

Chef April on why Uganda should be proud of her food

Through flavour, memory, and history, Chef April reveals how Uganda's everyday ingredients carry the same pride, depth, and story as any celebrated cuisine in the world.



Chef April shares the bold flavours and stories of the Caribbean in Kampala during the Singleton Chef's Table. PHOTO/COURTESY

BY ANDREW KAGGWA

If you are a foodie in Kampala, April Charlotte, or Chef April, is a name that resonates. Though she grew up in Great Britain, her Caribbean roots run deep. She says her cooking reflects the many strands of her heritage, just as it does for countless people from the Caribbean.

Talk to April about identity, and you will quickly realise she has no shortage of words. She may have been raised in Britain, but she is proudly Jamaican. And like many Jamaicans, she does not arrive quietly.

"You feel us before you even see us. The energy, the laughter, the boldness... we make sure you know we are here," she laughs.

That bold energy is visible everywhere, from Olympic tracks to everyday life, she explains. "Jamaicans are filled with guts. Very bold. Unforgettable."

Food as identity

For April, food is never just ingredients or technique. It tells the story of a people.

"Food is identity," she says.

"We may have lost language, religion, even tribe, but you look at food, and you find who we are."

Her culinary roots are deeply African. Take Jamaica's iconic rice and peas. To April, it mirrors West Africa's waakye so closely that the



Empowering. Food is the one thing we carried with us when everything else was taken. It holds memory, identity, and pride. When I cook, I am not just preparing a meal, I am telling a story that began long before me. And here in Uganda, I see that same story in your ingredients, your soil, your traditions. You already have everything, you just need to believe in the value of what's on your plate," says chef April

connection feels undeniable. Cooking in Kampala or standing at a buffet in Ghana, she says the realisation is striking; the Caribbean is not separate from Africa; it is part of it.

"Food connects us," she explains. "The way we cook, the way we season, even the rituals, it is the same story, just told in different places."

A seed carried across the Atlantic

One story she cherishes most is that of the ackee fruit, Jamaica's national treasure.

She imagines enslaved Africans carrying seeds across the Atlantic, small, defiant acts of preservation. Those seeds grew into trees, meals, and identity.

"They carried a piece of home with them," she says.

"Now ackee is everything to us. It is not just food, it is memory."

When she travelled to Ghana, she found ackee trees there. But unlike Jamaicans, locals were indifferent, letting the fruit rot on the ground.

History and care run through everything she cooks. Jamaican dishes are not rushed; they are slow, deliberate, and emotional. Meat is seasoned days in advance. Flavours are layered with patience. Every dish is an act of love. "It is not just throwing things in a pot," she says.

ACKEE: JAMAICA'S FRUIT OF MEMORY AND IDENTITY

Ackee is Jamaica's national fruit, but its story begins in West Africa. Enslaved Africans carried seeds across the Atlantic, planting them in new soil as small acts of defiance and preservation. Over generations, ackee became a cornerstone of Jamaican cuisine, most famously in ackee and saltfish, the country's national dish.

For Chef April, ackee is more than food—it is memory. She sees it as a link between continents, a living reminder of resilience, history, and cultural identity. The fruit must be allowed to ripen fully before cooking, as unripe ackee is toxic. Its preparation is careful and deliberate, much like the stories it carries.

"It is a ritual. It is love."

A celebration in Kampala

At the recent edition of The Singleton Chef's Table, April headlined a dining experience that went beyond food. The series,

which features celebrated guest chefs, gave her a stage to help Ugandans understand Jamaica, not through textbooks or tourism, but through taste.

She curated a "celebration menu," inspired by meals Jamaicans reserve for weddings, funerals, and family gatherings. At the heart of it was curry goat with rice and peas, rich with spice and history, yet infused with her own creative vision.

"I do not want people to just eat," she says. "I want them to feel something. To sit back and just... smile."

Ugandan inspiration

April is equally in awe of Uganda. She marvels at its fertile land, abundance of ingredients, and untapped culinary confidence.

"You have everything here; vanilla, cocoa, coffee, things the world craves. Be proud of it. Use it. Celebrate it. Uganda's soil is incredible. You can plant almost anything, and it will grow. That is a blessing not everyone has."

Her cooking is a fusion of worlds: Jamaican heritage, British upbringing, global exploration, and now Ugandan inspiration. She might infuse local *gorja* into a dish while honouring Caribbean spice traditions.

Beyond jerk

Many associate Jamaican cui-

sine with jerk chicken and dancehall culture, but April is determined to expand that narrative.

"There is more to us," she says. "Jerk is just one chapter. Our food is African, Indian, Chinese; it is a whole history on a plate."

From jerk, originally used to mask the scent of runaway slaves, to curries shaped by Indian labourers, each flavour tells a story. And now, in Kampala, those stories are being told again through a shared African lens.

Guided by ancestors

Self-taught, April lets the ancestors guide her. When she first appeared at The Singleton Chef's Table, she brought Jamaican desserts and treats to complement her savoury dishes. Boldness and resourcefulness, she says, run through her history.

In the end, Chef April's message lingers long after the last plate is cleared. Through every dish, she offers more than flavour; she offers a reminder.

That Uganda, like the Caribbean, carries history, resilience, and identity in its food. That the everyday ingredients, often overlooked, hold stories worth telling and celebrating.

And that sometimes, all it takes is one meal, thoughtfully prepared and deeply rooted, to see what has been there all along, with pride.