

History

Originally from present-day New Guinea, breadfruit has been cultivated for over 3,000 years and was introduced to the Western world by British explorers.

In 1769, Captain James Cook sailed to Tahiti and discovered breadfruit. He recognized its potential as a food crop in other tropical areas and proposed to King George III that a special expedition be commissioned to transport breadfruit plants from Tahiti to the Caribbean. In 1787, William Bligh was appointed Captain of the HMS *Bounty* and instructed by the Royal Crown to transport over 1,000 breadfruit trees from Tahiti to the Caribbean to be used as a high-energy, nutritious food source for British slaves. However, a month into the voyage, Bligh's crew mutinied—expelling him from the ship in a longboat and throwing all the plants overboard.

Bligh successfully navigated the small boat on a daring 47-day voyage to Timor without charts or a compass. He recorded the distance as 3,618 nautical miles (6,701 km; 4,164 mi).

The ambitious Captain eventually returned to Britain, and five years after the original voyage, commissioned a second trip aboard the HMS *Providence*. It was this journey that successfully introduced breadfruit to the West Indies. There you can find some of the original trees, planted over 200 years ago in Jamaica, still producing fruit.

Fifteen centuries earlier, in 300 AD, Polynesians introduced breadfruit to Hawaii as a “canoe plant,” along with other plants including bananas, coconut, sweet potato and ginger. Today breadfruit remains an integral part of the diet and culture of the inhabitants of the South Pacific.