

- 1 Witchetty Grubs, a traditional Australian Aboriginal food.
- 2 Audley's Peter Stanley-Jones samples deep-fried tarantula.
- 3 'Bush Tucker'—Australia.

While the dishes of some countries have become immensely popular in the West, certain delicacies haven't caught our imagination quite so much.



MEAN Cuisine

The Chinese probably lead the way in the unpalatable, but there are several close contenders. The Chinese say that the Cantonese will eat anything with four legs except a table and anything with two apart from their neighbours. It's just about right, with owl, fox and snake spotted on menus. The reputation of the rest of the country is no better; sheep's head stew is a favourite in Xinjiang while a bottle of bee's wine comes complete with a good smattering of

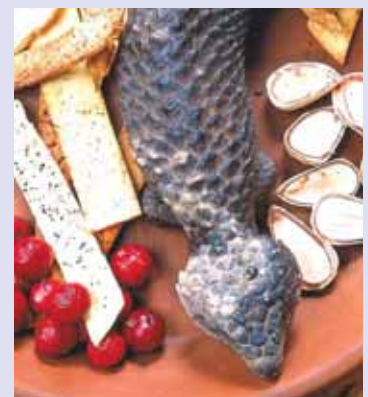
dead bees. Across the border, the Mongolians can't get enough of the marmot, a chubby little burrow-dwelling rodent. They love to barbecue it, using the methods of 'Khoorkhog' and 'Boodog', where the rodents are placed into an iron pot filled with hot rocks, and given a thorough roasting for a couple of hours. It's traditional, as you tuck into your charred rodent, to pass the hot greasy stones back and forth between each other. Unfortunately, for the Mongolian gourmet,

marmot-eating is a seasonal activity, as the animal is a carrier of the bubonic plague at certain times of year.

Venturing into Southeast Asia, serpent whiskey is a frequent sight in shops, the coiled cobra embalmed within the bottle reputedly adding aphrodisiac qualities. Our own Peter Stanley-Jones was offered deep-fried tarantula in Cambodia's Ratnikiri Province, and cow's nose is a delicacy in Surabaya. In New Zealand the fat and juicy hu-hu grubs are a traditional Maori staple whose taste has been compared to buttery chicken and peanut butter. Northern Australia's traditional 'bush tucker' includes the large abdomen of the green ant. With a flavour resembling lemon sherbet - it's recommended that the head is squashed first to prevent being bitten during consumption. In South Africa, the adjectives *hideous* and *slimy* have been applied to mopani worms offered to the squeamish visitor by hardy ranger types.

Visitors to South America fair no better. Capybara, the world's largest rodent, makes an excellent stew in Venezuela, and deep-fried winged ants known as culonas (meaning big bottom) are a favourite in the Orinoco Delta. The popularity of guinea pig in Peru is well-documented and is for some, perhaps remembering their first pet, a sometimes emotive menu item. It's really all down to conditioning, there is no doubt a wander around a Western supermarket would fascinate and very likely turn the stomach of a Laotian or Peruvian.

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