**WHISKED AWAY TO FRANCE**

**A cooking school in Provence provides the true flavors of the region.**

*By Linda Brightkom — Chicago Tribune*

It is Day Four of cooking class at La Bastide des Saveurs, and many of the 14 students are looking for chairs to catch a few minutes of rest before the whisking begins. But it is dessert day, so a delicious reward at the end is guaranteed.

Such are the joys, and challenges, of a gourmet cooking class at the estate of the Hostellerie Berard in La Cadière d’Azur, France.

There’s work to be done and instructions to follow during a day that can stretch to seven hours. The key is to have fun. Who wants to work on vacation?

The setting is movie-set-perfect: The rustic kitchen of a 19th-century country house in the Provencal countryside, with an herb and vegetable garden that students pass on their way to the kitchen with chef Rene Berard.

A cutting board and knife await each student around the wooden block table. Bowls of cubed butter, sugar, yellow apples and pine nuts give clues to the day’s tasks. Berard walks in, and it’s time to grab your knife, or your pen to take notes, and get cooking.

For 364 days out of the year, Gracias, a town of about 25,000 people located four hours from the famous Copán ruins, is merely one of the most charming small towns in Honduras. Iglesia San Marcos, a yellow-and-white lemon meringue pie of a church, anchors the town’s leafy central park. Cowboys on horseback and women selling homemade bread from baskets on their heads are as common on the cobblestone streets as motorized vehicles. There is no ATM.

Like so much of this part of the world, Gracias was conquered by Spaniards in the early 1500s, but not without a remarkable amount of resistance from the indigenous Lenca people led by a hothead known as Chief Lempira. He managed to unite historically warring tribes into an anti-Spaniard force 30,000 strong.

The Lencan leader was eventually killed by the Spanish and in his absence the popular uprising fizzled. However, Chief Lempira’s legend lives on. The currency of Honduras is called the lempira and he is still a hero to the Lenca, the largest indigenous group in Honduras.

I arrived in Gracias the day before the most important Lenca festival, Cacique (Chief) Lempira Day. Held every July 20 and celebrated nationwide, the event is most vibrant here, in the heart of southeastern Honduras’ 80-mile Ruta Lenca. Even the country’s president helicopters in to attend.

Gracias continues on G4 »

**Honduras IN HISTORY’S WAKE**

The town of Gracias is your welcome to the world of the country’s largest indigenous group.
IN HISTORY’S WAKE

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 though the festival was a success, some preparations moved forward at the typical Central American pace: slow and more or less steady.

The town’s central park was engrossed with temporary stalls and various groups of costumed paraders, each adorned with beans, corn kernels and palm leaves, representing either the Spanish or the Lenca, the sound of marching bands and hearty queens of all ages, each wearing tattered, one of the liveliest and oldest church in the town of La Campa, Honduras. In La Campa, head for Hostal JB. Located on San Manuel De Colohete, Set two blocks from the church, the hotel is in the final stages of gaining green certification, making it one of only a few eco-certified hotels in Honduras. 

Pousada de Don Juan Hotel (www.pousadadonjuanhotel.com) is the closest thing to a restaurant in Gracias. At Hotel Real Camino Lenca (www.posadadedonjuanhotel.com), the new rooftop bar called El Gran Congolon has a wider range of flavors including passionfruit, pineapple, strawberry and guanabana. It’s best to arrive with cash on hand. Except credit cards (including Hotel Guancascos and Kafe Kandil), but not many. It’s best to arrive with cash on hand. Kafe Kandil bar, on Jose Maria Rincon Graciana in Gracias. It’s best to arrive with cash on hand. Kafe Kandil bar, on Jose Maria Rincon Graciana in Gracias.

WHERE TO EAT

Do not miss the chance to eat at Rinconcito Graciano on San Sebastian Avenue. A few blocks west of the Rinconcito Graciano in Gracias, Owner chef guide and organizes food tours in La Campa.

WHERE TO STAY

The best accommodation value in Gracias is Hotel Don Juan (www.guancascos.com), located on San Cristobal Colubus just past the castle.

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