

The first thing that comes to mind when thinking about Portuguese culture is food. In The Netherlands food is very much seen as a utility thing, in order to live you need sustenance, while here in Portugal food is much more about recreation, leisure and pleasure. A big difference compared to my life in The Netherlands is how often I get lunch or dinner outside of the home. In the Netherlands I would go out for lunch/dinner on a monthly basis, some times even less than that, while here in Portugal it is a daily thing. I have mainly experienced this at work. During lunch time we often get lunch in a rather nice restaurant on the IST campus. It has become this very ritualistic thing where at 12.15, someone suggests having lunch, we walk there together, someone translates all the options on the menu (which are surprisingly different every time we go there) and we enjoy our food whilst talking about work, home life or any other topic that is commonly discussed over lunch. This really does not differ that much from the topics we discuss in the Netherlands over lunch.

The first time I visited Lisbon I was amazed by the sheer amount of restaurants and full terraces at any time of the day. People seem to be going out for breakfast, lunch and dinner in Lisbon. I fondly remember that the first thing my landlord told me upon arriving in Lisbon was were to get good food, where the food was not good and how much I should be expected to pay for food. In The Netherlands, going out for food is very much seen as something not everyone can afford and especially going out for dinner often might be seen as elitist (at least from my observation). Interestingly, I have always been told that Portugal was less wealthy than The Netherlands, but it seems like people are going out for dinner more often here. Apparently there is a difference in how Dutch people spend their budget and how the Portuguese do so.

Also, I noticed how traditional Portuguese food is not sold in restaurants, not even in the small Tasca's. The most authentic Portuguese food experiences that I have had were in Pastelarias, which are essentially bakery's.



Figure 1: Caldo verde

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*A Portuguese breakfast often consists of fresh bread, with butter, ham, cheese or jam, accompanied by coffee, milk, tea or hot chocolate. A small espresso coffee (sometimes called a bica after the spout of the coffee machine, or Cimbalino after the Italian coffee machine La Cimbali) is a very popular beverage had during breakfast or after lunch, which is enjoyed at home or at the many cafés in towns and cities throughout Portugal. Sweet pastries are also very popular, as well as breakfast cereal, mixed with milk or yogurt and fruit. Portuguese love a fresh baked "Pastel de Nata" which is one of their unique pastries. They enjoy it together with a shot of espresso, for breakfast or even as an afternoon treat.*

*Lunch, often lasting over an hour, is served between noon and 2 o'clock, typically around 1 o'clock and dinner is generally served around 8 o'clock. There are three main courses, with lunch and dinner usually including a soup. A common Portuguese soup is caldo verde, which consists of a base of cooked, then pureed, potato, onion and garlic, to which shredded collard greens are then added. Slices of chouriço (a smoked or spicy Portuguese sausage) are often added as well, but may be omitted, thereby making the soup fully vegan.*

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Figure 2: Feijoada

The Portuguese steak, bife, is a slice of fried beef or pork marinated in spices and served in a wine-based sauce with fried potatoes, rice, or salad. An egg, sunny-side up, may be placed on top of the meat, in which case the dish acquires a new name, bife com ovo a cavalo (steak with an egg on horseback)



The Mediterranean diet is based on a paradox: although the people living in Mediterranean countries tend to consume relatively high amounts of fat, they have far lower rates of cardiovascular disease than in countries like the United States where similar levels of fat consumption are found.



The American Diabetes Association writes about "Mediterranean-Style Eating", mentioning "the traditional Mediterranean lifestyle ... of ... eating healthfully ... together among family and friends", and asserting that "Mediterranean cuisine is plant-based", citing the ingredients "whole grains, fruits, vegetables, herbs and spices, beans, nuts, seeds, and olive oil", and stating that most foods "in a Mediterranean diet come from plants".



Increased wealth and busy lives have led people to eat more meat and less vegetables: their diet is becoming more northern European, with more convenience foods and with less of a preventive effect on cardiovascular disease.

