

On the northern part of the island, the area known as Guánica is home to one of the better fishing harbors in Puerto Rico. I love visiting so I can meet the fishermen and buy from them directly (the nearby seafood restaurants are also not to be missed). Almost always available: conch, queen snapper, and grouper.

I love a dramatic presentation. When a whole fish, cooked perfectly and dressed with bright herbs and vegetables, hits the table, people really respond. Red snapper is a perfect fish for frying whole. The result is super-crisp skin and—my favorite part—a crisp-crunchy tail. The tomato and pineapple dressing that is served with it acts as a salsa and supplies a fresh, acidic accompaniment to both the fish and the fried plantains.

CHILLO ENTERO FRITO EN ADEREZO DE CILANTRO, TOMATE Y PIÑA

Fried Whole Red Snapper with Tomato, Pineapple, and Cilantro Dressing

SERVES 2

- 1 whole red snapper (1 to 1½ pounds), cleaned
Kosher salt
- 4 cloves garlic, mashed to a paste in a mortar
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
Vegetable oil, for deep-frying
Tomato and Pineapple Sauce (recipe follows), for serving
- 1 lime, cut into wedges (optional)
Tostones (page 166), for serving
Cilantro leaves, for garnish

Using a sharp knife, make a few small hash marks on the surface of the fish. This will keep it from curling up too much when fried. Season both sides of the fish with salt and the garlic. Put the flour on a large plate or tray and dredge the fish in the flour, shaking off any excess.

Fill a deep-fryer according to the manufacturer's directions or fill a large, heavy pot with about 5 inches of oil. Heat the oil to about 350°F. Line a tray with paper towels.

Fry the whole fish until golden and crisp, about 10 minutes. Transfer the fish to the paper towel-lined tray to drain briefly.

Serve hot, with a little of the tomato and pineapple sauce poured over the top and the rest on the side, along with the lime if you like, and tostones. Garnish with some cilantro leaves.

TOMATO AND PINEAPPLE DRESSING

MAKES 1 CUP

- ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro
Juice of 1 lime
- ½ tablespoon apple cider vinegar
- ½ clove garlic, mashed to a paste in a mortar
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 cup olive oil
- 1 tomato, finely diced
- ½ cup diced fresh pineapple

Put the cilantro, lime juice, vinegar, garlic, salt, and pepper in a blender and blend for about 1 minute. With the blender running on low speed, slowly pour in the oil.

Pour the mixture into a small bowl, add the tomato and pineapple, and gently stir to combine.

