

Feast or famine

All that fresh air means sailors generally have a heathy appetite. Meanwhile, blue water cruising broadens the palette, as **Jess Lloyd-Mostyn** narrates

When the only thing that changes about your home is the location

you anchor it in you cannot help but draw comparisons. And the single thing that tends to occupy our minds in such appraisals is the food.

We eat well on board - better than we ever did in our land life - and are largely dependent on the quality and proximity of local fresh produce markets. So that means that the trendy buzzwords of eating 'locally and seasonally' are lost on us as that's all that you can do when you're long term sailing the world. It also results in times of plenty and times of shortage - never of anything that one needs for nutrition I hasten to add - but in terms of certain favourites.

Take mangoes, for example. All of us onboard adore their glossy, juicy orange flesh, so sweet when ripe that it tastes like edible sunshine. But we've experienced complete extremes with their availability. Nowhere in southern Cuba had them and each island we visited in Vanuatu informed us that sadly it was not mango season. However, in Pacific Central America we sailed upriver in El Salvador and moored at a resort that boasted several mango trees, so heavy with the ripe fruits that the slender branches were drooping. Not wanting to be greedy we started by gathering only the windfalls on the ground, but even these soon amounted to more than 70 fruits, each so perfumed and tasty that it made us swoon.

Sailing the more remote islands in the western South Pacific poses a bit of a culinary challenge as without shops or stores the subsistence farming crops dwindle down to a hefty proportion of cassava, yam and taro, none of which exactly ignite your taste buds. But the far northern Papua New Guinea region of the Ninigo Islands is close enough to Indonesia that occasional trades are made that give the islanders chilli and chilli seeds. This quite literally spices things up and gives a kick of flavour to an otherwise rather bland national cuisine. Ninigo Islands' chilli was something we took a shine to and stocked up on so that we could bring tiny wrapped gifts of it back to the UK.

By their very nature islands can be rather limited in their produce. This one grows rice but the next one



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along doesn't; that one has sweet pineapples but sail further west and they have none; that one exports all their pork but this one is Muslim so only farms cattle, so on and so on. Then there's also the tourist factor. A place that gets a lot of western visitors panders to 'international' tastes more than one that doesn't. And of course there is the reliability of refrigeration and power to consider.

In the Caribbean we were shocked to find that tropical fruits are mainly exported back to Europe or bought by the resorts and hotels, so that simple coconuts would cost an extraordinary amount. It was just the same story with lamb in New Zealand, whereas any other meat was cheap and readily available. The sheer logistics of importing fresh apples to

French Polynesia, as growing them would be impossible, explains the extortionate price tag of them there. But if baguettes and pâté or Bonne Maman jam are your guilty pleasures then they are easily affordable and abundant.

Eating local also means that our sailing history is littered with gorgeously delicious 'flavour moments', specific to a time and place, that perhaps we could only indulge in because we had a night or two in a certain anchorage. So there are the fresh, blue-corn tortillas we picked up in Guatemala, that we tore into with only a sprinkle of salt on them; the aniseed cream swirled with cardamom in a lovely little Portuguese cake, dusted with sugar; the streetside rotis, dipped into curry or sweetened condensed milk in Malaysia; the island of Taboga, in Pacific Panama, had a small sweet café that served up an incredible garlic clam soup; my favourite taco stand in Sayulita, Mexico, gently batters and fries the fish that goes in, and I still have the loyalty card of the shop in New Zealand that's makes the best flat white coffee I've ever had.

And, as I sit to write and reminisce, the memories of tagines in Morocco, Fijian curries, mid-ocean mahi-mahi sashimi, Solomon Island lobsters and Antiguan fried chicken all merge and combine into a sumptuous smorgasbord that bubbles on the backburner of my brain.

Yes, sailing is mostly about the wind and the waves, but the salt and the spray do also whet your appetite somewhat.



JESS LLOYD-MOSTYN

Jess and James left the UK in 2011 in their Crossbow 42 and have sailed halfway round the world, growing their crew en route. Follow their journey at water-log.com