

## **The Difference Between Cajun and Creole Cuisine**

All too often, we hear tourists ask what the difference is between Cajun cuisine and Creole cuisine. We don't blame them for asking and recognize that the best way to explain the difference is to have them eat a few dishes of each for themselves. Though, Louisiana—we have found—is the only place where the distinctions are, well, distinct and not experimented with, as many chefs love to do. Of course, there's no shame in experimentation, but Creole and Cajun food respectively are rooted in Louisianan culture and should, as such, be treated as individual experiences for the eaters. Because of this, we feel it is our duty to explain these differences.

### **Cajun**

All cuisine originates from a culture, and Cajun is no different. The word Cajun comes from the term "les Acadians," which refers to the French settlers that once lived in the Acadie region in Canada. You can see where the word Cajun comes from if you say "Acadians" fast enough. Once the French settlers were run out of the Canadian territory, they then settled in Southern Louisiana, where wild game roams free and the bayous are abundant with frogs—an important ingredient for fried frog legs, of course.

Cajun is often misunderstood as spicy. Though it is often spicy, the abundance of seasonings and the punch of flavor that hits the palette is the main reason for this misunderstanding. The Cajun flavor profile often comes from the "holy trinity," which is the use of celery, onion, and bell peppers as a base for many dishes. The spices mostly consist of thyme, paprika, garlic, green onions, cayenne pepper, and parsley.

Cajun food also has a reputation of being “country folk” food. This doesn’t mean that the cuisine is simple, oh no. In fact, Cajun ingredients can easily be elevated, which is why many people may mistake it as Creole, as we will explain in a moment. Because Cajun is associated with more rural beginnings, wild and more gamey meat is used, such as alligator or rabbit. This is one of the reasons why there are so many seasonings—the protein usually chosen can easily handle the amount of spices which often complement the gaminess of the meat. Cajun food often doesn’t incorporate tomatoes, as well. Yes, jambalaya exists in the Cajun realm, but only if it is used with more local ingredients and no tomatoes.

### **Creole**

Like the Acadians, Creole is a term to describe French settlers. Only this time, they settled in Louisiana first instead of Canada. Creole has a mixed background of French, Spanish, and African flavors, and was once considered very upper-class cuisine because of the expensive and foreign ingredients it contained. Like many upper-class homes in the early generations of Louisiana, there were, unfortunately, slaves. Some of these slaves were the cooks for the upper-class families. Those slaves passed on what they knew to later generations, and those recipes kept getting passed down to what we know now as Creole cuisine.

Creole food is most commonly found in New Orleans, which is why it is often described as “city food.” Its ingredients tend to be a bit more exotic and expensive than Cajun ingredients because Creole settlers often had more money and access to a wider range of ingredients through New Orleans’ ports. That’s why Creole jambalaya has tomatoes and Cajun jambalaya does not. Creole dishes tend to have creamier soups and sauces than in Cajun food, as well, because they had better access to ingredients such as butter, cheese, and milk.

Remember, food is the distillation of culture. Think of modern cuisines as a concentration of what the world has become. Hundreds of different techniques and recipes have been passed down and adapted over hundreds of years. It really is a beautiful and very important part of being human, as dramatic as that sounds. But we think it is important to understand what cultures to credit for the original recipes as much as possible.