



NEW RELEASE

Bahama Breeze Judges 12th Annual “Taste of the Caribbean Competition.”

MIAMI (June 30, 2005) — Indigenous island flavors spiced up the competition as top culinary teams from the Caribbean competed this week in the 12th Annual Taste of the Caribbean, a prestigious annual Caribbean culinary competition held this year by the Caribbean Hotel Association in Miami, Florida.

“In years past, we’ve watched these culinary teams introduce plantains, mangos, and jerk-flavored meats, which all went on to become everyday favorites in restaurants around the U.S.,” said Rick Crossland, executive chef of Bahama Breeze restaurants and head judge of the competition. “This year, the big news was the exotic spice blends created by each of the teams from spices and wild herbs indigenous to their own islands. It was all about each island’s unique spice blend and how the creation added a fantastic dimension of flavor to familiar foods, such as seafood, chicken, pork and beef.” Crossland added that consumers should expect to see these new spice blends in U.S. restaurants in the next year and later in grocery stores.

Exotic blends of island spices comprise just one culinary trend the public can expect to taste in restaurant recipes in the near future. Another, according to Crossland’s observations of the competition, is that chefs will use unique flavored island rums in sauces and desserts.

“Restaurants like Bahama Breeze get great ideas for new menu items from the Taste of the Caribbean each year,” Crossland said. “This competition helps us bring the most contemporary flavors from the islands to the guests who dine at Bahama Breeze restaurants around the country.”

Thirteen teams of chefs competed in a live kitchen environment and prepared a three-course meal for 25 people using a mystery basket of ingredients, such as fresh seafood and shellfish, pork loin, beef, chicken, tropical fruits (pineapple and bananas), traditional vegetables like potatoes and onions and island-grown root vegetables like yucca, malanga, calabasa and bonianto.

Anguilla, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Bonaire, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Curaçao, Puerto Rico, St Lucia, St Maarten/St. Martin, Trinidad/Tobago and the United States Virgin Islands were the islands represented at the event. Each team, which included a culinary coach, three chefs, a pastry chef and a bartender, had just four hours to cook the meal. A seven-person panel, led by head judge Crossland, evaluated their creations. The winning team was from St. Maarten/St. Martin.

Individual competitions were also held for Chef of the Year (Mr. Carlos Portela, Puerto Rico), Pastry Chef of the Year (Ms. Geert Maarten Van Mil, Aruba), and Bartender of the Year (Mr. Raakesh Madoo, Trinidad/Tobago).

Caribbean cuisine is gaining popularity in the United States because it reflects the country's multicultural heritage. Caribbean foods represent the diverse heritage of the islands, from native inhabitants to Western European, African, Asian and Indian settlers. The cuisine is also increasing in U.S. popularity because of the nation's growing Hispanic population and interest in Latin flavors. Restaurants with Latin influences are growing 3.5 times faster than any other restaurant group, and most mainstream restaurants are incorporating the region's diverse flavors, according to the National Restaurant Association.

The annual Taste of the Caribbean competition is sponsored by Bahama Breeze, the United States' leading island-inspired restaurant company. Its 32 restaurants helped bring Caribbean cuisine to American casual dining in the 1990s, with an island menu featuring fresh seafood, flame-grilled steaks, distinctive chicken dishes and hand-crafted tropical beverages.