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FREQUENT FLIER

A Restaurant Owner Bites Into Something Foul, Dark and Winged

IN my line of work, I have to go everywhere to get new ideas. When it comes to food, I will eat local delicacies to get inspiration, too.

I was a guest chef at a big festival in South Africa and decided I was going to extend my stay so I could see the Seychelles, a place I always wanted to go. The islands were as beautiful as everyone said. I got really excited when I found this little restaurant on one of the islands. The scents were amazing. I asked a staff member about the house special. It was bat.

I had never eaten bat, but I figured that since bats eat fruit, it couldn't be that bad. I ordered mine grilled. I can honestly say it was the single worst thing I have ever eaten in my entire life. The wings have more bones than any piece of fish on the planet. I'm lucky I didn't choke.

But choking may have been preferable to spitting out bat stubble, which I had to do since the bat wasn't cleaned all that well before cooking. The meat, all one-half ounce of it, was nasty. The only way I knew I could get

the taste out of my mouth was by drinking some tequila. There wasn't any. In fact, there was no liquor at all.

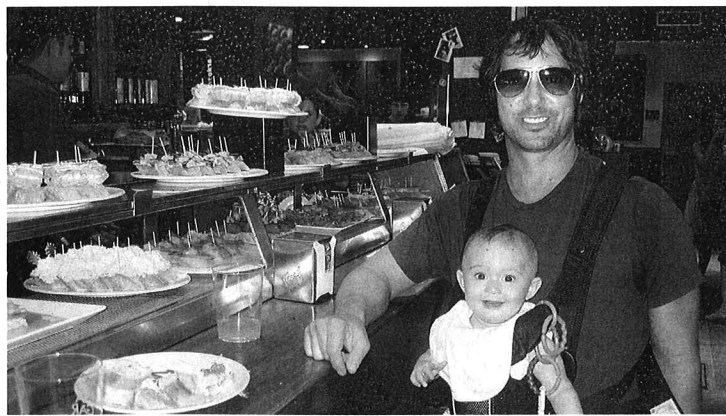
Several other restaurant patrons and I took a ferry to get to another island. I got sick, so did most everyone else who ate bat. It was like a horror movie. I'm still trying to get the image out of my head of bat flying out of my mouth.

On the other hand, the ant larvae taco I had in Mexico was great. If you put on enough hot sauce, most anything is good.

Trying to recreate what I see when I travel is a lot of fun. Sometimes it's easy; other times not so much. When I was in Spain, every tapas restaurant had a bull's head on the wall. I thought it would be cool to get one for my tapas restaurant, Toro, but I never had any luck, and I looked everywhere, including South America.

When I was in Tijuana, I found this metal worker who was selling crafts. He had giraffes and crocodiles that he made out of metal, so I asked him if he had a bull's head. He didn't, but he said he could make one for \$50.

I told him I was leaving for Boston the next day. I thought



Ken Oringer, owner of six Boston restaurants, with his daughter, Verveine, at a Spanish market.

there was no way he could do it before I left, and if he did finish it, I figured it would be about the size of my fist. Don't ask me how he did it in time, but he crafted a life-size bull's head for me, and it was gorgeous.

I'm an idiot and didn't think about how I was going to get it across the border. The thing

weighs about 150 pounds, and wouldn't fit into a taxi.

So my girlfriend, Celine, with whom I was traveling, and I walked it over the border. The thing was so heavy we both had to hold onto it. I had to check it when we flew out from California and I thought I'd never see it again.

But when we arrived at Logan and waited for the oversize luggage, there it was. It's now hanging in my restaurant.

Celine is now my wife. She didn't think I was an idiot and didn't complain once while helping me carry the thing, which are just two of the 17,000 reasons I love her.

Q. How often do you fly?

A. About three to four times a month, although with a second child on the way it might get a bit harder.

Q. What's your least favorite airport?

A. La Guardia. I have to arrive so early for a short flight to Boston it makes me crazy.

Q. Of all the places you've been, what's the best?

A. I'm obsessed with the Tokyo fish market, Tsukiji. I love Japan, and the people there, and wish them good things.

Q. What's your secret airport vice?

A. Architecture magazines and the local newspaper from wherever I am. Plus, I like to snack on salty foods, so I'll always grab a container of good olives and some Marcona almonds.

By Ken Oringer, as told to Joan Raymond. E-mail: joan.raymond@nytimes.com.