

# LISBON'S A TREAT

The foodie scene in Portugal's capital has never been more enticing — or varied

**T**HE smell of *sardinhas* wafts through the streets of Lisbon's oldest neighbourhood, Alfama.

'Why sardines?' I ask, while ordering three at a grill set up outside Restaurant Republica Portuguesa on Rua dos Cegos.

'For St Antonio, our saint,' the chef tells me, throwing the silvery fish onto the barbecue and sprinkling coarse salt.

'When he went to preach in Rimini, he didn't have the best time because everyone ignored him, so he went to preach to the sea and the sardines swam over to listen.'

He tells this story in such a straightforward way that it has to be true. And the fish, once cooked, with salad and a salted baked potato, is bang-on perfect.

Food tourism in Lisbon has boomed post pandemic with Jose Avillez's Michelin-starred Belcanto the hottest seat in town.

It must be pricey and so I head to his more accessible and less expensive Bairro do Avillez, housed in what was once the Sao Luiz Municipal Theatre.

Among its multi-eating options, Minibar, a gourmet bar hidden behind a bookcase, is the most intriguing. 'See if you can find a drink within the flower,' the waiter says, presenting me with a long-stemmed rose.

Like a magic trick, within the folds of its petals I discover an edible cocktail — a lychee and rose margarita-infused coil of apple.

Another unusual restaurant is found at Museu da Farmacia, where I wander among an exhibition of apothecaries through the ages, which includes a collection of medieval medical implements and linen condoms. It is almost, but not quite, enough to put me off my



Grand panorama: Portugal's capital. Inset, traditional fare

more tomorrow and the next day and the one after that,' the waiter jokes when I tell him how delicious it is. 'There are 365 ways to cook it so you're good for a year.'

For an evening combining Fado music (traditional songs from the 1820s that are characterised by mournful tunes and lyrics,) and dinner, I wind my way back to Alfama to Real Sociedade.

**A** BOTTLE of Torre de Vila Nova (a young green wine) characteristically light, and often with a slight sparkle, proves perfect with *arroz de marisco* (seafood rice) — a wetter version of Spanish paella made with a thick tomato sauce, prawns, clams and mussels.

The heartfelt songs (with lyrics pertaining to lost love and hard lives) continue into the small hours, until shots of *Ginjinha*, a sticky cherry liqueur that locals swear by as a quick 'pick-me-up', are downed to give energy for the journey home.

Final word must go to *chourico* (pronounced shoo-ree-zoo), Portugal's favourite sausage. Made with pork shoulder, with less paprika than its Spanish rival and more garlic.

Served at breakfast with eggs, appearing in soups and stews, and starring in the traditional *cataplana de marisco* (a monkfish, seafood and sausage casserole), the most theatrical way of serving it is a *bombeiro* (on fire), when the sausage is set alight at the table with a whoosh.

In the tree-canopied courtyard of Restaurante Lautasco, while my *chourico* are ablaze, I give thanks to St Antonio that I'm still in possession of my eyebrows.

by KATE WICKERS

lunch — testament to the deliciousness of the orange and duck croquettes and melon gazpacho, which I enjoy on Restaurant Pharmacia's lawn terrace with views down to the river Tagus.

A bike tour with Cycling Lisbon begins at the grand Praça do Comércio square and continues along the Tagus, past old wharfs reimagined into nightclubs and attractive restaurants. We pedal past the brick red 25th of April Bridge (the longest suspension bridge in Europe) and on to the Belem Tower, a 16th-century fortification

which was an embarkation point for Portuguese explorers, ending the tour at the Time Out Mercado da Ribeira, a gourmet food hall and produce market on the Western Waterfront.

Here, 24 of Lisbon's top chefs offer their food at a fraction of restaurant prices and €11 gets me a seaweed black risotto with scallops from chef Alexandre Silva.

For dessert, it's a *pasteis de nata* (Portuguese custard tart) from the Manteigaria bakery, where butter is pounded into the pastry before it is rolled and folded over and over to create the flakiest bite. I'm staying at AlmaLusa Hotel in one of the capital's loveliest squares — the historic Praça do Municipio — which occupies what was once the navy



arsenal. Its restaurant-cum-fine food deli Delfina specialises in Portuguese classics, so I order what is the country's ultimate comfort food *bacalhau a bras* — shredded salted codfish fried with matchstick potatoes, onion and egg.

'You can come back for some

## TRAVEL FACTS

DOUBLES B&B at AlmaLusa from £142 ([almalusahotels.com](http://almalusahotels.com)). Gatwick to Lisbon returns with TAP airline from £86 ([flytap.com](http://flytap.com)).



Chin-chin: Wooster and Jeeves (Hugh Laurie and Stephen Fry)

**T**HE dimmest young toff in literary history — employer of the shimmering valet (*never* a butler), Jeeves — was born in 1892.

His creator, P.G. Wodehouse, never reveals his birthday. But he is 24 in Jeeves Takes Charge, published in November 1916. So Bertie came into the world 130 years ago.

To celebrate this landmark, I went on a 'browsing and sluicing' (eating and drinking) tour of Bertie Wooster's Mayfair — the smartest part of London, as it was in Wodehouse's day. The Georgian and Victorian houses and shops are much the same today.

And Jeeves and Wooster's watering holes are still open for business.

I began outside Bertie's flat, on the third floor of 15 Berkeley Street. This is the immortal location of the first meeting between Bertie and Jeeves. Jeeves makes him a fog-clea ring hangover cure and Bertie realises he has a genius on his hands.

Wodehouse lived in the same flat. He based Bertie's haunts on his favourite places in London, where he lived from 1919 to 1939.

There were a few dark clouds in Bertie's carefree, work-free life. His neighbour, at 47 Charles Street, was Aunt Dahlia. Bertie said,

# Happy 130th birthday to you, Bertie old boy!

'It isn't often that Aunt Dahlia lets her angry passions rise but when she does, strong men climb trees and pull them up after them.'

I popped in on Heywood Hill, the Mayfair bookshop Bertie would have known well, even if he wasn't that keen on reading.

I was ready for a drink, as Bertie was at all times of day. Opposite Aunt Dahlia's is The Footman pub, original site of the Junior Ganymede, Jeeves's club. I had a haggis Scotch egg (£8) — the sort of Edwardian food Bertie liked in his midday nosebag.

I toasted Bertie with his favourite drink, a £7.25 brandy and soda, and it's a short stumble to Bertie Wooster's club, Drones, home to the drunkest young men in the kingdom, including G. D'Arcy 'Stilton' Cheesewright.

Drones was based on Buck's Club — a handsome terrace house, still going strong at 18 Clifford Street, near the Bond Street shops.

The club was set up by Blues officer Captain Herbert Buckmaster — thus Buck's.

Buckmaster installed an American cocktail bar and Buck's Fizz was invented here by barman Mr McGarry — also the name of the Drones barman.

So raise a Buck's Fizz to Bertie's 130th birthday and his words: 'It was my Uncle George who discovered that alcohol was a food well in advance of modern medical thought.'

**HARRY MOUNT**

■ HARRY MOUNT'S *Et Tu, Brute? The Best Latin Lines Ever* (Bloomsbury) is out now.