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Hot taste of fire and spice

By Elizabeth Meryment
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ANGELO'S PORTUGALIA 262 Anzac Pde Kensington Phone: 96621711 Food: Portugese Service: Cheerful and homely

The newest and fanciest establishment in this burgeoning strip is Angelo's Portugalia, a cheerful and bustling restaurant serving honest, good-quality food.

Portuguese food is not widely known in this country, but novices should be reassured that it's not an especially challenging cuisine reliant on strange spices and ingredients in the way that Spanish can be

Rather, it's a simple, meat-driven affair in which whole chickens are grilled over hot coals and beef and pork are flame-grilled on the barbie.

Tomato-flavoured rice and salads are usually presented asside dishes.

Perhaps Portugal's most famous dish - apart from those delicious little custardy tarts - is charcoal chicken.

Word is obviously getting around about Angelo's because on this quiet, early January Friday night of our visit, it's packed, mainly with families.

The space is a warehouse-like room with bare floors, wooden tables and homey-style prints on the walls.

It's nice, though, with a bustling atmosphere and a large window onto the kitchen where whole chickens are rotating above flames.

It smells fantastic.

We decide to share our order, starting with chourico assado (\$14), a smoked pork sausage, sliced and served with pickled vegetables. The wonderfully salty and mildly spicy sausage makes a good start to the meal.

Acepipes (\$12) is a plate of fish cakes and chicken rissoles, served with mayonnaise and peri peri sauce, that are fine, if fairly standard.

We give the hot peri-peri sauce a nudge and find it suitably eye-watering.

Meanwhile, a bottle of Portuguese red wine - a 2005 Quinta Das Setencostas - offers great drinking for \$28, from a very reasonably priced wine list.

The mains are a meat-a-thon - with some seafood thrown in for relief.

It's hardly possible to go past the frango de churrasco, barbecued charcoal chicken, (\$12.50, half bird, \$19, whole) and it's fabulous - the white flesh is meltingly tender and the skin is salty and crisp with a genuine grilled flavour.

My friend likes the sound of espetada (\$23.50), Angus beef skewers. Asked by the waiter how he'd like them done, his reply of ``well-done?" is met by a blank stare and the reply: "medium?" OK, medium then.

The two skewers are served at the table on a contraption that looks like a medieval torture device, in which diners pull the chunks of meat from long knives that point to the table, hoping not to slice their fingers in the process.

Luckily the meat isn't tough so it slides off without too much trouble.

A special of Portuguese prawns, pan-fried in brandy, (\$38) is rich and sweet.

There are also plenty of complimentary sides such as garden salads and homemade chips, cut so thinly they are like warm potato crisps.

It should be quite obvious that this is not dining for the health conscious.

Yet even after we've eaten our bodyweights in meat and garlic, we're still tempted by the prospect of ice-cream with Mars bar chocolate sauce (\$9).

Sadly, they've run out tonight.

Maybe next time._ ELIZABETH MERYMENT

All meals are paid for and visits are unannounced

