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## PORTUGUESE CUISINE

Portuguese cuisine is often confused with neighbouring Spanish cuisine however it is actually quite distinct due to its cultural isolation and historical background.

With such a large coastline, it should not come as any surprise that the sea has always been one of the main sources of food in Portuguese cuisine. Although not much is known about early culinary habits, archaeological evidence does show that by the end of the Palaeolithic period, about 7000BC the valley of the Tagus River was populated by hunter/gatherer/fishing tribes. The remains of shellfish and crustaceans, as well as the bones of oxen, deer, sheep, horses and pigs have been excavated from this period.

By 3000 BC Neolithic peoples had begun to practice agriculture and were practised in the use of polished stone tools and ceramics however it was the arrival and settlement of Celtic peoples by 600 BC which was to have a more profound culinary influence - more

so even than it's Spanish neighbour. The peoples occupying Portugal took advantage of the fine pasture-land, both for raising livestock and farming although wild game, shellfish and honey formed the basis of their diet. They also gathered nuts, in particular chestnuts, which they roasted and made into bread.

The arrival of the Romans had an effect on the dietary habits in this area. By the 2nd Century AD their building of new roads meant that food could be transported more easily, thus introducing new ingredients such as wheat to the different parts of the country. It is thought they also introduced olives (therefore olive oil), onions and garlic - three ingredients which are indispensable in Portuguese cuisine.

The Arabs who occupied the southern parts of Portugal from the early 8th Century AD also had a huge effect on Portuguese cooking, not only in the types of foods grown and eaten, but also on the preparation of foods. They introduced new irrigation methods which turned otherwise barren areas into agricultural land enabling fresh and new produce (such as almond trees, figs and citrus) to be grown. They also introduced new ingredients such as rice and spices and at least one cooking technique which still features in Southern Portuguese cuisine today, namely the Cataplana.

By the early 15th century, Portugal's sea-faring explorers were to add another dimension to the cuisine. The expansion of their

empire led to them introducing spices such as coriander, saffron and ginger to Europe, as well as tomatoes, potatoes, peppers and many other ingredients from The New World. Further driven by the desire to find exotic spices, it was a Portuguese, Vasco da Gama who discovered the sea route to India and the Far East. It was also around this time that what many think of as being the national ingredient of Portugal, came into popularity. Salted Bacalhau (cod) was used as a supplement to the usual cured pork to feed the sailors on the long voyages to the Far East.

### Breakfast

Portuguese breakfast is light and usually consists of milk, coffee (cocoa for children), bread or toast with butter, jam, cheese or ham. Croissants and cakes may also be included. Coffee is consumed by the Portuguese not only at breakfast, but throughout the day, especially as espresso. Eggs and meat are generally excluded.

### Fish and seafood

Portugal is a sea-faring nation at heart, and this is reflected in the amount of fish and seafood consumed by the Portuguese. Fish is served grilled, boiled (in this cases it is always flavoured with olive oil), fried or even roasted. Foremost amongst these is bacalhau, or salt cod, which is perhaps the most consumed type of fish in Portugal and of which it is said that there are more than 365 ways to cook, one for every day of the year. Also popular are sardines, especially when grilled as *sardinhas assadas*, as well as octopus, squid, crabs, shrimp, lobster, hake, horse mackerel (scad), lamprey, sea bass, scabbard (especially in the islands) and a variety of shellfish. *Caldeirada* is a stew consisting of a variety of fish and shellfish with potatoes, tomato and onion.

### Meat

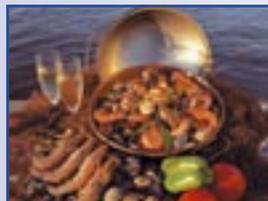
Meat is widely used, especially chicken, pork, beef, lamb, turkey and kid. Roasts and stews are the most common ways of preparing these. There is a frugal approach to ingredients, with nothing wasted. This emphasis is evident in the large number of dishes that make use of offal and the more unusual cuts of meat. This can be best observed during a *matança do porco*, or pig killing

## Seafood Cataplana

15 mins

### Serves 4 Ingredients

- 225g/8oz Fresh Mussels (in shell), scrubbed
- 225g/8oz Fresh Small Clams (in shell), scrubbed
- 225g/8oz Raw Prawns (in shell)
- 225g/8oz Baby Squid tubes, cut into rings
- 120ml/4fl.oz. White Wine
- 4 Garlic Cloves, chopped
- 8 sprigs of Fresh Thyme
- 1 Bay Leaf
- 60ml/2fl.oz. Extra Virgin Olive Oil



### Preparation

- ◆ Place all the ingredients in the bottom of a cataplana or a wide saucepan with a close fitting lid. Place over a low/medium heat, cover with the lid and cook for 5-8 minutes until the mussel and clam shells have steamed open.
- ◆ Stir well and remove and discard any mussels or clams which haven't opened. Serve immediately.





festival, where dishes are served using all parts of the animal. What cannot be served immediately is turned into a wide variety of cured or smoked meats, especially spicy sausages. These include *linguiça*, a seasoned pork sausage with onions, garlic and paprika, *chouriço*, a spicy dried sausage, *farinheira*, a sausage made of pork fat and flour and *negrinha* or *chouriço de sangue*, a sausage of pork blood similar to black pudding. A traditional meat dish is *cozido à portuguesa* consisting of boiled pork, beef, chicken and sausages with cabbage, carrots, potato and rice. In the north, especially in Porto, a stew made with beans and tripe is traditionally served.

## Cheese

There is a wide variety of Portuguese cheeses, especially made from goat's or sheep's milk, or both together. Usually these are very strong-flavoured and fragrant. In the Azores, there is a type of cheese made with cow milk with a spicy taste. (*queijo de S. Jorge*). Traditional Portuguese cuisine does not include cheese in its recipes, so it's eaten by itself before or after the main dishes. Another well known cheese is *Queijo da Serra da Estrela D.O.P.*, very strong in flavour, can be eaten soft or more matured. It is handmade from fresh sheep milk and a cardoon "*Cynara Cadunculus*".

## Vegetables

Vegetables that are popular in Portuguese cookery include tomatoes, cabbage and onions. There are many starchy dishes, such as *feijoada*, a rich bean stew, and *açorda*, a thick bread-based casserole generally flavored with garlic and cilantro or seafood. Many dishes are served with salad usually made of tomato, lettuce and onion flavoured with olive oil and vinegar. Rice is widely used, as are potatoes. Soup, made from a variety of vegetables is commonly available, one of the most popular being *caldo verde*, made from potato, thinly chopped collard greens and slices of *chouriço*.

## Drinks

Portuguese wine is of high quality and in last years has been considered by specialists among the best in the world. Port wine is a fortified wine of distinct flavour produced in Douro normally

## Pastry

- 2 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for rolling
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 10 tablespoons chilled unsalted butter, cut into 1/4 inch cubes
- 5-7 tablespoons ice water

## Custard

- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 1/2 cups heavy cream
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 6 egg yolks
- 12 tartlets Change size or US/metric
- Change to: tartlets US Metric

## Make the pastry:

- ◆ In the bowl of a food processor fitted with a metal blade, pulse the flour, salt and sugar to combine.
- ◆ Add the butter and pulse until the flour resembles coarse, uneven cornmeal, about 10 1-second pulses.
- ◆ Drizzle 5 tablespoons of the ice water over the mixture.
- ◆ Pulse several times to work the water into the flour.
- ◆ Add the remaining water, 1 tablespoon at a time, and continue pulsing until the mixture develops small curds.
- ◆ Turn the dough out onto a work surface, shape it into a disc and cover with plastic wrap.
- ◆ Refrigerate for at least 1 hour.
- ◆ On a lightly floured surface, roll half the dough to 1/16-inch thickness.
- ◆ Cut out 6 (4 1/2-inch) circles. (If you don't have a cookie cutter, a wide-mouth jar works well.) Ease the dough circles into a 12-cup (4-ounce capacity) nonstick muffin tin, pressing out any overlapping folds.
- ◆ Repeat with the remaining dough.
- ◆ Place the tin in the freezer for 5 minutes.

## Pasteis de Nata (Custard Tarts)

40 minutes 20 mins prep



- ◆ Remove and trim any overhang with the back of a knife so that the pastry cups are flush with the top of the tins.
- ◆ Line dough cups with cupcake papers and fill with dried beans or pastry weights.
- ◆ Bake at 350°F (180°C) for 8 to 10 minutes to set.
- ◆ Make the custard.
- ◆ Dissolve the cornstarch in 1/4 cup of the cream in a medium bowl.
- ◆ Add the remaining cream and sugar, and stir until the mixture is smooth and the sugar dissolves.
- ◆ Check for sugar granules with a spoon; none should remain.
- ◆ In a small bowl, blend the yolks with a fork until smooth.
- ◆ Add the yolks to the cream mixture, stirring gently to combine.
- ◆ Ladle the egg mixture into the partially baked pastry cups, filling to 2/3 capacity.
- ◆ Bake in at 350°F (180°C) until the edges of the custard are puffed and middle is still jiggly, about 20 to 25 minutes. (The custard will continue to cook.) Cool completely in the tin. The pastéis are best when eaten the same day.

served with deserts. *Vinho da madeira*, is a regional wine produced in Madeira similar to sherry. From the distillation of grape wastes from wine production is made a variety of brandies which are very strong tasting.

## Desserts

The Portuguese have a very sweet tooth, and especially enjoy rich, egg-based desserts. These are often seasoned with spices such as cinnamon and vanilla. Perhaps most popular is *leite-creme*—a set egg custard. Also popular is *arroz doce*—rice pudding, although *aletria*—

a similar dish, this time based upon a kind of vermicelli—is common. These are often decorated with elaborate stencilled patterns of cinnamon powder. Other custards include *puddim flan*—a kind of crème caramel. Cakes and pastries are also very popular. Most towns will have a local speciality, usually egg or cream based pastry. Originally from Lisbon, but popular nationwide, as well as among the diaspora, are *pastéis de nata*. These are small, extremely rich custard tarts, which are best eaten with a strong coffee.

