



24 Menus from Madeira

A culinary journey
through 24 places



Anita Fischer

24 Menus from Madeira

**A culinary journey through
24 island villages**

With 72 delicious recipes,
inspiring menu ideas,
and stories that bring the taste of
holiday right into your home

Anita Fischer

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Introduction: Food and Drink on Madeira

Madeiran cuisine is simple – and yet full of flavour, character, and stories. Here, food is so much more than just sustenance: it's culture, joy, and conversation. Islanders love talking about food, swapping recipes, sharing memories of big family meals or the best *Espetada* of their lives – often over a glass of *Poncha* and a hearty laugh.

So, what ends up on the table in Madeira? The answer is as varied as the island itself: fresh fish from the Atlantic, hearty meat dishes, tropical fruit, fragrant herbs, and sweet temptations – often seasoned with garlic, bay leaf, cumin, and a generous pinch of passion.

The foundations of Madeiran cooking are traditional rural recipes, and thanks to the island's long fishing heritage, seafood plays a central role in daily life. The cuisine is a vibrant mix of Portuguese roots and global influences – African, South American, and others – shaped by centuries of seafaring and trade.

24 Places – 24 Menus – 72 Recipes

This book takes you on a culinary journey across Madeira. We visit 24 unique places, and each location inspires its own special menu – consisting of a starter, a main course, and a dessert.

That makes 24 complete menus – a total of 72 authentic recipes, deeply rooted in the island's food culture. Some are rustic and down-to-earth, others unexpectedly refined or playful – but all of them are shaped by Madeira's flavours and the stories of its people.

Whether you cook the menus one by one, pick seasonal favourites or just browse for inspiration – this book is here to stir your appetite *and* your curiosity.

A menu is like a place: It speaks of the landscape, the climate, the ingredients, the tradition. Each dish becomes a culinary postcard – straight from the island of eternal spring.

Bom appetite!

Culinary Roots and Cooking Styles

The roots of Madeiran cuisine go back to the island's first settlers from Portugal. Over time, Madeira's location along historic trade routes brought a variety of culinary influences and ingredients from around the world. This blend has created a unique food culture that's both traditional and inventive.

Cooking methods reflect the islanders' creativity. Some of the most common techniques include:

- **Grilling:** For example, *Espetada*, where meat is grilled over open flames on bay laurel skewers.
- **Baking:** *Bolo do Caco* and other baked goods are traditionally prepared in stone ovens or on hot basalt stones.
- **Marinating:** Many dishes, especially meats, are marinated for hours or even days to deepen the flavour.
- **Seafood preparation:** Thanks to the island's coastal setting, seafood is often served in a simple way – grilled, boiled, or raw in salads – to highlight its natural freshness.

Popular Culinary Classics

Starters and Soups – Entradas e Sopas

- **Bolo do Caco** – Soft flatbread made with sweet potato and brushed with garlic butter. Traditionally baked on hot basalt stones (*cacos*), this warm, fluffy bread is served with garlic butter and parsley.

A must-have at festivals and found in nearly every restaurant or food stand across the island – true Madeiran street food.



Vorspeisen und Suppen - Entradas e Sopas

- **Lapas** – Limpets, gathered from Madeira’s rocky coastlines. A beloved starter or snack, these shellfish are usually grilled with garlic and sprinkled with lemon juice – a simple, flavourful treat that celebrates the ocean’s freshness. They’re served sizzling on a hot metal plate and slurped straight from the shell – no wonder they’re sometimes called the “Canarian oyster”.
- **Sopa de Tomate e Cebola** – Tomato and onion soup, typically topped with a poached egg.

Also popular is **Açorda**, a comforting bread soup made with chunks of rustic bread, garlic, poached egg, savory herbs like summer savory, and olive oil – all soaked in hot water for a rustic, flavorful dish.

Meat – Carne

- **Espetada** – Grilled beef on bay laurel skewers, cooked over an open flame and served with *milho frito* (golden cubes of fried cornmeal). A feast with campfire flair.

This traditional dish typically features juicy chunks of beef marinated in garlic, salt, and bay leaves. The meat is then skewered and grilled over an open fire, creating a mouthwatering blend of smoky, savoury flavours.

You’ll find *Espetada* at many local festivals and in countless traditional restaurants across Madeira. In restaurants, it’s often served in dramatic fashion: the skewer is brought to your table and hung vertically from a metal stand. You pull each piece off the skewer as you eat – a deliciously interactive experience.

Some places even offer a variation made with chicken, but beef remains the true classic.

- **Picado** – Tender beef cubes in a rich pan sauce, served in the middle of the table over a bed of fries – made to share!

Cooked with garlic (sometimes with peppers), *Picado* is served on one big platter surrounded by fries.

Everyone eats together from the same plate using forks or wooden picks (*picar* = to pick). It’s the perfect low-effort dish for gatherings with friends and family.

Fish – Peixe

- **Filete de Espada** – Tender black scabbardfish, often served with banana, passion fruit sauce or fried onions – a bold but surprisingly harmonious combination. *Espada* is a deep-sea fish caught by Madeiran fishermen using special rods and long fishing lines. The fish looks a bit like an eel, lives at great depths and is only caught at night – when it swims closer to the surface. It has tender, white flesh and is considered a delicacy.
In restaurants, scabbardfish is often breaded and fried, then served with grilled banana and passion fruit sauce – creating a beautiful balance of sweet and savoury flavours. It is often prepared in a light tempura-style batter and paired with exotic fruits, making it one of the island's most unique and iconic dishes.
- **Atum** (Tuna) – Tuna (*atum*) is another fish commonly found on Madeiran menus. It is caught in the waters surrounding the island and is a firm part of the local cuisine. One of the most traditional preparations is **Bife de Atum à Madeirense** – tuna steak Madeiran-style. Fresh tuna is first marinated in olive oil, garlic, salt and oregano before being pan-fried. It is usually served with *Milho Frito* (fried cornmeal cubes) or simply with a fresh salad.

Süßes und Gebäck – Sobremesa

- **Bolo de Mel** – The famous Madeiran honey cake, once a traditional Christmas treat, now a beloved sweet souvenir enjoyed all year round. *Bolo de Mel* is prepared much like gingerbread and flavoured with warm, festive spices. Though its roots are tied to the holidays, it's now available throughout the year – and is one of the most popular culinary keepsakes to take home from Madeira.
- **Pastéis de Nata** – Vanilla custard tarts. These pastries, famous throughout Portugal, are of course also found in Madeira. *Pastéis de Nata* are small puff pastry tarts filled with creamy vanilla custard and baked until golden brown. They're at their best when still warm, with a silky centre and lightly crisp shell. And by the way – a single tart is called a *Pastel de Nata*.

Ein starkes Getränk – Bebidas

- **Poncha** - The island's signature drink made from sugarcane aguardente, lemon and honey (*Poncha Pescador*) – or with orange juice (*Poncha Regional*). Creative bartenders also mix it with passion fruit or tangerine juice. There are hardly any limits to the imagination...

Enjoy discovering Madeira's flavours – and bon appétit!

ACHADAS DA CRUZ 1

Achadas da Cruz – A Steep Descent

Achadas da Cruz is located at the far northwest of Madeira and belongs to the municipality of Porto Moniz. This small village lies along the Estrada Regional 101 (ER 101), which winds from Porto Moniz through the southern part of the island to Funchal. Agriculture—particularly livestock farming—continues to dominate the local economy and shapes the lives of people in this remote region.

Settlement began relatively late, in the 16th century, by individuals seeking a secluded life in isolation and simplicity. The village's name likely derives from a chapel called Vera Cruz, built in the late 16th century. The term "Achada" refers to the "fajã" in this area—a coastal plateau formed by landslides, where driftwood often accumulates.

Achadas da Cruz remains shrouded in a certain mystique. One particularly legendary tale is the disappearance of the "Varuna Yacht," a luxurious sailing yacht owned by American millionaire Eugene Higgins, which sank off the coast about a hundred years ago. The international press reported on the incident, and rumors of a hidden treasure persist to this day.

Teleférico Achadas da Cruz – Possibly Europe's Steepest Cable Car?

Approximately two kilometers north of the village lies the access point to the famous Teleférico Achadas da Cruz cable car. Originally constructed to provide farmers with access to their fields on the Fajã Quebrada Nova, it has since become a popular tourist attraction. The gondola covers an impressive 451 meters of elevation over just 600 meters of track—a breathtaking experience that can be challenging, especially for those with a fear of heights.

For other visitors, the cable car serves as a moving panoramic viewpoint, offering unforgettable views during the descent to Fajã Quebrada Nova. The Teleférico das Achadas da Cruz is among the steepest cable cars in Europe .

It's essential to note the cable car's operating hours; otherwise, the only option to return is via a steep hiking trail. Since ascending in the dark can be dangerous, this path should only be used during daylight.

The ride is suspended during strong winds, but even in normal weather, the journey carries a hint of adventure, and boarding may require a bit of courage. If you have a fear of heights and prefer not to take the cable car, you can enjoy a fantastic view from the adjacent viewpoint or relax at the café.

The viewpoint is situated on a large rocky outcrop next to the cable car and offers a bird's-eye view of the houses on the Fajã da Quebrada Nova. The area resembles a green patchwork quilt stretching between the cliff and the sea. A hiking trail also leads down to the fajã. The approximately 2 km descent starts beside the cable car café and takes about 45 minutes. This hike should only be undertaken under good conditions and with sufficient daylight.

Upon reaching the Fajã da Quebrada Nova, you can enjoy the tranquility, listening to the waves and birdsong. It's delightful to explore the traditional agricultural plots along winding paths, savoring the salty and herbal aromas. Following the coastal path to its end leads to an abandoned small settlement, from which a narrow trail descends to a small beach with crystal-clear water.



History of the Fajã Quebrada Nova

Over a hundred inhabitants once lived by the sea here, engaging in livestock farming and agriculture. However, most of the houses are now abandoned, enhancing the area's mysterious aura.

Some houses near the cable car station are occasionally used—and with a bit of luck, you might discover a small bar serving lapas (limpets) with garlic butter and chilled wine. The pervasive feeling of being at the end of the world amplifies the relaxation you'll experience here.

Between Laurel Forest and Agriculture

A special nature experience awaits along the Levada do Moinho, which meanders through dense Laurisilva forest – a moist, evergreen oasis with small waterfalls and babbling channels. The approximately 10-kilometer hike is a sensory delight and harkens back to Madeira's origins of water usage: supplying the mills.

A detour to the chapel Nossa Senhora do Livramento is also worthwhile – right next to it is a small children's playground, demonstrating that even this quiet place offers space for community.

After completing the tour, the "101 Bar" – located along the Estrada Regional (ER 101) opposite a small park – provides an opportunity to order the menu for Achadas da Cruz.

Culinary Heritage of Achadas da Cruz

In a village so deeply shaped by agriculture, it's no surprise that the local cuisine is simple, nourishing, and down-to-earth.

People here cook with what nature provides – from the garden, the pasture, and the sea.

Traditionally, the locals lived off livestock, beans, cabbage, sweet potatoes, chestnuts, and whatever the Atlantic offered. Even today, in this rural region, much of the food is still homegrown, self-slaughtered, or preserved in jars. The cooking is humble, but full of flavour – no frills, just honesty and heart.

The menu of Achadas da Cruz reflects this spirit:

- **Starter:** White bean salad – fresh, filling, and full of flavour.
- **Main course:** Beef Picado – tender beef pieces pan-fried with garlic and bay leaf sauce, served with oven-baked fries
- **Dessert:** Milk pudding with caramel coating – a sweet finish made from simple ingredients like eggs, milk, and sugar, yet leaving a lasting impression.



Starter: White Bean Salad



4 servings



15 minutes

INGREDIENTS

700 g cooked white beans

1 red onion, finely chopped

250 g cherry tomatoes

1 bunch of parsley, chopped

6 tablespoons olive oil

2 tablespoons red wine vinegar

1 teaspoon mustard

Salt and pepper to taste

PREPARATION

- 1 Place the white beans in a large bowl.
- 2 Add the chopped onion, halved cherry tomatoes, and parsley.
- 3 In a small glass or jar, mix the olive oil with the vinegar, mustard, salt, and pepper.
- 4 Stir well.
- 5 Drizzle the dressing over the salad.
- 6 Adjust seasoning with salt and pepper if needed.🔗
- 7 Serve and enjoy!

You can easily adapt this salad to your taste:

- Add roasted red bell peppers
- Mix in cooked, flaked cod and a handful of olives
- Try it with canned tuna
- Or top with boiled eggs, sliced or quartered

Bon appétit!



Main Course: Beef Picado and Oven-Baked Fries



3-4 servings



45 minutes

INGREDIENTS

For the Beef Picado:

1,5 kg tender beef (Sirloin), cut into 2-3 cm cubes
 9 medium garlic cloves, chopped
 6 bay leaves
 200 ml oxtail soup (or beef broth)
 2 tbsp butter
 1 tbsp olive oil (for searing)
 100 ml white wine
 1 tsp salt
 Salt & pepper, to taste
 Optional: thinly sliced mushrooms or diced bell peppers
 Parsley and olives, for garnish

Für die Backofen-Pommes:

6 medium potatoes, peeled
 2 tbsp olive oil

PREPARATION

- 1 Cube the beef and toss it together with the chopped garlic, bay leaves, salt and pepper. Let it rest while you prepare everything else.
- 2 Preheat your oven to 200 °C.
- 3 In a large pan, melt the butter with the olive oil over high heat. Add the cubes and sear them until browned on all sides. Season with a pinch of salt and pepper.
- 4 Remove the seared beef (it may still be pink inside) and transfer to a plate.
- 5 Pour the oxtail soup (or broth) and white wine into the hot pan to deglaze, scraping up any browned bits.
- 6 Reduce the sauce. Let the liquid simmer gently.
- 7 Cut the peeled potatoes into long, thin strips. In a bowl, toss them with the olive oil until evenly coated.
- 8 Spread the potato strips on a baking tray and bake at 190 °C for about 15 minutes, turning once or twice, until golden and crispy.
- 9 Return the beef cubes to the pan with the reduced sauce and heat through briefly.
- 10 Arrange the oven-baked fries on a large platter, top with the Picado and sprinkle with chopped parsley. Garnish with a few olives if you like.



Dessert: Milk Pudding With Caramel Coating



10 servings



30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

For the caramel sauce:

- 2 cups sugar (320 g)
- 1 cup water (240 ml)
- 2 tbsp vanilla essence (optional)

For the milk pudding:

- 2 egg yolks
- 2 packets of gelatine powder
- 2 cups of milk (480 ml)
- 1 cup of cream (200 ml)
- 1 can of condensed milk
- Caramel (see recipe) for greasing the pudding mould

PREPARATION

Caramel sauce:

- 1 Mix the sugar and water in a pan.
- 2 Boil until the bubbles get bigger and the syrup darker; it will start to caramelize.
- 3 When amber in colour, turn off the heat.
- 4 Brush a pudding mould with the syrup.

Milk pudding:

- 5 Prepare all the ingredients for the pudding.
- 6 Soak the gelatine in the milk for 10 minutes.
- 7 Then dissolve in the warm milk.
- 8 Place all the ingredients in a blender:
The egg yolks, the condensed milk, the milk
With the dissolved gelatine and the cream.
- 9 Blend until a homogeneous mixture is obtained.
- 10 Pour the liquid into the caramel-greased pudding mould and refrigerate until fully set.

Bon appetit!

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