Dulce de Leche

A traditional Latin American sweet made from milk and sugar

Dulce de leche, manjar blanco, cajeta... these sweets bearing several different names and characteristics are widespread in Latin America and are made from condensing milk and sugar until caramelized.

Originally home-produced in temperate cattle raising areas (mid-altitude tropical mountains and pampas) colonized in the 16th to 18th centuries, dulces de leche have been commercialized in towns of the same regions since the end of the 19th century.

The basic recipe is the same, but the proportion between milk and sugar, the cooking time and the added flavors vary in each region, giving a particular taste, color, and texture. Even when bearing the same name, the sweet is different from one country to another.

So diverse are these treats, many consider them local specialties. By creating uniform products, large food companies cannot compete with handicraft products in the market.

A Culinary Tradition

Argentina and Uruguay claim dulce de leche as gastronomical heritage.

A Short History

The Arabs bring sugar cane and sugar processing techniques to Spain, borrowed from India.

Sugar cane and milk-producing livestock come to Latin America by Spanish and Portuguese colonizers.

Colonizers occupy lands with low native populations and set up cattle ranches.

Recipes for milk sweets appear in the first Latin American recipe books.

Trade increases in towns, near roads or railroad stations.

Argentina and Uruguay dispute the gastronomic heritage of dulce de leche with Argentina.