

Catfish Anyone? It's an Important World Food Source

Fisherman's Quarters II, an Asheville, NC seafood restaurant, is very home cooking catfish- anyway you like it! George Baxevanis, the restaurant's owner, explains that it's great fried, roasted, grilled or sautéed. George feels strongly about his catfish, as do many others around the world because catfish is one of the world's most prolific species and an important world food source. It's found in rivers, lakes and estuaries in water ranging from the equator up into the more northern latitudes of America, Europe and Asia. It is a featured item in the cuisines of dozens of regions and countries. Baked, broiled, grilled, stewed, steamed or fried the flavor and texture of catfish is always...delicious.

What is a catfish?

Catfish are members of a diverse group of fish. There are about four dozen distinct families of catfish, with each having multiple distinct species. They are called catfish because of "whiskers" called barbels that extend from their chins. These are actually sensory organs which help the catfish to find food. Catfish range in size from tiny parasitic minnows to the world's largest freshwater fish – the Mekong Giant Catfish. The Mekong Giant has been known to reach lengths of more than 10 feet and weights up to 650 pounds and more. The Mekong is now critically endangered and in need of help.

Catfish are found on all the world's continents except Antarctica. They are found in freshwater habitats of all variety, with over half the world's species found in the Americas. Catfish live in underground rivers and in the deepest caves, and there are even a few saltwater species.

Catfish and the Asheville, NC Restaurant Scene

Catfish have been caught and farmed for hundreds, if not thousands of years. The mild flavor and dense, meaty texture make it ideal for almost any preparation. As an entree item, catfish is found in the center of the plate in many of Asheville's restaurants. In Europe it is eaten broiled with lemon and capers, in Indonesia catfish is grilled with veggies and served by street vendors, in Thailand whole catfish are fried and served with white rice while in Mexico it is baked with chilies and cumin.

Health Benefits of Catfish

Besides the obvious benefit of delicious food, catfish also offers some health benefits. Catfish is high in protein, lean and low in cholesterol, particularly the LDLs (low density lipo protein). Fish is becoming more and more popular in a healthy diet for a number of reasons. A diet rich in fish is good for lowering cholesterol and helping with heart disease, immuno-diseases, arthritis and even depression.

Should Asheville, NC Restaurants Worry About Mercury Catfish?

As Americans are eating more and more fish and at the same time becoming more aware of where their food comes from, some worries have arisen concerning fish. The primary worry is mercury. It is at the forefront of a group of concerns with seafood with sustainability a close second. Catfish has one of the lowest levels of mercury. Of course, it will vary from river to pond and from farm raised to wild. Since most catfish eaten in restaurants is farm raised, the levels of mercury will be far lower than that of wild catfish. Another benefit of catfish is their success in aquaculture. Since they are easily farmed, there is no concern about the sustainability of wild populations.