**Barriers to Trade**

**Is that a Sausage in your Suitcase?**

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At first, there's the thrill. You practically swooned tasting that sheep cheese in France. Or maybe it was rice crackers or pickled radishes in Tokyo. In your suitcase, you've managed to stuff a dozen delicious mementoes - an international doggie bag. You convince yourself it should be okay. After all, you're going to eat everything as soon you get home. And it's not like you're smuggling firearms.

So why are you sweating as one of the canine detectives at Toronto's Pearson International Airport approaches your luggage? Among the keenest pleasures of travelling is food not previously encountered. I still remember everything I ate on my first trip to Europe - the tang of olives in Paris and perfumed pesto in Genoa. Sure, you can now find these items at gourmet shops in Canada's major cities. But there's nothing quite like buying them at the source. They're fresher, of course, and usually cheaper. Back in your own kitchen, they bring back memories of trips past.

But there is a catch: Do you declare them at the airport? If you get caught with a rogue kilo of fresh Dutch Edam or a rope of Provencal garlic, will they be taken from you? Or worse, will you be charged a hefty fine for your attempt at long-distance takeout?

Few travelling gastronomes can figure out what edibles you can legally bring into the country, and this state of affairs creates a sense of guilt and confusion. The customs declaration form is maddeningly vague. What exactly are "plant materials" anyway? That delectable French greengage jam, impossible to find in Canada, is definitely made of fruit - but is it forbidden fruit? The tinned foiegras is meat ... isn't it? In the end, like many guilty foodies, I've kept mum.

None of which comes as a surprise to Edward Filman. An officer with Canada Border Services at Pearson, he says he has confiscated everything from fruit to bloody meat. Some pose unfair competition to local producers, others can carry pests that endanger Canada's food supply. To find offending foods, Filman and other officials count on a team of very effective spies: those food-sniffing beagles that work on the international arrivals level. They're trained to sniff out eggs, plums, potatoes, chicken feet and other meats as they circle the baggage carousels, while ignoring permissible foods.

In a closed-off area of Pearson one afternoon, Filman demonstrates with a dog named Lana. She circles bags in a faux arrivals area until she picks up the right scent - at which point she places a paw on the bag in question and wags her tail. If she smells contraband in your pocket, she may also jump up on you. All of which sounds friendly. But according to Filman, Lana has been on the job for six years and nothing dicey gets past her. And once she gets excited about your suitcase or carry-on bag, you will be asked firmly to open it and answer a few questions.

"Sometimes people bring in really stinky fish and declare it, because they think that we will then not look for meat. Once we found a whole sausage stuck down into the body of a fish," Filman recalls.

**WHAT NOT TO PACK**

Inspectors take a particularly stern view of meat. "What we are worried about is BSE [the mad-cow virus] infecting Canadian livestock," Filman says. "Only six countries in the world do proper testing to classify beef as being BSE-free: Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and the U.S. But this could change overnight."

This means no beef is allowed in, not even canned, since BSE is not destroyed by heat. Mutton also carries a small risk of the disease, so travellers coming home from Scotland can forget the haggis. And while commercially canned poultry and pork products are okay, nothing raw, smoked or salted is permitted. "We have no way of knowing how it was made, whether heat was applied," Filman says.

In fact, to keep up with the vast array of meats checked through major airports such as Pearson - surreptitiously or not - demands a knowledge of foreign delicacies. "Our inspectors know what to ask for," he says. "Someone coming from South Africa might say he has no meat. Then we ask, 'Do you have any biltong?' They are surprised that we know about that and admit that yes, they do." Biltong is beef jerky. In a bygone era, it was used as a provision for explorers leaving the Cape.

Then there are "candies" from the Far East. On the counter in his office, Filman shows me some in a small basket. Each one is wrapped in a bit of gold foil, with what looks like a brown cube inside. "We ask people coming back from China, 'What do you have to eat?' And they say 'Only candy.' When we ask to see it, it turns out to be meat candy; it's a common Chinese product."

Filman also has a collection of Polaroid photographs, which show that some smugglers are less subtle than others. These document seized meats, mostly raw, including hunks of bloody camel, hindquarters of gazelles, antelope and other "bush meat" people have attempted to bring from Africa.

"Lana found this piece of water buffalo in December, 2002," he says, pointing proudly to one picture. "And look at this goat. The hooves are still attached; it could carry hoof and mouth disease, which means you'd have to kill the herd if they get infected. It would cost millions." As for less exotic fare: Eggs are forbidden, hardboiled or not, because of the risk of avian influenza and other flu strains. Officials are also on the lookout for plums and peaches, which can carry a disease called plum pox.

"It causes the fruit to drop prematurely so the crop yields are reduced," Filman says. "We don't have it here, but it's endemic in Europe. You might say you are just going to eat it right away, but people eat the plum or nectarine then throw away the pit - the virus is in the pit."

Among the confiscated foods in Filman's office, I also notice seemingly innocent potatoes. "We have a huge potato-growing industry here and there are many kinds of blight that could be carried in," he says. "Anything with soil clinging to it is dangerous."

**CUSTOMS KOSHER**

All of which is interesting. But what I want to know is whether my stealth imports of dried paprika garlands from Budapest and almond cookies from Aix-en-Provence were worth the airport panic.

It turns I have been about as daring as a teenager smoking an oregano "joint." None of the foods I've snuck across the border in the past few years have been contrary to regulations. In fact, a surprising number of goodies - including fish and seafood, spices, baked goods, jams, sauces, oils and mustards - are perfectly okay. Customs inspectors don't even care if your cheese is pasteurized or un-pasteurized, since you are not bringing it in for resale. "Cheeses from Europe are okay so long as it's no more than $20 in value or more than 20 pounds by weight," Filman explains. "It's like wine or spirits: You can bring back a limited amount."

Should you be treating those mangoes, pineapples or Seville oranges like the fruit version of heroin, you can also relax. They represent no threat to our crops since tropical fruit don't grow here. Treats such as chocolate, coffee and tea are fine too. As are pistachios from the Middle East and other nuts. And more acquired tastes? Your guests may or may not eat them, but you are allowed to bring back crunchy roasted grasshoppers - often served with beer in Mexico - and dipping sauces from Laos made from insects. Once they're dead, such creepy crawlies are fair game.

Still, it's best to declare all the foods you are carrying. If you avoid meats, fruits with stones, potatoes and wheat stalks (they can carry wheat rust) you have nothing to worry about. But should you be caught with contraband, it will be taken from you and you may be fined up to $400. "I've had people act surprised and say, 'I had no idea that was in there - my mother packed my bag,' " Filman says, "That won't wash."

As for what happens to your seized ham, or that peach from your mother's garden that you brought back from holiday: Anything seized from incoming travellers, no matter how sentimental (or delicious), is destroyed the same day.

*To verify whether something you intend to bring from abroad is permitted, call Canadian Border Services at 800-461-9999.*

1. Why is no meat allowed into Canada?
2. What is BSE?
3. Why is some fruit allowed into Canada and other fruit not?
4. How much cheese are you allowed to bring into Canada?
5. Why does Canada Border Services not allow soil in the country?