

Can you imagine anything more idyllic than spending a spring weekend with 19 mates lazing on a houseboat moored on the tranquil lagoon at Langebaan on the West Coast? Langebaan is one of a series of quaint historic villages which include Lambert's Bay, Paternoster and Saldanha Bay. In case you've never been there, it's about an hour's drive from Cape Town.

SNOEK

Around these parts snoek (*a member of the snake mackerel family*), mussels and crayfish are staple food, and in August and September the surrounding fields are carpeted with flowering wild daisies, succulents and other brightly coloured fynbos.

Human footprints dating back about 117 000 years have been found on the shore of the lagoon and for nearly as long 'bokkoms', which are salted mullets strung up in bunches and left to dry, have been a local delicacy. In fact the locals regard all the fruits of the ocean as culinary treasures and at the drop of a hat will slap the day's catch on the braai and sit back with a glass of something not so soft and take in the sun sinking slowly over the sea. I was more than happy to join in this quaint custom but first I needed to prepare the side dishes . . .

① Stuffed Butternuts, Potatoes and Sweet Potatoes on the Braai

Wash all the veggies well and pat dry. Halve and de-pip the bulb of the butternuts, then fill the cavities with blanched and chopped spinach, feta, butter and parsley. Rub oil and salt on the outside of the potatoes then wrap all the veggies in tin foil and braai on the coals, turning the potatoes regularly for an all over tan. You'll know the butternuts are cooked when the sides squash in easily and the potatoes when a sharp knife slides through them with ease.

② Strawberry Dressing for a Green Salad

Place halved strawberries in a bowl. Add 2 tablespoons sugar, balsamic vinegar and chillies to taste. Mix and allow to stand so that the juice from the berries is drawn out and forms a thick syrup which goes beautifully with the snoek. Serve over an array of salad greens, especially peppery rocket.

③ **Snoek on the Braai** Cut the snoek open along the backbone, from the tail to the head. Remove entrails and head and rinse. Next, cut one incision down the centre of each fillet (**be careful not to cut through the skin**). This increases the surface area of the fish, and what you are left with are two butterflied halves. Down in the Cape this vigorous form of gutting and butterflying a snoek is called 'vlekking'. Whack with salt and allow to stand for 20 minutes. Rinse and pat dry. Melt a large knob of butter in a saucepan, then add a handful of roughly chopped chillies (**seeds & all**),

a couple of chopped garlic cloves and apricot jam to taste. Combine all ingredients thoroughly. Liberally rub the sweet and sticky marinade/glaze well into the flesh side of fish - be careful because the bones are prickly! It's best to do this once it's on the braai. Place flesh side down on medium heat - that is, when you can hold your hand over the coals for about 8 seconds before it gets too hot. Watch the butter and jam turn golden brown. Then turn fish over to skin side but don't leave too long - allow for about 4 - 5 minutes per side
Get stuck in, but watch out for those bones.

