

# A Traveler's Library

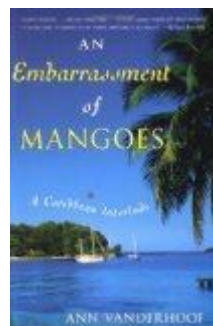
*Books, Movies, and other Travel Inspirations*

## Sail Away from It All

🕒 June 7, 2012   📁 Books, Caribbean, Cookbook, Destinations   📌 Caribbean, cookbook, food travel, guest, guest post, lobster recipe, memoir, recipes, sailing   👤 Brette Sember

## TASTY TRAVEL THURSDAY

**Destination: The Caribbean**



**Book: *An Embarrassment of Mangoes: A Caribbean Interlude* (2005) by Ann Vanderhoof**

## Article by Brette Sember



*Ann Vanderhoof's sailboat, Receta, under sail; photo credit: Kenmore Henville*

Have you had one of those days where you fantasized about just jumping on a boat and taking off for the Caribbean for a year or more? In ***An Embarrassment of Mangoes***, Ann Vanderhoof and her husband do just that, but they do a little advance planning first. They lived in Toronto and in the dark days of winter put together a five-year-plan that would allow them to save enough cash so they could rent their home, put their belongings in storage and head out on the open seas for a year or two (which ends up being two). The five-year-plan became a six-year-plan, but they did eventually manage to set sail on the sailboat *Receta* (recipe, in Spanish), with its dinghy, *Snack*. Clearly, eating well was going to be part of the plan (although some of the provisions she stocked are unappetizing to say the least, such as canned whole chickens).



*Vanderhoof in Receta's galley with a batch of Papaya-Banana Muffins; photo credit: Steve Manley*

Island escapism fantasies aside, I was drawn in by the descriptions of life aboard this boat, particularly Vanderhoof's talk about her tiny galley kitchen. She put a lot of thought into what exactly she could bring along and on the journey from Lake Erie to Grenada and parts beyond, she cooks an amazing assortment of dishes in her cramped space: crabcakes, curried lobster, tropical salsas, fried plantains, mango crisp, stuffed christophenes and more. But life on board a sailboat is not all lobsters and mangoes. There are so many things you would never think about. No cardboard food boxes are allowed on board (they carry roach eggs), so all supplies have to be unboxed before boarding. Produce is washed with bleach and water before it is loaded and all dry food stuffs are double bagged in zipper bags. Then there is the boat maintenance. *Receta* is dry docked for work and they live without a refrigerator or toilet for weeks in the baking sun with the boat on land. Vanderhoof has to cook while they are sailing and seasick, resulting in less than gourmet concoctions at times.

Sailing to the islands is just the first step (not to minimize the dangerous seas and strong winds to be con-



*Vanderhoof eating a mango; photo credit: Steve Manley*

tended with along the way). Once there, they must rely on irregular public transportation or the kindness of strangers to get to markets, stores, homes of locals who sell food, and to see any of the sights. Vanderhoof and her husband get to know many locals who share their cooking secrets for things like bread-fruit and callaloo stew. They also learn how to catch local seafood in ways they never imagined (diving and looping a wire around a lobster's neck, for example). Eating aboard a sailboat means learning to net shrimp in the Low Country (along the Intra-Coastal Waterway), spear lobster in the islands, peel mangoes, spit on your lure before dropping it in the water, and crack conch.

Vanderhoof published another island memoir with recipes in 2011: ***The Spice Necklace: My Adventures in Caribbean Cooking, Eating, and Island Life***, and **her website** is packed with sailing and cooking information.

Vanderhoof's account makes sailing feel very real. The frustrations and the fun are laid bare in this honest examination of what happens when you set sail for two years. Her honest narrative makes it clear how much the experience meant to her and also makes it clear to me I'll continue to best **enjoy the islands from solid ground!**

Here's one of Vanderhoof's shipboard recipes to enjoy:

## Dingy's Curried Lobster

This treatment showcases the flavor of the rich meat without overwhelming it with melted butter. Serve the lobster over rice.

- 1 large lobster (about 2 pounds)
- 1 small onion, sliced thinly
- 1 large clove garlic, grated
- 1 small cubanelle or green bell pepper, sliced thinly
- ¼ teaspoon seeded and finely chopped hot pepper
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 green onion, smashed and chopped
- 2 teaspoons white vinegar or lime juice
- 1 teaspoon (approx.) curry powder
- 1 tablespoon ketchup
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1. Cook the lobster in boiling water. When it is cool enough to handle, remove the tail meat (and claw meat, if you're using a clawed lobster) and cut into small chunks. (Reserve the rest of the lobster to make Lobster Broth; see below.)
2. Toss the rest of the ingredients, except the oil, with the lobster meat. Taste and adjust seasoning, adding a little more curry powder if necessary. (There should be just a hint of curry flavor.) Refrigerate for a couple of hours to allow flavors to blend.

3. When ready to serve, heat the oil in a heavy pan or wok until very hot. Stir-fry lobster mixture for a minute or two. Add about 1/2 cup water to create a bit of sauce and allow to cook for just a couple minutes longer. Serve over rice.

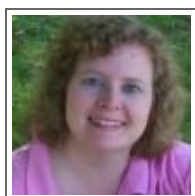
Serves 2.

## Dingis's Lobster Broth

This needs to be made with a large Caribbean spiny lobster, because the parts that remain after the tail is used still contain substantial meat. Break the remainder of the steamed lobster into pieces and put in a large pot. Add a couple of potatoes and carrots (and green figues, or half a plantain, if you like), cut into chunks. Season with salt and pepper, and add a tablespoon or two of butter or margarine and an inch of water or light fish stock. Bring to a boil, lower heat, cover pot, and simmer, stirring occasionally, for about 30 minutes or until vegetables are tender. After the broth is at a simmer, drop in dumplings, if desired. (To make dumplings, combine 1 cup all-purpose flour with 2 teaspoons baking powder and 1/4 teaspoon salt. Cut in 2 tablespoons butter or shortening to make small pieces, then add 1/2 cup milk all at once. Stir to mix thoroughly and make a soft dough. Knead gently with floured hands about five times until smooth. With floured hands, shape dough into 1-inch balls and drop into hot broth. Cover pot and simmer 15 minutes. Don't peek during cooking.) Serve Lobster Broth in deep bowls.

If you have access to a West Indian market, substitute sive (West Indian chives) for the green onion and a seasoning pepper for the cubanelle (or green bell pepper) and the hot pepper.

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Brette writes often about travel, food, and home arts and is the author of more than 40 books about food, law, health, family issues, business, finance and textbooks. She blogs at [Putting It All on the Table](#) and her personal web site is [Brette Sember](#).

[Brette Sember](#) – who has written 27 posts on [A Traveler's Library](#).



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## About Brette Sember

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## 7 thoughts on “Sail Away from It All”



June 7, 2012 at 7:49 pm

what a great post – i want to read this book!

wandering  
educators

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June 7, 2012 at 12:36 pm

a fine article for a week in which World Oceans Day is celebrated. thanks, Brette and Vera.

Kerry Dexter

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June 8, 2012 at 12:17 am

Did not know about Oceans Day. Thanks, and I'm glad we are in sync. Brette, I am wild about lobster so always glad yo see another way to eat it. So many people had recommended this book and I'm happy to have this great summary.

pen4hire

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June 7, 2012 at 11:13 am

Oooh, I'm so excited to read this review. I've had this book on my reading list for a while now.

Pamela

My husband and I are on year 2 of our own 5 year sail-away plan so I'm devouring (pardon the pun) every sailboat voyaging book I can find.

BTW, some current sailors claim that the cockroach eggs in cardboard is a nasty rumor. But since you have nowhere to discard cardboard once you take off, there are plenty of good reasons to leave packaging behind at the dock.

Great review. Would love to try those mango muffins.



June 8, 2012 at 12:26 am

pen4hire

Pamela, we sailed the Aegean (with a captain but no crew) for ten days. Three other couples and we ate on shore most of the time since islands are close together, but took some food with us. The Greek capt. Went shopping with us but was not very helpful. Although we had a fridge on board he neglected to warn us it only was on when the motor was running. Since this was a sail boat and also the motor didn't run at night, we had to discard stuff like a (formerly) frozen chicken. That canned chicken sounds pretty good, Brette.



June 7, 2012 at 9:16 am

Jen

I am adding this to my already a mile long summer reading list. If I weren't so afraid of the vast ocean and everything living in it, I would totally jump on a tiny sailboat and sail around the world. What an adventure!



June 7, 2012 at 7:33 am

merr

I'm not a lobster eater anymore, but those mango muffins looks light and yummy!  
Nice post, Brette!

*Comments are closed.*