



## WHET YOUR APPETITE

WORDS BRANT CROUCHER PHOTOS GEORGES SCHEMAGIN



**A purple crushed velvet couch lines a black brick wall facing an exposed light stone facade. A shiny bar in the back glares at a stage that hosts live music up front nightly. Dark floors, black ceilings, candles and decorative lighting tie the skinny, posh lounge together. Latin rhythms fill the air of the off-the-beaten path venue—and so forms the canvas that showcases Rio's Brazilian's Downtown Austin debut.**

Rio's Brazilian is the culinary creation of business partners Ben Googins and Rio de Janeiro native Elias Matins, who met in Sao Paulo where Googins was teaching English. Using traditional family recipes and a knack for being in the right place at the right time, the charitably conscious duo developed a series of fine-packaged Brazilian foods and sauces. Vintage Lounge now plays host to an expanded spread of their Brazilian tapas, dishes and drinks.

Brazilian fare is as diverse as the country's coastline is long, taking cues from the Mediterranean and Europe as well as its indigenous, tropical roots. Start the tour de Brazil by snacking on the deliciously chewy and fluffy Pão de Queijo (cheese bread), which is all natural, gluten- and sugar-free. Amazed? Pick some up from a local grocer for your next party; it's pop-in frozen, pull-out fun.

Risoli de Frango finds chicken and vegetables stuffed into a pair of pastry shells, deep-fried into delicious oblivion. Carnivores will be satisfied with the Kibe, a meaty dish served in pairs (though sufficient for threes), which marries mint, beef and tabuli in a bulbous cylinder and is baked to mouthwatering perfection after a brief dip in the fryer. Inoque de Arroz is dressed for the holidays, with its sausage and mozzarella-stuffed green rice gnocchi, bathed in a tomato basil red sauce.

If meat doesn't agree, try the Botafogo salad, also available in stores, made with garbanzo beans, pear, spinach and toasted almonds. The vegetarian-friendly Lagoa Bisqua is a sweet potato bisque made with fresh veggies and served in a bowl that

commands more attention than the dish's Abe Lincoln-friendly sticker price. Rounding out the dessert menu are traditional Brazilian flan and a passion fruit chocolate mousse that are absolutely worth the extra visits to the gym.

For details on Rio's Brazilian's savory, preservative-free sauces and bite-size breads, including where they can be found, nutritional facts, ingredients and recipes, peep the website, [riosofaustin.com](http://riosofaustin.com).

The rest is served Tuesday through Saturday, 4pm to 10pm. Happy hour is 4pm to 7pm and includes appetizer specials and a dollar-off drinks.

Rio's Brazilian at Vintage Lounge  
504 Trinity, Suite B, Austin, TX 78701  
512.567.1597  
[riosofaustin.com](http://riosofaustin.com)



For the thirsty, the must-consume libation is Brazil's national drink, the Caipirinha. The murky, green bundle of fun is mixed with muddled lime and Cachaça, a Brazilian liquor made from fermented sugar cane. One is good, but two or three provide an all-expense paid excursion to Carnaval.

Fighting the hangover blues? Flag down a fiery Malaguetini, a Brazilian take on the forgiving Bloody Mary. It's made from Rio's Brazilian's spicy, homemade Original Malagueta sauce, which is bottled and sold locally.

