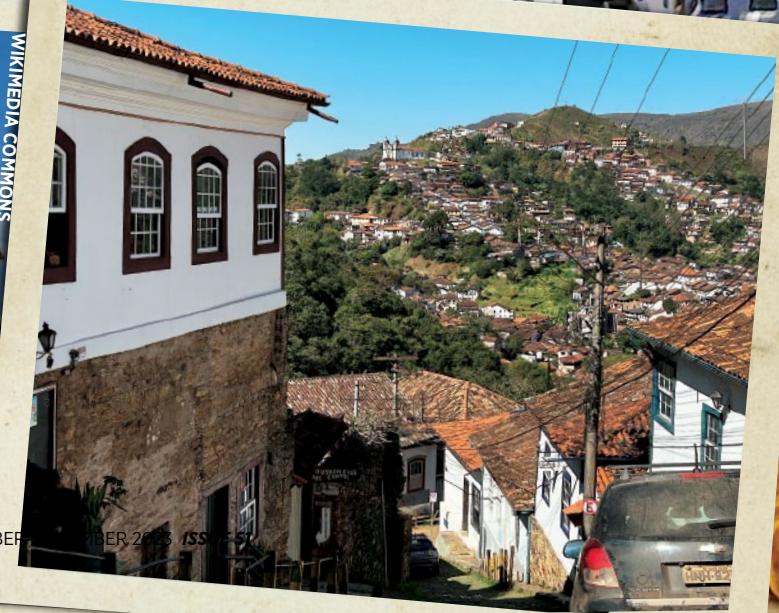
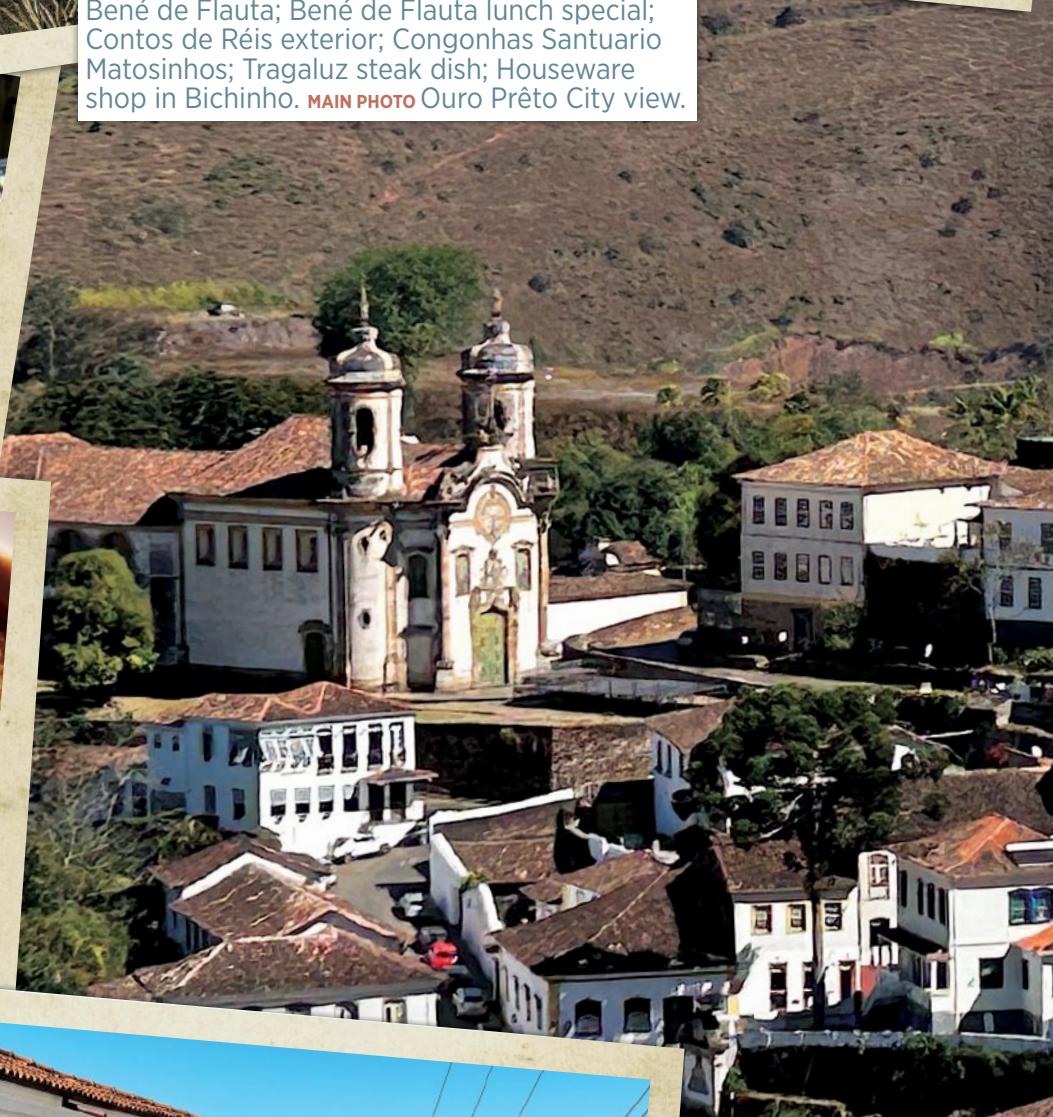
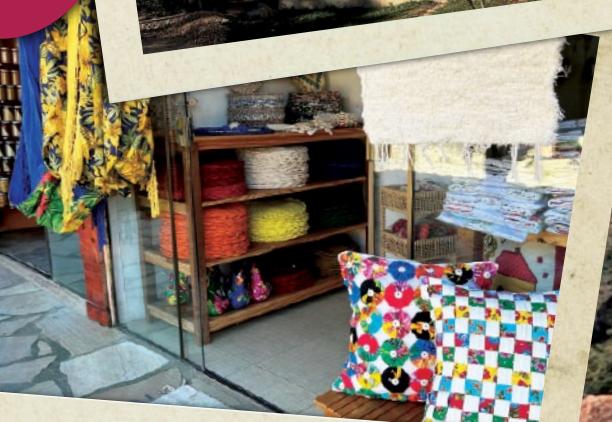
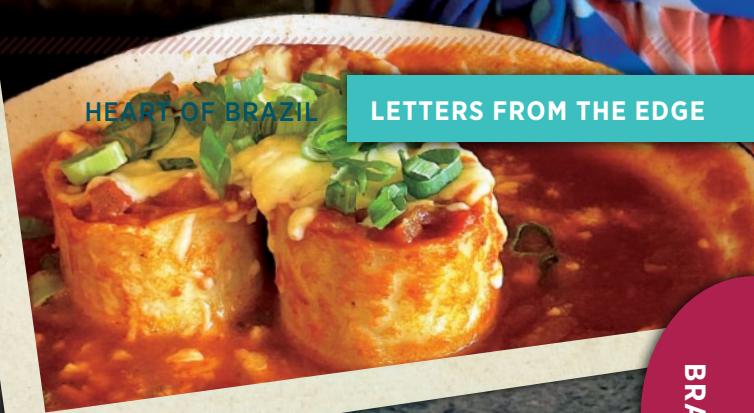


THIS SPREAD CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Street art in Bichinho; Atrasda Matriz cod with almonds; Atrasda Matriz interior; Solar Tiradentes lounge; Bené de Flauta; Bené de Flauta lunch special; Contos de Réis exterior; Congonhas Santuario Matosinhos; Tragaluz steak dish; Houseware shop in Bichinho. **MAIN PHOTO** Ouro Prêto City view.





HEART OF BRAZIL

LETTERS FROM THE EDGE

BRAZIL



Brazil

WHERE ON EARTH

MINAS GERAIS Heart of Brazil

by ELYSE GLICKMAN



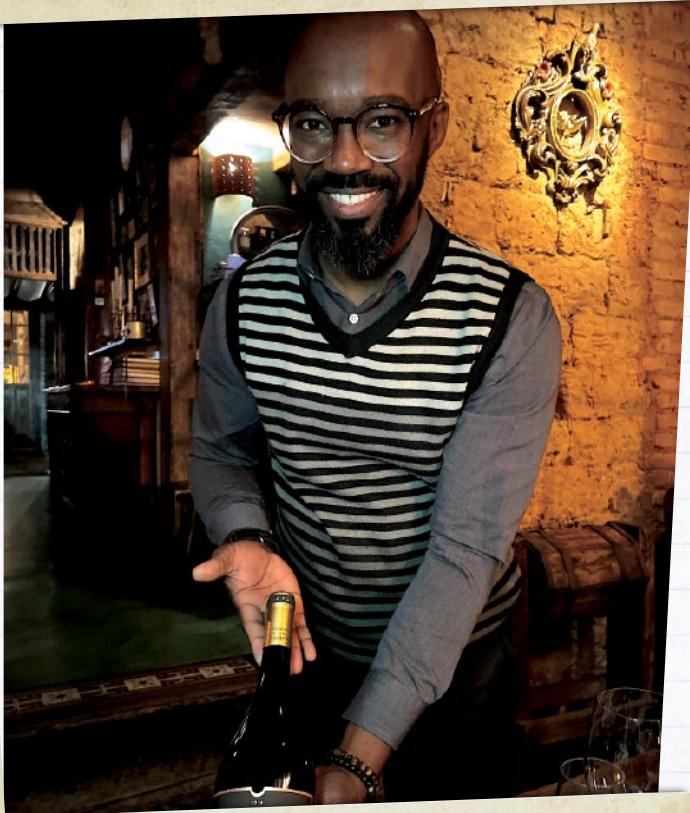


PHOTOS THIS SPREAD CLOCKWISE FROM
TOP LEFT Museu Inconfidencia exterior; O Passo interior;
Tragaluz server; O Passo risotto with prawns; Tropea
passionfruit cocktail; Ouro
Prêto gem shop.

«BRAZIL IS ONE OF THOSE DESTINATIONS where having “something for everybody” is a state of being rather than a promotional catch phrase. Its famous beaches and fashion sensibilities entice luxury/lifestyle-driven travellers. Its dramatic landscape draws active and athletic travellers with its many jumping off points for adventure travel and eco-tourism and its distinctive mix of museums, entertainment and cultural happenings make it perfect for families.

Although the Brazilian heartland may be overlooked by travellers outside Latin America because of its land-locked location, a road trip to Minas Gerais state (“General Mines”) in the country’s southeast region can offer a more complete picture of Brazil’s history, art, culture and cosmopolitan population.

The hills of colonial city Ouro Preto (“Black Gold”) unfold to reveal a fascinating economic, artistic and political legacy. Congonhas do Campo (home of UNESCO World Heritage Sites Santuário do Bom Jesus de Matosinhos and Church of Our Lady of the Rosary), Mariana, Diamantina and Tiradentes present as 18th-century villages plucked out of Portugal and mounted like gemstones into Brazil’s verdant subtropical milieu. The



SERVES 4

Minas Cheese Soufflés

THE CATTLE ranchers who replaced miners in Minas Gerais didn't generally drink milk but they did make cheese. Minas Cheese, made from raw cows' milk, is hard to come by outside Brazil, but Gouda will work fine in this recipe. Because the eggs are not separated, the soufflés won't puff super high but there's no need to worry that they will fall.

Whole Milk

1 cup, warmed

Butter 3 Tbs

All-Purpose Flour

3 Tbs

Salt and Freshly Ground Pepper
to taste

Nutmeg a pinch

Cayenne Pepper
a pinch

Eggs 3 large, whisked

Gouda Cheese

4 oz, grated

Parmesan Cheese

1 oz, grated

1 PREHEAT the oven to 375°F.

2 MELT the butter in a saucepan over low heat. Stir in the flour and cook, stirring, for one minute. Gradually add the warm milk, stirring constantly to avoid lumps. Cook until thickened into a creamy sauce then remove from the heat and stir in the salt, pepper, nutmeg and cayenne.

3 ALLOW the sauce to cool for a few minutes while you grease four ramekins with butter.

4 STIR the cheeses into the sauce then stir in the beaten eggs.

5 POUR the batter into the ramekins and bake for 15 to 20 minutes until risen and golden, then serve immediately.

roads to and from Bichinho, located near Tiramontes, are lined with colourful ateliers and shops stocked with beautiful housewares, textiles and furnishings.

The state has so much to offer it's surprising its food culture hasn't received as much attention. Like other aspects of Brazilian culture, its gastronomic underpinnings are informed by a couple of centuries' worth of indigenous, Portuguese, African, Spanish, Italian and even Middle Eastern influences. While Brazil's major cities have restaurants dedicated to regional cuisines at all price points, Minas Gerais is building its reputation as one of Brazil's gastronomic focal points, underscored by the history of the mining industry and the »

...Minas Gerais is building its reputation as one of Brazil's gastronomic focal points...

different groups who came from other countries during the 18th century because of it.

Restaurants with ties to the region's history run the gamut from no-frills buffets with hearty stews someone's grandparent could have prepared (and often did) to cafes with art gallery-inspired interiors balancing traditional Minas recipes with modern presentation, and high-end restaurants where international cuisine and mixology are filtered through the life experience of a local chef or restauranteur channeling his or her own family background.

Ouro Preto is the proverbial jewel in the Minas crown, living up to its "living museum" reputation through opulent 18th-century churches and museums. The Museum of the Inconfidência brings the fairytale setting down to earth with artifacts and displays revealing the political turmoil and human rights issues that took place under the Portuguese crown. It is also a shopper's paradise thanks to its fantastic jewelry stores, crystal shops and the Feira de Pedra Sabao (Soapstone Fair) near Largo de Coimbra (the city's main plaza) with hand-carved soapstone bowls, pitchers, coasters, napkin holders and other useful items.

Feira de Pedra Sabao is visible from the landmark cathedral São Francisco de Assis, the Museum of the Inconfidência, and the colourfully decorated Bené da Flauta restaurant located in an 18th-century townhouse. The appealingly busy decor frames stunning outdoor views. The menu mixes traditional Minas dishes with a few European dishes and simple salmon and steak entrees. Appetizers, particularly the cod fritters and pickled vegetables served with dinner rolls, provide zesty counterparts to the substantial stews, soups and meat dishes.

Tucked into a hilltop 150 metres from the city centre, Restaurante Contos de Réis has a more old world tavern aesthetic, but earns equally high marks for its takes on the simple, sturdy Minas preparations.

Both restaurants' menus offer subtly updated takes on the stick-to-your-ribs dishes that provided sustenance to miners and other workers, including *Bamba de Couve* (corn flour soup with kale, sausage, pork and fried polenta), *Canjiquinha* (a stew with pork ribs, originating in the 19th century, blending indigenous and Portuguese influences), *Menina do Sobrado* (sun-dried beef sautéed in cassava mush, accompanied by pumpkin puree and garlic rice), *Tutu à Mineira* (slices of pork loin, boiled egg, sausage, and pork cracklings accompanied with beans whipped with cassava flour), *Tropeiro* (a dish of beans, sausage, bacon, collard greens, eggs and manioc flour, based on a traditional dish eaten by *tropeiro* — troopers), and roasted chicken flanked with okra and angu (a cornmeal mush introduced to the local diet via the area's African population).

O Passo and sister restaurant Tropea are essentially two sides of the same coin. Both excel with dishes rooted in Italian cuisine but take on their own original character by incorporating locally sourced ingredients and seasonings. The respective wine and cocktail



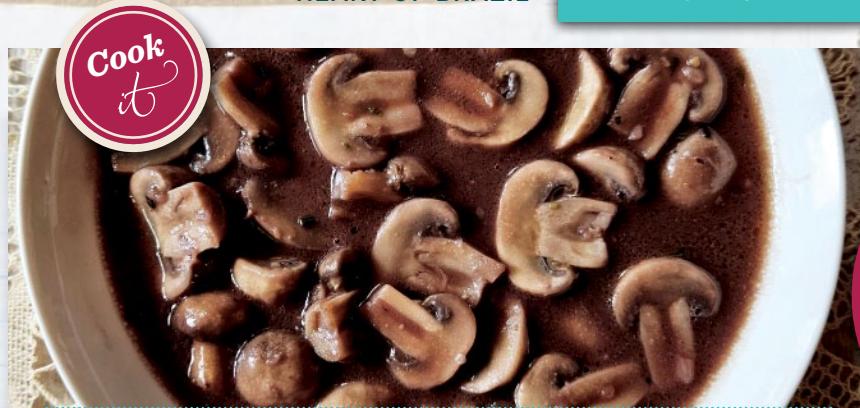
PHOTOS THIS SPREAD CLOCKWISE
FROM TOP LEFT Rocambole sign; Solar de Rosário;
Tragaluz guava dessert; Server at O Famoso
Rocambole; Tiradentes crazy house.

programs are creatively thought out, especially as there are numerous Brazilian-made wines available that are on a par with European wines made with the same or similar varietals. Caipirinhas will often take a back seat to signature cocktails that clearly originate from the minds of creative bartenders.

O Passo's many jewel-toned dining rooms mix modern art and vintage furnishings, while its lushly landscaped outdoor patio is Brazilian to the core. The staff is well versed in wines and the goings-on in the kitchen. The best dishes are as visually appealing as the surroundings – prime examples include *Exibidas* (phyllo dough baskets stuffed with pumpkin cream and topped with dried beef) and *Pasteis de Angu* (water-milled cornmeal dough pastries, stuffed with meat, accompanied by lightly spiced tomato chutney). The cocktail program is just as innovative and expands well beyond caipirinhas. The signature *Ouropretanagin* (gin, passion fruit, elderflower, lemon juice and ginger foam) is a must if gin is your spirit.

O Passo's exceptional mains include *Tornedor São José* (grilled filet with paprika sauce and mushrooms, served with handmade papardelle in sage butter), *Gamberi Dolci* (grilled shrimp with truffle sauce and crispy sage, served with black rice with vegetables and chestnut farofa) and (of course) the house *Bacalhau* (confited in olive oil, with roasted potatoes, garlic, red onion, homemade sausage, raisins and olives). Tropea, in contrast, is bright, minimalist, with a more family-friendly feel. The appetizers are the highlights, and include sausage and mushroom bruschetta, arrancini, and burrata baked in pizza dough, served with fresh herbs pesto and grape tomatoes.

Although Tiradentes is a much smaller community, local businesses and art galleries make as good use of the Baroque architecture and dramatic landscapes as their counterparts in Ouro Preto. The kitchens at the better high-end restaurants here also follow suit, with refined dishes and menus that have a pronounced Portuguese foundation with touches of African and indigenous seasonings, influenced also by the personal backgrounds of those working in the kitchen. Even with pizza in its name, *Atrás da Matriz Pizza & Bacalhau* can't get more Brazilian-Portuguese with its emphasis on bacalhau in starters and mains. While the ambiance and many of the menu offerings are rooted in the area's 18th and 19th century origins and foodstuffs, the kitchen does



SERVES 4 AS A SIDE DISH

Mushrooms in Red Wine Sauce

THE FIRST European settlers in Minas Gerais were miners who had to make do with what they could hunt, fish for or forage. Dishes such as this, with a rich butter and red wine sauce, date from the colonial period, when tables were well supplied with imported foods and produce from local farms and ranches.

Button Mushrooms 1 lb

Unsalted Butter

½ cup

Garlic 2 cloves, minced

All-Purpose Flour

3 Tbs

Beef Stock 1 cup, warmed

Dry Red Wine 1 cup

Salt and Freshly

Ground Black Pepper

to taste

1 **CUT** any large mushrooms in half and leave the small ones whole.

2 **IN** a saucepan over medium heat, melt the butter and sauté the garlic until fragrant but not browned.

3 **STIR** in the flour and mix well. Stirring constantly to avoid lumps, gradually add the beef stock and then the wine.

4 **ADD** the mushrooms, salt and pepper and cook until the sauce has thickened and the mushrooms are tender.



Cook



MAKES ABOUT 20 COOKIES

Half Moon Peanut Cookies

MERENDA — tea time — was an important tradition in colonial Portuguese homes. This recipe for cookies topped with peanuts — brought to Brazil by the Portuguese from Africa — has been handed down for generations.

All-Purpose Flour
1 ½ cups

Sugar
¾ cup, more for sprinkling

Cold Butter
6 oz, cubed

Roasted Peanuts
½ cup, finely chopped

Egg Yolk 1, whisked

- 1 **PREHEAT** the oven to 350°F.
- 2 **IN** a food processor, pulse the flour, sugar and butter until a dough starts to form.
- 3 **TIP** out onto a sheet of parchment paper and knead with your hands into a smooth ball of dough.
- 4 **ROLL** out to $\frac{3}{8}$ " thick and use a round cookie cutter to cut out circles. Cut the circles in half and place on a parchment-lined cookie sheet.
- 5 **BRUSH** the cookies liberally with egg yolk and sprinkle with peanuts.
- 6 **BAKE** for 15 minutes until just starting to brown at the edges.
- 7 **REMOVE** from the oven and sprinkle with a little extra sugar. Allow to cool on the cookie sheet for a few minutes then move to a rack until completely cool and crisp.

“get adventurous when the right ingredients and presentation are combined. Case in point is the *Bacalhau do Aniversário* (Birthday Cake Bacalhau), where the cod is layered with zucchini and almonds, and seasoned with rosemary. Classics such as *Bacalhau ao Alho e Óleo* (fried cod fillet in olive oil and garlic) or Portuguese style (with olives, garlic, and tomato, with or without ham) with sides of broccoli, white rice, and black olives are also beautifully executed.

Tragaluz Restaurante Casa — my favourite restaurant of this journey through the Brazilian heartland — carves out a distinctive



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
The Soapstone Market in Ouro Prêto; Street scene in Tiradentes; Local dishes at Tempero da Ângela.

identity through the juxtaposition of traditional and modern techniques. Built into a 200-year-old stone house on the outskirts of Tiradentes, the interiors are dark and made one feel like they'd snuck into the kitchen of a European manor house for a midnight snack while having stepped a few centuries back in time. A menu filled with Felipe Rameh's simple but approachable dishes is rooted in the present, along with sommelier Antônio Eduardo's astute pairing recommendations. The fanciful menu could be mistaken for a volume of children's stories with its delightful illustrations and story about the origins of the Guinea hen (*pintada*), the restaurant's mascot, which is a prime ingredient in several signature dishes.

That said, Rameh's prowess (honed in other kitchens around the globe, including Mugaritz in Spain, Le Châlet de La Forêt, Belgium, London's Canteen, and D.O.M. by Alex Atala in São Paulo) covers all proteins as well as vegetarian items. Menu highlights include *Pintada Tragaluz* (rice topped with guinea fowl confit), *From the Ranch* (filet mignon adorned with fresh foraged mushrooms), *Picadim* (beef cubes in butter glaze with fried bananas, cabbage and crispy farofa), and *Bacalhau ao Cabo da Roca* (salt cod loin roasted in olive oil, with fresh bay leaf, cornbread, golden onions, Portuguese olives and white corn angu mash).

Desserts, such as *Goiabada* (guava) *Tragaluz* and *Chocolate, Chocolate, and Chocolate*, are without a doubt or hyperbole, some of the best in Brazil, using regional elements to maximum effect to achieve intense, complex texture and layers of flavour.

Exploring the “Solar” System

Pousadas (Portuguese-style inns), like their Spanish *paradores* cousins, are historic buildings repurposed as hotels with modern amenities and creative approaches to decor that reflect the tastes and experiences of the often well travelled owners. In Brazil, where “Solar de...” is part of the property name, they translate to lodging that respects the regional history while being in tune with the needs and tastes of international guests. There is also a strong possibility that the

staff will be able to make sound food and shopping recommendations, and the properties will have interesting food and bar offerings.

In Ouro Prêto, Solar de Rosário, housed in a mansion built in the 1840s, has 41 rooms and suites, a cute and cozy lobby with an adjoining scotch-focused bar and wine cellar offerings, and a multi-level pool and patio area that offers exceptional panoramic city views. It overlooks the Nossa Senhora do Rosário Church and Pico do Itacolomi, the region's distinctive highest peak. With its architecture and decoration, the hotel expands the scope of the city figuratively and literally as you could plan your day by simply heading up to the hotel's outdoor expanse and look outward first thing in the morning. It also has an outpost of Belo Horizonte "it" restaurant Olga Nur Solar do Rosário, which turns out beautiful made-to-order breakfasts.

Solar da Ponte Hotel Tiradentes, adjoining historic site Campo do Aymorés in Tiradentes, blends seamlessly into the 18th-century town architecturally, even though it was built in the 1970s by its owners, English nature-lover John Parsons and his Brazilian historian wife Ana Maria. The sensibilities of the couple are built into a stay, from afternoon teas with Minas-style pastries to landscaped gardens with orchids growing among the trees (and the occasional marmoset sighting) and eclectic decor specific to both individual rooms and public areas. It's the perfect base camp for exploration of the town's historic churches, monuments, restaurants, specialty food boutiques, and shopping expeditions to the areas dominated by studios operated by contemporary artists and skilled artisans.

Other satellites worth visiting en route to Ouro Prêto and Tiradentes include the Famous Rocambole in Lagoa Dourada, a simple bakery whose claim to fame is its many expressions of the rocambole — a rolled cake with Lebanese origins. In addition to the best-selling but intensely sweet dulce de leche roll with coconut, other delights include a savoury cheese bread and strong, sturdy coffee. Between shopping stops and atelier visits in and around Bichinho enclaves, stop at Tempero da Ângela, which takes its "family style" dining vibe seriously. In the buffet room, copious kettles and pans almost overflow with hearty stews and salads. A small, inconspicuous door near the buffet leads out to a simple but thriving garden whose bounty enriches the traditional dishes. 



Bené da Flauta
www.benedaflauta.com.br

O Passo Pizza Jazz
www.opassopizzajazz.com.br

Restaurante Contos de Reis
www.restaurantecontosdereis.com.br

Tropea Cantina e Armazém
www.opassopizzajazz.com.br/tropea

Tragaluz Restaurante Casa
www.tragaluztiradentes.com.br

Atrás da Matriz Pizza & Bacalhau
www.atrasmamatriz.com.br

Solar de Rosário
www.hotelsolardorosario.com/newsite/en

Solar da Ponte
www.solardaponte.com.br

Mirtes do Líbano — O Famoso Rocambole
Av. Sebastião Pinto Andrade, 26, Lagoa Dourada

Tempero da Ângela
R. Dep. José Bonifácio, 64, Bichinho, Prados



Minas Gerais Tourism
www.minasgerais.com

Ouro Preto Tourism
www.ouropretoturismo.com.br/en

ELYSE GLICKMAN is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.