

First Sin: Canelazo for the Holidays

By Karen Catchpole - December 18, 2013



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It's fitting that my first sip of *canelazo* took place in the bar at [Hosteria Molina del Mesopotamia](#) in a 445 year old building. After all, this hot cocktail is also believed to be centuries old.

Canelazo is a popular drink in the Andes of South America and it's been made with regional twists in Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador for generations. In Colombia, the traditional method is to boil water with mint (or any other aromatic herb you like), a chunk of *panela* to taste, a slice of lime (with rind), and lots and lots of cinnamon.

As the water is simmering, rim small ceramic mugs or glass sipping cups with lime (your sadly neglected punch cups will work nicely) and dip them into the coarsest sugar you can find. Once the *panela* has dissolved and the simmering water has taken on the color and flavor of the spices, strain it and fill each cup 2/3 full then top each cup off with *aguardiente*, an anise-flavored sugar-cane-based liquor. Fruit juice can be added with passion fruit, strawberry, and blackberry being favorites in Colombia.

My first *canelazo* was made without fruit juice. As I sipped it next to a fireplace repurposed from a centuries old oven, it occurred to me that it tasted a lot like a hot, liquid, alcoholic version of Chuckles, those black licorice gum drops coated with sugar that can be found in every movie theater candy case. But with a vast improvement.

Canelazo is enjoyed any time of the year but it's especially popular around Christmas. In Villa de Leyva, a gloriously preserved and restored Colonial town at more 7,000 feet not far from Bogota, traditions are revered and bars sell *canelazo* with pride. While watching the annual Christmas fireworks show in the town's main square one drizzly night I eyed fellow reveler's steaming cups of *canelazo* with envy.

Pro tip: simmer plenty of flavored water and strain and transfer it to a large thermos to make it easy to keep the festive drinks coming. Roaring fire in a 400 year old oven optional.

Want to make your own? Try our recipe for a classic *canelazo*.

Canelazo

- 8 Mexican cinnamon sticks
- 5 whole cloves
- 1 cup naranjilla (lulo) pulp
- 1 cup light brown sugar
- 1 shot Aguardiente (per serving)
- rind of one medium orange