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Chorote con Churros

Hot Chocolate with Churros

Serves 6 to 8

Cultivated in Baracoa since the seventeenth century, fermented cacao beans are traditionally ground into a paste and shaped into a ball with just enough flour to hold it together. Raised on her mother's small cacao farm, Esperanza still makes hers by hand, preferring the darkest possible chocolate that retains the entire soul of the cacao. In this typical preparation for Chorote she gave me, which I've adapted here, dark chocolate is blended with spiced coconut milk and thickened with corn starch.

FOR THE CHOROTE

4 cups fresh Coconut Milk (page 298) or best-quality canned unsweetened coconut milk or whole milk
1 whole cinnamon stick
1 tablespoon whole allspice berries
1 teaspoon whole cloves
1 tablespoon cornstarch
7 ounces high-quality bittersweet chocolate (70% cocoa), chopped

FOR THE CHURROS

2 cups water
6 tablespoons (¾ stick) unsalted butter
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1 teaspoon kosher salt
2 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
4 cups canola oil for frying
1 cup sugar
1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
Pinch ground clove (optional)

Special equipment:

Metal or plastic *churrera* (churro maker) or pastry bag fitted with ½-inch star tip

To make the *chorote*, combine the milk, cinnamon, allspice, and cloves in a medium saucepan and bring to a simmer over medium heat, about 10 minutes. Whisk in the cornstarch until well combined. Whisk in the chocolate and return to a simmer, stirring constantly, until it is completely melted and smooth, 5 to 7 minutes. Strain the chocolate mixture and discard the solids.

To make the churros, combine the water, butter, vanilla, and salt in a medium saucepan and bring to a boil. Lower the heat to medium-low and slowly beat in the flour with a wooden spoon until the dough is smooth, 2 to 3 minutes. Allow the dough mixture to cool for 1 to 2 minutes.

Heat the oil over medium-high heat in a heavy 3- to 4-quart pot to 375°F.

Transfer the dough to a *churrera* or pastry bag fitted with a star tip. Working in batches, pipe a 6-inch strip of dough directly into the oil and fry, turning once, until lightly golden on all sides, 2 to 3 minutes total. Transfer the churros to a plate lined with paper towels to drain. Repeat with the remaining dough.

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Combine the sugar, cinnamon, and clove, if using, in a large shallow bowl. Roll the churros in the sugar mixture while they are still warm and set them on a platter. Serve with the *chorote*.

NOTE

Churros can be piped onto a baking sheet lined with wax paper before transferring to the oil. They can also be made in advance and chilled up to 2 hours before frying.