First Sip: Rosero Quitaño in Ecuador
By Karen Catchpole - March 26, 2014

Quito, Ecuador, the world’s first UNESCO World Heritage Site city, is a cultural treasure trove where Ecuador’s Spanish and indigenous heritages comingle in an eye-popping mix. Elaborate Colonial-era churches are adorned with Last Supper paintings featuring cuy (traditional guinea pig) on the table, and museums burst with European religious art and indigenous artifacts.

That cultural mix is also responsible for a beloved beverage called rosero Quitaño. Documented as far back as the 1700s, rosero Quitaño is made from a base of water infused with lemongrass, cinnamon, pineapple rind, clove, and panela. This base is enriched with finely chopped cooked mote (a type of corn that forms the basis of much indigenous cooking in Ecuador) and finely chopped babaco (a less pushy type of papaya), strawberries, pineapple, and other tropical fruits.

Invented in Quito, rosero was once sold to eager school children and thirsty workers by street vendors who served up a non-alcoholic version. Adults soon realized that old rosero developed mildly alcoholic properties, and thus began agingrosero on purpose. The street hawkers have since disappeared, but rosero is being preserved as a cocktail in places like the Plaza Grande Hotel. This luxury hotel, the long ago residence of Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro located on Independence Plaza in the heart of Quito’s historic center, makes a pitch-perfect setting for an afternoonrosero.

Served in a tall glass or beer mug, freshly made rosero is chilled then spiked with white wine and served with a spoon. The luscious fruit salad and chewy chopped mote sinks to the bottom to form a grown up fruit cocktail, while the spices and wine combine to give a mulled quality to the liquid. It was difficult to choose between sipping and spooning myrosero, which was light and refreshing as a drink and as a snack. With its festive rose color and unexpected ingredients, rosero makes a great punch bowl filler and is fantastic spiked with sparkling wine as well.

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

Rosero Quitaño

- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1/4 cup panela or brown sugar
- 3 ounces cinnamon sticks
- 3 ounces star anise pods
- 3 ounces whole cloves
- 2 ounces lemongrass

Get the full recipe.