

Best of Both Worlds

Whapping Costa Rican food cart serves up a fusion of Caribbean and Hispanic cuisine BY RICK LEVIN

For folks who relish both the stewy, fruity tang of the tropics and the spicy stuff that's served with rice and beans south of the Rio Grande, the cuisine of Costa Rica presents a savory medium. A Central American country bordered by Nicaragua to the north and Panama to the south, Costa Rica touches the Pacific Ocean on one side and the Caribbean on the other, and is therefore uniquely positioned to receive two different but complimentary cultural and culinary influences.

It's the best of both worlds, says Fred Badillaobando, owner and proprietor of Whapping, the new Costa Rican food cart parked beside Tiny Tavern in the Whiteaker. "It's a fusion between Hispanic and Afro-Caribbean," Badillaobando says of the plates he serves, which he describes as staples you can find at any restaurant in his homeland of Costa Rica. "It's the most typical Creole, Costa Rican food, made for everybody from farmers to surfers."

Typical, but largely unfamiliar to Northwest palates. At Whapping — patois for the greeting "what's happening?"

— the traditional plates, known as *casados*, are served with sides of rice, beans and a delicious fresh slaw, as well as fried plantains, a member of the banana family that runs larger than your average *platano* (Spanish for nanner). The main dishes are caribena chicken or a stewed steak which, in consistency and tenderness, lies somewhere between a roast and a jerk, and is mouthwateringly tasty.

Badillaobando says he learned to cook from his mother. "My mom is a culinary art teacher," he explains, noting that when he was a young man in Costa Rica, he and a good friend spent their vacations at culinary school learning the ropes of local cooking. Badillaobando moved to Oregon in 2002 to study multimedia design at the UO; he still runs a multilingual graphic design business as well as opening the Whapping cart earlier this summer — hours from about 5 pm till 2 am Wednesday through Saturday.

The most exotic item served at Whapping, at least to the uninitiated, is likely the plantain, which Badillaobando prepares in two traditional forms. On the one hand, there is the ripe plantain, known as *maduro*, which he fries in

oil until it caramelizes, releasing a sweet flavor that is irresistible. *Patacones*, on the other hand, are made from the unripe plantain, pounded down into a disc and twice-fried into a savory, salty cake and served with a bean dip and the house salsa, which is tamarind-based and to die for.

Also tasty are the yucca fries, sliced from the tuber plant and prepared like French fries, yet far more juicy and fresh than your standard potato stick. All of these traditional dishes, Badillaobando says, are a rich source of vitamins and high in fiber content.

Such sides at Whapping run between \$4 and \$5, while meals top out at \$9. According to Badillaobando, there are plans to expand the menu, though for now he's focusing on getting Eugeneans acquainted with the basics of Costa Rican eats. "We're doing a staple of the main ones," he says. "No matter where you are in Costa Rica, you'll see these anywhere."

Whapping Costa Rican Food Cart is open from about 5 pm to 2 am Wednesday through Saturday at 394 Blair St. See whapping.net/index for full menu.



WHAPPING FOOD CART OWNER
FRED BADILLAOBANDO
WHIPPING UP TRADITIONAL
COSTA RICAN CUISINE
PHOTOS BY TODD COOPER



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