

The costa rica essay sample

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Phase I

A cultural group is defined as a group of people who share the same cultural experience. The people in the same cultural group identify with each other through a common language, traditions, food habits, nationality, religion, beliefs, and values. In today's world there are so many people who have migrated to a different country and still they follow the same traditions and customs of their culture. There are as many cultures in the United States as there are in the world, as the United States is the place of some form of acceptance for all cultures. For my research I interviewed a person from Costa Rica. I found that Costa Rican culture is heavily influenced by Spanish culture. In addition to this, I also interviewed my grandmother who is an Indian Gujarati woman. Both the interviews helped me list the similarities and differences of the cultural background.

The person whom I interviewed for my research was ethnically Costa Rican, Alejandro Sapriza. He was the first from his family to migrate to the United States whereas the rest of his family still lives in Costa Rica. He is not having any religious affiliations.

Costa Rican cuisine is a combination of Spanish, South American, and American influences. The food items needed to make Costa Rican are beans, rice, potatoes, and coffee (which can be sometimes used to cook food as well). Costa Ricans generally have three meals a day: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Traditionally lunch is the main meal of the day and they like to have a light snack in between lunch and dinner. Alejandro has his snack during his break which mostly consists of coffee, muffin, or a croissant. Usually the

mother cooks the food. Costa Ricans enjoy their family time and the dining table is where everyone sits, eats, and enjoys each other's company.

Due to modernization, the lifestyle and the food habits slightly change. For instance, this was shown when Alejandro said that he has not touched a plate of rice and beans all day because he does not have enough time due to work and other responsibilities. His life is very fast paced now since he has moved to the United States and as a result he tends to eat a bit more pre-cooked meals, which he would never have eaten back in Costa Rica.

There is no specific symbolic meaning for meaning of food to the Costa Ricans. When Alejandro he said, " I cannot really think of something that is seen as " symbolic" but there are certain foods that remind me of certain holidays such as homemade relleno (stuffing) that is made for Christmas.

Costa Ricans do not specifically have any food taboos except for the ones that the Catholics follow which Alejandro stated. He said, " I can't seem to think of any specific food taboos except being catholic we do not eat meat on some specific Fridays and in addition, we definitely do not eat things such as cockroaches."

Every country has its own festivals and holidays. In Costa Rica, some of the major holidays that are celebrated are Christmas, Semana Santa, Mother's day, and time of Independence. These are all considered to be significant and major national holidays. Food served for the holidays include special homemade relleno (stuffing) for Christmas as well as ham. Alejandro's mother also makes a special kind of rice made with some sort of thin noodle which is known to be very delicious during the holidays. Costa Ricans

generally do not fast but there are some people who do sustain from eating meat and such foods for religious reasons.

To improve strength, endurance, and vitality there are a few things to be consumed in every culture; health is of some importance to the people of Costa Rica. They tend to eat Caldo de vegetales (also known as vegetable soup) along with meat to get more energy. To prevent illness or diseases vegetables and vitamins are essential. To stay healthy and fit they eat fruits, vegetables, and water. They try to avoid too many carbs in their daily diet to stay fit and also by adding foods like fish to the diet helps them consume more protein.

When you feel sick, Costa Ricans mostly eat concentrated chicken soup. Alejandro confirms that, “ It can cure anything!” and he desires to eat it when hes sick. They also believe that a certain kind of fish oil, Bacalao is helpful when sick. Therapy used for curing the illness is sought through vapor rub on particular body part to help relieve pain or even by rubbing it on the chest to help stop a cough.

For Alejandro his cultural habits have changed as he is living in the US that has influenced his eating habits very much because they do not necessarily sell the foods he likes eating in “ fast food” areas. My food back home was more natural and did not have as many preservatives and condiments in them.

It seems that Alejandro misses his home food because the food in America does not taste the same. The influence of American culture has changed his food habits and he has no other option than to opt for ready to eat meals.

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Living in a different country all by oneself is difficult if one does not know how to cook their native food.

Alongside with meeting Alejandros and learning about his culture I have also interviewed someone who belongs to my cultural group, my grandmother. She currently lives in India with some of my other relatives. Her family also has not migrated to the United States yet. I am the first offspring of hers who has migrated and is now living in the United States as an International student. My grandmother is a Hindu, Gujarati woman who prays every day in the morning and before eating any meal. She thinks this is her way of thanking God for the food that has been given to her.

Indian cuisine which is mostly vegetarian consists of rice, atta (whole wheat flour), combination of spices and vegetables, and a variety of pulses. The cuisine changes with the seasonal availability of vegetables. Two meals are eaten everyday (lunch and dinner). Indians snack two times a day and they have chai tea or coffee with a salty snack in the morning. An afternoon snack is often served around 4 or 5 pm after a work day. It also includes chai tea or coffee, and snacks. It has been traditionally engrained in the Hindu culture that the women in the house prepare the food. Traditionally, meals are served and eaten while sitting on the floor or on very low stools. Food is most often eaten without using any utensils and instead by using the fingers of the right hand.

My grandmother lives in India so she usually has the traditional Indian food every day. There is not much of a change in her food habits from the family. When I asked my grandmother what is the symbolic meaning of the food for

Indian culture she said, “ food indicates hospitality.” Whenever someone visits your house, you must feed them good food, as guests are considered to be a form of God in Indian culture.

My family is vegetarian and we do not eat meat of any kind at all. Indians in general do not eat beef at all because cow is considered to be sacred. This taboo does not extend to the dairy products, the dairy items such as milk, yoghurt, and particularly ghee which is used in holy ceremonies.

The holidays in India are quite different from the holidays in Costa Rica. Indians celebrate Diwali which is the time of New Year according to the Indian calendar, Holi (a festival of colors), Uttrayan (a Kite flying festival), and Independence Day. Various kinds of food are prepared during Diwali. My grandmother makes sweets like kajukatri, barfi, and gulab jamun, mathiya and chorafari. During holi, dhani (smaller version of popcorn) and mamra are made. My grandmother fasts on the day of a few festivals. Food made from flour and salt are avoided on the day of the fast and only fruits and milk are consumed on certain fast days.

As my grandmother has said Indians consume more dairy products specially ghee (Indian butter) to improve strength. There are various herbs taken at different times of the year to prevent disease or illness. More pulses, fruits and milk are consumed to stay healthy.

When my grandmother is sick, she eats a kind of soup and a lot of pure herbs that helps her feel better. She believes that is the only thing that can cure her sickness than modern tablets that most people take. Certain kinds

of oil made from herbs are rubbed on the chest and back to help cure cold and cough.

The major thing that has influenced the food habits is the commercials they watch on T. V. for both Costa Ricans and Indians. My grandmother said that she gets to learn about the new brands and products available in the modern era through the advertisements she sees on the T. V.

My grandmother said that American influence has not influenced her eating habits but she can see the eating habits of her children and grandchildren to be different than what her era was like. She believes that Americans eat more often in restaurants that serve pizzas, pastas, burgers, etc., which according to her is not good food. It is considered to be unhealthy for her.

Similarities between the two cultures (according to me)

There are a very few things in common between the Costa Rican and the Indian culture. The only thing I can remember being common is that the mother or the women in the house cooks the food. Other than that, I can see major differences between the cultures. For example, some of the major differences can be found in everything the food, religion, food taboos, number of meals consumed during the day, etc. These differences have a profound effect on each cultures world view. I encountered interesting facts about Costa Rican cuisine as well as Indian culture while working on this assignment. Such experiences help make clear the disjunction between the two cultures.

Phase- II (I)

Costa Ricans have several various food dishes and a few of them are said to be similar to those of the neighboring countries because they mostly have the same ingredients. However the one thing that sets them apart is that the Costa Rican cuisine is mostly savory compared to the other Central and South American foods. Fresh fruits and vegetables, beef, and plentiful salads are the staples of Costa Rican cooking. The Costa Rican Core food includes black beans and rice is the backbone of the meal, carrot tomato cabbage salad, roast pork or chicken.

The secondary foods include vegetables are mostly in soups and stews with the exception of the following three plantains (fried like chips or patacones like mashed potatoes), corn one of the most favored vegetables (tortillas, corn on the cob roasted or boiled, empanadas, corn pancakes, fries yuca, fruits: papaya, mango, pina, sandia, melon, moras, limons, guayaba, granadilli, aguacates all can be served plain or blended with ice as a refresco. The peripheral foods include cheese and other dairy products like sour cream or chili peppers that are only used with the milder of the peppers. There are several other Costa Rican fruits like maranon, zapotes, guanabanas, pipas, pejibaye, manzana de agua, palmito, and carambola.

Meat and fish mostly are used in the preparation of Costa Rican food. Pork and chicken roasted over coffee wood for a smokey flavor, ceviche is a popular dish (raw fish with lemon juice onions and cilantro), lobster and shrimp served throughout the region, most seafood is more readily available near the coast (sea bass and swordfish). Typical Costa Rican snacks are fried yuca or plantains. It seems they have a wide variety of options for their meal.

In most traditional Costa Rican families, food is usually cooked by the women in the house, mainly the mother. Also the grandmother often prepares meals for the families and children, especially when parents are off at work.

Food is cooked during all three meals of the day; breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Also, two coffee breaks are prepared by the women of the household as well. Lunch is the main meal for the Costa Ricans. Food is usually prepared in the kitchen. It is usually consumed in the dining room at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Meals are shared with every member of the family at the dining table. This means they have a system of the whole family dinning together.

In urban kitchens, Costa Ricans use a small wooden table for food preparation. Table appointments used on the dinner table usually include plates, glasses for beverage like beer, forks, knives for meats, napkins. This means it is more similar to European and American culture.

Ticos (Costa Rican people) are gentle, friendly and very polite. Respect for older people is of utmost importance, always place Don or Dona before an older person's name. Tico society is classless. All people in Costa Rica are treated with the same amount of respect. When greeting someone you know, young or old, kiss the person once, on the right cheek (except if it's two men greeting each other- a firm handshake is expected). Costa Ricans are always very conscious about looking presentable and tidy when they go out. They like getting dressed.

Costa Ricans are usually very polite, quick to shake hands or place a kiss on someones cheek and they tend to use formal Spanish. Family is also very

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important, and it is considered polite to ask about how is their family doing. If you are invited to someones home, take a hostess gift such as flowers, chocolates or something special from your home country. If you are offered food, try to eat it even if you are not hungry. Costa Ricans dont like to say no and will avoid answering no, just saying gracias.

Dress code in San Jos is more formal than in the countryside. People usually don't wear shorts outside the beach areas and they use leather dress shoes, instead of tennis, unless they are doing sports. When you sit down to eat, it is polite to say Buenos dias , it means good day, good morning, to people you might be sharing a table with. If you're eating with a group of locals, it's polite to say buen provecho(bon apptit) —it means enjoy your meal just like we say help yourself at the start of the meal.

There are many holidays throughout the year in Costa Rica the main holidays are there are New Year's Day, Feast of Saint Joseph, Anniversary of the battle of Rivas, Easter, Labor Day. The only traditional food I found that is served for a specific holiday was that they serve tamales for Christmas.

There are around 270 medicinal plants growing in Costa Rica. There are a few traditional therapies involving use of those plants to cure the diseases and illness. The noni fruit is known as the “ miracle plant” or “ natures cure”. They use it to help cancer, digestive problems, gout, high cholesterol, hypertension, infections, lung disease, pain relief, type 2 diabetes, among other things. One specific home remedy this site lists is a mixture of aloe gel, milk, and honey for indigestion and heart burn.

There aren't any major food taboos in Costa Rica. Except for their main religion is Roman Catholic and Catholics are prohibited from eating meat on Fridays. Costa Ricans also celebrate Easter and on the pre-Easter weeks of lent meat of warm blooded animals is not eaten by Catholics.

Tamale symbolizes Christmas the Costa Ricans have Tamale at Christmas it is a special dish. Maize tamales are prepared by hand for Christmas Food Customs at Ceremonial Occasions includes Salty appetizers are served at parties and at bars and restaurants. Other special occasions (birthdays, graduations, and marriages) may merit a roasted pig, an elaborate cake, or other sweets. Food in Daily Life includes Maize is consumed as tortillas, which accompany rice and beans typically eaten three times a day with eggs, cheese, meat, or chicken and with chayote stew or salad at lunch or supper. The midday meal (i. e. lunch) is the main meal.

So we can see that Costa Ricans have a variety of food available all throughout the year. Costa Ricans are considered to be polite, and having family values.

Phase- II (II)

There are not a lot many comparisons between the information I researched and the answers that the person whom I interviewed answered. Both the questions were quiet different and so couldn't compare much. Most of the things seem similar to what the Aljendro said but there were many questions for which I thought the answers seemed a bit different.

During Christmas the Costa Ricans generally have Tamale as per the research but Aljendro said that he has relleno (stuffing) that is made by his mom during Christmas.

A few other changes I noticed was in the therapies they use to cure diseases. According to the research noni fruit is used to cure illness and another specific home remedy the site lists is a mixture of aloe gel, milk, and honey for indigestion and heart burn. But Aljendro said, “ Only one I can think of is using vapor rub on particular body part to help relieve pain, even rubbing it on chest to help stop a cough.”

Even the list of major holidays celebrated differed the research states that the major holidays are New Year’s Day, Feast of Saint Joseph, Anniversary of the battle of Rivas, Easter, and Labor Day. Aljendro said the major holidays celebrated are Christmas, semana santa, mother’s day, time of independence.

I think there might be differences in the research and the interview as the due to changes and modernization. There might have been changes in the lifestyle and other things which led to a few differences in the answers.

Phase -II (III)

This assignment was more of a challenge for me. As we were the first group I am a bit nervous about the presentation. Moreover English is my second language, so it’s more peer pressure for me. I got to discover how to work in a group and how to approach people for interview through this assignment. I

also got to gain knowledge about a new culture and a chance to compare my culture with the culture about which I just learned.

I think all the group members were involved in doing the research assignment. Stephanie helped with getting done the PowerPoint slides and the menu. Fannie somehow managed to get hold of someone from Costa Rica for the interview. Casey got the entire multiple choice question together. Vivian came up with great ideas which helped us get done with the research quickly. I'm glad I got all of them in my group it was great knowing them and working on the research with them.

Phase – III

Casodo

Roasted pork served with black beans and rice, fried plantains, and cabbage, carrot, and tomato salad.

Wine Pairings: California- Mirassou Pinot Noir

Old World- Joseph Faiveley 2004 Pinot Noir Bourgogne

Sopa de Mondogo

Hearty soup prepared with tripe, chayote, potatoes, cilantro, and sazón w/ achiote. Served with rice.

Wine Pairings: California- 2007 Banshee Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon

Old World- Cotes du Rhone

Arroz Pollo

Fried rice with chicken. Served with black beans, roasted corn on the cob, and cabbage, carrot, tomato salad.

Wine Pairings: California- 2008 Sonoma County St. Francis Chardonnay

Old World- 2007 Zind-Humbrecht Vin de Table Francais Zind

Dessert

One of the most common dessert in Costa Rica is

Tres Leche. Which is a three layered custard flan. Soaking process involves condensed milk, evaporated milk, and whole milk (hint at the name) and then topped with icing. Tres Leche is the national dessert

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