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Above: We ate a delicious traditional Garifuna lunch prepared by Miss Marva, the owner of Innies Restaurant

On a rainy Saturday morning, I sat in a white muddied minivan traveling up Belize's scenic Hummingbird Highway. My driver and guide, Kylon, was taking me on a tour of Garifuna food and culture throughout the country.

The Garifuna are descendants of native Carib and Arawak, and African slaves transported to Central America by the British. While they inhabit many countries along the Caribbean coast, the Garifuna are especially influential in Belize. Their music, in particular, is undergoing resurgence in the country thanks to local musicians fusing it with modern sounds.

On this particular drive, Kylon was taking me to the small fishing village of Hopkins for a traditional Garifuna lunch at Innies Restaurant. Upon arriving, we were immediately greeted with a colourful and mouth-watering array of food. The meal included fresh-caught grilled fish in delicious coconut gravy, along with plantain paste created by meticulously pounding ripe and lightly-seasoned plantains in a tall wooden bowl. All of these components together form the traditional Garifuna Hudutu.



From left: Hudutu, plantain boiled and mashed accompanied by cracker-like cassava bread; tools for making cassava bread

Cassava bread, a staple in many tribal villages in Central and South America, brought the meal together.

After our bellies were full and the table was cleared, Miss Marva, owner of Innies Restaurant, enlisted the help of her two beautiful daughters in a demonstration of cassava bread making - a labour-intensive process that can take days to complete.

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The steps:

- Peel skin off the cassava root using a sharp knife.
- The cassava root is pulverized using an egi, a wooden grating board embedded with small bits of quartz.
- The cassava is then stuffed in a long, snake-like woven basket called a ruguma.
- This ruguma is hung from a tree limb to strain the cassava. It may be left overnight to ensure all the juice is extracted, as the juice can be bitter and poisonous.
- Once dried, the cassava is sieved through hibise, flat rounded baskets, to form a fine flour.
- The cassava flour is spread over a large and hot iron griddle, a comal, to toast. The flour and resulting cassava bread is kept flat with a wooden tool called a garagu.
- And finally, you have cassava bread or ereba.

Parmjit Parmar is a publicist and foodie-at-large.

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