

CAMARONES AL COCO

COCONUT SHRIMP WITH SWEET-AND-SOUR PINEAPPLE SALSA

The origins of this dish remain obscure, but it almost certainly evolved as a natural marriage of the bounty of crustaceans and coconuts found along the world's tropical coasts. The coconut probably evolved in southeast Asia as did so many tropical foods. Migration to other shores could easily have happened as nuts fell from the trees and floated along on ocean currents. Coconuts were also popular with sailors on long ocean voyages, due to the refreshing liquid and the nourishing meat found inside, which further contributes to the explanation of their broad global distribution. There is no record of coconuts existing in the Americas until the arrival of the Spaniards. In fact, the name "coconut" derives from the Spanish El Coco – a name used for something akin to the "bogyman", supposedly due to the odd face-like impressions on the end of all coconuts. Whatever its origins, coconut shrimp can now be found in the Yucatán peninsula from the shores of Campeche to the beautiful beaches of the Caribbean.

10 APPETIZER-SIZE SERVINGS

✧ PREPARE THE BREADING ✧

- 1 1/2 cups (355ml) cornflakes
- 1/3 cup (80ml) all-purpose flour
- 2 cups (475ml) shredded sweetened coconut
- 1 1/2 tsp. (7.4ml) garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp. (2.5ml) salt
- 1/2 tsp. (2.5ml) freshly ground black pepper

- 2 eggs
- 1 cup (235ml) beer
- 1 tsp. (5ml) salt
- 3/4 cup (175ml) all-purpose flour
- 2 1/2 tsp. (12ml) baking powder

- 40 medium or 20 large frozen shrimp, *NOT THAWED*, shelled and deveined, tails intact
- 3/4 cup (175ml) all-purpose flour

- Vegetable oil for frying
- Salt

STEP 1 PLACE CORNFLAKES in a sealable plastic bag. Using your hands or a rolling pin, crush them until they are smaller pieces, but not totally pulverized. Add flour, coconut and spices. Spread coconut mixture evenly on a large baking sheet and set aside.

STEP 2 PLACE EGGS in a mixing bowl and beat until light yellow. Add remaining ingredients in the order shown and beat until well incorporated.

STEP 3 PLACE FROZEN SHRIMP in a sieve or colander and rinse under cool running water; drain and pat dry. Holding the shrimp by the tail, dip in beer batter and allow any excess to drip off. Roll the shrimp in the flour. Dip again in the batter, then roll in coconut mixture. Transfer to a tray lined with waxed paper and refrigerate for 30 minutes. (*NOTE: This method has been developed to help the coconut mixture adhere to the shrimp better. With the frozen shrimp and a first dip in batter and flour, you are creating a sticky surface to which the coconut mixture will adhere.*)

✧ FRY THE SHRIMP ✧

STEP 4 POUR 2 INCHES (5CM) OF OIL into a deep skillet or pot; heat to 350° F (175° C). Working in batches, cook shrimp about 1 minute per side or until a light golden color. (The shrimp will cook quickly and should not be a deep brown, which can cause the coconut to turn bitter.) Transfer to paper towels to drain. Sprinkle with salt to taste.

STEP 5 SERVE IMMEDIATELY with warm *Salsa Agri dulce de Piña*.

CAMARONES AL COCO (CONTINUED)

- **1 1/2 cup (355ml) Vinagre de Piña**

(Substitute: white wine vinegar)

- **1 4-inch (10cm) stick canela**

(Also known as Mexican cinnamon.

Substitute half the quantity of cassia cinnamon)

- **1/2 tsp. (2.5ml) ground allspice**

- **4 Tbs. (60ml) honey**

- **1/2 cup (118ml) sugar**

- **8 cups (2 liters) pineapple, cut into 1/2-inch (1.25cm) cubes**

- **4 cloves garlic, peeled and minced**

- **2 tsp. (10ml) fresh ginger root, grated**

- **1 chile habanero, seeded and minced**

- **1/2 tsp. (2.5ml) salt**

- **1/4 tsp. (1.25ml) freshly ground black pepper**

- **1/2 tsp. (2.5ml) vanilla**

✧ Salsa Agridulce de Piña ✧

STEP 1 IN A LARGE SAUCEPAN, combine ingredients and bring to a simmer.

STEP 2 ADD INGREDIENTS at left and continue to simmer for 45 minutes to 1 hour over low heat.

The pineapple should be falling apart and the liquid reduced and syrup-like (it should coat the back of a spoon).

STEP 3 ADD REMAINING INGREDIENTS and check seasonings; remove from heat and serve while still warm. The *salsa* can be refrigerated for 2-3 weeks or frozen indefinitely. Reheat before serving.