

FOOD GLORIOUS FOOD

I can't cook to save my life; however, I cannot get enough of Masterchef.

I think my interest in food extends from my travels over the last 50 years – Australia, USA, Spain, France, Germany, Austria, Turkey – for me, great food memories.

The diversity of food, in my humble opinion, is the true story of world culture.

For Australia, back in the early 1970s, I distinctly remember vast BBQs with ranges packed with all manner of steaks, burgers, and poultry, served up with a “sunshine” salad! I was too young to drink the “amber nectar” but ice-cold fresh citrus drinks and Coca-Cola, seemingly on tap, were a welcomed beverage. Just how big were those homemade burgers, I simply can't recall, but they were big! and always flame-grilled – well before 1980s UK packaging promised such!

In the USA, I tasted alligator in Florida (which resembles fermented chicken), maple syrup waffles for breakfast (sending my sugar levels sky high), and copious amounts of black coffee from a percolating pot left to simmer for hours. Incredible steaks, and “the” dish of the south, Jambalaya – all I can say about the Cajun Jambalaya is “WOW” – a seafood offering of immense portions complimented with smoky rice, vegetables, stock, and southern seasoning (minus the cheese for me). I can recall visiting the southern states in the 1980s and Florida in the early 1990s. The food coincided with reading the novels of John Steinbeck on sultry hot afternoons; and, appreciating the music of the delta.

Spain did not disappoint and in the late 90s and early years of the new millennium, I became very attached to the Spanish way of life, away from the Brit resorts. Copious amounts of homemade Paella, Valencian style (that is to say made with rabbit, rice and green vegetables), was served with fresh batons of bread dipped in olive oil. Valencian paella became my favourite dish of my retreats to the Alicante region, trips occasionally taken on my own. There are essentially three main variations of paella – meat, seafood, and vegetable. The Basque version of the paella will sometimes consist of all three mains together in one dish – the Valencian version could vary between rabbit, chicken or duck but traditionally would be rabbit – all cooked in a wide flat pan on a range or outdoor over a BBQ or firepit. As my Spanish hosts would retreat inside for their siesta after a sumptuous lunch, so I would sit in the shade or on a terrace

working through poems; and then take a walk in the hills in late afternoon or early evening stopping off at roadside tabernas to enjoy tapas and chilled white wine from the region.

Fast forward to Turkey in 2018 and the amazing choice of food – curries, lamb kavurma, salads, meatballs and potato casseroles. “Tasters” were often enjoyed aboard a boat owned by a very entertaining host, Captain Ali, and cooked to perfection by his wife, Mary... the food just kept on coming. After a day at sea, the endless restaurants professing to have the best cuisine were so funny in their methods of enticing business through their door and never disappointed.

Mrs W’s Chicken Pie is my absolute favourite meal – homemade to perfection every time!