

Taste | *Food & Wine*



Safari fare

The Food Wranglers gather the sights, sounds and tastes of Botswana



Quick Fix

Meals in 30 minutes or less



MCT

A tip from actor Danny DeVito is mixing ground sirloin with water-soaked bread to make light and fluffy meatballs for this dish of spaghetti and meatballs. Add a salad and dinner is served.

DeVito tip improves old standby

Actor Danny DeVito told me in an interview that his meatballs are so good he insisted they appear on the menu of his new restaurant, Devito South Beach. I based this easy dinner on his mouth-watering description. Mixing the ground sirloin with water-soaked bread makes the meatballs light and fluffy. Add a salad and dinner is served. Each serving has 638 calories (27 percent from fat).

Spaghetti and meatballs

2 slices whole wheat bread
 ½ lb. lean ground sirloin
 2 med. garlic cloves, crushed
 8 fresh sage leaves, chopped (or 1 tsp. dried sage)
 ½ cup frozen chopped onion
 2 T. raisins
 1 large egg
 Salt and freshly ground pepper
 1 T. olive oil
 ¾ cup pasta sauce
 4 oz. spaghetti

Steps: Bring a large saucepan of water to a boil. Meanwhile, pour 1 cup water over bread and set aside. Place sirloin, garlic, sage, onion, raisins and egg in a bowl or food processor. Squeeze the bread dry and add it to the meat mixture; pulse or stir just to combine. Add salt and pepper to taste. Form into four balls. Heat oil in a small nonstick skillet. Brown the meatballs on all sides, about 5 minutes. Mix pasta sauce with ¾ cup water and add to pan. Simmer 10 minutes, carefully turning the meatballs once. Meanwhile, cook spaghetti in boiling water according to package instructions. Drain and divide between two plates. Top with meatballs and sauce. Makes two servings.

— By Linda Gassenheimer, author of "The Portion Plan" and "Prevention's Fit and Fast Meals in Minutes."

The food of Botswana reflects the multicultural heritage of southern Africa



MARIE PERUCCA-RAMIREZ/Special to The Herald

The safari vehicle pulls a small trailer with camping gear, food, water, grills and firewood.

ON SAFARI

On the cover

Clockwise from top: An elephant silhouetted against the setting sun on the Chobe River; village women brew millet beer in the hot noon sun; Julio Ramirez helps grill chops and local sausages for the evening meal; the Okavango Delta as seen from the air; potjie, a complete meal cooked over coals in a heavy cast-iron pot, is commonly served on safaris.

Traveling under a bright winter sun, the road winds through what could be California's Central Valley — except for the troop of baboons scampering through the bushes, babies riding piggyback; the warthogs rooting about in the scrub; and the pair of bull elephants suddenly lumbering across the gravel road in front of us.

We pass an occasional village of circular, thatched-roofed houses with walls of sun-baked mud; neat little herds of goats and a few long-horned cattle pastured near golden fields of sunflowers, millet and corn. Women in colorful headwraps and flowered dresses balance baskets on their heads, passing men selling firewood along the road.

We're on safari in Botswana, heading into the vast Okavango Delta, where the annual floods of the great Zambezi River create seasonal islands of isolated wildlife, oxbow rivers and salt pans. Soon the road becomes dust and the landscape gives way to savannahs studded with termite mounds and baobab trees,

Food Wranglers

Back Roads, Good Food



hunting lions and grazing impala, flamingos and fish eagles.

Not too long ago Botswana realized that, with little arable land

Stews and casseroles made in cast-iron pots, fresh vegetables and seasoned squash cooked over the grill, bread baked in Dutch ovens, barbecued meats, kebabs and local sausages

in a country the size of Texas, and many people dependant on subsistence agriculture, the nation's economic future lay in the herds of Cape buffalo, elephants and zebras moving across its open

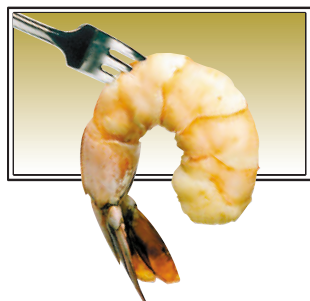
grasslands. With foreign tourists willing to pay a premium to view African animals in the wild, the government began to actively protect its wildlife and promote safari tourism. As a result, safaris have generated jobs for rural peoples and become, along with diamonds, Botswana's main economic mainstay.

Pulling a small trailer behind our truck, with sleeping bags, tents, camping gear, water and provisions, eight campers will spend the next few weeks together in the bush driving over dirt roads — and off road — exploring the pristine wilderness of this country. Lesedi, our guide, Mr. J., our cook, and Betta, our tracker/driver, are Tswana; they speak both Setswana and English. Lesedi has a university degree, but job opportunities here are limited. Familiar with the customs, lore and wildlife of his country, he is an excellent safari guide. Excitedly expecting the birth of his first child, Lesedi is saving money for the bride price so that he can marry his child's

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Good to know

What's cooking?



Q&A

Q: What are the reasons for an angel food cake to fall?
— *Lynette Ereaux, Malta, Mont.*

A: Since angel food cake is leavened only with egg whites, you need to be extra-cautious with it. One of the most common reasons for it to deflate is that it was cooked in a non-stick (or greased) pan — a “stick” pan is crucial, as the cake needs to grab onto the sides in order to stay up. A greased pan doesn't work because introducing fat to egg whites deflates them. That delicate egg white structure is also why you need to cool the cake in the pan, instead of unmolding directly onto a rack as you would with other cakes. As the cake cools, it's held in shape by the pan, helping it have that characteristic airy texture associated with angel food cakes.

— *Food Network*

Tips

Oil and water

The goal of an egg-based sauce (such as hollandaise, mayonnaise, bearnaise or aioli — even Caesar dressing) is to get two things that don't mix (that is, fat and water) to mix. To make that happen, you have to add the fat as slowly as possible, whisking constantly so the sauce gets thick and creamy. If your sauce begins to look grainy, like there's liquid on top and solids on the bottom, then it's broken — this is a textural problem, not a taste one, but it doesn't hurt to know how to fix it. Add a splash of warm water (about a teaspoon's worth) to an empty bowl, and slowly begin beating the broken sauce into it. Start with a few tablespoons, and add more of the broken sauce gradually, starting only after the sauce already in the bowl is emulsified. Continue until all the sauce has been added. If water isn't working, add another egg yolk to the bowl. You'll have to adjust the other ingredients accordingly, and you'll have more sauce than you need, but that's a small price to pay for a perfect sauce.

— *Food Network*

Safari

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mother.

At 5 in the morning, still dark and icy cold, the night noises stop. There is total silence for a few moments, then the world exhales and the morning cacophony of birds begins. Already Mr. J has started the fire, gotten the water boiling and is setting out breakfast of rusks, muesli and the bread he baked over the coals the night before. Within an hour, camp will be struck: campers and crew alike will have all finished each of our morning rituals, eaten, brushed our teeth, taken our tents down, rolled up our sleeping bags and loaded the truck. The sun is barely up when we hit the road.

We all want to see a leopard, and suddenly our vehicle stops in the middle of a field. Betta tells us, “Here's your leopard.” No one sees it at first — but it's right there above our heads in a tree. How is Betta able to track while jostling over rutted roads — and driving at the same time? Using skills he developed over the years as a tracker for big game hunters, Betta finds us a lion stalking a herd of impalas; a pride of lionesses taking a siesta — their playful cubs soon rolling about near our truck; elephants bathing in the river — a group of aunties giving a very tiny elephant a mud bath; cheetahs bounding through the savannah grass; Cape buffalo, ostriches, Kudus, a spitting cobra . . .

In the afternoon we find another campsite, latrines are dug again, and a fire is built for the evening meal. By dinnertime, everyone is ravenous. The hearty food we eat reflects the multicultural heritage of southern Africa: stews and casseroles made in cast-iron pots, fresh vegetables and seasoned squash cooked over the grill, bread baked in Dutch ovens, barbecued meats, kebabs and local sausages.

During the Great Trek, 200 years ago, the Boers migrated north from the Cape Town area to avoid British rule in South Africa; they camped on their journey. Today, the Afrikaners are intrepid campers — they load up the car with blankets, sleeping bags, ice chests and tents and take their families out to camp on the vast African savannah. Much as Thanksgiving is a culinary celebration of our country's historical past, for Afrikaners, the memory the Great Trek lives on in potjie (one-pot

About the authors

Julio Ramirez and Marie Perucca-Ramirez, creators of the Fishwife Seafood Restaurants and Turtle Bay taquerias on the Peninsula, sold their restaurants to start The Food Wranglers Inc., a restaurant consultant group.

Julio is certified as an executive chef by the American Culinary Federation and in 1999 was inducted into the prestigious American Academy of Chefs. Marie is a writer with a degree in history and sociology and a master's in applied linguistics.

The couple have always enjoyed traveling the back roads of the world; they are interested in seeing what other ethnic groups grow, what they eat, how they prepare their food — what their various cultures “taste like.”

During their travels they have met many remarkable individuals, had a number of unusual experiences, eaten a variety of unfamiliar foods — and collected some great recipes they have adapted for home use.

Once a month they will share their experiences — through words and photos — with Herald readers. Write to them at marie@foodwranglers.com.

meals), braai (barbeque), and Dutch-oven bread. These Afrikaner dishes are found on safari menus, along with the spicy curries of India and Malaysia and the traditional dishes of the Tswana people.

In Tswana cooking, the main course is mealie meal pap — unseasoned, unsalted cornmeal cooked to a gummy consistency. The mealie pap is accompanied by seswaa: beef or goat, braised, cooked and pounded in a rounded cast-iron pot; dinawa, black-eyed peas, sugar beans or lentils stewed with onions, potatoes, carrots and spices, then mashed; and lephutshe, seasoned butternut squash cooked over the coals, then mashed. Traditionally, Tswana food is eaten by hand: the mealie meal pap used as a “spoon” to scoop up the pounded meat and mashed vegetables.

After dinner, warmed by the campfire camaraderie, the campers retire for the night. We can hear the hippos moving by the river and hyenas sniffing around our campsite. One night our tent begins to shake; on my knees, I unzip the front flap to see, in the moonlight, what appears to be two giant tree trunks planted in front of the tent opening. Looking up, I see two large ivory tusks; a bull elephant is

snacking on the tree directly overhead. A laundry line attached from my tent to the tree is causing the tent to jiggle as the elephant pulls the leaves and branches from the tree. I sit motionless watching this massive animal in the moonlight — not 4 feet away from me — trusting what they told me: Elephants are very careful where they step — unless they are stampeded.

This is the miracle that is Africa: the wonder of being out under the star-dense Milky Way, sitting close around a fire, listening to the animal sounds in the night; seeing the natural world much as our distant ancestors must have and feeling a deep connection to them and to this land — the feeling that we have come home. We understand now why it is called “Mother Africa.”

Chicken Chobe (Minted Tandoori-Spiced Chicken)

(Serves 6-8)

Grilled, barbecued or sautéed, this chicken, marinated in a mild but flavorful Indian tandoori spice mixture, is a versatile addition to anyone's chicken recipe repertoire. Not only is it good hot, it makes great sandwiches, too.

1 chicken, cut in pieces — or use 4 breasts and 4 thighs — rinsed and patted completely dry
1 cup natural yogurt
2 tsp. minced ginger
2 tsp. minced garlic
1 T. lemon rind (1 lemon)
Juice of one lemon (about 1 T.)
1 T. tomato paste
¼ cup olive oil
½ tsp. black pepper
1 tsp. paprika
1 tsp. chile powder
2 tsp. salt
2 T. fresh minced mint

Steps: Using a wire whisk, mix all of the ingredients above (except the chicken) in a large mixing bowl. When it's well blended, add the chicken to the yogurt spice mixture, coating all the pieces well. Put in refrigerator in a noncorrosive bowl, covered with plastic wrap, for at least 6 hours (12 is best).

Cook chicken on a barbeque (oil the grill first). Since the pieces are of different thicknesses, they will require different cooking times, so make sure they all get cooked appropriately (internal temperature should be 165 degrees). Or, pre-cook the chicken in a large, hot, Teflon sauté pan over medium heat for 3½ to 4 minutes on each side, then place the pieces in a Pyrex baking dish and finish cooking in a preheated 350-degree oven for 12 to 15 minutes. Serve with rice.

Moremi Lamb Stew (A Potjie One-Pot Meal)

(Serves 5 to 6)

This stew is so easy to make and it's really delicious — the lamb comes out so tender it almost melts in your mouth; the pot juices are so rich and flavorful you'll need an

extra loaf of sourdough to sop it all up. A great dish for a cold winter night — and like all stews, it's even better reheated.

2 lamb shanks (about 1¼ lbs.) cut in half
½ pound lamb shoulder, cut into 3-inch pieces
1 T. peanut oil
2 cups beef or chicken stock, heated
1 cup pearl onions
6 garlic cloves, chopped
2 cups baby carrots
1 serrano chile, cut lengthwise (optional)
½ lbs. red potatoes, quartered
½ lbs. creamer potatoes, quartered
½ cup diced butternut squash
½ lb. yucca, peeled and sliced lengthwise (optional)
2 cups chopped tomatoes
1 T. brown sugar
2 tsp. salt
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

Steps: In a large, heavy casserole or cast-iron pot, heat the oil over medium heat, and add the meat to the pot and brown it, turning it as it browns (about 5 minutes). Add the stock carefully, cover, and let the meat cook over medium low heat for 20 minutes. Then layer the onions, garlic, carrots, potatoes, squash, yuca and tomatoes over the meat. Sprinkle the sugar, salt and pepper over the top, cover and continue to cook over low heat for 1 hour and 40 minutes. Remove from heat, let rest for 10 minutes. Serve hot.

Tswana Roasted Butternut Squash with Sage, Thyme and Shallots

(Serves 6)

This is a great side dish. It goes well with seafood as well as chicken and meat dishes. In Botswana, the squash is seasoned with sage and thyme, but we also tried cooking it with rosemary, an option for another equally good, but different, taste.

3 cups of peeled (use a potato peeler), seeded and diced (½-inch cubes) butternut squash (see note)
2 T. virgin olive oil
2 T. diced shallots
2 T. diced sweet onion (e.g. Vidalia, Maui)
1 tsp. minced fresh sage and ½ tsp. minced fresh thyme, or ½ tsp. fresh minced fresh rosemary
½ tsp. salt
½ tsp. black pepper
1 tsp. sugar

Steps: In a bowl, mix the squash with the oil and spread it evenly on a sheet pan covered with aluminum foil. Put it in a preheated 450-degree oven for 12 minutes. In the oil remaining in the bowl used to mix the oil and squash, mix the shallots, onions, sage and thyme (or, alternate recipe, just the rosemary). When the squash is done cooking, add the roasted squash to the ingredients in the mixing bowl. Add salt, pepper and sugar, toss gently, and spread the squash mixture over the same sheet pan. Finish baking in oven for another 10 minutes (the onions will begin to caramelize along the edges).

Note: Use only butternut squash — it's very difficult to extract flesh from other winter squashes.