

Pretty in Portugal & Spain: Fun Ways to Eat, Drink, Make Merry!

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By **LAURA MANSKE** @lauramanske



(© Laura Manske)

Welcome to “Chat & Chew,” an inviting, travel-inspired interview series in which accomplished chefs from around the world answer feisty, fun, fantasy questions — because, after all, it is the *people* you meet on your journey who truly bring out a destination’s flavor. Plus, there is a delicious recipe for you to try. My new tasty talk spotlights Chef Ricardo Camacho, who creates culinary kudos aboard the **Gil Eanes**, a 132-passenger, 66-cabin river ship of **CroisiEurope**, a French cruise company with more than 50 vessels plying picturesque waters in Europe and Asia. On Portugal’s gorgeous, glittering Douro River, the Gil Eanes and its staff navigate a 7-night/8-day voyage starting in the historically colorful city of Porto — passing fishing villages and Medieval towns and impressive vineyards famous for port wine that rise high on terraced hills and mountains surrounding the river valley — until reaching its farthest itinerary stop in Spain, where an excursion via coach bus to the UNESCO World Heritage city of Salamanca made me joyfully wonder: “*Where has Salamanca been all my life?!*” Aboard the Gil Eanes, which is named after a 15th-century Portuguese navigator and explorer, Chef Camacho serves a palate-pleasing medley of French, Portuguese, and Spanish cuisine, accompanied by local wines. Born in South Africa, Camacho’s family moved to Portugal when he was 13 years old: “I had to learn the Portuguese language and about a new country all at once,” he says. Now, Chef Camacho is admirably fluent in English, Portuguese, French, and Spanish; he is learning German and Italian as well. Warm up reading this cool Q&A with Chef Camacho. Then please click the **LAUNCH GALLERY** button (*above or below*) for feel-good photos of traveling and eating aboard the Gil Eanes and exploring its pretty ports of call. Here is what we dished about:



► *Chef Ricardo Camacho aboard the Gil Eanes river ship in Portugal.* (© Laura Manske)

What is your favorite food?

Drinking a good beer and eating good bread is fantastic together!

What has been your happiest food experience?

When my mother taught me how to cook at age eight. We made octopus with rice.

With whom would you like to dine once? (A fantasy question!)

My grandmother, who passed away. And the late great musician, Bob Marley.



► *The Gil Eanes ship docked near Porto on the Douro River.* (© Laura Manske)

What is your personal motto?

Go with the flow.

When are you happiest?

I am happy almost all the time.



► In northwest Portugal near the Atlantic Ocean, centuries-old Porto has recently become newly popular as a bucket list tourism destination. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the medieval, riverside Ribeira district is eye-opening to meander — amid narrow cobblestone streets and mosaic-tile sidewalks, antique buildings, festive family-owned cafés, and local port wine cellars, many of which offer tastings across the river at Vila Nova de Gaia. This is Portugal's second largest city (after Lisbon) — abuzz with both contemporary diversions (including youthful nightlife) and yesteryear's charms. During the Age of Discovery (the end of the 15th century to the 18th century), many explorers and merchants embarked from Porto's shores, changing the world in myriad ways. (© Laura Manske)

Which four words best describe you?

Hard-working, stubborn, humble, and funny.

What has been your most important kitchen lesson?

Always pay attention — to everything.



► Like a lovely patchwork quilt, the undulating landscape of Portugal's verdant Douro River Valley is stitched together by terraced vineyards that are sculpted on mountains and hills. Famous port wines are grown and bottled here. (© Laura Manske)

What would passengers be most surprised to learn about you?

How shy I sometimes feel in public.

Looking back, what career advice do you wish you could have heard as an 18-year-old?

Don't work only in one country. Travel the world first and work in different places. Learn about new cuisines and people and cultures. It is often easier to do that when you are young.



▶ *Traditional Portuguese custard tarts: the bright rich egg yolk filling and flaky-crisp pastry crust make these sweet treats a must. Who can eat just one? Admittedly, not me. (© Laura Manske)*

Which three things are always in your home refrigerator?

Beer, vegetables, and spicy sauces.

How is cooking aboard a ship different than cooking on land?

In the kitchen of a big restaurant or hotel, there is usually a comparably large kitchen staff, with different workers assigned to cooking stations that specialize in courses, such as salads or soups or desserts. Aboard Gil Eanes, there is basically only myself and my *sous* chef to do it all, plus, of course, I manage the menu, order the food supplies, oversee the waitstaff, and much more. I enjoy the challenging and creative work and have been with CroisiEurope since 2010.



► In the spacious lounge aboard *Gil Eanes*, which is decorated in calming shades of turquoise, soft gray, and white, lots of natural light is appreciated. Almost all alcoholic beverages are included in the cruise fare. Relish the sweet, fortified local wine called port. White port, often golden and somewhat syrupy, is usually served as a pre-meal aperitif; red, called ruby, is customarily a dessert drink or after-dinner nightcap. Port is also produced in dry and semi-dry varieties. Tawny port, made from red grapes aged in wooden barrels, generally has a nutty essence. Rosé port is the newest variation, growing in popularity. Overall, Americans visiting Portugal are often surprised by the appealing affordability of port wines as well as the range of flavors with notes of blackberry, caramel, chocolate, raspberry, and cinnamon. Ports pair well with complex, deep-creamy cheeses, such as blue and brie, as well as salted nuts, smoked meats, and chocolate and caramel desserts. (© Laura Manske)

What gives you the most pleasure working for CroisiEurope?

At the end of dinner, my *sous* chef and I leave the kitchen and go into the dining room to meet the passengers. Then the passengers applaud! It means that our job has been well done. That feels very good.

Please click on the **LAUNCH GALLERY** button (above or below).

Among Portugal's most savored foods: pork, particularly the much-lauded Iberian ham; seafood, favorites of which are fresh hefty sardines and codfish; and more than a dozen different distinct pastries that are ubiquitously filled to overflowing with a sweet yellow egg yolk custard. Port wine, of course, is Portugal's premiere nectar.

Frequent globetrotter Laura Manske has visited most U.S. states, explored 80+ countries, and cruised 70+ ships. An international foodie, wine and spirits fan, and culture enthusiast, she loves to wander the world, unearthing travel joy, beauty, adventure, and humor in her photography and articles.