

 **ARUBA**

A speciality on the Dutch island, Keshi Yena is also the star attraction on Christmas menus. Baked in a Gouda cheese shell, the hearty casserole of chicken, onions, raisins and peppers is gussied up with sides of a cornmeal mash called funchi and a flat pancake called pan bati. "We serve this dish family-style because it's perfectly share-able," smiles Lino Van der Biezen, manager of Elements restaurant, Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort, "and for dessert, try our Christmas cashew cake with a shot of Ponche Crema, our version of eggnog." Sweetening the pot, Bon Pasco, or Merry Christmas in the local Papiamentu language, is a must-sip blend, with the island rum called Coicoei, Licor 43, vanilla ice cream and coconut cream.

www.bucuti.com



TASTE THE ISLANDS THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

WRITER MELANIE REFFES PHOTOGRAPHY SUPPLIED

A MULTICULTURAL MELTING POT AND RECIPES TREASURED LIKE FAMILY HEIRLOOMS, PREPARING, SHARING AND ENJOYING HOLIDAY FARE IN THE CARIBBEAN. BRING YOUR APPETITE AND DIG INTO OUR DELECTABLE ROUNDUP OF HOLIDAY DISHES.

 **NEVIS**

On the small isle across the channel from St. Kitts, holiday sips and snacks cover the bases from a traditional turkey to West Indian mainstays like the one-pot pelau made with rice, pigeon peas, chicken, salted pig tail, pumpkin, coconut milk and herbs. Keeping the holiday theme, add a slice (or two) of the boozy rum-basted Black Cake, and a few forkfuls of, coconut rum bread pudding. At the Caribbean's only plantation inn on the beach, bartenders Dan Perkins and Kaddy Simmonds at the Nisbet Plantation Beach Club get creative, with their island-famous tropical tipples like the Christmas-colored ruby-red Nisbet Beach Martini, and the green melon Nevisian Sunset splashed with vodka. www.nisbetplantation.com



JAMAICA

From the Grand Market on Christmas Eve to houses sparkling with 'pepper lights', the holidays are all about families, good cheer and downhome specialities. Kick start Christmas Day with ackee and saltfish, the Jamaican breakfast of champions made with sautéed codfish and boiled ackee that looks a lot like scrambled eggs. Move on up to Christmas dinner, often served in the late afternoon, where hefty platters of chicken, curried goat, stewed oxtail, rice and gungo peas (also called pigeon peas), plantains, dumplings and boiled green bananas do a dash of scotch bonnet pepper proud. A glass of sorrel drink made from the tart red flower that tastes a tad like a raspberry, rum-soaked fruitcake and a reggae soundtrack, morph every backyard into a holiday dance floor. www.visitjamaica.com

PUERTO RICO

Meat, eat and be merry with Spanish staples like perril asado or roast pork shoulder with a spicy sweet drizzle, rice and pigeon peas called arroz con gandules, and for the fish lovers in the family, guisado are salt cod fritters that marry well with tostones or fried green plantains, topped with chicken or pork. Sharing the marquis, mofongo is a hefty mashed plantain mound stuffed with chicken, beef or seafood. Upping the festive ante, chefs add pork cracklings, bacon, garlic and a fruity salsa to cut the salty taste. Not for the faint-of-appetite, toast dinner with a decadently rich piña colada and a coquito made potent with white rum (we recommend Bacardi Superior), coconut cream, condensed milk and vanilla. For a sweet treat, tembleque is irresistible, made with coconut milk, sugar and cinnamon. www.seepuertorico.com

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Popular on Christmas morning, glazed ham and hops (like a hamburger bun) with a side of pepper relish called chow chow is a guaranteed crowd pleaser. Other fan favorites include tamale-like snacks called pastelles made with cornmeal that is stuffed with meat, olives and capers, and then steamed (or boiled) in banana leaves. A pretty side dish, Christmas rice flecked with raisins, peppers, ginger and thyme, is on the holiday A-list. Leading the dessert hit parade, black cake is deliciously browned with sugar and molasses, and studded with hooch-soaked raisins, prunes and currants. Keeping the spirit flowing, a peppery ginger beer with a pinch of cloves and a splash of lime fits the bill nicely. www.visittobago.gov.tt

