

Foodie's Guide to Regional Gastronomy: The Piri-Piri pepper and Piri-Piri Sauce

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This is certainly not unique to an Italian or Sicilian household. Every ethnic group in the country has a proud culinary tradition that they grew up around. You can easily replace “Sicilian” with Irish, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Ethiopian, Greek or anything else. This is why food as a topic is always so popular. We humans love our food and that passion goes beyond the gustatory or taste – we crave the aromas, delight in the presentation, are fueled by the atmosphere, and relish – pardon the pun – discussion about our favorite dishes, restaurants or cuisines.

One thing that is often not discussed – is glossed over, or barely touched upon – is the history or background of these dishes. Now, to some, this conjures up the voice of the guy from the “dry eyes” commercial. The terms, for many, are synonymous with “boring,” “dull,” or “It’s time to go.” However, the background can be interesting, fun, or funny and it can be so without being facetious, dumbed-down, or popular. I will make every attempt to maintain a fresh balance with those elements in this series.

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Do you enjoy a little spice in your life? Do you prefer just a little tickle of heat or are you a chilihead who wants the pain? Either way, you will want Piri-Piri Sauce in your life.

Piri-Piri sauce is something familiar to the Portuguese and by proxy those in Portuguese communities in various parts of the world. Having said that, in spite of Piri-Piri sauce being available in supermarkets and Salchicharias, I am still surprised when I hear locals have neither tried it nor heard of it.

You don't have to be a chilihead to enjoy Piri-Piri sauce – in spite of its appearance and the fact that it uses a pepper of moderate heat, it is only one player in the sauce. If you're a true chilihead you can always kick it up a notch by adding some of your favorite chili peppers, but the Piri-Piri pepper can be as hot as a "weaker" Habanero or the Scotch Bonnet that is popular in Jamaican cuisine – they range between 100,000-350,000 Scoville Units. However, Piri-Piri is a rich sauce that is best appreciated and enjoyed without insane levels of pepper to temporarily destroy your tastebuds or blast your face off.



The Piri-Piri pepper is sometimes referred to as a Bird's Eye Chili, African Bird's Eye, or African Devil pepper because, believe it or not, there are actually birds who enjoy them. It is a cultivar in the *capsicum frutescens* family of peppers. In other words, a pepper "groomed" by farmers over generations of the pepper so that certain characteristics are bred out or into the pepper.

The pepper it was cultivated from was the Malagueta Pepper which was brought from the Caribbean to southeastern Africa where Portuguese traders discovered it and fell in love with it. The Portuguese explorer Vasco Da Gama arrived in Mozambique in 1498 and the Portuguese ruled the nation for 400 years enjoying the pepper.

The Malagueta pepper hovers somewhere around the 100,000 Scoville Units mark and wasn't hot enough for some Portuguese so they played around with the pepper to come up with a hotter version. Once the pepper reached almost double that of the Malagueta Pepper at 175,000 Scovilles the Portuguese felt it was hot enough and stopped tampering with it.

It is there in the Portuguese-speaking Mozambican community that the pepper's name was borrowed from the Swahili word for

“pepper,” *Pili*. The Portuguese being world-famous navigators, pilots, and traders brought it to many of their colonies, territories, and trading partners, particularly India. From there it spread over generations throughout the Portuguese-speaking world wherever it may be.



Anywhere that becomes a colony inevitably merges the cuisine of the two cultures (French-Vietnamese cuisine being an exemplar) so, of course, Portuguese-Mozambique cuisine would inevitably spring up. Has anyone on the SouthCoast not had Chicken or Shrimp Mozambique?! One thing I have been puzzled about is why Mozambique Wings are not ubiquitous here on the SouthCoast, but I digress.

The sauce itself is comprised of crushed Piri-Piri peppers combined with paprika, basil, lemon juice, garlic, oregano, tarragon, salt, onion, black pepper, and a bit of citrus peel. Of course, there are some minor variations of this, but these ingredients are the core. Some brands may favor a particular ratio or perhaps make theirs hotter than others. It's similar to red sauce in Italian households (not in flavor) in that there are endless variants and ratios of what is just a “simple” sauce.

When it comes to making dishes from recipes the sauce's best compliments are chicken and shrimp, but the sauce can be used as a dipping sauce on the side or just squirted right from a bottle of your preferred brand. It will brighten up just about any dish. If you like Tabasco or Sriracha sauce, you will fall in love with Piri-Piri sauce. Accompany with a side of Portuguese round fries and you are in foodie heaven.

The best place I've been to that has an amazing Piri-Piri sauce is Novo Mondo restaurant and if you've ever been there...you know how addicting it is. If not, ask around.

Do you love Piri-Piri? Do you have a favorite brand and/or do you make your own? Let us know in the comments so others can benefit.



Foodie's Guide to Regional Gastronomy: Kale Soup or Caldo Verde or Caldo Gallego or Minestra Maritata

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Oh, the ways we love you kale soup. You warm our bones on a cold day, bring us back to our childhood and fond memories with our *avós*, and feed our souls. I don't know about you but just seeing or hearing the words evokes the aroma!

My landlady is from the "old country" and when I come home and walk into my apartment and get whiff of kale soup that was evidently simmering on her stove for hours it shifts my assemblage point. It pushes the worries and stresses of the day away from my mind, the tension in my shoulders loosen, and

I get happy.



Of course, I'm hoping that she will hear me come home and soon I will hear a knock on the door and she'll offer me a generous bowl of soup. One thing you can rely on with those from the "old country" is that when it comes to homecooked food they are always generous, so that knock always comes – but just in case she doesn't hear me I'll be extra heavy with my footfalls, maybe "accidentally" bump my elbow into the stairwell's wall.

While I didn't grow up with the aroma of kale soup cooking in the house, I had many friends that were Portuguese and the idea of their generosity came from the fact that those Portuguese friends consistently brought me batches of it when their *avó* or *mãe* made some. Why didn't the *avô* or *papai* ever make some?

While considered to be Portugal's national dish, Kale Soup, *Caldo Verde* (meaning "green broth") or Portuguese Sausage Kale Soup for you non-Portagees, there is little history about its origins. When this is the case for something historical – whether an invention, discovery or creation of a dish – it typically means the origins are from another nation and that

would ruin any claims. For example, ask someone where Baklava or Falafel came from and a half dozen nations will raise their hands, all claiming to be the originator and all claiming to make the best, most delectable version.

First of the problems is that the soup, or at least most of its primary ingredients coming together in one place, are also found in Italy and Spain. I'd imagine that Brazil has a version, but I know very little about Brazilian cuisine. This is because the core of the soup is linked to farmers and the ingredients were readily available or inexpensive. One could say it's a quintessential "poor man's soup" comprised of ingredients that cost little but filled the belly for a day's work and for most of that day. In my book, "poor man's" anything is a code word for mouth-watering and delicious.

Italy has many regional variations from the "old country" all the way to Italian-American neighborhood: *Minestra Maritata* or Italian Wedding Soup. The "married" bit is a reference to the mingling together of greens – *torzella* or kale, escarole, broccoli rabe, endives, chicory or even lettuce – with meat, which can be Italian sausage, *guanciale*, pork ribs, ham hocks or meatballs. Of course, these are accompanied with pasta (*ditali* or any of the *pastina* is best) or potatoes for starch, cannellini (white) or kidney beans, carrots, and red pepper flakes swimming in a rich broth.



Forget the bread to sop up and get hurt, buddy.

Spain has its version in *Caldo Gallego*. This version is different in that they are heavy on the amount of beans, in this case, white beans. The last difference is a slight one in that is the selection of meat: *chorizo* as opposed to *linguiça* or *chouriço*. Otherwise, *caldo gallego* is the same as kale soup, and does not have the astounding variety that you'll find in the Italian version. Don't believe me about these two "imposters" or "wannabe" kale soups? Only one image in this article is of kale soup and the other two are of *Minestra Maritata* and *Caldo Gallego*.

The Portuguese standard has room for variety, at least here on the SouthCoast. The only wiggle room that I have encountered is whether there is pasta or not and the pasta is inevitably elbow macaroni. Now, I haven't the faintest idea if this ties into differences among the island, e.g. Azores, St. Michael, Madeira, just a variety from household to household, or is specific to the Portugues here in the New World. You would know better than me.

One thing I do know is that there is quite the debate about

whether the elbow macaroni belongs and whether *linguiça*, *chourico*, ham hock, or even *paio* should be used for the meat. In fact, I can picture the *avós* fistfighting about what real kale soup is and what the ingredients are supposed to be. The only thing I can think everyone agrees on is that it must be served with some Portuguese bread, preferably a *Papo Secos* or *pao* or as the *gringoosh* say, a “pop.”

This is apparently a “thing” in greater New Bedford. We all have our favorite restaurant or two, bet if you **ever** say your restaurant is best or *gasp* authentic be prepared for flushed faces, loud voices and declarations like “That place doesn’t serve genuine Portuguese food, just fake dishes for Americans!” Is there a Portuguese equivalent for *gringo*? Pronounced “gringoosh” I’d imagine? If so, I’d imagine that is bantered about too.

The reality is that I haven’t come across a bad Portuguese restaurant and maybe I am disqualified to judge because I’m a *gringoosh*, I don’t know. Does *authentic* or closest to the “real thing” really matter? What is the real thing? Can anyone say “I have this recipe I found from 1452 that states ‘My name is Manuel Gomes Fernandes Pereira Ferreira Da Silva Silva and I invented kale soup! Here’s the recipe.’”?



Again, does it really matter? Would you turn down anyone's kale soup, *Minestra Maritata* or *Caldo Gallego*. "This aroma has my belly growling, my mouth watering and looks sensational but sir, I am affronted by your use of Italian and Spanish words so I must refuse!!!" said no one ever.

When I hear the words Kale Soup it conjures up childhood memories of curling around a hot bowl on a winter day after snow fights, sledding, and building snowmen. My Portuguese friends will mention the history and family members that trace back to Portugal for generations and the various family members that make a "mean" bowl.

At the end of the day, it's about what the bowl of soup does for you, what it means, how it makes you feel, the memories involved and how it brings together family and friends and unites people regardless of their gender, nationality, ethnicity, skin color, political affiliation or any other petty nonsense. That's what food does. I believe it was Samuel Clemens that said: "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts."

Maybe that's the key to world peace and the end of all this toxic political disagreement that now characterizes America today? What if we had some 80-year old *avó* from a tenement in Fall River or New Bedford who has been making kale soup for 65 years, force everyone to sit down a hot, fresh bowl of "happy" from the "old country" before they got to talking?

I bet you it would put a smile on all the *gringoosh's* faces and they would all lighten up.

Who makes the best kale soup in your house? Do you know of a restaurant that is as good as your avó makes it? Have a recipe to share?

If you enjoyed this type of article and are foodie who wants more you can read the other ones in the series here.

Foodie's Guide to Regional Gastronomy: Dominican Republic's Mofongo, Chimichurri and Pastelitos

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There are many cultures that have contributed their cuisine to greater New Bedford. While the most known are Portuguese and French-Canadian, the various Latin American cuisines from the Hispanic world when combined is one of the greatest contributors in the region and the nation, for that matter.

While the language may be shared (though some native Spanish speakers may accuse other nations of not actually speaking Spanish!) the cuisines can have some astounding, stark differences. Having said that, nations near each other geographically can often have variations of one particular dish – often claiming to be the originators.



The Dominican Republic has a relatively large presence in greater New Bedford and has brought a number of mouth-watering dishes. The Caribbean island nation shares the island with Haiti and is east of Cuba and Jamaica. That will give you a sense of the influences on their cuisine which comes primarily from Spain, but also has strong influences from the indigenous Taino, the Congo in West Africa and Levantine Middle East.

While nothing is ever better than home cooking, there are restaurants in the region that either specialize or offer a few dishes: La Candela, Celia's, El Caribe and Panchi's here in New Bedford and the aptly named Dominican Restaurant and Latino in Fall River. I have eaten quite a bit at the first three places, never at the others. I've also eaten at restaurants around the country and been privileged enough to have eaten home-cooked Dominican food from co-workers while working throughout New Bedford.

Mofongo and Mofongo Relleno

I will state from the get-go that **Mofongo** is one of the greatest dishes ever created on this planet. While Mofongo is

considered by the majority of the Spanish speaking world to be Puerto Rican, it is, in fact, a dish that has its roots in West Africa's Fufu, and when combined with Spanish influences became common throughout the Carribean.

So, what is the *manna*, this food dropped from heaven, this dish so good every bite is life-changing? Its base is mashed and fried plantains seasoned with garlic, salt and oil, and throughout the Carribean that is about the only thing they agree on. Plantains are native to Asia but made their way to West Africa before the Carribean where they are a staple to both.



Now, when it comes to things we foodies love, the word “juicy” is quintessential and pretty much describes everything that has ever been delicious. We need “juicy.” I will go into a cry-closet and not come out if something is dry. I will have temporary PTSD. The founding father Patrick Henry actually said “Give me juicy, or give me death.” and only through Chinese Whispers has his original historic statement been lost.

The plantains' purpose is to absorb all the mouth-watering

juiciness that comes from the meat and sauce that is poured over the top so we can enter foodie Nirvāṇa. An upside down bell is formed with the mashed plantains and then flipped onto a plate before being smothered with sauce and your choice of meat. The sauce is typically a chicken-based broth, garlic, olive oil, and the standard meat is chicken, shrimp or beef but can also be octopus, bacon, or chicharrón (pork cracklings).

In my opinion, the only thing better than that is the *mofongo relleno* or stuffed mofongo. Before flipping the shell you load it with sauce and filling, cap it off with more mashed plantain, flip it over and smother it with sauce and meat.

I have seen variations – mostly food stalls and food trucks – that leave the upside down bell in a plastic bowl and then they pour everything inside the “bell” and served.

Since we live in a melting pot of a community, I would love to see a fusion with Portuguese cuisine – a mofongo stuffed with shrimp Mozambique, pork Alentejana, or linguica, anyone?



Pastelitos and Pasteles en Hojas

Pastelitos or Savory Turnovers are common not only throughout the Latin world but all over the world. You'd be hard pressed to find a culture that didn't have some version, whether savory or sweet. Each culture has a different preference for the filling and even the name – pastelitos, pastelillo, pasteles, empanada, empanaditas, pastie, croquettes, dumpling, calzone, et al are used synonymously. Often the difference in a word is just the size or which preference a region or country has settled on.

Whatever you call them, planet earth and earthlings have a love affair with them. While they can be baked, they are typically fried to get the dough to be crispy and flaky and then stuffed with a delectable sauce and diced, chopped or ground beef, chicken or shrimp. Some can even have some melty, gooey cheese. My first foray into the Dominican version was simple ground beef and spices cooked by someone's grandmother. If you have had one, you know that you really don't need anything more than perfectly, lightly seasoned fresh ingredients and a crust that was fried until it was golden crisp. Simple ingredients, culinary works of art.

I have heard that some blasphemers will dip them in ketchup. If you witness evil in this form, please call your local police department and report it.

Pasteles en hojas is the use of grated plantains, on occasion cassava or potato, seasoned, mashed into a paste, shaped and stuffed with meat. They are then wrapped with a banana leaf and boiled. Sound familiar? Yes, it is akin to the famous Mexican *tamale*.

What makes these varieties of *pasteles* so popular beyond their tastiness are their utility: you can grab one on the go. Or if you are so predisposed, grab 2,3 or 8 on the go.



Chimichurri Dominicano or Chimi Hamburguesa

Like the pasteles, the Chimichurri Dominicano or Chimi Burger, is extremely popular among street vendors, trucks and stalls, perhaps even more so. There are even Chimi Trucks specializing in just this one iconic dish.

This sandwich is symbolic of much of Dominican cuisine – it takes the best of a few cultures and makes it their own. You have one part hamburger, one part Argentinian chimichurri, and one part Puerto Rico's *pan de agua* bread. The meat is ground pork or beef, *chimichurri* is chopped garlic, fresh parsley and oregano, olive oil, vinegar, and a pinch or two of red pepper flakes, and the bread is a sort of baguette which is crispy on the outside and soft inside.

Like red sauce with Italians, each cook makes their own special recipe and hungry foodies all swear their favorite variation is best of all. As you well know, there is an astounding variety in Italian sauce with just tomatoes, salt, pepper and garlic which everyone claims is distinctly

different and superior to everyone else's. So you can imagine the variety and claims to superiority that the Chimi Burger comes with. In fact, just look at how zealous people can get in America when you ask them who makes the best burgers. A few ingredients prepared a particular way to differentiate it.

Honorable Mentions

Chicharrón de pollo (or puerca) Dominicano or chunks of fried chicken which can be eaten alone or used as a filling or topping are incredibly popular. A dish that sounds strange is *Spaghetti a la Dominicana* – spaghetti cooked with...milk, garlic, onions, peppers, olives and oregano covered in a salami based tomato sauce. I've never had it, so can't vouch for it.



Of course, you'd have to live under a rock to have never heard of or tried *tostones* which are sliced plantains fried, removed from the oil, slightly flattened and then fried again. Salt and/or lightly season, serve still warm and you have a delicious snack.

Sopa de mondongo is a diced tripe (cow stomach) slow-cooked

soup with vegetables, celery, tomatoes, cabbage, carrots, onions, bell peppers, garlic and cilantro.

When it comes to desserts, the Dominican Republic makes a rice pudding (Arroz Con Leche) and Dulce de leche (with pineapple jam) that rivals anyone's, but probably most popular and know the world over is *Arepa* a dense cornmeal and coconut cake. It is considered a "poor man's" dish because of the common, few and simple ingredients (water, milk, sugar, egg, butter, cinnamon) and it is so easily made that kids often make it. Think of a moist cornbread with coconut and a hint of cinnamon added.

This was not meant to be an exhaustive list, so if I didn't include something it is because I am unfamiliar with it.

Do you have a favorite among these Dominican dishes? Or is your favorite not one that is mentioned? Do you make any of these dishes or know someone that does? Have a recipe? Let us know in the comments!

Foodie's Guide to Regional Gastronomy: The Tourtière or French Meat Pie

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Since the past few installments in this series highlighted Portuguese and Hispanic cuisine, I figured we’d switch gears and tackle a different ethnic community: the French Canadians. Thanks to them we have glorious, glorious French Meat Pie a favorite dish certainly not limited to the holidays or after church on Sunday – any day of the year is a good day for some meat pie!

As is the case with most of a specific heritage’s favorite dishes, this is a dish that appears to be quite simple on the outside. However, as we all know what is in a dish is a small factor in its deliciousness – other factors include freshness and quality of ingredients, how each ingredient is treated, and the all-important ingredient: love.



French Meat Pie has its roots in the festive Réveillon at end of the year festivities.

Traditionally made by mémère for end of the year festivities, after special religious events like baptism, communion or after Midnight Mass, or specifically when it comes to Canada, as part of a *réveillon* the long Christmas Eve dinner or on New Year's Day. The name means "waking" which refers to staying up super late to get our grubby hands on the savory, loaded with Umami, meat pie with a flaky, buttery double-crust crust. My mouth is watering just thinking of it.

We call it a French Meat Pie in our neck of the woods because of the area's history and large French-Canadian population, but the meat pie actually traces back to the Mesopotamians in the 16th century B.C.E. Even the Romans had a love affair with it and showing up in their cookbooks as "La Patina." Throughout most of the world, you will find some version of the meat pie whether variations of a proper pie like the

British *cipaille* or Sea-Pie, tarts, or smaller versions like the Indian *samosa* or hand-held like *empenadas*. Modern variations include Meat Pie Triangle using the super thin Phyllo dough and even Spring Rolls.

Well, who cares about them?! We're discussing the contemporary version from our friends up north! There's no telling how old the French Meat Pie was when it comes to Canada but it started showing up in historical documents in the 1600s and originating in Quebec with the earliest settlers celebrating the aforementioned *réveillon* before spreading all over Canada. *Réveillon* itself traces back to France where it was a veritable feast on Christmas Eve that included many dishes, sweets, and wine, naturally.

While we immediately think of pork or even beef as the primary filling, in Canada there are many regional variations which can be veal, pigeon, moose, rabbit, pheasant, mutton, game, salmon, or a mix of seafood. Some recipes call for the filling to be solely meat, others include potatoes. All these variations have added fuel to the fire when it comes to claims of authenticity or originality but in reality, there is no such thing as an authentic version. About the only thing, people can agree on or not debate over is that the dish used to bake the pie is typically deep and ceramic.



There are variations of the French Meat Pie all over the world including the British Cipaille or Sea-Pie.

The debate doesn't stop at the filling and extends itself to the seasoning, crust, gravy and what should accompany it. Some say keep it safe with salt, pepper and sage. Others recommend herbs and/or spices like sage, allspice, nutmeg, clover, and cinnamon. With the crust would it be safe to say that a bad crust can ruin the whole pie no matter what meat is chosen to fill it? That crust **will** make or break that pie and playing around with that is a good way to place a dark cloud over festivities and have everyone pointing the finger at the communist who baked it.

Like we Italians and our red sauce recipes (please, it's not gravy – people who call it that are *goombas* or watch too much *The Sopranos*) the French-Canadians and the French-Canadian...um, Americans, have recipes that have been passed down as heirlooms through generations. Generations where it has been perfected. Hard to believe in the day and age of pre-made

packets of gravy, but traditionally it was made from scratch – just as some people still do today.

There are rumors of communist activities in the area: people who don't put gravy on their French Meat Pie, but ketchup. For this sort of behavior the the corrective and curative remedy is ostracization or banishment from the community **after** they spend the larger portion of the day in stockades or a pillory in a public square.

The final aspect that causes argument is what should be served with it? Mashed potatoes so you have an excuse to smother something with gravy even more? Peas?

In my opinion, the best way to end these debates is to have an annual New Bedford French Meat Pie Fest as we have with Chowder. We can have categories like the best traditional, most innovative, and best gravy as we eat ourselves into foodie bliss.



One French-Canadian dish that I wish would catch on locally is poutine. While I have seen it served locally no one is doing anything remotely close to authentic. Some Americans apparently think cheese is the same as curds – it's not.

There have been a number of retail producers and one that comes to mind immediately is Antil's that used to be at 249 Adams Street in Fairhaven next to the Oxford Pub. While that business closed I have seen their pies show up in supermarkets.

Not that it matters, because everyone knows that mémère makes the best. If you don't have a mémère you likely know someone who does or know someone who has a golden recipe since the French Meat Pie has become so popular that it has been assimilated into local culture and Americana. In this area, it's almost as American as Apple pie.

Now that I'm thinking about it, we should change that saying "As American as French Meat Pie." I'd take a French Meat Pie with gravy over and Apple Pie and day of the week.

What do you think is the most important part of the pie? Filling? Crust? Gravy? Sides? How about the easiest part to ruin?

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Foodie's Guide to Regional Gastronomy: Caçoila, caçoula or caçarola

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Want to get into a fistfight? Tell someone that they are flat-out wrong about the best local spot to get caçoila and that your spot is the best. We here on the SouthCoast are rabid about our caçoila and where to go to get it and here in New Bedford, we'll punch a Nazi in the mouth, I mean, we'll punch someone that tells us some really bad place is the best place to get it. It'll be like the "Red Wedding" scene.

I don't want to even ponder the sheer terror of the concept and reality that there are millions upon millions of people across the country or even the world, that simply never heard the word or...gasp...ever tried caçoila. Clearly, these poor souls were horrible people generating dark karma over thousands of lifetimes during countless kalpas to receive such punishment.

For the rest of us, we know caçoila. Oh, we **know** caçoila. **Our** caçoila.



In fact, we know it so well, many have no problem changing New Bedford nickname from the “Whaling City” to Caçoila City. Seriously, whaling is dead, harkens back to a time when we slaughtered the poor things almost to the point of extinction, and no one really cares to call it by that name. It’s a dead name like the industry.

Caçoila, on the other hand, is alive and well. Let’s have it, Mayor Mitchell, we were the Whaling City, then that died and we became the City Of Light. Who even calls New Bedford “The City Of Light”? Caçoila City has such a nice ring to it.

While you’ll find few people that will offer much disagreement and little to no fight when it comes to the fact that no one, and I mean no one, makes caçoila better than our avó or vovó or if you aren’t Portuguese, you’ve had it at someone’s house that is Portuguese. Where the disagreement comes from is where else to get it when you don’t have access to vovó’s cooking and when it comes to that there are eateries with decades of

tradition and fans behind them.

Now, I'm not going to tell you where to get the best caçoila – I don't want to have strangers randomly punching me in the mouth or suplexing me while I'm taking out the garbage or getting a coffee – this is about caçoila, its culinary history and culture.

To begin with – for those ghastly souls who aren't sure what caçoila is – generally, caçoila is marinated cuts of pork butt stewed for hours with spices like paprika, garlic, allspice, coriander, cinnamon, bay leaves and wine and/or vinegar. Stewed until tender, tender, tender, “fall-off-the-bone” tender. I say “generally” since some folks like to substitute pork for lamb or beef, and every region and family has their own variety steeped in tradition when it comes to the ratios or even specific spices.



It is this variety which is cause for all the hoopla and disagreement on who makes the best, but truth be told you would really be hard-pressed to find genuinely **bad** caçoila. You are likely just to find caçoila the way you prefer it and dislike or even bad-mouth the other ways. If you still can't picture it, think “BBQ Pork pulled sandwich Portuguese-style

without all the BBQ sauce.”

While you can, of course, find caçoila as a dish with let's say potatoes and onions, some classic Portuguese red peppers, and sides of rice, olives and perhaps a basic salad it is probably the caçoila that reigns supreme in popularity. Using a “pop” or pão of course. Want one of those aforementioned punches in the mouth? Go ahead and make that sandwich with an English muffin, some rye bread, gluten-free, fat-free, cholesterol-free, pro-PaleoKetogenicAtkinsSouthBeachDukan5:2, you Nazi.

The sheer practicality and handiness – pardon the pun – that comes with a sandwich when it comes to the very industrial, busy and blue-collar SouthCoast make it a favorite. You may not have time to seat and eat, you may want to continue to work, perhaps drive (you didn't hear that from me!), keep watching the game on TV or something else. One hand on the sandwich, the other free to do other things.

Also, there is the frugality and affordability: for about \$5 you can get a sandwich with some fries on the side, at the vast majority of local restaurants.

So where does caçoila come from? How many calories does it have? Who invented it or came up with it? What was vovó's that name so we can send her flowers, love letters, and put her in our last will and testament? Well, that's like asking “Who invented fire?” or the wheel, or breathing. It hardly matters. Especially when we can't taste **her** caçoila anyway. We can, however, taste the caçoila from all the living, breathing, vovó's in the area and that's what matters.



If you could find out who made the first and/or had access to that original recipe as if there was some “Ur-Caçoila” it might even turn out to be so unlike **your** favorite way of making it that you wouldn’t like it. And no one is going to tolerate you punching a vovó in the face, pal.

There are significant differences in other Portuguese enclaves around the world anyway. So, if you are prone to being triggered you better not go to Hawaii where the Portuguese there added pineapple and a little ketchup to their caçoila sandwich. There are even sick, sadistic and twisted rumors that you can optionally add avacado. Definitely fascists.

Now, one thing that always puzzled me, and being a Grammar and Spelling Nazi (in spite of making a ton of mistakes in those departments myself) and even irked me being a First Worlder, when people would insert an “r” in the word. They would say “caçerla” and I would think “Listen, buddy: we are in the land hating on the letter ‘r.’ We lop it off of the ends of words, we skip its existence in the middle of words, we just don’t like that letter – it’s ‘pahk’ not ‘park’, it’s ‘tahtah’ sauce not “tartar” sauce. So what possessed you to add one where there isn’t one?” Why are you coming at me, bro?

I get the same feeling when I pour my bowl of cereal and find out there is no milk. It's pure rage. I take it out on people by replying to "Have a good day!" with a "No thanks." or "No one tells me what to do."

Anyhow, it turns out I am a miser, curmudgeon, a cranky old man because that mysterious 'r' that seems redundant turns up in certain regional Portuguese dialects where you will see the word as **caçoila**, **caçoula** or **caçarola**.

Damnit. I wanted to hear myself complain.

Foodie's Guide to Regional Gastronomy: 7 Of The Best Traditional Holiday Drinks

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“Tis the season and nothing says “Thanksgiving” and “Christmas” more than the food and drinks that come with them. When these holidays are mentioned they conjure up the various seasonal flavors and aromas we all love. Often, a drink is needed to destress or unwind after the work, stress and sweat that goes into the planning, cooking, shopping, decorating and everything else that goes into making the holidays go off without a hitch.

Summer has its drinks that conjure up sand, sunshine, and beaches. Coconut, little umbrellas, citrus, and fruit put summer in your drink. When it comes to fall and winter, a whole new host of ingredients come into play – hazelnuts and chestnuts, cinnamon, nutmeg, apple, et al.

The fun in these drinks shouldn’t be limited to simply spiking some eggnog or hot chocolate when there is a myriad of traditional seasonal drinks that have been around for decades, even centuries. Want to treat your guests to a pleasant surprise? Offer them more than just a cocktail, but perhaps a little ice-breaking – pardon the pun – chit-chat about what the cocktail is, how old it is and where it came from.

Here are 7 traditional holiday drinks with a little history presented in a light and fun way.



Tom And Jerry

Nothing cartoonish or funny about this classic that marries brandy, rum, and eggnog and served hot but the cartoon characters did get their names from the drink. The “Tom & Jerry” has been around since the early 1800s when British journalist, and writer on popular culture and sports, Pierce Egan, made the drink popular by elevating the “spiked eggnog” to the next level, called it the Tom & Jerry based on characters in his book *Life in London, or The Day and Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorn Esq. and his Elegant Friend Corinthian Tom*. Say that five times fast. Then say it five times fast after having a few Tom & Jerry cocktails

As is evident by any trip to the supermarket during the holidays, folks love eggnog in many flavors and one flavor that goes well with it is vanilla and in my opinion, a vanilla “Tom & Jerry” with a light sprinkle of nutmeg is the best version of a “Tom & Jerry.” Some like to put a sprinkle of

cinnamon, a little sugar to sweeten the deal and for presentation some beaten eggs. The flavor? Think of a homemade sugar cookie.

Incredibly easy to make, but be forewarned: very addictive!



Mulled Wine, Glögg or Glühwein

The first time I had this popular Christmas drink was while on sabbatical backpacking Europe. I was in the Rhineland-Palatinate in Southwest Germany attending an outdoor film festival. Yes, it was cold. Yes, the *Glühwein* – which I absolutely loved – made the weather bearable. Well, that plus the blanket they offered.

Traditionally the wine is red, but of course, white wine is an option. Heck, here in Portugal, er...I mean, the SouthCoast you can do it with green wine. Heat the wine, add mulling spices

which typically are cinnamon, fennel seed/star anise, nutmeg, cloves, cardamom, orange or lemon, and ginger and voila: instant happy. How long has mulled wine been around? Since ancient Rome. How popular is it? You'd be hard pressed to find a European nation that doesn't enjoy some variant and that includes eastern Europe and the Baltic States. It can also be found in Canada, Russia and even Turkey.

Popular variations include using Port or a Madeiran wine, fruit wines like cherry and blueberry, *mit Schuss* or with a shot of brandy, akvavit (Glögg), or vodka. If you are a fan of Victorian England and/or Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" then you know about the "Smoking Bishop" variation which used citrus fruits that are roasted until caramelized. Can you say "Yuuuum!!"?

There are even variations of the "Smoking Bishop" called, the Smoking Archbishop (w/ Claret), Smoking Beadle – a sort of church usher (using ginger wine and raisins), Smoking Cardinal (using Rhine wine or Champagne), and a Smoking Pope (using Burgundy wine). They all sound good to me!



Wassail or Hard Cider

The word Wassail instantly conjures up Christmas Carols as it is synonymous with the virtually dead activity. Whatever happened to that?

The word is an Old English word *was hál*, meaning “be healthy” which was itself taken from Old Norse. That’s just hoity-toity talk to say that the word goes back a looooooong way. In fact, to the Middle Ages when it was used a good thousand years or more, ago. So long ago, that you wouldn’t understand the English if you heard it today. The point is that the word and drink was common parlance at one point in England well before the United States existed.

The reason for its popularity and why it is associated with Christmas is because Wassail is a cider-based drink and apples are harvested late in the year and there is typically a surplus. What to do when you have a surplus of fruit? Make booze, of course!

The hot, mulled punch or cider was originally made from a mead – fermented honey – in which roasted crab apples were tossed in. Sound familiar? Yes, this is the original “bobbing for apples.” Apparently, someone thought “Mead is gross. Let’s just make booze from the apples and forget the mead.” Kick it up a notch by mulling it with nutmeg, ginger, cinnamon and some sugar, then heat it up since it was cold outside and you have wassail – the perfect hot cup of something with alcohol in it to warm your bones while caroling.

Well, we know that booze heating you up is just an Old Wive’s Tale – these wise ladies got a bad rap if you ask me – but its placebic effect was enough. Along with thinking the booze was heating you up, was the ginger which actually does improve circulation. A little ginger, a little placebo, and you were warmer or at least you thought so. “It’s real to me damn it.”



Eggnog

Once upon a time, in the Pleistocene Era – which for those of you who don't know, is in the early to middle 1970s – eggnog was a popular holiday drink mom would make and kids would go mad for it. The first eggnog of the season was a momentous one: it officially signaled that school vacation was coming, lots of holiday specials on TV, driving about looking for Christmas trees, and unwrapping presents was all right around the corner.

The story behind the word is an ugly, dull one that covers centuries and many nations. Yeah, not going there. The only fact surrounding the word is that the first known use of the word “nog” was in 1693. What about the “egg”? Not going there either. Who cares about that stuff?

Eggnog brought the whole house together because the kids could join in drinking it and the adults could get the spiked version. It was fun as a kid, to pretend you were joining the

adults and maybe, just maybe an adult accidentally put a little booze in yours. You could even placebo yourself into swearing it happened and you were a bit tipsy.

Traditionally a mixture of milk and cream, some whipped egg whites, egg yolks and sweetened with sugar before whipping it into a froth, you then would sprinkle a little cinnamon and/or nutmeg over the top. Adults could add a little whiskey, rum or brandy with it and for those cold days you could warm it up.

These days, you “run to Cumby’s” and choose from 813 flavors including cookie dough, Oreo, sugar cookie, etc. Is that stuff even have egg or nog in it? The ingredients are usually listed something like milk, sugar, cream, sugar, egg whites, sugar, egg yolks, sugar, and then sugar. You can even get eggnog “creamers” whereby you can make eggnog lattes, add to your coffee, or even pour into you custard mix. Of course, all of those creamers come in the 813 flavors.

Call me a throwback, but I’ll take the homemade traditional eggnog over those cleverly disguised “milkssugars” any day. Same with the coffee. Can we just leave some things alone?



Hot Toddy

The Hot Toddy is a perennial favorite and one that tops many people's list. Why? Well it has booze. That's it. Just kidding.

The word Toddy was gifted to us from India – the culture that also gave us words like pajamas, bungalow, loot, and punch as in liquor and fruit. They also gave us vindaloo, roti, curry, raga, Yoga, Bollywood, Sanskrit, and Nithya Menen. Good people, those Indians.

The Hot Toddy became famous or infamous depending on your point of view, as a nightcap. The typical Hot Toddy was some warmed whiskey, water, honey, a dash of clove and cinnamon, and optionally use tea instead of water. Place a slice or lemon on the rim and you will have sweet dreams of chestnuts roasting on an open fire. If not, at least it would put you in a good mood and your heart wouldn't be an empty hole, your brain wouldn't be full of spiders and you wouldn't have garlic in your soul. No one likes a mean one around the holidays.



Brandy Alexander

Changing gears a little, we have the Brandy Alexander – a cocktail containing brandy (duh), creme de cacao, cognac, and cream that has been around since the 1920s. You know “brandy” but who the heck is Alexander? That’s a road that is just going to be more arguing. Let the snobs argue, we’ll just sip, enjoy, and smile.

Speaking of snobs, the drink has been associated with snobs, the rich, the wealthy and famous since its inception. From royal weddings, a Russian Tsar (Alexander, duh), and in movies like *Tattoo*, *Days Of Wine and Roses*, and *Two Lovers* to being John Lennon favorite and mentioned in books by Kurt Vonnegut and Chuck Palahniuk. Have a few and you can easily pretend you are a tsar, celebrity, famous musician or musician and

entertain all your friends.



Poinsettia

This last one I've been hearing and hearing and hearing about and it seems it is growing in popularity to the point that it wants to be added to the list of holiday cocktails. The simple drink is a detour from all the previous ones in the sense that it is a mixture of Cointreau, champagne, and cranberry juice. Alternatively, you can replace the Cointreau with the more affordable, Triple Sec.

The champagne adds the festive quality that comes with the holidays. The cranberry adds the seasonal (and regional) aspect and the Cointreau is the orange in the lemon or orange citrus element you see in so many of the other drinks. Not sure heating it up would be very appetizing though. I've never had warm or hot champagne, but I'll pass on that.

Where does the name come from? Well, the color of the drink and the flower match and of course, the Poinsettia flower is a common one on the holidays.



Honorable mentions go to the popular Hot Buttered Rum and English Christmas Punch which need no write-up to detail, the Ovaltine – “You’ll shoot your eye out!” and the Mayan Hot Chocolate which can be spiked to make them “festive” for the holidays. The Mayan Hot Chocolate is the adult version of hot cocoa that has cinnamon, nutmeg, vanilla, honey, and a little kick to warm you up courtesy of a chili pepper.

Lastly, is my personal favorite which is not a cocktail, but just something you pour over the “rocks”: DiSaronno on the rocks. I don’t like 35 flavors competing in my glass, and I don’t need all the extra calories from fillers, creams, eggs, etc. Just something about Amaretto that reminds me of the holidays.

The only drawback to the drink is ordering it a bar. You have to look both ways, make sure no one is listening and say

“DiSaronno on the rocks, please.” You don’t want to be “that” guy.

Foodie’s Guide to Regional Gastronomy: The Hamburger

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Ah, the hamburger, the dish with a million faces. It can be humble or grandiose, basic or extravagant, affordable or one with which you might need to leverage your house to get a small loan. It can have next to nothing on it or more other ingredients than the burger itself weighs. Either way, America and the world has a love affair with the hamburger and it has become as American as baseball, apple pie, and politics.



Why do we love this sandwich so much? Some of us love it so much that if someone said that they could eat a hamburger every day it wouldn't sound like crazy talk at all. In fact, they'd probably say "Me, too!"

The hamburger joins the short list of elite dishes and keeps company with the likes of pizza, hot dogs, chowder, fried chicken, et al. The proof is in the seemingly innocuous

question “Who makes the best _____?” You’ll not only get plenty of different answers but a debate, even an argument will ensue. Don’t be surprised if insults and even threats fly about as well.

Like, pizza, the hamburger’s popularity has much to do with how customizable it is. The gamut ranges from just some ketchup or perhaps a slice of melted cheese, to a veritable mountain of multiple patties, trimmings, sauces, and toppings making the sandwich as big as your head. The “bread” layers can be a classic bun or fried bread, a croissant, pretzel, cheese roll, even ramen noodle, grilled cheese sandwiches, or donuts. The patty can be all sorts of things, like black beans, mushrooms, tofu, turkey, or veggie but we’ll narrow the scope to the classic ground beef patty.

While the hamburger had humble beginnings – chopping up the least expensive, lowest quality cuts of meats and dressing it up making it more edible with a host of trimmings and toppings – it has also ventured out beyond its blue-collar beginnings into the “white” collar territory with gourmet, astronomically and outrageously priced versions. You can find the hamburger at a greasy spoon and a Michelin star restaurant, and there are as many versions as there are restaurants or grills at home. Foodies around the world are always eager to find a new restaurant’s hamburger or a variation they never tried and every foodie’s bucket list will have a hamburger on it somewhere.



Don't make fun of his swag – the 4th Earl of Sandwich, John Montagu's first world problems led to the hamburger.

While food historians (yes, there is such a thing and they take this sort of stuff seriously) don't all agree on where the hamburger had its start since references to something similar go as far back as 4th century A.D. Rome with their *isicia omentata* – they are almost unanimous in that it is a very, distinctly American dish.

Incidentally, ancient Rome's *isicia omentata*, was a baked

minced meat patty with "...pine kernels, black and green peppercorns, and white wine." Yum, pine kernels. That may be the only version of burger today that hasn't been done. The term *sandwich* itself wasn't "invented" until 1765 after an unknown chef prepared this marvelous creation for the ...ahem... 4th Earl of Sandwich, John Montagu.

While there is a Sandwich here in Massachusetts, there weren't Earls and this Sandwich was a town in Kent in the Southwest of England. Incidentally, the Russell family which helped create the village of Bedford which would become the city today traces its roots to the Duke of Bedford. Dukes, Earls, ...oh, sandwiches. Back to sandwiches. This genteel, first First World Problem-haver, the 4th Earl of Sandwich did not want to soil his precious hands while scoffing meats, cheeses, jams and other goodies, so his chef decided to place them between two slices of bread, creating the first historical mention of the term.

If only that chef would have known the types of sandwiches people would create like something with 6 patties, onion rings, french fries, wrapped in bacon served on a donut and topped with a grilled cheese. He would have had a heart attack without even having eaten one.



Elizabeth Leslie was the first person to put a hamburger recipe in a cookbook.

Anyhow, the hamburger itself had its first historical mention in a cookbook by the prolific Elizabeth Leslie in 1840. OK guys – keep the kitchen and “sammich” jokes to yourself. Remember, you may not have ever had a hamburger in your life if it wasn’t for her. Pay tribute and homage to her greatness. After Leslie’s cookbook this glorious, glorious sandwich had its start in America’s “greasy spoon” mom & pop diners, but really only officially reached the general populace in the 1920s through the White Castle restaurant chain.

Now, some of you are thinking “Why the heck is it called a hamburger then? Is there a German Duke or Earl of Hamburg somewhere in the equation? How and when did the Earl of

Sandwich and Duke of Hamburg collide?"

Well, there is Russian collusion and immigration here – don't worry, no need to grab your tinfoil hats – I abhor politics. Russian immigrants were flocking to Germany in the middle of the 19th century and so many came to Hamburg that it was even dubbed "The Russian Port." Or I should say what would become Germany since at that time the unification of Germany hadn't happened yet and was only a confederate of 39 states.

Anyhow, Hamburg being a port city was like most port cities throughout history: an entry point for migrants. These immigrants brought with them *tartare*, a dish of raw, ground or minced beef or horsemeat. I don't know about you, but I'm glad that the latter choice didn't catch on.

While the word *tartare* is equated with French cuisine where it is served with a raw egg on top and perhaps some capers and onion, the word refers to the Turkic-speaking, Russian Tatar culture that brought the dish and variants with them to Hamburg. As happens in all melting pot cities cuisines from various cultures mingle, fuse and adapt and locals not too keen on the raw meat would simply cook it and serve it, called a "Hamburger Rundstück," or Hamburg Steak. At this point in Hamburg's history it was sans buns, and it isn't a hamburger, unless you've got buns, hun.



The "Russian Port" of Hamburg in 1862.

Now, with a short jaunt down the Elbe, you hit the Atlantic and can come to the New World. Incidentally, again, Hamburg is a 6-hour drive from Leiden, Netherlands – the port English separatist Puritans used to embark from aboard the Mayflower. When America declared to the world "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free..." The Russians along with many ethnic cultures, left from the "The Russian Port" of Hamburg, came to America and brought their *tartare* recipes with them and the Germans that came brought their Hamburger Rundstück. So, thank the Russians for their, um, collaboration and contribution to world cuisine that helped create the hamburger we love so much today.

Most came through Ellis Island and so New York became the site of the first restaurants to serve cuisines that would appeal to incoming immigrants. Naturally, the restaurants would serve the hamburger steak sans buns and the *tartare* to appeal to those that came from Hamburg, so they added a *Hamburg-style American fillet* on their menus.

Once some clever souls figured out that you could use cheap

cuts of meat or trimmings, then add other ingredients like onion making it affordable, the dish could reach the masses and it really caught on. In the 1930s, the American love affair with shortening and abbreviating names, was in full effect and the term hamburger or just hamburg came into common use.

So, when did the hamburger leave its nakedness and become the hamburger sandwich? No one knows. No boos, please – I don't create history, just share it. The history of placing hamburger meat between two buns is one of speculation rife with anecdotes, urban legends, and myths. I mean, who doesn't want credit for creating the hamburger sandwich? There are stories on top of stories, but I don't think it would take too much thought to put the two together and people have likely been doing it since time immemorial.



The Hamburg Steak made popular in New York in the 19th century to attract immigrants.

Honestly, who cares? All that matters is that it exists. It's here. You can make or get one right at one or more places

within walking distance of where you are right now. In fact, the hamburger is a global phenomenon and you can get them anywhere in the world and in a dizzying array of variations.

Did someone say, "variations"? Every part of a hamburger can be substituted for just about anything. You can swap the buns for the afore-mentioned grilled cheese, waffle, fried PBJ or donuts. Sauces can be as "normal" as ketchup, mustard and relish, slightly different like Bacon jam, aioli, BBQ or Whiskey sauces or even far-out like yogurt. Ew.

Trimmings or toppings typically include any type of cheese, lettuce, tomato or onions, however you are only limited by your imagination and it's not unheard of to hear about taste-buds destroying hot peppers, egg, French Fries, pork belly, onion rings, pancetta or prosciutto. There are even stories told around campfires that mention placing chile rellenos, berries, tater tots, caviar, soft-shell crabs even gold-leaf.

Then, of course, there is the matter of size and signature. Restaurants will market a hamburger that they invented to separate themselves from other restaurants, or they will offer a massive burger or one with multiple patties.

One of the most insane burgers I have come across are the ones served at the Heart Attack Grill on Las Vegas, Nevada. Fat, grease, cheese, sugar, calories, cholesterol, salt? Who cares!? Take it to the next level by adding as much of those things as possible in one burger and have it served to you by a waitstaff in nurse gowns and hospital scrubs. You can have these heart attack inducing megaburgers called "Bypass" burgers that range as high as 20,000 calories with a side of "Flatliner" fries cooked in lard. Heck, might as well put the "Flatliner" Fries in the burger. Wash it down with a diet soda, of course.



McGuire's Irish Pub in Pensacola, FL offers a "...three-quarter-pounder Black Angus beef burger covered in a scoop of hot fudge-drizzled vanilla ice cream." Say, what?

The Ramen Burger invented by Japanese-American Keizo Shimamoto uses Ramen noodles formed into the bun and the patty is seared in Sesame oil. At Boston Burger Company you can get, The King – a burger that is topped with bacon, peanut butter, and fried bananas, then dusted with cinnamon and sugar. Chicago's Kuma's Corner offers the "Ghost" burger, as in the "Holy Ghost. You get a hamburger with goat shoulder, Ghost pepper aioli, slathered in a red wine reduction called "The Blood Of Christ" and a communion wafer. Heilege Scheiße!

Mallie's Sports Grill & Bar in Detroit is home to the world's largest hamburger at 1,794lbs with 300lbs of that being the toppings and 250lbs being bun. Those are some big buns, hun. They planned it over the course of 4 years and the burger was 5' wide by 3' tall. Have \$7,799 to blow? Give the restaurant 3 days notice and head there.

The 666 Burger food truck in New York City, used to sell a “f***ing burger filled and topped with rich people sh**” aptly called “The Douchebag Burger” that cost \$666. What are the toppings that make a douchebag happy? Well, like it says in the description, rich people “sh**” like a Kobe burger patty, topped with lobster caviar, Himalayan rock salt, foie gras and it’s served wrapped in greasy \$100 bills.



Douchebag Burger anyone?

The most expensive burger I could find was the \$5,000 FleurBurger served at Las Vegas’s Fleur restaurant inside Mandalay Bay Casino. It gets things we’ve already come across like Kobe beef and foie gras, but what makes it so expensive is the huge quantities of expensive black truffles and it’s paired with a rare bottle of Château Pétrus, a Merlot wine made in Bordeaux, France. The wine is served in fancy, high-end Ichendorf Brunello wine glasses.

I hope you enjoyed this little merger of gastronomy, history and cultures. History can be interesting and fun, and often

it's as interesting or more so, than fiction.

Have a dish you absolutely love and want to know how it came about? A dish that your heritage has produced? Comment on the article or social media post, or inbox us at info@newbedfordguide.com.

Foodie's Guide to Regional Gastronomy: Latin America's "Empanada"

Glorious, glorious, empanadas – filled with meat, vegetables, even fruit and wrapped up in a pastry dough.

Series Introduction (Move down if you're familiar with the thread or don't care)

In this series, we hope to highlight and showcase in as interesting a way as possible, the stories behind our favorite, mouth-watering local dishes. While we'll focus on greater New Bedford and the South Coast, we will occasionally "travel" to places like Plymouth, Providence or even Boston. I will attempt to keep it light-hearted, fun and easy to read. While I can't promise to keep you compelled and pull you along with prose – that would take a professional writer – I will promise to be liberal with the drool-inducing images of these dishes.

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occasional heated debate. Food was a huge part of our identity, where we came from, who we were. There was something special about the atmosphere that revolved around a meal that we prepared.



Argentinian version of the empanada with the national “sauce,” green chimichurri- generally made of parsley, oregano, vinegar, garlic and pinch of red pepper flakes. Photo: Rick Wood.

This is certainly not unique to an Italian or Sicilian household. Every ethnic group in the country has a proud culinary tradition that they grew up around. You can easily replace “Sicilian” with Irish, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Ethiopian, Greek or anything else. This is why food as a topic is always so popular. We humans love our food and that passion goes beyond the gustatory or taste – we crave the aromas, delight in the presentation, are fueled by the atmosphere, and relish – pardon the pun – discussion about our favorite

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Be honest. When you saw the word “Empanada” your salivary glands were activated and you saw an image of your grandmother’s or mom’s empanadas. You may have even picked up a faint aroma. With this sensory activation comes memories – sitting around the table, walking about the house, laughing, faces of friends and family come and gone, etc.



*Classic, traditional empanada that you will find locally.
Photo: "The Photographer."*

In my case, the word conjures memories of an old company on the waterfront I used to work at. I've had many an empanada – in different parts of the world, too – but none compared to a Dominican lady that brought them in on special occasions. I swore there was some kind of voodoo afoot. Some magic powder must have been put inside, because these were special.

Now, I don't know if she wanted to keep the family recipe secret, or she was being dishonest, but no matter how much I pried she would say that it was just dough, meat and a few everyday spices. Thing is that even though I followed her recipe to a "T," it never came out the same. Heck, it never even came out **close**. You can't just know the ingredients, but have to have been cooking it for years and it has to come from the *corazon*.

The world over has something similar or close: Vietnam has the *Bánh gỏi*, Turkey has the *Börek*, Eastern Europeans the *Knish*, Jamaica the *patty*, India makes the *Kajjikaya*, England has a *pasty*, and of course, Italy has the *Calzone*. I'm going to

limit this article the Latin American kind – there are enough variations among the nations! Though we will stray a bit, it will be into nations that either speak Spanish or are influenced somehow by the culture.

For those who don't know * gasp * an empanada is a stuffed bread or pastry that can be baked, but is usually fried. The word comes from the Spanish "*empanar*" which means to wrap in bread – literally means to "embread" something. In this case, the bread is dough to make a pastry crust and what is "embreaded" is a filling that varies. While many nations have their own favorite filling, you will see most of them everywhere. Typically savory, the fillings are generally a meat, but you will also come across seafood, just vegetables, eggs or even the dessert variation of fruit. In parts of Mexico they put *huitlacoche* or corn smut inside which is a – believe it or not – a fungus that grows on corn.



A Peruvian version with chicken thigh, boiled egg, onion, garlic, green olive and spices, served with a slice of lime.

Argentiniāns love their beef, but you'll also find raisins, ham or spinach. Colombians enjoy potatoes and meat, Spain prefers vegetables that grow in the Mediterranean. In Chile you'll see lots of sauteed onions, olives and eggs. In Portugal you can find sardines, tuna, pork, cod and duh – chouriço, accompanied with perhaps garlic, tomato and onion in a sauce.

The first mention in history comes from a Catalan (Spain) history book appropriately called “*Libre del Coch*” written in 1520 by a one Robert de Nola. In de Nola's book he mentions empanadas crammed with seafood and includes recipes from Catalan, of course, but also France, Italy, and the Middle East. Since then, the empanada went from Spain and Portugal, was brought to the Philippines and Latin America by Spaniards and then eventually to North America by immigrants. The empanada has spread across cultures, through time to modern day – so biting into one is like biting into history.

So where are the best spots on the SouthCoast to get empanadas? Let us know so we can head out and try them!

Foodie's Guide to Regional Gastronomy: The Malasadas – Portugal's Glorious Version Of Fried Dough

Malasadas being prepared at everyone's favorite city celebration: The Feast of the Blessed Sacrament.

Series Introduction

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Ah, imagine life without having ever had a malasadas? Do you remember the first time you saw one as a kid? What a moment. It's amazing how popular something so simple, with so few ingredients can have such a marked effect on people and be so popular.

Meaning "poorly cooked," malasadas are yeast-leavened "doughnuts" or fritters without a hole in the middle, are enriched with butter and eggs, fried to a delightful golden brown, rolled in sugar and served.

They are typically stretched into a rustic, round shape, or even a triangle or square. Also referred to as "filhoses," in some parts of Portugal like Graciosa, the filho resembles the perfectly circular doughnut we are all familiar with.

That former, rustic style circular shaped ones are the ones served in most areas of Portugal and in the Portuguese communities along the South Coast. However, there are other Portuguese enclaves throughout the nation, most notably the rather large one in Hawaii. There, it is also shaped like a doughnut is typically shaped, and may be topped or filled with a variety of things, such as evaporated milk, plain custard, a coconut-flavored pudding called *haupia* or, of course, Hawaii's beloved pineapple.



Hawaii's version, more of a filho resembling a traditional doughnut, commonly has toppings or fillings. Photo by _e.ts_. The origins are sort of clouded in mystery. The Portuguese will proudly say that the invention of the tasty treat originated in the Azores, specifically, the island of São Miguel. It is said that sometime early in the 15th century, someone's avó created the malasadas to feed the cravings of a grandchild. Others say, it was a by-product of Muslim occupancy and rule over Portugal as early as the 8th century.

Thing is that fried dough is universal across cultures and time. It's just one of those things that has been around forever – since at least 8,000 B.C.E. and mentioned in ancient Sumer, Egypt and China. The ancient Romans had scriblita, and today they have *zeppole* or *fritelle*. Native Americans have fry bread, Canadians have beaver tails, “Newfies” have Touton, Americans have versions served at festivals and carnivals, called Elephant Ears, doughboys, or fry dough.

Whatever you want to call it, some variation is made in most countries because of its simplicity to make and availability of the ingredients. And whatever you want to call it, it's mouth-watering delicious and now I want one!



■

Foodie's Guide to Regional Gastronomy: The Humble "Queijadas" or Portuguese egg tart pastry

The Hieronymites Monastery Mosteiro dos Jerónimos in Lisbon, Portugal where the "queizadas" was first created by Catholic Monks. Photo by Alvesgaspar.

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You haven't lived until you've had at least one...or ten "queijadas"!

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Creamy and sweet, with a warm, almost hot center, flaky crust and a tinge of "burnt" flavor on the top. This describes the

quintessential *pastel de nata* (mainland Portuguese name), *queijadas de nata* (Azorean name), or as they are known colloquially, *quezadas* or *natas*. Whatever you decide to call them, they are tiny morsels of life-changing deliciousness. Bite into one, your life is changed. You are whisked away to a stress-free existence and everything is vales of lavender and lilies and in the distance you can hear angels sing.

Well, not really. I exaggerated the part about the lilies.

This Portuguese egg tart delicacy is a favorite anywhere that there are Portuguese enclaves on the the planet, e.g. New Bedford, Fall River, parts of Hawaii, Florida, Brazil, Mozambique, and even China in Macau. How did they come about? Who made the first ones? Has someone paid tribute with a statue or monument? Where are the best places to get them? Because I want these bakers to take my money.



You so want this to be a picture of your hand.

Believe it or not the pastry is a merger of two giants of the culinary world: France and Portugal. One famous the world over, the other known only in certain communities like our own. Having traveled over the world, I am always astounded how little people know about the Portuguese, their culture and cuisine. Especially astounding since they have made some of the greatest contributions to these areas.

In 1501, a Hieronymite monastery called *Mosteiro dos Jerónimos*, was erected in Lisbon in the parish of Belém, under

the supervision of a Frenchman by the name of Diogo Boytac. The Hieronymites were a Catholic enclosed religious order – a fancy way to say Catholic “hermits.”

The monastery was started by a Frenchman, but after he passed away, local Portuguese took over, most importantly João de Castilho, Diogo de Torralva and architect Jérôme de Rouen, son of the renowned French sculptor Jean de Rouen. In all, it would take nearly 70 years to complete and finally finished in 1600.

However, I digress. These monks had a connection to France, not only through the original builder, Diogo Boytac, but the order itself was originally based in France. Those French monks favored a local pastry, called in French, the *flans pâtissier*. The French version was “pie sized” and not the little “two-biters” we’ve come to know.

Once the monks had settled in at the monastery and their normal lives would resume, they of course would create French dishes. Since the monks used egg-whites for starching of their clothes they would be “stuck” with a lot of egg yolks. When you have lots of egg yolks, what do you do? Well, you make custard! So, it was a no brainer to begun cooking *flans pâtissier*.



The French flans pâtissier that gave birth to the Portuguese “queijadas de natas.”

In 1820, a revolution struck Portugal changing the political

and social landscape of the nation. The “Liberal Revolution of 1820” would temporarily, adversely affect the economy of the country and lead to the extinction of many religious orders. Without funding and having to generate revenue themselves, the monks decided to take their surplus of eggs and make smaller, more affordable versions of *flans pâtissier* to reflect the economy of the time. People who couldn’t afford an entire pie, could afford a vastly smaller version and the “grand” *flans pâtissier* became the *pasteies de natas* found in Portuguese bakeries and *pastelarias* around the world.

The revolution finally reached the monastery in 1834 and the order was resolved. The local sugar refinery where the monks had been buying their sugar to make the pastries ended up purchasing the building and in 1837 they re-opened it, not as a monastery but the “*Fábrica de Pastéis de Belém*,” roughly translated as the “Bethlehem Pastry Factory” or “Bethlehem Factory of Pastries,” named in tribute to its parish.

Guess what? They never stopped making them: you can still visit the *Fábrica de Pastéis de Belém* to eat one, made by the same family that purchased in the the 1830s.

And, no – don’t ask me to discuss the abomination and cousin of the *pasteis de nata*, called the *pastel de bacalhau*. Don’t ask!

Want to make your own egg custard pastries? Here is one of the best recipes with step-by-step pictures and instructions. Have a recipe to share? Please do!