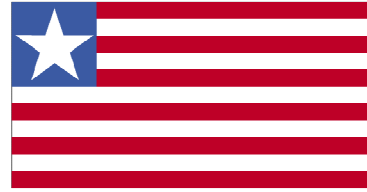


# LIBERIA



## History & Geography

- Located along the western coast of Africa, along the Atlantic Ocean.
- Borders Sierra Leone, Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire
- During the early 19th century thousands of freed slaves and mulattoes (aka Americo-Liberians) from the United States immigrated to Liberia and declared it an independent Republic on July 26th, 1847; the first in Africa to not be colonized. This brought conflict to the country between the newly settled Americo-Liberians and the indigenous people.
- Its capital, Monrovia, is named after the former U.S. President James Monroe.
- Between 1989 and 2004, political war rages within country and also spreads to neighboring countries. Since the war started, over 200,000 Liberians have immigrated to the United States; with the majority settling in Minnesota, Maryland, Providence, and Philadelphia. In Massachusetts, there is a large population located in Lynn and Lowell.
- English is the primary language; however there are 20 tribal languages.

## Health Concerns

- HIV/AIDS
- Hypertension
- Diabetes
- High cholesterol
- Cancer (of all types, mostly in women)
- Poor oral health
- Majority of the traditional foods are found in Asian and west Indian supermarkets. Foodways have not changed greatly, but activity level has decreased; resulting in higher occurrences of health problems.



## Food Management Practices

- Dinner is the main meal at home; lunch is usually eaten away from the home. Breakfast is usually not eaten, except among the elderly.
- Dinner is usually eaten together, but not at a common table unless they are eating from the same bowl. Sharing food from the same bowl/plate is common among family and friends.
- Women are in charge of buying and preparing the food. Young girls are also made a part of this process.
- Women usually serve men first, then the child(ren), and finally themselves.

## Foods

- Majority of dishes are served with these core foods: rice and fufu (fermented cassava/tapioca).
- Dishes are made with various green leafy vegetables: potato greens, spinach, cassava leaves, jute leaves, collard greens, and cabbage.
- Other popular vegetables and fruits are plantains, okra, mangos, coconut, ginger, avocado, watermelons, oranges, and grapefruits.
- Many dishes are made with palm oil; the nuts of the palm tree are boiled, crushed and oil is skimmed off the top.
- Fresh fish was the main staple food, but since immigration to the US, overall meat consumption has greatly increased. Such meats as beef, chicken, chicken feet, tripe, snail, goat, smoked turkey, smoked beef, smoked fish, and salted fish.
- Milk is not commonly used in households besides cooking.
- Foods are typically fried/cooked in vegetable oil, palm oil, and/or canola oil.

## Specific Food Practices

- Infants are not given a chicken bone before the age of one, because they will not eat their baby food when given because of the spices and flavoring in the chicken bone.
- After social gatherings with a lot of drinking, spicy pepper soup is given to sober people up before they drive home.
- Older populations commonly consume coffee or tea and bread or cream of wheat for breakfast.
- Food taboos are not common among Liberians.

## Major Celebrations

- Religious holidays of all faiths are celebrated with similar foods. Specific food rituals are not commonly a part of the culture.
- Social gatherings including brunch after church service, birthdays, graduations, weddings, baby showers, etc. all have these core foods present: jollof rice (similar to black American jambalaya), pepper chicken (fried chicken baked in hot peppers), potato salad, and pepper soup (broth made with meats/fish and pepper) and fufu (see description above).

Written by Michelle Carter, FSC graduate from Liberia

### Communication Style

- Between two women greeting someone should be accompanied by a hug and a smile. Men greet each other with a firm handshake.
- Surname should be used in addition to title, until person has given you the right to use their first name. When greeting always say the person's name after greeting.
- Speech tends to be loud.
- English is their first language; however it is spoken differently in the terms of pronunciation, spelling, quickly, and grammar.
- Direct eye contact is seen as disrespect and is usually avoided.
- Silence between small talk is seen to be uncomfortable and can be understood as the completion of a conversation
- Liberians can be very confrontation when their beliefs or decisions are being questioned, or they are being taken advantage of.
- Aggressive behavior, bribery, bargaining are a means of life in Liberia especially when dealing with food and/or money. Some of those characteristics can be seen at Framers' Markets in the US, where Liberian women will get their fresh produce during the summer months.
- Women will usual do the talking during interviews dealing with children and food. Men will not speak on the matter unless there is no woman available.