



Three hundred and fifty years after the birth of Jesus Christ, the Mayas in Mexico and Guatemala had never heard of this revered person, but they still celebrated their holidays with tamales—lots of them. Recent discoveries in 2010 at the medium-sized Mayan city of El Zotz in Guatemala included a tamale bowl with the representation of the head of a peccary, also called a javelina. This is pretty clear evidence that the pig-like peccary's meat was probably contained within the maize dough of the tamales. According to other archaeological finds, the tamales were served topped with either a squash seed sauce (*pipián*) or a chile sauce much like we eat today.

Although peccary meat is available in markets all over South America, I could not find a



commercial source for it in the U.S., so you will have to find a hunting guide and shoot one. During slaughtering the first thing to do is remove the musk gland at the end of the backbone or it will taint the meat. My friend Dave Jackson has been peccary hunting in the “bootheel” of southwestern New Mexico and says it's exciting and dangerous because herds of peccaries have attacked and killed humans before.



[This recipe](#) would be a close approximation of the Mayan tamales, with pork substituted for the peccary meat. People who have consumed peccary meat (I haven't, yet), say that it has a naturally smoky flavor, and it's been compared to pork, lamb, and veal. So, enjoy a uniquely American Mayan Christmas dinner and remember that early American cuisines like that of the Maya and Aztecs was more sophisticated than that of Europe at the same time.