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The World of Food

A culinary tour of Portugal and Spain

From *Wine Spectator* magazine

While the cuisines of Spain and Portugal share many of the same ingredients, there are striking differences that allow each nation to make its distinctive mark on the food world. Spanish cuisine, like Italian cuisine, focuses on raw materials such as olive oil, ham, piquillo peppers and seafood, with an emphasis on the quality of ingredients and relatively simple preparation. Spanish food isn't all spicy, as some believe, nor is it like Mexican food. Portuguese cuisine is more rustic than Spanish cuisine. It's also spicier, which isn't surprising since Portuguese explorers and traders brought back spices from all over the world, including curry (from Goa) and chiles (or piri-piri, from Angola). Here are important foods in both culinary cultures.



Andrew McCaul

Hold the mayo: The best canned Spanish and Portuguese tuna needs only a spritz of lemon juice.

Almonds

Introduced by Moorish invaders, almonds appear throughout Iberian cooking. Fried almonds are a common tapa. The nuts are also used in desserts, in savory presentations such as gazpacho and *zarzuela* (Spanish shellfish stew), and in sauces such as the famed Spanish romesco, with peppers, garlic and olive oil. The highly regarded Marcona almonds of Spain are rounder and flatter than other almonds.

Canned Tuna and Anchovies

Luxurious canned tunas from Spain and Portugal are meaty and rich—a world apart from what Americans put in sandwiches. The best canned Spanish and Portuguese tuna is the ventresca, or belly of the fish, a fatty, rich cut that needs no more than a squeeze of lemon juice to be enjoyed. Anchovies are eaten fresh (deep-fried or marinated in vinaigrette), preserved as fillets in olive oil or salted and packed whole.

Cheeses

Spain makes many kinds of sheep's-milk cheese, Manchego being the most renowned. They are typically mild and nutty, but come in a wide range of ages that tend to concentrate flavors and sharpness and highlight differences. Zamorano and Castellano can be equal or superior to Manchego in texture and flavor. Lightly smoked, Idiazábal has a nutty flavor and gets sharper with age, making it a good grating cheese. Roncal has a rich and slightly waxy quality. Torta del Casar has a runny texture and a flavor akin to French Vacherin Mont d'Or.

Most Portuguese cheeses are made from sheep's milk. Many are classified as Amanteigado, a style of soft, runny cheeses similar to Spain's Torta del Casar. Serra da Estrela, Portugal's most celebrated cheese, and Azeitão, are made in the Amanteigado style. Evora, also made from raw sheep's milk, is longer-aged and sharper-tasting. São Jorge, produced in the Azores, is Portugal's most famous cow's-milk cheese.

Cod

It's interesting that Portugal's signature fish isn't from the bordering eastern Atlantic or the nearby Mediterranean. For more than four centuries, the Portuguese have traveled almost 3,000 miles to the Grand Banks off Newfoundland to catch cod, which was salted on the boat and sun-dried upon the ship's return. After a side or fillet of salted cod is reconstituted, which takes 24 to 36 hours, it can be baked, broiled, fried, put into salads or formed into cakes. The Spanish, particularly the Basques, prepare salted cod in similar ways.

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