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ON A SHOESTRING Lisbon

A culinary revolution has taken place in Lisbon. You'll find a market selling small plates made by top chefs and revamped classics like salt cod and custard tarts

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Imagine a place where 30 of the city's best chefs sell small, reasonably priced plates of their top dishes, alongside local wines and fresh lemonade, from a gathering of stalls. That's exactly what's on offer every day at Lisbon's **Mercado da Ribeira** in the Cais do Sodré area. With dishes ranging from €5-8 each, we pile our wooden table with crunchily tempura-battered green beans from Café de São Bento, platters of cheese, ham and sausages from classic Lisbon charcuterie house Manteigaria Silva, and piri-piri chicken with double-fried chips by Miguel Laffan of Michelin-starred restaurant L'And Vineyards in the Alentejo.

Over glasses of red wine, also from the Alentejo, and a platter of Iberian ham that includes a finely aged reserve from Trás-os-Montes and a pica pau – beef with pickles and olives – from chef Miguel Castro e Silva, local journalist Célia Pedroso, of food tour company **Eat Portugal**

(eatportugal.net), explains the petiscos renaissance. 'These small plates were once relegated to humble tasca bars, but now they're everywhere, with chefs competing to attract diners with the best cod cakes or the most tender prego (steak sandwiches).'

The market, which opened in May 2014, has less character than it might thanks to heavy branding by its managers *Time Out* (plates, banners, and anything else that can be plastered with the publishing company's logo is) but it's a decent renovation and, if you have only one day in Lisbon, this is where you should come to taste as much as possible. There's even a little outlet of the classic tinned goods retailer **Conservreira de Lisboa**, where you can pick up tins of sardines in technicolour retro packaging (conserveiradelisboa.pt).

In an adjacent section of the 19th-century building merchants sell fish, meat and vegetables. We buy fresh

piri-piri peppers, bay leaves, garlic and almonds from women with life etched on their faces before following Célia to some of the city's other affordable food hot spots.

First there's sweet little **Sol e Pesca**, a fishing tackle shop that doubles as a tinned fish café (solepesca.com). A funky spot, with formica tables and stools, it serves only fish straight from the can accompanied by corn bread; you can try octopus, sardines and anchovies, and work out which tins you want to take home. From there we head to **Nova Pombalina** to eat juicy suckling pig sandwiches, served in a crusty roll with crackling and gravy (€4). It's a workers' lunch institution, the city's best porcine sandwich by a mile (*R. do Comércio 2, 00 351 21 887 4360*).

In the last five years, Portugal's capital has undergone a culinary revolution that is truly thrilling. 35-year-old José Avillez is at the vanguard of this gastronomic blossoming, elegantly proving that there's a lot more to the city's menus than custard tarts, sardines and salt cod. Since 2010, the former head chef of local fine-dining stalwart Tavares has opened five game-changing restaurants. First was Cantinho do Avillez, then came Belcanto, which won its first Michelin star 11 months after opening and its second last year.

For a more affordable way to sample his cooking, we head to **Mini Bar** (minibar.pt), a cocktail lounge with a menu of snacks and small dishes, like codfish nuggets with 'Bulhão Pato' emulsion (€6), Algarve prawns in ceviche (€7.5) and a mini burger of PDO beef (€6). There's also a street kiosk outside Mini Bar where you can try Avillez' take on pastéis de nata and savoury pies.

Around the corner at **Flores do Bairro**, on the ground floor of the Bairro Alto hotel, young chef Vasco Lello also embraces the new Portuguese cuisine, taking traditional recipes and styling them up to great effect (bairroaltohotel.com). There's an exquisite fish soup topped with a slender crab crostini, the wafer-like biscuit dotted with sweet threads of white crabmeat. The room itself feels a bit too much like a hotel lobby for our liking, but the food is terrific and well priced, with an 'Os arrozes do Bairro' menu of rice dishes – including snails, quail and oregano – at €12.

In a sidestreet in the Chiado area, we seek out the glorious shopping cornucopia that is **A Vida Portuguesa**, where shelves are lined with reissued kitchen packaging classics (avidaportuguesa.com). We buy a sardine grill for the barbecue, a stove-top toast maker, orange and red melamine plates, and yet more twinkly tins of fish.

Following the calçada-lined streets downhill from here to Rossio, we stick our heads in **Confeitaria Nacional**, an old-school pastry and jam shop complete with rococo mirrored ceiling and marble counter (confeitarianacional.com). But our real destination is Lisbon's iconic cherry liqueur bar, **A Ginjinha**, a hole-in-the-wall big enough for just three people (*Largo de São Domingos 8, no phone*). We order glasses of the house-made Morello cherry spirit for €1.40, and are given the choice of 'com ou sem elas' (with a cherry or without). This little bar has been here since 1840, and has passed through the hands of four generations of the same family. Lisbon may be experiencing a culinary revolution, but some things resolutely remain the same.



PHOTOGRAPHS: AUDREY GILLAN; LONEY PLANET TRAVELLER; MATT MUNRO; RUI FERRE; PAULO BARATO

Clockwise from top left: **Confeitaria Nacional**; clams at **Bicado Sapato**; Michelin-starred **L'And Vineyards**; **Flores do Bairro's** grilled sardines with melon gazpacho; **Lisbon's 28 tram**, a favourite tourist trip through the city; **José Avillez** at **Mini Bar**; prawn cerviche.

