

Preparing for Passover in Santiago

By

Leigh Takata

The smell of scrambled eggs mixed with Matzoh, drifted from the kitchen into the living room, offering a welcoming scent to those who entered. A roundtable displayed other breakfast items such as fruit, turkey bacon, and a kosher for Passover cake. A knock at the door brought the first few guests, and they were greeted by the smell of artfully prepared food. Once everyone had arrived, dishes began to be passed from one person to the next until all of my friends and host family members had filled their plates. I was asked to lead the group in Hamtozi, and then everyone started digging in.

Since I had to start somewhere in order to begin my preparation for Passover, I would start by investigating where to find a box of Matzoh in Santiago. Since I did not really have someone to ask, I resorted to using Google as means of finding my information. I managed to find to listings under ‘Matzoh in Santiago’ and proceeded to further investigate as to whether they still had Matzoh available or not. The first number I called was disconnected. I looked up the address and, since it was not terribly out of the way, I decided to give it a try.

Once I arrived at the store, however, trying to explain to the store owner what the heck a box of Matzoh is turned out to be a difficult task. After much explaining and using hand signals, gestures, and descriptive phrasing since there is no Spanish equivalent of Matzoh, we both walked in front of a display of Matzoh by the checkout area. The store owner smiled and shook his head since we had just walked around the whole store. As there were only two boxes left, I took one to be considerate of the next person who might need one as well. The comical situation brought laughter to both of us. I then thanked him for his assistance and headed back home to my host family.

All four of them, grandmother, daughter, and twin granddaughters, seemed fascinated by the box of Matzoh that was placed on the counter. Upon opening the box, I took out a piece of Matzoh and broke it into four pieces so that each of them could try it for the first time. As is usually the case with people who are not Jewish, they also thought it tasted like a cracker. Berta, my host 'mother,' though actually in her seventies, thought that it was "interesting and cracker-like with a nice flavor to it." Her daughter and granddaughters nodded in agreement, asking for more. Luckily for them, they do not have to eat it for days at a time and experience the unfortunate trips to the restroom that coincide with doing so.

Later, I went to the grocery store to purchase items to make Matzoh brie (Note the side bar for Leigh's personal recipe) I prepare it in a way that tastes salty and sweet. As a result, mine usually has not only salt and pepper, but also a dash of cinnamon sugar.

The following morning, I started preparing the amazing Passover brunch feast. In addition to the wonderful Matzoh brie, I was also making turkey bacon, fruit salad, and a kosher for Pesach dessert. Once everything was started, I anxiously awaited the arrival of my friends. Being that this was the first time I had ever made Matzoh brie without my mother, who is an amazing cook; I was a little bit nervous of how things were going to turn out. Having previously discussed my concern a couple days earlier with my mom via Skype, she said, "even if it is not perfect, no one would know any better." Though somewhat reassuring, I still wanted my cooking to at least be on the same playing field.

My guests started arriving, and my host family took turns answering the door. As my friends waited, I set the table and began bringing out the dishes one by one. Everyone commented that the food smelled amazing and were anxious to start digging in. I finally seated myself and one of my friends, Heidi, asked if I would lead us in prayer before we ate. A little

hesitant, I agreed and said hamotzi. Once I had finished, the delicious delicacies started going around the table and everyone began helping themselves. After everyone had served themselves, no one knew who should take the first bite. After a moment of silence someone suggested that I should go first since I had worked so hard at putting this meal together. A few others chimed in and also thanked me for getting everyone together and making all the food, even though a couple people felt obligated to bring food.

I stuck my fork into the Matzoh brie and took a satisfied bite and let out a sigh of relief as well as a 'yum.' Everyone started digging in and the meal went better than I had hoped. There was lots of good conversation, interesting observations about Matzoh, as well as some questions about Passover. None of this was unexpected and I took everyone's questions and observations as gracefully as possible. It was apparent that everyone had initially come because of a slight curiosity, which had now been peeked.

The quest to find Matzoh and preparation of the meal itself was certainly well worth it. Not only could I finally say I had tackled making Matzoh brie on my own, but was able to educate others about the importance of Pesach and teach them a couple of things about Judaism as well; which made everything very worth-while for me. For additional suggestions about traveling to Chile during Passover, please view the accompanying sidebar. If interested in my version of Matzoh brie, there is also a recipe as well. Enjoy!

Tips for Jewish Travels

1. Buy Matzoh far in advance because as is true in most places, it will sell out quickly.
2. Buy any additional Passover items far in advance as well

3. Map out which specialty stores care kosher for Passover Matzoh and other items as Matzoh in regular grocery stores is typically not kosher for Pesach.
4. Plan on having to explain to the store keeper what you are looking for, having pictorial images is useful.
5. Plan on having a wonderful meal with friends and family.

Leigh's Matzoh-brie Recipe

Ingredients:

3-4 large eggs

½ cup nonfat or 2% milk

1 ½ teaspoon cinnamon sugar

Salt and pepper to taste

1-2 pieces of Matzoh

In a large bowl, combine ingredients, breaking the Matzoh into smaller pieces.

Heat pan to medium heat and pour in Matzoh brie mix. Use a spatula to mix and turn ingredients for about five minutes or until desired scramble. Serve.