

8. Recipes from Portugal

Fish cookery is a subject of interest to all Portuguese, none of whom lives very far from the sea, and there are recipes for every species to be found in their markets and at the beach auctions which are held in many fishing villages, right beside the colourful fishing boats. But pride of place goes to their beloved bacalhau, salted dried cod, a fish which does not occur in Portuguese waters but which the Portuguese have traditionally fished in distant seas. Equally popular and less expensive are the fresh sardines, the smell of which, as they are grilled over a charcoal brazier, is almost omnipresent in Portuguese coastal towns and villages. The hake (pescada) completes the trilogy of favourites; it is the standard high-class fish.

Other seafood is available in abundance. Squid (lulas, or lulinhas for the little ones) appear on every menu; as do the small clams (see page 234) which are called amêijoas and are so delicious as to make up for the (to me) disappointing quality of the native Portuguese oyster.

Communications within Portugal have been developed slowly; and this may account for the strength of local traditions in cookery. Two magnificent compendia of Portuguese regional cookery are listed in the bibliography under the names Olleboma and Valente; but regional is perhaps the wrong term, for most of the recipes are identified with particular towns or villages, where to this day they are proclaimed as specialities in the restaurants and executed with pride in Portuguese homes.

In touring Portugal, I looked for signs of an influence from Portuguese possessions in the Orient. There are few, although I was surprised to find that fresh coriander (which I knew as Chinese parsley in South-East Asia) is so commonly used. Traces of cooking from Angola and Mozambique are to be found, it is true, but on the whole Portuguese cuisine has remained remarkably pure in its tradition and in its use of native ingredients, one of which must now be mentioned. Portuguese olive oil has a distinctive taste because, unlike the practice in France and Italy, the olives are kept for a week before being pressed. If a Portuguese recipe calls for olive oil and you want the flavour to be authentic, you must use Portuguese olive oil.

Caldeirada

The Portuguese national fish stew

serves eight at least

There must be almost as many versions of this as there are households on the Portuguese coast. This one was demonstrated to me in Lisbon by Judite Jesus de Cabo. I give it exactly as she made it; but with the advice to be flexible in the choice of fish. Conger eel helps to make the liquid pleasantly unctuous; but many cooks prefer a less bony fish. The addition of sardines, cooked separately, is optional. Their crispness provides a note of contrast; but pieces of fried bread, such as adorned a caldeirada which we ate at Peniche, will do the same.

mixed fish, 1¼ kg (2¾ lb)
 conger eel, centre cut, ¾ kg (1 lb)
 hake, ¾ kg (1 lb)
all the above cleaned and cut into sections of 1–2 cm thick
 squid, ¼ kg (½ lb), cut up
 small clams (amêijoas, page 234), ½ kg (1 lb)
 fresh sardines, 8
 onions, ¾ kg (1½ lb), sliced
 a bunch of parsley
 a bunch of coriander

tomatoes, 1 kg (2 lb) } peeled
 potatoes, 1 kg (2 lb) } and sliced
 garlic, 2 cloves, finely chopped
 a fresh chilli pepper, finely chopped
 fresh red and green peppers, ½ kg (1 lb), cut into strips
 black pepper, freshly ground
 olive oil, 9 tbs
 white wine, 400 ml (¾ pint)
 salt
 tinned mild red pepper (pimiento), cut into strips for decoration

Take a very large cooking pot and line the bottom with onion slices. Then add further ingredients, in layers, as follows: some of the mixed fish, some conger and squid; some parsley and coriander; tomato slices; potato slices; a sprinkling of garlic and chilli; strips of red and green pepper; hake and more mixed fish; a third of the olive oil and almost half of the wine; with occasional grindings of pepper and discreet sprinklings of salt. Repeat, using up all the ingredients (except what you need for the sardines and clams – see below) and finishing up with a layer of onion, a sprinkling of garlic and chilli and second doses of olive oil and wine. Set the pot to cook over a moderate flame for 30 minutes.

About 12 minutes before serving, fry the sardines in 2 or 3 tablespoonfuls of olive oil, with a small quantity of onion, tomato, red and green pepper, parsley and coriander. Six minutes later, set the clams to steam open in a pan with the remaining (2 or 3 tbs) wine and a dash of salt.

When all is ready, ladle the main mixture, juices and all, into a deep serving platter. Put the clams, still in their shells, on top, with the strips of red pepper among them, and the sardines round the side.

Bacalhau Dorado

Salt cod scrambled with eggs and potato

serves six

The Portuguese are great enthusiasts for dried salt cod (page 54). When I was in Lisbon, there was a temporary shortage of it in the shops. The news that a large shipment from Norway had arrived in Oporto was carried under big headlines on the front pages of the newspapers; which was quite right for an item of such immediate interest to all their readers.

The recipe given here happened to be demonstrated to me by a cook from Tras os Montes, but it is popular throughout the country.

bacalhau (dried salt cod), 1 kg (2 lb)	chopped parsley, 2 tbs
potatoes, 1 kg (2 lb), peeled	pepper
vegetable oil for deep-frying	olive oil, 4–5 tbs
salt	margarine, 150 g (5 oz)
eggs, 10	medium onions, 3, chopped
milk, 2 tbs	garlic, 2 cloves, chopped
	black olives, 40 or so

Soak the bacalhau in several changes of water for 24 hours. Then drain it, free it of skin and bone and flake it into smallish pieces.

Cut the potatoes into matchsticks. Heat the vegetable oil in a deep pan and deep-fry them in three batches, each of which will take about 12 minutes. As each batch is done, put it to drain in a bowl lined with absorbent paper and add a light sprinkling of salt.

Meanwhile, break the eggs into a bowl and add the milk, most of the parsley and a little pepper. Whisk the mixture and set it aside.

Next, heat the olive oil and about half the margarine in a large frying pan. (This should be done when the second batch of potatoes is nearly ready.) Add the onion and garlic and fry them over a medium flame for 7 or 8 minutes. Next, add the flaked bacalhau, mixing it in well, and continue to fry for another 7 or 8 minutes, stirring the mixture from time to time. Then spoon it out into a bowl and clean the frying pan in readiness for the final operation.

Melt half the remaining margarine in the pan, then add half the potatoes and half the bacalhau mixture. Stir to mix; and immediately pour in half the egg mixture. Continue to stir and turn and scrape (rather as when cooking scrambled eggs) for 3 minutes over a medium flame, then decant the mixture on to a large, warm serving platter. Melt the remaining margarine and repeat the process. The platter will now be covered with a thick layer of the golden concoction. Dot the olives and sprinkle the rest of the parsley over the surface. Serve at once with a green or mixed salad.

Congro Ensopado à Moda de Bragança

Conger eel stew from Bragança

serves four

conger eel, centre cut, 650–700 g (1½ lb), sliced	a bay leaf
olive oil, 100 ml (7 tbs)	vinegar, 1 tbs
a medium onion, chopped	bread, 4 thick slices
pepper and salt	egg yolks, 3
	a sprig of parsley, chopped

Heat the oil in a pan and add the onion, pepper and bay leaf. When the onion is golden, add the fish, salt to taste, the vinegar and $\frac{3}{4}$ –1 cup water. Cook for 10 to 15 minutes, until the fish is done. Reserve the broth.

Place the slices of bread, cut to match the slices of fish, on a serving dish, and the fish on top of them. Beat the egg yolks with the parsley and combine this mixture, away from the heat, with a little of the fish broth. Then stir it into the rest of the broth, mix well and let it simmer until the egg yolks are cooked. Pour this sauce over the fish and serve at once.

Lampreia à Moda do Minho

Lamprey in the Minho way

serves four

The village of Monção, on the Minho River, is one of the few places in the world where the lamprey is fished with real enthusiasm. The season is in the early part of the year. This Minho recipe is widely and justly famed.

a lamprey of $\frac{3}{4}$ kg (1½ lb)	a marinade of $\frac{1}{4}$ litre (about $\frac{1}{2}$ pint)
vinegar, 1 tbs	each of sweet wine (vinho maduro) and dry red wine (vinho tinto verde), 2 tbs
olive oil, 100 ml (7 tbs)	brandy, 1 small glass port,
butter, 30 g (1 oz)	2 bay leaves, salt, pepper and parsley
onions, 2, chopped	
a clove of garlic	

Scald the lamprey with boiling water, then scrape it with a knife and rub it clean with a thick linen cloth. Wash it in several changes of water until all viscosity is gone. Next, use a pair of scissors to make a few slits in the head openings. Collect the blood, which will run out, in a bowl with the vinegar. Cut the belly open and pull out the intestines carefully. Then slice the fish and put the slices in a casserole, covered with the blood and all the other ingredients of the marinade. Leave overnight.

Heat the olive oil and butter, add the onions and garlic and cook until transparent. Add the lamprey and some of the marinade and cook gently for 1½ hours, shaking the casserole now and then to prevent sticking.