

Foraging in Mozambique: Felicity Pulman

Some 50 years ago, while we were living in South Africa, my husband and I decided to holiday in Mozambique, which was still a Portuguese colony in those days. We opted to drive down the coast road from Lourenco Marques to Beira.

We'd intended to stay at hotels along the way, so took no camping gear – but after leaving LM we discovered that the rest of the country was largely undeveloped; the roads were crap and hotels were pretty much non-existent. Late one afternoon we found a wild and idyllic camping site on a beach, with a small store manned by 'Smiling Sam', so-called because he was such a grumpy sod! Not knowing where our next pit stop would be, or what we might find when we got there, we decided to stay for the night, so stocked up on beer, tinned food and a can opener, pointing out what we wanted with a smile in the hope it might be catching!

After a wonderful snorkel, we met a fisherman on the beach selling freshly caught crayfish. So we joined forces with a camping family, who took pity on us and cooked up a quantity of crayfish for all, served with bread, lots of butter, and copious cans of warm beer. We ate with our fingers, juice dripping down our chins, although our delicious feast was rather marred by the memory of watching those poor crawling crayfish being dropped into boiling water!

We stayed for a few nights, dining thereafter on our basic supplies and sleeping in the car with the windows up for protection against blood-thirsty mosquitos! There were no tourist 'sights' to visit, so we stayed close to the beach and the scrubby coastline. The weather was hot and dry, and there were always a myriad fish to see on our snorkelling expeditions.

Our next 'proper' meal came at the end of our holiday, when we finally hit civilisation once more. We stopped at the first cafe we came to, which was pretty basic, and ordered peri-peri chicken and chips, a Portuguese specialty. I can still remember the taste of that spicy, juicy chicken and hot, salty chips – the best and most memorable meal I've ever tasted!