



THE ESSAY

Endless Summer What happens when you quit your job to chase the sun around the world?

By Jennifer V. Cole

I AM A WOMAN WHO LUXURIATES in the warmth of summer's kiss so intensely that I spent nearly 18 months ensuring I never escaped its embrace. After 17 years of making my living as a writer, I was traveling so much that my home had become an albatross—a place that signaled nothing more than the tedium of things that needed fixing. So I leaned into the travel. I sold my house, put everything in storage, and hit the road indefinitely to chase summer around the globe with nothing more than my laptop, a single suitcase containing a few sundresses and a swimsuit, and one hell of an appetite.

Along the North Sea in Holland, where the June sun hangs high until nearly 10 p.m., I met up with friends from college and ate the small, tender pickled herring found only at the beginning of the fishing season. In southwestern France, I joined a girl I'd met while studying abroad years earlier. Together we explored the region's pebbled coves by day (my first nude beach!) and dove deep into Catalan home cooking by night, preparing poulet aux gambas, a chicken and prawn dish simmered with Banyuls wine that eats like a sea-inflected coq au vin. Across the Mediterranean, the azure coast of Sicily beguiled me with its undulating transition from volcanic outcroppings to golden sand to limestone cliffs. Here, I felt I could feast for a lifetime on sweet and creamy gamberi rossi, the local red shrimp, served raw with a squeeze of lemon.

As the European sun weakened its gaze, I searched for cheap flights to anywhere warm. The exact destination wasn't important. Two hundred dollars to travel from Beirut to Bangkok with a 24-hour layover in Dubai? Perfect. Following tips from fellow travelers and last-minute transportation deals, I traded friends'

guest quarters for Airbnbs and beach-hopped from Tel Aviv to Beirut to Dubai to Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Though I had fewer connections, wherever I landed, I quickly learned that eating well, no matter the budget, is a universal priority, and the beaches are there for the taking. And people will help you find both. Through suggestions from store clerks and rental hosts and the meat guy at the local market, I found some of my favorite meals—and the most untouched beaches. Like the whole fried fish lathered in chile paste at Bu Qtair in Dubai, served along the Persian Gulf in the long neon shadow cast by the slick luxury hotel Burj Al Arab Jumeirah, and the cove in the Andaman Sea perfect for floating beneath the dramatic karst cliffs. (No, I'm not going to tell you where it is. Sorry.)

I made my way through Hawaii, California, and Mexico, then back to the American South for a family beach vacation in Gulf Shores, Alabama. Then an onward ticket to Spain, and back to southern Italy. By now, I'd found my rhythm. And my inner glow (SPF 30). At first glance, my destinations shared little more than jaw-dropping shorelines—sometimes rock, sometimes sand—and a profusion of seafood. But similarities resonated around the world: fish so fresh I often saw it being delivered to whoever was cooking it; shared affinities for chiles, citrus, and fresh herbs. And there were few fast meals: Lingering over a table along the sea as the food unfolds is a global pastime.

Eventually, my grand beach tour came to an end. Family obligations and some required work travel plopped me briefly back in cooler climes. But I've still got a foot on the road and an eye on the sun. There's a wooden sailboat in Puglia (and a captain who cooks some damn fine mussels) with my name on it.

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