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從“Recado”到彈性：在食材受限的情況下，如何在台
灣保留伯利茲飲食文化

From Recado to Resilience: Preserving Belizean Food
Culture in Taiwan Amid Ingredient Constraints

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Acknowledgments



With Belize forever in my heart, I arrived in Taiwan two years ago, wide-eyed, hopeful, and admittedly uncertain about the direction my studies or career would take. What I found instead was a journey filled with unexpected clarity, meaningful connections, and a growing appreciation for the power of food, identity, and community.

First and foremost, I wish to thank my advisor, Professor Jer-Ming Hu. Thank you for your unwavering support, thoughtful guidance, and gracious spirit in allowing me the freedom to pursue a topic so close to my heart. Your kindness and insight have made this thesis not only possible but enjoyable to write, and I am sincerely grateful for your patience and encouragement along the way.

To my dear friends in Taiwan, thank you for embracing me with open arms and open kitchens. Your generosity, laughter, and shared meals have fed both my stomach and soul, and reminded me that “home” can be found wherever people care for one another.

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To my incredible mother back in Belize, thank you for being my biggest cheerleader. Your frequent (and sometimes stern) reminders to “keep writing” were always laced with love, and your prayers and support helped me through even the toughest days. You are the foundation on which this journey was built.

To my father, thank you for planting the seeds of this passion so early in my life. Growing up, I was always at your side in the kitchen, eagerly watching, learning, and savoring the magic you created with your hands. From your fiery fresh habanero pepper sauce with hints of cilantro and carrots, to the seasonal comfort of your crab soup simmered in creamy coconut milk and served with perfectly soft dumplings, every



meal was a lesson in love, patience, and pride. Your cooking filled our home with unforgettable aromas and my heart with a lasting curiosity about food and culture. Thank you, Dad, for feeding me in every sense of the word, your creations still inspire me and fuel this journey.

To Dr. Lyra Spang, your passion for food studies and its cultural symbolism first sparked my interest during my undergraduate years in Belize. Your work has been a guiding light throughout this thesis, and our conversations during this process gave me a renewed appreciation for Belizean food and its power to tell our collective story. Thank you for inspiring me to look at food not just as sustenance, but as a lens through which we can understand our people, our history, and our future.

Finally, I am humbled to contribute to the growing body of literature on our beautiful Belize. This thesis is more than an academic project, it is a love letter to our culture, our flavors, and the vibrant community of Belizeans who continue to carry our traditions across oceans and borders. I am proud to add my voice to this ongoing conversation.

摘要



本文探討了居住在台灣的伯利茲人在應對移民挑戰的同時，如何維護、適應並重塑其傳統飲食文化。本研究基於對五位伯利茲參與者的定性訪談，探討了食材供應、替代做法、社區網絡以及共享烹飪體驗在維護海外文化認同方面所發揮的作用。伯利茲美食不僅是滋養的來源，更是情感連結、懷舊和社會歸屬感的載體。研究結果強調了食材如何充當文化錨點，而食材的缺失往往會激發創造力和社區合作。無論是聚餐、國家慶典或日常交流，美食聚會都是保護傳統文化和營造賓至如歸感的重要場所。儘管食材供應有限，且學生生活經濟拮据，在台灣的伯利茲人仍在不斷探索尊重和分享其烹飪傳統的方式。本研究豐富了關於離散飲食習慣、烹飪懷舊和文化適應的文獻，並旨在進一步探討非西方東道國移民飲食文化的韌性與創新性。

關鍵字：

伯利茲飲食文化、離散族群、台灣、烹飪適應、食材替代、食物與認同、美食民族主義、社區網絡、文化保護、移民經驗。

Abstract



This paper explores how Belizeans living in Taiwan maintain, adapt, and recreate their traditional food culture while navigating the challenges of migration. Grounded in qualitative interviews with five Belizean participants, this research examines the role of ingredient availability, substitution practices, community networks, and shared culinary experiences in sustaining cultural identity abroad. Belizean cuisine is not only a source of nourishment but a vehicle for emotional connection, nostalgia, and social belonging. The findings highlight how ingredients act as cultural anchors, while their absence often sparks creativity and community collaboration. Food gatherings whether through potlucks, national celebrations, or casual exchanges serve as crucial spaces for preserving heritage and creating a sense of home away from home. Despite limitations in ingredient accessibility and the financial constraints of student life, Belizeans in Taiwan continue to find ways to honor and share their culinary traditions. This study contributes to the literature on diasporic foodways, culinary nostalgia, and cultural adaptation, and

invites further research into the resilience and innovation of immigrant food cultures in non-Western host societies.



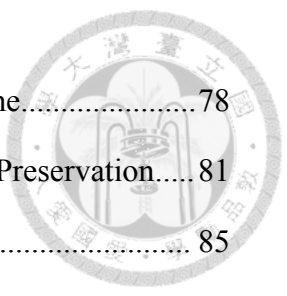
Keywords:

Belizean food culture, diaspora, Taiwan, culinary adaptation, ingredient substitution, food and identity, gastronationalism, community networks, cultural preservation, immigrant experiences.

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Preface:

- **Personal motivation for the research**

This research is deeply personal. It is rooted in my own experiences as a Belizean living abroad and my enduring love for food, not just as nourishment, but as a connection to memory, identity, and community. Like many others who leave home in pursuit of education or opportunity, I found myself in Taiwan, surrounded by unfamiliar flavors, languages, and ways of life. While Taiwan offered new possibilities, it also presented the challenge of learning how to feel at home again.

What I missed most wasn't just the Belizean dishes themselves, but the flavor profiles that tell stories of our history, and the warmth that radiates from sharing a meal with familiar people. The taste of recado in stewed chicken, the comfort of coconut rice, or the heat of habanero pepper these were more than ingredients; they were reminders of where I came from and who I was.

My academic background in Anthropology only deepened my curiosity. I began to wonder: how were other Belizeans in Taiwan adapting? Were they also struggling to recreate home on their plates? What strategies had they developed to preserve their food culture in a place so far from the Caribbean? These questions sparked the beginning of this research.

In the early months of my stay, I, too, struggled to find comfort in the newness of Taiwan. But over time, it was the Belizean community that helped me bridge that gap, whether

through small gatherings, recipe swaps, or simply sharing tips on where to find plantains or allspice. In those acts of togetherness, Taiwan began to feel less like a temporary stop and more like a second home.



This study is not just an academic inquiry it is a celebration of resilience, cultural pride, and community support. At the heart of this project lies a quiet resistance against a mindset that has, for too long, discouraged collective growth. In Belize, we are often confronted with what's known as the "crab in the bucket" mentality a pattern of behavior where individuals, instead of lifting one another up, pull each other down in fear, jealousy, or insecurity. As Tagle (2021) explains, "If the individual who compares themselves with others finds those others more successful, they may show anxiety and fear for their own performance and exhibit behaviors in order to hinder others." Lith (2017) further notes that such mentality is marked by "belittlement, humiliation, harsh criticism, grudge-holding, jealousy, and hostility toward others." This study highlights how food sharing, knowledge exchange, and community support challenge the scarcity mindset embedded in the 'crab in the bucket' mentality.

This research aims to push back against that narrative. It strives to show that Belizeans abroad can support one another, share knowledge, and celebrate their culture with pride and generosity. Through the lens of food, I hope to highlight how we can build community in unfamiliar places, and how solidarity, not scarcity, can define our diasporic experience.

- **Brief introduction to Belizean cuisine**

Belizean cuisine is as vibrant and diverse as the people who call the country home. It is a fusion of traditions, histories, and cultural identities each bite telling a story shaped by centuries of movement, adaptation, and shared living. From coastal Garifuna communities to inland Mayan villages and bustling Kriol households, food in Belize is both a marker of identity and a deeply personal expression of heritage.

The everyday meals of Belizeans range widely but often include staples such as rice and beans with stewed chicken, served with ripe fried plantain and creamy potato salad, a dish so beloved that it has come to represent the national plate. Other classics like boil-up, a hearty medley of ground foods like cassava and green bananas steamed together and served with boiled eggs, fish, and tomato sauce, showcase a connection to traditional fishing and farming lifestyles. The Garifuna dish hudut, made with mashed green and ripe plantains served alongside serre, a rich coconut fish stew, brings coastal and African-Caribbean culinary techniques into focus.



Photograph from (Maya Island Air, 2015) showcasing the traditional dish of Belize, from left to right, rice and beans, fry plantains, stew chicken and potato salad.



The photograph from (Gonzalez, 2019) showcases a Belizean Boil up, this includes pigtail, fry fish, eggs, yam, cassava, sweetpotato and plantain served with a tomato sauce.



Photograph from (Waight, 2022) showcasing Belizean Hudut, a fish stew served with mashed plantains in a coconut broth. Bottom

Seasoning plays a vital role in defining Belizean food. Many Kriol dishes rely on the flavor foundation of coconut oil, onion, sweet pepper, and recado, a seasoned paste made from annatto seeds, blended into savory sauces. These flavors provide depth and warmth that evoke memories of family kitchens and Sunday dinners.

Lyra Spang (2019) describes how Belizean food culture cannot be fully understood without examining how it intersects with national identity. Belize's diverse population—Kriol, Garifuna, Mestizo, Maya, East Indian, Chinese, Mennonite, and more each contributes distinct dishes and ingredients. Yet, what gets categorized as “Belizean food” is often shaped by broader power dynamics. Kriol cooking, in particular, dominates public conceptions of Belizean cuisine due to its historical visibility and strong associations with home cooking

and the national language, Kriol. Many traditional Garifuna dishes have also become widely recognized as “Belizean,” especially when prepared in similar ways by Kriol families.

At the same time, Spang notes that other culinary traditions, such as those of the Maya, East Indians, or Mennonites, are less familiar to the average Belizean and often overlooked in national food narratives not because they are less “authentic,” but because they are less commonly prepared in mixed households or public eateries. The hegemonic model of nationalism, as discussed in her work, privileges foods most familiar to the dominant groups, particularly those that are prepared in Kriol homes. Thus, while dishes like chimole (black dinna) or escabeche are considered “Belizean” due to their widespread adoption, other equally traditional dishes such as poch, tacari chicken, or curried cohune cabbage may be excluded because of limited exposure or lack of “Kriolization.”



Photograph from (Island Expeditions, 2025) showcasing the dish Black Relleno soup which is a Christmas special for the Mestizo ethnic group.



Photograph by (Big Oven, 2012) showcasing Belizean Escabeche, which is a soup containing onions, carrots and chicken.



Photograph from (The Corner-Stop PG, 2022) displaying Belizean Cohune Cabbage, which is the diced heart of the cohune palm tree cooked with curry chicken, served over white rice with fried plantains, and an onion sauce made with habanero pepper.



Despite these complexities, Belizean food is ultimately defined not just by ingredients or techniques, but by the emotions and memories it carries. Whether it's a warm plate of Johnny cakes, soft baked biscuits, and fried fish, a bowl of Serre shared during a family gathering, or the use of homegrown coconut milk in a celebratory dish, food remains a key connector to identity and belonging. It is a language of comfort and pride, capable of bridging the spaces between tradition and innovation, and between homeland and diaspora

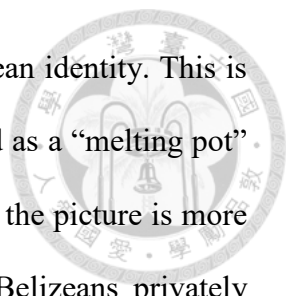
Chapter 1: Introduction

Section 1: Research Background

- **Belizean cuisine and its cultural significance**

Belizean cuisine is far more than the dishes that appear on a plate it reflects identity, power, and the way different cultural groups relate to one another within the broader national narrative. The cultural significance of food in Belize has been deeply shaped by overlapping models of nationalism, which in turn influence how Belizeans define what counts as “authentically” Belizean cuisine.

As Spang (2019) describes, Belize officially promotes a pluralistic model of nationalism, where the nation is portrayed as a harmonious blend of diverse cultures, each contributing

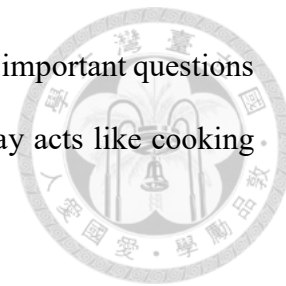


distinct traditions, such as food, language, and music, to a shared Belizean identity. This is the version often seen in tourism promotions, where Belize is advertised as a “melting pot” of flavors and cultures. Yet, Spang’s fieldwork in Placencia reveals that the picture is more complex in practice. While pluralism is the public narrative, many Belizeans privately subscribe to a form of hegemonic nationalism, where Kriol and Garifuna food traditions dominate what is understood and accepted as “Belizean food.” For this reason, food anthropologists, like Spang, have struggled to clearly define what truly is Belizean food. In this view, foods associated with other groups, particularly Spanish-speaking and Mayan communities, are often excluded from the national culinary identity unless they have been adopted into the Kriol culinary repertoire.

Spang’s findings build on earlier work by Wilk (2006), who suggested that Belizean cuisine fits into a “lumpy stew” model: a national cuisine composed of diverse elements, where individual cultural food traditions remain visible and distinct, yet blend into a shared national broth. However, even in this stew, some flavors overpower others. Kriol home-cooking often serves as a gatekeeper for what counts as “truly Belizean,” setting the standard for taste and authenticity.

This dynamic illustrates a key feature of gastronationalism, the use of food to express national identity and to reinforce which groups are seen as central or peripheral within that identity (DeSoucey, 2010). In Belize, decisions about which foods are “most Belizean” are not just culinary they are political and social. Participants in Spang’s study often excluded Mayan foods from their concept of Belizean cuisine, in part due to unfamiliarity, despite the

longstanding presence of Mayan communities in the country. This raises important questions about representation, memory, and cultural dominance, even in everyday acts like cooking and eating.



For many Belizeans, then, food is both a personal and collective symbol, a way to express belonging, but also a reflection of whose traditions are most visible and valued. Understanding this complexity is essential to any discussion of cultural preservation, especially among diasporic Belizeans who are not only trying to recreate home through food but are also negotiating which parts of their food identity to preserve, adapt, or let go.

- **Belizean migration to Taiwan and its impact on food access.**

Belize, a developing nation, established diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1989. Belize and Taiwan have nurtured a strong and mutually beneficial relationship over the years. Taiwan has provided Belize with valuable financial and technical support, helping the small Central American nation in various areas of development. In appreciation of this assistance, Belize has been a steadfast ally of Taiwan, particularly in advocating for its participation in major international organizations (Neszmélyi, 2022).

This cooperative bond allowed Belizean students to further their education in Taiwan. From the initiative's inception in 2013, scholarship recipients receive comprehensive support,

including round-trip airfare, housing, tuition and credit fees, insurance, textbook costs, and a monthly stipend (The San Pedro Sun, 2013). Over the years, both the areas of study and the number of scholarship recipients have increased. In 2013, Taiwan awarded a total of 24 scholarships to Belizean students (The San Pedro Sun, 2013); that number almost tripled in 2023, when a record-breaking 66 scholarships were awarded to Belizean nationals (7 News Belize, 2023).

According to the National Immigration Agency, ROC, there are a total of 367 Belizeans living in various urban municipalities across Taiwan (Ministry of the Interior National Immigration Agency, 2025). This number not only represents those individuals who are currently studying in Taiwan, it also encompasses those who have completed their studies and choose to stay in Taiwan to work, and also those who come to Taiwan to work, especially as English teachers. This decision is backed by projects such as Taiwan's 2030 Bilingual Country Project, which aims to enhance Taiwanese students' English conversation skills, strengthen local teachers' English instruction, and improve the overall English learning environment in schools (Embassy of the Republic of China (Taiwan) in Belize, 2023). Belizeans in Taiwan, often times socialize with one another in part due to the events which are planned by the Belize Taiwan Association (BTA). Aside from this, Belizeans have done well to mingle and share their culture and cuisine with other foreigners, notably those from the diaspora such as St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Kitts and Nevis and Haiti.

- **Importance of ingredient availability in maintaining traditional cuisine.**

The preservation of traditional cuisine within migrant communities is deeply dependent on the availability of culturally specific ingredients. For Belizeans living in Taiwan, ingredient sourcing becomes more than just a logistical challenge; it is central to the continuation of foodways that carry emotional, historical, and communal significance. Traditional dishes often act as tangible links to home, memory, and identity, and the ability to cook them faithfully depends on access to the building blocks of their original flavor profiles.

In Belize, food is a powerful symbol of national and ethnic identity. As Spang (2019) highlights in her work on Belizean food politics and identity in Placencia, the authenticity of a dish is often judged by whether it includes culturally recognized ingredients and preparation methods. Through her research, Spang found that certain foods especially those associated with Kriol and Garifuna cooking are widely accepted as “Belizean” due in part to their visibility and consistency in home-cooking. In contrast, dishes from Mayan or Spanish traditions were often overlooked or excluded from the national culinary identity, largely because of participants’ unfamiliarity with their ingredients. This reinforces the idea that recognition and belonging in the national cuisine are directly tied to ingredient familiarity and availability (Spang, 2019b).

This phenomenon is echoed in the experiences of Belizean migrants in Taiwan. Interviews conducted for this study revealed that common obstacles to recreating traditional meals included the inaccessibility of staple ingredients such as recado (annatto paste), plantains, and certain local herbs. These ingredients are foundational to dishes like stewed chicken,

boil-up, and escabeche, and their absence alters not just the flavor but the emotional and cultural resonance of the food itself. While many participants described developing creative substitutions, such as using paprika in place of recado or blending vinegars and citrus juices to mimic sour orange, these adaptations were often seen as compromises rather than solutions.

As Trichopoulou et al. (2006) emphasize in their analysis of the traditional Greek Mediterranean diet, traditional foods are not only nutritionally valuable but also culturally embedded. They argue that ingredient integrity is essential to preserving both the health benefits and the heritage of traditional diets, warning that lifestyle changes and ingredient shortages are causing traditional foods to disappear across Europe. Their call for the documentation and protection of traditional ingredients and recipes aligns closely with the challenges faced by diaspora communities like Belizeans in Taiwan, where modern global mobility can result in cultural loss through culinary adaptation if key ingredients are no longer accessible.

Furthermore, the substitution of traditional ingredients, while often necessary in the diaspora, can create a rift in how food is perceived and remembered. Trichopoulou et al. (2006) caution against poor imitations of traditional dishes, which may misrepresent cultural heritage and distort consumer understanding. This is particularly relevant for Belizeans abroad who strive to share their cuisine with others or introduce it to their children. The inability to fully replicate traditional dishes may lead to a gradual dilution of culinary identity, and over time, the “Belizean-ness” of certain foods may fade.

Despite these challenges, ingredient substitution also reflects adaptability and resilience, values that are central to many migrant experiences. For some long-term residents in Taiwan, sourcing ingredients has become easier over time due to greater familiarity with local markets, shared knowledge within the Belizean community, and, in some cases, cultivating certain herbs and spices at home. Still, participants consistently emphasized the importance of authentic ingredients in preserving the full sensory and cultural experience of Belizean cuisine a sentiment that aligns with the broader understanding that food is a repository of memory and cultural continuity.

In sum, ingredient availability is not a superficial detail in culinary practice; it is a critical factor in cultural preservation. Without access to traditional ingredients, migrants must choose between altering their recipes or not preparing certain dishes at all, both of which have implications for how culture is sustained in a new environment. As the literature suggests and as Belizeans in Taiwan experience firsthand, the ingredients themselves are carriers of identity. Protecting, accessing, and sharing them is essential for keeping traditional cuisine, and by extension, cultural belonging, alive in the diaspora.

Section 2: Literature Review

- **The role of food in cultural identity and migration**

What happens to the knowledge of herbs and spices when people migrate beyond their diaspora?

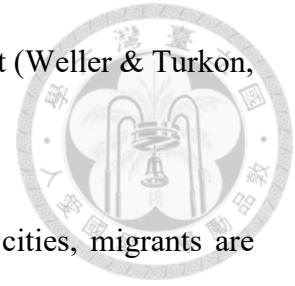


Food serves as a tangible link connecting individuals to their cultural heritage and local communities (Weller & Turkon, 2014). While the significance of food varies among immigrants, it remains one of the most enduring elements of identity formation and maintenance. As such, examining food traditions can provide valuable insight into how immigrants preserve their cultural identity and maintain ties to their communities (Weller & Turkon, 2014; Vandebroek & Balick, 2012).

A study on **Globalization and the Loss of Plant Knowledge** found that Dominican migrants in New York City retained their traditional plant knowledge, particularly for medicinal and culinary purposes. The most frequently used plants were those integral to Dominican cuisine and traditional medicine, highlighting how migration does not necessarily lead to cultural erasure (Vandebroek & Balick, 2012).

International migration, whether temporary or permanent, is a key aspect of globalization (Vandebroek & Balick, 2012). In metropolitan areas like London or New York, changes in traditional plant knowledge can be especially pronounced (Vandebroek & Balick, 2012). Migration often leads to both the adoption of new food traditions and the gradual fading of traditional ones (Vallianatos & Raine, 2008). The extent to which certain foods are retained or replaced depends on various factors unique to each immigrant's experience. Availability plays a key role, as some traditional foods may be difficult or impossible to find due to

physical, political, economic, or cultural barriers in the new environment (Weller & Turkon, 2014).



However, migration also presents opportunities. In culturally diverse cities, migrants are exposed to new knowledge and practices, allowing them to integrate and expand upon their traditional understanding of herbs and spices. Rather than simply losing their ancestral plant knowledge, immigrants often adapt, incorporating elements from other cultures to enrich and evolve their practices (Weller & Turkon, 2014; Vandebroek & Balick, 2012).

- **Previous research on ingredient substitution and adaptation in diasporic communities**

Not all migrants have the advantage of settling in a place with a large community from their home country. This was the case for Ghanaian migrants in London in 2006, as documented in the study "**Migration and Foodways: Continuity and Change among Ghanaians in London.**" With a relatively small Ghanaian population in the city, many migrants had to adapt their diets by finding alternative ingredients to replace those that were unavailable (Tuomainen, 2006). However, this adaptation was not always welcomed. Many were hesitant to alter their traditional diet, fearing how unfamiliar foods might affect their health and overall well-being.

To work around these challenges, migrants relied on two main approaches. In some cases, they substituted completely different ingredients, such as using potatoes or other starches in

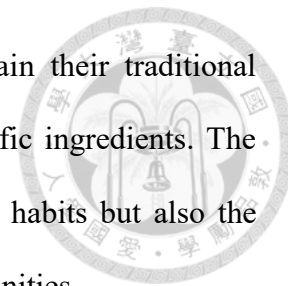
place of cassava for making fufu. In other instances, they used the same ingredients as in Ghana but in a modified form, often processed and sold as powders that required preparation. Although these substitutes rarely replicated the exact taste of the original dishes, the willingness to embrace them highlighted the deep cultural significance of traditional foods and their role in maintaining a sense of identity.

Over time, some of these substitutes, particularly those used in sauces, became preferred over the original ingredients. Many of the alternative foods were also more convenient, saving time in the cooking process. This was especially appealing to younger generations, who valued quick and spontaneous meal preparation. Processed and canned products allowed for greater flexibility, making it easier to cook without the lengthy preparation associated with traditional methods.

One of the study's key findings was the essential role of staple food substitutes in preserving the traditional structure of Ghanaian meals. Though the ingredients and preparation methods differed, the resulting dishes maintained the consistency and heaviness characteristic of Ghanaian cuisine. This allowed migrants to eat their meals familiarly, providing a sense of comfort and continuity in their new environment. In doing so, they not only upheld their broader Ghanaian or African identity but also preserved the unique culinary traditions of their specific tribal backgrounds (Tuomainen, 2006).

- **Challenges of sourcing ethnic ingredients in foreign countries**

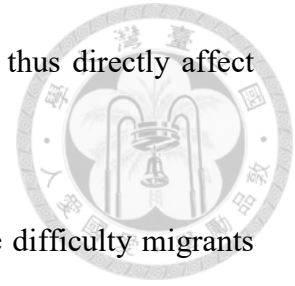
One significant challenge migrants encounter when trying to maintain their traditional culinary practices abroad is the limited availability of culturally specific ingredients. The ability to source traditional foods directly influences not only dietary habits but also the broader cultural identity and emotional well-being of immigrant communities.



Trichopoulou et al. (2006) assert that traditional cuisines rely heavily on specific ingredients, without which the integrity and cultural meaning of dishes may be compromised. They argue that the inaccessibility of certain ingredients often leads to culinary substitutions, potentially diminishing the nutritional and cultural authenticity of the traditional diet. Similarly, Spang (2019b), in her study of Belizean cuisine, underscores how the authenticity of Belizean dishes depends significantly on the availability of culturally recognized ingredients such as recado, coconut oil, and sour orange. When these ingredients are absent or substituted, dishes lose a degree of their cultural resonance and authenticity, influencing how migrants experience their culinary heritage abroad.

Economic barriers also significantly impact the maintenance of traditional dietary practices in migrant communities. Joseph and Voeks (2021) highlight how the high cost of imported ingredients limits the ability of Indian migrants in Southern California to consistently prepare traditional foods, forcing them to either adapt recipes using more affordable local alternatives or reduce the frequency of traditional cooking altogether. Tuomainen (2006) similarly found that Ghanaian migrants in London often faced financial constraints due to the high prices of imported ethnic ingredients, compelling them to ration traditional staples or substitute them with cheaper, readily available alternatives such as potatoes instead of cassava or instant

powders instead of freshly prepared fufu. These economic limitations thus directly affect both the frequency and authenticity of traditional cooking.

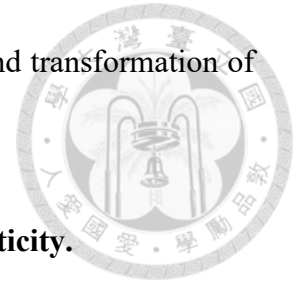


Furthermore, the absence of established ethnic markets exacerbates the difficulty migrants face in sourcing traditional ingredients. Joseph and Voeks (2021) emphasize the advantage enjoyed by immigrant communities with well-developed ethnic commercial infrastructures, such as Southern California's "Little India," where traditional ingredients are accessible through specialized markets. In contrast, Belizean migrants in Taiwan, similar to Tuomainen's (2006) Ghanaian migrants in London, often lack established ethnic markets, making sourcing traditional ingredients challenging. This frequently necessitates reliance on informal community networks, direct imports from home countries, or cultivation of certain ingredients in home gardens as adaptive strategies.

The reliance on informal trading networks and community-based sharing is particularly notable among migrants facing limited access. Tuomainen (2006) describes how informal networks and personal connections within migrant communities facilitate access to otherwise unavailable traditional ingredients. Similar patterns emerged in interviews conducted with Belizean migrants in Taiwan, where respondents frequently relied on interpersonal connections, social media groups, or shared shipments from Belize to obtain essential ingredients such as recado paste, and spices.

These challenges underscore a broader theme: the struggle to maintain culinary authenticity in the diaspora often requires migrants to engage in adaptive strategies, balancing nostalgia and tradition with the practicalities and realities of their new environments. Ingredient

availability thus remains a critical factor influencing the preservation and transformation of cultural identity through cuisine among migrant communities.



- **Ingredient substitution and its impact on food authenticity.**

Ingredient substitution is a common practice among migrants faced with the unavailability of culturally specific ingredients. While substitutions are practical responses to resource scarcity, they inherently impact the authenticity of traditional dishes, altering not only their taste but also their cultural and emotional significance.

According to Trichopoulou et al. (2006), ingredient integrity is vital for maintaining the nutritional and cultural authenticity of traditional foods. They note that substitutions, though often necessary, can significantly alter the original taste profiles and reduce the traditional nutritional benefits. This loss of authenticity can affect how migrants perceive and value their culinary heritage, potentially leading to a gradual detachment from traditional dietary practices.

Spang (2019b) similarly identifies ingredient substitution as a crucial factor influencing the perception of Belizean cuisine authenticity. Her research highlights that Belizean migrants frequently resort to using locally available substitutes for critical ingredients like recado paste and sour oranges. These substitutes, while practical, often result in dishes that differ considerably from their traditional counterparts, weakening the dishes' emotional and cultural resonance among migrants.

Joseph and Voeks (2021) document analogous experiences among Indian migrants in Southern California, noting that substitutions for traditional herbs and spices due to high costs or limited availability often lead to altered flavor profiles. Such culinary modifications impact the authenticity of traditional dishes, potentially influencing their transmission to subsequent generations. The researchers emphasize that ingredient substitutions, while necessary, often represent a compromise between cultural preservation and practical adaptation.

The impact of substitution on authenticity is further illustrated by Tuomainen (2006), who found that Ghanaian migrants in London frequently replaced traditional staples like cassava and plantains with potatoes or processed substitutes. This substitution significantly altered traditional dishes' taste and texture, reducing the overall sensory connection to their cultural heritage. Tuomainen argues that while substitution allows migrants to retain the structure of traditional meals, the essence and authenticity of these dishes are inevitably compromised.

Moreover, substitution practices highlight migrants' adaptability and resilience. Migrants often creatively adjust traditional recipes using available local ingredients, illustrating their willingness and capability to navigate their new culinary environment. Yet, these adaptations also reflect ongoing negotiations between maintaining cultural identity and responding to practical constraints imposed by their host environment.

Ultimately, ingredient substitution underscores a broader tension in migrant culinary practices between preservation and adaptation. While substitutions help sustain culinary traditions abroad, they inherently reshape the traditional flavors, meanings, and cultural narratives associated with migrant cuisines.



- **Community networks and food sourcing in immigrant communities.**

Community networks play an essential role in facilitating food sourcing among immigrant communities, significantly influencing their ability to maintain traditional dietary practices. These networks help migrants navigate the logistical challenges of obtaining culturally specific ingredients and foster social ties and cultural continuity within diaspora contexts.

Tuomainen (2006) highlights the importance of informal trading networks among Ghanaian migrants in London, noting that personal connections and informal channels often become primary means for obtaining traditional ingredients. These informal networks help bridge the gap created by inadequate local availability, enabling migrants to continue their culinary traditions despite market limitations. Tuomainen (2006) further notes that informal food parcels from relatives or friends in the home country significantly supplement local sourcing efforts, underscoring the importance of transnational ties in food sourcing.

Joseph and Voeks (2021) similarly illustrate the critical role community infrastructure plays among Indian migrants in Southern California. The presence of dedicated ethnic markets, such as those in the "Little India" district, greatly facilitates consistent access to authentic ingredients. Such community hubs not only provide essential culinary items but also serve as vital social spaces where cultural knowledge, culinary techniques, and information about ingredient sourcing are exchanged, reinforcing community bonds.

Spang (2019b) underscores the importance of community networks among Belizean migrants, observing that knowledge-sharing within the community significantly impacts migrants' ability to source critical ingredients. For Belizeans abroad, informal communication channels, such as social media groups and personal connections, become critical platforms for exchanging information about ingredient availability, recipe adaptation, and culinary innovation, thus maintaining cultural continuity.

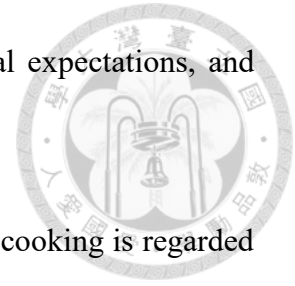
Additionally, Trichopoulou et al. (2006) emphasize that community-level cooperation and shared cultural initiatives are essential to preserving traditional cuisines threatened by ingredient scarcity. They argue for collective actions, including documentation, cultural events, and community gardening initiatives, to ensure continued access to authentic culinary resources and support the collective cultural identity of migrant communities.

Ultimately, community networks serve not only practical needs in sourcing traditional ingredients but also play crucial roles in sustaining cultural identity, fostering social cohesion, and providing emotional support among migrants. These networks allow communities to mitigate the challenges associated with ingredient scarcity, thereby preserving cultural traditions and culinary authenticity in foreign environments.

- **Women's role in food preparation**

Women have long been central figures in the preservation, preparation, and transmission of food culture, particularly within Caribbean and Latin American immigrant communities.

Their culinary labor is deeply intertwined with cultural identity, social expectations, and gendered power structures.

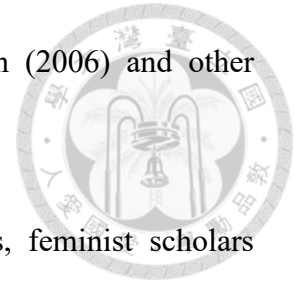


In many societies, including those in the Caribbean and Latin America, cooking is regarded as a vital aspect of female identity and a key duty within the domestic sphere. This is not simply a matter of routine responsibility, but also a meaningful act of cultural preservation and social performance. As Tuomainen (2006) notes, in Ghanaian communities both in West Africa and the diaspora, food preparation is regarded as a woman's duty and a symbol of marital competence. In these contexts, cooking is closely linked with the construction of female identity and the maintenance of social status within both family and community settings.

A similar pattern emerges in the Caribbean. In Indo-Caribbean households, women are viewed as the keepers of culinary traditions, with kitchens serving as cultural repositories. As highlighted in *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies*, Avakian and Haber (2005), East Indian women in Guyana were often seen as cultural custodians, passing down recipes and cooking techniques that reinforced ethnic identity and resisted cultural erasure following indenture and migration. Rajkumari Singh's reflection on her "Coolie-grandmother" preparing traditional dishes such as sadha roti and alu chokha illustrates how food and memory merge in the formation of a diasporic identity.

Cooking also provides a space of power and influence. In addition to nurturing their families, women often gain respect and social leverage through their culinary skills. This is particularly evident in the way women use food exchange and gift-giving to establish social bonds and

reciprocal relationships within communities, as noted by Tuomainen (2006) and other scholars of food and migration.

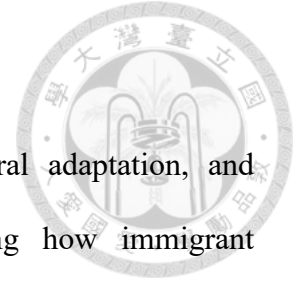


While these roles are often framed within traditional gender norms, feminist scholars emphasize the dual nature of kitchen labor. It can both reinforce patriarchal expectations and serve as a platform for resistance and cultural assertion. As Avakian and Haber (2005) describe, cooking can become a space where women express creativity, forge community, and assert ethnic identities especially when broader society renders those identities invisible or marginalized. For many Armenian-American women, for instance, cooking is not just a domestic task but a way to reconnect with ancestry, resist assimilation, and assert cultural pride (Arlene Voski Avakian & Haber, 2005).

Moreover, the emotional and aesthetic investment women make in cooking elevates its value beyond mere sustenance. Trichopoulou et al. (2006) assert that the act of preparing traditional meals carries intergenerational meaning and contributes to familial and community cohesion, especially in diasporic settings where food becomes a bridge to the homeland.

The role of women in cooking cannot be understood solely as a product of patriarchal expectations. Rather, it reflects a complex interplay of identity, cultural transmission, social power, and resistance. Within immigrant communities from the Caribbean and Latin America, women's culinary labor is vital to maintaining cultural continuity and shaping evolving foodways in foreign environments.

- **Theoretical frameworks**



The theoretical frameworks of foodways, culinary nostalgia, cultural adaptation, and gastronationalism provide important perspectives for understanding how immigrant communities manage and preserve their food traditions abroad.

The foodways perspective emphasizes the cultural, social, and economic practices related to food production, distribution, preparation, and consumption within a community. Spang (2019b) utilizes this framework to demonstrate how Belizean migrants actively construct and negotiate their culinary identities through daily cooking practices, ingredient selection, and interactions within their community networks. Foodways thus provide a lens to understand not only dietary habits but also the broader social and cultural meanings embedded within food practices.

Culinary nostalgia, another vital theoretical construct, addresses the emotional and psychological connections migrants maintain with their homeland through traditional foods. Culinary nostalgia drives migrants to seek familiar tastes, aromas, and textures, reinforcing their identity and providing emotional comfort in foreign contexts. Joseph and Voeks (2021) illustrate how Indian migrants in Southern California actively pursue traditional spices and herbs to recreate flavors from home, underscoring culinary nostalgia's critical role in shaping immigrant dietary practices and maintaining cultural continuity.

Cultural adaptation theory addresses how migrants adjust their culinary practices to accommodate new environments and ingredient availability. According to Tuomainen (2006),

Ghanaian migrants in London adapted their cooking practices due to economic constraints and limited ingredient availability, often substituting traditional staples with locally available ingredients. This adaptive behavior reflects a broader negotiation process between preserving cultural authenticity and responding pragmatically to environmental constraints.

Adding to these perspectives is the theory of gastronationalism, introduced by DeSoucey (2010), which explores how food becomes a symbol of national identity and pride. Gastronationalism highlights how certain foods are promoted as representative of the nation while others are excluded, based on power dynamics and cultural narratives. In the context of Belize, Spang (2019b) demonstrates how Kriol and Garifuna dishes often dominate the national food narrative, while foods associated with Mayan or Spanish traditions are marginalized. This theoretical lens underscores how ingredient availability and culinary recognition are deeply intertwined with questions of belonging and national representation.

Collectively, these theoretical frameworks illuminate the complex dynamics involved in maintaining traditional cuisines within immigrant communities, highlighting how food practices intersect with identity, memory, adaptation, and national symbolism in diaspora contexts.

Section 3: Research Methods

- **Explanation of qualitative research approach**

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore how Belizeans in Taiwan navigate ingredient availability and sustain their food culture. The decision to use qualitative methods stems from the research's central aim: to understand the lived experiences, perceptions, and adaptive strategies of Belizean individuals as they engage with traditional cooking in a foreign environment.

Rather than quantifying how often ingredients are found or used, this research seeks to uncover the meanings, memories, and cultural values embedded in Belizean cuisine and how these are maintained, modified, or compromised in Taiwan. By listening to the voices of Belizeans with different lengths of stay in Taiwan, this study captures both the immediate challenges and the longer-term adaptations that shape culinary practices in the diaspora.

The research questions guiding this thesis are as follows:

1. Which ingredients essential to Belizean cuisine are available or unavailable in Taiwan?
2. What strategies do Belizeans use to substitute or source these ingredients?
3. How do these changes affect the authenticity, flavor, and cultural meaning of traditional dishes?
4. What role do social networks and community practices play in sustaining Belizean cooking habits abroad?
5. In what ways does ingredient access influence the cultural identity and emotional well-being of Belizeans living in Taiwan?

To address these questions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Belizeans living in Taiwan. Participants were selected to reflect a range of migration experiences and included both short-term residents (1–3 years) and long-term residents (4+ years). Two sets of interview questions were designed to capture the different stages of adaptation and integration.

This qualitative approach allowed for flexibility in the interviews, giving participants the space to reflect on their food journeys, describe ingredient substitutions, express feelings of nostalgia, and share practical advice with others in the community. The interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented with field notes, and then organized thematically around key areas such as ingredient availability, substitution practices, cultural significance, market access, and social support.

By grounding the analysis in the real-life stories and voices of Belizean migrants, the research brings attention to the complex relationship between food, identity, and migration in a context that has not been widely studied.

- **Interview process (Short-term vs. Long-term Belizean residents).**

To explore how Belizeans in Taiwan navigate ingredient availability and preserve their culinary traditions, this study employed a semi-structured interview format. The participants were divided into two categories based on the length of their stay in Taiwan: short-term residents (1–3 years) and long-term residents (4+ years). This distinction reflects common

migration pathways, particularly among students many Belizeans come to Taiwan to pursue academic opportunities, with master's degrees typically lasting two years and undergraduate degrees spanning four to five years. As such, the 1–3 year range captures those who are still in the early stages of settling and adapting, while the 4+ year range represents those who have had time to develop more stable routines and strategies around food sourcing and preparation.

A total of five participants were interviewed for this study: four women and one man. The gender distribution of the sample was not deliberate but reflects a broader cultural context. In Belizean society, traditional gender roles often shape who takes responsibility for cooking within the household. As a result, women are more commonly involved in food preparation and were more readily willing and able to speak about their experiences with Belizean cuisine in Taiwan. The gender imbalance in the participant pool therefore, aligns with observed social norms around domestic roles in Belizean culture.

Participants in this study were selected from both ‘Southern’ (Kaohsiung and Pingtung) and ‘Northern’ (Taipei and New Taipei) Taiwan to reflect a broad range of Belizean experiences and perspectives. Charles, a male participant residing in northern Taiwan, is originally from the Cayo District in western Belize. With fourteen years of experience living, studying, and working in Taiwan, he is categorized as a long-term participant and is currently completing his PhD. Charles is well-connected within the Belizean and broader expatriate communities and is known for frequently preparing Belizean dishes and sharing them with both local and international friends.

Kayla, also from the Cayo District, is a female participant living in northern Taiwan. Having spent two years in Taiwan pursuing her Master's degree while working part-time, she is classified as a short-term participant. Living in student dormitories, Kayla often cooks Belizean meals with another Belizean student in her building, despite the limited kitchen space.

Mia, originally from the Belize District in central Belize, has been living in northern Taiwan for four years and is currently pursuing her undergraduate studies. She resides in a shared house with other Belizean students and regularly prepares meals at home, making her a long-term participant.

Dani, another long-term participant, has lived in southern Taiwan for nine years and is also from the Belize District. She is well-known for her culinary contributions to the Belizean community, particularly for leading the preparation of stew chicken at the annual BTA Independence Gala, where her cooking received overwhelmingly positive feedback.

Olivia, also from the Belize District and based in southern Taiwan, has spent eight years living in the country and currently works full-time as an English teacher. A consistent contributor to BTA events, Olivia is recognized for her love of cooking, often sharing photos of her Belizean culinary creations on social media. She, too, is categorized as a long-term participant.

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, primarily through Belizean community networks in Taiwan, including WhatsApp groups and social media platforms. This approach

allowed for the inclusion of individuals with firsthand experience in cooking Belizean food and navigating ingredient sourcing in different parts of Taiwan.

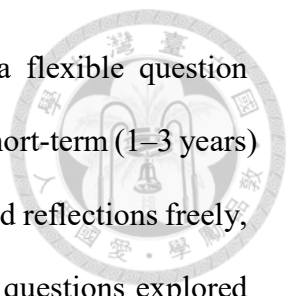


Each group (short-term and long-term) was asked a tailored set of questions that addressed shared thematic areas, such as ingredient availability, substitutions, sourcing strategies, and emotional ties to food, but with attention to their specific duration of stay. For example, short-term residents were asked about their initial adjustment and early discoveries in local markets, while long-term residents reflected on how their sourcing habits and community relationships had evolved over time.

All interviews were conducted in a conversational and flexible manner, using a semi-structured question guide that allowed participants to share personal experiences in depth. The interviews were audio recorded with consent and supplemented by observational notes taken during the conversations. This approach ensured that both factual and emotional insights were captured, offering a richer understanding of how food culture is preserved and transformed across different stages of the Belizean migrant experience in Taiwan.

- **Data collection (voice recordings, notes, and thematic analysis).**

Data collection for this study was carried out through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with five Belizean participants currently residing in Taiwan. These interviews were central to understanding the personal and collective experiences of Belizeans as they navigate the challenges of sourcing ingredients and preserving their food culture in a foreign setting.



Each interview was conducted in a conversational style, guided by a flexible question framework tailored to the participant's length of stay in Taiwan—either short-term (1–3 years) or long-term (4+ years). This allowed participants to share their stories and reflections freely, while ensuring consistency in the core topics addressed. The interview questions explored various aspects of culinary adaptation, including ingredient availability, substitution practices, emotional and cultural significance, community support systems, and the practicalities of food sourcing in Taiwan.

To accurately capture participants' responses and nuances in tone, voice recordings were used for all interviews, with participants' informed consent. These recordings were essential in preserving the authenticity of the participants' voices and ensuring that their thoughts and experiences could be revisited in full detail during the analysis phase. In addition to audio recordings, detailed field notes were taken during each session to document contextual cues, observations, and any spontaneous reflections made by participants. These notes also helped capture initial impressions and ideas that would later support theme development.

Following data collection, the recordings were reviewed in full and key responses were transcribed or expanded upon using the supporting notes. The analysis was guided by a thematic approach, which allowed for the organization of data into recurring and meaningful categories. Initial themes were developed based on both the structure of the interview guide and emergent patterns that arose organically during the interviews. These included:

1. Ingredient Availability – Identifying which Belizean ingredients were easy or difficult to find in Taiwan.

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2. Substitution Practices – Exploring the creative ways participants adapted recipes using available alternatives.
 3. Cultural and Emotional Impact – Understanding how modifications to traditional dishes influenced feelings of identity, nostalgia, and belonging.
 4. Community Support – Highlighting the role of Belizean networks and social platforms in sharing information and sourcing ingredients.
 5. Market Accessibility and Cost – Examining the economic and logistical aspects of maintaining a Belizean diet in Taiwan.

Participant responses were coded according to these thematic categories, with attention paid to both individual narratives and broader trends across the sample. Comparisons were also made between short-term and long-term residents to highlight how duration of stay influenced food sourcing strategies and cultural adaptation. This method of thematic analysis enabled a rich, contextualized interpretation of the data, revealing how Belizean food practices are both preserved and transformed in the Taiwanese context.

- **Ethical considerations and limitations.**

Ethical responsibility was a central consideration throughout the research process. Given the personal and potentially sensitive nature of discussing cultural identity, adaptation, and food practices in a foreign context, care was taken to ensure that all participants felt respected, safe, and heard during the study.

Before beginning each interview, participants were provided with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, their rights as participants, and how the data would be used. Verbal informed consent was obtained for both participation and audio recording. Participants were assured that their identities would remain confidential and that all names or identifying information would be anonymized in the final thesis. Recordings and notes were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.

In addition to formal ethical considerations, cultural sensitivity was also important during the interviews. Many of the participants were speaking about food not only as a practical concern but as an emotional and cultural anchor that connects them to home. As a Belizean researcher working with members of the Belizean community in Taiwan, the researcher was mindful of the trust participants placed in the process and worked to foster a conversational, respectful space during the discussions. This insider status helped build rapport and made participants more comfortable sharing their stories openly.

However, this research is not without limitations. The small sample size, five participants (four women and one man), limits the generalizability of the findings. While rich and in-depth data were collected, the experiences presented cannot fully represent the diversity of the Belizean community in Taiwan. The gender imbalance, while reflective of traditional gender roles in Belizean culture (where women are more likely to be involved in cooking and food-related responsibilities), may have led to the underrepresentation of male perspectives in food-related adaptation.

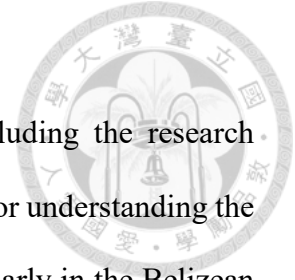
Another limitation lies in the geographic scope. While participants were drawn from both northern and southern Taiwan, regional differences in ingredient access and community networks may not be fully captured with this sample size. Additionally, participants were recruited through personal and community networks, which may introduce a degree of selection bias, as those more actively involved in food practices or more engaged in Belizean networks may have been more likely to participate.

Finally, while interviews were recorded and supported with field notes, full verbatim transcriptions were not produced for every conversation, which may limit the depth of textual analysis. Nevertheless, extensive notes and multiple listenings of the recordings were used to ensure accurate theme development and representation of participant voices.

Despite these limitations, the study offers meaningful insights into the ways in which Belizeans in Taiwan negotiate cultural continuity through food and respond to the challenges of ingredient availability. It also lays the foundation for future research on diasporic food practices in understudied migrant communities.

Section 4: Chapter Structure

This thesis is organized into five chapters, each building upon the last to explore how Belizean migrants in Taiwan navigate food availability, adapt their culinary traditions, and maintain cultural identity through cooking and ingredient sourcing.

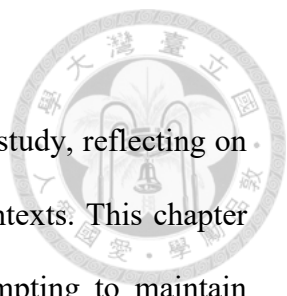


Chapter 1, the Introduction, provides an overview of the study, including the research background, literature review, and methodology. It sets the foundation for understanding the relationship between food, migration, and cultural preservation, particularly in the Belizean context. This chapter also outlines the key research questions and the significance of the study.

Chapter 2, "Navigating Belizean Ingredient Availability in Taiwan," examines which traditional Belizean ingredients are accessible, which are difficult to find, and how migrants modify their diets based on availability. This chapter also explores the factors influencing these changes, including geographical location, market access, and economic considerations.

Chapter 3, "The Social Life of Belizean Ingredients in Taiwan – Sourcing and Exchange," shifts focus from individual adaptation to the broader social networks that help sustain Belizean cuisine abroad. It discusses where Belizeans source their ingredients, how they navigate local markets, and the role of community networks in ingredient exchange, whether through personal connections, online groups, or shared resources.

Chapter 4, "Recreating Belizean Food Culture in Taiwan," explores how cooking practices evolve in a new environment and the deeper cultural significance of food beyond sustenance. It highlights the role of shared meals, nostalgia, and identity, examining how food serves as a bridge between the past and present, home and abroad.



Finally, Chapter 5, the Conclusion, summarizes the key findings of the study, reflecting on the broader implications for cultural food preservation in migration contexts. This chapter also discusses the challenges and opportunities that arise when attempting to maintain traditional cuisine in a new country and suggests directions for future research.

Through this structure, the thesis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Belizeans in Taiwan navigate the complexities of food availability, adaptation, and cultural continuity.

Chapter 2: Navigating Belizean Ingredient Availability in Taiwan

Section 1: Changes, Substitutions, and Adaptations – Documenting Belizean Ingredients in Taiwan

- **Which key Belizean ingredients are accessible vs. unavailable?**

One of the most fundamental challenges faced by Belizeans living in Taiwan is the inconsistent availability of traditional ingredients that form the foundation of Belizean cuisine. Participant interviews revealed notable variations in ingredient access, often dependent on geographic location (e.g., northern vs. southern Taiwan), store availability, and personal networks. To better understand

these patterns, ingredients were ranked on a scale from 0 (least available) to 3 (readily available) by both short-term and long-term residents.

Based on the average availability scores reported by participants, ingredients were grouped into three categories: easily accessible (2.5–3.0), moderately accessible (1.5–2.4), and hard to access (0.0–1.4). These thresholds were selected to reflect general distinctions in sourcing frequency, as observed across multiple interviews.

It is important to note, however, that some ingredients (e.g., allspice and tamarind) had closely similar ratings. Their placement in different categories should not be interpreted as a strict boundary but rather as an analytical tool to guide discussion. These distinctions reflect trends in perception and access, rather than absolute availability, and small variations may result from personal shopping habits, local contexts, or differing levels of ingredient familiarity.

Readily Available Ingredients (Average Score: 2.5–3)

Several ingredients were consistently rated as easily accessible across both short-term and long-term participants:

- **Coconut milk and coconut oil** (average rating: 3): Available in mainstream supermarkets such as PX Mart, Carrefour, Costco, and Filipino stores.



Photograph showcasing on the left the Kirkland brand of Coconut oil that can be found in Costco Taiwan and on the right the Silk Grass Farms brand of Coconut oil that is manufactured in Belize.

- **Cilantro** (*Coriandrum sativum*) (3): Easily sourced in local traditional markets.
- **Red kidney beans** (*Phaseolus vulgaris*) (average rating: 2.6): Although pricier, available in Carrefour, Filipino stores, and sometimes French imports.



Photograph from (Anderson, 2016) showcasing stewed Red kidney beans over rice

- **Allspice** (*Pimenta dioica*) (average rating: 2.2): Found in PX Mart and Mia Cibon.



Photograph showcasing the brand of Allspice widely used in Belize

- **Corn tortillas and Maseca (Corn Flour)** (2–3): Available in Filipino stores, Fabrica Bakery, and online platforms like Shopee.

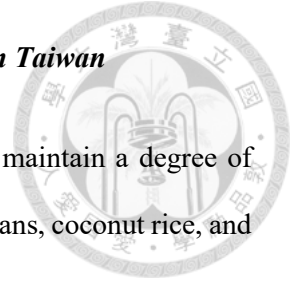


Photograph showcasing the brand of Maseca (Corn Flour) widely used in BelizeD

- **Seafood** (average rating: 2.4): Generally accessible in seafood markets, though pricing can vary.
- **Cumin and chicken broth cubes** (3): Widely available in standard supermarkets, although the flavor may differ from Belizean versions.



Photograph showcasing the brand of chicken broth cubes that can be found in Taiwan



These ingredients, often used in multiple Belizean dishes, allow migrants to maintain a degree of continuity in everyday cooking, particularly with popular staples like stewed beans, coconut rice, and tamales.

Hard-to-Find or Inconsistently Available Ingredients (Average Score: 0–1.5)

A number of key Belizean ingredients were ranked as scarce or inconsistently available, leading to a heavy reliance on substitutions or modified recipes:

- **Recado Rojo** (*Bixa orellana*) (1): Universally ranked as difficult to source; some use paprika or seasoning blends as substitutes, but with notable flavor loss.



Photograph showcasing red Recado from Belize in both paste and powder form, one participant mentioned that the paste tends to last longer or “stretched” as it can be diluted in water.

- **Culantro** (*Eryngium foetidum*) (1.4): Often confused with cilantro but distinct in taste; only one participant reported consistent access.



Photograph from (Kitchen Gardens, Inc., 2018) showcasing Culantro's (Eryngium foetidum) leaves and flowers.

- **Habanero or Scotch Bonnet pepper (*Capsicum chinense*) (0.8):** Replaced with Thai chili or Marie Sharp hot sauce, though lacking the unique aroma and heat.



Photograph from (Outstanding Foods, 2021) showcasing Habanero (Capsicum chinense)



- **Plantains** (*Musa × paradisiaca*) (1.4): Available in some markets but often in limited quantities, different varieties, or sold out.



Photograph from (Wartzman, 2019) showcasing Plantains (Musa × paradisiaca) at different stages of maturity

- **Salted pig tail** (1): Extremely rare; some participants resort to salting pork themselves or using pork belly, with mixed culinary results.
- **Tamarind** (*Tamarindus indica*) (2): Available sporadically in some local markets.
- **Salad cream** and **Happy Cow cheese** (1–2): Found online or in niche grocery stores, but not widely accessible.



Photograph from (Happy Cow, 2025) showcasing Happy Cow Cheese which is widely used in cheese dip and as a side.

- **Season-All and Authentic Belizean Cumin (0–1):** Participants noted differences in flavor between local and Belizean products.



Photograph showcasing the brand of Cumin widely used in Belize

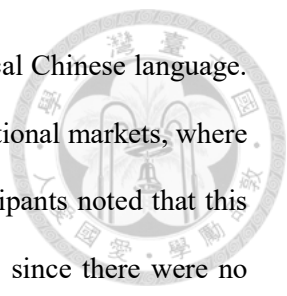
Geographic and Store-Dependent Factors

- Participants in southern Taiwan (e.g., Dani and Olivia) occasionally reported better access to items like cassava or Happy Cow cheese due to proximity to Filipino stores or local markets with diverse imports.
- Northern residents (e.g., Charles, Kayla, and Mia) emphasized the role of online shopping (e.g., Shopee) and specific foreign grocery stores like Mia Cibon in expanding access to hard-to-find ingredients.
- **How availability differs between short-term and long-term residents.**

Ingredient availability and sourcing experiences differed noticeably between short-term and long-term Belizean residents in Taiwan. These differences were shaped not only by the length of residence but also by accumulated knowledge of the local market landscape, development of social networks, and individual adaptability.

Short-Term Residents: Limited Knowledge, Initial Frustration

Participants who had lived in Taiwan for fewer than three years (short-term residents) expressed greater frustration with locating traditional Belizean ingredients, particularly during their first year. Many were unaware of where to begin looking, often relying solely on mainstream supermarkets and occasionally venturing into traditional markets without success. Their comments reflected a steep learning curve in both identifying ingredients that could serve as substitutes and discovering lesser-known ethnic stores or online platforms.



An additional barrier for short-term residents was their limited grasp of the local Chinese language. This language barrier proved to be a significant obstacle when navigating traditional markets, where ingredients are often unlabeled and vendors rarely use English. Several participants noted that this limitation prevented them from using tools like Google Translate effectively, since there were no signs to scan or read. Interacting with vendors often required verbal communication, which frequently led to misunderstandings, mistranslations, and ultimately, frustration. One participant explained:

"At the market, you can't just point and scan with your phone—nothing's labeled. You have to ask, and if you don't know the word in Chinese or the vendor doesn't understand English, you just end up leaving empty-handed."

In several cases, short-term residents reported abandoning certain dishes altogether due to the inability to source key components like recado or salted pig tail. Their strategies for substitution were often experimental, driven more by necessity than cultural continuity.

Long-Term Residents: Broader Strategies, Better Access

In contrast, long-term residents (those in Taiwan for four or more years) had developed more sustainable sourcing strategies, including cultivating relationships with specific vendors, growing herbs like cilantro or culantro at home, and leveraging Belizean and wider Caribbean or Latin American networks online.

One long-term participant shared:

"At first, I used to just settle for whatever was on the shelf or just stop cooking the food, but over the years, I figured out where to get what—and I've learned to bulk order, freeze, or even get a friend to bring back stuff from Belize for me."

Long-term residents were also more confident in using substitutions that retained the essence of Belizean dishes, reflecting deeper familiarity with both the host country's offerings and their own culinary heritage. Their experience navigating Taiwan's diverse food spaces (e.g., Filipino groceries, Vietnamese markets, online platforms like Shopee) afforded them greater flexibility and resilience in maintaining traditional cooking habits.

Limitations of the Sample

While these patterns are informative, it is important to recognize that the sample size of five participants—two short-term and three long-term residents—does not represent the entire Belizean population in Taiwan. The findings presented here reflect individual experiences and perceptions, which may vary significantly based on regional location, personal cooking habits, income levels, and social networks.

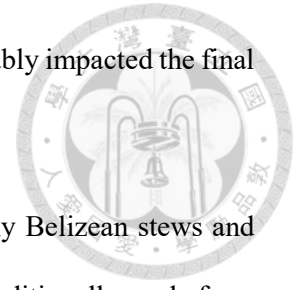
Nevertheless, the insights gathered provide valuable entry points for understanding how time spent in the host country influences the ability to preserve cultural food practices. As migrants navigate a new environment, access to traditional ingredients, along with the skills and networks to obtain them, emerges as both a practical challenge and a reflection of cultural adaptation over time.

Section 2: Changes at the Ingredient Level

- **Common substitutions for unavailable ingredients.**

Given the limited availability of several core Belizean ingredients in Taiwan, participants regularly resorted to ingredient substitutions to recreate traditional dishes. These substitutions were often based

on similarities in flavor, texture, or function within a recipe, though they inevitably impacted the final taste and authenticity of the dishes.

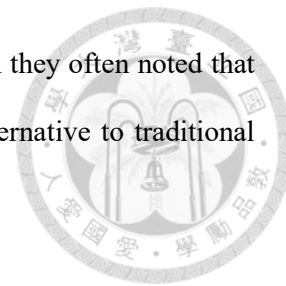


The most commonly substituted ingredient was recado, a cornerstone of many Belizean stews and meats. As described by Spang (2019a), recado is a thick, dough-like paste traditionally made from the seeds of the *Bixa orellana* shrub (also known as achiote or annatto), combined with ingredients such as salt, vinegar, onion, garlic, cloves, allspice, and black peppercorns. It is widely used across all cultural groups in Belize to season meats and add vibrant color to dishes like stewed chicken and tamales. Variants such as black recado include burnt corn tortillas for deeper flavor and coloring which is used when making Black Relleno. Particularly important in Kekchi and Mopan Maya cooking, recado is not just a seasoning but a symbol of cultural continuity. In the absence of this seasoned annatto paste, participants used a combination of paprika, cumin, and Chinese five-spice powder to mimic the desired depth and color. Though these replacements fall short of capturing the complex, earthy flavor of authentic Belizean recado, this blend offered an acceptable approximation for some dishes.

Habanero and Scotch bonnet peppers, essential for the characteristic heat in Belizean cuisine, were frequently replaced with Thai bird's eye chilies or bottled Marie Sharp hot sauce, the latter being brought in from Belize or ordered online. These substitutes provided heat but lacked the fresh and fruity aroma of the original peppers.

Pigtail, typically imported from Canada and the United States, is preserved through brining and is a key flavor component in several iconic Belizean dishes. It is most commonly used in meals such as stewed beans, split peas, boil-up, conch soup, and is also served on its own as stewed pigtail. In Belize, salted pigtail is commonly sold in five-gallon "pigtail buckets" at local grocery stores. Its distinctive salty, savory flavor is difficult to replicate (Spang, 2019a). Due to its absence in Taiwan, some

participants attempted to substitute it by salting pork belly themselves, though they often noted that the result lacked the signature flavor and texture, making it an imperfect alternative to traditional Belizean pigtail.

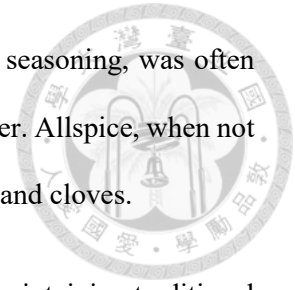


Photograph from (Ambergris Caye Belize Message Board, 2021) showcasing the traditional Belizean dish Split Peas with pigtail served over white rice.

Culantro, often confused with cilantro due to their similar flavor profiles, is a distinct herb with long, serrated leaves resembling those of a dandelion. Known as *samat* in Kekchi Maya, culantro is an essential aromatic in many traditional Belizean and Maya dishes. Its pungent, earthy taste adds depth to stews, soups, and rice dishes (Spang, 2019a). Despite its cultural importance, culantro is rarely found in Taiwanese markets. Most participants reported substituting it with cilantro, although they acknowledged that the substitution compromises the intended flavor of the dish, especially in recipes rooted in Maya cooking traditions.

When plantains were unavailable or sold out, participants substituted ripe bananas for certain sweet dishes or omitted the ingredient entirely. Similarly, cassava, while occasionally available in Filipino or Vietnamese markets, was often substituted with taro or sweet potato.

Substitutions also extended to pantry staples. Season-All, a popular Belizean seasoning, was often approximated using chicken broth cubes combined with onion and garlic powder. Allspice, when not available in whole form, was substituted with a mixture of cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves.



These substitutions illustrate both the creativity and compromise involved in maintaining traditional cooking practices abroad. While they allow migrants to continue engaging with their food culture, they also reflect the challenges of preserving culinary authenticity in an environment where key ingredients are often out of reach.

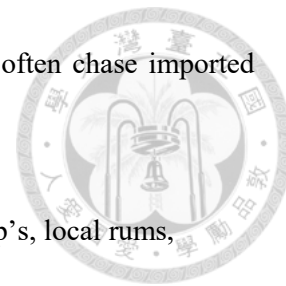
- **Impact on taste, authenticity, and cooking methods.**

The absence or inaccessibility of traditional Belizean ingredients in Taiwan has tangible effects not only on the sensory qualities of food—its taste, aroma, and appearance—but also on the emotional resonance and cultural authenticity of the meals prepared. This influence extends into how migrants adjust their cooking methods, often creating hybrid practices shaped by substitution, improvisation, and memory.

Many participants expressed a sense of compromise when recreating traditional dishes in Taiwan. Key flavoring agents like recado, salted pigtail, and culantro could not be replicated authentically with available substitutes. Paprika may add color, but it lacks the depth and earthy bitterness of annatto-based recado. Similarly, pork belly salted at home does not yield the briny punch or gelatinous texture of true salted pigtail. Even with cilantro's aromatic charm, it cannot replace the bold flavor of culantro in Maya dishes. These culinary gaps lead to what one participant called "Taiwan-style Belizean food"—nourishing and nostalgic, but inevitably different.

This gap between what is authentic and what is possible is particularly poignant in the diaspora. Ironically, as Chef Sean Kuylen points out (Spang, 2019a), while Belizeans living abroad long for

the fresh, seasonal, and organic ingredients of home, those living in Belize often chase imported products. Kuylen critiques this phenomenon with wit and insight:



“Belizean families living abroad always ask for red recado, Marie Sharp’s, local rums, and Belikin beer when family members visit, yet we at home actively (and illegally) smuggle Mexican beer, strawberry jelly, tabasco peppers... because it is ‘whiter in Chetumal.’”

He further reflects on how cooking in Belize is rooted in seasonal necessity and local abundance. In culinary school, he notes that students earned points for using produce that was currently in season—a practice that reflects Belizean cooking’s strong connection to land and climate. Kuylen’s observations underscore the irony of postcolonial consumer preferences: exported Belizean goods are romanticized abroad, while imported goods are often preferred at home.

This dynamic highlights the emotional significance of food in the diasporic experience. In Taiwan, the longing for authentic ingredients is not merely about flavor—it is a yearning for cultural grounding. Migrants often go to great lengths to maintain traditional dishes, sourcing from specialty stores, growing herbs at home, or requesting ingredients from visiting family. Yet even with these efforts, some reported that dishes like boil-up or stewed beans “just don’t taste the same.”

In response, cooking methods evolve. Techniques are simplified, flavors adjusted, and new rituals formed. In this way, food preparation among Belizeans abroad becomes not just a practice of sustenance, but a form of cultural negotiation, where identity is affirmed through adaptation, and tradition lives on not in perfect replication, but in determined reinvention.

Section 3: Multiple Factors Influencing Ingredient Availability

- **Geographic location**

Geographic location plays a significant role in determining how easily Belizean migrants in Taiwan can access culturally specific ingredients. Fortunately, many Belizean students are placed at universities located in or near urban centers across Taiwan. This urban concentration affords them better access to international grocery stores, traditional markets, and a reliable public transportation network. The accessibility of metro systems and buses means that even if an international market is not within walking distance, students can often reach one without excessive inconvenience.

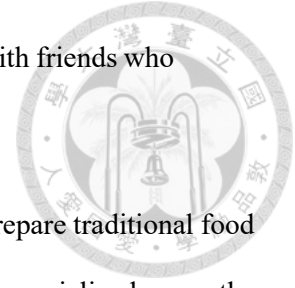
For many participants, the proximity to ethnic stores—such as Filipino, Vietnamese, or Latin American grocers—made sourcing core ingredients like coconut milk, beans, or seasonings a manageable task. As one participant described, “You don’t have to go too far out of your way—you just need to know where to go.” This reflects how urban infrastructure helps bridge the gap between cultural need and practical accessibility.

However, this ease of access is not universal. Kayla, a short-term participant studying at National Chengchi University (NCCU), located on the forested outskirts of Taipei, expressed their frustration with the added burden of accessing basic ingredients:

“It takes me a long time to leave campus, and getting to a good international store usually means a long bus ride or a combination of buses and trains. Sometimes I have to plan my whole day around it.”

Despite the inconvenience, the participant emphasized that the effort was worth it, not just for the taste of home, but for what it represents:

“Food brings us closer to our culture. Sharing a plate of rice and beans with friends who feel like family here—that makes all the effort worthwhile.”



This testimony underscores that, beyond logistics, the motivation to find and prepare traditional food is rooted in a deeper emotional and cultural drive. In more isolated or less commercialized areas, the challenge of ingredient access can be a deterrent, yet for many Belizeans, especially those who’ve lived in Taiwan for longer periods, it becomes a meaningful ritual of connection and resilience.

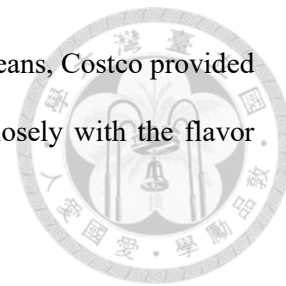
- **Market accessibility**

Across all interviews conducted, participants consistently emphasized the importance of large-scale supermarkets and specialty ethnic stores in their efforts to maintain Belizean cooking traditions while living in Taiwan. Regardless of geographic location, Belizeans referenced several key stores that served as gateways to international ingredients, even if only occasionally or through creative substitutions.

Two of the most commonly mentioned chains were **PX Mart** and **Carrefour**, which are among Taiwan’s largest and most widely accessible supermarket brands. While these stores primarily cater to Taiwanese consumers and do not specialize in foreign products, participants noted that they sometimes stock useful ingredients such as coconut milk, allspice, canned beans, and spice blends. These items tend to appear as specialty imports, and availability is often inconsistent, but when present, they offer convenient local access.

Participants also praised the international wholesale store **Costco**, which has locations in major cities across Taiwan. As an American-based brand, Costco offers familiar foreign goods, often in bulk

packaging. For long-term residents or those sharing groceries with other Belizeans, Costco provided access to high-quality oils, meats, and imported sauces that aligned more closely with the flavor profiles of Belizean cuisine.



A particularly rich source of accessible ingredients came from **Filipino grocery stores**, with **EEC** being the most commonly referenced among interviewees. These shops regularly stock staples like coconut milk, evaporated milk, and canned items that mirror ingredients used in Belizean stews and soups. As one participant shared, visiting a Filipino store often felt like “finding home in the most unexpected place.”

This affinity is not coincidental. As noted by Herrera (2015), the Philippines' colonial history—shaped by Spanish, American, and Japanese influences—has contributed to a complex and layered food culture. Belize, though geographically distant, shares similar colonial legacies. Surrounded by Spanish-speaking countries like Mexico and Guatemala, and with a history shaped by British rule and later American influence, Belizean cuisine reflects a diverse blend of traditions. Participants also noted the cultural parallels between Belize and the Philippines, especially in flavor preferences, family-centered meals, and the fusion of indigenous and colonial ingredients. These similarities make Filipino stores uniquely valuable to Belizeans navigating food sourcing in Taiwan.

In addition to mainstream chains and Filipino outlets, participants pointed to more specialized stores depending on their region. Those based in northern Taiwan frequently mentioned **Mia Ci'bon**, a dedicated international grocery known for its wider selection of Latin American, Caribbean, and Western goods. Meanwhile, a participant from southern Taiwan directed attention to **Wanglai**, a baking supply store that surprisingly stocks imported spices, extracts, and canned goods suitable for recreating traditional Belizean desserts and savory dishes.

Together, these store networks—ranging from global chains to niche ethnic shops—form a patchwork of access points that allow Belizeans in Taiwan to sustain their food traditions. However, this access is often the result of trial, error, and word-of-mouth within the Belizean community. As one interviewee reflected, “It’s not that the ingredients are totally unavailable—you just have to know where to look, and sometimes you learn that from each other.”

- **Cost considerations (financial feasibility of maintaining a Belizean diet).**

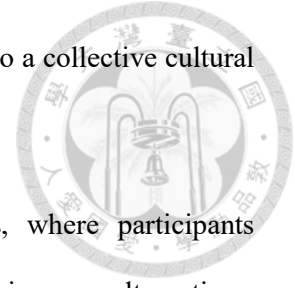
A recurring theme throughout all interviews was the acknowledgment that maintaining a truly authentic Belizean diet in Taiwan is not financially practical for most students. All five participants noted that sourcing imported ingredients—especially those from Latin America or the Caribbean—is considerably more expensive than buying local Taiwanese produce. This is not unexpected, as the cost of international goods often includes additional fees for transportation, storage, and import duties, making even small items like seasonings or sauces disproportionately costly.

Participants shared that while they deeply value the cultural and emotional significance of traditional meals, recreating these dishes in Taiwan on a regular basis is simply not feasible for someone living on a student budget, especially if cooking for one. One participant explained:

“You want to eat like home, but you look at your bill and realize you just spent almost a whole week’s food budget on one pot of rice and beans.”

To navigate this challenge, Belizeans in Taiwan have developed several cost-saving strategies. One common approach is communal cooking, where friends or fellow students gather to cook and share a meal, distributing the financial burden across multiple people. This practice not only makes the

preparation of complex meals more affordable but also transforms cooking into a collective cultural experience, reinforcing bonds of friendship and shared identity.



Another strategy mentioned was the simplification of traditional dishes, where participants intentionally substitute expensive or rare ingredients with more accessible Taiwanese alternatives. For example, instead of buying imported salted meats or specific seasonings, participants use local pork belly or Chinese-style sauces to approximate flavor profiles. While this inevitably alters the taste and presentation of the food, participants emphasized that the core emotional value of the meal remains intact.

These adaptations reflect a pragmatic balancing act—preserving cultural foodways within the economic realities of student life abroad. Although certain compromises are necessary, the effort to cook Belizean food, even in simplified or modified forms, demonstrates a commitment to cultural continuity and creative resilience.

Section 4: Summary

- **Recap of key findings from this chapter.**

This chapter explored the complex realities that Belizeans in Taiwan face when trying to maintain their traditional food culture, focusing on the availability of core ingredients and the strategies used to adapt. While some essential items like coconut milk, cilantro, and kidney beans are relatively accessible, others such as recado, salted pigtail, and culantro, are far more difficult to source, often requiring substitutions or special trips to international markets.

Differences emerged between short-term and long-term residents, with those living in Taiwan longer developing more effective sourcing strategies and deeper familiarity with alternative ingredients. Language barriers, especially for newer arrivals, further complicate access, particularly in traditional markets where communication with vendors is essential.



Geographic location also influenced access, with students based in urban areas benefiting from proximity to major supermarkets and public transport. Participants cited key store chains such as PX Mart, Carrefour, Costco, Filipino stores like EEC, and specialty outlets like Mia Cibun and Wanglai. These venues served as lifelines for maintaining traditional diets, though prices were often high due to import costs.

The financial burden of maintaining a Belizean diet was a recurring concern. Many participants described Belizean cooking in Taiwan as a special occasion effort, made more feasible when shared among friends or simplified with local produce. Despite these constraints, the act of preparing and sharing traditional food remained a meaningful way for Belizeans abroad to stay connected to home.

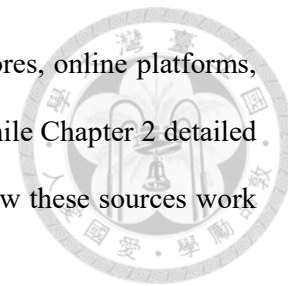
Chapter 3: The Social Life of Belizean Ingredients in Taiwan:

Sourcing and Exchange

Section 1: From Markets to Home Kitchens: Sourcing Belizean Ingredients

- **Where do Belizeans find their ingredients?**

Belizeans in Taiwan rely on a mix of mainstream supermarkets, specialty stores, online platforms, and local markets to source the ingredients needed for traditional cooking. While Chapter 2 detailed the specific locations and products available, it is important to understand how these sources work together to support everyday food practices.



Interview participants across Taiwan consistently cited PX Mart, Carrefour, and Costco as foundational stops for general grocery shopping. Though not specifically geared toward international cuisines, these stores occasionally stock useful specialty items, making them convenient and widely used.

For more culturally aligned products, many Belizeans turn to Filipino grocery stores like EEC, as well as international markets such as Mia Ci'bon and Wanglai. These outlets are especially helpful for sourcing niche items like Maseca or dried seasonings. Additionally, online platforms like Shopee have become an important tool for acquiring harder-to-find Belizean staples such as Happy Cow cheese or Marie Sharp pepper sauce.

Beyond these commercial sources, participants also emphasized the importance of Taiwan's local traditional markets. These markets offer a reliable and affordable way to purchase fresh produce such as cilantro, onions, green bananas, and root vegetables, ingredients that can be adapted into Belizean meals. While language barriers may present challenges, the variety and freshness found in these markets make them a practical and essential part of ingredient sourcing for many Belizeans.

Together, these sources represent a flexible, community-informed approach to navigating life abroad, allowing Belizeans to preserve their food culture through both improvisation and shared knowledge. In turn by utilizing ingredients which are shared with other Asian countries, Belizean food is constantly evolving with its people and making way for transcultural and even fusion cuisine.



- **Strategies for sourcing rare ingredients**

Faced with limited access to many culturally specific ingredients, Belizeans in Taiwan have developed creative and community-driven strategies to source items that are otherwise unavailable or unaffordable. While some substitutions are possible with local products, certain ingredients remain central to achieving the authentic taste of Belizean dishes and require more intentional effort to obtain.

One such strategy is the attempt to grow herbs and fresh produce at home. A long-term participant described their efforts to cultivate culantro, an essential seasoning in Belizean stews and rice dishes. However, due to the typical limitations of student life in Taiwan, small dorm rooms or apartments with little to no outdoor space, and the time demands of school and work, the plant eventually died. This experience highlights a stark contrast with life in Belize, where many people have access to yard space and rely on home gardens to supply fresh herbs and vegetables as a cost-effective and culturally rooted practice.

Another widespread strategy among participants is stocking up on Belizean ingredients during trips back home, or when friends or family return from Belize. All interviewees mentioned that they make the most of these opportunities to bring back essential seasonings that are difficult, or impossible, to find in Taiwan. These include black and red recado, cumin, Complete Seasoning (also known locally as Season-All, which is a blend of seasonings), Consommé (chicken bouillon powder), dried Mayan pepper (ground red habanero), and BBQ seasoning. While a few of these items, such as cumin or commercial barbecue rubs, can be found in global markets, participants emphasized that the versions sold in Belize offer a more “authentic” flavor. This authenticity, they believe, comes from the use of

local ingredients and traditional blends made by Belizean vendors, particularly those found in local markets.

Recognizing the consistent demand for these products, one participant who travels frequently between Belize and Taiwan even established a small business to meet the needs of the Belizean community. Their service includes bringing hard-to-find Belizean ingredients like chocolate, seasonings, and local beer back to Taiwan, and also sending items from Taiwan, such as skincare, luxury goods, and personal gifts, to friends and family in Belize. The cost is determined by item weight, and while informal, this grassroots exchange highlights the importance of maintaining cultural and culinary connections through transnational networks.

These strategies reveal the lengths to which Belizeans abroad will go to preserve their culinary heritage. Whether through home gardening, community exchanges, or small-scale import efforts, the act of sourcing rare ingredients becomes more than a practical task, it becomes a reaffirmation of cultural identity and collective resilience.

Section 2: Continuity and Change in Sourcing Practices

- **How ingredient sourcing has changed over time.**

Ingredient sourcing for Belizean cooking in Taiwan has not remained static, participants, particularly those who have lived in Taiwan for several years, noted subtle yet meaningful shifts in the availability and accessibility of key ingredients. While many core items are still difficult to find, some have become more accessible with time, due in part to changing market trends, the expansion of international trade, and community advocacy.

One of the most commonly mentioned improvements was the increased availability of cilantro. Long-term participants shared that cilantro, though not always affordable, has become more visible in both supermarkets and traditional markets in recent years. While often priced as a premium herb, its presence makes it easier to replicate staple Belizean dishes that rely on its distinctive, citrusy aroma.

Another notable shift involved Maseca, the corn flour used to prepare tortillas and tamales. Participants recalled that when they first arrived in Taiwan, Maseca was virtually impossible to find outside of online platforms. Now, it occasionally appears in specialty stores and international markets, signaling a slow but positive shift in access to Latin American pantry staples.

The most significant and impactful change in ingredient sourcing, however, has been the increasing availability of Marie Sharp's hot sauce, a beloved staple in Belizean homes. One participant described how Marie Sharp, once hand-carried back in luggage or sourced from the occasional online seller, is now consistently available in Taiwan, even at a discounted rate for Belizeans.

This change is largely thanks to the efforts of Dejiawu International Trading Co., Ltd., the official Taiwan distributor for Marie Sharp's Granny Berry's Chili Sauce. The company was founded in 2017 by a Taiwanese alumnus of Tamkang University who had studied abroad in Belize. Inspired by his own experience with Belizean food culture, he became committed to importing and promoting Marie Sharp's products in Taiwan. Through years of collaboration with the Central American and Trade Office (CATO), who aids in shipping, and participation in cultural events and exhibitions, Marie Sharp's has gone from a niche, hard-to-find condiment to a growing presence in Taiwan's hot sauce market (Marie Sharp Taiwan, 2025).



Photograph from (Marie Sharp Taiwan, 2025) showcasing different flavors of their hot sauce made in Belize.

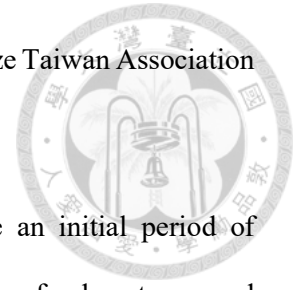
This evolution not only reflects improved access but also a sense of recognition. Marie Sharp's hot sauce is now celebrated not just as a Belizean treasure, but as a product appreciated by Taiwanese consumers as well. For Belizeans in Taiwan, this shift carries cultural weight.

These changes, whether in fresh herbs, corn flour, or national condiments, reflect the dynamic nature of cultural preservation in migration. They show how ingredient sourcing is not only shaped by availability but by advocacy, personal memory, and the growing visibility of Belizean culture abroad.

- **Differences between short-term and long-term residents.**

The process of sourcing Belizean ingredients in Taiwan is closely tied to experience. As expected, those who have lived in Taiwan longer tend to have greater familiarity with where to find specific ingredients, how to substitute effectively, and how to navigate the local food landscape. However, this knowledge is not accumulated in isolation, it is often shared, cultivated, and passed down through

the Belizean community in Taiwan, particularly through the support of the Belize Taiwan Association (BTA).



Short-term residents, especially those newly arrived in Taiwan, often face an initial period of uncertainty and adjustment. The challenges of a new environment, unfamiliar food systems, and language barriers can make ingredient sourcing feel overwhelming. However, this phase is rarely endured alone. Participants emphasized that the Belizean community, particularly long-term residents, plays a crucial role in easing this transition.

From the moment new students arrive, the BTA plays an active role in welcoming and orienting them. This includes everything from airport pickups and city tours to the hosting of cultural events where Belizean food is featured prominently. These shared meals not only satisfy the craving for home flavors but also serve as informal educational spaces where short-term residents learn which stores to visit, which brands to trust, and which ingredients are best substituted or imported.

Over time, with support and firsthand experience, short-term residents begin to adapt and build their own sourcing strategies. As one participant reflected, “At first I didn’t know where to start, but now I know exactly where to get the things I need for my rice and beans, and I’ve even introduced a new student to stores like EEC.” These evolving roles, from receiver to resource, highlight how the Belizean community collectively sustains its culinary culture abroad.

The dynamic between short-term and long-term residents is not simply one of knowledge transfer; it is a reflection of solidarity, shared memory, and cultural stewardship. It ensures that no one has to start from scratch and that the tastes and traditions of Belize can continue to thrive, even far from home.

Section 3: Community Networks and Social Exchange



- **The role of Belizean social groups (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp) in helping each other.**

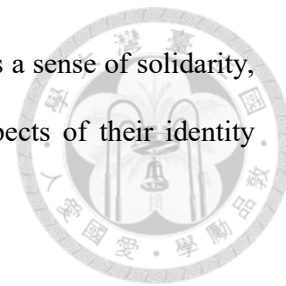
Digital communication platforms have become indispensable tools for sustaining Belizean foodways and cultural connection in Taiwan. Among these, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram play a central role in supporting ingredient sourcing, community organization, and everyday problem-solving within the Belizean diaspora.

The WhatsApp group maintained by the Belize Taiwan Association (BTA) has been identified by participants as particularly effective for information sharing. In addition to coordinating logistics for community events and regional travel, the group serves as a real-time forum for exchanging tips on where to find specific ingredients or how to navigate local markets. As one long-term resident shared, “As Belizeans spend more time in Taiwan and they explore what this new country has to offer, they are able to find more useful ingredients, and for the most part, people are open to share their sources.”

This openness is further supported by the use of broader social platforms like Facebook and Instagram, where individuals can pose questions, post updates, or contact the BTA directly. These digital spaces allow both short- and long-term residents to contribute to a collective knowledge base, one that reflects the lived experiences of Belizeans navigating life abroad.

The reliance on WhatsApp is consistent with broader communication norms in the Caribbean and Latin America, where the platform is widely used to maintain family and community ties. In Taiwan, it becomes more than a messaging app; it functions as a cultural anchor, connecting Belizeans not only with one another but also with familiar rhythms of communication and community back home.

In this way, social media does more than bridge geographic distance, it fosters a sense of solidarity, enabling Belizeans to adapt together, share resources, and preserve key aspects of their identity through food and fellowship.



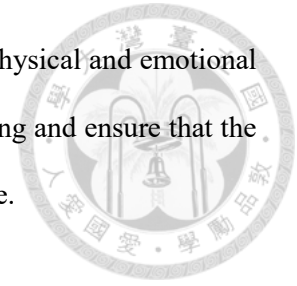
- **Gift-giving and sharing ingredients among the Belizean community.**

For many Belizeans living in Taiwan, food is not only a means of sustenance but a vessel for connection and cultural continuity. While some participants shared that they simply go without certain ingredients or substitute with local alternatives when necessary, others described more communal strategies that reinforce both culinary authenticity and social ties.

Ingredient sharing among friends emerged as a common and meaningful practice. When someone finds themselves short on a key seasoning or item, reaching out to a fellow Belizean often leads not just to solving a cooking dilemma but to the creation of an impromptu shared meal. In this way, sourcing ingredients becomes a collaborative effort, one that transforms the act of cooking into a social ritual. As one participant put it, a simple request can bring several people together to recreate the flavors of home, reinforcing a sense of community while distributing the cost of ingredients among the group.

Gift-giving further strengthens these bonds, particularly around the start of the academic semesters. After summer and winter breaks, returning students often bring back cherished Belizean items, seasonings, candies, beverages, and dried goods, to share with friends who were unable to travel home. These gifts are especially meaningful for those who remain in Taiwan due to financial or scheduling constraints, and they are received with the kind of excitement typically reserved for holidays. In the words of one participant, “For Belizeans in Taiwan, Christmas comes more than once a year.”

Such acts of generosity and mutual care highlight how food becomes both a physical and emotional bridge across continents. These small but significant exchanges foster belonging and ensure that the Belizean community in Taiwan remains closely knit, even when far from home.



Section 4: Market Trends and Future Opportunities

- **Have Taiwanese markets started catering to Belizean or Latin American diets?**

While Taiwanese markets have not formally adapted to meet the dietary needs of Belizean or broader Latin American populations, signs of increasing openness are evident. Supermarkets like PX Mart and Carrefour occasionally carry international items such as tortillas, canned beans, or spice blends, which, although inconsistent, offer glimpses of shifting consumer demand. In addition, Filipino grocery stores like EEC have become reliable sources for Belizean cooking substitutes, reflecting shared culinary influences shaped by overlapping colonial histories and diasporic exchange.

Taiwanese society itself has shown enthusiasm for Latin American flavors, demonstrated through the growing success of restaurants such as Fonda Mexico, Chilangos Mexican Snacks, Macho Tacos, Tacos N' Taps, and Taco Joe. Notably, ABV Bar & Kitchen, a chain specializing in world cuisines, features Belizean dishes like shrimp ceviche and chips, rice and beans, and even hudut on its menu. The popularity of these establishments points to a willingness among Taiwanese diners to explore and embrace regional cuisines from Central America and the Caribbean.



Photograph from (Eating With Carmen Food Tours, 2019) displays a seafood ceviche dish made with a mix of shrimp, octopus, squid, tuna, and mackerel. The seafood is marinated in a blend of lime juice, salt, onions, chili peppers, cilantro, and avocado.

Events like the 2025 Taipei International Food Show further reinforce this trend. This year, five Belizean businesses, including Hot Mama's Belize Ltd., Travellers Liquors Ltd., Finca Chocolat, Ixcacao Mayan Belizean Chocolate, and Naledo Belize, presented and sold their products. These companies are helping expand the visibility of Belizean goods in Taiwan's growing international food market. One participating business, Ixcacao Mayan Belizean Chocolate, went a step further by reaching out to the Belizean community in Taiwan ahead of the show to organize pre-orders for delivery during their visit, ensuring students and residents have access to nostalgic flavors from home.

Such developments signal that although local markets have not yet fully integrated Belizean food culture, Belizeans in Taiwan are actively shaping that future. Whether through participation in international expos or by cooking and sharing meals on university campuses, Belizeans are

increasingly taking on the role of cultural ambassadors, creating opportunities not only to preserve their foodways but also to introduce them to a curious and receptive public.



Picture showing a poster for the 2025 Taipei International Food Show



Photograph showcasing products purchased at the 2025 Taipei International Food Show. Featured items include a variety of Belizean chocolate bars in multiple flavors; cacao tea made from the cacao fruit—the source of chocolate; an assortment of Marie Sharp’s hot sauces,

including newly released flavors previously unavailable to Belizeans in Taiwan; bottles of Belizean rum; and skincare products crafted with turmeric as a key ingredient.



- **Potential business opportunities for Belizean food in Taiwan.**

While formal avenues for Belizean cuisine in Taiwan remain limited, small-scale Belizean-run businesses have begun to bridge the gap, offering familiar flavors to Belizeans abroad while introducing Taiwanese consumers to Central American culinary traditions. Two notable ventures, Belizean Flavaz TW and Belizean Bakes TW, operate primarily through Instagram and have cultivated a loyal following. Although not active year-round, these home-based businesses align their offerings with culturally significant holidays. Belizean Bakes TW, for instance, features hot cross buns during Easter and black cake during Christmas, while Belizean Flavaz TW is known for Garifuna Settlement Day hudut, Christmas turkey dinners, and year-round specials such as Belizean BBQ and tamalitos. These sales often coincide with community events organized by the Belize Taiwan Association (BTA), further rooting them in the social fabric of Belizean life in Taiwan.

In addition to these businesses, other Belizean individuals across the country occasionally offer specialty items such as panades and desserts, contributing to a growing informal economy centered around food. These grassroots efforts not only satisfy culinary nostalgia but also foster cultural continuity through taste and tradition.

A particularly innovative initiative involves a Belizean student majoring in agriculture who has spent the past four years cultivating plantains in southern Taiwan. The project, which required importing seedlings, faced considerable challenges including crop diseases and natural disasters such as typhoons, which the plant is not accustomed to. Nonetheless, the first harvest in the previous year was met with great enthusiasm, selling out quickly after being advertised on Facebook. The strong

community response illustrates the untapped demand for staple Belizean ingredients and the potential for growth in agricultural ventures that cater to this niche market. For the staple to be widely accepted by the Asian community, which can aid in funding and research towards a more climate resistant cultivar, better marketing must take place, as the starchy and sweet flavors of the plantain may not be suited for the Taiwanese palate.

Overall, these emerging businesses and experimental agricultural projects highlight the creative and entrepreneurial spirit of the Belizean diaspora. With continued support from the community and greater visibility, there is significant opportunity for these efforts to evolve into more sustainable and widespread enterprises that enrich Taiwan's multicultural food landscape.

Section 5: Summary

- **Recap of findings from this chapter.**

This chapter explored the social dynamics surrounding Belizean ingredient sourcing in Taiwan. It examined where Belizeans obtain key ingredients, the strategies used to overcome limited availability, such as growing herbs at home, bulk ordering, and importing, and how sourcing practices have evolved over time, especially with the growing support of local networks and small businesses. The chapter also highlighted the crucial role of community, through WhatsApp groups, gift-giving, and shared cooking experiences, in maintaining culinary traditions. Finally, it addressed the emergence of Belizean food businesses and agricultural initiatives in Taiwan, revealing both the challenges and opportunities for sustaining and sharing Belizean food culture abroad.

Chapter 4: Recreating Belizean Food Culture in Taiwan



Section 1: From Belize to Taiwan – The Culinary Use of Ingredients

- **How Belizeans in Taiwan cook their traditional dishes.**

Belizeans living in Taiwan continue to recreate traditional dishes by maintaining core cooking techniques, creatively adjusting to ingredient availability, and relying on both community and family ties to preserve culinary authenticity. Despite the geographical and cultural distance from home, participants described a range of strategies that enable them to prepare familiar meals that reflect both heritage and resilience.

Traditional cooking methods, such as caramelizing sugar to brown stew chicken, sautéing onions and garlic as the base for most dishes, and slow-simmering meats or legumes, remain common. Participants shared that these techniques, passed down through generations, are maintained faithfully, even when substitutions are necessary.

The use of Taiwan's standard kitchen appliances, like rice cookers and compact stovetops, has also shaped how Belizeans cook. For example, beans for rice and beans may be soaked and simmered directly in rice cookers, and one-pot meals like split peas or cow foot soup can be prepared this way for convenience.

When traditional ingredients are unavailable, substitutions are approached with intentionality. If red or black beans cannot be found, pinto beans are used instead. When plantains are inaccessible, some participants mentioned turning to green bananas, referred to colloquially as “blogo”, as a textural stand-in, despite the lower starch content. Recado, a key spice blend in Belizean cuisine, is often

replaced by a mixture of paprika (for color) and available spice blends to recreate the desired flavor profile.

Importantly, cooking is rarely an isolated activity. Newer Belizean students are often guided by long-term residents who help them navigate where to find ingredients and how to prepare complex meals. Holidays and cultural events hosted by the Belize Taiwan Association become key moments for collaborative cooking, where skills and recipes are shared across generations of students.

Some participants described calling their families back home, often their mothers or grandmothers, while cooking. These long-distance calls, especially when making a dish for the first time, allow Belizeans in Taiwan to preserve culinary traditions, receive real-time advice, and maintain a vital emotional connection to home. This practice ensures that dishes are not only cooked “correctly” but also retain the spirit of communal care and shared knowledge.

Altogether, Belizeans in Taiwan cook their traditional dishes by blending time-honored methods with locally adapted tools, substitutions, and support networks. Whether through a rice cooker, a phone call to family, or a shared kitchen with friends, the act of cooking becomes an expression of cultural identity, continuity, and creativity.

- **Adjustments in cooking styles due to ingredient limitations.**

Belizeans in Taiwan are not only adapting what they cook but also how they cook it. Due to differences in kitchen environments, time constraints, and cultural context, traditional cooking styles are often reimagined to fit the realities of daily life abroad. Most Belizeans living in Taiwan rely on stovetop burners and compact kitchen appliances in shared dorms or small apartments, which limits

their ability to prepare elaborate meals in the traditional way. As a result, participants reported adjusting both cooking methods and meal routines to maintain a connection to home without overwhelming their schedules or spaces.

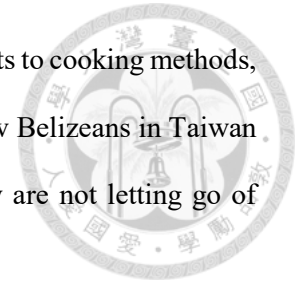


Whereas in Belize it is common to cook slowly over a “fyah-haat” (fire-heart), an outdoor wood-burning stove revered for the smoky flavor it imparts, Belizeans in Taiwan recreate the essence of these dishes using gas stoves. While this removes the unique smokiness and “earthy” profile found in fire-heart dishes like rice and beans or tamales, the simplified method still delivers comfort and nostalgia. These adaptations are practical but do not diminish the cultural value of the meal. In fact, for many participants, cooking on the stove becomes a form of culinary resilience, doing the best with what is available while still holding onto tradition.

Some cooking techniques have shifted entirely due to Taiwan’s fast-paced academic and professional environments. Batch cooking and freezing components such as beans or stewed meats has become a common strategy to save time while still enjoying traditional meals throughout the week. One-pot dishes are especially favored, not just for convenience, but because they allow flavors to build together in ways that mirror traditional stews or coconut milk-based rice.

Though the lack of space and tools can be limiting, participants described becoming more intuitive in the kitchen. Without written recipes, many relied on taste memory and shared tips from fellow Belizeans. A unique adaptation shared by several was the practice of video calling family members in Belize while cooking. These sessions not only helped guide them through recipes they hadn’t prepared solo before but also served as cultural bridges, keeping familial and culinary traditions alive across borders.

While ingredient substitutions remain necessary, it is these everyday adjustments to cooking methods, shaped by practicality, community support, and emotional ties, that define how Belizeans in Taiwan sustain their food culture. In reconfiguring the way meals are prepared, they are not letting go of tradition, but rather proving that tradition can travel, adapt, and endure.



Section 2: Nostalgia and Identity – Food as a Connection to Home

- **How food helps preserve Belizean cultural identity in Taiwan.**

For Belizeans living abroad, food serves as a powerful cultural anchor. It is not only a source of nourishment but also a vital expression of identity, memory, and belonging. In Taiwan, where access to familiar cultural cues may be limited, preparing and consuming traditional Belizean dishes helps maintain a tangible link to home.

Cooking becomes an act of cultural continuity, drawing on embodied knowledge passed down through generations. Many participants shared that they prepare traditional dishes without written recipes, relying instead on instinct, taste memory, and, in some cases, phone calls with family members during the cooking process. This oral and experiential transmission of culinary knowledge strengthens cultural bonds while preserving family traditions.

Belizean food also plays an important role in resisting cultural loss. Despite limitations in ingredient availability, participants adapt and persevere to recreate flavors from home often times with a Taiwanese twist, which can look like adding less salt or sugar to the original recipe, as their tastebuds assimilate to the flavors of Taiwan. The act of making rice and beans, stew chicken, tamales, or even

simpler dishes like fry jacks or salbutes, becomes a form of cultural resistance, asserting the relevance of their heritage in a new and unfamiliar environment.



Photograph from (McNab Editorial Team, 2023) showcasing a traditional Belizean breakfast consisting of fry jacks, fried flour dough, happy cow cheese, eggs, and refried red kidney beans.

Holiday gatherings and special occasions such as Garifuna Settlement Day, Belize Independence Day, and Christmas serve as important cultural touchpoints. These events provide an opportunity for Belizeans in Taiwan to collectively prepare and enjoy traditional meals, reinforcing shared cultural identity and fostering a sense of community. Through these rituals, cultural identity is not only preserved but actively performed and celebrated.

Food also becomes a way for Belizeans to express national pride. Several interviewees described sharing home-cooked meals with classmates or colleagues in Taiwan, using food as a medium of

cultural exchange. In doing so, they affirm the value of their cultural heritage and invite others to engage with Belizean traditions.

Lastly, preparing and eating Belizean food fosters emotional connection to family and homeland.

Cooking alongside loved ones via video calls, helps recreate the warmth and guidance of home. These moments of culinary intimacy bridge geographical distance and offer comfort amid the challenges of living abroad.

In these ways, food helps Belizeans in Taiwan not only remember who they are, but continue to live that identity through every shared meal, adapted recipe, and cherished tradition.

- **Emotional and psychological effects of food adaptation.**

For Belizeans living in Taiwan, the emotional and psychological dimensions of adapting traditional food practices are layered and complex. While participants consistently expressed gratitude for the opportunity to study and grow professionally in a modern and developed country, this progress often comes at the emotional cost of physical separation from loved ones, cultural rituals, and the familiar flavors of home.

Being thousands of miles away from family means missing out on significant life milestones birthdays, holidays, and communal meals that once anchored emotional well-being. The absence of these moments is deeply felt, and for many, food becomes one of the few remaining threads that tie them to home. Preparing traditional meals, even with modified ingredients, serves as a coping mechanism a way to soothe homesickness and maintain a sense of identity in the face of cultural displacement.

Despite best efforts, however, the substitutions and adaptations required to recreate Belizean dishes can become emotionally taxing. Several participants expressed frustration when their food “just doesn’t taste the same,” even after investing significant time and effort. The recurring need to compromise on flavor and authenticity can feel like a subtle erosion of one’s cultural connection, leading to emotional fatigue. Yet, it is precisely within this space of limitation that resilience emerges.

Belizeans in Taiwan have found creative ways to reclaim comfort and joy in their culinary routines. Many attend Belizean, Caribbean, and Latin American cultural events, where they enjoy food from across the diaspora and reconnect with shared histories. Others channel their determination into developing adaptive cooking skills experimenting with flavor profiles, testing local substitutes, and reaching out to friends and family for guidance.

Ultimately, while the emotional toll of food adaptation is real, it is often transformed into strength. Belizeans in Taiwan are not only keeping their foodways alive they are evolving into more resourceful cooks and cultural ambassadors. In the face of absence, they continue to cultivate presence one adapted recipe, one shared meal, and one call home at a time.

Section 3: Shared Meals and Community – Cooking as Cultural Preservation

- **The role of food gatherings in sustaining Belizean heritage abroad.**

Among the Belizean community in Taiwan, food-centered gatherings serve as vital anchors of cultural connection, identity reinforcement, and community building. While smaller potlucks, barbecues, and informal group dinners occur frequently among friends, the most prominent food-centered celebration is the annual Independence Gala held each September. Organized by the Belize

Taiwan Association (BTA) and supported by the Embassy of Belize in Taiwan, this event attracts more than 100 Belizeans and other foreigners from across the island to commemorate Belize's independence through food, music, and shared heritage.

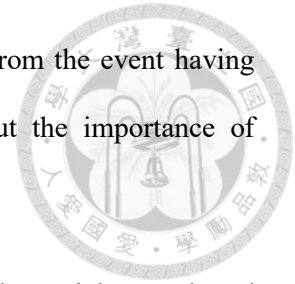


The gala offers not only traditional dishes like rice and beans, stew chicken, hudut, coconut tarts, and milk cake but also the opportunity to immerse attendees both Belizean and non-Belizean in a uniquely Belizean atmosphere. New students arriving for the academic year often attend this event as one of their first major community experiences in Taiwan, making it an essential remedy for early homesickness and a catalyst for forming friendships and networks. Guests are treated to entertainment including cultural performances, trivia, and even the occasional punta contest, turning the night into a vibrant celebration of national pride.

A key feature of this event's success lies in the communal nature of food preparation. Since most Belizeans in Taiwan lack access to large kitchens, the BTA has previously partnered with ABV Bar & Kitchen, which generously lends its commercial kitchen space for gala food preparation. Volunteer-driven and rooted in solidarity, the cooking process typically begins the night before the event, with Belizeans working together through the night to ensure the dishes are both fresh and deeply seasoned with traditional flavors. Notably, returning students often bring critical ingredients such as spices, dried herbs, and condiments from Belize during summer break, allowing for a level of authenticity that is otherwise hard to replicate in Taiwan.

Although women often take the lead in preparing and serving food at the event, the gender roles within this communal labor are fluid. Some Belizean men take an active role in cooking, challenging traditional norms and reinforcing the value of shared responsibility in sustaining their culture abroad. As the night progresses, long-term residents frequently share tips, substitution strategies, and recipes with newer members of the community, turning the kitchen into a space of cultural transmission and

mentorship. Even those without prior cooking experience often walk away from the event having learned something new, not just about preparing Belizean food, but about the importance of community, cooperation, and cultural resilience.



Ultimately, these gatherings go far beyond satisfying hunger. They recreate the social warmth and familiarity of home, strengthen ties among Belizeans and other foreigners from across the diaspora, and serve as inclusive platforms for cultural exchange with the broader Taiwanese and international community. Through food, Belizeans in Taiwan preserve not only their culinary traditions but also the sense of togetherness that defines their identity.

- **How food fosters belonging in the diaspora.**

For members of the Belizean diaspora in Taiwan, food is more than sustenance, it is a powerful medium for cultural connection and belonging. Amid the geographical and emotional distance from home, food functions as an emotional anchor, grounding Belizeans in familiar tastes, smells, and rituals that recall memories of family, community gatherings, and cultural celebrations. The act of cooking, especially traditional dishes like rice and beans, hudut, or tamalitos, brings with it a sense of comfort and continuity in an otherwise foreign environment.

Shared meals, whether at small home gatherings or large-scale events like the annual Belize Independence Gala, cultivate a sense of community among Belizeans in Taiwan. These occasions become vital cultural spaces where stories are shared, friendships are forged, and mutual support is offered. Cooking and eating together transforms a meal into an expression of solidarity, a way to recreate the familial warmth often missed while living abroad.

Food also affirms cultural identity. In preparing and serving traditional Belizean dishes, individuals assert their heritage in a visible and tangible way. This is particularly significant in Taiwan's multicultural landscape, where showcasing Belizean cuisine becomes an avenue to increase cultural awareness and representation. Events such as the Independence Gala and community potlucks offer not only a taste of home but also a platform for Belizeans to take pride in their culinary traditions.

The preparation and sharing of food also supports intergenerational knowledge transfer. More seasoned members of the community often guide newer or younger Belizeans in adapting recipes using local ingredients, substituting creatively, and preserving core flavor profiles. These moments, often occurring late at night in shared kitchens before major events, become spontaneous workshops where culinary heritage is passed on and cultural memory is sustained.

In more private moments, food becomes a coping mechanism for managing homesickness and isolation. Some Belizeans cook while on video calls with family members back home, receiving real-time guidance on how to recreate a favorite dish. These digital kitchen connections help bridge the physical divide, maintaining familial bonds and ensuring that traditions continue despite distance.

Furthermore, Belizean food serves as an inclusive bridge to the wider Taiwanese and international communities. Many cultural events are open to non-Belizeans, inviting others to learn about Belize through food. In this way, cuisine not only strengthens internal bonds within the diaspora but also extends outward, fostering multicultural understanding and appreciation.

Ultimately, food operates as both a cultural emblem and a social glue. It ties individuals to their roots, eases transitions into new cultural contexts, and creates spaces of warmth, memory, and mutual support. In Taiwan, where the Belizean community is small but tightly knit, food remains one of the most enduring and meaningful ways of nurturing a collective sense of home.



Section 4: Summary

- **Recap of findings from this chapter.**

This chapter explored how Belizeans in Taiwan actively preserve and recreate their food culture despite being thousands of miles from home. The findings reveal that traditional Belizean dishes continue to be made by adapting recipes, substituting ingredients, and relying on community knowledge and support. While the lack of access to key ingredients such as recado, plantains, and red kidney beans poses challenges, Belizeans creatively overcome these barriers by using local alternatives and sourcing hard-to-find items through networks of friends or occasional trips to Belize.

Cooking methods have also shifted due to the constraints of modern housing and limited cooking space. The open-fire or “fire-heart” style of cooking, cherished in Belize for its smoky flavor, is often replaced with stovetop alternatives. While these methods may lack certain traditional elements, they still evoke powerful memories of home and foster a sense of comfort.

Beyond the technical act of cooking, food plays a vital emotional and cultural role. It helps Belizeans maintain their identity, cope with homesickness, and stay connected to their roots. Preparing and sharing meals, whether alone while video-calling family or at large communal events like the Belize Independence Gala, strengthens bonds within the diaspora and reinforces a shared cultural identity. These gatherings not only sustain culinary traditions but also create welcoming spaces for new arrivals and provide opportunities for cultural exchange with the broader Taiwanese community.

Ultimately, food serves as a vital link between past and present, tradition and adaptation, homeland and host country. It empowers Belizeans in Taiwan to navigate life abroad while continuing to honor and celebrate their cultural heritage.



Chapter 5: Conclusion

- **Summary of Key Findings**

This thesis explored how Belizeans living in Taiwan recreate, adapt, and sustain their culinary traditions while navigating the challenges of sourcing and preparing Belizean food in a foreign context. Drawing from semi-structured interviews with five participants (four women and one man), as well as supporting literature, the findings highlight the complex interplay of cultural identity, ingredient availability, social networks, and culinary adaptation.

Chapter 1 established the foundation of the research, presenting the motivation, background, and methodological framework. With personal experiences of homesickness, a deep appreciation for Belizean food, and an academic background in anthropology, the researcher was driven to understand how food practices shape cultural identity and resilience in diaspora settings. The qualitative approach enabled in-depth exploration of the participants' lived experiences and strategies for food adaptation, while also acknowledging the limitations of a small, non-generalizable sample.

Chapter 2 focused on the availability and sourcing of Belizean ingredients in Taiwan. Findings showed that while some key ingredients, such as rice, chicken, and cilantro, are moderately accessible, others like recado, plantains, culantro, and pigtail are far more difficult to obtain. Short-term residents,

particularly those with limited Chinese language skills, faced greater difficulty navigating local markets, often relying on mainstream supermarkets like Carrefour, PX Mart, or online platforms like Shopee. Ingredient substitutions are common and often creatively employed, such as using paprika instead of red recado, or green bananas in place of plantains. However, these adaptations inevitably alter the flavor and authenticity of dishes. Cost was another major barrier, with all participants acknowledging that maintaining an authentic Belizean diet in Taiwan can be financially burdensome, particularly for students. To reduce costs, participants shared meals with others or simplified recipes. The chapter also highlighted that geography plays a role, as access to international markets and fresh produce is easier in urban centers than in remote campuses like National Chengchi University.

Chapter 3 examined the social dimensions of food, emphasizing the central role of community networks in ingredient sourcing, knowledge-sharing, and emotional support. Belizeans in Taiwan rely on a tight-knit web of social platforms, such as the Belize Taiwan Association's (BTA) WhatsApp group and Facebook page, to exchange information about where to buy ingredients, coordinate group orders, or share cooking tips. Gift-giving and resource-sharing, particularly when students return from Belize with food items, foster a sense of community and reduce isolation. Events like the September Independence Gala serve as the largest food-centered gathering among Belizeans in Taiwan. These celebrations, complete with home-style dishes and traditional entertainment, are key opportunities to showcase Belizean culture to both fellow Belizeans and the wider Taiwanese public. Additionally, while Taiwanese markets have yet to fully cater to Belizean tastes, signs of growing interest are evident through events like the Taipei International Food Show and the emergence of Belizean-led food businesses such as Belizean Flavaz TW and Belizean Bakes TW.

Chapter 4 turned inward to explore how Belizeans use food as a means of personal identity-building and emotional resilience. Despite the absence of traditional tools and ingredients, Belizeans continue

to cook rice and beans, stew chicken, tamales, and other beloved meals using modified techniques and ingredients. These culinary adaptations are not just acts of necessity, they are also acts of cultural preservation and resistance. Food helps alleviate homesickness, connects Belizeans with their families back home through video calls, and reinforces a shared identity through communal meals and potlucks. The emotional toll of being far from home is softened through shared experiences and the comforting familiarity of food. In this way, food becomes a medium of belonging, healing, and cross-cultural exchange.

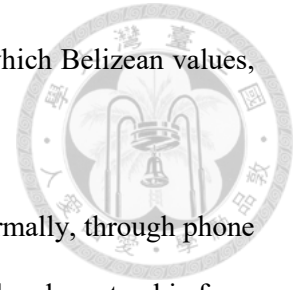
Overall, the study reveals that while ingredient availability, affordability, and sourcing present tangible challenges, the Belizean community in Taiwan employs adaptive strategies grounded in cultural pride, social cooperation, and creative resilience. Food serves not only as sustenance, but as a vehicle for identity, memory, and connection, linking Belizeans to home and to each other in meaningful ways.

- **Implications for Cultural Food Preservation**

The findings of this study illustrate that food practices among Belizeans in Taiwan extend far beyond sustenance, they are a means of preserving cultural identity, fostering community, and sustaining heritage in a diasporic context. The adaptation and recreation of Belizean cuisine abroad not only reflects resilience but also highlights the evolving nature of cultural preservation.

At the heart of this preservation effort lies the community's collective desire to maintain a sense of national and cultural continuity. Despite the challenges posed by ingredient scarcity and high living costs, Belizeans in Taiwan continue to prioritize traditional foods as central elements of their cultural identity. Whether through weekend cooking sessions, festive gatherings, or simple acts like seasoning

a dish with complete seasoning and recado, food remains a vehicle through which Belizean values, memories, and customs are expressed and retained.



Equally important is the transmission of culinary knowledge. This occurs informally, through phone calls to relatives during meal preparations, advice shared in group chats, or firsthand mentorship from long-term residents during community events. These intergenerational and peer-to-peer exchanges play a pivotal role in keeping traditional recipes and preparation techniques alive, particularly among the younger members of the diaspora who may be cooking Belizean food on their own for the first time.

Crucially, adaptation emerges as a powerful tool in the preservation process. While some may view substitutions as a departure from authenticity, this study finds that innovation in response to local limitations often strengthens cultural resilience. From using pinto beans in place of red kidney beans, to replacing plantains with green bananas, Belizeans demonstrate a commitment to culinary creativity that allows their food culture to survive and even flourish under new conditions.

Community networks also prove indispensable to cultural food preservation. Platforms such as the Belize Taiwan Association's WhatsApp group, Facebook pages, and Instagram profiles act as informal cultural repositories, where information is shared, questions are answered, and encouragement is offered. These digital spaces help Belizeans source ingredients, learn recipes, and stay connected through a shared culinary language.

Events like the annual Independence Gala or the Taipei International Food Show further reinforce the importance of food in cultural preservation. These gatherings serve as stages where traditional Belizean dishes are cooked, served, and celebrated, not only by fellow Belizeans but also by Taiwanese nationals and other international attendees. In doing so, these events foster cross-cultural

exchange and raise the visibility of Belizean cuisine, ensuring its relevance both within and outside of the community.

Nevertheless, the preservation of Belizean culinary traditions is not without its challenges. Ingredient inaccessibility, high prices, and the constraints of individual living situations, especially for students, pose real threats to maintaining consistent cooking practices. Without the support of a strong community network or access to essential components, there is a risk of culinary traditions fading or being diluted over time.

Ultimately, the preservation of Belizean food culture in Taiwan is a shared responsibility. It rests on the willingness of individuals to share knowledge, offer ingredients, and celebrate their roots through food. Efforts such as home-based food businesses, student-led agricultural projects, and group cooking nights demonstrate that even small-scale actions can contribute meaningfully to the larger goal of cultural preservation.

In sum, Belizean food culture in Taiwan thrives not because conditions are ideal, but because the community is determined. Through adaptation, collaboration, and celebration, Belizeans abroad continue to honor their heritage and ensure that their culinary traditions remain a vibrant part of their diasporic lives.

- **Challenges and Opportunities (e.g., how Belizean food culture can adapt in Taiwan).**

The experience of recreating Belizean food culture in Taiwan reveals a dynamic intersection of both persistent challenges and emerging opportunities. As Belizeans navigate life in a new cultural and

geographic setting, the effort to maintain culinary traditions becomes both a personal and communal endeavor, shaped by limitations but also enriched by innovation and resilience.



Challenges

One of the most immediate challenges faced by Belizeans in Taiwan is the limited availability of key ingredients. Essential items such as plantains, black and red recado, and certain Belizean spice blends are not commonly found in mainstream Taiwanese supermarkets. Even when these ingredients can be sourced from international stores, their availability is often inconsistent, and prices are elevated due to import costs and niche demand. For students and recent arrivals, these expenses can pose a significant barrier to preparing traditional meals regularly.

Another pressing challenge is language. Short-term residents in particular often struggle with the inability to communicate in Mandarin, making it difficult to source ingredients in traditional markets where signage may be sparse and interaction with vendors is necessary. As many fresh or culturally similar ingredients can only be found in these markets, language barriers limit access and lead to frustration or abandonment of the culinary pursuit.

Living conditions also play a role. Many Belizeans reside in dormitories or small apartments that offer limited kitchen space and no outdoor area for growing herbs or vegetables. These constraints restrict the scope of traditional food preparation, especially for dishes that require larger cookware, longer cooking times, or specialty methods such as smoking over an open flame.

Opportunities

Despite these challenges, several opportunities are helping Belizean food culture to not only survive but evolve in Taiwan. One significant area of growth lies in substitution and adaptation. Belizeans

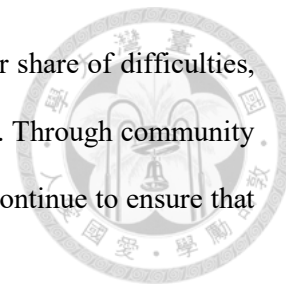
have found creative ways to replicate the flavor and presentation of traditional meals by using locally available alternatives. For example, when plantains are unavailable, green bananas (“blogo”) are used in their place; paprika and other seasoning blends stand in for red recado; and pinto beans are used when kidney beans are scarce. While these adaptations may not perfectly replicate the taste of home, they serve as functional and flavorful bridges between memory and present-day cooking.

Digital platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram have become invaluable tools for ingredient sourcing and cultural exchange. These platforms foster community connections and facilitate the sharing of recipes, sourcing tips, and bulk orders. The growing presence of Belizeans in Taiwan has also led to the rise of small food businesses such as Belizean Flavaz TW and Belizean Bakes TW, which offer dishes aligned with national holidays and traditional cravings. These grassroots initiatives play a key role in providing Belizean comfort food and expanding awareness of the cuisine among Taiwanese consumers.

Cultural events and collaborations offer further potential. The annual Belize Independence Gala, student cooking nights, and participation in events like the Taipei International Food Show have proven that there is space for Belizean cuisine to be appreciated beyond the diaspora. Taiwanese restaurants like ABV and the continued success of Latin food establishments across the island suggest a growing openness to flavors from Central America and the Caribbean.

Additionally, educational and entrepreneurial ventures, such as agricultural projects that attempt to grow plantains or source fresh herbs, point to a forward-looking vision where Belizeans not only adapt to Taiwan but actively shape its culinary diversity. Though these efforts may face setbacks such as climate and logistical hurdles, they exemplify the spirit of innovation that characterizes diasporic foodways.

In sum, while maintaining Belizean food culture in Taiwan comes with its fair share of difficulties, each challenge presents an opportunity for adaptation, connection, and growth. Through community resilience, cultural pride, and creative problem-solving, Belizeans in Taiwan continue to ensure that their food culture not only endures but thrives in new and meaningful ways.



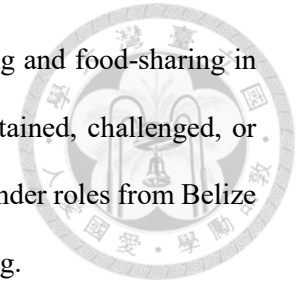
- **Future Research Directions**

As this study highlights, food plays a pivotal role in preserving cultural identity and fostering community among Belizeans living in Taiwan. However, the scope of this research, while meaningful, was limited in scale and geography, capturing the lived experiences of a small group of Belizeans. Future research can build on this foundation by expanding in several key directions.

First, a broader and more diverse sample of Belizeans living across Taiwan, panning different cities, education levels, and age groups, would provide a richer understanding of how food practices vary across subgroups. Including Belizeans who are not affiliated with academic institutions or who have migrated for reasons other than education, such as employment or marriage, could reveal new insights into how Belizean food culture evolves in Taiwan beyond the student experience.

Second, comparative studies between Belizean communities in Taiwan and those in other regions of the world, such as the United States, Canada, or the United Kingdom, would shed light on how geographic and sociopolitical contexts influence food adaptation and cultural retention. How do Belizeans in Taiwan differ in their ability to access ingredients, create community, or maintain traditions compared to those in areas with larger Central American or Caribbean populations?

Third, deeper ethnographic exploration into the gendered dynamics of cooking and food-sharing in the diaspora would enrich the understanding of how culinary roles are maintained, challenged, or redefined. This would be especially useful in understanding how traditional gender roles from Belize are replicated or reshaped in the context of a more global and egalitarian setting.



Additionally, more research is needed on the commercial and entrepreneurial aspects of diasporic food culture. What are the barriers and opportunities for Belizean food businesses to thrive in Taiwan? What role does the Taiwanese market play in shaping the success of such businesses? Investigating how Belizean entrepreneurs navigate licensing, sourcing, and consumer outreach would be useful for future diaspora members considering similar ventures.

Finally, future studies could focus on the role of digital spaces and technology in maintaining culinary knowledge across borders. Exploring how Belizeans use platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube to teach, learn, and share recipes would illuminate the ways in which technology mediates tradition and innovation.

In essence, there remains much to explore about the intersection of food, migration, and identity in Belizean communities abroad. Further research in these areas will not only deepen our understanding of cultural preservation but also contribute to broader conversations around diaspora resilience, adaptation, and belonging in an increasingly interconnected world.

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Interview Questions

In-Depth Questions for Short-Term Stay Participants (1-3 years)

1. How long have you been living in Taiwan? What is your current status e.g. student, employed?
2. What are some authentically Belizean foods found in Belize?
3. What are some ingredients found in Belize that are essential for authentic Belizean cuisine?
4. How often do you cook Belizean food during your stay in Taiwan?
5. How have you adapted to sourcing ingredients for Belizean food during your short stay in Taiwan? What has been the biggest challenge so far?
- 6.



1. Please rate the availability of each ingredient listed below in your area. Use the scale from Unavailable or Rare, Partially Available, or Easily Found. Select the option that best describes how easily you can find each ingredient for cooking.

	Unavailable or Rare	Partially Available	Easily Found
Recado (Achiote Paste)	☐	☐	☐
Coconut Milk	☐	☐	☐
Cilantro and Culantro	☐	☐	☐
Scotch Bonnet Peppers	☐	☐	☐
Allspice (Pimento)	☐	☐	☐
Cassava	☐	☐	☐
Plantains	☐	☐	☐
Coconut Oil	☐	☐	☐
Red Kidney Beans	☐	☐	☐
Salted Pigtail	☐	☐	☐
Fish and Seafood (snapper, conch, shrimp)	☐	☐	☐
Corn Tortillas	☐	☐	☐

7. Are there any ingredients not listed that you would consider key ingredients for Belizean dishes? If so, how would you rate their availability?
8. For key ingredients in Belizean dishes that are considered “unavailable or partially available”, what specific substitutes do you use, and how do they affect the authenticity of the dish?
9. Have you found any stores or markets that regularly carry Belizean ingredients or close substitutes? How did you discover them?

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10. What impact does the substitution of certain ingredients have on the flavor or cultural significance of Belizean dishes?
11. What are some ingredients that you believe cannot be substituted? How do you source these ingredients in Taiwan?
12. How important is it for you to continue cooking Belizean food while living in Taiwan?
Do you feel a need to adapt your diet to Taiwanese ingredients?
13. How easy is it to find the necessary ingredients for Belizean dishes in Taiwan, and is the effort worth it?
14. Are you aware of any networks or communities that help Belizeans source hard-to-find ingredients in Taiwan? How have they been helpful to you?
15. Have you noticed any seasonal trends in the availability of certain ingredients? How does this affect your ability to prepare traditional Belizean meals?
16. Is it financially feasible to maintain a Belizean diet in Taiwan for someone with your current lifestyle? How do the costs compare with local food options?
17. How do you manage when key ingredients for special dishes are not available for important occasions?
18. Do you feel Taiwan's agricultural or market systems support the increasing Belizean community's dietary needs? Why or why not?
19. In your experience, how has the proximity of your home to specific markets influenced your ability to source Belizean ingredients?
20. What advice would you give to Belizeans who are missing a taste of home and are looking to source ingredients/make Belizean dishes?

In-Depth Questions for Long-Term Stay Participants (4+ years)



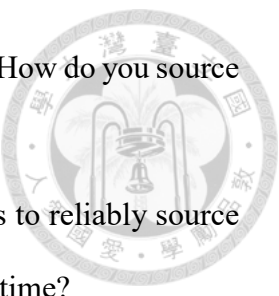
1. How long have you been living in Taiwan? What is your current status i.e. student, employed?
2. What are some authentically Belizean foods found in Belize?
3. What are some ingredients found in Belize that are essential for authentic Belizean cuisine?
4. How often do you cook Belizean food during your stay in Taiwan?
5. Over the years, how have you adapted to sourcing Belizean ingredients in Taiwan?
Have you noticed any improvements or setbacks in availability?
- 6.



1. Please rate the availability of each ingredient listed below in your area. Use the scale from Unavailable or Rare, Partially Available, or Easily Found. Select the option that best describes how easily you can find each ingredient for cooking.

	Unavailable or Rare	Partially Available	Easily Found
Recado (Achiote Paste)	☐	☐	☐
Coconut Milk	☐	☐	☐
Cilantro and Culantro	☐	☐	☐
Scotch Bonnet Peppers	☐	☐	☐
Allspice (Pimento)	☐	☐	☐
Cassava	☐	☐	☐
Plantains	☐	☐	☐
Coconut Oil	☐	☐	☐
Red Kidney Beans	☐	☐	☐
Salted Pigtail	☐	☐	☐
Fish and Seafood (snapper, conch, shrimp)	☐	☐	☐
Corn Tortillas	☐	☐	☐

- Are there any ingredients not listed that you would consider key ingredients for Belizean dishes? If so, how would you rate their availability?
- How easy is it to find the necessary ingredients for Belizean dishes in Taiwan, and is the effort worth it?
- Can you find all the necessary ingredients for traditional Belizean meals now compared to when you first arrived? If not, how do you manage substitutions and how does this impact your cooking?

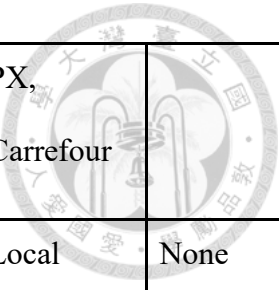
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10. What are some ingredients that you believe cannot be substituted? How do you source these ingredients in Taiwan?
11. Have you established relationships with specific vendors or stores to reliably source Belizean ingredients? How have these relationships evolved over time?
12. How do you maintain the essence of Belizean dishes despite the need for substitutions? Are there any dishes that you've had to stop making because of unavailable ingredients?
13. How has sourcing ingredients for Belizean food changed with the growth of the Belizean community in Taiwan? Do you feel more support now than in the past?
14. What role does the Belizean community in Taiwan play in helping each other source hard-to-find ingredients? How has this network developed over your stay?
15. Are there specific ingredients that have become easier or harder to find over time? Have you noticed any changes in their seasonality or availability during special occasions?
16. Is it financially sustainable for you to maintain a Belizean diet in Taiwan after being here long term? How do these costs compare with sourcing local Taiwanese food?
17. How do you manage when important ingredients are unavailable during significant Belizean celebrations or events?
18. Have you seen any initiatives in Taiwan, whether by local markets or agriculture, to accommodate the Belizean diet? What do you think could be improved?
19. Does the distance between your home and specific markets affect your ability to source the necessary ingredients for Belizean food? How has this impacted your routine over time?

20. What advice would you give to Belizeans who are missing a taste of home and are looking to source ingredients/make Belizean dishes?



Table Showing Participant Comparison of Ingredient Availability, with 0 being not available, 1 being rare, 2 being partially available and 3 being easily found.

Ingredient	Short-Term Stay (1-3 years)		Long-Term Stay (4+ years)			Where to Find	Substitution
	Kayla 2y North	Mia 3y North	Olivia 8y South	Dani 9y South	Charles 14y North		
Recado	1	1	1	1	1	Belize	Paprika(color), Cajon seasoning, seasoning blend
Coconut Milk	3	3	3	3	3	PX, Carrefour, Costco, Filipino Store	Not needed
Coconut Oil	3	3	3	3	3	Costco,	Unscented oil



						PX, Carrefour	
Cilantro	3	3	3	3	3	Local Market PX, Carrefour	None
Culantro	1	3	1	1	1	Local Market	Cilantro
Habanero or Scotch Bonnet Pepper	1	1	1	0	1	Local Market	Long red pepper, Thai, Marie Sharp
All Spice	2	2	3	2	2	PX, Mia Cibon	None
Cassava	2	0	1	2	3	Local Market	Potato, Yam, taro
Plantain	1	2	1	2	1	Local Market, Filipino, Banana	Blogo, smaller, less starch, r

						project sold out	
Red Kidney Beans	2	3	3	3	2	Carrefour, Filipino store	Split peas, black or pinto beans
Salted Pig Tail	2	1	1	2	0	Meat shop	Salt the meat yourself, not as successful Use pork belly in beans
Fish and Seafood	3	2	1	3	3	Seafood market Pricey	
Corn Tortillas	3	1	2	2	3	Fabrica Bakery, Filipino Store, Mia Cibon	
Maseca	1	2	2	1	1	Shopee, Carrefour	

