



Pan de Jamón

Shared by Alba de Borges, SSH Coppell

One of my favorite foods at any time - but especially at Christmas - is Pan de Jamón. It's a Venezuelan recipe that combines sweet and salty flavors. The taste and aroma of this bread transport me to the street where I grew up, in La Candelaria in Caracas. In this neighborhood, almost every street had at least one bakery. Try this delicious recipe!

Ingredients

For the dough:

- 500 gr. flour
- 200 ml. milk
- 75 gr. butter
- 1 extra large egg (or 2 small ones)
- 25 gr. fresh baker's yeast (this is equal to 3 tsp active dry yeast)
- 4 tablespoons of warm water and 1 tablespoon salt

For the filling:

- 50 gr. of raisins
- 20 gr. of butter
- 100 gr. olives (stuffed or not, to taste)
- 1 beaten egg
- 200 gr. of cooked ham

Method:

1. The first step for any bread is to make the dough. In a small bowl, add 4 tablespoons of warm water and dissolve the yeast in it. Mix with your hands or a spoon and let stand for 10 minutes.
2. Melt the butter in a saucepan until it is completely liquid. Sift the flour into a large bowl and add the butter, egg, and salt. Mix well with hands or a spatula.
3. Combine the yeast mixture with the milk and gradually add this liquid to the flour, mixing until a dough forms. Keep mixing until the dough is homogenous, flexible, and somewhat sticky.
4. Dust a clean work surface with a little flour and transfer the dough. With floured hands, knead the dough for about 5 minutes until you get a smooth and very soft dough. If necessary, add a little bit more flour - let the kneading process tell you if it's needed.
5. Add some flour to the bottom of another clean bowl. Place the dough in it and cover with a clean cloth. Let it sit in a warm place for an hour so that it rests and doubles in size.
6. While the dough rises, put the raisins in a glass of water to soak. This makes them plump and juicy.
7. Lightly flour the countertop/work surface again. Place the risen dough on the surface and spread it out with a rolling pin until it forms a rectangle. Be careful not to exceed the size of your tray. A good size is approximately 40 cm x 28 cm. Trim off excess with a knife and you can use this to decorate the top if desired.

Preparation of the Ham Bread

1. I've listed the most commonly used ingredients, but in Venezuela each family adapts the recipe to their own tastes. You can be creative and use your imagination to create the best version! You could add thin strips of bacon, or substitute prosciutto or jamón serrano for the cooked ham. You could also add cheese slices along with the cooked ham.

2. Melt the 20 gr. of butter and brush the top of the dough (which will be the inside of the roll). Place the slices of cooked ham on top and sprinkle the drained raisins over the surface. I suggest placing the olives in a long, single row so you'll be sure to taste olives in each slice of the bread.
3. Carefully roll up the dough, bit by bit, to make sure no filling escapes. This will form a cylinder. Seal the ends and the bottom well so that the bread doesn't open up while baking. Let it rest on parchment paper covered with cloth for at least an hour, until it rises again to about twice its size.

Baking and Presentation

1. After the final resting time, preheat the oven to 200° C. Beat an egg and brush the outside of the bread evenly. You can also decorate the top with the pieces of leftover dough, if desired.
2. Prick the dough with a fork so that it "breathes" in the oven and does not rise too much. I make some light cuts with a knife as a decoration, and also to mark where the slices will be.
3. Reduce the temperature to 180° C and bake for 20-25 minutes, until the bread is golden on the outside. The exact cooking time may vary by the power or efficiency of your oven.
4. It is usually done in about 20 minutes. Note that the residual heat will continue to cook the bread on the inside even after you remove it from the oven.
5. Remove from the oven and let it cool to room temperature before serving. Personally, I like *pan de jamón* better cold than warm, but this is a matter of personal taste. You'll find that it's still perfect in texture and delicious after a few hours or even the next day.

To serve the bread, cut it carefully into slices about 2-3 cm thick. This should give you slices with a firm crust, a sweet, fluffy crumb, and a uniform filling of ham, raisins, and olives. I hope you enjoy this Latin American recipe that can easily be included in your holiday menus!