

Created by: Debra C. Argen
Cacao and Chocolate



Money doesn't grow on trees but chocolate does!

Everyone knows that money doesn't grow on trees, but did you know that chocolate does? Imagine being able to go out and pick your favorite – bittersweet, dark, or milk chocolate right off the tree. Ok, so that may be a bit fanciful, but chocolate, or rather, cacao really does grow on trees. During a trip to Brazil in January 2005, I had the incredible experience to see for myself where this "food from the gods" comes from. While I was staying at **Itacaré Eco Village**, www.ecovillage.com, (read the article on the resort in **Hotels & Resorts**), in the northeast of Brazil in the state of Bahia, I had the opportunity to see cacao plants up close and personal. Although I love chocolate, I hate to admit, I never really gave much thought as to its origins, so seeing it growing was a unique experience.



First of all, cacao is planted under the rainforest, and is a symbol of nature, culture and preservation. The fruit of the cacao plant is actually an oblong ribbed shape that when ripe is a deep yellow, but when I saw the plants growing they were still green. When you open up the cacao fruit, there is a white pulp inside, which is made into juice, and having tried it, I can assure you that it tastes nothing like chocolate. Once you remove the pulp, there are beans inside – which are the beginning of chocolate! The beans are removed, and then dried, and then later processed into powder and ultimately into chocolate, making their way into our desires in the forms of hot chocolate, cakes, pastries and luscious candies.

The Aztecs first began using cacao beans in ancient rituals dating back 2,000 years. The French were drinking hot chocolate by the mid 1600's, and the Swiss made the first milk chocolate in 1876. The world can thank Swiss candy-maker Daniel Peter for introducing us to this sweet milk chocolate addiction.



In keeping with our Brazilian edition this month, I thought it only appropriate to share my friend, Gilberto Sacilotti's recipe for Brigadeiro, a type of chocolate fudge-like candy that any self-respecting Brazilian child learns to make early in life. Gilberto used to make this sweet treat for his cousin Marcelo and I when we were children. Today, he and his wife, Regina, have regular competitions over whose Brigadeiro is better.

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Gilberto makes it the old-fashioned way on the stove, while my friend, Regina makes hers in the microwave! Whichever recipe you choose, see if you can wait until it cools to eat it!

Gilberto Sacilotti's Brigadeiro

Ingredients

1	can	condensed milk
1	tablespoon	butter
1	can	milk
4	tablespoons	cocoa
1	jar	chocolate sprinkles

In a non-stick pan, pour the condensed milk, the milk (using the can of the condensed milk as a measurement), and add the butter and cocoa. Cook the mixture over medium heat, stirring constantly, until it starts to come away from the sides of the pan. Continue beating, until the mixture starts to look a little dry. The whole process will take about 20 or so minutes, depending on your stove.

Pour the mixture into a bowl to cool. This is where Gilberto, Marcelo and I would always debate, since they would want to eat it straight from the bowl, whereas I wanted to eat it rolled into balls and then rolled into chocolate sprinkles like they sell in the sweet shops. Either way, it is still delicious!

To present the Brigadeiro the traditional way, when the mixture has cooled, butter your hands, and roll 1 teaspoon of the mixture in a ball, and then roll the ball into the chocolate sprinkles. Place in bonbon papers. Makes about 24 if you do not taste too many samples.

Regina Sacilotti's Brigadeiro

Ingredients

1	can	condensed milk
1	tablespoon	butter
4	tablespoons	cocoa
1	jar	chocolate sprinkles

In a glass bowl, pour the condensed milk, and add the butter and cocoa. Cook the mixture in the microwave for about 6 minutes, stopping and stirring occasionally, until the mixture starts to come away from the sides of the bowl. Take care that you watch the progress so that you do not burn the chocolate. Remove from the microwave and allow the mixture to cool. Regina recommends you eat it right away though, since why wait!

To present the Brigadeiro the traditional way, when the mixture has cooled, butter your hands, and roll 1 teaspoon of the mixture in a ball, and then roll the ball into the chocolate sprinkles. Place in bonbon papers. This recipe will make fewer bonbons than Gilberto's recipe, but it is also wonderful to eat in a dish with a spoon.

For additional information on Bahia, please contact the **Bahia Tourism Office** at: www.bahia.com.br.

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