

Gone to Ghana: Necessity nudges taste changes

Written by Story and photo by Cordie Aziz
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Plantains; they have always been a food enemy of mine. I am not sure why I have never liked them, but I never have. I often used to joke with friends and family that I was the only second-generation African who wasn't fond of the fruit. But then I moved to Ghana, and my taste buds adjusted. The same food I used to readily reject, even if my stomach was growling, I now buy at the market on a regular basis. At first I found it odd that a despised food was now one of my favorites, but then as I looked back on this past year, I realized that my taste buds, in general, have changed. When I arrived in Ghana last year, I knew that I was relinquishing certain comforts; it just never occurred to me that food was one of them. I am not sure why I didn't realize this during my original exploratory trip, but once I was on ground it was apparent that finding food that I enjoyed was going to be a challenging experience. It is not that food is not readily available, it is. However the quality of food, especially from restaurants, leaves much to be desired. So I lost some weight, and when the hunger pains became too much, I decided I was going to learn to like the local food. After all, you can't live in Italy and not eat pasta, right?

So the past year has brought my palate many new taste experiences; both good and bad. I realized that smoked fish makes me sick-violently sick. I discovered that snail tastes slightly like calamari, and I have learned that my teeth are not equipped to chew skin and bones. I have also learned that okra, another food enemy, just might be ok. Let me assure you though, it's not making it to the favorite list just the tolerable list.

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I have learned to enjoy hot soup in hot weather and admitted to myself that I am not a fan of fufu. Goat is my preferred meat, but there is nothing like tilapia, pepper and banku on a Friday afternoon, and I have grown fond of the gizzard and liver, with plenty of raw onion. And I even discovered a new favorite dish, red-red and plantains.

Although finding the right diet in my new home has been, at times, like dining from a Fear Factor menu, overall it has been an awakening experience. It has made me realize that it is ok not to have meat with every meal and that sometimes I will have to eat foods that I simply tolerate and not love. It also made me realize that finding a new diet is much like finding a new life; you have to keep all your options open, even if you didn't like it the first time around, you may find yourself coming back. After all, you never know when your tastes, like mine, might have changed.