

## GUATEMALA'S LAKE ATITLAN REGION

## Immerse yourself in Mayan culture

By KRISTI EATON  
Associated Press

PANAJACHEL, Guatemala — The boat zips across the water starting early in the morning, picking up local villagers and dropping them off at various points around the lake. A few passengers wear traditional Mayan dress in a kaleidoscope of colors, heading to the town of Panajachel in hopes of selling their handmade crafts to tourists.

Located in Guatemala's Western Highlands, Lake Atitlan is a tourist-friendly area rich in the Mayan culture. There are more than 20 Mayan ethnic groups in Guatemala, and the Lake Atitlan area is home to a handful of them, most notably the Tz'utujil and Kaqchikel people.

Each of the towns and villages surrounding the lake is known for something different — for example, textiles, ceramics or holistic therapies. The area is also known for Spanish language schools, with options for students to live with local families.

Panajachel is the main town and

where many visitors start their trip. Several other towns and villages surround the lake and are accessible by foot, tuk-tuk or lanchas (public boats) across the lake.

Panajachel, known as Pana, is home to several restaurants featuring local and international cuisine, coffee shops, street food vendors and more. The town's main street, Calle Santander, is where visitors can shop for textiles and artisanal pieces handmade by indigenous people from around the lake. During the day, the street is lined with vendors who set up shop, selling bags, wallets, scarves, coffee, jewelry and other items.

Across the lake, the town of San Marcos La Laguna is known for its laid-back vibe and attracts tourists interested in spiritual and holistic therapies, including massage, yoga and meditation. Visitors can sign up for classes of varying lengths at studios and retreats run by expats throughout the town. Vegetarian, vegan and locally produced dining options also abound in San Marcos.

The entire town is walkable, though there are tuk-tuk drivers



This November 2015 photo shows one of the volcanoes at Lake Atitlan in Guatemala's Western Highlands. Lake Atitlan is a tourist-friendly area rich in the Mayan culture.

Kristi Eaton via AP



AP photo/Kristi Eaton

In this November 2015 photo, a woman uses a weaving loom in Santa Catarina Palopo, Guatemala.

offering services as well.

San Juan La Laguna, meanwhile, is an up-and-coming town known for women's cooperatives and textiles created using natural dyes. One of the best-known cooperatives is called Lema. Started by Rosalinda Tay, indigenous women in the cooperative use dyeing and weaving techniques handed down from past generations. The natural dyes are made from various plants grown in the area.

Visitors to the cooperative can learn firsthand how to weave and create the natural dyes during classes or purchase a scarf, bag or other handmade item created by the women.

Just down the road, a community project in San Juan, the Utz'il Eco-Centro, is being developed

as a cultural exchange hub for the community, featuring a hostel, tea room, gardens, music stage and area for artisans. The goal of the project is to share the Mayan traditions of locals who are Tz'utujil as well as to promote environmentally sustainable practices.

Another town along the lake, San Antonio Palopo, draws visitors because of its ceramics. Cooperatives create a variety of intricate pottery pieces in different designs.

Though Spanish is often the second language for many of the indigenous people in the area, visitors can study Spanish at one of the schools in the region that offer one-on-one sessions and the option of a homestay or on-site accommodation.

I spent my mornings taking

two hours of Spanish classes each day at a local school in Panajachel for four weeks. My teacher was a young indigenous woman who lived with her family in the nearby village of Santa Catarina Palopo, so I was able to practice the language with her while also learning more about the Mayan culture and way of life.

The lake area offers accommodations for any budget — from the luxurious Casa Palopo in the village of Santa Catarina Palopo that features breathtaking views of the lake and volcanoes, to hostels and funky bed-and-breakfasts in San Marcos catering to yoga and massage enthusiasts.

Follow Kristi Eaton on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/KristiEaton>.

## The simple chicken sandwich gets a picnic-worthy makeover

By ELIZABETH KARMELE  
Associated Press

Atlanta-based Chick-fil-A famously claims that they didn't invent the chicken, just the fried chicken sandwich. There is no denying that the fried chicken sandwich is a classic and crave-able combination. Before I started making my own version of the sandwich it was always the first thing I would eat when I visited my hometown.

Six years ago, I created my version for one of my restaurants and called it the "chickwich." It was my public homage to the sandwiches that I knew and loved from growing up eating Chick-fil-A. For my version, I use aromatic buttermilk brine for the boneless skinless chicken breasts to keep them juicy and then dip them three times: First in seasoned flour, then an egg wash and finally crushed saltines to make the crust extra crispy. If you have a large sauté pan or a griddle, a buttered and griddled bun is nice, but the bun is just fine without any prep. The sliced pickles — the only condiment in this sandwich — are key, and if you are like me and want them in every bite, make sure to layer the entire top bun with pickles. I like tangy and sour dill pickle slices but if you prefer bread-and-butter or sweet pickles, they'll work equally well.

The sandwich can be served hot or cold. If you are packing this for an al fresco dining experience, bring the three components in separate containers and assemble the sandwiches just before eating. Otherwise, you run the risk of a soggy sandwich.

Elizabeth Karmel is a barbecue and Southern foods expert. She is the chef and pitmaster at online retailer CarolinaCueToGo.com and author of three books, including "Taming the Flame."



AP Photo/Richard Drew

Created by Elizabeth Karmel as a public homage to the Chick-fil-A sandwiches she grew up eating, Karmel's "chickwich," is dipped three times before cooking, for an extra crispy crust.

## Elizabeth's Chickwich

**Start to finish:** One hour and 20 minutes

**Servings:** 4

- 4 small boneless, skinless chicken breasts, brined and patted dry
- 2 large eggs + 2 Tablespoons milk, whisked
- 2 cups self-rising flour
- Seasoned Flour
- 1 sleeve of saltines, pounded fine by hand to make uneven crumbs
- Peanut or cottonseed oil, for frying
- Buttermilk Brine:**
- 3 cups hot water
- 1 cup kosher salt
- 1 cup packed dark brown sugar
- 2 generous sprigs of fresh rosemary or 2 tablespoons dried rosemary, leaves
- 1 teaspoon whole black peppercorns
- 4 cups cold buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon hot sauce or cayenne pepper
- Chicken Rub:**
- 2 1/2 teaspoons granulated garlic
- 2 teaspoons onion powder
- 2 teaspoons smoked Spanish paprika
- 1 Tablespoon kosher salt
- 1/2 to 1 cup pickles
- 4 buns

In a large saucepan over high heat, bring the water, salt, sugar, rosemary, and peppercorns to a boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar and salt. Stir and let cool to warm/room temperature.

Add 4 cups of ice cubes, the buttermilk, and hot sauce or cayenne. Whisk well. When the brine is cool to the touch, submerge the chicken

breasts in the brine. Refrigerate covered for 15-20 minutes. Remove chicken and pat dry. Discard brine.

Add chicken rub to 2 cups of self-rising flour and mix well.

When ready to fry, remove tendon from the back of the chicken breast, if it is still intact. Coat breasts lightly and evenly with seasoned flour. One at a time, dip into egg mixture and immediately into cracker crumbs. Pat cracker crumbs into all sides.

Let sit for 5 minutes to make sure crust is solid before frying.

Heat a cast-iron skillet with at least 1/2 inch of peanut or cottonseed oil.

When the oil reaches 325 degrees, place chicken in the skillet and cook for 3-4 minutes with the lid on. Remove the lid and turn chicken over. Cook with the lid off for another 4 minutes or until desired color of brownness.

To keep chicken warm and crispy before assembling sandwich, place fried chicken on a rack set in a sheet pan and place in a 300 F oven.

To assemble sandwich; open potato bun and layer one side with sliced pickles, place chicken on the other side and close bun. Enjoy immediately.

To up the ante, you can butter and grill the inside of the bun before making the sandwich.

**Nutrition information per serving:**  
650 calories; 148 calories from fat; 17 g fat (4 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 160 mg cholesterol; 2186 mg sodium; 89 g carbohydrate; 4 g fiber; 6 g sugar; 35 g protein.

## Quick and easy pickles

By MELISSA D'ARABIAN  
Associated Press

In the world of summer barbecues, the pickle hardly plays a starring role.

Truth to be told, "hold the pickles" is my standard order, as I am not a fan of pickles on a cheeseburger, nor do I particularly care for pickle juice leaking onto my sandwich bread at a deli.

But homemade quick pickles made from a variety of fresh veggies, not just cucumbers, are a completely different story! Quick pickles are made in minutes, not days, so the veggies stay crisper than store-bought versions. And since you control the ingredients, you can customize your pickles to make them as tart, sweet, sour, spicy or salty as you want.

Make one batch, and you'll immediately know how to adjust the flavors to your liking. You can even make a variety of pickling flavors easily — add extra smashed garlic cloves and red pepper flakes to the green beans and bump up the vinegar to give

cauliflower floret pickles extra pucker. You can even pickle fruit — sliced lemon, pineapple chunks, halved cherry tomatoes all make tangy toppings for grilled meats and spicy dishes, for example.

The homemade pickle is a far more versatile actor than its commercial -produced cousin. Try serving a variety of lightly pickled veggies with dip instead of the expected crudité.

Imagine a veritable mini-buffet of brightly colored pickled veggies in Mason jars set up next to the condiments at your next barbecue. Bring along a jar or two to someone else's party this summer as a healthy hostess gift.

Or, just keep a jar or two in your fridge for snacking. The basic recipe is easy enough to keep your fridge stocked, too. Just six simple pantry ingredients are needed: vegetable, vinegar, salt, sugar, garlic and an herb or spice. Which means homemade pickles can probably be on your menu tonight without even a trip to the store.



AP Photo/Melissa d'Arabian

## 6-INGREDIENT QUICK PICKLES

**Start to Finish:** 15 minutes

**Yield:** varies

- 1/2 cup white vinegar
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 6 smashed garlic cloves
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes (or other spice or herb, such as mustard seed, celery seed, or dill)
- 2 cups vegetables, approximately, trimmed to fit in two 1-pint Mason jars
- 2 Mason jars (1 pint size)

Heat the vinegar, salt and sugar in a saucepan with 2 cups of water and bring to a boil and stir until salt and sugar dissolve, about 2 minutes.

Meanwhile place the garlic and red pepper flakes at the bottom of the Mason jars, and add the trimmed vegetables. Pour the boiling pickling liquid into the jars to cover the vegetables completely. (You should have enough water, but if not, boil a little extra plain water and add.) Cover the jars and let the vegetables sit until cool enough to eat. Store in refrigerator. Best if eaten within a week.