

A moveable feast

Gone are the days of hard tack, Jess Lloyd-Mostyn lists simple tips to get the most out of your galley.

It was once a central theme of life on the sea that the food consumed was dull and miserable.

Stories of ship's biscuits, salted meat and grog floated down through the ages, transforming into its modern day counterparts of cans of sardines, one-pot meals and convenience foods.

Since moving on board, choosing to live and sail full-time, we both agree that we have never eaten better in our lives, despite being two foodies from London.

This surprises most people who assume that without regular access to standard weekly supermarket runs you need to have some sort of secret Jamie Oliver skills up your sleeve in order to live that way on a boat. However, food onboard has never been a chore for us to create and enjoy and we have learned a number of tricks to keep what we eat varied, interesting, sustainable, cheap and tasty.

Entrees

When I first started my sail training, my own ideas about food on a yacht were slightly tacky.

The one or two week sail courses that I would attend used a system of each crew member taking it in turns to make the evening meal and the day would be filled with grazing on snack foods like crisps and granola bars. Every main meal would inevitably be something quick to throw together into one dish so our arrival at any new port would be combined with a rush to a local bar or café to get some decent food.

What first opened my eyes to an alternative style of eating was when I went on two mile-building sails to the Isles of Scilly in England and the Atlantic coast of France, with instructors who really valued eating well onboard as being fundamental to sailing properly.

Our first real test with our own boat was provisioning for our first ocean crossing. The journey from the Canary Islands to St Lucia was to be our longest non-stop passage to date and there were four of us on board.

Sitting down and planning how we wanted to stock up for the trip involved calculating things like how many pieces of fruit each person was

likely to want to eat during the day or snack on during nightwatch and multiplying this by four and then by the hypothetical maximum number of days that we might be at sea.

Needless to say the local markets were rather astounded when we arrived with our shopping lists the length of streamers and started eyeing up apples and oranges by the crateful.

Yet, that first ocean taught us so much about the healthy eating ideal at sea. Over the three-week passage none of us consumed anything highly-processed or packaged; we had abundant fresh fruit and vegetables, even upon arrival in the Caribbean; we learned how to make fresh bread; we indulged in other homemade baked goods, producing biscuits and cakes from scratch; we even started to catch our own fish and come up with different and inventive uses for it.

By the time we arrived we all looked well and were grateful for having made such good nutritious choices; compared to friends on other boat crews who had simply stockpiled lots of convenience foods, chips, crisps and nibbles to sustain them.

Even we were surprised by how easy it had been. We had also bought a whole horde of tinned fruits and vegetables "just in case", which were never touched. Plus, during this particular crossing, we had issues with our refrigeration on board and had to turn it off altogether about halfway through.

It is worth remembering that even the longest passages at sea are seldom likely to last more than four weeks, which is not actually all that great a challenge for keeping most foods, so long as you have some options for keeping things cool.

So how did we do it?

One of the first great techniques to acquire for organising fresh food onboard is how best to store it.

This is as true and important for a three day crossing as it is for a month long ocean passage. We have found that string hammocks and other ways of hanging certain items really helps keep

MAIN: Simple, nutritious and inexpensive.

BELOW LEFT TO RIGHT: On watch snacks; String hammocks are best for storing fruits; Don't be chicken and make chicken pie.



OPPOSITE PAGE: Have your cake and eat it too.

BELOW CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Bananas from Dominica are perfectly green to ripen on board; It doesn't take much to eat with fresh ingredients during long journeys; One good catch can feed you for days.

them aired, plus it is easy to visually check at a glance to see which ones are ripening fast and need eating first.

Apples and oranges will last a lot longer than anything soft, so eat the papayas, nectarines and kiwis first. Some fruit and vegetable does well stacked in trays, crates or boxes. Maybe separated with newspaper or other things to cushion the soft flesh and stored in the coolest part of the boat that can house them. Again it is checking it all regularly that keeps these things long-lasting, making sure that one orange skin going mouldy does not affect the whole lot.

Bunches of bananas hang quite naturally and beautifully from grab-rails but we always try to separate them out somewhat, to stop them all ripening at once.

There are particularly savvy choices that you can make with vegetables that will last longer than others. Cabbages do particularly well; as do leeks, onions, potatoes, yams, sweet potatoes, garlic and beetroot. Plus these have the added bonus that they are happy to be stored in darker places, so our saloon seating was stuffed with them.

Although we still checked them with an almost religious fanaticism.

Then there are the most robust and hardy ones of them all: the pumpkins, squashes and gourds; the coconuts and the limes which will see you through to the end of almost any voyage. Even carrots can last amazingly well if moved into a refrigerator to prolong their life.

Another great trick is to carry a lot of dried fruit. It is great for snacking on and works really well as part of making a muesli or porridge breakfast more tasty; for baking breads or biscuits; or in cooking any kind of meat. A hearty stew or casserole is particularly gorgeous when you throw in some prunes, raisins or apricots.

Before our Pacific crossing, which was 26 days in total, we borrowed a vacuum sealer from a friend on the dock and made packs up of a whole host of dried mango, papaya and figs among other things to help liven up our food choices on board. We had been warned about the high prices and low availability of certain foods in the South Pacific islands so we were keen to stock up as much as possible whilst in the far more inexpensive Mexico.

"For what it is worth, neither of us has ever once been ill from eating street food."

When combined with all the raw nuts and oats that we provisioned with as well, it meant that we could throw together a huge variety of different dishes. Vacuum sealing also worked well for things like cereal and coffee and we even had time to vacuum pack any meat in our fridge before leaving which helped to prolong its life.

Tinned or canned fruit and veg has been something we were always cautioned by other sailors as imperative to have in stock for long offshore passages. But, in truth, we have used them very little and often given away any that have sat at the back of a cupboard for ages.

The few exceptions to this have been occasionally throwing some canned peaches into our 12 volt blender to add to a smoothie and the convenience of good quality tinned mushrooms. Mushrooms are soft, fragile and do not last at all well, even dockside when you are in the tropics. So, a few cans of these can be great to use in pastas or risottos if they take your fancy.

Canned green veg however, even for our longest stretches at sea, has never proven its value to us. Even in the hottest climates you can still get away with eating the fresh stuff, which is far better for you and has a much nicer flavour.

Those with freezers on boats can carry frozen peas, carrots, spinach etc. with ease, so why anyone would settle for a tin of green peas and convince themselves that it is worth eating is beyond me.

Yet beans, pulses, lentils and chickpeas are great in tins; providing a brilliant source of protein en-route and hugely reducing the cooking time and gas needed to cook up the dried ones.



We eat a lot of eggs on board and also use them a lot for making pancakes and in other baking.

Taking proper care of eggs on a sailboat is another topic that is approached by some as a kind of special and mysterious dark art. Yet, so far, our adventures in keeping them fine for long voyages have been very straightforward.

We try to buy them unrefrigerated and as fresh as possible. Once on the boat they are kept in just their normal cardboard containers or in a plastic one and kept somewhere cool, where they will feel minimal movement in even big seas. No smearing with Vaseline or other special treatment needed.

Plastic containers do have a place if the location where you are doing your provisioning is likely to have slightly dodgy cardboard ones, which could easily be housing cockroach eggs.

A good rule for eggs onboard when you are sailing for a number of weeks is to always crack each one into a bowl first before adding it to any other ingredients, to ensure that a bad one does not mess up what you are preparing.

We both really enjoy eating good bread but planning our first ocean passage made us acutely aware of the lack of any mid-sea supermarkets. So we realised we would have to learn how to make it.

Making your own bread at sea sounds like something only undertaken by the coolest, most accomplished and expert mariners. However, I can assure you that it is much easier than you might guess and is something that you do not have to be any kind of domestic goddess to do well, even I can do it.

The trick is to have a few test runs while you are still dockside, in order to get familiar with the process. It is only flour, water, salt and yeast.

Also, we tend to use the simplest bread recipe that we know and stick to it. There will always be instances when the dough does not rise or the timing doesn't quite work to see the whole thing through, but do not despair. Half-made kneaded bread dough can be rolled out, turned into pizza bases or portions of it cooked in a hot frying pan without oil to become a delicious pan bread, rising to about an inch thick in minutes.

If you can not be bothered to do any kneading or if the sea state changes on you and stops you from kneading, the same dough ingredients but minus the yeast and adding a bit of oil instead, can be simply rolled into balls, flattened and cooked quickly on a hot pan to make really lovely and versatile flatbreads or tortillas.

These methods are quick and failsafe and we have found them invaluable for putting food on the table both mid-ocean and in any anchorage. Calmer seas can encourage you to branch out further into cakes, biscuits and brownies, which taste all the sweeter for having made them in such an unusual environment.



They can also help to punctuate the long days on the open water, to commemorate crossing the equator, the dateline or purely for celebrating a birthday or anniversary on board.

Neither of us had attempted to fish before in our landlubber, preboat lives. But the thought of catching food for our table while living on board had a certain appeal and we were keen to experiment.

Armed with a few shiny new hand reels and a simple fishing rod given to us by a friend, we tried our luck for the first time when crossing the Atlantic. We had a brightly-coloured and fun assortment of lures to choose from, ranging from pink toy squids to silver imitation flying fish.

Much to our amazement we succeeded in landing and identifying our first mahi-mahi, also known as dorado and managed a quite nifty technique of reeling it in close to the boat, scooping it on board with a net and delivering a swift blow to its head with a winch handle.

BELOW: Home made dough makes pizzas easy.

RIGHT: Check out the local markets to see what they stock best.

It was the most delicious fish and the four of us on board were eating it for two days.

During the next two weeks at sea we caught two further mahi-mahi, each bigger than the last and significantly harder to land.

The Atlantic also brought the added bonus of our first encounter with flying fish. These iridescent lovely little creatures literally fly onto your decks and get stranded meaning that for no effort whatsoever you can have fried fish for breakfast.

There are times when catching fish is something that even we can carry out with total cool and aplomb. The most satisfying of these times are, undoubtedly when you have visitors on board.

Catching something fresher than your land-based friends and family have ever tasted is the climax to the cocktails-on-deck-at-sunset picture-perfect cruising holiday experience that we all relish giving to our guests, even though the liveaboard reality is often a far cry from this scene.

In Panama we got serious and invested in a small spear gun. Brilliant, we thought, you have a nice time on a snorkelling adventure and simply take the spear with you and then point and shoot at anything that looks tasty.

It is actually quite tricky to even arm the spear underwater and then you have to adjust for everything looking magnified. So much so that you think you have caught something sizeable but it is revealed to be tiny when you resurface.

So, far from being a smoothly choreographed procedure I should probably admit that we have only managed either in the presence of our visitors thanks to sheer dumb luck.

The real snag to our all-or-nothing luck with fishing has to be that the lures we put out bear very little relation to the size of fish we eventually land. On the Pacific coast of Costa Rica we landed an eight kilogram mahi-mahi, which we ate for a week. That was with a really simple, three inch metal 'spoon' lure, which had only ever caught us much smaller fish before.

But to gut and fillet so large a beast on the aft deck, while sliding around in a rolly sea, is quite a challenge.

Fresh sashimi on day one became breadcrumb fish and chips on day two and we ended the week with fish curry. We even fried the roe in butter and had it with toast for breakfast.

But, without a freezer onboard, a fish that large was quite overwhelming for the two of us to consume and it took some time for us to attempt to put the lines out again.

Joining the throng

We really enjoy discovering what fills the shelves in the supermarkets in every new country we visit. It is a great way to get an angle on how people live.

In some places there is often a clear connection with an umbrella of foreign power and the goods are largely exported from there, even if the distance may be thousands of miles. It can seem a rather jarring relationship, especially on a tiny island in the middle of nowhere.

American luxuries dominate the stores of Cancun in Mexico and in Panama City; products from New Zealand and Australia are the staples in the Cook Islands and Tonga; French cheeses and pâtes are widespread across the East Caribbean and French Polynesia. But, these familiar brand names and labels come with a high price tag when they are made available so far from home.

Truly local supermarkets and grocery stores are a more low-key affair, without the high-rise shelves and towering boxes of the larger international conglomerates. Our shopping and provisioning experiences in countries like Cuba, Fiji, Guatemala and Domenica were poles apart from those models.

Locals would swim out to our boat at anchor or motion to us from the bushes offering bags of lobster, limes and onions to trade or we would have a strange encounter simply negotiating to buy some eggs at a market, which would feel like a clandestine underground deal.

One of the greatest joys of sailing and exploring so many different countries is the opportunity to eat both locally and seasonally. Plus, if you throw in the fact that you are likely to keep moving somewhat, you have the chance to experience an endless variety of different produce.



After we had sailed for nine months in the south Pacific we were thrilled to find items like broccoli and apples were cheap and readily available in New Zealand, as both were hugely overpriced and imported in all the island groups that we had been visiting en-route.

We also arrived there at the start of strawberry season and witnessed the transition of the year at the farmers' markets through the cycle of blueberries, sweetcorn and passionfruit that accompanied the changes in climate.

Local and seasonal eating is always more affordable than buying imported goods, particularly ones that tend to be highly packaged. Sure, home comforts are a nice touch of nostalgia but embracing the native, indigenous cuisine is one of the delights of travel. Especially if there is an associated cost saving involved.

Do not get me wrong, we still ask our visitors to ferry out the odd pot of Marmite, Earl Grey tea bags or Bombay Sapphire gin as luxuries when they come to stay on the boat. However, we like to balance this out by introducing them to the home-grown fare of where we are sailing and serving up to them new vegetables like plantain, yucca, jicama, chayote and breadfruit. Or astonishing them with the sweetness and unusual appearance of local fruits like mangosteen, rambutan, jackfruit, starfruit, papaya, feijoa, soursop and sugar apples.

Even items that seem quite recognisable to begin with, such as the French Polynesian pamplemousse, are capable of changing your expectations. This native variant is so much larger, juicier, more fragrant and sweeter than the grapefruits we had tasted in Europe or the Americas that to use the same word to describe the two would be almost an insult.

Local fresh produce is also grown by the common man: in everyone's gardens and fields. To combine going on a walk ashore with asking people about the fruits and vegetables growing on their own trees and shrubs will inevitably result in some gifting, trading and making friends.

Downtime

Like anyone else, the average live-aboard cruiser will undoubtedly have times where they simply cannot be bothered to cook and it is here that the economy of local food really comes into its own.

Upon our arrival in the Caribbean, the couple that we had onboard to share the ocean crossing with were keen to do a lot of eating off the boat. They chose to eat out always at quite high-end restaurants, boasting international menus and imported delicacies.

As a result they quite literally ate through their remaining budget and had to return to England sooner than planned.



By contrast, our own forays into dining off-board always tend towards the local street food, eating out in the same establishments as the folks who live there year-round.

Some of our most memorable, enjoyable and scrumptious meals were had this way: from fried fish and barbecued corn in Morocco; freshly cooked blue-corn tortillas and ceviche in El Salvador; and spicy rotis in Fiji to cheap and delicious taco stands all across Mexico; pistachio, aniseed and cream cakes in Portugal; crispy fried chicken in the East Caribbean or steak frites in French Polynesia.

For what it is worth, neither of us has ever once been ill from eating street food.

So, that should be enough to start your mouth watering and get you planning your next voyage as all of these food experiences are a far cry from the hardtack, salt horse and beer of historical sailing lore. In fact, our exploits and adventures on the water have encouraged both of us to be much better cooks as a result.

What is more, we are still eating better than we ever have in our lives. 

cruisinghelmsman Jess Iloyd-Mostyn



Jess and James left England in 2011 aboard *Adamastor*, a Crossbow 42, intending to circumnavigate in a couple of years. After crossing the Atlantic and cruising the Caribbean they reached Panama, where they decided to take longer over the trip and also to start a family. Daughter, Rocket, was born in Mexico and logged her first sea miles on their Pacific crossing in 2014. They got married in Fiji and are currently in New Zealand where they just added to their crew list with son, Indigo. Now, over four years, 18,000 miles and 32 countries since they set off you can follow their progress at www.water-log.com.