



Fish Chowder
BERMUDA

Splash in My Soup

Let me come clean here: I don't like chowder. It isn't the taste. It's the texture — and the calories. And that means trouble on Bermuda. An expat whom I met on the plane over told me fish chowder is the island's national dish. "It's on every menu," he said.

Sure enough, sitting down for my first meal at the Fairmont Hamilton Princess' Heritage Court, I ask about the specialties. The server stresses one in particular. "Fish chowder," she says. Then, sensing I'm a chowder doubter, she goes to the kitchen and returns with a sample, saying, "Give it a try."

The waitress can't tell me exactly what kind of fish they use. The locals know it doesn't matter. What goes *around* the fish is what matters. But even that's hard to pin down, because chowder recipes are guarded. At Henry VIII Restaurant in Southampton, for instance, the recipe is not allowed to leave the kitchen. And while locals don't necessarily argue about the best chowder, their taste buds are quite discerning.

"If someone's fish chowder isn't up to par, they'll hear about it," says 64-year-old taxi driver Ronald Scraders, during a ride through the center of the island.

By day three I'm practically a chowder connoisseur. Around this time I also discover that, although each chowder has its own character, all of my bowls have had two common ingredients: black rum and sherry peppers sauce. Small bottles of each appear on tables everywhere. So I'm not sure if it's the chowder or the bottles, but something has me hooked. — KAREN ASP

We've been served (from left): Magic syrup in Bermuda, special sauce in Vietnam and a rare gem on Kangaroo Island.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: TOHRU MINOWA/AGE FOTOSTOCK; EVERETT KENNEDY BROWN/CORBIS; PHILIPPE WIDLING/CORBIS; CHAD CHISHOLM; TODD COLEMAN; OPPOSITE: VICTOR KORCHENKO/AGE FOTOSTOCK



LIVELY BITES Three words often said at mealtime in Japan: *I dare you*. (Above, from left): Tiny lake shrimp peek out from a bowl of soybeans. A plate of globefish can cost \$175, but that's nothing compared to what can happen if the chef hasn't filleted the fish exactly right — its toxins can cost you your life. Honey-glazed lollipops look shiny and sweet until you notice the tentacles — yep, they're octopus lollipops.



Open with Care

I learned how to wield a bottle of fish sauce in Hanoi, on mainland Vietnam, while slurping steaming rice-noodle soup — pho — at a hole-in-the-wall kitchen. A fellow diner nudged a locally made amber liquid, Red Boat, toward me and smiled. So by the time I make my way to the island of Phu Quoc, 30 miles off Vietnam's southwest coast, I'm using the stuff on everything. This is when I meet Mrs. Linh for my first Vietnamese cooking class.

"We make something easy," Mrs. Linh says. In a clay pot over hot coals, we simmer garlic, red chilies, green onions and *nuoc nam*, known as, yes, fish sauce. When I ask Mrs. Linh why the sauce is so addictive, she says the makers of Red Boat use anchovies that are "fermented for a year, and pressed." The stuff is said to be so pungent that Vietnam Airlines staff can sniff it out on potential smugglers. Armed with this information, I consume the sauce like milk on cereal, knowing I will not be taking a bottle home. — CHANTAL MARTINEAU



Open with Force

The wind blows wildly. Pelicans stretch their ballooning necks. It's a boisterous day on Kangaroo Island when Paul Polacco bounds off his boat with untamable hair and a net filled with shells. Paul is the only scallop diver in South Australia, plucking half a ton of scallops a week for local restaurants. He cracks open a shell and holds out the meat. There's no butter or angel-hair pasta in sight. "Down it," Paul says. The scallop is briny. It's also sweet and creamy because there are no competing flavors — like butter or pasta. When Paul offers another, I hold up my hand. "Save it for dinner." — KATE PARHAM