

Table of Contents

| | | |
|---|-------|-----------|
| Keneth Adjahoungbeta | | |
| <i>My Favorite Food, Riz au Gras</i> | ..... | 2 |
| Tamana Ahmadzai | | |
| <i>Afghanistan, Before and After the War</i> | ..... | 4 |
| Sena Akakpo | | |
| <i>The Natural and Historical Assets of Benin</i> | ..... | 6 |
| Adjiwanou Amegandji | | |
| <i>Tutors of Togo</i> | ..... | 8 |
| Aur Areepan | | |
| <i>Mango Sticky Rice</i> | ..... | 11 |
| Blanche Doriane Gato | | |
| <i>The Zaouli Dance</i> | ..... | 12 |
| Jean Kpoti | | |
| <i>Tourism in Togo</i> | ..... | 14 |
| Jiali Ling | | |
| <i>Health Regimen in China</i> | ..... | 17 |
| Safaou Moustapha | | |
| <i>Weddings in My Culture</i> | ..... | 19 |
| Rachel Nouvi | | |
| <i>The Struggle of Immigrants in the U.S.</i> | ..... | 21 |
| Emma Ocampo-Galicia | | |
| <i>Manufacturing of Trophies</i> | ..... | 23 |
| Pra Paw | | |
| <i>Karen Buddhist Water Festival</i> | ..... | 26 |
| Ana Angelica Roncolato | | |
| <i>Brazil, a Culturally Diverse Country</i> | ..... | 28 |
| Mohamed Sam | | |
| <i>The Month of Ramadan</i> | ..... | 31 |
| O'Naing Sha | | |
| <i>My Life in Mae La Camp, Thailand</i> | | 34 |
| Namfon Wongkaso | | |
| <i>Thai Cuisine</i> | | 37 |

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Nina De Bisschop

Keneth Adjahoungbeta

My name is Keneth Adjahoungbeta. I'm from Benin, Africa. I lived in a city called Cotonou with my mom until I moved to the US when I was 13 years old. I graduated high school in 2023, and now I'm a freshman at Black Hawk College, currently planning to study computer engineering. I was able to build my own computer, and I really enjoyed doing it, so I want to do that for a living.



My Favorite Food, *Riz au Gras*

Over the span of five years living in America, I have had the pleasure of tasting some amazing dishes. From Mexican food to Chinese food and many more, each bite of those foods was delicious. But, even with all these new flavors and tastes, there remains one dish that holds a special place in my heart: *Riz au Gras*. It is more than a dish to me because it reminds me of home. I am sharing the recipe of this amazing dish with everyone.

First, we need to gather the ingredients, such as rice, meat, vegetables like onions, green peppers, carrots, peas, and spices. We start by frying our vegetables lightly until they are golden.



We need to add in our meat. I would recommend using chicken because it makes the dish taste even better, but any meat would be good. Make sure your meat is cooked and fried thoroughly because this is very important, and it gives us a deep, savory flavor.

Next, we need to get the rest of our vegetables, such as carrots and bell peppers. We need to let them soften with the meat. While those are cooking, we need to rinse our rice and add it to the pot with the vegetables and meat. Make sure you stir the pot and combine everything.

Finally, we need to add enough water for the rice to cook and cover the mixture. We add some spices to the mixture and stir it. After doing all of this, we need to let it simmer and wait for

everything to combine and create our dish. Cover the pot and let the rice cook and the water vanish. After that, your *Riz au Gras* is ready to be served.

In conclusion, you have learned how to prepare my favorite dish. It is a delightful mix of flavors. I really hope that you enjoy making this as much as I do, and I would be very happy if you could share this amazing dish with everyone.

Egougou

In my country, January 10 is a special day that is dedicated to summoning the spirits known as *egougou*. Since there are many different ways to call these spirits, the celebrations surrounding them are mysterious. While some think they are just people wearing extravagant costumes, others are insistent that they are the real deal. Either way, when those spirits are called, they gather near a nearby location and perform active dances and lively song. Seeing the amazing feats they pull off with their clothing is one fun part of watching them. There is a precautionary factor though since these spirits have been known to pursue people during the festivities. People in the area claim that if you are captured by them, you might turn into one of them. I really miss watching them, and I cannot way to see them again in the future.

Tamana Ahmadzai

My name is Tamana Ahmadzai. I am 22 years old. I am from Kabul, Afghanistan. I can speak four languages, which are Dari, Pashto, Urdu, and English. I finished my high school education in my own country. Now, I am taking ESL classes to improve my English more and to go to college for my future career. I like to watch movies in my free time and play volleyball as well. I have a family of eight members, which includes me, my mom, two brothers, and four sisters.



Afghanistan, Before and After the War

Afghanistan is a landlocked country located in the heart of Asia, and it is bordered by five countries: Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. People in Afghanistan speak around 40 languages, but the most famous ones are Dari and Pashto. Afghanistan has been experiencing war for a long time, but the recent event that I remember happened in August 2021, when the U.S. Army left Afghanistan, and the Taliban took over the country. That recent war badly affected our country and people's lives, especially girls. After the Taliban took over the country, Afghanistan changed a lot, especially for the girls and the economy.

The biggest impact of the war is that girls' lives became more difficult than before. Before the war, girls had opportunities to study, and they could go to school. They could go out shopping by themselves, go on vacation, go to restaurants with friends, and much more. They also had freedom and the right to choose what they wanted to wear. However, after the war, the Taliban, who are now controlling the country, changed everything and made girls' lives worse. They closed the schools and colleges to girls and do not allow them to attend school or any educational program. Girls are not allowed to go out for shopping or vacations unless they have a man with them, and the man has to be a husband, brother or father. Now, girls no longer have the freedom to choose their clothing style; they have to wear long dresses, are not allowed to wear jeans, and must cover their head and body with a burka.

The second and most important impact of the war is the economic changes in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a poor country, but before the war, people could make enough money to support themselves. Everybody had the opportunity to work in different fields. For example, many young boys served in the Afghan and U.S. Army. Some had grocery stores, clothing shops,

malls, restaurants, or worked any kind of job to afford their lifestyles. Now that most people have lost their jobs and have limited funds, they cannot afford to eat in restaurants or go shopping. In fact, too many people have nothing to eat at all. There were many families who had a son, brother, father or husband in either the U.S. or Afghan Army who were responsible for all the family expenses. However, after the war, they had to leave the army and hide their identity because the Taliban would kill them. The Taliban considers them non-Muslims due to their military service. Many families had no men in their households and had a daughter who could work and take care of the family. Unfortunately, after the war, girls are no longer allowed to work.

In conclusion, After the war in Afghanistan, life became much harder, especially for girls. They lost their freedom to go to school and dress the way they want. Additionally, the war also brought economic difficulties; families are struggling for their lives. I hope one day my country, Afghanistan, gets its freedom back, and people live happily and peacefully.

Kabuli Palaw

I would like to introduce you to one of Afghanistan's most famous and delicious dishes, *Kabuli Palaw*. While our country has many delicious foods, *Kabuli Palaw* has a special place. This special Afghan dish is often served for special occasions, such as engagement parties and weddings.



Kabuli Palaw is also known as *Qabuli Palaw*; this dish is celebrated in Afghan culture and is typically made with Basmati rice, meat (usually lamb), a selection of vegetables (carrots and raisins), almonds, and some mixed spices. It is a very special dish all over the country.

Kabuli Palaw is very important in Afghanistan. If you do not serve it at your gatherings, people might feel like something is missing or that the party was not great. It is like the must-have dish at parties.

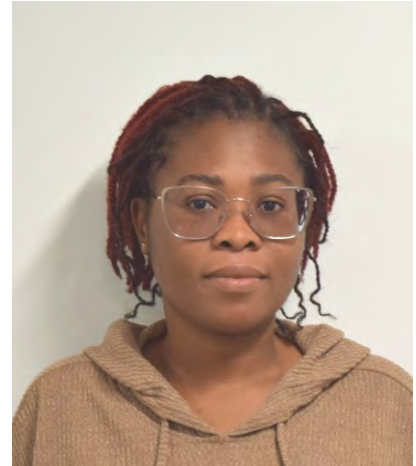
When you invite someone over to your house and cook *Kabuli Palaw* for them, it is a big deal. It shows that you really respect and care about them, but if you invite someone and do not serve them *Kabuli Palaw*, they might get upset and think that you do not really care about them. It is more than just food; it's a way of showing love and appreciation.

This special dish is not eaten alone; it's often served with yogurt, chutneys, bread, and drinks. These extras make the meal even better. It is like a delicious combination of flavors and colors that make you feel perfect.



Sena Akakpo

My name is Sena Diane Akakpo. I was born and raised in Benin to a Togolese mother and a Beninese father. I am my mother's only child, and I have five brothers and sisters on my father's side. I received my scientific baccalaureate in 2012 and a bachelor's in marketing and commercial communication in 2017. In 2018, I completed the master 1 in commercial communication before getting married in April 2018. I am the mother of two beautiful children, a boy and a girl. My goal since coming to the USA in October 2019 is to become a nurse, and I believe that I am on the right track to achieve this goal.



The Natural and Historical Assets of Benin

Benin is a country in West Africa bordered in the north by Niger, in the northwest by Burkina Faso, in the west by Togo, in the east by Nigeria and in the south by the Atlantic Ocean. Benin occupies a unique place in West Africa thanks to the richness of its artistic and intellectual life. It is a small country with multiple assets such as: landscape, history and culture, and tradition.

Firstly, in Benin the landscapes present a great variety. The south of the country is made up of superb beaches as well as vegetation. In the north, we find the Atacora mountain range and the savannah, which represents a refuge for large animals like the lions and the elephants of the immense Pendjari reserve. In Atacora, we also find the *tatas sombas*, which are nothing other than huts in the shape of castles, which are a unique type of architecture in the world. *Tata somba* are clay earth constructions, which were built at the time of slavery to protect against beasts and enemies.

Benin's second most fascinating asset is its history. Before the arrival of European settlers, the country was made up of kingdoms, the most important being the kingdom of Abomey. Benin was marked by the terrible slave trade, and the city of Ouidah was the main departure point for African slaves for the Caribbean and America. These tragic events are still felt today in places such as: the slave route, the door of no return, etc. The vestiges of the common past of France and Benin like the French language, which is the national language of the Country today, the use of CFA and the numerous buildings dating from this colonial era still exist today.

Finally, culture and tradition are very important in Benin. Benin constitutes the historical origin of thousand-year-old traditions, particularly that of Vodou. Vodou is an animist

tradition still practiced today by a majority of residents. The events linked to the Vodou cult are always interesting and impressive. For example, demonstrations of Vodou and different dances during worship are spectacular. The magical and mysterious aspect of Vodou is unique in the world.

In conclusion, Benin is a hospitable country with beautiful historical, natural and tourist Assets, and the Beninese are a welcoming and peaceful people. Take a trip to Benin and enjoy these beautiful assets.

The Vodou Festival

The Vodou festival is a celebration of traditional religions. Benin, a country rich in tradition and unique cultural heritage, is known to be the land of Vodou. In Benin, Vodou occupies a very important place in the country's identity. The festival is celebrated every January 10 to pay homage to the divinities of Vodou. It is an unmissable celebration



for Vodou followers, who gather and celebrate together through offerings,



dances, entertainment and lively demonstrations. The followers are recognizable through their white and bright outfits, with numerous bracelets and necklaces, some colored and others in cowrie shells specific to each divinity. The rhythm of the sound emitted by the tam-tams and the gongs

are also an indicator of each famous deity. All these celebrations aim to keep away homesickness. It is a spectacular celebration, which allows the population and visitors to discover different kinds of divinities and to see incredible demonstrations allowing followers to enter into a trance, during which they let themselves be inhabited by spirits.



Adjiwanou Amengandji

I am Marius Adjiwanou Amegandji. I am Togolese, and I have been living in the US since August 2022. I used to live with my whole family in Lomé, the capital city of my country, before I moved to the US. Now, I live in East Moline, and I share an apartment with my friend Henry. I am young and single, and soon I want to find a partner with whom I can share my life. I work at Tyson, and I am also a student at Black Hawk College. I work full-time each day in the afternoon shift, and I am in ESL classes in the morning each day, except on Fridays and the weekend. I have many goals that I am working on achieving, and the most important to me is to become an engineer in mechanical and automatic systems. That is my big dream, and I know I can do it by the grace of God and with my perseverance. My favorite adage is "In god we trust."



Tutors of Togo

Teachers participate a lot in the education of students and are always available to assist and help the students to succeed. In the educational environment, there are other educators called tutors, whose way of teaching is more profitable for the students because they must explain more than the classroom teacher. In Togo, many families hire tutors, and they have to consider the process to hire a tutor, who can be a tutor, and how tutors work to help students.

First, the process to hire a tutor in Togo is similar to many countries. A tutor is hired by the parents of a student who has difficulties in one or more disciplines, and the tutor must assist the student at home and explain the material to him. The tutor can be the main teacher, and he must choose a time outside of the class time to work with the student. A tutor must spend at least five hours per week with his student. The tutor can also be a senior graduate student who has more knowledge and skills to assist a younger student. The tutors do not work full-time; they choose at least two days in the week and spend at least two hours at a time with the student. The tutor can have other jobs and work as tutor at the time he chooses during the week.

Second, the tutors must be credible and use the documents based on the curriculum to teach the student. It means that the tutors are not allowed to teach something different from what the main teacher does in class. In fact, in Togo, many things have changed since Mr. Koroko became the education minister. The curriculum also changes a lot, and tutors must be trained before they can teach a student. It is no longer allowed to be a tutor without good train-

ing as a teacher and an attestation to prove that you have competence and skills to teach. However, there are some tutors who are not official in the system because very often they are a brother or uncle who wants to help a student. In Togo, this is very common, and the parents often opt for this opportunity because it costs less to employ a relative or neighbor than employ a tutor who has training and knows the system. However, with the new educational system of the new minister, the number of unofficial tutors is decreasing, and that is a good thing because we all want to give a stronger and better education to our students.

Third, the tutors work hard to help students improve. The tutoring sessions are like classroom teaching, and the student can have deeper explanations and a lot of application exercises. Tutors must focus on a specific subject and make sure that the student gets it and does not forget the content. They are hired by students' parents and are paid according to the subject they teach. For example, a tutor in science may be paid 30,000 CFA while a tutor in literature may be paid 20,000f CFA. This is often a negotiation between the student's parents and the tutor. Tutors in my country had better do their job well or they lose their name, and no parents will want to hire them anymore. Therefore, they must be excellent in their way of teaching and ensure students receive good results at the end of the academic year. They are not subjected to as much pressure as the classroom teachers, but the challenge remains the same because success is the only thing that matters in the end.

In conclusion, tutors have the same function as the teachers, but they usually work with the student at home. They must use the authorized documents to teach because the new system does not allow ways of teaching different from the educational system's requirements. The main goal is to help the student to succeed and, why not, be the best in the class.

Independence Day

The celebration of April 27 in my country, Togo, is what I want to share with you. It is Independence Day for my country. It is a great celebration every year, and it is also a holiday. Nobody goes to work on this day. On this day, the military parade and make truly extraordinary figures. It also includes paratroopers who make remarkable descents. All the government members are usually present for the celebration. It is very often a moment of patriotism. TV channels are typically on site and transmit video so that people at home can watch. After the parade, The president gives a speech to greet his people and talk about the plans for the next days of the year. At the end of the speech, he exhorts the people to stand up and sing the national hymn. After the ceremony, people leave the site and go to



enjoy the holiday. Most of the time, the bars are full of people, and they play loud music. You can feel the joy, and it is also a moment to share love so that patriotism fills our hearts. "Togolais vient batissons la cite." This is our moto, and it means that every Togolese must do his duty and be a good citizen to build the nation.

Aur “Nadia” Areepan

I am Nadia. I was born in Korat, Thailand, and I am 18 years old. I came to the United States in 2022, when I was in high school, with the intention of attending high school, but I changed my mind and decided to attend college instead. I am currently studying ESL at Black Hawk College, and my goal is to be a dental hygienist. Working in a dental clinic has been my dream since I was young. I had braces in middle school, so I went into the clinic almost every month for two years, and I knew I wanted to work there. I love spending my free time playing musical instruments, such as the violin, guitar, and piano. When I was in middle school, I had the opportunity to learn taekwondo and go to competitions, which made me love exercising. I have so many hobbies that it can be hard to figure out which of them I am best at.



Mango Sticky Rice

Mango Sticky Rice, known as *Khao Niew Mamuang* in Thailand, is a popular Thai dessert. It is especially popular during the mango season. The combination of the sweet and slightly salty sticky rice, creamy coconut sauce, and sweetness of ripe mangoes creates a perfect balance of flavor and textures.

To make it, we start by soaking sticky rice until it is soft and sticky. Then we steam it until it turns tender. After that, we mix this delightful rice with a creamy coconut sauce made from coconut milk and sugar. The last thing that is indispensable is diced or sliced ripe mango on top of the sticky rice.

The recipe below is an easy way to make coconut sticky rice:

For 1lb of cooked sticky rice

1 cup of water

2 3/4 cups of coconut milk

1 1/4 cup of sugar

Half a teaspoon of salt

For a sweet Thai aroma, pandan leaves can be added.



For anyone yet to experience the delightful taste of Thai Mango Sticky Rice, go ahead and check it out. It is a mouthwatering masterpiece waiting to be discovered.

Blanche Gato

My name is Blanche Doriane Gato. I come from Ivory Coast in West Africa. I grew up in the city of Abidjan with my aunt. I am the eldest of a family of five children. I went to Moline High School for two years and did track and field. When I was young, I dreamed of becoming a flight attendant, but one day I watched a documentary about BTK (serial killer). I was fascinated, so I decided to become a lawyer to help bring justice. However, today, I am on my way to becoming a dentist, and I love it. I always want to help people. If it's not by being a lawyer, I will do it as a dentist. Don't be afraid to change your path.



The Zaouli Dance

The Zaouli Dance is a traditional dance of the Guro people of Côte D'Ivoire. According to legend, it was inspired by a beautiful girl named Djela Lou Zaouli. Her father created a mask to celebrate her beauty and grace after she was taken away by the geniuses of the forest.

Although the dance is performed by men, the Zaouli mask represents feminine beauty. Over the years, more masks have been added for various occasions, resulting in seven variations of the original mask. Each variation comes with its own version of the story. The masks are not merely decorative; they are deeply symbolic and represent various characters and spirits from Guro culture.

Becoming a Zaouli dancer is not a matter of personal choice. Individuals must be chosen by the geniuses of the forest, who communicate their choices through the village representatives. The chosen ones then spend two to three years in the forest, learning everything they need to perform this beautiful dance. This period of learning and isolation in the forest is very important. This allows the chosen one to connect more deeply with the spirits and nature.

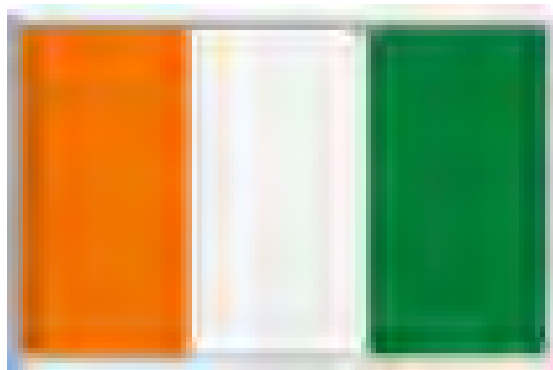
The Zaouli dance is performed during celebrations, funerals, and other significant events in the village. The dance, performed by men but representing the feminine beauty, is a unique blend of art, movement, and artistry. When the time comes to perform, the dancers put their masks on, and their bodies no longer belong to them. The movements are fluid and graceful, making it one of the most difficult dances in the world to perform without being an initiate. It is

even part of UNESCO's cultural heritage.

In other words, the Zaouli dance is more than just a dance. It is a vibrant and integral part of the Guro community's cultural heritage in Côte D'Ivoire. Each performance is a tribute to Djela Lou Zaouli and a testament to the rich cultural tapestry of the Guro people. Its recognition by UNESCO underscores its significance as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity.

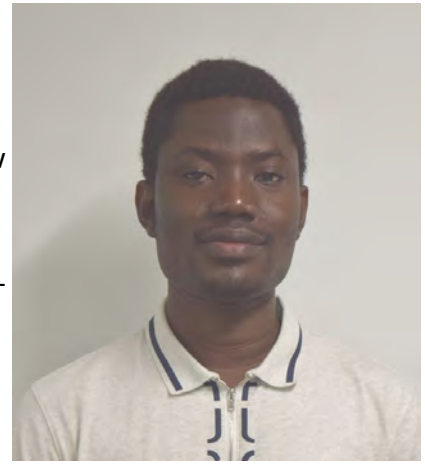
The Most Popular Dish of Ivory Coast

Today I will present to you the most popular dish of Ivory Coast, which is *Alloco*. It is a very easy dish to make that anyone can make in less than thirty minutes, and it is made with plantains. First, you have to make sure that the plantains are not too ripe; otherwise, it will give way to another dish called *Claclo*, which is made from overripe plantains. After choosing the right plantains for our dish, we cut them into small pieces. We put them in a container and add salt to have the contrast of sugar and salt at the same time. Then we fry them in hot oil. Finally, we eat them with boiled eggs and chili pepper.



Jean Kpoti

My name is Jean Kpoti, and I am from Lomé, Togo in West Africa. My brother and I are here in the United States. My mother, my sisters, and other brothers are living in Togo. When I was a child, one of my dreams was to study abroad. I can say that I am living that dream now because this is my first year at Black Hawk College in the United States of America. I am studying computer science. I hope to make friends and connections, which will lead me to success. After my graduation, I would like to work for companies like Google, Amazon, Microsoft, or Netflix to get more experience and become an expert in my field. Additionally, I would also like to travel around the world when working. After I become an expert in my field, I would like to go back to my home country to teach and train young people about what I learned so that I can make an impact on my society.



Tourism in Togo

Togo is a small, beautiful country located in West Africa with nine million people, bordered in the west by Ghana, in the east by Benin, in the north by Burkina-Faso, and the beautiful sea in the south. Togo attracts a lot of tourists because of its historical sites, cultural diversity, and natural beauty.

First, Togo has beautiful historical sites, which is one of the reasons people choose it for tourism. For example, Togo has historical sites such as Koutammakou, Tamberma Villages, Aného Glidji, the Palace of Lomé, the Grand Market of Lomé, and the Beach of Lomé. Koutammakou is a UNESCO World Heritage site, and it is a traditional village for the Batammariba people. Moreover, it is well known for its fortified huts made with clay and without mortar. Tamberma Villages is also a UNESCO World Heritage site located in the north of Togo. The village is made of houses built with clay and perched on rocky hills. Furthermore, the Tamberma people have been living for centuries in those villages, and they developed unique lifestyles. Aného Glidji is a historical city in the south of Togo, and it was once upon a time the capital of the Ewe kingdom. Moreover, it contains collections of ruins and objects of the former Ewé kingdom. Next, we can find Aného Glidji, the Palace of the King, the Catholic church Saint-Michel, and the fetish market, which are also im-



portant historical sites in Togo. The Grand Market of Lomé is a big market in the south of Togo; it is near the border between Togo and Ghana and the beach. People come from Ghana, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, and from around the world to buy goods in that market. The market is animated, full of people, and well-known in the entire country. The beach of Lomé is also known for its beauty with sandy soil, palm trees, the sea, and nearby buildings.

Second, Togo is rich in cultural diversity. We can count more than 40 ethnic groups with their languages, traditions, cultures, customs, and French is the official language. Moreover, there are a lot of traditional festivals in Togo such as *Tingban pab*, the Moba people's harvest festival, *Evala*, the traditional wrestling festival, and *Ayiza*, the bean festival in the south of Togo. Furthermore, arts and crafts are well developed in Togo; therefore, we can see good-looking sculptures, jewelry, textiles, and pottery created by talented craftsmen. In addition, the music sector is also developed in Togo, and it is characterized by singing and dancing with good flowing melodies. Togo also has archaeological sites, historical monuments, and museums. For example, Koutammakou, the Land of the Batammariba in the north, Monument de l'indépendance in the south, and Palais de Lomé in the south, which is the old official palace of the president of Togo.

Third, Togo has much natural beauty to convince tourists to visit the country, such as Mont Agou, Lama Forest, the waterfall of Kpimé, Lake of Togo, National Parc of Fazao-Malfakassa and National Parc of Kéran. Mont Agou is the highest mountain of Togo at 3,234 feet (986 m), and it allows us to have remarkable views of the villages and area around it. Lama Forest is a tropical forest in the south of Togo, and it contains animals like elephants, lions, gorillas, mon-



keys, and elephants. Furthermore, the waterfall of Kpimé is a nice-looking and spectacular cascade located south of Togo precisely in Kaplimé at a height of 328 feet (100m). Lake of Togo is a popular lake for fishing near the border of Togo and Ghana. People fish for fish such as tuna, salmon, and sardines. The National Parc of Fazao-Malfakassa is in the north of Togo, and it contains animals such as lions, elephants, mon-

keys, and rhinoceros.

In conclusion, Togo has a lot of characteristic attractions such as historical sites, cultural diversity, and natural beauty. It also attracts tourists because of its hospitality, which makes it a good place to visit anywhere from the north to the south and from the west to the east. I think Togo would be my next place to visit if I was not Togolese.

A Recipe for a Special Dish

A special dish from my country is *Ayimolou*. First, to cook *Ayimolou*, we need rice, beans, tomatoes, pepper, oil, canned tomatoes, and fried beef to cook the sauce. Let us start cooking *Ayimolou* by adding beans to a pan of water and putting it on the stove. Wait almost thirty minutes until the beans are cooked. After the beans are cooked, add the salt, add the rice, mix everything with a spoon, and wait till it is cooked. For the sauce, add a small quantity of oil to the pan and put it on the stove. After the oil is hot, add the canned tomatoes to the oil and start mixing everything till you see that it is cooked in the oil. After, add the tomatoes and crushed pepper in a blender and add water. Leave everything on the stove for almost ten minutes. Then add the meat, salt, and stock cube. Mix everything and wait for ten minutes. Taste the sauce to see if everything is well cooked and serve it with the rice.



Jiali Ling

My name is Jiali Ling. I am from the Guangdong Province, which is in the southern part of China. I lived in a coastal city with my family when I was in China, so I really love the beautiful ocean. I have been living in the states for almost two years. I used to live in a beautiful town in Oklahoma, and I moved to Davenport, Iowa six months ago. I can speak Mandarin and Cantonese, and now I am learning English as an ESL student. This is my first semester at Black Hawk College. I am patient and kind, and I want to be a registered nurse in the future. I like traveling. I have been to Vietnam, Thailand and a lot of beautiful places in China and the States. I hope to explore more possibilities in the future.



Health Regimen in China

China has a long history and culture, which has also given rise to a long-standing way of maintaining health. People have been searching for a way to live long and healthily since ancient times. Some ancient emperors were keen on elixirs or a religious tradition, Taoism, trying to be immortal. Some ancient people were well-informed about internal harmony and found a balance with the outer world to maintain good health. Taking the essence and discarding the dross, many health books and well-known health regimens continue to be popular to this day. There are some basic and common health regimens in our daily lives, which are drinking warm water, using traditional Chinese therapies, and eating food according to Chinese solar terms.

Firstly, Chinese people believe drinking warm water is good for our health. In most Western countries, people like drinking water or beverages with a lot of ice cubes, while Chinese people prefer to drink warm water, no matter if it is winter or summer. Besides, thermos cups for Chinese people are usually used to keep their beverages warm instead of cold. Because warm water has a similar temperature as our body, we believe it is good for our stomach and digestion. Additionally, drinking a lot of warm water can relieve cold symptoms, and that is why doctors always tell us to drink tons of warm water when we are sick.

Secondly, traditional Chinese therapies are very popular in China. Chinese medicine is an indispensable part of our self-care. For example, if a woman has irregular menstruation, she will prefer to see a traditional Chinese doctor and get some herbal medicine. Herbal medicine may take a longer time to heal the body, but it is gentle and without any side effects. Besides, Tai Chi

is a Chinese martial art, which is good for our mental and physical health. It comes with slow moves but requires balance from our mind and body; it is like a moving meditation. When we go to the parks or city squares, we can see a lot of elderly people practicing Tai Chi there, and it is also a compulsory course in college in China. Additionally, acupuncture and cupping therapy are also great ways to cure injuries. Using the body's acupuncture points, both forms of therapy aim to improve blood circulation, relieve pain and stress, and promote healing.



Last but not least, another way to remain healthy for Chinese people is eating food according to the solar terms. There are twenty-four periods of solar terms in traditional Chinese lunisolar calendars, and we usually eat seasonal foods according to them because we think it is a good way to go with nature. We give food five properties, which are cold, cool, neutral, warm, and hot. For instance, in summer, we should eat food with cool properties, such as watermelon, tofu, duck meat, etc., because it can cool down our bodies. In winter, we should eat food with warm properties, such as cherry, pepper, mutton, etc., because it can warm us, improve circulation, and dispel the cold. That is why we always have different menus in our home from season to season.

In conclusion, Chinese people incorporate these health regimens into every day of their lives. These traditional health regimens are important to us because they have been experienced for five thousand years and have been passed down to today. They bring together the infinite wisdom of our ancestors, and we will continue to hand down and maintain them.

Mid-Autumn Festival

The Mid-Autumn Festival is one of the most important traditional festivals in China, and we celebrate it on August 15th of the lunar calendar. According to legend, the Mid-Autumn Festival comes from the mythical story of Chang'e flying to the moon, and now it has become an important day for us to worship the moon and enjoy family reunion. The traditional food of the Mid-Autumn Festival is mooncake, a round shape cake with different delicious fillings. During the festival, people eat mooncakes and drink osmanthus wine, waiting for the full moon with family. When the full moon rises, people sing moon poems, and children make flying lanterns to wish good luck for the coming year. This is one of my favorite traditional festivals. Chinese people all around the world share the same tradition, and it is just like an ancient Chinese poem says, the sea mirrors the rising moon bright; miles apart, our hearts share tonight.



Safaou Moustapha

My name is Safaou Moustapha. I am originally from Burkina Faso, but I was born in Togo. Before coming to the US, I graduated from high school in Togo in 2019. I also studied civil engineering for two years. In 2022, I immigrated to the U.S. After coming to the U.S., I studied English for one year at Black Hawk College. I hope to learn a lot of things. My dream is to develop confidence in speaking, reading and writing in English.



Weddings in My Culture

A wedding is a union of two people in front of God and humans. Every culture has its own way to celebrate a wedding. In Mossi culture, to have a wife, men used to exchange their sisters. For example, they would give their sister to the bride's family in exchange for their own wife. But now, women choose their husbands themselves.

First, before getting married, men have to bring the dowry to the woman's family. On that day, on the woman's side, the oldest people, especially the men, have to meet and wait for the man's family. The man's family will bring cola and an amount of money depending on the man's income. When the man's family comes, they will discuss the day of the wedding. After that, the woman's family will share the cola and the money between them no matter the amount.

Second, the man has to give the woman money to buy clothes and wax-printed cloth (things she will wear on the wedding day). A few days before the wedding, the women from the man's family have to bring suitcases which contain wax, clothes, underwear, hijab, dresses, shoes and the ingredients for the wedding food and money. Some men also provide a motorcycle or a car for the bride; it depends on the man's wealth.

Third, during the days before the wedding, women on the man's side have to come and put henna on the woman's hands and feet, and they will sing; it is interesting. They will go back home, and both sides will separately prepare to receive their guests. During the night, they will have music, and the bride will dress well, put on make-up and can go out dancing. On the day of the wedding, women will wake up early to cook for the guests. In the morning, the men on both

sides will go to the mosque or the Iman can come and do the wedding. After that, the man's family will give money to the woman to start a business after the wedding, and we call this *sadatchi*. Then the show can start; they will play music, the guests will start coming, and they will eat. The bride will put on make up, put on a beautiful dress, go out and dance with the bridesmaids, and she can change clothes as much she wants. In the afternoon, when the man's friends and family come to take their wife, the eldest people will give the woman advice about marriage; then she will go. Some people on the woman's side will follow them. When they go to the man's side, the bride will put on clothes of the same color and go out and dance.

In conclusion, there are a lot of things to do for weddings in my culture. To have a wife, the man has to work hard, but it depends on the man's situation because not everybody has the same situation.



Foura

I wanted to talk about a recipe for a special beverage from my culture and when and how it is served. The dish's name is *Foura*. It is a dessert. You can eat it with milk, yogurt, and sugar. This is the recipe.

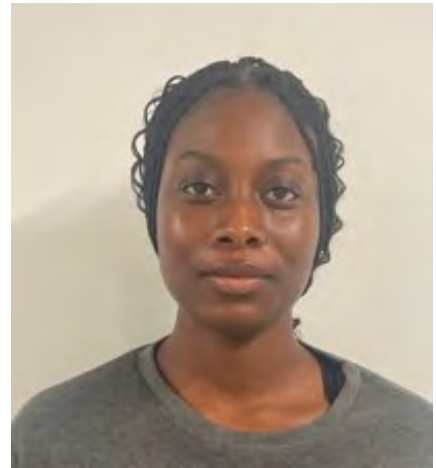
Ingredients: millet

- Crush the millet to remove the skin. Wash to remove all the dirt.
- After pounding the millet, sift the flour obtained, and then add water. Knead to form balls.
- Put water in the pot and bring it to a boil. When the water is boiling, add the balls. Cook for around 15 minutes; then remove the cooked balls. Crush the balls again with a little hot water. Then re-form the balls. Your *Foura* is ready.
- Now you can dissolve the *Foura* with water, milk, and sugar.

People drink *Foura* as a dessert or when they have guests.

Rachel Nouvi

My name is Rachel Nouvi. I was born and raised in a suburb of Lomé in Togo, West Africa. I have two younger siblings. I came to the USA when I was 13 years old and started seventh grade in middle school. It was the worst experience ever because I was constantly getting bullied. It lasted the whole year until my father went to talk to the principal. The bullying was mostly about my French accent, but when I started high school, the bullying stopped. After high school, I entered Black Hawk College to begin preparing for a career in the science field. I want to make my parents proud of their first child by receiving a college degree. Currently, I'm considering majoring in health science. If I accomplish my goals, I will have a bachelor of science degree in medical laboratory science by 2026.



The Struggle of Immigrants in the U.S.

When immigrants from Togo come to the USA, they face a lot of problems. Two of the biggest are shopping for food and preparing it in the way they traditionally do in their culture. Food is important for nourishment as well as being a part of family tradition and celebration. Consequently, when there is an obstacle to finding or preparing food, it can be frustrating. Learning how and where to shop for food and preparing it in different ways requires a big adjustment.

First of all, there are numerous places to shop for groceries, but that can just add to the confusion of an immigrant. In their countries, they were used to walking to a local store five minutes from their home. They did not need a car; they could walk to the store every day and carry home what they needed for meals that day. Instead of neighborhood stores, immigrants can choose from a number of large supermarkets in the USA, but they need to have transportation to get there. Furthermore, they have to shop for a whole week rather than for one day at a time. That is not what they used to do back in their countries, and they might be having transportation issues .

In addition to adjusting to not having a local store, they have to become familiar with the different kinds of supermarkets. For example, in the Quad Cities, there are at least five major grocery stores, which are Hy-Vee, Jewel, Aldi, Sam's Club, and Costco. Sam's Club and Costco have very low prices, but they are membership warehouses that sell large quantities. Entering huge grocery stores can be amazing, but learning to shop in them can be overwhelming at first because the immigrants are not native speakers, and they might not know the name of items that they want .

An even bigger problem that immigrants face while shopping for groceries is to find the products that they want. First, it is hard for immigrants to find the right product that they need. For example, immigrants have to go to the World Food Market to find the right Seasonings, like selim pepper, or fruit like hibiscus. Sometimes cultural foods such as *fufu* and *akume* are important for special celebrations, but the ingredients can not be found in American supermarkets.

On the other hand, immigrants also struggle with pricing. I remember when I first Came, I struggled buying food at a grocery store because I didn't know the price of things. Back in my home country, Togo, there is not much difference in the prices from store to store. In the USA, immigrants need to be aware of competitive pricing, where they can save a lot of money by shopping at a store that has special sales. For instance, one store might cut the price of a product by several dollars. Immigrants can not take advantage of the bargain unless they can read the flyers or understand the ads on TV. Bartering to save money by getting a lower price is common in Togo but not in the USA .

In conclusion, people might think that buying food in the US would be the least of their problems, but it is a big adjustment for immigrants. Food and special meals are important cultural traditions, and it can be very frustrating trying to keep those traditions while learning to shop and prepare food in a new country.

Traditional Clothes and Jewelry

Togo Is a beautiful country. Some traditional pieces in my country Togo are clothes and jewelry. First, Togo has many traditional clothes. In Togo, women wear a wrap called *kente* around their waist. It is made out of bright-colored stripes with different weaves representing my Ewe tribe. Togo also has another type of clothing called *agbada*, which comes with a hat; it is usually worn by men in Togo. In addition, in Togo, we have many pieces of jewelry. Beaded



bracelets and beaded belts are usually worn for protection from evil spirits. The belt around the waist is also for body shaping and to celebrate womanhood.

Bigger beads are used for the traditional wedding belts, which show that the woman is pure.



Emma Ocampo-Galicia

Hello everyone! I am Emma, and I was born in Mexico, where I lived with my parents, sisters, and brothers. I grew up in a small town called Santiago Cuautlalpan in Mexico State. I studied until the bachelor level, and I completed my nursing degree. While I worked in my first years, I decided to specialize in the newborn area. Before I came to the USA, I worked as a nurse in my beautiful country for 10 years. I have been living in the USA for 7 years, and although I am happy here, I miss my family, who is in Mexico, especially my mom. Here in the USA, I have been a homemaker; however, I want to achieve some academic goals, and I am working on that. I like to learn and to socialize. I loved my job, and I was working until I emigrated to the USA.



Manufacturing of Trophies

Since a long time ago, society has rewarded people who participate in sports events. These prizes are given to people who win the first, second, or third place in these kinds of events; these prizes are well known as trophies. Most people know the trophies, and many people have even won one. When people see a trophy in a showcase, we do not usually imagine the manufacturing process that the trophy went through to be in that special place; for this reason, we will talk a little about the manufacturing of trophies.



First of all, the manufacturing of trophies has been a source of work for many years in a town called Santiago Cuautlalpan, Texcoco, Mexico State. The creation of these factories has been a great advantage for many people of the town. The factories have given jobs to the native people of the town, and the people who have worked in these factories have not had to work far away from their houses. In this town, there are several factories that have produced trophies for many years. For example, the oldest factories are: Trophies Bonanza, started in 1966; Trophies Olympic, started in 1969; and Trophies Azteca, started in 1978. The last one started as a small factory with some workers who were



from the same family: father, mother, the two older sons, and two cousins. They were just six workers, but later they reached twenty-one workers. The factories grew little by little.

Subsequently, people were learning the trade, and as a result, they were opening new factories, and the number of the factories was increasing. Actually, there are approximately twenty producing factories in the town. Many times, the people who opened new factories used their houses as a place of work; they have their house in a different separated room of the workshop, but they are in the same lot. This situation sometimes generates disputes between neighbors because these factories consume a lot of energy with their work tools, and many times the factory's owner does not have the appropriate electricity installation for their factory's necessities. Therefore, in the houses of the neighbors, the electricity goes up and down, which can break down electronic household devices. These kinds of situations are common.

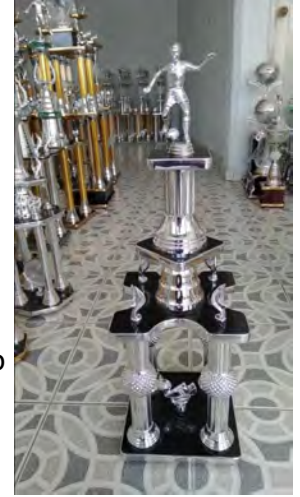


Meanwhile, the process that the factories have used for many years consists of the following: First, there is the smelting of metal and designing of figures. The person who is in charge of this step needs to use protective measures and equipment, such as leather gloves, glasses, a mask, and a shield. The metal used in the fabrication of the trophies is zamak which melts in a melting pot at high temperatures of up to 1,100 degrees Celsius, according to the manufacturers of the trophies. Once in liquid state, the metal is emptied into the molds of the desired figures. The figure gets solid in approximately one minute; it is removed from the mold and sanded wherever burrs have formed. The second step is the metalizing of the figure. This step consists of giving the desired color to the trophy, such as, gold, silver and bronze. This process is done in another external factory called metallizer. Years ago, the figures were sent to a small town in Michoacan state, but now there are three metallizers in the town. Third, there is the perforation of the wood, the glass or the marble. These materials are bought precut and used as the base of the trophy. The workers drill the bases for screwing at the time of assembly. Also, the factory fabricates specific screws for the assembly. The fourth step is the elaboration of aluminum cups. Through a lathe, the circular profile of the aluminum is molded until it has a cup shape. The aluminum cups can be of different sizes and are also sent to metalize. The last step is the assembling of the trophies. The trophy is assembled upside down. The figure is screwed to the long rod depending on the desired size of the trophy. On this rod, a small square marble stone is, the aluminum cups, and the square base, which can be wood, glass or marble, are assembled; at the

end, this base is screwed into the rod, and the trophy is finished. It is important to mention that there are trophies in different sizes and designs; they can be assembled with many different accessories, and the assembling is always done manually.



In conclusion, the little town, Santiago Cuautlalpan, which many times people know as “the town of the trophies”, has been referenced in all of Mexico for its manufacturing of trophies, and at one time it was in second place in the manufacturing of trophies at the national level. These factories supply trophies to many states of the country. If some day, you need a trophy, you could go to this beautiful town. In my opinion, thanks to this industry, the fabrication of trophies has become a traditional trade of our town.



Pulque

When I arrived in the USA, I missed the Mexican food a lot; we have many special dishes and beverages. The most special beverage is called pulque, and it is known as the “beverage of the Gods” because, according to the story, only the Aztec Gods could drink it. *Pulque* is an alcoholic beverage. It is the result of the fermentation process of honey water (*aguamiel* in Spanish), which is obtained from a plant called *maguey*. This process takes a long time, around fifteen days; the final liquid is viscous in consistency, white in appearance and slightly sweet; besides, it can be combined with different fruits, and its taste is better. If some time you can try it, say cheers!



Pra Paw

My name is Pra Paw. I was born in Thailand. I have been living here for about eight years. I know how to speak three languages, which are Karen, Poe Karen, and English. I have three younger sisters and one brother. When I entered school for the first time as a freshman in the USA, I was so shy talking to people. I was scared to make friends. While I was in high school, I joined a tennis club for four years, and it was fun. I made friends and practiced speaking more English and learned more tennis skills. When I was young, I dreamed about becoming a pilot, but after I started going to college, I became interested in nursing.



Karen Buddhist Water Festival Holiday

The Karen Buddhist Water Festival happens in the middle of April. It is a holiday where young people fill small containers with water and pour it on their parents' and grandparents' hands to show respect. When children pour water on their parents' hands, they also believe it washes away evil and bad luck. The celebration is not only for families, but it is for the whole Karen Buddhist community.



After Buddhist children pour water on their parents' hands at home in the morning, they go to the temple to show respect to other elderly people in the Karen Buddhist community by pouring water on their hands to wish them good fortune. In addition to the pouring of water, the Karen Buddhist water festival is celebrated with food and dance.

Traditional food is an important part of the Karen Buddhist Water Festival. The most popular dish is *Meea` Thaw Kra*, which is white rice mixed with water and yellow beans. Green mangos, onions, fish, green jackfruit, and red pepper are added to the yellow bean mix; the *Meea` Thaw Kra*, is eaten with a bowl of white rice. Another common food is called *Goon Pu Neha Kee*. It is made with sticky flour, coconut, and sugar. To make this, put sticky flour rolls in boiling water and add coconut and sugar. Buddhist families from out of the state join families in the local community to enjoy the food together.

Karen Buddhists celebrate the Water Festival with a lot of different dances in America and Thailand. Only ladies dance in the temple. However, Karen men dance outside the temple in Thai-

land to non-traditional music; they have not started doing that in America yet. Ladies wear beautiful traditional long skirts and T-shirts to dance in the temple. Last year, the people in the Buddhist community in Moline built a stage inside the temple for Karen ladies to dance the traditional dances. On the other hand, the Karen people in Thailand are incredibly fun. The ladies and guys both dance because people build a stage outside the temple. Therefore, Karen ladies and guys can dance with a DJ playing hip hop during the Water Festival.

Karen New Year

There are three ways Karen people celebrate the New Year, which are performances, food, and meeting new people. The people in the Karen community post on social media when and where people are going to celebrate. On the day, people celebrate, and there are many performances with dancing and singing. The performances are five hours or longer, and there are performances of traditional dancing, singing, and fashion shows. The performers must wear traditional clothing, and it looks colorful on the stage. Some performers wear a two piece skirt and a Karen t-shirt; others wear long Karen dresses. The type of clothing that women wear has a meaning. For example, if the women wear black, it means they are married. On the other hand, if the women wear white or other colors, they are not married yet. In addition, Karen people make special food for the celebration. Before the New Year event starts, the Karen community asks for donations because they need to buy food to prepare. Next, on New Year's Day, they make lots of food: fried rice, egg rolls, and *kaw naw* noodle soup. Karen people enjoy eating the food with friends, family, and new people. Finally, on New Year's, Karen people from all over the States can see each other. For example, people from New York, Nebraska, and Tennessee come to celebrate together in Illinois to get to know more people. In conclusion, New Year's Day is the most fun day for Karen people. They perform or go to performances, eat, and get to know new people. Since I was young, I have gone to the New Year's celebration every year.



Ana Angelica Roncolato

My name is Ana Angélica, and I am a Brazilian who has been living in the United States for almost four years. My family and I moved here because of my husband's job. When we decided to move, I thought it would be for three years, and now we do not have plans to go back to Brazil yet. I am a psychologist in Brazil, and I continue studying and practicing my profession, considering what is possible being out of my country and the language barriers. I have a six-year-old son, and he is my big love and makes me so proud. While he is growing up, I can learn with him about resilience, confidence, and how to insert yourself in a world so far away from what you knew before. I love my life with him and my husband. We like to spend our time together, cooking, playing and traveling. We like to see new places, experience new foods and understand new cultures. We like to live in the US, but our hearts are in Brazil, where our families and friends are. We try to live this experience very deeply, so when we come back to Brazil, we will have so many stories to tell about that.



Brazil – a Culturally Diverse Country

Brazil is a country located in South America, and it has continental dimensions. The Brazilian population totals 203 million inhabitants, with influences from different cultures coming from all parts of the world. Although every country has its own territorial borders and designation as an independent country, what we see is how much the countries are a mixture of cultures and how the borders and differentiations can be very subtle. Brazil is great example of this combination of cultures, receiving influences from all parts of the world with the migration of people to the Brazilian territory.



Firstly, Brazil was discovered in 1500 by Portugal as one of the important historical events in the period of great navigation in the 15th century. Even though there is talk of "discovery" by the Portuguese, it is important to highlight that the country was already occupied by Indians who were the population of the Brazilian territory at that time. The Portuguese had firearms and were considered a more "civilized" people; consequently, the indigenous population was subjected to the Portuguese people, who started to make the country a territory of Portugal. The country's independence was achieved in 1822, when it was declared an independent territory. It can be

said that from that moment, Portuguese culture began to have a strong influence on the country, together with the indigenous people who had already lived in the country previously.

Another important mark in the Brazilian history was the period of slavery, when Africans were taken to the country to be enslaved, as well as a subsequent period of immigration to Brazil by European and Asian people. Thousands of slaves were brought from Africa to Brazil, and this is certainly a sad mark in the country's history. Beyond the sad part of this story, the Africans brought their habits, beliefs and culture to Brazil. Despite this irreparable mark, it is possible to observe the strong presence of African culture in the country, through the people, rites and cuisine. In the 19th and 20th centuries, there was a large wave of immigration of European and Asian people, who sought new territories in the hope of a better life. The strong presence of German, Italian, Dutch, Spanish and Japanese culture can be seen in the country through the mixing of people and cuisine.



In conclusion, it can be said that the Brazilian population is made up of indigenous people, Portuguese, Africans, Europeans and Asians. Being a country that has received so many individuals from every part of the world, Brazil is considered a multicultural country, which we can see in the culture, religions, habits. One of the best-known Brazilian dishes worldwide is *feijoada*, which has African origins. Religions of Africa are also practiced by a large part of the Brazilian population. Sushi and sashimi, although foods of Japanese origin, are a national passion in Brazil. These are some examples that show the diversity of Brazil. The most interesting aspect about this whole mix is the fact that the Brazilian people are open and receptive, and they are always able to embrace so many differences in the same place, which makes the country a really fascinating country.



Pão de Queijo

In Brazil, we have a very special dish called *Pão de Queijo*; in English, we call it cheese bread. The recipe uses a specific type of flour made from a root called cassava. We mix this flour with eggs, milk, water, oil, a little bit of salt and the main ingredient, the cheese. The cheese that we use in the recipe comes from a specific state, the state I am from, Minas Gerais. Actually, Minas Gerais is well-known because of the food. There we have a very special cuisine. The cheese used in the recipe is really special and makes all the difference. After mixing all the ingredients, you make small balls and bake them in the oven for around 40 minutes. We eat the cheese bread for breakfast, for a snack or even as part of a meal, stuffing it with pork or sausage. The kids love it, and the adults do too. It is a national passion and something that really characterizes Brazil.



Mohamed Sam

My name is Mohamed Sam. I am from North Africa, Sudan. I was born in a region called Darfur. I am 21 years old. I completed my early education (elementary and middle school) in a city called Nyala, but I went to high school in a city called Al Fashir. I graduated from high school in 2021, and I got into the engineering program at the Sudan University of Science and Technology. It is in Khartoum, which is the capital of Sudan. However, I did not start studying at the university even though I got accepted; fortunately, I got the US visa and got the opportunity to be here. I would like to continue studying. I live in East Moline with my family. I have seven siblings. One of the things that I really enjoy is having a meal with the whole family. I also like playing soccer.



The Month of Ramadan

Ramadan is an Arabic word, and it means the intensity of the heat. In 624, about fourteen centuries ago, Allah (God) made one month of the year an obligation for the Muslim community to fast, which means having no food or drinks. Not only were Muslims obligated to fast, but also no gossiping was allowed. For religious scholars, there are a lot of unseen things about the month of Ramadan, but most people are only aware of the fasting. This month is sacred and has many blessings. This description of Ramadan fasting includes who must fast, when they must fast, and how they must fast.

First of all, before the month begins, people prepare for it. The preparation is very important, and it is not exactly the same for everyone. People usually fast a few days before Ramadan begins, so they can get used to it. People also give to charity and read the Quran to purify themselves and be closer to Allah. Others visit their relatives and try to seek forgiveness from Allah to purify their hearts. The number of fasting hours varies from one location to another based on the geographical region. In America, the average number of hours of fasting is about 15 to 16 hours per day, and it lasts from dawn until sunset.

Then, how does each Ramadan day of fasting begin? The very first thing people do is wake up around 5 am to have some food and drinks because, for the next 15 or 16 hours, there will be no food or drinks. During the day, people seek forgiveness from Allah and try to perform good deeds. In addition, they prepare a lot of food and drinks. Before sunset, people take what they have cooked to their community center or mosque. Then, as the sun goes down, they start

drinking and eating. Two hours after breaking their fast, people go to a mosque and pray the Al-Tarawih prayer. The Al-Tarawih prayer is a very long prayer, not like any other prayer, but it is very healthy; science has proven it. The long prayer keeps people from going to bed with a full stomach, which would not be healthy. It also relaxes and lowers blood pressure. In the last three days, people who have enough money to cover their needs take some of their money and give it to people who are in need.

Finally, who are the people who must fast? All mature Muslims are obligated to observe Ramadan fasting. Sometimes, there are special cases that govern people who are sick or have to travel long distances. There are two kinds of special cases. One has to fast after a period of time, but the other does not. The people who are sick or the women who are menstruating or nursing babies do not have to fast during the regular Ramadan, but they are required to fast later. Also, the people who are traveling long distance can eat during Ramadan, but when they get back to their place, they have to fast for the number of days that they missed. In addition, the people who have chronic diseases that cannot be cured or the older people who are not able to fast because of their age can feed poor people instead if they can afford it.

To conclude, Ramadan is the best month of the year for Muslims. It has many blessings and mercy, but it is not as easy as it looks. The how, when and who it is very important to know about Ramadan. Because Ramadan is very important, when it ends, Muslims follow it with a celebration.



Yosuf

There was a man whose name was Yaqoub. He had 12 children one of them was named Yosuf. The other 11 children said to each other, "Our father loves Yosuf more than he loves us." They decided to kill Yosuf, but one of them said I have an idea. "We don't have to kill him. Let us take him away and throw him in a well." They asked their father if they could go out of the village with Yosuf. Father said, "I don't mind, but I feel like some would happen to him accidentally." They promised their father that they would take care of him. They took him away and threw him into a well. They came home in the evening. They had blood on their clothes, crying and saying, "While we were playing, a wolf came out of nowhere and ate our brother." As some people were passing the well, they saw him, and they took him out then they took to market and sold him. Yousuf grew up without his family. He went through many difficulties in his life, but eventually he met his father and lived with him the rest of his life.

O'Naing Sha

My name is Onaing Sha. I was born and raised in Mae La Camp, Thailand. I have been living in the USA for nine years. I am 19 years old and a student at Black Hawk College, and I am currently taking ESL classes to improve my English and writing skills. I used to be interested in becoming a teacher until I found my new goal to become a registered nurse or work in health information management. In Mae La Camp, there are not a lot of jobs available, and my parents had a hard time supporting my siblings and me. Then my parents decided to come to America to find jobs and good opportunities for their children to study in America. I have lived with my parents, two older sisters and one older brother in Rock Island for nine years. I hope that I will become a successful person one day. My dream is to make my parents proud and take them to visit Thailand or Myanmar soon.



My life in Mae La Camp, Thailand

There are many ethnic groups that became refugees in Thailand because of the serious conflicts in Myanmar. Many Karen people lost their homes, families, and their properties because of Burma soldiers. Burmese soldiers abused Karen people before killing them. My parents and other Karen people decided to leave their villages to escape the horrible war and find a new, safe home. Afterwards, my parents became refugees in Mae La Refugee Camp, Thailand, which is the largest of all camps in Thailand. They felt very safe there, so they decided to stay there. My siblings and I were born in Mae La, and we felt safe, joyful, but worried about jobs.

First, living in Mae La is very safe. When we lived in Mae La, we did not have to worry about much because there was no war or Burmese soldiers coming to our house when we went to bed. We used to own animals, such as cows, goats, chickens, ducks, and we also grew vegetables and fruits on my dad's land where no one could take his animals or plants because he owned the property, which had his name on it. For example, my parents told me that before they escaped, they had to give their animals and property to Burmese soldiers whenever they asked for anything from them. If my parents, or someone else refused to give them what they asked for, they would either threaten or abuse them. However, in Thailand, when we went



to the forest to collect wood, dry teak leaves, and other materials, we were very safe because there was no danger at all. On the other hand, in Myanmar, my parents were not safe to collect any material from the forest because Burmese soldier were often in the forest, so everyone had to stay alert; for instance, it was not safe for women to go alone in the forest because they were likely to get raped by Burmese soldiers. Whenever women went to the forest, they had to go with a male in order to protect them.



Second, living in the refugee camp was a joy even though Mae La is a poor village and not well-developed yet. When I used to live in Mae La, we didn't have a phone or TV, so we usually spent our time outside with family or friends. For instance, at that time, we couldn't afford to buy any phone, so I hung out with my friends a lot. My friends and I played cards, rubber games in different ways, jump rope, and other different games. Also, I used to see groups of women talking about their life stories at the water stream pump where everyone was collecting water for drinking or bathing. Even though living in Mae La was joyful and happy, we still struggled with life because we didn't have the money to buy food. Many people who lived in Mae La were hungry; however, some did share their foods and whatever they could. One of the most joyful moments was when my dad went to fish in the river. Whenever my dad went to fish, my friends and I skipped school and asked for his permission to go to the river with him. After he agreed, we brought snacks or rice



to eat whenever we felt hungry. Once we got there, my dad was fishing while my friends and I swam in the water and played games.

Finally, in Mae La Camp, people had problems with finding jobs. There are no jobs in Mae La, so everyone had to go work in other cities to support their families financially. Some people from Mae La went to work in Ma Sot or Bangkok, the capital of Thailand. For example, my cousin Cho Win went to work in a rich family's house. She needed a Thai ID in order to work for a rich family as a maid. When she worked for the family, she had to clean the house and look after their kids. She also had to do whatever the boss said to do. She was still young when she went to work in Bangkok. Because of money, she decided to go work there in order to earn money to support her family. She

sent money to her parents when she received money from her boss. That is how Mae La people supported themselves financially. Others supported themselves by selling products, such as fresh vegetables, fruits, clothes and other things to earn money in this way.

In conclusion, Mae La Refugee Camp was safe and enjoyable for everyone that lived there, but it was also quite difficult because there were no jobs available. Everyone's dream is to come to the U.S. because parents want their kids to have a better life, better education and a place to work. My parents gave my siblings and me a new life in the U.S. I have been a resident of Rock Island for nine years. I think moving to America was the best decision because I do not want to see the struggles my parents went through when we lived in Mae La, but I do miss my childhood friends.

Special Holidays in My Culture

In my culture, we celebrate a special holiday called *Eid Al-Fitr* and *Eid Al-Adha*. It is a big celebration in Islam and very important to every Muslim. We celebrate *Eid Al-Fitr* when Ramadan ends, and *Eid Al-Fitr* means "festival of the breaking of the fast." In Islam, Ramadan is the 9th month of the Islamic calendar; Ramadan lasts about 30 days, which means every Muslim fasts for one month every year. During Ramadan, some houses who make food share with each other in the neighborhood. Those who fast cannot eat anything the whole day, and we also cannot swallow any drink like water or soda; we have to be strict with our fast. We break the fast when it is sundown around 7 or 8 pm; we also have to pray five times daily, and some people recite the Quran after the prayer. After Ramadan ends, we celebrate the holiday called *Eid Al-Fitr*. We say to each other, "Eid Mubarak," which means blessed Eid. The second holiday is called *Eid Al-Adha*. In Islam, people celebrate *Eid Al-Adha* after *Eid Al-Fitr* finishes. During *Eid Al-Adha*, all men wake up early and go to the mosque to pray while women and their children at home wear new clothes for *Eid* and get ready to go outside. During *Eid Al-Adha*, people who bought a cow must share the beef with their relatives or other people that are in need. Sometimes, adults give money to children during *Eid* or feed them a food. In conclusion, *Eid Al-Fitr* and *Eid Al-Adha* are the most important events, and people still enjoy these two holidays.

Namfon Wongkaso

My name is Namfon Wongkaso. I am twenty-five years old. I was born in the Nong Khai province in northeast Thailand. After I finished high school, I moved to the north of Thailand to study at Chiang Mai University in Chiang Mai. Chiang Mai was very different from my hometown because of the many mountains, local food and local language. I lived in Chiang Mai for four years, and I got a bachelor's degree. While I was studying in my senior year, I had a chance to join a Work and Travel Program in the United States. I first arrived in Colorado. I like to cook, so I chose to work at a sandwich shop in Colorado, and I got so many experiences. In the future, I want to have a restaurant business where I can share my life experience through the food.



Thai Cuisine

Thai food, representing Thai culture, is a vibrant and essential part of Thailand's cultural identity. Thailand is located in Southeast Asia, and the temperature is warm all year, which allows for a wide variety of ingredients to be used. Thai food is not only very complex but also very difficult to make. Thai food has become a favorite of people around the world today. It is known for its diversity, unique flavors, and international impact.

Thai cuisine is a testament to the country's cultural diversity. There are three different parts of traditional Thai foods. From the north to the south to the central region, each region offers distinct flavors and ingredients. In the north, the local cuisine is known for its intricate use of herbs and spices such as *sai oua*, the north Thai sausage, while the south has hot curries and fresh seafoods like stir-fired spicy pork with yellow curries. The central region has the famous Pad Thai, a famous stir-fried noodle dish, and delicious green curry. The diversity of Thai cuisine reflects the country's rich history and regional influences. In Thailand, we have street food night markets almost everywhere and every day. Street food is not only convenient but also inexpensive and tasty. When I was studying in Chiang Mai and had the opportunity to enjoy a variety of street foods, I loved visiting street food night markets almost every week. The night markets are not just to enjoy the local foods, but they are also a place for people, happiness and experiences. Moreover, some Thai street food vendors use natural materials like banana leaves for packaging instead of plastic or containers woven from bamboo. The street food varies by the region, and it makes enjoying street food an environmentally friendly experience.

Two famous Thai dishes, *Pad Thai* and *Tom Yum*, are examples of the country's unique flavor combinations. *Pad Thai* contains a balance of sweet, sour, salty, and spicy flavors. It also contains rice noodles, tofu or shrimp, bean sprouts, peanuts, and various vegetables. *Tom Yum*, a hot and sour soup, uses aromatic herbs and seafoods. The key



ingredients include shrimp or chicken, mushrooms, lemongrass, galangal, kaffir lime leaves, and chili peppers. These dishes represent the complexity and balance of Thai flavors.

In the United States, Thai food is very popular and evolving. Thai food has been successful with local Thai flavors. In my opinion, Thai food in the U.S. is a little bit different from traditional Thai food. For example, *Pad Thai* in the U.S. is sweeter than *Pad Thai* in Thailand

because they have to adjust it to suit the taste of the local people, and some of the ingredients are missing. However, the emphasis on fresh, healthy ingredients in Thai cooking has resulted in an increase in healthy eating options in the United States.

Traditional Thai Green Curry

The delicious Thai green curry is rich in flavor and creamy, and it is made with coconuts and colorful fresh chili. It has the color of green soup from the fresh green chili paste. Green curry does not have fixed ingredients, but the classic Thai green curry consists of green curry paste, coconut milk, fish sauce, sugar, oil, water, herbs, such as basil leaves, egg plant, bamboo, and chicken. First of all, start with the chicken sliced into small bite-sized pieces and cut the vegetables. Then stir-fry the curry paste with oil in the pan until it smells good and turns a little brown. Next, add the chicken and continue stir frying until the chicken is half cooked. After that, we add the coconut, water, bamboo and Thai eggplant. We season the curry with fish sauce and sugar and let it simmer for 15 minutes. We put the basil and fresh chili in last. The taste has to be a balance of sweet, a little bit salty and spicy. Some Thai people serve it with jasmine rice, and others serve it with rice noodles, so both sides are good with the curry.