

A taste of Tiradentes

The quaint colonial city of Tiradentes has much more to offer than history. **Kevin Raub** pulls up a seat at the table

How many families can boast that they've been engaged in the same trade for the last ten generations? Few clans or companies in the world can lay claim to such an astonishing feat; so it's doubly startling to discover a tenth-generation Cossack knifemaker, Woldyslak Nicolayewtch Zacarowyskini (dubbed 'The Russian'), whose family began the noble trade in 1667, hidden away inside a replica Russian *dacha* on the outskirts of a sleepy village in Minas Gerais.

It's all part of the experience of a stay in Tiradentes, a postcard-perfect and pristinely preserved colonial treasure about 200km south of Belo Horizonte. And the funny thing is that **Burza** (32 3355 1561/burza.com.br), which makes some of the most beautiful artisanal knives and swords you'll ever lay your eyes on, isn't even the most compelling reason to come to Tiradentes. While channeling one's inner hunter-gatherer will immediately produce a Pavlovian desire for Burza's blades, it's something far more straightforward that makes Tiradentes one of the Brazilian interior's most coveted destinations: sustenance.

Few would argue that Brazil isn't a wonderful place to eat. A collision of cultures, ethnic backgrounds and indigenous ingredients has blessed the country's kitchens with *delicias* way beyond what is perhaps just. Even less fair is that Tiradentes, despite having a population of only 7,000, boasts five restaurants that have been awarded stars by the influential Brazilian travel guide, *Guia4Rodas* – the highest proportion per capita in Brazil.

So you could do far worse than plan the time you spend in Tiradentes around meals. Perhaps the best plan is to go traditional for lunch, and then contemporary for dinner. The latter starts with **Tragaluz**, located inside a 300-year-old historic home in the heart of



If these walls could talk They'd have three centuries' worth of gossip to bang on about

Tiradentes' historic centre. Dinner here kicks off with a 32-page, pocket-sized menu that is laid out comic book-style and features all sorts of cute tales about the history of the town and the current staff. Things get serious – seriously good, that is – upon the arrival of creative Brazilian dishes like the golf ball-sized house gnocchi,

that are often ignored by other chefs in the area. The three-course prix-fixe is a gastronomic idiom of contemporary Brazilian cuisine: duck magret in *jabuticaba* sauce, an exotic tree berry found in the region; or artisanal ravioli sautéed with *pimenta biquinho*, a sweet and mild pepper native to Minas Gerais only discovered last

into a food coma. The former's chef/owner Beth Beltrão keeps an organic garden surrounding the restaurant, from which she selects ingredients for standout dishes like *póvim cumê quitábão* (very loosely translated from country slang as, 'Come eat this – it's damn good'), a modest dish of grilled pork with brown beans sautéed in bottled butter and pumpkin balls stuffed with Brazilian cream cheese and sun-dried meat. At Estalagem, it's all about one dish: *Manuel sem jaleco* (Manuel without a jacket), a comfort-food scramble of sorts with rice, beans, eggs, kale, house-smoked bacon, bananas and a succulent, semi-smoked pork loin that spends days maturing in a rudimentary backyard closet.

It's a dish that did little for ex-President Lula's waistline when he visited in 2005; but then again, whoever said visiting Tiradentes was part of a well-balanced diet?

Manuel sem jaleco is a succulent, semi-smoked pork loin that spends days maturing in a backyard closet

made with *ora-pro-nóbis* (a leafy green endemic to the region, known as poor man's meat for its high protein content) and paired with beef stewed in dark beer.

Another contemporary highlight for dinner is **Theatro da Villa**, the most expensive (and adventurous) option in town. A theatrical twin-brother team runs this Slow Food jewel, which isn't afraid to take risks in marrying haute cuisine with simple Brazilian ingredients

decade, when it inexplicably and spontaneously mutated from a far more spicy local pepper.

Tiradentes is perhaps the best spot in all of Minas to dig deep into the state's traditional *comida mineira* – but be warned: it isn't the kind of food that leaves you with much spring in your step, so lunch is the way to go when local food is on the menu. **Virada's do Largo** and **Estalagem do Sabor** duel it out for the right to put visitors

TRIP flies weekdays from Guarulhos to São João del-Rei (from R\$520 return). From there, a taxi to Tiradentes costs R\$50 one-way for the 20-minute trip.

Eat

Estalagem do Sabor The unpretentious air of this rustic spot, with a little front patio and a backyard vegetable garden, makes you feel right at home. Just don't get carried away and grab a beer stright from the fridge. *Rua Ministro Gabriel dos Passos 280 (32 3355 1144). Open 11am-4pm, 7pm-9.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-10pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun. Main courses R\$65-\$75 for two.*

Theatro da Villa As well as the sophisticated three-course menu, try a little wining with your dining: their list is impressive. *Rua Padre Toledo 157 (32 3355 1275/theatrodavilla.com.br). Open 8pm-midnight Mon-Sat. Three-course menu R\$140.*

Tragaluz This restaurant's creative contemporary Brazilian cuisine provides a great contrast with the historic atmosphere of the old homestead that houses it. *Rua Direita 52 (32 3355 1111/tragaluztiradentes.com). Open 7-10.30pm Sun-Mon, Wed-Thu; 7pm-late Fri-Sat. Main courses R\$35-\$58.*

Virada's do Largo Everything in this cosy restaurant, from the décor to the traditional culinary delights, puts you in the right mood for the full stomach that follows. *Rua do Moínho 11 (32 3355 1111/viradasdolargo.com.br). Open noon-10pm daily. Main courses R\$18-\$54.*

Stay

Pousada Brisa da Serra With thoughtful, antique furnishings and vast windows opening to vistas of the majestic Serra do São José, this pousada manages to provide the perfect mixture of traditional atmosphere and chic accoutrements. *Rua Santíssima Trindade 520, (32 3355 1144/brisdaserra.com.br). Rates R\$300-\$550 doubles.*

Pousada da Bia The budget choice in Tiradentes, this small pousada with its threadbare rooms offers memorable *mineira* hospitality, and a wonderfully homey breakfast. *Rua Frederico Ozanan 330 (32/3355-1173/pousadadabia.com.br). Rates R\$140 doubles.*

Pousada Vivenda This cutesy, midrange option on a quiet residential street is full of charming personal touches and lush gardens, and has a lovely little pool for a post-lunch dip. Don't forget to wait an hour first. *Rua José Batista de Carvalho 39 (32 3355 1982/pousadavivenda.com.br). Rates R\$220-\$374 doubles.*

Solar da Ponte Set in a refined, 18-room country house run by an Englishman since 1974, this lodge brims with local art and the handcrafted furniture of the region. *Praça das Mercês (32 3355 1255/solardaponte.com.br). Rates R\$615-\$885 doubles.*



Easy breezy The Pousada Brisa da Serra offers traditional chic

Weekender

Santos



PREFEITURA DE SANTOS/SECRETARIA DA COMUNICAÇÃO SOCIAL/FADEU NASCIMENTO

Life's a beach São Paulo's 'official' beach is only an hour away

At just 72 km from central São Paulo, Santos serves as the city's 'official' beach. Bordered by an oceanfront park and punctuated by a series of canals built a century ago to drain the city's wetlands, Santos mirrors Ipanema with its collection of cliques of every social stripe.

To the west, bookended by hang-gliding jump-off Morro de Santa Teresinha, sits Praia José Menino, the ideal spot for surfers and partiers, as it's near the city's club district. Between canals 1 and 2, the *paulistanada*, as paulistanos-by-the-sea are collectively dubbed, stake out their territory among the coconut water kiosks at Praia Pompéia.

The most popular beach is Praia Gonzaga, between canals 2 and 3. Bordering downtown, everything happens at Gonzaga, from free, city-sponsored cultural events to market fairs. Gay and lesbian beachgoers have a tiny plot here, and the eating

options are among the most diverse on the beach: try traditional fried treats at Pastel do Trevo (R\$6-\$10) or the codfish (R\$16) at Último Gole.

Teenagers run Praia Boqueirão, at Canal 3; surfers hang out at Embaré; and the Basílica Menor de Santo Antônio do Embaré is a major draw for culture vultures. Praia Aparecida, between canals 5 and 6, welcomes families, especially around the Fonte do Sapo, where kids ride bikes while their parents or grandparents relax on benches. And at the eastern end sits Ponta da Praia, fronting a chic neighbourhood near the port, where the beautiful crowd bronzes its collective abdominals in the sun. Don't miss the Santos Municipal Aquarium, free on Sundays. *Andrea Mercado*

Santos is an hour away from São Paulo. Several bus companies offer services, from R\$17 one-way.

Roads scholar *Brazil's best highways*

The Transpantaneira

Cruising slowly across the floodplain is the only way to do the Transpantaneira, an unpaved stretch of road that connects the 147 km between Poconé in Mato Grosso and Porto Jofre in Mato Grosso do Sul through part of the Pantanal, the world's largest wetland system. In the

dry season, from May to September, ordinary cars can use the road with care. Otherwise, even 4x4s tend to get stuck in the mud. Alligators, capybaras, deer and storks are just a few of the myriad creatures that cross your path. Be sure to fill up in Poconé; there are no gas stations on the road. *Joana Curvo*