

BOOK REVIEWS

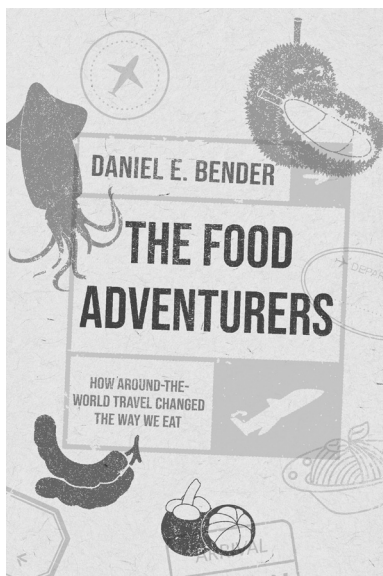
Daniel E. Bender: *The Food Adventurers: How Around-the-World Travel Changed the Way We Eat*, Reaktion Books, 2023: 352 pp., hardback, £20.

On my desk, next to me as I write this, lies an exotic fruit hotly desired but reputedly never eaten by Queen Victoria. A mangosteen. She never ate it because it was impossible to ship. The fruit went rotten before it arrived. Or at least that's what we are told.

Daniel E. Bender's book *The Food Adventurers* offers us a whole, delectable chapter on the mangosteen. It is a rare, delicious point in a book which concentrates on the ways food, seen through the eyes of gastro-tourists, was judged exotic but dangerous.

The book uses diverse sources – travel books, diaries, and postcards – and presents a mixed bunch of food explorers. They are, with a few notable exceptions, wealthy and full of disdain for the global food they encounter.

For example, the English traveller Edith James on board the steamship *Franconia* in 1926. The *Franconia's* holds were bursting with European supplies which meant that wealthy tourists like Edith could rely on familiar food all around the world. She wrote about the 56 dishes for breakfast and 60 for lunch but was appalled by local fare. In her diary she recorded untasteful experiences,



chickens barbequed until black and Japanese women cutting up turnips on the floor. In Hawai'i, her scorn reached grand heights. Not only was the food tropical but it was American. A sign that read 'Hot Dog on a bun' confirmed her terror of eating local. Only later she discovered that the dish was not canine but a sausage on a split roll, served hot.

Harry Franck was disdainful of global tourists like Edith James and chose instead to travel rough. Like many travellers mentioned in the book, he proclaimed his bravery in eating local foods. He liked to prove his manhood by travelling cheap, dressing in baggy, torn clothes and hitting the high seas. In Beirut, when offered a bowl of lentils, chopped potatoes in oil and yoghurt he mocked the dish, claiming he'd need 'a pair of biceps' to tear the accompanying flatbreads. I was happy to read that his wife Rachel Latta Franck wrote her own revenge book, *I Married a Vagabond*, describing the difficulties of living with a man like that.

Food Adventurers offers other examples of world travel of the virtual kind. We are introduced to food consultant Myra Waldo whose *Complete Round-the-World Cookbook* offers world recipes, adapted for 1960s American housewives, so that virtual tourists could 'circle the globe without ever leaving their table.' She made exotic food accessible by making recipes less alarming. A trip to India? Take 'sautéed chicken, onions, tinned broth, yoghurt and a few teaspoons of pre-ground spice.' Want to go to the South Pacific? Use pineapple chunks, raisins and a splash of rum. 'Pollo, galinha, huhn, gai, Poulet, hens, kip, kykling, kana...all chicken' she wrote.

Bender's book reveals, perhaps, the limits of travel as a way of altering one's view of the world. These global travellers took their prejudices with them. Food – and people – were seen through the lens of their own cultures and societies. Rarely is it the cast of characters that make a food book interesting. But here the food adventurers come alive through their accounts of food which Bender weaves into a delicious history of gastro-tourism. Like the mangosteen, I devoured it with abandon.

PAUL COUCHMAN