric
- 2 yellow onions, thinly sliced into half-moons
- 4 large tomatoes, coarsely chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Rinse the salt cod well under running water and rub off any salt on the surface. Place the cod in a large container or bowl, cover with fresh water, and place a plate or something else on top to keep the cod submerged. Cover the container and place it in the refrigerator. Soak, draining and changing the water every 6 hours, for at least 24 hours and up to 48 hours. When you're ready to cook, rinse off the cod, pat it dry, and set it aside while you get your aromatics going.

Place the oil in a large heavy pot or Dutch oven set over medium heat. Add the garlic and turmeric and cook, stirring occasionally, until very fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until beginning to soften, about 5 minutes. Stir in the tomatoes and pepper and increase the heat to high. When the tomatoes start to bubble, immediately reduce the heat to low, set the cod on top of the tomato mixture, and cover. Cook until the cod flakes easily when poked with a spoon or fork, about 10 minutes. Break the fish into large pieces with a serving spoon and serve immediately while hot. Leftovers can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to a few days and rewarmed in a pot set over low heat (stir while you heat).



# M'tsolola

(FISH, YUCA, GREEN PLANTAIN, AND COCONUT MILK STEW)

Creamy coconut milk and a fiery chile-and-garlic paste are the secrets to m'tsolola, a simple stew that stretches a little fish with a lot of plantains and yuca (also known as cassava; see page 22 for more information). M'tsolola is one of the most consumed dishes throughout Comoros and is considered a meal to be shared; it is usually served in a wide dish called a sinia. Ma Mariama demonstrated how she makes it in her outdoor kitchen; watching her prepare it is a testament to how much physical work cooking often is for women around the world. Rather than turn a knob on a stove, she built a fire. Rather than open a can of coconut milk, she cracked a fresh coconut open with a machete, grated the meat, massaged it with water almost as if she were kneading dough, and strained it to make fresh coconut milk. Rather than throw some chile peppers and garlic cloves in a food processor or even chop them on a cutting board on a counter, she placed them on a large, flat rock on the ground and used a smaller rock to grind them into a paste. We've adapted the recipe slightly to make it more conducive to Western kitchens. In making it, we're reminded how many conveniences we have and how important it is to appreciate them and the effortlessness we're so regularly afforded. A few notes about some of our changes: Ma Mariama uses a banana leaf to keep the stew from boiling over, and she says it also lends a sweet flavor to the broth. It's okay if you don't have one—the stew will still be wonderful. Also, she used very small green plantains that aren't available in the United States, so instead, we call for four large green plantains in their place. Wherever in the world you make this, make it for friends or family. As Ma Mariama told us, "Wageni ni baraka," which means "Guests are a blessing."



## SERVES 6 TO 8

- 2 hot chile peppers (such as habaneros or jalapeños), stemmed
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt, plus more as needed
- 3 large garlic cloves
- ¼ cup freshly squeezed lime juice
- 2 pounds tuna steaks or other firm, oily fish (such as mackerel), cut into 2-inch pieces
- 4 green plantains
- 2 pounds yuca (also labeled cassava), tough brown outer layer peeled off and discarded, thinly sliced
- 2 cups water
- 1 small red onion, finely diced
- 1 large banana leaf (optional)
- Two 13-ounce cans full-fat unsweetened coconut milk

Place the chiles and salt in a mortar and use a pestle to grind them to a paste (or place in a small food processor and pulse until finely chopped). Add the garlic, one clove at a time, and grind it into the chile paste. Stir in the lime juice. Place the fish in a large bowl and add the chile paste. Using your hands, rub the paste all over the fish, taking care not to touch your face after handling the hot paste. Cover the bowl and set the fish aside while you prepare the plantains and yuca (you can leave the fish at room temperature for up to 30 minutes or refrigerate for up to 24 hours).

Prepare the plantains by first putting on a pair of disposable gloves to keep your hands from getting too sticky while you peel them. Using a paring knife to help you trim the ends and skins, peel the plantains. Cut the plantains in half lengthwise and then cut each half in quarters crosswise (you'll end up with eight pieces per plantain). Place the plantains in a large bowl of cold water to preserve their color and to help remove excess starch. Add the yuca to the bowl, mix the plantains and yuca by hand, and set aside.

Place the fish in a large heavy pot with the water. Cover, set the pot over high heat, and cook until steam is pushing its way out from under the lid, about 10 minutes. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the fish to a large plate.

Drain the plantains and yuca and place half of them into the pot with the fish broth. Place the fish and red onion on top and then cover with the remaining plantains and yuca. If you have a banana leaf, rinse it and then cover the pot with it. Whether or not you're using the banana leaf, cover the pot with a lid and bring the mixture back to a boil over high heat. Boil the stew until the plantains and yuca are just tender, about 20 minutes. Uncover the pot, add the coconut milk, and bring the stew back to a boil. Once it boils, turn off the heat. Season the stew to taste with salt. Serve immediately. Leftovers can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to a few days and rewarmed in a pot set over low heat (stir while you heat).



# Grilled Lobster Tails with Vanilla Sauce

Known throughout Comoros by its French name, langouste à la vanille, this luxurious dish is the national dish of Comoros and features the vanilla that the French started growing in the area just before the twentieth century. Sometimes it's made by simmering lobsters in vanilla sauce, and other times it's made by stuffing whole lobsters with vanilla beans before grilling them. But it's most often made with simply grilled lobster, drizzled with sauce. We just went with lobster tails, since they're more readily available (plus, they're easier to eat than an entire lobster). For the sauce, use whatever white wine you would drink with this (that way, the bottle is already open!). If you don't have an outdoor grill, you can grill the lobster tails on the stovetop in a grill pan.

## SERVES 4

Four 6- to 7-ounce lobster tails  
Kosher salt  
2 tablespoons canola oil  
2 tablespoons unsalted butter  
2 large shallots, minced  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup white wine  
1 vanilla bean (preferably from Madagascar or Comoros)  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup heavy cream

Prepare an outdoor grill (charcoal, gas, or whatever you have) for medium-high heat. Using a chef's knife, split the lobster tails in half lengthwise, season the cut sides generously with salt, and rub all over with the oil. Grill the lobster tail pieces, turning them every couple of minutes, until the flesh side is nicely charred and the meat is firm to the touch, about 8 minutes. Transfer the lobster tail pieces to a serving platter and cover with aluminum foil to keep them warm.

Meanwhile, place the butter in a small saucepan set over medium heat (you can do this directly on your grill as long as your saucepan is entirely heat-safe). Once the butter has melted, add the shallots and cook, stirring occasionally, until just softened, about 3 minutes. Add the wine, bring the mixture to a boil, and reduce the heat to low (or move the pot to a less intense part of the grill). Slice the vanilla bean lengthwise and, using the blunt end of a paring knife or a spoon, scrape out the seeds. Place the vanilla seeds and the scraped pod in the pot and add the cream and a pinch of salt. Cook, stirring, until bubbles form at the edges, about 3 minutes. Turn off the heat, remove the vanilla pod (see page 17 for a good idea of what to do with it), and season the sauce to taste with salt. Drizzle the sauce over the grilled lobster tail pieces and serve immediately.

# Sweet Vermicelli Noodles with Cardamom and Butter

Toasted, softened sweet noodles flavored with cardamom and butter, this dessert is basically a warm noodle pudding. It's cozy and comforting and reminiscent of the many desserts made with toasted vermicelli noodles that are popular all over South Asian countries, whose cuisines have heavily influenced Comoros and beyond. Look for vermicelli noodles made of wheat (not rice) in the pasta aisle at your grocery store or in Indian grocery stores. If you find ones that are already toasted, you can follow the recipe as is for even more toasted flavor or simply just cook the noodles for a minute before adding the water. The easiest and least-messy way to break up the noodles is to crush them in a bag with your hands or a rolling pin (use the bag they came in or transfer them from their package to a plastic bag).

SERVES 4

- 4 green cardamom pods**
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter or ghee**
- 6 ounces wheat vermicelli noodles, broken into 2-inch pieces (about 1½ cups)**
- 2 cups boiling water**
- ½ cup granulated sugar**
- Pinch of kosher salt**

Use the flat side of a knife or a pestle to lightly crush the cardamom pods. Place the butter in a medium saucepan or large skillet set over medium heat. Once the butter has melted, add the crushed cardamom and vermicelli and cook, stirring occasionally, until the noodles are browned and the butter smells nutty, about 4 minutes. Add the water, sugar, and salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until the vermicelli is tender and almost all the water has been absorbed, about 7 minutes. Serve immediately, while hot, and discard the cardamom pods as you eat.





# Roho

(COMORIAN WEDDING SWEET)

Comorian weddings are a huge deal, to say the least, and roho, a fudgelike sweet made of cardamom-infused eggs and sugar, is a special treat often made for these celebrations. It is usually served with strong coffee poured into small cups. Roho must be stirred constantly while cooking. Don't discard the leftover egg whites; save them in the refrigerator for a day or two to add to your next omelet or to whip and fold into cake or pancake batter.

MAKES 16 SQUARES

5 large eggs  
5 large egg yolks  
2 cups granulated sugar  
1 cup ghee, at room temperature  
1 teaspoon ground cardamom  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup sweetened condensed milk

Place the eggs and egg yolks in a large heavy pot and whisk well to combine. Whisk in the sugar, ghee, cardamom, and condensed milk (it's okay if the ghee is lumpy at this point—it will melt when you heat the mixture in just a moment). Set the pot over medium-low heat and cook, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until thickened and the consistency is like pudding or porridge, about 1 hour. (The fat from the ghee and the egg yolks will start to draw out from the mixture, almost frying the mixture in its own fat; ultimately, the mixture will become less smooth and more granular and will take on a dark caramel color.) Adjust the heat as you cook to keep the roho from burning.

Carefully transfer the mixture to an 8-inch square baking pan. Using a spoon, spread the mixture so that it's in an even layer about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch thick.

While the roho is still hot, using a paring knife, score the top of the mixture in four even strips in both directions (you will have a total of sixteen squares). Let the roho cool to room temperature before cutting into (crumbly) squares along the scored lines and serving. Leftovers can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to a week. Serve cold or bring to room temperature before serving.

# Watermelon Juice with Lime, Ginger, and Mint

While watermelons originated across the continent in West Africa, they are widely consumed on the eastern coast and on the islands off the coast. Blended with fresh lime juice, spicy ginger, and mint and served over ice, this drink is an ideal way to cool down in hot weather. If you'd like to turn this juice into a cocktail, simply add a splash of rum, tequila, vodka, or gin.

SERVES 4

8 cups seedless watermelon cubes

½ cup freshly squeezed lime juice

One 2-inch piece ginger, peeled and coarsely chopped

12 large mint leaves

Ice, for serving

Place the watermelon, lime juice, ginger, and mint in the jar of a blender and puree until smooth. Fill four tall glasses with ice and divide the drink among them. Serve immediately.

