



## Paella & Pintxos... *Olé!*

Spain is a country of seventeen regions, mountains and sea, kings and commoners, with a past of invaders and rebels. Its gastronomy is as varied as its topography and people, and two culinary ambassadors, Her Excellency Milagros Hernando Echevarría and Chef Fernando Canales, guide us on an exploration of Spain



**Spanish Ambassador to Lebanon, Her Excellency Milagros Hernando Echevarría, was born and raised in the coastal city of Bilbao in Basque Country.**

“It is the place where my family is still living, and where I return every time to visit.”

*Purrusalda*, a soup of leeks and potatoes “that you boil and boil,” and cauliflower soup are the dishes that remind Echevarría of her childhood.

“Every Monday afternoon I went to my aunt and uncle’s home, and I stayed for dinner. Cauliflower soup is one of my aunt’s specialties; I still have the smell of this dish in my memory because I was very happy in that house.”

### **The culinary specialties of Spain**

“Of course, I will begin with *paella*, a dish of saffron rice with seafood, often with chicken and chorizo mixed in. The most typical place to eat *paella* is Valencia, but the entire eastern coast is good for this dish.

Second, I will choose *cocido madrileño*, a chickpea stew with meat and vegetables, and of course Madrid is the place to eat it.

The third dish is the Spanish omelet, made of eggs with potatoes and onions; you can eat this dish in any place in Spain.

For the fourth dish I recommend *bacalao al pil pil* [salt cod with garlic and hot pepper sauce]. This is perhaps the main specialty in the Basque cuisine and one of my favorites.

With regards to restaurants, I think the best way to find a good one is always to ask on the street. The Spanish people do not cheat, they will immediately tell you which is the best restaurant in any town.”

“Barcelona is the most popular destination for the Lebanese visiting Spain,” continues Echevarría. “Probably because it is a Mediterranean city, with a lot of light, wonderful architecture, plenty of design - all the things that I know the Lebanese people like a lot. If I were you, I would try fish all the time, wonderful *paella*, *esqueisada* [cod salad], Catalan cream...”



Meson O Porton



Etxanobe

**Chef Fernando Canales** of the Michelin-starred restaurant **Etxanobe** in Bilbao brought his interpretations of Spanish cuisine to Lebanon earlier this year through an event at the Phoenicia Hotel, and was happy to share his knowledge.

"In Madrid I like *callos* [tripe], and *buñuelos de bacalao* [the cod fritters]. In Alicante, the rice dishes are incredible. In Castille, I die for the roast lamb. In Galicia, the mussels are the best in the world."

### For restaurants, Canales recommends the following:

**Casa Mingo**, a Madrid institution serving roast chicken and hard cider; **Darsena**, a port-side restaurant in Alicante, Valencia; **Casa Antón**, a no-frills eatery offering outstanding lamb in Lerma, Castille; **Mesón O Porton**, serving seafood tapas in Vigo's 'Oyster Alley' in Galicia; and sea-front **Masia del Mar** in La Caleta, Tenerife.

### The Basque Country

Our experts both hail from the Basque Country, a small region in northern Spain. Chef Canales has equally fond food memories. "At home we ate a calamari *paella* - not very yellow but very delicious. Also batter-fried vegetables in sauce,



Casa Mingo

and woodcock, which is a long-beaked bird that is sublime."

Seafood is the real star in Basque cuisine. It appears in forty percent of the dishes on Etxanobe's menu, such as *txangurro*, [a typical Basque dish of local spider crab] reinvented at Etxanobe with white shrimp from the south of Spain. The menu also includes six preparations of *merluza* [hake], a white fish from local waters. Hake is often called the "bride of the Basques," and Canales is clearly a love-smitten groom. "The hake that lives here is delicate, delicious, very fresh, and around it many mythic plates have been created, like hake with clams and *kokotxas* [a miniscule part of the head of the hake]."

### Ir de Tapas

Tapas are little plates of food, typically served with drinks. Sherry, a fortified wine of Spain, is the classic accompaniment for tapas. It is said



Darsena



Casa Anton

that bartenders used to serve a slice of bread or salty ham on top of a glass of sweet sherry to protect it from flies, hence tapas (meaning covers) were born.

Tapas such as olives, cheese and tortillas are served cold, while others, such as shrimp in garlic sauce and spicy potatoes, are served hot.

"*Ir de tapas* means that we go to places usually in streets where there are lots of bars offering little plates to accompany the wine. Usually in each town you have some areas where mainly between 1pm and 3pm or starting again around 7 or 8pm, you can see people standing around deciding from a very big selection in each bar," Echevarria says. A type of tapas called *pintxos* originated in the Basque Country. The name means skewer and refers to the toothpick on which the food is served. A *montadito* is a bite served on a piece of bread, while a *racion* is a larger plate of food, still served in the casual, sharing manner of tapas.



## Paella

Serves 6  
Prep/cooking 1 hr 30 mins

### INGREDIENTS

- 1.5 kg frying chicken, cut into 10 pieces
- ¼ cup Extra Virgin olive oil
- 2 Spanish chorizo sausages, thickly sliced
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1 Spanish onion, diced
- 4 garlic cloves, crushed
- Bunch of flat-leaf parsley, chopped, reserve some for garnish
- 1 can whole tomatoes, drained and hand-crushed
- 4 cups short grain Spanish rice
- 6 cups warm water
- Generous pinch of saffron threads
- 1 dozen littleneck clams, scrubbed
- 500g jumbo shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 2 lobster tails
- ½ cup sweet peas, frozen and thawed
- Lemon wedges, for serving

### PREPARATION

Heat the oil in a paella pan over a medium-high heat. Sauté the chorizo until browned, remove and reserve. Add the chicken skin-side down and brown on all sides, turning with tongs. Add salt and freshly ground pepper. Remove from pan and reserve.

In the same pan, make a sofrito by sautéing the onions, garlic, and parsley. Cook for 2 or 3 minutes on a medium heat. Then, add tomatoes and cook until the mixture caramelizes a bit and the flavors meld. Fold in the rice and stir-fry to coat the grains. Pour in the water and simmer for 10 minutes, gently moving the pan around so the rice cooks evenly and absorbs the liquid. Add chicken, chorizo, and saffron. Add the clams and shrimp, tucking them into the rice. The shrimp will take about 8 minutes to cook. Give the paella a good shake and let it simmer, without stirring, until the rice is *al dente*, for about 15 minutes. During the last 5 minutes of cooking, when the rice is filling the pan, add the lobster tails. When the paella is cooked and the rice looks fluffy and moist, turn the heat up for 40 seconds until you can smell the rice toasting at the bottom, then it's perfect. Remove from heat and rest for 5 minutes. Garnish with peas, parsley and lemon wedges.

# FAVORITES



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### ZONE SERRANO

**Lunch: Ten Con Ten Restaurante & Bar** is where the jet-set come, excellent Spanish food (+34) 91 575 92 54

**Lunch: Pandelujo** is a renovated in century-old bakery (+34) 91 436 11 00

**Aperitif: Dry Cosmopolitan Bar**, go to the terrace on the Castellana to see the Spaniards after their workday. The gin and tonic is their specialty. Taste the FOXTROT (+34) 91 431 67 00

**Dinner: Alcalde** is the best Basque restaurant in Madrid, amazing meat, don't miss the Pimientos del Padron (+34) 91 576 33 59

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### ZONE CENTRO HISTORICO

**Aperitif: Mercado De San Miguel**, a wonderful gourmet market - you'll taste tapas at each stand with wines sold on site

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### ZONE CENTRO GRAN VIA

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