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More than a meal: the swanky Rio restaurant for homeless people

Dignity is on the menu at a Brazilian eatery where tasty dishes are conjured from food that would otherwise have gone to waste.

In a chic, minimalist restaurant with an Italian name and an innovative menu, near the centre of Rio de Janeiro, Valdicir dos Santos tucks into his dinner.

- 5 The food at Refettorio Gastromotiva is excellent – and Dos Santos is one of 90 people eating here for free.

“I’m a regular,” says Dos Santos, a homeless man, who has a salad to start and banana ice cream, strawberries and granola for dessert. “It’s a real find, because the food is well selected.”

- 10 Refettorio Gastromotiva, which opened in August 2016, just before the Olympic Games, is a unique project in a city blighted by poverty and rising homelessness.

Those who eat here – abandoned by a country where inequality runs deep and the economy is still crawling out of a crippling recession – say its meals offer a rare moment of humanity.

- 15 The restaurant’s food is donated by companies that would otherwise throw it away, and prepared by a team of trainees led by professional chefs. They are adept at turning what would otherwise be waste into appetising menus.

The diners, who are served the food by volunteers, are selected by different non-profit groups.

- 20 Most of the team cooking here are from favelas and low-income communities. All negotiated a tough selection process to claim a place on a three-month training course leading to a diploma.

“For us, fighting food waste is a way of generating meals for people who need them, people in need,” Dos Santos says.

- 25 “Gastronomy for us is a means for social inclusion. There is a whole sociability in the project,” he says.

“They don’t just socialise the homeless, they humanise us.”

“It was my first time in a favela,” he says, “and what I saw that day would transform my life forever.”

By Dom Phillips, adapted from *The Guardian*, November 2018