

THE Traveling Fork

PAELLA

- BILL BLACKWELL



This month's edition of THE TRAVELING FORK comes to you from Spain, where we recently docked in Vigo (northeast coast), Malaga, Cartagena, and Barcelona on the Mediterranean coast. While on the Viking Saturn, I participated in a one day cooking school with the Head Chef, the Kitchen Chef, and the dessert Chef. Afterward, I persuaded the boss Chef to give me a tour of the kitchen. This is a kitchen aboard ship that prepares food for 1,000 shipboard cruisers like us, most of whom come from the USA and Canada with a sprinkling of Asians and others. Food of such quality is an amazing accomplishment given the required volume for so many.

Without trying to sound like a commercial for Viking, I will say that their food product was truly outstanding! As proof of that, I gained 10 lbs. in 10 days. Surprisingly, the Chef told me to use plain olive

oil for serious cooking instead of extra virgin olive oil because in a Paella like the one featured here, longer cooking with the extra virgin oil would add a small bitter element to the product. Never one to argue with someone of his culinary expertise, I have adopted PLAIN olive oil for the Paella pan. We purchased ours in a 22 inch diameter. Speaking of the ship's Paella Pan, it was 42 inches in diameter and was set up on a large outdoor gas stovetop. It covered the entire stovetop. This large production of Paella was soon gone, understandingly so, given its quality.



'Paese'

In future editions of The Traveling Fork, additional superb gastronomic creations from the onboard will be celebrated here.

Continued

CLASSIC PAELLA - SERVES 6-8

Base:

3 tbsp olive oil (non-virgin)
1 medium onion, finely chopped
3 cloves of garlic, minced
1 red bell pepper, diced
1 tomato, finely chopped

Protein:

8-10 large shrimp or prawns
8-10 mussels or clams
1 lb. chicken thighs, cut into chunks
½ lb. chorizo, sliced ¼ inch thick

Alternatively, if you want a pure seafood paella:

8-10 large shrimp, 8-10 mussels and/or clams
½ lb. squid rings or cut calamari
Small chunks of white fish (halibut, corvina, cod, etc.)



Rice and Stock:

2 cups bomba or calasparra rice (short grain Spanish rice)
4 cups hot chicken or seafood stock
1 pinch of saffron threads (soaked in a little water or toasted in a dry pan)
1 tsp salt and 1 tsp paprika

Vegetables:

½ cup green beans cut into ½ inch slices OR ½ cup frozen English peas
Optional: artichoke hearts or roasted red pepper strips for garnish, along with
Lemon or lime wedges and fresh parsley chopped

Preparation:

Prepare the Sofrito (the base) by heating the olive oil in a wide paella pan over medium heat. Add the chicken and chorizo and sear until golden; then remove and set

saffron and salt to taste. Return the chicken and chorizo to the pan; stir once to distribute the rice evenly; don't stir again. This helps to form the crispy bottom crust.

Cook the paella by bringing it to a boil and lower the heat to reach a gentle simmer. Cook uncovered for 15-18 minutes, rotating the pan for even cooking. After 10 minutes arrange the shrimp, mussels & clams on top. If the liquid evaporates too quickly, add more stock.

Create the *Socarrat* (the 'crisp bottom'). When the liquid is mostly absorbed and you hear gentle cracking, increase heat for the final 1-2 minutes in order to develop the crispy bottom layer, *but don't burn it!*

Remove from heat, cover loosely with foil or a towel and rest for 5 minutes. Garnish with parsley and lemon/lime wedges.

Tips for Perfection:

Pan width matters! The rice should be no deeper than ¾ to 1 inch. Don't stir after adding the broth; use good saffron, not artificial coloring. Stock quality is key, but our chef said that good bone broths from the grocery store are good, although he makes his own from fish trimmings in the kitchen. Test the *Socarrat* by tilting the pan: if the rice on the bottom is crisp and golden but not burnt, *it's perfect!*



aside. Add the onion and bell pepper, sauteeing them for 5-7 minutes until they are soft. Stir in the garlic, paprika, and tomato, cooking until the mixture thickens and darkens slightly, about 5 minutes.

Toast the rice by adding it to the Sofrito, stirring it to coat it for about 2 minutes. This toasts the grains and they absorb flavor in this way. Add the stock and the