

## Seafood & Guns

*Portuguese-Angolan returnee Ana has both happy and frightening childhood memories of Angola*

Luanda, Angola. An open colonial roof with plastic chairs and tables. That is all you see, driving on the main road on the left side of the Ilha (Chicala). There is no sign, no name, nothing to indicate that this is a restaurant. But on that roof, some of Luanda's best grilled fish is served for a mere 20,00 USD a head. That makes it a typical middle-class favorite, although the restaurant without name is popular among the higher class as well.

Some who walk into the restaurant without a name might claim it is not really a restaurant at all. Downstairs is a small open patio, with a tiny grill. Upstairs are seats and tables. Clients can choose their fish – no lobster, no shell fish, just fish - from a bucket, after which it is cleaned and grilled. The fish is served with a sauce of freshly chopped onions, baked bananas and wine. That's it. No nonsense.

### Three properties

Account manager Ana Rosa (48) has never been here before, but loves it. She usually has sea food at other middle class fish restaurants on the Ilha, Multibocas and Club Naval. And sometimes at the new, upmarket Pescaderia Lookal which serves mostly imported fish from Portugal. "This one is simple but cosy, and their fish is delicious," she says approvingly. Ana likes trying out restaurants, and this one will be added to her list of favorites.

Ana was born in Luanda in 1964. Her poor Portuguese parents moved to Angola in 1958 while their country was struggling financially. At the age of 11, three months before Angolan independence (1975), Ana moved back to Lisbon. She now works at an international logistics company in Luanda since 2007.

Four years ago, Ana had to leave her then 12-year-old son behind in Portugal. Now, he does not want to move to Angola. "He hates Angola," Ana says, to the point.

In Angola, her father started working as an independent food distributor and became increasingly wealthy. When Ana was sent to Portugal in the midsts of Angola's political turmoil, her parents stayed in Angola to keep an eye on their three Luanda properties.

### Bucket of fish

The bucket of fish is brought to our table. We order the garapão. "We buy all our fish daily from there fishermen on the beach across the road, or at the Samba nearby," Maria Luisa Kueiros says. "Only our sopa, imported fish from Portugal, we buy at the market."

Maria Luisa has been selling fish for 17 years. First in a small hut, which was closed down by the government. Then in another one, which was also closed down. "A few years ago I started selling fish here, together with my cousin and nephew. Officially it's a shop rather than a restaurant."

The house belongs to an Angolan owner, Maria Luisa says. “He will soon destroy his house and have it replaced by something modern.” The owners’ plan echoes what is currently happening on the entire Ilha. While the old house is still here, Maria Luisa and her relatives are allowed to use it.

### **Free flights to Portugal**

“All the people from the ghetto were occupying the Portuguese houses,” Ana continues her story. “They didn’t have any money in Portugal, and weren’t expecting the revolution.” Until November 1975 there were five free flights per day for anyone under the Portuguese flag. “There were huge cues at the airport. Nevertheless, my parents stayed until 1989.”

Ana moved back to Angola when she was 13. Two years later, she returned to Portugal to go to boarding school. “My parents earned lots of money after independence. They started their own business in organizing parties for the NGO’s, embassies and so on. They imported some food, but during 10 years of Communist trading in dollars was forbidden. So they mainly used Angolan seafood, and my father had the right connections for that.”

Ana has very happy childhood memories of Angola. “When I arrived at the airport four years ago, the smell reminded me of that and that affected me emotionally,” she says. She also remembers being frightened, shortly after Angola’s attempted coup d’état by a disgruntled section of the MPLA in 1977. “Lots of people were killed at the time,” Ana remembers. “Three men with huge guns walked into our house one evening. They wanted our documents, put their guns against my parent’s and brother’s heads and threatened to kill us. Then they just walked out. We never understood why they did that, they probably just wanted to know our names.”

Eventually in 1989, her parents did return to Portugal. They sold their houses for 5.000 to 10.000 USD in 1985. “Those same houses would nowadays be worth 1,5 million USD.”

### **Lobster mayonnaise**

The huge, grilled fish on our plates have turned into small heaps of bones. Ana has special memories related to food. “Before independence, my mum used to cook prawns with hot sauce. I was seven years old, but I already liked to hot sauce. I loved ‘muambo’, palm oil mixed with chicken and funje. I also remember ‘pirão’, fish soup with spicy corn flour. And of course the ‘leitão’ – little piglet – which all Angolans eat.”

Her father used to go fishing in his own boat and come home with twenty kilos of lobster, caught at sea, then cooked and sold them. When Ana was 7 or 8 years old she used to go fishing with her cousins, bring fish and lobster and barbeque them at home. “It was so good to eat them fresh.”

“After the 1975 revolution there was hardly any food at all,” Ana says. “My mum used to be in cues from 5 am, have my brother replace her at 10 am, and then they’d wait further until 5 pm. But my father continued fishing and selling fish and we still had lots of fish at home, like lobster mayonnaise for parties. My mother used to prepare it with small potatoes and

prawns, it was delicious.”

As we walk out, the fire in the grill is still burning. Next to the patio in a small annex, three people are watching TV.

Ana has considered herself more Angolan than Portuguese ever since she moved back to Angola, she says. “I’ve never wanted to go back to Portugal. After 4,5 years I feel ready for another change, but it would have to be within Africa.” “I love Africa. I don’t like Europe,” she says. “Probably because my African childhood affected me so much.”

*By Lula Ahrens for Collateral Creations*