



HOME TURF

# NUNO MENDES' LISBON

The Portuguese chef made his name in Britain, but the city of trams, tiles and custard tarts still calls him home

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“We earn our custard tarts in Lisbon,” says Nuno Mendes cheerfully, as he strides up another vertiginous street. “There isn’t a single flat surface in the entire place!” He may not be joking; nicknamed the city of seven hills, the Portuguese capital is so steep that even its famous yellow trams seem to huff in protest as they rattle up and down.

In Britain, Nuno is best known as the executive chef of Chiltern Firehouse, the modish London restaurant that doles out crab doughnuts and paparazzi opportunities to its celebrity regulars. But though he has been based in London for years, Lisbon is home – and it recently began to call to him. “I wanted to open a restaurant here [in Lisbon], something that would let me use all my favourite local ingredients.”

In 2019, the opportunity came up in the form of the swish Bairro Alto hotel. Nuno now oversees its modern Portuguese restaurant, BAHR, plus a cocktail bar and a bakery-cum-café, where he puts his stamp on classic Lisbon treats.

The hotel is named for the historic district it sits in, which has long been the chef’s favourite stamping ground. “Bairro Alto is quiet during the day but at 2am, all those little streets are usually filled with people eating and drinking. It’s fun.”

Nuno is a high-end chef, whose innovative cooking at his former London restaurant Viajante won him a Michelin star, but as he walks the district’s cobbled streets, excitedly pointing out favourite

places, it’s clear he has a passion for everyday Portuguese food. He is particularly fond of the *tascas*: small, inexpensive restaurants which specialise in hearty traditional dishes. Often a little ragged around the edges, with strip lighting and paper tablecloths, “they’re the kind of places you wouldn’t go in unless you knew about them,” he says. At Fidalgo (restaurantefidalgo.com), a contemporary spin on the concept, he orders *farinheira*, a smoked sausage, alongside scrambled eggs, and a rich stew of beans (*feijão*), served with slices of octopus, and liberally drizzled with *piri piri* oil.

Like the faded tiles that decorate its grand old buildings, the city’s cuisine is

a jigsaw. Nuno describes it as a “best of” compilation of Portuguese cooking: “Most of our parents and grandparents were born somewhere else, so they all bring local specialities.” But there are influences from further afield, too: fruits and nuts from nearly 500 years of Moorish rule, which started in the seventh century; later, the spices and chillies brought back by Portuguese sailors from Asia and Africa. Nuno is enthusiastic about the cuisine of Goa, the coastal Indian state once under Portuguese control, which remains popular in the city. “It’s so unique, because it fuses Indian and Portuguese flavours. I probably first tried it at four or five years old, and the fragrant spices really stuck with me.”

Today chefs are adding even more global influences to the city’s table. He points out BouBou’s (boubous.com), a cosy restaurant where a typical menu

might include local sea bass served up with German-style noodles, or meringue and a yuzu sauce. “Lisbon used to be a bit run-down, but the food scene has great energy now,” he says.

A short walk away from the *bairro* is Lisbon’s waterfront market, Mercado da Ribeira; Nuno loves the fresh produce. “Many restaurants come here to get their ingredients,” he says, stopping by a stall to sniff the swags of bay leaves appreciatively. Raiding Lisbon’s local larder clearly brings him great pleasure. For one dish at the restaurant, he uses goose barnacles or *percebes* – a treasured Portuguese seafood, usually prised off rocks and cliffs – which come from an island an hour or so away. “There’s a man in his 50s who swims out on a boogie board and collects them. Amazing.”

Lisboetas’ love for fresh seafood and vegetables is balanced by their sweet

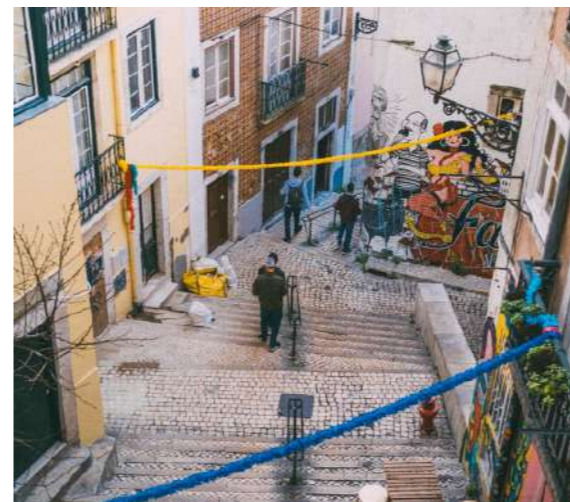


tooth. Cafés and *pastelarias* (patisserie) are part of the city’s social fabric, their counters stacked with treats such as Lisbon’s beloved custard tarts (*pastéis de nata*) and almond triangles (*Jesuítas*). Many of these pastries have roots in convents and monasteries; legend has it that egg whites were traditionally used to starch clerical gowns, so leftover egg yolks ended up in the kitchen. Custard tart-hunting tourists usually make a pilgrimage to Pastéis de Belém, a short tram ride to the west, and whose secret recipe supposedly came from the monastery next door. Nuno, however, likes the tarts at Manteigaria (Rua do Loreto 2) – or his own at the hotel bakery. It took him a while to crack the perfect recipe, with that coveted dark, almost burnt top and soft, quivering centre. “A lot of tarts are too sweet, and have too much flour, so they’re stodgy. You don’t want to taste the flour; you want it to almost ooze.”

His top foodie tip for visitors is surprisingly low-key. When he’s not working, you’ll usually find Nuno at a traditional *quiosque* (kiosk) in one of Lisbon’s parks, sitting with a newspaper and a strong espresso-style coffee known as *bica*. The coffee, he says, “won’t be the best you’ve ever had – but I just love to watch the city go by”.

TAP Air Portugal (flytap.com) offers return flights from Heathrow to Lisbon from £82.34. Doubles at Bairro Alto Hotel (bairroaltohotel.com) start at £247. Please check Covid-19 regulations before travelling. »

## ‘AT 2AM ALL THOSE LITTLE STREETS ARE FILLED WITH PEOPLE. IT’S FUN’





## ORANGE-RUB PORK BELLY WITH FENNEL (Barriga de porco assada com laranja)

*I made this pork belly dish when I invited some Portuguese friends to celebrate Christmas with me at my first restaurant in London. The skin is crisp and the meat is lovely and succulent, flavoured with the unmistakably Portuguese notes of orange and coriander.*

<b>Serves</b> 4	• 280ml dry white wine	• 2 tsp smoked paprika
<b>Prepare</b> 15 minutes, plus marinating	<b>MARINADE</b>	• small bunch coriander, leaves and stalks finely chopped
<b>Cook</b> 2 hours 50 minutes	• 5 garlic cloves, crushed	• 1 long red chilli, deseeded and finely chopped
• 800g boneless pork belly	• 2 tsp sea salt flakes	• 1 orange, zest and juice
• 1 fennel bulb	• 1 tsp ground white pepper	• 4 tbsp olive oil
• 2 onions		

**1** Use a stick blender or small food processor to blend together all the ingredients for the marinade. Pat the pork belly skin dry with kitchen paper, then, with a sharp, pointed knife, score the skin all over in a criss-cross pattern; rub with a little salt. Rub the marinade all over the pork belly meat (not the skin); transfer to the fridge and leave to marinate for at least 2 hours or ideally overnight.

**2** Preheat the oven to 150°C, gas mark 3. Slice the fennel and onions into roughly equal pieces, put them on a baking tray and put the pork belly on top with its marinade. Pour in ½ the white wine. Roast for 2 hours 30 minutes, or until tender all the way through with no pink meat remaining, adding the remaining wine after 1 hour.

**3** Transfer the pork belly to a separate baking tray. Increase the oven temperature to 210°C, gas mark 6, and roast for another 15-20 minutes, or until the skin is crisp. Remove from the oven and leave to rest on a warm plate. Cut into thin slices, making sure everyone gets a piece of the crackling. Serve on top of the fennel and onions.

**Per serving** 2995kJ/721kcal/49g fat/14g saturated fat/10g carbs/6.9g sugars/4g fibre/45g protein/2.9g salt

## JERUSALEM ARTICHOKE AND CAVOLO NERO WITH CONFIT GARLIC (Tupinambos e cavolo nero com alho)

*This is not a classic Lisbon dish, but it features our characteristically bold and beautiful flavours.*

**Serves** 4

**Prepare** 25 minutes

**Cook** 2 hours 40 minutes

- 160ml olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 50g garlic cloves, peeled and left whole, plus 1 garlic clove, crushed
- 2 tbsp single cream
- 400g Jerusalem artichokes, halved lengthways, or quartered if large
- ½ red chilli, deseeded and finely chopped
- 150g cavolo nero, stalks discarded and leaves left whole
- lemon juice, to taste (optional)

**1** Put the oil and the whole garlic cloves in a small pan, ensuring the garlic is fully submerged. Heat over a low heat until just below simmering point – or 80-85°C using a temperature probe. Turn the heat down to its lowest setting. Cook very gently for 2 hours, or until the garlic is completely soft. Strain the oil and mash the confit garlic with just enough of the oil to make a smooth paste, then stir in the cream and put both the garlic paste and the remaining garlic oil in the fridge.

**2** Preheat the oven to 200°C, gas mark 6. Put the artichokes on a baking tray. Mix with 2 tbsp of the garlic oil; season. Roast, cut-side down, for 30 minutes, or until golden.

**3** Heat 2 tbsp confit garlic oil in a pan over a medium heat (discard the remainder). Add the crushed garlic and chilli with a little bit of salt and cook gently until soft. Increase the heat, add the cavolo nero and fry for a few minutes. Add a splash of water, cover and steam for a few minutes until cooked through. Add the artichokes and a drizzle of olive oil; cook for 2 minutes. Season, adding a squeeze of lemon juice if you like.

**4** To serve, I like to spread a generous amount of garlic paste on each plate and put the artichokes and cavolo nero on top so that the juices combine with the garlic.

**Per serving** 1114kJ/269kcal/21g fat/  
3.8g saturated fat/13g carbs/2.6g sugars/  
3.7g fibre/41g protein/0.1g salt »



## CARAMEL CHOCOLATE TRUFFLES (Brigadeiros)

*These are the Portuguese version of chocolate truffles. Condensed milk is often used in Portuguese desserts and, handily, it can be bought pre-caramelised.*

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| <b>Makes</b> about 30                    | • 300g dark chocolate (minimum 70% cocoa solids) | • 200ml double cream  |
| <b>Prepare</b> 25 minutes, plus chilling | • 1 tbsp cocoa powder                            | • 397g can caramelised condensed milk (such as Carnation Caramel) |
| <b>Cook</b> 5 minutes                    |  |   |

**1** Roughly chop 200g chocolate and put it in a bowl with the cocoa powder. Heat the cream in a small pan to just below boiling point, then pour it over the chocolate. Leave for a minute to allow the chocolate to melt, then stir until the mixture is smooth and glossy. Fold in the caramelised condensed milk and a pinch of fine salt. Chill for 2-3 hours or freeze for 20 minutes before shaping: it should be firm but still pliable.

**2** Meanwhile, finely grate  $\frac{1}{2}$  the remaining chocolate and coarsely grate the rest, mix it together and then spread it out on a tray. To shape the brigadeiros you need to work on a cold surface; my hands are always warm, so I keep everything else very cold when making them. Use a teaspoon to scoop up the chocolate caramel mixture and roll it gently into balls with your hands. Roll the balls in the grated chocolate to coat them completely. If the mixture starts to get too soft, put it in the freezer for a few minutes. Put the truffles in the fridge or freezer to firm up before serving.

**Per truffle** 568kJ/136kcal/91g fat/5.6g saturated fat/11g carbs/10g sugars/1.2g fibre/2.2g protein/01g salt

**COOK'S TIP** THE BRIGADEIROS WILL KEEP IN THE FRIDGE FOR 3 DAYS IN AN AIRTIGHT CONTAINER, OR YOU CAN FREEZE THEM FOR UP TO 1 MONTH.



RECIPES ADAPTED FROM LISBOETA BY NUNO MENDES (BLOOMSBURY, £26)

**‘LISBOETAS’ LOVE  
FOR FRESH  
INGREDIENTS IS  
BALANCED BY THEIR  
SWEET TOOTH’**

