

destination: ANGUILLA

The Quest for Crayfish

BY MARYLOU CROWLEY

I'm on a motorboat speeding away from Sandy Ground beach on Anguilla, where a small spit of white sand hovering like a mirage in the distance grows larger. It's called Sandy Island.





It's not my first trip to this idyllic spot in the Caribbean. I love it for the deserted-island feel of the place. There's also the beachcombing, swimming and snorkeling. But this time, I'm craving crayfish and there is no better setting in which to enjoy this delicacy.

The Anguillians call them crayfish, but no one knows why. They're not the small freshwater shellfish known by the same name. The proper name is *spotted spiny lobster*, and they're like smaller cousins of the Caribbean lobster found near the islands. But Anguilla claims crayfish are indigenous to their island, even though that's also not completely accurate. What's true, though, is that no other Caribbean island does crayfish like Anguilla.

I hop off the boat into crystal clear water and walk up the powdery white sand to the bar to order one of Jo Jo's famous rum punches. After a 20-minute walk around the perimeter of the island, I hang out with Ernice Joseph, the grill master, to see if I can pick up some tips about how to prepare perfectly grilled crayfish. The seasoning mix is a closely guarded secret, but I come away with a few tips.

First of all, the crayfish are cleaned thoroughly in seawater. The tails are cut in half lengthwise. A healthy squeeze of lemon, and light sprinkle of the proprietary seasoning mixture that included, from what I could tell, paprika, garlic powder and lemon pepper, among other things, are added. Then off to a hot grill, flesh side down, for a few minutes...then turned over to finish cooking, shell side down. With my toes in the sand, I eat slowly to savor every bite. A rain squall passes by in the distance. The sun reappears. The sea beckons. Shells and sea fans that washed ashore needed a second look to see what I wanted to add to my collection of seaside treasures. It's a Caribbean experience that's hard to beat.



The last boat leaves the island at 3:30PM and I wait until the last minute to pack up my things. Ten minutes later, I'm back on Anguilla, an island with striking beaches, aquamarine water and bluer-than-blue skies. On this trip, though, I'm on a quest. With all this beauty as my backdrop, I order crayfish everywhere I go. Too much of a good thing? Not at all.

There are plenty of great restaurants on Anguilla and many of them have crayfish on the menu. A great spot for grilled crayfish is Straw Hat Restaurant at the award-winning Frangipani Beach Resort on Meads Bay. At E's Oven, a favorite local dining spot, Chef Peggy Hughes shared with me how she prepares the very popular dish with lime juice and garlic butter. As much as I love this shellfish prepared on the grill, I decided to search for chefs who were taking it in other directions too.

On Anguilla, they call Sunday "fun-day," and there are several beach bars where people hang out and enjoy music and great food. At Da'Vida on Crocus Bay, I tried their seafood sampler featuring crayfish with mussels and mahi-mahi in a garlicky seafood broth. Over at the spectacular Zemi Beach House Resort & Spa located on Shoal Bay East, another of Anguilla's perfect beaches, the preparation begins with the grill but is finished with a delicious coconut lime vinaigrette and topped with mango salsa. The crayfish dish served at The Reef by CuisinArt was poached and plated with purées of cauliflower and peas and a touch of mandarin butter sauce. And on a hot and sultry night, I lingered with friends on the wrap-around porch of the acclaimed Veya Restaurant and delighted in butter-poached crayfish with spinach risotto.

I knew I was only skimming the surface of what crayfish magic was possible in the hands of the talented chefs on this island. I'd go back in a heartbeat for more. www.िवisitanguilla.com

Intermezzo



POACHED ANGUILLIAN CRAYFISH WITH PEA AND CAULIFLOWER PURÉE AND MANDARIN BUTTER SAUCE The Reef by CuisinArt

SERVES 4

For crayfish

- 4 crayfish tails (or lobster tails),
split lengthwise
- 1 rib of celery, chopped
- 1 carrot, chopped
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 onion, chopped
- 3 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- 4 cups water
- 1 teaspoon salt

For braised celery

- 1 rib of celery, peeled and cut diagonally
into 1-inch pieces.
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 cup water
- Pinch salt

For pea purée

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 shallots, finely chopped
- 1 cup vegetable stock
- 2½ cups peas
- Small handful fresh mint leaves
- Salt

For cauliflower purée

- 1 head cauliflower, trimmed,
cut into florets
- ½ cup water
- ½ cup chicken or vegetable stock
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

For mandarin butter sauce

- 2 cups mandarin orange juice
- 10 tablespoons unsalted butter,
cut into cubes
- Pinch salt

1. Poach crayfish. In a large pot, bring water, celery, onion, carrots, bay leaf, salt and vinegar to a rolling boil. Add crayfish; cook for approximately 7 minutes. Remove crayfish and place into ice water. When cool, remove

meat from shell; set aside.

2. Braise celery. Place the celery in the water with thyme and salt; bring to a simmer. Cook for 20 minutes. Remove celery from heat and let cool. Refrigerate and reheat when needed.

3. Make pea purée. In a medium saucepan on medium heat, melt butter. Add shallots; stir for 3 minutes, until softened. Add vegetable stock; increase heat to high, until stock boils. Add peas, reduce heat to medium and simmer for 2 minutes. Remove peas from heat and cool slightly, stir in mint leaves. Place mixture into a food processor;

blend into a fine purée. Season with salt to taste. Remove mixture from the processor and cool over an ice bath to retain the green color. Cover and chill. Reheat when needed.

4. Make cauliflower purée. In a medium saucepan on high heat, combine cauliflower, water and chicken stock; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a simmer; cook cauliflower until very tender, about 15 minutes. Remove cauliflower from stock and drain. Place in blender and purée until smooth. Add butter; process 5 to 10 seconds more. Season with salt and pepper. Cover and chill. Reheat when needed.

5. Make mandarin butter sauce. In a small saucepan on medium heat, heat juice and salt until reduced to 1/2 cup. Reduce heat to low; add butter by slowly whisking 1 cube at a time until emulsified completely. (Do not boil this sauce or it will separate and curdle.) Let sit in a warm place until ready to use. Do not refrigerate.

6. To serve, place most of the cauliflower and pea purées on bottom of each dish, reserving some for garnish. Top with the crayfish tails. Garnish with braised celery and dollops of pea purée, cauliflower purée and mandarin butter sauce.

GRILLED CRAYFISH WITH
COCONUT LIME VINAIGRETTE
AND MANGO SALSA
Zemi Beach House Hotel and Spa

SERVES 4

- For crayfish
- 4 crayfish (or lobster tails), split lengthwise
 - 1/4 cup olive oil
 - Salt
 - Freshly ground black pepper

- For coconut lime vinaigrette
- 3 1/2 ounces freshly squeezed lime juice
 - 1/2 cup coconut milk
 - 1 1/4 teaspoons salt
 - 1 tablespoon honey
 - 3 cloves garlic, minced
 - 1/2 cup grapeseed oil

- For mango salsa
- 2 large ripe mangoes, peeled, cut into small dice
 - Juice of 2 lemons
 - Juice of 1 lime
 - 1 medium red pepper, cut into small dice
 - 1 bunch chives, minced
 - 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
 - Salt
 - Freshly ground black pepper

1. Grill crayfish. Brush tails with grapeseed oil; season with salt and pepper. Grill, flesh side down for 2 to 3 minutes. Flip tails over and grill shell side down for another 2 to 3 minutes. Place tails on a baking sheet

and finish cooking in a 350°F oven for 5 minutes. Set aside and keep warm.

2. Make coconut lime vinaigrette. Whisk all ingredients except grapeseed oil in a bowl. Slowly whisk in the grapeseed oil until vinaigrette is emulsified. Adjust seasoning and set aside.

3. Make mango salsa. Mix all ingredients together; chill until ready for use.

4. To serve, spoon coconut lime vinaigrette over crayfish tails; top with mango salsa.

BUTTER POACHED CRAYFISH
WITH SPINACH RISOTTO AND
CRISPY PARSNIP GARNISH
Veya Restaurant

SERVES 4 TO 6

- For parsnip garnish
- 1 large parsnip, peeled
 - 4 cups vegetable oil
 - 1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley

- For crayfish
- 6 crayfish (or lobster tails), split lengthwise
 - 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
 - 3 garlic cloves, minced
 - Kosher salt
 - Freshly ground black pepper
 - 1 pound unsalted butter, or more if necessary
 - Juice of 1 lemon

- For risotto
- 1/2 cup white wine
 - 2 to 3 cups water or vegetable stock
 - 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
 - 1 medium white onion, minced
 - 1 tablespoon minced garlic
 - 2 cups Arborio rice
 - 1/2 cup grated Parmesan Reggiano cheese
 - 10 ounces fresh spinach
 - Kosher salt
 - Juice of lemon

1. Make parsnip garnish. In a deep skillet or deep fryer, heat oil to 325°F. Using a vegetable peeler, shave off very thin strips of parsnip. Fry very briefly until strips just start to turn a very pale golden color. Transfer to a paper towel; salt immediately.

Parsnips will crisp as they cool. Set aside.

2. Prepare crayfish. Preheat grill or griddle. In a small bowl, combine olive oil and garlic. Brush crayfish with garlic oil; season with kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper. Grill, flesh side down, until 1/4 cooked. Turn and cook, shell side down, until 1/2 cooked. Move to tray; cool at room temperature. When cool enough to handle, remove crayfish meat from shells.

3. In a large, shallow skillet, melt butter with lemon; salt to taste. Maintain a temperature of about 180°F. (Butter should never boil or even simmer). Submerge crayfish meat in butter. Poach until cooked through, about 4 minutes, turning occasionally.

4. Prepare spinach. Place spinach in a large colander in a clean sink. Prepare an ice bath. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Pour boiling water over spinach in colander. Plunge spinach into ice bath to stop cooking. When cool, remove and squeeze spinach to remove as much water

as possible; chop roughly. Set aside.

5. Make risotto. In a large saucepan in medium heat, heat water or stock; keep warm on low heat. In a large saucepan on medium high heat, heat oil until it starts to ripple. Add onion and garlic; sauté until translucent (do not brown). Add rice; stir to coat very well. Reduce heat to medium-low. Add wine; stir continuously until all wine is absorbed into rice. Add about 1/2 cup of heated water or stock at a time, stirring constantly until liquid is absorbed by rice. Continue adding liquid and stirring constantly until rice becomes al dente or tender, approximately 30 minutes. When risotto is creamy, add Parmesan and chopped spinach. Season to taste with kosher salt.

6. To serve, place a small amount of spinach risotto in center of shallow bowl. Arrange crayfish around risotto, spooning a small amount of poaching butter over each piece. Garnish with crispy parsnips and minced parsley.

