

Post



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Too much food? - June 2, 2025

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SUMMARY

Today's Secret Foodie Tour of Porto confirmed my own secret: I'm not really a fan of lots of Portuguese food. (Salted cod, salted cod/potato fritters, tinned sardines and an abomination of a sandwich called a Franceshina which they alleged, **WRONGLY**, was an improvement on the French croque monsieur.) IMHO only! We did have a good tour guide, good wine, port and the ubiquitous pasteis de Nata dessert. As the tour ended down close to the Douro river, we headed the rest of the way down and wandered around trying to walk off some of the calories we'd consumed. In Porto, what goes down must come up so Scott and I trudged up the 210 stairs to the

steep walkway to the steep sidewalk and up the 74 stairs to our room. The Atkinsons wisely chose the funicular. My Apple Watch gave me credit for 33 flights of stairs on the day! Very good rotisserie chicken with very spicy Peri Peri sauce and gelato made up for the disappointment of our earlier tastings. - Karen

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DETAIL

We're doing a foodie tour later, but breakfast is included, so we have to do that. Before that we're getting ready and hearing a racket out our window. They're emptying the recycling containers. Above ground they're not much bigger than ours at home, for our house. These have cavernous receptacles that they're pull up out of the ground. A robotic arm positions the reservoir over the truck and then the worker pulls a rope to open the bottom and all the bottles (or cans, or ?) come streaming down the bottom. It's pretty cool.

Breakfast is good, and there's lots of variety. We try more than we should, since we have a food tour in a couple of hours. The ladies who prepare it and keep the buffet stocked poke their heads out now and again and we say 'Bom dia' (good morning).

For the foodie tour, from Secret Food Tours of Porto, or some such name, the way you find your guide is that he/she has an orange umbrella, and here it's no different. Our guide is José, and in his pronunciation the J is hard and guttural. He's a local, of course, and so Portuguese is his native language. To my ear, for this reason, when he speaks English I would swear he's from Russia or somewhere in Eastern Europe. He's good and personable. We have twelve people on our tour, so we're fully 1/3 of the group. One couple just got married and this is their honeymoon. Her luggage still hasn't made it so she's wearing clothes she bought here. Another couple is from Hawaii, but his ancestors are from the Azores, a Portuguese island group. Another couple is from Georgia (the state or country I ask - state). The last couple is a jolly middle aged pair from Germany.

Our first stop is at Sanzala Cafe for coffee and the famous pastel de nata Portuguese egg custard tart. They're everywhere, but supposedly at this cafe they're somehow special. I can't tell the difference. We're here because going to the famous Majestic Cafe, across the street, would be crazy. It's the oldest and has an amazingly ornate front. It's always pack jammed with people getting coffee and taking pictures of the beautiful front. I pass on the coffee (too much already) but eat the pastel de nata. It's fine. Maybe I don't have a taste for the perfect one. This is one course down and four to go, we're told.

We head back out and walk on, up the street, past the famous Cappella Das Almas church? Chapel? Anyway it's totally covered in beautiful blue and white tile. Nearby we go into 'the market'. The name is Bolhão and the pronunciation, for those of you who are not Portuguese, is Bull-Yow. This is the market across the street from our hotel. It's been recently redone and is gorgeous. Here we taste wine, canned rehydrated salt cod in oil, and a sardine. All are as to be expected. Nothing special, they are what they are. This is how the Portuguese lived and ate for 100s of years. Now they do not eat any fresh cod, only the salt cod. OK. It has memories back to your childhood, I get it.

The next place is a secret, we're told. Not that I can't tell you, but that's what it's called, a secret restaurant. We do not know what this means. We walk along, and at some point we go into a store. It's a drawer and door hardware store. If you need new handles for your drawers or doors, this is where you'd buy them. They have a zillion of them and they're in brass or copper or zinc or etc. So many it's a pleasure to take them all in. That's not why we're here. We simply walk through, not giving the sales representatives the time of day, and head for the back. Here we find a garden, with tiled walls, tables and chairs, and lots of flowers. It's open to the sky. We sit and wine and cheese are brought. This is the secret restaurant. The only way to know it's here is that you already know it's here. There are zero signs out front. When the door/drawer hardware store is closed the restaurant is, necessarily, closed. This is number three of our five places.

We walk on and our next place (Caps Na Baixa) has beer. Good beer. Yay. They also serve a mean croque monsieur. The French think they've perfected this dish but some Portuguese beg to differ. You need to add a tough slice of grisly beef, a thin slice of mortadella, and then swim it all in a shallow lake of beef and tomato gravy. It's a thing, we'll grant them that. We'll stick with the French version, merci! This is number four of our five places.

To get to our last place we walk through the big square with the city hall at the top. We pass the McDonalds that is supposedly the most beautiful McDonalds in the world, both inside and out. We've seen it before so we know of what José speaks. There's big ornate windows, like an oversized Tiffany lamp, with a big stylized eagle. What eagle, you might ask? I have my answer. Having had beer and wine already today I'm not feeling shy and so I ask our German couple if it looks familiar. NOOO. They're never seen it before. They do not know of what I'm referring. José introduces the restaurant and explains about it. He suggests people go in and look around, but do NOT try the food!

While they're in there I take José aside and say this eagle looks AWFULLY familiar. He admits, yes, this is the same one that the Third Reich in Germany made so infamous back during World War II. This building was the headquarters for the (cities? countries?) secret police. Hence the eagle. Why keep it to this day? The building has historical significance and so you can't change it. He tells me this. The rest of the group, not so much.

Our last stop at which to taste is one of the port houses where we try some port and some chocolate. Those are good. José thanks us, and we thank him and tip him and say good-bye. So now, where are we? We're all tipsy (from the wine and beer and port) and we're sitting in a port house with a couple bottles of port, maybe still 1/4 full. The group starts to contemplate whether José intended for us to finish the bottles. Maybe yes? Maybe no? The more this is discussed the more convinced this tipsy group gets that, yes, this is what José intended. (I'm thinking they're all crazy.) They pass the bottles around and all have another small or bigger second pour. After the damage is done someone from the store sees what's happening and informs us that this is NOT what this port is (er, was) for. Whoops!

Stuffed from the foodie tour (but still not enamored of traditional Portuguese cuisine) we continue down hill, towards the Douro river. There are the boats in the style that hauled port wine casks for 100s of years, and tons of tourists. Where we'd normally walk up towards our hotel is a fire truck and firemen walking around as if something might be, or should be, on fire. We're not walking there. Between funicular and stairs we all get back to our hotel for some down time.

Unbelievably enough, at dinner time we decide to go eat some more food. We are craving peri-peri chicken. Yum! It's a real price performer and the wine is good (for the price). Karen and I split a chicken (buried under a mountain for french fries). And Ron and Nancy split 1/2 a chicken and a tuna/potato salad. In the end we're stuffed and can't eat another bite. On the way home we stop for gelato. OK, we're bad.

Photos



From our room I finally got a good view of how these European "bottomless pit of recycling cans" get emptied!



The breakfast included with our room. We really shouldn't, but we do.



Our first (not) stop. Too famous, too crowded. We go across the street. But I'll admit, the decorations out front are damn nice, for a coffee shop.



Pastel de Nata... Yep, they're fine. Best when eaten warm.



Now that's a tiled religious building. I approve!



José going over the nuts and bolts of how the market works. There's a tunnel underneath which is why you never see big delivery trucks out front.



At the (one of the many) canned fish booths José channels his inner sales girl and explains the relationship between the Portuguese and salt cod and sardines. They're inseparable. Fresh? Not so much.



Time to sample a sardine. They're fine.
Thank goodness for the wine in the other hand.



You didn't think those were dry enough?
Try this fried salt cod (bacalhau) ball!



Time for... drawer hardware??



But walk through the store and out back is this secret restaurant!



With wine and cheese to sample.



And then on to see how many ways you can mess up a perfectly good Croque Monsieur.



Beer's good, though!



We continue our walk and enjoy the tiled/stone pedestrian streets and jacaranda trees.



At the downtown McDonald's (the "Imperial McDonald's"), is an eagle that looks very familiar. Not sure where I've seen that before, mein freund.



Time for port. It's always time for port. Is this for us to self-serve. It is now. Whoops! Sorry.



The iconic bridge in Porto over the Douro river.



Dinner time. More food. Chicken (hidden somewhere under all those fries).



And they do cook so many of those chickens every day (and they do it so well).



Not one more bite! Say what? Gelato?
Sure, why not?

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