

## TRAVEL

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# Visit Portugal in Asia

*While most people know Macau for its gambling and casinos, the city is also a great destination for gourmands looking to enjoy European food — at Asian prices*

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STAFF REPORTER



## IF YOU GO

### GETTING THERE

EVA Airlines, Macau Airlines and Dragon Air all offer short-stay round-trip airfare from Taipei to Macau for less than NT\$5,000, including tax

### THE RESTAURANTS

#### Espaço Lisboa

8 Rua dos Gaivotas, Coloane Village, Macau  
Tel: +853 2888-2226  
Average meal: NT\$800 per person  
On the Net: [www.antoniomacau.com](http://www.antoniomacau.com)

#### Escada

8 Rua de Se  
Tel: +853 2896-6900  
On the Net: [www.yp.com.mo/escada](http://www.yp.com.mo/escada) (Chinese)  
Average Meal: NT\$1,000

#### Robuchon a Galera

Hotel Lisboa (3F Lisboa Tower)  
Tel: +853 2888-3888  
On the Net: [www.hotelisboa.com/htmlindex2.htm](http://www.hotelisboa.com/htmlindex2.htm)  
Average Meal: NT\$2,000 (set menu)

#### Lord Stow's Bakery

1 Rua da Tassar, Coloane Town Square, Macau  
Tel: +853 2888-2534  
On the Net: [www.lordstow.com](http://www.lordstow.com)  
Average Meal: NT\$200

**The Macau Food Festival**, featuring food by Portuguese chef Antonio Neves Coelho, takes place at the Ambassador Hotel Taipei until Sept. 20 and the Ambassador Hotel Hsinchu until Sept. 28. Buffet (NT\$800/NT\$850, Ming Garden) and a la carte (Ahmi Coffee Shop) are both available at the Ambassador Hotel Taipei. Call (02) 2100-2100 X2185 (Ming Garden) or X2181 (Ahmi) for more information

PHOTOS: IAN BARTHOLOMEW, TAIPEI TIMES, AND COURTESY OF MGO

Little more than an hour's flight from Taipei, Macau is a foodie's paradise. The city is home to Western restaurants that can compete with the best Taiwan has to offer; its own homegrown Macanese cuisine, which blends Portuguese, African and Asian flavors; as well as a huge range of Cantonese and other Chinese regional cuisines.

Eating is one of life's great pleasures, and discovering a new cuisine is a special delight. While the food of many nations is increasingly available in Taipei, the dedicated foodie can become a little jaded with the plethora of Italian and Thai food on offer. Enter Macau, which is still relatively unknown for its food in Taiwan, even though the city is little more than an hour's flight away. In addition to a huge range of Cantonese and other Chinese regional cuisines, the city also offers the exotic flavors of Portuguese food and its homegrown Macanese cuisine. The quality of Macau's restaurants ranks with the best Taipei has to offer, but prices are significantly cheaper.

For an authentic taste of Portugal, Antonio Neves Coelho's Espaço Lisboa (里斯本地帶餐廳), located in the quiet lanes of Coloane, one of Macau's two main islands, is a favorite among both locals and tourists. The restaurant is a quaint two-story terrace, and when the weather is fine, the tables on the narrow balcony are much in demand. They overlook the cobbled alleys off the Rua dos Gaivotas, and a light sea breeze can be felt coming from the ocean just out of sight a 100m or so away. The mood is charmingly parochial, but the laidback atmosphere belies its popularity, and advanced bookings are essential.

You can also get a taste of Coelho's cuisine at the Ambassador Hotel in Taipei City during its Macau Food Festival, which runs until Sept. 20 and continues until Sept. 28 at the Ambassador Hotel in Hsinchu. His famous dishes, such as deep fried balls of *bacalhau*, a salted cod used extensively in Portuguese cuisine, lobster soup and suckling pig, will all be available, though minus the atmosphere of his Macau restaurant.

Coelho is something of an institution in Macau, where he was the chef of the Clube Militar de Macau, the officer's club of the territory's Portuguese overlords, and has recently opened a new restaurant in the rapidly developing area of Tapa, called simply Antonio. But there are many other Portuguese restaurants that deserve equal claim on any visitor's attention.

One immensely popular choice for Portuguese, which serves what is described as Macanese food — a blend of Portuguese cuisine with the ingredients of its former colonial possessions — is the stylish downtown eatery of Escada.

Located in a narrow fronted terrace that has been painstakingly renovated to resemble the stylish residence it once was, Escada has a family atmosphere that is particularly appealing. Helpful staff are more than happy to guide the diner attempting to navigate the unfamiliar menu. The range of Portuguese favorites is similar to what is offered at Espaço Lisboa, and the African chicken, a highly spiced chicken stew that is redolent of North Africa, is especially recommended. In fact, attempts to try an "authentic" Portuguese steak and chips proved to be misguided, for while it was tasty enough, it paled in comparison to many of the more exotic dishes that the Portuguese developed in their explorations of Africa and Asia.

But this is not to say that traditional Portuguese is uniformly unexciting, a fact that a visit to another local institution, Fernando's, amply proved. A rather ramshackle establishment on the Hac Sa beachfront on Coloane, Fernando's is rustic in atmosphere (no air conditioner even at the height of summer), but the food from its grill is unsurpassed. It makes few concessions to non-Portuguese taste (Portuguese food tends to be salty). When I asked whether the grilled sardines might be too salty for the average diner, the waiter shrugged and said if I like salt, it'd be fine; and if not, then it probably wasn't a good idea. The sardines were salty, and really delicious, as was the suckling pig. Portions are big, the flavors robust, the space noisy, and the bottles and carafes of wine (only Portuguese wine is offered) flow freely.

What adds to the appeal of Macau's restaurants is that while quality is up there with the best Western food Taipei has to offer, prices are significantly more reasonable. This is most notable at one of Macau's biggest ticket restaurants, Robuchon a Galera, owned by Michelin-starred chef Joel Robuchon.

Robuchon a Galera might not quite be up to the standards of Robuchon's restaurants in New York, Paris or Monaco, but with a lunch set menu ranging from 288 to 488 Macau patacas (roughly NT\$1,000 to NT\$2,000) a head, it is the kind of value you could never hope for dining at a similar establishment in France, or Taipei for that matter. A la carte runs a little higher, but you get to eat food designed by one of the world's most highly decorated chefs. (Robuchon has the most Michelin stars of any chef in the world, with a total of 18; his nearest rivals are Alain Ducasse with 15 and Gordon Ramsay with 11.) The cellar of 2,800 wines is an additional attraction, and you are perfectly located for having a little bit of a flutter at the tables afterwards.

In Macau you will also have the chance to eat the original Lord Stow's Bakery egg tarts, those little confections of pastry and custard that kicked off the whole egg tart craze in Taipei a few years back. Such remains the popularity of these tarts that the bakery has a dedicated takeout outlet. Tour buses stop by on the way to the airport for tourists to pick up a box or three.

Lord Stow's Bakery also has two little cafes that serve sandwiches, savory pies and, of course, egg tarts. Lots of other places sell Macau's signature sweet as well, but Lord Stow's was the first, although there is plenty of room to argue which produces the best.

All this is just a drop in the bucket of the culinary cornucopia that is Macau. The city also offers a huge range of Cantonese and other Chinese regional cuisine, ranging from top-of-the-line restaurants to excellent street stalls with selections that will delight anyone who has had enough of the usual Taiwan snack foods. And then there are all the usual scenic spots, ranging from baroque churches to Chinese temples, not to mention the casinos. But for the food alone, Macau is certainly worth a visit.