

Picnics ahoy



Clockwise from top: The beautifully imagined picnic hampers are packed full of local produce; the worn wooden wheel of the Yukon, a Dutch timber sailing boat based in Franklin, which was sailed from Copenhagen; and the glorious vessel's bell tolls for lunch.

WORDS TRACY RENKIN PHOTOGRAPHY MATHEW FARRELL

Prepare to melt into relaxation while floating down the Huon River aboard the Yukon

THERE'S something special about unpacking a picnic someone else has lovingly prepared for you. Discovering the delicacies as you float down the Huon River aboard a Danish ketch may just be the perfect feasting experience.

This farm-meets-sea adventure was created after two women – Sadie Chrestman of Fat Pig Farm and Yukon vessel owner Ea Lassen – instantly clicked at a tourism event and nutted out an idea to fuse their two loves.

Ea says their friendship and now business venture is the perfect arranged marriage. “We made eye contact and we both said ‘I have wanted to meet you for ages,’” she says. “We like to travel with just the wind in our sails and Sadie’s farm grows everything organically – it’s the perfect fit. There’s a lovely feeling that just takes over when you are on the water. People are just so busy these days but when that special river silence hits them, they just melt into relaxation.”

The Yukon – a traditional 1930s sailing ketch – was raised from the mud at the bottom of a Copenhagen harbour and fully restored by Ea’s partner David Nash who paid for it with a case of beer. The pair first operated it as a charter vessel in Scandinavia before sailing around the world and finally anchoring in friendly Franklin where Ea says they instantly felt at home. The Yukon does daily cruises and often ventures further to the north and south.

Fat Pig Farm is a nationally recognised paddock-to-plate experience in Glazier’s Bay in the Huon Valley run by Sadie’s partner and chef Matthew Evans. The farm is a 28ha mixed property with pigs, dairy cows, beef cattle and a 1ha vegetable and herb garden with fruit and nut trees. The weekly long-table feasts and farm tours run all year round.

Sadie says she had always admired the Yukon from afar. From high up at Fat Pig Farm, looking over the goat house, she can just make out the sails of the Yukon as the breeze carries it

south on the Huon River below Glaziers Bay.

Before meeting its owner, she had promised herself that one weekend she would escape her farm chores and treat herself to a Huon River cruise. “The Yukon has become a feature on the river here so putting our specialities together seemed like a perfect combination,” Sadie says. “She looks amazing sailing down the river when she’s in full sail. I love being on the water here.”

One of the elements the pair has perfected is the friendly and warm welcome aboard. Names are remembered, picnic hampers are personalised for each guest and the atmosphere is relaxed and fun. “Ea is the friendliest person I have ever met, we just stood in the corner that night chatting and plotting how we could work together and we came up with this idea: gourmet food produced on our farm served aboard Ea’s 22m boat.”

The Fat Pig Farm Afloat sails are held only a few times each year. “It’s something we do as a very special occasion,” Ea says. “It’s a plan-ahead adventure.”

Sadie Chrestman of Fat Pig Farm and Ea Lassen of the Yukon have teamed up to run locally catered river sailing picnics.

As guests are guided onto the Yukon deck the first treat they are handed is a glass of Sadie’s refreshing cumquat apple juice kombucha steeped with fennel. It disappears too quickly. Not long after finding their padded seat, they are offered freshly picked strawberries from a vintage cane hamper. Local wines are poured just as the spinach and ricotta tarts come out. Guests are just brushing the crust crumbs onto the deck when Sadie starts calling out the names for the brown-paper lined picnic tubs. The look and feel of the picnic presentation has been designed by food stylist and author Michelle Crawford. Sadie likens them to the Tardis because they keep opening out to reveal more goodies. “It was important to us that our picnic looks and feels like a really bountiful feast,” Sadie says, before adding, “Does anyone need more wine?”

The Yukon heads up stream with skipper David at the wheel – the only original piece above water line on the whole ketch. He shares the story of the salvage and restoration as it meanders along by engine and later turns around as they hoist her impressive square sail and the north-easterly takes her away. The Huon Valley is lovely by road but spectacular from the water.

As for the food served on board, it’s all made from scratch. There are multiple layers of tastes and textures – all made by Sadie’s right-hand woman and kitchen manager, Kellie McChesney on the morning of the cruise – and as Sadie explains everything has a story.

The lemon chutney she serves is based on her dad’s recipe. It’s got lots of onion so it’s really dark and rich and quite caramelly. She carries a tray of condiments around as picnics are opened up. Multiple jars of mustards, relishes and chutneys are the perfect match to the food on offer.

There’s a salt and pepper salami made from the Wessex saddleback pig fed 60kg of acorns (raked up from under the Cygnet childcare centre) during its last two weeks. Its melty fat goes soft in your mouth. Then there’s the delicious hand-carved ham that was smoked over Tassie hardwood, smoked pastrami coated with coriander and peppercorns served with sauerkraut and winter cabbage, and last summer’s cucumbers preserved with lime and mustard seeds. There’s always a locally produced cheese because, Sadie says, we are spoiled for choice. The cheese platter is offered around more than once. Dig a little more and you’ll find roast potatoes, pickled turnips, zucchini salad and a soft centred baguette.

“There are many layers to the picnic,” Sadie says. “There’s a lot of thought that’s gone into them.”

The delicious lemon cordial is made from freshly squeezed le-

mons, which are put back into the jar and then infused with a bay leaf.

Guests are just finishing their lemon posset dessert with fresh raspberries when the Franklin Boat Shed comes back into view. The riesling Sadie serves on the cruise is from Fat Pig Farm’s neighbours, the Elsewhere Vineyard. It is fruity and delicious. There’s also a light and earthy pinot noir from Hughes & Hughes in Middleton.

“One of the things that is really special about Tassie is that we still have a lot of small farms and lots of small businesses in our food industry,” Sadie says.

“What that means is that there is a family behind it all. Everyone can tell you where the cream came from that was churned to make the butter. And that’s what’s really nice about having this network of small producers. There are local families behind them, rather than big businesses from the mainland.”

As guests wander away from their two-hour cruise, they are bid farewell by Ea and Sadie, who is holding a vintage biscuit container brimming with freshly baked almond meal cookies. “Go on, have another,” she says.

Upcoming Fat Pig Farm Afloat cruises are scheduled for Sunday, January 27, Saturday March 30, and Saturday April 6. For more information phone Ea on 0498 478 535. @fat_pig_farm @yukonsailingtours