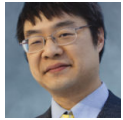


Bacalhau: The unofficial national dish of Portugal, and don't pass the salt

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The unofficial national dish of Portugal is *bacalhau*, or dried salted cod. The story goes that there is a different bacalhau recipe for every day of the year. There are those who believes that the stories provide a gross underestimate. Bacalhau naturally dates back to the days before refrigeration: Drying and salting served to preserve the fish. At a group dinner, one of the faculty members lobbied heavily but ultimately unsuccessfully for us to order the bacalhau. I did have a bacalhau appetizer later in the trip, so I did hold up my end of the deal, eventually. A friend of a friend spent some time in Lisbon and prior to my trip, he recommended that I try a bacalhau dish. “The one I got was too salty, but that might just have been bad luck on my part.” Nope, it wasn’t bad luck. It really is salty. Actually, Portuguese food is salty pretty much across the board. Definitely a problem if you’re watching your sodium intake. I remember one dish consisting of grilled salmon with rice and salad. The salmon was salty. The rice was salty. *The salad was salty*. I’m told that the Portuguese public health department recognizes the high sodium levels in traditional Portuguese cooking and is trying to get people to cut down. Good luck there fighting hundreds of years of culinary tradition. **Sidebar:** Perhaps it was just my choice of restaurants, but I was often disappointed with the vegetables, or what passed for vegetables. For example, that salmon dish counted rice and salad as vegetables. Others counted potatoes as a vegetable. (Psst, potatoes and rice may technically be vegetables, but they are not green. They are starches.) With beef often comes creamed spinach, although the Portuguese preparation blends the spinach into a purée rather than leaving the spinach leaves in small chunks. And the traditional Portuguese vegetable soup consists of cabbage and potato, with some carrot if you’re lucky.

I just hope this was touristified restaurant food and that real Portuguese people eat proper vegetables.

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