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HAM IT UP

Ham may be a staple of spring holiday meals, but that doesn't mean cooks can't get creative with it. In the recipes below, two chefs add eggs for updated brunch-lunch dishes, while another skips the traditional version for a homemade Cajun favorite — spicy tasso ham.

Nine-Ten

Leftover Easter ham inspired this truffle-perfumed quiche by award-winning pastry chef Jack Fisher of La Jolla's popular Nine-Ten restaurant and bar. He serves it at home for spring Sunday brunch along with a light spring salad or fresh fruit and, of course, mimosas.

Truffled Ham and Parmesan Cheese Quiche

Serves 8-10

- 1 9-inch pre-made pie shell
- 1 1/2 cups country ham or other high-quality ham, diced
- 1 teaspoon canola oil
- 4 eggs
- 1 1/2 cups half-and-half
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1 teaspoon sea salt

- 1 tablespoon, or to taste, white truffle oil
- 1/2 cup grated parmesan cheese
- 1/2 cup shredded mozzarella cheese

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees F.
2. Place a sauté pan over high heat until hot. Add canola oil and heat for 30 seconds. Add the ham and cook until the ham is slightly golden on the edges, about 3-4 minutes. Remove with slotted spoon and place on paper towels until cool.
3. In a blender, combine eggs, half-and-half, pepper, salt and white truffle oil. Blend on medium-high speed for 20 seconds.
4. Place ham and both cheeses in the pie shell and cover with egg mixture until just under the top of the pie shell.
5. Bake for 20-25 minutes or until set in middle. Use the tip of a small knife to test the center. The top of the quiche should brown slightly.
6. Remove from oven and cool on a wire rack for at least 15 minutes. (Can be made up to two days ahead and reheated as needed.)



Flavor Del Mar's Black Forest ham sandwich

Flavor Del Mar

Chef Brian Redzikowski adds a twist to the classic French sandwich croque-madame with a touch of licorice-y basil and a warm egg. Redzikowski recommends a good-quality Black Forest ham made in the traditional German way, like those sold at Whole Foods markets.

Black Forest Ham Sandwich

Makes 8 sandwiches

- 8 eggs
 - 16 slices Black Forest ham
 - 16 slices sharp Vermont cheddar cheese
 - 16 slices brioche bread
 - Fresh basil, sliced thin
 - Butter
1. Place eggs in cold water in a pan. Bring the water to a boil and cook at a boil for 8 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and let the eggs sit in the water for 45 minutes. Remove and reserve.
 2. Place two slices of ham and two slices of cheese on four of the bread slices. Top with a sprinkle of the basil. Top with the remaining bread to form a sandwich.

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Opposite: Nine-Ten's truffled ham and parmesan cheese quiche

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3. Heat up a sauté pan. Add butter and when melted, add a sandwich. Cook at medium heat on each side for 4 minutes per side. Remove and keep warm while making remaining sandwiches.
4. To serve, cut each sandwich into four pieces and place on a plate. Crack one egg onto each sandwich.

333 Pacific

Unlike traditional hams that take months to cure, spicy tasso ham is ready to eat in a couple days. Chef Brian Hyre of Ocean-side's 333 Pacific steak and seafood restaurant uses this homemade version to flavor omelets, soups and a host of classic Cajun dishes.

Tasso Ham

Serves 8-10

3 pounds of pork shoulder (or Boston butt), deboned and cut into slices 1-2 inches thick

Dry rub

- 2 pounds kosher salt
- 1 pound brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons onion powder
- 1 tablespoon ground cloves
- 1 tablespoon ground mace
- 1 tablespoon ground allspice
- 1 tablespoon smoked paprika

Tasso seasoning

- 1/4 cup black pepper
- 1/4 cup cayenne pepper
- 1/4 cup marjoram
- 1/4 cup allspice
- 1/4 cup smoked paprika

1. Combine salt, sugar and seasonings in a bowl.
2. Rub dry-rub mixture over the slices of pork. Any leftover rub can be saved. Place the slices on a wire rack in a baking pan. Leave uncovered and place on the bottom refrigerator shelf for one day.
3. Remove the marinated pork slices from the refrigerator and rinse off the dry rub. Wash the baking pan and rack. Return the pork slices to the rack to dry.
4. Heat a smoker to 200 degrees F. Use apple wood chips if available. Otherwise use hickory or mesquite chips.
5. While the smoker is heating, combine tasso seasoning ingredients. Cover the pork slices with the tasso seasoning and sear in a pan or on a grill to get a nice color.
6. Place pork in the smoker. Leave it there for a few hours until its internal temperature reaches 150 degrees F.
7. Remove from the smoker. The tasso ham is now ready to use. It can be kept in the refrigerator for up to a week or can be frozen. ♦

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