



Cuisine can provide amazing insights into the culture of a region. We take a close look at the food and drink scene in Portugal's northern city of Porto to see how things tick.

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Photography LIZ & MAX HAARALA HAMILTON

# FLAVOURS OF THE NORTH

**IT'S REALLY HORRIBLE,"** says coffee roaster Gonçalo Cardoso of his country's signature brew, typically created with dark, bitter Robusta beans. "Our coffee culture came from war — it came from the Portuguese colonies in Africa who brought cheap beans to Portugal. The people here got used to it, and now changing a 50-year-old culture is one of my biggest fights."

Nevertheless, Cardoso is showing no signs of defeat and is pushing demand for specialty coffee in the historic city of Porto. After living and travelling in Australia and Asia, the engineer turned coffee connoisseur was determined to shake up the caffeine habits of his home folk. He started serving quality internationally sourced coffee in downtown Porto from a van in 2015, before unbridled success drove him to open Combi Coffee café in Porto's tree-lined suburb of Bonfim last year. Clearly he was onto a very good thing.

"My main customers are from Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea. They appreciate good quality," says Cardoso. "I think the city's new generation will start appreciating this coffee once they taste and understand it. Many people here have never tried coffee like this before." While Combi is one of the few roasters in Porto, and even Portugal more generally, Cardoso and his team have joined a growing clan of gourmands and coffee buffs swooping in on the ancient city to breathe new life into its food and drink scene.

Zenith Brunch & Cocktails, for example, jumped on the cosmopolitan bandwagon in 2017, with specialty coffee backed up by a menu of eggs Benedict, French toast and fancy salads, while Bao's Taiwanese Burger and RO Ramen e Outras began flinging Asian chow over the pass. In the same wave, Puro 4050 started plating up mozzarella balls, and Época bolstered a lean vegetarian food movement with house-made veggie dishes and gluten-free cakes. Being a forerunner in the diet scene was a gamble for the couple behind Época, twentysomethings Liliana Alves and Tiago Teixeira, but their busting doors suggest they had little to worry about. "We weren't confident [opening Época] at all because there was nothing to compare it to. But it's been such a great journey meeting everyone who also wants to eat and drink the things we like," says Alves. "We love Portuguese food, but there were just too many restaurants with the same traditional menu. We decided to build a place that serves the food we want to have every day, which is usually vegetable-based, organic and made from scratch."

This type of food was almost impossible to find in the city even two years ago. As a place where centuries' old customs float through timeworn buildings like ghosts, and locals relish the comfort of doing things the way they've always been done, cultural shift doesn't come easy. Nevertheless, the quaint city is capturing the attention of travellers worldwide and is starting to rouse from the slumber of tradition as a younger generation, such as Alves and Teixeira, seeks new business opportunities.

Craft beer houses are now a dime a dozen, and dedicated wine bars are springing up to appease a foreign market that's catching on to Portugal's inventory of quality table wines. "Although port wine is well known outside Portugal, table wines aren't so much," says André Apolinário, co-owner of local food tour company Taste Porto. "When we show people on ➤



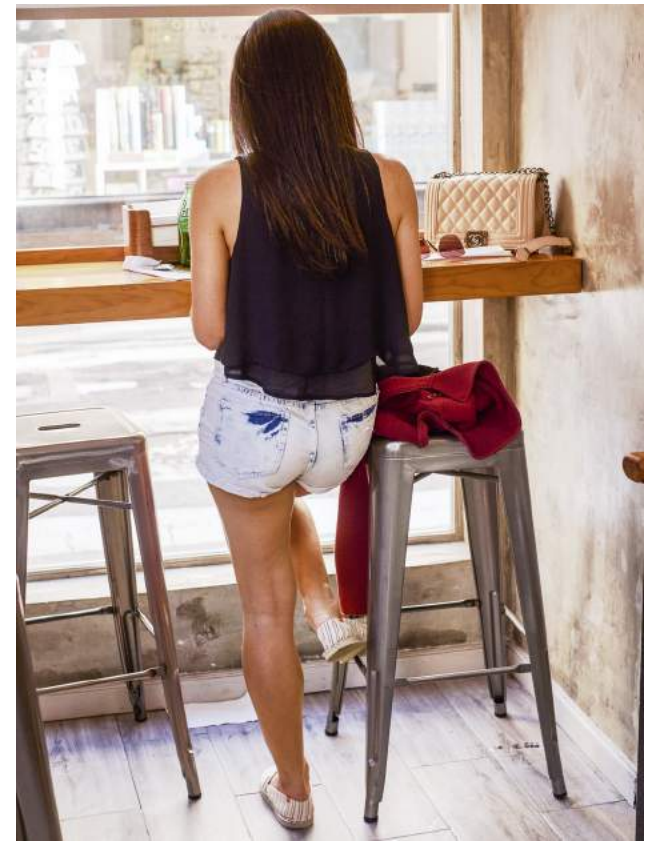
## EAT

**Antunes** Rua do Bonjardim 525; +351 22 205 2406. **Bao's Taiwanese Burger** Rua de Cedofeita 263; www.baos.pt. **Bolhão Market** Rua Formosa, 4000-214; +315 223 326 024; **Café Santiago** Rua Passos Manuel 226; www.cafesantiago.pt. **Capela Incomum** Travessa do Carregal, 77 79 81; +351 936 129 050. **Combi Coffee** Rua Morgado Mateus 29; www.combicoffee.pt. **Conga** Rua do Bonjardim 314; +351 969 637 441. **Época** Rua do Rosário 22; www.epocaporto.com. **Esplanada Marisqueira** Rua Roberto Ivens 628; +351 229 380 660. **InterContinental Porto** Praça da Liberdade 25; www.ihg.com. **Pedro dos Frangos** Rua do Bonjardim 223; www.pedrodosfrangos.pt. **Puro** 4050 Largo de São Domingos 84; www.puro4050.com. **RO Ramen e Outras** Rua de Ramalho Ortigão 61; www.restaurante-ro.com. **Taste Porto** www.tasteporto.com. **The Yeatman** Rua do Choupelo; www.the-yeatman-hotel.com. **Wine Quay Bar** Muro dos Bacalhoeiros 111 e 112; www.winequaybar.com. **Zenith Brunch & Cocktails** Praça Carlos Alberto; www.zenithcaffe.pt.



## CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

Outdoor dining is a must in Porto; The Yeatman Hotel; intricate plating at the InterContinental Porto; Gonçalo Cardoso of Combi Coffee. **OPENER, FROM LEFT** Porto skyline; the Bolhão Market, a popular spot to find fresh produce and seafood.



**CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT** Fresh bread from Bolhãu Market; work off any indulgences by rowing the Douro river; or just relax and enjoy the scenery; classic architecture. **OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Época dining; Bao's Taiwanese Burger; flowers and plants at Bolhãu Market. >>





## READ

Porto-based tour operators **Catavino** capture the region's flavour profile in their book, *The Undiscovered Food Stories of Northern Portugal*, by Gabriella Opaz, Sonia Andresson Nolasco and photos by Ryan Opaz.

## STAY

After a feeding frenzy bunk down in one of Porto's best beds. **M Maison Particulière** (Largo de São Domingos 66; www.m-porto.com) is a redesigned 16th century house that creates small-scale luxury on one of Porto's most vibrant streets. **The Artist Porto Hotel & Bistrô** (Rua da Firmeza 49; www.shotelscollection.com) is a quirky hotel and adjoining fine dining restaurant, run by students from a Porto hospitality school. Bag a prime spot in the heart of the Ribeira district by the Douro river at **Porto River Apartments** (Rua dos Canasteiros 50; +351 223 401 210). **Palácio Fenizia** (Rua de Fernandes Tomás 215; www.palaciofenizia.com) is perfect if you're after glamorous boutique accommodation. It's the creation of Italian fashion designer Gianfranco Fenizia.

**FROM TOP** Outside the Igreja do Carmo, an 18th century Porto church; at Café Santiago, order the Francesinha — a signature Porto dish containing four different meats, served with egg or chips and covered in cheese.

our tours how many wine-growing regions we have in Portugal that produce drops with different profiles and tremendous quality, it's usually a wow moment." Indeed, the country has been perfecting its viticultural art since Roman times. Such prowess can be observed upriver of Porto in the Douro Valley, where grape varieties such as Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca and Malvasia Fina are muddled into the blended wines for which Portugal is renowned. The Douro's award-winning *vinhos* can be tracked to the source at the many estates across the valley, or scouted in the city's increasingly popular wine bars, such as Capela Incomum and Wine Quay Bar.

Serafim Miranda, whose family owns one of the oldest seafood restaurants in Porto, Esplanada Marisqueira, has seen a raised awareness of Portuguese table wines parallel to the demand for more sophisticated dining options. "Porto's dining culture is changing," he says. "Interest in the city is building every year and, since people are travelling more and want new experiences, they're looking for more gourmet restaurants, too." Porto isn't ready to give up on tradition just yet though, with Miranda's family restaurant still serving similar dishes to when it first opened its doors back in 1957. "We are near the sea so the Portuguese like lots of seafood, and in northern Portugal it's typical to boil seafood with water and salt, nothing else," says Miranda. "Like my mother and father taught me and my brother, we continue to prepare it the natural way."

There are plenty of other examples of Porto staying true to its culinary roots, with a progressively modernised city centre still laced with eateries serving food typical to Portugal's north. This includes Conga and its famous pork sandwiches, *bifanas*, Pedro dos Frangos and its spit-roast chickens, and Antunes, which serves tear-with-your-fork pork hocks. Then there are restaurants such as Café Santiago, which remain focused on dishing up Porto's signature dish, Francesinha — a layered heart-stopper of sausage, ham, steak, chorizo and white bread wrapped in cheese and doused in spicy tomato sauce. It's usually served with chips and sometimes an egg. Teaming it with a beer, or *fino* in Porto, is almost mandatory to cut grease.

Simple pastries are also part of everyday life, with *pastéis de nata* (Portuguese custard tarts) and *rissóis* (crumbed pockets of meat or seafood) the snack of choice for many locals. *Pesticos*, which draw similarity to tapas and may include codfish fritters, cured meats and chicken gizzards, are also common as a mid-afternoon refuel or shared as a main meal. Weekday lunches are equally cherished, with colleagues setting aside a good hour to tuck into a two- or three-course *menu do dia* (menu of the day) at their local restaurant. The offering is often scratched on paper and taped to a window or scrawled on a sandwich board to reflect the availability of local and seasonal produce.

This focus on seasonality and simplicity also permeates the top echelons of Porto's gastronomic scene, with the majority of the city's most accomplished chefs favouring fresh produce, with an emphasis on local dishes. "Our menu reinvents Portuguese flavours and combines three essential characteristics: traditional, seasonal and classic," says Francisco Pico, who last October took over the reins as head chef of the five-star InterContinental Porto's restaurant, Astória. "I want to revisit Portugal's flavours and give them a modern touch." ➤



**CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE**  
 Creating vegetarian dishes at Época; soak up the sun in the outdoor setting at Zenith Brunch & Cocktails; enjoy a drink (or two) with friends at Zenith.

Two Michelin-star chef Ricardo Costa from five-star The Yeatman Hotel thinks on a similar wavelength. “The Yeatman’s cuisine makes the most of northern Portugal’s gastronomy, favouring fresh products such as fish and other seafood,” he says. “We only use high-quality ingredients and always give preference to those that are national.” Costa’s ever-changing tasting menus feature anything from fleshy octopus or sea bream plucked from Porto’s coastline to rich house-made butter whipped with local sheep and goat’s milk.

As a keen watcher of his home city’s ever-evolving food scene, Apolinário has witnessed the growing culinary tendency to balance the old with the new. “In the past five years Porto’s food scene has been undergoing a modern day renaissance, with a lot of new restaurants opening, but it still keeps a strong attachment to the roots of northern Portuguese gastronomy,” he observes. “Young chefs have found ground to experiment by bringing new ideas, techniques and ingredients from around the world, and then twisting our Portuguese food with modernity to make it even more appealing.”

Despite gentrification prompting a gastronomic refresh, Porto still has a foot sitting firmly in the culinary past. And given that the charm of an antiquated city such as Porto is built on tradition, that can only be a good thing. 🍷



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