

WHAT'S FOR DIN?

THE GEORGIAN GRANDMA MEAL

I visited Georgia in a very pivotal time of my life. It was at the end of a three month odyssey around the Middle East with my dear friend Mike Moffett, and it was a space for us to sit back, unwind, and indulge.... In fact, we mostly ate and drank in Georgia. It's the perfect place for it. It's a land filled with excellent wine and food, and there was one meal that will always be close to our hearts.

The first place Mike and I travelled to in Georgia is this little town called Kutaisi. Just off a 40 hour bus and taxi extravaganza all the way from Iraq, Mike and I plopped ourselves down in our hostel and slept it all off. We woke up at midday starving. We stopped off at a fancy bar (first place we found) and had a glass of wine and something pretty unmemorable to eat. Unsatisfied, we walked into this dowdy place across the street and we instantly knew we were at the right place. There were four short and stocky georgian ladies in their flowery aprons and perms there to meet us; they tugged at our sleeves motioning us to the kitchen. Inside, they opened a procession of pots encouraging us to taste it all. We said we'd have a little bit of each (by some kind of hand gesture) and sat back down. When all the food came out our eyes widened a little. Four different stews filling their own bowl. Salad. A whole plate of cheese. A loaf of bread. A bottle of vodka. Two bottles of local soft drink. And then, to top it all off the old men sitting next to us kept on buying us pints of beer. We spent the whole afternoon lying on our beds nursing our full bellies. The particular dishes of that meal I do not remember, but the sights and smells still linger in my memory; I want to share some of that with you. We want to share the abundance, we want you to indulge, sit back, and take a slow evening to yourselves.

Soon after I left Georgia I came back to New Zealand and I realized I was looking for something more than what was in front of me at my university. It was that formative trip in the Middle East that urged me to explore even more, and the next summer I found myself in Ethiopia. Georgia was a nice in-between time, a little moment of pleasure and rest before getting lost again in the often overwhelming web of life. Hopefully this dinner can be a little slice of that too.

Enjoy.
-Liam

MENU

DISHES TO HEAT UP:

(1) Ojakhuri- pork and potatoes.

Slow roasted pork belly, ham and potatoes with peppers and cilantro.

Vegetarian: fried potatoes and garlic with corn and Shepherd's Way Farms fresh cheese.

(2) Pork and kidney bean stew.

Pork meatballs with garlic, dill and mint in a rich stew of kidney beans, whey and georgian herbs. Vegetarian: the same but with mushrooms.

THINGS THAT STAY COOL(ISH):

(1) **Homemade sauerkraut** with raisins and tarragon pickled radishes. We recommend you use these pickles as a palate cleanser between bites, or perhaps with the heavier meat based dishes.

(2) **A simple fresh cheese** with oregano. This cheese was made by yours truly a couple days ago. It is a basic white cheese found all across Georgia, it is fantastic with bread.

(3) **Pkhali**. An english description of this dish is "vegetable pate". There are two kinds. There is the spinach kind, which is caramelized onion and walnuts, sautéed spinach, khmeli suneli (Georgian spice mix) and chargrilled anaheim peppers. The other is the roasted carrot and beetroot kind, which is mixed with the same spices, onion and walnut, with the added addition of a little dried fruit.

(4) **Tonis puri** (best served warm). Wholemeal sourdough flatbread cooked in clay dishes. A companion to all dishes of this meal, and especially to mop up the juices at the bottom of the dish.

(5) **Homemade sour cream** with herbs. Cultured cream with garlic and herbs. Excellent on the pork dishes (or anything really!).

D-SERT.

(1) **Kalakand (caramelized milk cake)**. Serve at room temp: A rich dessert made out of milk, sugar and cardamom. Boiled for many hours, the cake is topped with a scorched pistachio crumble.

(2) **Pranay's mum's Chai**. Pranay was one of my closest friends at University. I lived next to him so at the end of each day we would go into the others room and say "well sir, the sun is getting low." We would give each other a handshake and then tell each other one good thing about the day. Pranay is a homebody, and he always kept home close to him in the form of his mother's chai (a tin of it below his bed). It is very spicy, but I think it makes a perfect companion to the Kalakand. To make the tea, take two teaspoons and add it to 1 cup of milk (preferably whole, but any milk will do), and simmer for 10 minutes. Grate the ginger root in at end to taste, and add as much sugar as your heart desires (I would recommend at least one teaspoon per cup, but since this tea is very spicy, you may want more).