

Fire up the grill for a tasty summer salad

By **KATIE WORKMAN**
Associated Press

This recipe sounds, looks and tastes fancy, but it takes only a few steps of preparation and some simple assembly.

It's one of those recipes that demands the best ingredients you can afford; it will make a difference. You can also use rib lamb chops, which are a bit pricier.

Play around with the herb and lettuce mixture. Any assortment of tender lettuces and fresh herbs will be lovely atop the rich grilled chops and tender, smoky onions. Grilling the lemons with the lamb and onions caramelizes them, and the juice you sprinkle over the finished dish will have a nice hint of smokiness.

You can let the onions and lemons sit in the marinade at room temperature for an hour or so, or in the fridge for up to 2 days, for more flavor.

If you have a vegetable grilling grate, use it. Otherwise, even if you use a wide grilling spatula, you might end up sacrificing a few of the onion rings to the grilling gods.

Katie Workman has written two cookbooks focused on easy, family-friendly cooking, "Dinner Solved!" and "The Mom 100 Cookbook." She blogs at <http://www.themom100.com/about-katie-workman/>



Grilled lamb chops and onions with herb salad.

Katie Workman via AP

GRILLED LAMB CHOPS, ONIONS, HERB SALAD

Start to finish: One hour
Servings: 5

- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil, divided
- ¼ cup dry white wine
- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar, preferably white balsamic
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- 3 large yellow or Vidalia onions
- 3 lemons, halved crosswise
- 10 loin lamb chops, about 1-inch thick
- 2 cups baby arugula
- 1 cup flat-leaf parsley leaves

Combine ¼ cup of the olive oil with the white wine, balsamic vinegar, and salt and pepper in a shallow baking dish. Peel the onions and cut them crosswise into ½-inch slices. Place them in the baking dish along with the lemon halves, turn to coat with the marinade (it's fine to stack the onion slices) and set aside.

Brush the lamb chops with 2 tablespoons of the remaining olive oil, generously season with salt and pepper, and let sit for 30 minutes at room temperature. Meanwhile, preheat the grill to medium/medium-high.

Grill the onions and the lamb chops for about 8 minutes, about 4 minutes on each side, so that they get nicely browned on both sides. Turn the onions with a grilling spatula (you can use a spatula or tongs for the lamb). At the same time, grill the lemons cut-side down for about 5 minutes. The internal temperature of the lamb chops should be 130 degree F for medium rare.

Remove the chops and lemons from the grill and let sit on a cutting board for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, move the onions to a cooler area of the grill or turn the gas down, and let them continue to soften while the lamb and lemons sit, watching carefully to make sure the onions don't burn.

While the chops sit and the onions finish cooking, place the arugula and parsley in a medium bowl. Drizzle with the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil, season with salt and pepper, and toss.

Place the lamb chops and onions on a serving platter. Pile the arugula and herb salad on top. Place the lemon halves on the side so people can squeeze them, or squeeze the juice yourself all over the meal and serve immediately.

Nutrition information per serving: 420 calories; 171 calories from fat; 19 g fat (4 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 146 mg cholesterol; 403 mg sodium; 11 g carbohydrate; 2 g fiber; 5 g sugar; 51 g protein.



Meera Sodha via AP

Date, coconut and peanut granola bars.

Naturally sweet granola bars are sure to be a hit

By **MEERA SODHA**
Associated Press

Once upon a time, my Indian grandma was left in charge of packing school lunches for my sisters and me. We were sent off to school with some potato curry and a garlic chutney so fierce my eyebrows twitched on the bus all the way to school and I couldn't bear to open the Tupperware in fear of what might be unleashed on my friends.

After that, I outlawed traditional Indian food in my packed lunches, setting my mother free to get creative with Anglo-Indian dishes that became family favorites.

This granola bar using dates, coconut and peanuts is among the recipes she created. It doesn't use sugar, instead relying on dates and honey as sweeteners. The

dates add a lovely fudgy texture and the oats and peanuts give slow release energy which will keep your kids (and you) going for a few hours. Cinnamon and ginger, in a nod to India, are used in small amounts to add a hint of warmth and extra flavor.

Mum used to make it in big batches on a Sunday and fill the house with the most divine smells, which would creep under the door while I was doing my homework. For the rest of the week, I'd look forward to packed lunches knowing what I was going to get.

Meera Sodha is an Indian foods expert and author of "Made in India: Recipes from an Indian family kitchen." She lives in London, blogs at www.meerasodha.com and tweets at @meerasodha

Here's the scoop on Cuba's first U.S.-run hotel in 50 years

By **MICHAEL WEISSENSTEIN**
Associated Press

HAVANA — Cuba is a land of architectural splendors, stunning scenery, warm, welcoming people and some of the world's worst hotels.

Communist states aren't known for their hotel management, and I've heard and lived a string of hotel horror stories since I moved here in 2014: inedible food, rude staff, sewage leaks in kitchens, glass doors collapsing into shards onto guests as they shower.

So when American hotel giant Starwood announced a deal to manage the Fifth Avenue Hotel run by the Cuban military in the upscale Miramar section of Havana, I was intrigued. Would Starwood be able to upgrade a facility that guests had lambasted online for crickets, cockroaches and dirty carpets? A lot's riding on the answer.

Tourism rose 20 percent last year after Presidents Raul Castro and Barack Obama declared detente. Commercial flights from the U.S. begin in September, bringing another surge in visitors. With patron Venezuela collapsing, Cuba needs tourists' money.

But there's a shortage of decent hotel rooms even in facilities labeled as five-star. U.S. chains hope to help solve that problem and get back into a one-time American playground that's slowly reopening its economy after a half-century of communism.

If American companies can expand and improve Cuba's state-run hotel industry, there could be a lot of winners.

So I made a reservation. Using Starwood's website, I booked a "Classic Room" with king bed for two for \$250. Testing Starwood's invitation for special requests, I asked for extra pillows, water and a map upon arrival.

Starwood has been retraining staff at the Fifth Avenue, which it's renamed Four Points by Sheraton Havana. The training shows: Check-in was remarkably smooth for a Cuban hotel. Front-desk clerks were solicitous and spoke fluent English. My fiancée and I got our key and headed to our room. It had two single beds instead of a king, and no water, extra pillows or map. The front desk quickly changed us to a room with a king.

But the rest of our experience was pretty unpleasant. The hotel had been rebranded with great fanfare a month earlier, including promised amenities like Starwood's comfortable "signature beds." But our mattress was saggy, with a stained decorative cover and flat sheet tucked over the sort of squeaky rubber pad used for bed-wetting children. When I investigated why a bedside lamp wasn't working (due to a missing bulb), I realized that the entire wall-mounted light



AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa

In this June 28 photo, a vintage car passes in front of the Four Points by Sheraton hotel in Havana, Cuba. American hotel giant Starwood has begun managing this hotel run by the Cuban military, opening one of the biggest holes in the U.S. trade embargo on Cuba since Presidents Barack Obama and Raul Castro declared detente in Dec. 2014.

was loose and balanced in the sole position that kept it from collapsing.

The hallways carpets looked new and the paint looked fresh, and our room did have a new-looking hairdryer, showerhead and bathroom tiles. But the walls were scuffed and dirty. Tables looked like someone had scraped stickers off them with a piece of sharp plastic. The minibar door hung loose on its hinge, with drinks inside in a pool of room-temperature water.

The coffee maker came with two packs of coffee, a teabag and a sign: "Coffe-Te NOT INCLUDED." In-room internet was \$5 an hour.

Dspirit, my fiancée and I headed to the pool. The front desk clerk said it was open 'til 7 p.m. but added graciously, "You can swim until 9 or 10."

We arrived at 6:30 p.m. It was closed. A worker treating it with chemicals from a plastic bucket told us to come back after two hours.

We went to the spacious terrace for cocktails and snacks. The shrimp cocktail wasn't terrible: a handful of shrimp doused in Russian dressing in a martini glass filled with lettuce. But the menu dated to around the hotel's opening in 2010, when it was run by the Spanish hotel chain Barcelo. How do I know? Because someone had taped a little piece of paper with the "Four Points by Sheraton" logo on the front. When I pulled it back, it said "Barcelo."

Unwilling to try our luck with entrees, we fled for an excellent privately run restaurant nearby, then stopped in the lobby for a nightcap.

I asked for an Absolut vodka, soda water and lime. I don't know what came, but it wasn't Absolut. It tasted of paint thinner and curdled my mouth.

When I complained to the bartender, she tasted and agreed it wasn't Absolut but showed me the

bottle and insisted no one at the hotel had filled it with a cheaper brand or adulterated liquor. She opened a fresh bottle of Finlandia and poured me a drink that tasted as advertised.

I headed to the men's room but fled the moment I opened the door, driven back by the smell of raw sewage. We headed for our room.

Our stay ended the next morning on its lowest note.

The complimentary buffet looked inedible and was: a series of warming pans containing two-toned scrambled eggs, greasy sausages and swollen boiled hot dogs floating in tepid water. To accompany the spread, a mix of stale and fresh bread rolls and puckered chunks of guayaba, papaya and watermelon.

I tried a grayish sausage patty and spit it out. It was colder than room temperature. I washed it down with coffee that was thin and bitter with a chemical aftertaste.

We checked out and headed home to recover.

Pablo Casal, the hotel's manager, appears to be working furiously to upgrade the rundown facilities he took over from Gaviota, the tourism arm of the Cuban military. Asked for comment about our experience, he said that all hotel conversions take time and guests should expect rapid improvements in coming months, including the arrival of new, Sheraton-standard mattresses and bed linens by the beginning of September.

"If you stay right now at the hotel, you can have a good experience. It's not the experience that we want," he told me. "We want to have all the standards in place."

I believe he'll be able to improve his hotel dramatically in coming months. But until then, those expecting international standards from the first U.S.-run hotel in Cuba in more than 50 years may go home disappointed.

DATE, COCONUT, PEANUT GRANOLA BAR

Start to finish: 40 minutes
Servings: 16

- 1 ¼ sticks butter, unsalted
- 1 cup dates, pitted and chopped
- 1/3 cup honey, plus more to drizzle
- 1 ½ teaspoons ground ginger
- 1 cup desiccated coconut
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 cups rolled oats
- ½ cup roasted unsalted peanuts, chopped

Grease and line an 8-inch square baking pan and pre-heat the oven to 325 degrees.

Add the butter, dates, honey, coconut, ginger and cinnamon to a deep saucepan and heat over a low flame until butter and honey melt, stirring occasionally.

Stir in the oats and chopped peanuts until mixed, then spread evenly into the baking pan. Pat the top down with a spoon to smooth the top and drizzle top with honey.

Bake for 25 to 30 minutes or until brown and firm on top. Cool before cutting into squares.

These bars will keep for up to a week in an airtight tin.

Nutrition information per serving: 200 calories; 107 calories from fat; 12 g fat (7 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 15 mg cholesterol; 11 mg sodium; 23 g carbohydrate; 2 g fiber; 13 g sugar; 3 g protein.