

## **Tamales, A Delicious Part of Christmas Culture**

Written by Afif Arafina

Christmas season is here. Anyway, what do you usually do to welcome the Christmas holiday? Many people fill their holiday season with Christmas shopping (trying to find a small shirt for your dog), tree decorating or cookie baking. Well, I have a story about a Christmas traditions in Mexico or Latin countries. You might have heard a dish named tamales before. During most of the year, tamale is part of a meal. But during the Christmas holidays, tamales become a delicious Christmas tradition.

For many Hispanics, the season is complete with this holiday meal. For cultures with Latin roots, tamales are perhaps the most important celebratory food during this holiday. Hmm, it seems like I could not wait until dinner time to eat tamales. Like some people, I believe that good food takes a long time to prepare. Yes, it takes a little time to set everything up. But, it was so nice to see the process in making tamales because we didn't buy the tamales but we made them together. But, believe me there's nothing like homemade! The process of making the tamales turned out to be lots of fun. Like most of the tamales, our tamales were wrapped in corn husk filled with chicken, cheese, chili, and masa. I have to say tamale making is also a great way to bond with friends and family. Get a group together and make a project of it. My host mother, aunt, uncle, few cousins, and another Exchange student from Indonesia, Rahmi, worked together to accomplish this long process.

First, I shopped together with my host mother to buy all the ingredients that we need to make tamales. We bought 8 pounds of masa, the Spanish word for dough and made from field corn. I realized I we would have a tamales party with so many tamales around me. But, since it takes a bit of time to prepare the dough and fill for tamales, it's a good idea to make many. We started by adding salt and kneading the masa. Then we prepared the desired fillings that we were going to use. Later, we spread masa on the corn husks, put the filling and then wrapped the tamales. Then we steamed them as the final process. It looks like we only took a short time to make them, doesn't it? But, we spent approximately 4 hours until the tamales were ready to serve. We started to eat at 9 PM while my eyes were starting to guide me to the bed. But, it was a nice time to experience the Latin culture to welcome the Christmas holiday. Later on, it was a good experience to eat the tamales that we made. When else can I experience a food tradition like this? Now, if someone asks me what is your favorite Mexican dish? I will answer Tamales.