



THE ALGARVE CATAPLANA

A pan full of stories*

Throughout the Algarve region a gastronomic delicacy can be found, the cataplana, this is probably the most iconic recipe of the region. Its origin is lost in the memories of time and today is one of the most genuine symbols of the Algarve.

The term cataplana refers to both the utensil and the recipes cooked in it. This kind of metal pan, originally made of copper or brass, is formed by two concave parts joined by a hinge that, with the help of two lateral latches, allows them to close on themselves in an airtight manner, thus allowing for the hermetic cooking of delicacies, becoming, in essence, a precursor to today's pressure cooker.

Little is known about the origins of the cataplana, given the lack of historical records relating to its creation. It is assumed that its appearance in the Algarve is the result of Arab influence from North Africa and the Arab occupation of the region for more than 500 years. The famous Moroccan "tajine", although traditionally made of clay, uses the same type of airtight steam cooking that came to be used in the cataplana. Another hypothesis suggested, given the similarities, is that perhaps the idea behind it was inspired by the shellfish of Ria Formosa and clams, in particular, are one of the most common ingredients of the cataplana. This instrument began to be produced many decades ago in the Algarve region by old boilermakers, masters in the art of working copper, for which this region was once well known. The most current version of the Cataplana is attributed to the boilermaker Ricardo Pinguinha Guerreiro, who perfected it in copper and made it more airtight. It is increasingly difficult to find copper cataplanas because the boilermaking activity has been lost in time. Nowadays the stainless steel ones are more used, also because they are easier to clean, since they don't have the copper texture.

Whatever the material from which it is made, the cataplana never loses qualities, for example, the particular fact that it allows the use of little fat in cooking. The concave shape of the cataplana allows heat to be distributed evenly throughout its interior space, thus enabling more uniform cooking of the food. There are several advantages of the "steaming" cooking process used in the cataplana. The loss of nutrients and food's aroma is avoided, and the fat and calories needed to cook the recipes are reduced, so in addition to being associated with the region historical, cultural, and gastronomic heritage, the cataplana is also associated with a healthy diet based on ingredients from the region. As the water evaporates, the cooking vapors are kept in the cataplana, so the pressure increases and allows for a slightly higher cooking temperature than the normal 100 °C. The unmatched naturally created flavors and aromas are retained in the cataplana and provide a unique and delicious taste and smell experience. And the sense of sight does not fail to be surprised by the wonderful colors of this delicacy.

**text by Tertúlia Algarvia.*

PROMOTORES:



PARCEIROS:

