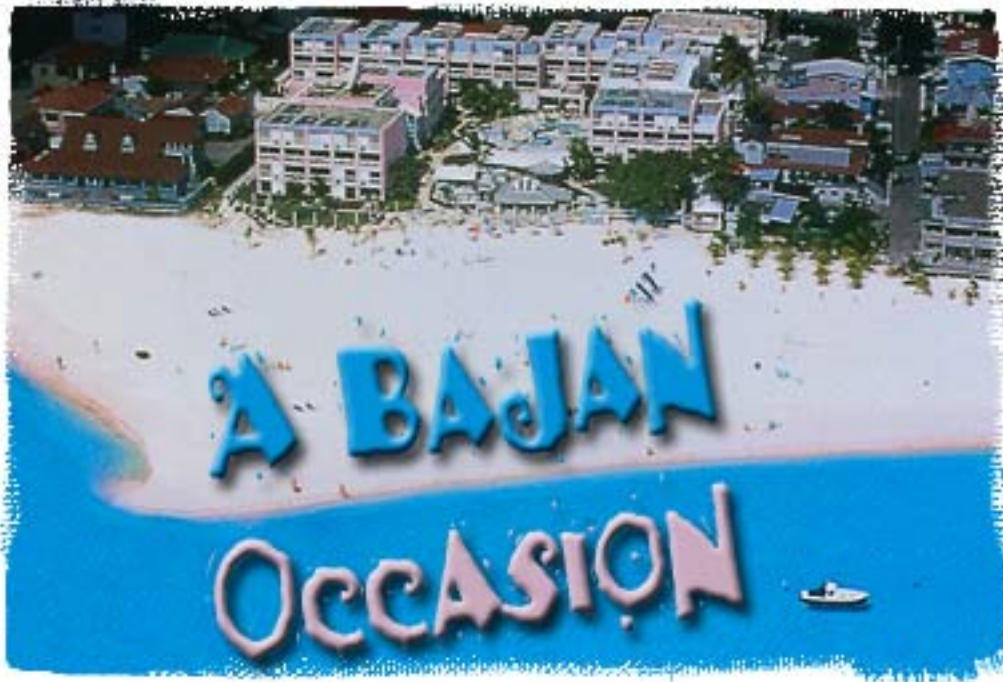


Story and Photos by Dave DeWitt



Recipes on Page 4:

- The Prime Minister's Hot Sauce**
- Enid Worrell's Corned Bonney Peppers**
- Bajan Seasoning**
- Creole Pumpkin Soup**
- Roasted Pork with Bajan Seasoning**
- Fried Flying Fish**
- Bajan Cabbage and Bacon Salad**
- Bajan Rum Punch**

<< Sandy Beach Resort

"One bellyful don' fatten de hog," goes a proverb in Barbados, meaning that it takes bit of an effort to achieve anything worthwhile. That saying applies to finding true Bajan

food if you're staying at a resort or beach hotel, because they serve mostly American-style fare. So, to experience the wide range of fiery island delights, we had to desert the beach and meet the cooks, chefs, and saucemakers of Barbados.

Ground Provisions and Bonney Peppers

Our main guide to the culinary delights of this 122-square mile island was Anne-Marie Whittaker, an energetic go-getter who markets food products under her brand, Native Treasures. With her help and the assistance of the Barbados Tourism Authority and driver Emerson Clarke, we were able to conduct our whirlwind culinary exploration with maximum efficiency.

We began with a visit to Cheapside Market, a hundred-year-old metal building that housed vendors both inside and outside. This market is a trip into the past, especially in Barbados with its fancy supermarkets. According to Anne Marie, most of the locals were "too big-up to go to market," too full of their own self-importance to be seen buying "ground provisions" such as yams and sweet potatoes and the vegetables like cucumbers, tomatoes, okra, christophene (chayote), and eggplants. This was no tourist market--Mary Jane and I had the only white faces and the closest thing to souvenirs were the bright red bonney peppers that appeared in nearly all the vendors' stalls.



Bonney Peppers on the Bush

The bonney pepper, a member of the same species as habaneros and Scotch bonnets, *Capsicum chinense*,

closely resembles the Congo pepper from nearby Trinidad. Fragrant and powerful, the Bonney

has a long and celebrated culinary history in Barbados. Richard Lignon, in his

History of the Barbadoes

(1647), described the two varieties of peppers he found on the island: "The one so like a child's

corall, as not to be discerned at the distance of two paces, a crimson and scarlett mixt; the fruit

about three inches long and shines more than the best pollisht corall. The other, of the same

colour and glistening as much but shaped like a large button of a cloak; both of one and the

same quality; both violently strong and growing on a little shrub not bigger than a gooseberry

bush."

Anne-Marie was shopping for a picnic and she needed more than bonney peppers. We stopped by the stall of the one vendor who had seasoning peppers. Anne-Marie bought every one she had and ordered more, explaining that the vendor had carried the seasoning pepper seeds from St. Lucia and grew them in Barbados. The pods were identical to Trinidad seasoning peppers and Anne Marie planned to use them in a seasoning paste for roasted pork.

At the stand of one grizzled old man, I spotted a jar of small, thin peppers.

"Bird peppers?" I asked the vendor.

"Nigger peppers," insisted the vendor, who was a black man.

"Not a very polite term," I observed. The man just shrugged.

"They're bird peppers in Trinidad but nigger peppers here," explained Anne Marie. *"Nobody thinks anything about the word."*

Indeed. Later, I asked our driver Emerson, and he just laughed.

"Nigger peppers is what they

are

."

I decided to drop the subject.

Inside the market were the meat vendors offering beef, pork, and what I took to be goat but was really black belly sheep, a common island farm animal and apparently a sheep that's adapted to

ninety degrees and ninety percent humidity. At Nora's stand, we ate the traditional Saturday souse, which is pickled pork parts with cucumbers, bonney peppers, and other vegetables. I use the term "parts" because the cuts of pork used are generally the less desirable--the feet, facial meat, and other trimmings. Except for being overly fatty, the souse was delicious.

Rumbullion

Does it sound strange that even in a tropical paradise I'd rather visit a museum than lie around on a beach? It's either curiosity or nosiness, but I want to learn all I can about the country and the people I'm visiting. The Barbados Museum, conveniently located near Queen's Park, was the perfect place to start. Its modern, interpretive displays tell the story of the island from an emerging coral reef to settlement by Amerindians to the arrival of the British and the birth of the sugar cane industry. Special exhibits describe the natural history and prehistory of this easternmost island of the West Indies, complete with early artifacts. A map room of the Caribbean and gallery of early colonial art are equally fascinating. Fortunately, the gift shop has reproductions some of the maps and prints.

Another place to catch up on island history is the Mount Gay Rum Visitors Centre on the Spring Garden Highway. Nobody seems to know precisely when Mount Gay started producing rum, but the date of 1703 was given most often, with 1663 also appearing in the company's brochure. At any rate, the scholarly work *Rum Yesterday and Today* confirms that Mount Gay was the first rum made anywhere in the world.



Sampling Mount Gay Rum

In a theatre designed to resemble one of 1,200 sidewalk rum shops in Barbados, a twelve-minute multimedia presentation on the history of sugar cane and rum making on the island tells of early beginnings of rum production in St. Lucy Parish, using very pure water that has filtered through limestone. Sugar cane and rum made Barbados the pride of the British colonies. Even today, sugar cane is the second largest industry, after tourism.

The film is followed by displays of antique equipment used in the early distillation of rum; a tour of thousands of barrels of rum ageing for up to twelve years; a viewing area of the blending and bottling processes, a tour of the cooperage where the barrels are assembled, and finally a stop at the bar in the gift shop for a tasting of the finest Mount Gay aged rum.

Since many of the processes in rum-making are similar to those in making hot sauce, I suddenly flashed back to the special tour of the Avery Island Tabasco® plant arranged for me by Paul McIlhenny. It was uncanny: in both places, there was fermentation, storage in oak barrels from

Kentucky, blending, and bottling. Of course, instead of hot sauce, the fermentation and distillation at Mt. Gay produces intensely flavored rum with overtones of sweet vanilla, bitter almond, and charred oak.

My favorite story of the Mt. Gay rum operation is that of Aubrey Ward, who bought the operation in the early 1900s. His hobby was fathering children by his women workers, somewhere between sixty and a hundred kids. Blame it on the availability of rumbullion, the first term for rum. The women were elevated to the lofty position of "child mother" and each was given a

brick house to live in. No wonder there are plenty of Wards in Barbados today.

Limin' with the Locals

There are no hot sauce factories in Barbados that offer an official tour like the Mt. Gay operation, but Anne Marie was able to arrange visits to two facilities. "Factory" is an extravagant term for what is essentially hands-on manufacturing of the typical Bajan hot sauce that's bright yellow with dangerous red flecks of bonney pepper. At the Lottie's facility, about fourteen workers sat around tables performing various necessary functions: cleaning bonney peppers, chopping onions, mixing herbs and spices, and applying labels to bottles of the finished products.



Ready for Processing

Jackie Heath, owner of Lottie's, was in the middle of shipping a 55-gallon drum of hot sauce to the U.S., where it would be bottled as Spitfire Sauce. She revealed to us that she had switched careers in mid-stream, giving up selling insurance to become the producer of one of the island's best-known brands of hot sauces, seasonings, and fruit juices. Her mustard-based hot sauce is so popular that Jackie has part of each batch packed in 32-ounce bottles! She estimates that there are between six and eight firms manufacturing hot sauces in Barbados right now, and that probably a maximum of 100 acres of bonney peppers are under cultivation in many small plots

to supply the hot sauce industry.



Bajan Chile Products

One of Jackie's competitors is Pat McClean, who runs L.G. Miller Import and Export, which manufactures and sells hot sauces and other products under the Windmill Products brand. Her father started the business in 1965 with a homemade hot sauce recipe and soon they were producing thirty gallons of sauce a week. Nowadays, their capacity is about 2,000 gallons per week, and part of each batch is packed for competing brands. They also run special manufacturing for other Bajan food companies; for example, Pat bottles Anne Marie's Native Treasures brand.



Pat McClean

When we visited, the plant was down except for workers cleaning tamarind, but Pat showed us the modern, stainless steel equipment and the stacked products produced from the last batches run: three versions of hot pepper sauce, two ketchups, a number of syrups, jams, and jellies, and the ever-present Bajan herb seasonings. Pat loaded us up with samples, and we staggered out to the car.

Ever the organizer, Anne Marie had scheduled two sessions of "limin'." Now, to lime is essentially to relax and hang out with friends, which is easily done in friendly Barbados. One night, she and her husband Charlie took us to the fishing village of Oistins for a seafood feast. Numerous vendors prepared the day's catch, spiced up with the ubiquitous hot sauces. I opted for dolphin at Bellamy's stand and received a succulent cut from near the backbone that tasted great with Anne Marie's tamarind sauce, not to mention her nutmeg-dusted rum punch. We were joined by Mark and Kim and Noel and Andrea and soon a spirited discussion resulted, during which we covered all the important subjects: could Dole beat Clinton, Princess Di's affairs, the Chicago Bulls, and Mighty Gabby's calypso song about Lorena Bobbitt.

The limin' continued in full force on Sunday, when a caravan of cars converged on Farley Hill and most of the crew from Oistins was joined by Jasmine and Frank, Norman the jokester and Dennis for a rain-soaked picnic. Farley Hill is a landscaped national park and the ruins of a nineteenth-century plantation great house that was featured in the 1956 Harry Belafonte film, *Is/and in the Sun*.

That would be before it burned down. Some 900 feet above the ocean, it is constantly cooled by the trade winds, which brought squalls that kept us jumping back into the cars. Under the direction of Anne Marie, we feasted on Cabbage and Bacon Salad, Roasted Pork with Bajan

Seasoning, Ackee and Salt Fish, Caribbean Rice, Coconut Bread, Black Cake, and Sweet

Potato-Pineapple Pie.

The only question we had was, could restaurant fare top this?

Dining from Jerkit to Sandy Lane

Of course, it was our duty to eat at as many restaurants as possible. One thing we had not counted on was dining with birds. Since most of the restaurants are al fresco, dining with only a roof or umbrella over your head, the birds will readily help themselves to your food. They are nondescript but industrious sparrows and ravenous small grackles, jet black with brilliant yellow eyes. As we found out at breakfast at the Sandy Beach Island Resort, they are particularly fond of croissants.

There were several interesting restaurants near the Sandy Beach, where we enjoyed nice rooms and a great view of a truly sandy beach. At the tiny restaurant Jerkit on the Worthing Main Road, Al Knight and his son Ian told us that they went to Jamaica to study jerk technology and then changed the cooking style to meet Bajan tastes. The Bajans, as it turned out, would not eat crispy grilled pork. "They like their meat with gravy," explained Ian. So now they use typical jerk spices, but stew the meat instead of smoke-grilling it as the Jamaicans do. The jerk chicken was grilled however, because Bajans are accustomed to barbecued chicken done on a grill.

True local cuisine was the main menu at the Bonito Bar, in Bathsheeba on the wild east coast.

Swimming is banned here but the site of the Barbados Surfing Championships is opposite the restaurant. Enid Worrell, former home economics teacher and now owner and cook at the

Bonito, was proud to inform us that her first name spelled backwards is "dine," which was propitious considering the quality of her food.

I had to experience the Fried Flying Fish, a Bajan specialty that's exquisite when slathered with the mustardy hot sauce. Mary Jane had the Creole Dolphin and our meals were accompanied by Fried Plantains and Breadfruit. Then Enid brought us her pride and joy, corned peppers. She described this use of bonney peppers in her thesis, *Local Nutritional Satisfying Foods*: "These peppers were 'corned' with vinegar and salt after extracting the seeds to reduce the strength of their flavours and these pickled peppers were stored for future use, when the fresh ones became scarce."

Continuing our search for local food, we tried with great delight the Planter's Buffet at Brown Sugar in Bridgetown. This classy, open-air restaurant had mahogany accents and delightful prints of the early days of sugar production and colonial Bridgetown on the walls. The buffet included Creole Eggplant, Pepperpot, Fried Flying Fish (again), Creole Okra, Saffron Rice, and Gooseberry Tart. The pepperpot, with its sweet and spicy, slow-cooked meat was particularly memorable.

The Waterfront Cafe alongside the Careenage, in downtown Bridgetown took the worship of

local flying fish to the next logical step with Melts, flying fish roe that's battered and fried. I loved shad roe when I lived in Virginia, but this roe was much milder and tasted more like a delicious fried clam. It was washed down with the local island beer, Bank's.



A Beachfront Café Filled with Tourists

The Waterfront's owner, energetic Susan Walcott, recognized Emerson and quickly pried out of us our purpose for hiring a Taxi Driver of the Year. In the true spirit of Mary Jane's philosophy of "it's a small world and you gotta be good all the time," when Susan heard that we were from New Mexico, she said that a famous musician from Santa Fe was having lunch on the patio. A few minutes later, jazz great Herbie Mann and his wife Janeal Arison dropped by our table to introduce themselves. Herbie was in Barbados for a concert and was dining at the Waterfront because it the main jazz bar on the island.

Speaking of musicians, we were fortunate enough to interview Eddy Grant, best known to North Americans for his hit reggae songs "Romancing the Stone," "Electric Avenue," and "Baby Come Back," but now is becoming famous for his efforts to preserve the history of calypso music. He is planning to open a Calypso Museum in Barbados.



Eddie Grant

On our last day on the island, we went from the ridiculous to the sublime. We flew back from a short visit to Trinidad on a Sunday around noon, and not only was it too early to check into the hotel, very few restaurants were open for lunch. Jerkit was closed, we eschewed the fast food of Chefette, and ended up at Bubba's Sports Bar in Worthing eating hamburgers and watching Germany beat the Czech Republic in soccer. We felt a bit guilty, but hey, it was all part of the Bajan experience. And the burgers weren't half bad!

What a reversal for dinner! I changed from shorts and t-shirt into a coat and tie and Emerson drove us to the fanciest resort on the island, the Sandy Lane, where the room rates *start* at \$800 a night. We were the guests of executive chef Hans Schweitzer, who had led the Barbados team of chefs to victory in the most recent Caribbean Culinary Classic.

The Sandy Lane was extremely classy and for a moment I worried about my garish chile pepper

tie. But Hans professed to love it as he greeted us and kissed Mary Jane on both cheeks. Swiss chefs must do that in Barbados, I thought.

Dining in a covered verandah open to the gentle breeze, we could hear the soft sound of the surf and gaze on the softly-lit tropical foliage below us. It was quite romantic and fortunately, the Sandy Lane management had thoughtfully provided netting to keep out the grackles. Chef Hans himself brought out the sinfully rich foie gras, imported from--where else--Long Island, New York.

As if that wasn't overkill, we shared a large portion of Lobster Ratatouille that was extraordinary.

Then it was time to order the main course and there it was! Oven-Roasted Leg of Black Belly

Sheep with Yams and Local Vegetables. Mary Jane opted for the Gently Fried Dolphin with

Pommes Duchess and Tomato Basil Fondue. The sheep was lean and tasty, much like a cross

between lamb and venison. Chef Hans' food was every bit as elegant as the venue. When we

return to Barbados, we're thinking about reserving the Sandy Lane Penthouse Suite at \$2,200 a

day and staying for as long as we can afford: about four hours.

Because of sugar cane and rum, Barbados became the wealthiest European colony in the Caribbean. It's still wealthy. During high tourist season years ago, two Concorde flights a day from London landed at Grantley Adams Airport. And because none of the other powers in the Caribbean--Spain, France, or Holland--ever captured it, Barbados has remained staunchly British in attitude and custom. The literacy rate is 95 percent and you don't see the shantytowns, grinding poverty, and crime I've witnessed in Montego Bay and Port of Spain. Even the money is easy: Two Barbados dollars for one American. The Bajans speak English clearly, have a great sense of humor, and love sports and hot and spicy food. What more could you want in an

island paradise? Oh yeah, the beaches are perfect, too. **The recipes are on the next page!**

Recipes

The Prime Minister's Hot Sauce

Here is the hot recipe of the famous Errol W. Barrow, who was Prime Minister of Barbados from 1961-76 and again from 1986 until his death in 1987. He was also an accomplished cook, and published *Privilege: Cooking in the Caribbean* (Macmillan Caribbean) in 1988. He noted: "Pepper sauce recipes can be adjusted to suit individual tastes: green papaya, green mango may also be used." We have modified this recipe slightly for the food processor-enhanced kitchen.

-

6 large bonney peppers, seeds and stems removed, chopped

-

1 large onion, coarsely chopped

-

2 small cloves garlic

-

1 tablespoon mustard

-

1 tablespoon white vinegar

-

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

-

1/2 cup chopped carrots

-

1 cup water

-

Salt and pepper to taste

Combine all ingredients in a saucepan and boil for about 15 minutes. Adjust the consistency

with water. Puree in a food processor or blender and bottle in sterilized bottles.

Yield: About 2 cups

Heat Scale: Hot

Enid Worrell's Corned Bonney Peppers

In tiny Bathsheba on the wild Atlantic coast, Enid Worrell creates some of the best Bajan cuisine at her establishment, the Bonito Bar and Restaurant. She was kind enough to give us her recipe for corned--or pickled--bonney peppers. The vinegar acquires the heat of the peppers, and then it's sprinkled over fish or curries. The pickled peppers are chopped up and used when fresh ones are not available. Note: This recipe requires advance preparation

1 pint fresh red bonney peppers, or substitute habaneros, stems removed, left whole

-

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

-

1 teaspoon salt

-

1 tablespoon rum

-

White vinegar to cover

Place the peppers in a 1-pint jar. Add the vegetable oil, salt, and rum, then add the vinegar to cover all. Shake vigorously. Allow the peppers to pickle for at least 2 weeks before using. As the vinegar is used, replace it with fresh vinegar.

Yield: 1 pint

Heat Scale: Hot

Bajan Seasoning

This version of the famous island seasoning is from Ann Marie Whittaker, who noted: "This is found in almost every home and is the secret to the success for many mouth-watering Bajan dishes." One of the favorite uses is to place it between the meat and skin of chicken pieces before grilling, baking, or frying. Note: This recipe requires advance preparation.

-

1 pound onions, peeled and coarsely chopped

-

5 ounces green onion, coarsely chopped

-

8 garlic cloves, peeled

-

4 bonney peppers, seeds and stems removed, or substitute habaneros

-

2 ounces fresh thyme

-

2 ounces fresh parsley

-

2 ounces fresh marjoram

-

1 1/2 cups vinegar

-

2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauces

-

1 teaspoon ground cloves

-

1/4 teaspoon black pepper

-

3 tablespoons salt

In a food processor, combine the onions, green onion, garlic, and bonney peppers and process to a coarse paste.

Remove the leaves from the stems of the thyme, parsely, and marjoram. Place the leaves and the vinegar in a food processor or blender and liquefy.

Combine the onion paste, vinegar mixture, and the remaining ingredients in a bowl and mix well.

Cover, transfer to the refrigerator, and allow to sit for 1 week before using. The seasoning will

keep in the refrigerator for at least 6 months.

Yield: About 2 to 3 cups

Heat Scale: Hot

Creole Pumpkin Soup

Here is a classic Caribbean soup, as served at the Sandy Beach Resort. Be sure to use a mustard-based Bajan sauce such as Windmill or Lottie's. Remember that pumpkin in the Caribbean is winter squash, such as hubbard.

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

-

1 medium onion, diced

-

3 cloves garlic, minced

-

2 medium carrots, diced

-

3 tablespoons brown sugar

-

1 teaspoon ground nutmeg

-

5 cups chicken stock

-

5 cups chopped hubbard squash

-

1/2 cup butter

-

1 cup cream

-

3 tablespoons fresh lime juice

-

2 tablespoons Bajan hot sauce

In a large pot, heat the vegetable oil and saute the onion, garlic, and carrots until the carrots are soft. Stir in the sugar and nutmeg.

Add the chicken stock and squash and cook until the squash is soft. Transfer the mixture to a food processor or blender and puree until smooth. Return to the pot, add the butter, cream, lime juice, and hot sauce. Heat, stir well, and serve.

Yield: 6 servings

Heat Scale: Medium

Roasted Pork with Bajan Seasoning

This is the great pork recipe that Anne Marie prepared for our rain-swept picnic at Farley Hill

National Park. Serve it with rice and peas or roasted potatoes.

-

1 3-pound pork roast

-

2 limes

-

2 tablespoons salt

-

4 tablespoons Bajan Seasoning (see recipe)

-

2 tablespoons Worcestershire Sauce

Wash the pork roast, dry it, and then rub it with the juice of the limes and the salt. Let stand for

15 minutes, then rinse and pat dry. Cut slits in the roast in at least 6 places, cutting as deeply as you can. Pack the slits with the Bajan seasoning and rub the remainder on the outside of the meat. Rub in the Worcestershire Sauce and sprinkle the roast with salt, if desired.

Place the roast in an ovenproof dish, cover with foil, and bake in a 360 degree oven for about 1 1/2 hours. Baste with the accumulating juices and during the final 30 minutes remove the foil and allow the meat to brown.

Yield: 6 servings

Heat Scale: Medium

Fried Flying Fish

There are a great number of variations on this favorite Bajan specialty. This is probably the favorite version, as described in John Lake's book, *The Culinary Heritage of Barbados*. Flying fish is sometimes found frozen in Florida markets; if it's not available, substitute any mild white fish, such as flounder.

-

8 small flying fish fillets

-

Bajan Seasoning as needed (see recipe)

-

2 eggs, beaten

-

Bread crumbs and flour, mixed

-

1/2 cup butter

-

Lime slices and parsley for garnish

-

Bajan hot sauce, such as Windmill or Lottie's

Rub the fillets with the Bajan Seasoning, then dip them in the beaten eggs, then the bread

crumbs and flour. Fry the fillets in the butter until lightly browned, turning once.

Serve garnished with the lime slices and parsely. Sprinkle hot sauce over the fillets to taste.

Yield: 4 servings

Heat Scale: Varies

Bajan Cabbage and Bacon Salad

This is an island coleslaw with a bonney pepper kick, another one of the spectacular dishes

served up by Anne Marie on our picnic. She says that it tastes best (of course) when made with

her brand of hot sauce, Tropical Inferno. Warning: this is not a low fat recipe.

Note: This recipe requires advance preparation.

-

4 tablespoons vegetable oil

-

1/2 pound bacon, chopped

-

1 head of cabbage, cut into thin strips with hard spines removed

-

1/2 cup mayonnaise

-

1/2 teaspoon seasoning salt

-

1 tablespoon bonney pepper hot sauce (Tropical Inferno preferred)

-

1/4 teaspoon paprika

-

Salt to taste

Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a wok and fry the bacon for 3 minutes. Remove it from the work and
drain on paper towels.

Add the remaining oil and stir-fry the cabbage for about 4 minutes. The cabbage should still be fairly crisp.

Combine the cabbage and bacon in a bowl.

In another bowl, combine the mayonnaise, seasoning salt, hot sauce, paprika, and salt and stir well. Add this dressing to the cabbage mixture and mix well. Refrigerate for 2 hours before serving.

Yield: 6 servings

Heat Scale: Medium

Bajan Rum Punch

"Do not let the pleasant taste fool you," warns Anne Marie, "it carries the kick of a mule!" She continues, "In case you drink up your supply and in your liquorized state find that you are having difficulty with the formula, this clever little rhyme will help you:

One of sour,

Two of sweet,

Three of strong,

And four of weak."

-

1 cup freshly squeezed lime juice

-

2 cups simple syrup

-

3 cups Bajan rum (Cockspur preferred)

-

4 cups water

-

A few dashes Angostura Bitters

-

Grated nutmeg

In a pitcher, combine the lime juice, syrup, rum, water, and bitters and stir well. Pour into

glasses filled with ice, and sprinkle the nutmeg over the top.

Yield: 2 1/2 quarts

[Top of Page](#)