

# Uncle Sam's Hotels and Restaurants at Panama

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**H**OTEL TIVOLI, ANCON, Canal Zone, Panama.—During the past week I have investigated Uncle Sam's hotels down here on the Isthmus of Panama. He is feeding a multitude of men every day, and the meals served in his hotels, restaurants and kitchens are now about 600,000 per month. The cost of his commissary runs into the millions a year, but he buys and sells so closely that he annually comes out a little ahead. It is not Uncle Sam's idea to make money out of the stomachs of his hard working children. His chief aim is to give the employees good food at just about cost. He does this, furnishing the best board that can be gotten anywhere in the world for the money.

In making this statement I know whereof I speak and that by the test of both stomach and brain. I have gone through the commissary account books with Colonel Eugene T. Wilson, the chief subsistence officer, and have figured the cost of and receipts from the meals item by item. Moreover, I have been living for a month at the Tivoli hotel, where the board costs \$5 a day, and have dined again and again at the hotels along the line of the canal where a full dinner is served for 30 cents, and that the equal of many you buy in New York for \$2. I have also taken my tin plate and for 3 cents have had a square feed at the laborers' kitchens, and later on have eaten with the European silver men, where the meals are 15 cents, with all the extras thrown in.

Indeed, since I came to Panama I have lost all my sympathy with the woes of the American landlord. His prices are such that he ought to be rolling in wealth, and if he is not making money he does not know how to run his hotel. I am also losing some of my pity for the whining American housekeeper in these days of so-called high prices, and I believe that any woman in the United States, if she figures as closely as does Uncle Sam, could not only put more flesh on the bones of her children, but lay away much spare change in her stocking or in the family slot savings bank on the mantel.

### What Uncle Sam Gives for 30 Cents.

One can keep alive and do good work on the 3-cent meal or the 15-cent meal, but the 30-cent meal which the government gives times a day at the line hotels situated at the principal settlements along the canal zone, and also at Taboga, Naos and Porto Bello outside of it. There are nineteen of these hotels. They are great eating houses surrounded by verandas and so inclosed in woven wire netting that there is never a fly in the butter, and the bald-headed man can eat without a skull cap. These eating rooms are equipped with dining tables like those of a hotel. They give you fresh tablecloths and white napkins, and the china and glassware are first-class. They have excellent waiters, and the service is better than that of the average hotel of the states.

Here are some of the menus. I have taken them at random out of the mass which is sent in from day to day showing just what the men have to eat. The ones selected give a single day's meal at the hotel at Gorgona, the station on the canal where the repair shops are located. They are as follows:

**BREAKFAST.**  
Oranges, Toasted Corn Flakes, Hominy, Eggs to Order, Fried Bacon, French Fried Potatoes, Corn Muffins, Hot Cakes, Maple Syrup, Tea, Coffee or Cocoa.

**LUNCHEON.**  
Puree of Vegetable Soup, Beef a la Mode, Fried Liver and Onions, Mashed Potatoes, Spinach and Eggs, Navy Beans in Cream, Coconut Pie, Cream and Cake, Tea, Coffee or Cocoa.

**DINNER.**  
Beef Broth, Beefsteak, French Fried Potatoes, Green Onions, Mashed Turnips, Buttered Beets, Lettuce Salad, Apricot Pie, Ice Cream and Cake, Tea, Coffee or Cocoa.

Those meals cost 30 cents each. I could give you all the menus supplied to eighteen other hotels the same day, but it would take too much space. Some are a little better than the above and some perhaps, not so good, depending on the choice of the cook as to dishes. But the meals are all excellent, and none costs over 30 cents to the consumer. Every cook has to figure out his meals so that the average cost will not be more than 25 or 28 cents, and if he spends more on one meal he must cut down on the next. Nevertheless, the government finds that this sum is quite sufficient to enable the cooks to give the very best food and that in large portions. Indeed, the average cost of the meals is now under 25 cents. Here is the actual cost of the items figured out on such meals. The decimals run out to the hundredths of a cent. Here is how the 30 cents is divided:

Meat and fish, fresh, 7.36 cents; eggs, 3.59 cents; fruits and vegetables, 3.56 cents; bread and butter, 2.88 cents; cured meats, 2.03 cents; fish and lard, 1.85 cents; miscellaneous, 1.26 cents; ice cream, 1.20 cents; sugar and syrups, 1.19 cents; ice, .59 cent; bread and cake, .52 cent; coffee, tea and cocoa, .58 cent; milk, evaporated, .53 cent; flour, .45 cent; cleaning material (Sapolio, etc.), .37 cent; canned meats and fish, .31 cent; dried fruits and vegetables, .18 cent.

If you will add those items you will find the total is not 30 cents. It is only 28.11 cents, and this is a cut on the cost of the same meal about a year ago. The government is furnishing as good food today as it did then at 1 and 1/2 cents less per meal, and a similar saving has been made in some of the other departments of the feeding supply.

**At the Hotel Kitchens.**  
Now let us go to the kitchen where the silver laborers get their daily bread. The most of them are West Indian negroes and they have tastes of their own.



This institution is the only one in the central west with separate buildings situated in their own ample grounds, yet entirely distinct and rendering it possible to classify cases. The one building being fitted for and devoted to the treatment of noncontagious and nonmental diseases, no others being admitted. The other host cottage being designed for and devoted to the exclusive treatment of select mental cases, requiring for a time watchful care and special nursing.



Waiting for Meals at one of Uncle Sam's Kitchens

They want certain kinds of food, and the government gives them cooks from Jamaica and others of the islands because they are better fitted to supply the dishes which the men like.

At these kitchens the men receive three meals for 37 cents, or one meal for 9 cents. They do not eat in the kitchen, but they bring their own buckets, plates and other dishes and carry the food away smoking hot to eat as they please. Each man has a bucket of rice, a great ladle of meat and soup and in addition to that a banana or so. He has a pint of coffee and plenty of vegetables. He receives one loaf of bread per day, and the menu is varied from meal to meal.

I have eaten at some of these kitchens, taking my own bucket and spoon, and I can tell you the food is not bad. The cooking is done in great copper tubs on long ranges, which run from one side of the kitchen to the other, and the soup is served from pots which will hold as much as a cider barrel.

I have eaten also with the silver employes along the Europeans. These are Spaniards and Italians. They demand a little better meals than the negroes, and they like to sit down at the table. Many of their dining rooms are connected with the kitchens. They are much plainer than those of the line hotels, the meals being served without cloths and in dishes of tin or enamel. The food is brought to the table on the plates used for eating, and the coffee is served in tin cups. In these dining rooms the men are fed for 40 cents a day, or 134 cents per meal. For this they have a dish of soup, a plate of roast beef or other meat and a half loaf of bread. A common dish is a stew of rice with meat or macaroni as a base. I remember a dinner I had yesterday with a lot of Spaniards. I was given a quart of soup, which alone was enough for a meal, and in addition was served with a great chunk of roast Chicago beef and potatoes. I had also a half pound of bread and a full tumbler of wine, the latter equal to that you pay \$1 a quart for at any hotel.

### Ration Which Digs the Canal.

I have talked with Colonel Wilson about the ration of the silver laborers. It is a pound of beef, a pound of potatoes, one-sixth of a pound of flour, one-half pound of rice and four tenths of a pound of sugar. The food is varied from day to day. The staple diet of the West Indian at home is codfish, rice and sugar. During the last year Uncle Sam has sold 1,800,000 pounds of codfish, almost all of which has been bought by the West Indian negroes. At the same time we are teaching them to eat beef, and when the government finds a man who does not seem strong enough for his work he is asked as to his food. If he is not living at a government kitchen he is given tickets and told that he must do so. Within a short time he begins to fatten and his work comes up to standard.

The West Indians and also the Spaniards and Italians eat but little for breakfast, but they make their main meals at noon and night. The actual cost of the kitchen meals is a little over 22 cents a day, or a little more than 7 cents a meal. Uncle Sam gets 9 cents, but he has to pay for the service.

As to the bread furnished, this is made in the government bakery, and it is better than any you can buy almost anywhere in the United States. The flour and all the ingredients are chemically analyzed and a full pound of bread is put to the loaf. The flour used is a blend of Kansas hard wheat flour and Dakota hard wheat flour. The loaves sell for 4 cents each, and they contain as much bread as one gets for 6 cents in the states. The Spaniards eat about 90 per cent more bread than the negroes, and the average consumption of bread in the hotels is two-thirds of a pound per person a day. It is found that the native American eats more rice than either the European or the West Indian, the latter, to a great extent, making starch and sugar take the place of meat.

### One Year's Hotel Bills.

All of the supplies for the hotels and kitchens are bought in quantities, and handled through the commissary. The government here has the biggest and most complete cold storage plant of the world, and it sends out a train of twenty-one cars every morning to carry provisions to these hotels, and to the various families which live in private houses throughout the canal zone. It is estimated that more than 100,000 people are regularly supplied by the department.

At present the government is operating these nineteen line hotels, sixteen of the 40-cent-a-day messes, and fourteen of the laborers' supply kitchens. The total number of meals served last year at the laborers' supply kitchens. The total number of rations given in the European laborers' messes was more than 1,000,000, while the rations served in the kitchens was less than 500,000.



The Tivoli - Uncle Sam's Five Dollar a Day Hotel at Ancon

is the porch, the stove consisting of a bowl of charcoal inside a galvanized screen about two feet cube, or of the size and shape of a shoe box.

The total revenues of the government hotels, messes and kitchens amounted last year to just about \$1,250,000, which was almost \$100,000 less than the year previous; and in keeping the establishment it was found that there was a loss on the hotels and restaurants patronized by the gold men, but that the profit on the silver men made Uncle Sam come out something like \$20,000 ahead.

### At the Hotel Tivoli.

Outside this class of hotels and restaurants devoted to the actual feeding of the canal employes, Uncle Sam has a great establishment here, where tourists and high officials are entertained and where the richer of the canal employes may live if they care to pay the bills. This is the Hotel Tivoli, situated on the slopes of Ancon hill about 650 feet above the level of the sea, with a fine outlook upon the city of Panama and the Pacific ocean.

The hotel is a great three-story building, part frame and part brick. It is over 300 feet long and about 160 feet deep, being built around the three sides of a rectangle, with a porte-cochere extending out from the center of the front. It has a lobby sixty feet wide, with an eleven-foot veranda, and it has other verandas running about the building with galleries inclosed in wire netting. The whole hotel is so screened that it is impossible for flies, mosquitoes or insects of any kind to get into the rooms, and it is one of the most comfortable summer resorts of the world.

The Tivoli is built high above the ground on concrete piers, giving a circulation of air underneath. It has, with the addition which has been added this year, about 180 rooms, and these are so arranged that many of them can be thrown into two or more room suites. Some of the suites have private baths, and there are also single rooms with public baths and toilets.

The dining rooms are immense, seating hundreds at a time, and there is a great ballroom where all the fashionable people of the canal and the tourists have dances of a Saturday night during the season.

This hotel is managed like those we have at the seaside at home. It has its clerks and office boys, and the system of giving out rooms, serving the meals and taking care of the guests is practically the same.

### Our Dollars Are Not Good.

I have spent more than a month at the Tivoli during my stay here. It is the one hotel I know of where the charges are fixed and where one cannot bribe the clerks. The hotel has been crowded all year and will be so from now until the canal is finished. To my table today came three rich Americans, a portly dame in diamonds and two la-de-dah young men. They complained about their treatment all through the meal. The woman said that her room was no better than that of her servant's at home, and the young men, who were bunched four in a room, were as mad as their feeble minds would let them. Said one of them to the woman: "Mother, we will go back tomorrow. This is the only place I have ever been where our dollars are not good. I offered the clerk all kinds of money, but he laughed at me and told me that Uncle Sam could not be bribed. It is first come first served, and our money is of no account. I never saw such a place."

### Five Dollars a Day.

And still the hotel is not run at a loss. It made a profit of \$36,000 last year and will increase \$10,000 or more this. I have the price list before me. Transient guests pay \$5.50 per day if there is only one man in a room, or \$10 if two bunk together. There are some rooms as low as \$4.50, but all the best rooms cost \$1 more. The weekly rates are \$25 for a single room, with proportionately a little less when more people are put in one room. There are slightly reduced rates for employes, but they are still too high for the average government clerk.

The above prices include meals, and that on the American plan. The transient rates for meals alone are 75 cents for breakfast and \$1 each for luncheon and dinner. Meals are also served a la carte. Children under 12, if they require no extra beds or rooms and are old enough to sit at the table, are taken in at

\$1.25 per day or at \$1 per day by the week or month, but all over 12 years of age must pay full rate.

Accounts are rendered every week, and you pay on the spot or you go.

### New Washington Hotel.

The Tivoli is on the Pacific side of the Isthmus. It has succeeded so well that Uncle Sam is now building a great hotel to correspond on the Atlantic side. This is the New Washington, situated on Colon beach, a half mile away from Cristobal. The hotel is being erected by the Panama Railroad company, which, as everyone knows, is the United States government. It will cost something like \$500,000. The style of architecture is Spanish. The building is to be of concrete and the walls and everything about it will be arranged to suit the tropics. The hotel will be 300 feet long. It will have three stories and very large parlors, lounging rooms and billiard rooms. The ball room is to be fifty-three feet long by thirty-seven feet wide. In the

front outside and surrounded by a concrete balustrade will be made a concrete-walled swimming pool covering about a quarter of an acre. This will be from three to nine feet deep and will be open on the sea side with a wall in front to protect it from rough water.

In the New Washington the rooms are to be arranged so that they can be used singly or en suite. It will be possible to throw from two to fifteen rooms together, the private bath being entered by private passages and not from the bedrooms. Every bedroom will have either a private bath or a shower bath, and the whole equipment of the hotel will be modern and up-to-date.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

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