

on the go is right in the middle of the action: on the streets of Barranquilla. Start with *patacones*, or *tostones* as they're known elsewhere in South America. One-inch thick green plantain slices are fried, removed from the oil, flattened and returned to continue crisping. When they get to a deep golden hue and are appropriately crunchy, they're sprinkled with salt and devoured. They're like a fibre-boosted thicker potato chip, only infinitely better. Next, order a small *butifarra* – beef or pork sausages that are eaten with *bollos de yucca* or *bollos limpios*. *Bollo* is the coastal Colombian version of a tamale: cassava or cornmeal *masa* (dough) wrapped in corn husks and steamed. Another crowd-pleaser is the *carimañola*, a lightly golden torpedo-shaped *yucca* fritter stuffed with cheese or meat. If you feel adventurous, try it with *aji* – a spicy, vinegar-based condiment. And don't miss the *arepas*: cornmeal tortilla-like breads. In Barranquilla, it's criminal not to have an *arepa de huevo*, in which a whole egg is cracked into the arepa, sealed and deep fried. Crispy, packed with protein and better than any 'eggwich' you've ever had, it's the quintessential 'street eat' for people on the conga line.

Amid all this excitement, you're bound to get thirsty. You'd think rum is king in this coastal town but, while it's a popular choice, the clear winner is beer. The national brand, **Club Colombia**, is considered one of the best to quench a dance-induced thirst. Next in order of liquid importance when it comes to party lubricants is *aguardiente*, which translates loosely as 'firewater.' As the name implies, this drink packs a punch. This distillate of sugar cane, with a distinct anise flavour, is consumed around the country as a badge of cultural honour. *Aguardiente* is to Colombia what Champagne is to France: national character in liquid form, and both capable of making you happy or knocking you off your feet.

If you're looking to hydrate, *aguapanela* is refreshing and non-alcoholic. Made from condensed sugar cane juice, served with lemon or lime and sometimes flavoured with cinnamon or with milk instead of water, it's like a portable oasis in the tropical heat. Ironically, it's also often the chaser of choice with a shot of *aguardiente*. After all, this is one of the best parties in all of South America, so if you party like a Barranquillero for four days, that's okay. Post-Ash Wednesday, you'll have plenty of time to atone for your dance-induced indulgences. ▣

Party Here, Party There

NEW ORLEANS does Mardi Gras with *jambalaya*, *shrimp étouffée* and *beignets*, standards so beloved that they're not just for Mardi Gras anymore. And then there's the **King Cake**. Enriched with sour cream and decorated with purple, green and yellow icing, the cake hides a tiny baby doll, representing the Christ child. It is said that if you find him in your slice, you'll be lucky all year long.

RIO DE JANEIRO dishes up *feijoada* for Carnaval, a black bean stew with pork, served with rice and orange wedges. On the street, there's meat on a stick, meat off a grill and plenty of sausage. Other Rio Carnaval stars: *acarajé*, a fritter made from black-eyed pea flour; *pão de queijo*, a cassava flour cheese puff; and the famously potent *caipirinha*, a drink made with lime, sugar and *cachaça*, a type of liquor made from sugar cane.

VENICE invests a lot of Carnevale energy into multi-epoch costumery complete with sparkling silver and gilding. Festival food is from the 'special occasions' repertoire, except for these two Carnevale essentials: *frittelle*, small balls of fried dough with raisins and pine nuts; and *chiachiere*, a lemon-scented yeast dough, cut into ribbons, deep-fried and dusted with sugar.

LIMOUX, in France's Languedoc, calls its Carnival *Fécós*, and **Blanquette de Limoux** is the festival's official drink. This sparkling white wine is said to predate Champagne. Do we believe that? Since women weren't allowed to participate in *Fécós* until 1972, maybe not.



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