

SEVILLE:

A CULINARY HOMECOMING

LIFE IN SEVILLE REVOLVES AROUND MEALS; THE CLINKING OF GLASSES, THE SHARED LAUGHTER OVER PLATES OF TAPAS, THE WAY THE CITY SLOWS DOWN AS THE AFTERNOON HEAT SETTLES IN... THERE'S A CERTAIN MAGIC THERE, BUT IT'S THE FOOD THAT TRULY TELLS SEVILLE'S STORY. THE CULINARY TRADITIONS HERE ARE AS CENTRAL TO THE CITY'S IDENTITY AS ITS SUN-DAPPLED STREETS AND ANCIENT MOORISH ARCHITECTURE.

BY SOPHIE BAKER

My childhood summers were spent in a little Spanish village. Every year, we'd make the trek from the UK by car, our family of six crossing the channel and winding through France, all for the reward of languid weeks by the sea.

I can still taste the churros: piping hot corrugated sugary dough sticks pulled straight from a greasy paper bag, and dipped into melted chocolate. We'd swirl the hot dough between our teeth, breathing as quickly as we could to cool them

down between bites, each of us desperate to have our fill before another sibling beat us to it.

Churros were Spain to me, then. But it was there, too, that I developed a taste for seafood – from fish braais to a taste for swordfish and my first bite of calamari, a gullible seven-year-old me tricked into it by my brother claiming they were "unbattered onion rings". Trips to the local supermarket saw us leaving with mountains of cured *jamón*, the famous Spanish dry-cured ham, while fruit was picked from the backyard of our whitewashed villa. Occasionally we'd drive





into town for dinner and, under Dad's watchful eye, order food in clumsy Spanish – he spoke it fluently, having spent a few years working in Madrid.

For me, returning to Spain was a culinary homecoming of sorts. After years away, I returned to Seville hoping to rekindle those fond memories.

On my first night, I booked the Seville Tapas Tour by Secret Food Tours – something I hoped would give me the confidence to navigate the tapas scene solo for the remainder of the week. It's the kind of thing that could easily feel touristy, but didn't.

After a 6km Lime scooter ride to the meeting spot, I knew I was far from the typical tourist haunts. The guide led us through narrow winding streets, past grand cathedrals and hidden courtyards. We stopped at bars and restaurants that seemed unremarkable from the outside yet inside, held treasures. One spot offered cured tuna and a selection of *jamón Iberico*, each slice marbled with fat and practically melting on my tongue. Another served a spinach and chickpea stew rich with cumin, a nod to the Arabic influences that still flavour Andalusian cuisine. Piping hot fried cuttlefish bites, doused in lemon and enjoyed straight from a paper cone, were somehow reminiscent of both those early days of trying seafood in Spain and the occasional Friday night fish and chips in the UK.

Feeling ready to brave the food scene alone, I

ventured out. My mornings quickly fell into a comforting rhythm, beginning with a simple breakfast – coffee, freshly squeezed orange juice, and a *tostada* drizzled with olive oil and topped with a paste made from fresh Andalusian tomatoes. The tomatoes here are like nowhere else's – vibrant red, bursting with flavour, and sweetened by the intense Andalusian sun. Stuffed with creamy burrata and roasted with a touch of honey, they make a simple but unforgettable lunch.

One morning, craving something sweet, I followed my nose to Doña Carmen Churros. A small, unassuming spot, the smell of frying dough led me right to it. From the very first, meltingly delicious, crunchy bite, I was transported right back to those early childhood days.

As the week unfolded, I discovered the joys of exploring Seville's food scene at my own pace. Evenings were reserved for tapas-hopping. You start at one bar, perhaps Bodeguita Romero, with a plate of *carrillada* (braised pork cheeks in red wine) or gooey cheese and ham croquettes. Then on to the next, where you might sample one of the city's famous octopus dishes, or *ensaladilla rusa*, a cold potato salad with shrimp or tuna – a staple since the 19th century. By the time you reach your final stop, you have a deeper appreciation for the city's culinary heritage.

Even as a solo traveller, it was impossible to feel lonely in the evenings. Seville buzzes with the energy of spontaneous friends' meet-ups, couples sharing a drink and tapas, and the continual

hum of a city that only winds down as the clock approaches midnight. Dining alone immerses you in the experience so you can focus on the flavours and textures that tell the story of Seville.

Forget tapas, lunch is the star of the show here, something to be savoured... slowly. You can enjoy three courses and a drink for around 10-12 euros (€250, at the current exchange rate). And nobody bats an eyelid if you opt for wine or beer on a workday.

After five hours' touring the Real Alcazar and the cathedral, I was ready for a carb-heavy lunch. For years, I'd seen the famous *tortilla de patatas* recommended, but I'd dismiss it as a bland mix of potatoes, onion, and eggs in a crustless tart. To my delight, it was perfectly seasoned and utterly delicious. I devoured it in record time. Later, feeling sticky in the stifling Sevillian summer heat, I wandered back to the hotel to shower off the dust of the day. Then, feeling delectably drowsy, drifted off in the glorious Spanish tradition of the siesta, to shake off the food coma.

Artichokes were another ingredient that seemed to appear on every menu. They're usually served whole, roasted or confit-ed in oil and garlic, with a side of fresh bread. In Seville, artichokes are a nod to the city's Moorish past, where advanced agricultural techniques allowed these tender, slightly bitter vegetables to thrive. Paired with a heartier tapa, such as pork in mustard sauce, baked butter prawns, or croquettes, artichokes



add a fresh, earthy, and vinegary contrast to the richer dishes.

Later that week, I treated myself to dinner at Restaurante Vela Azahares in Triana, with its modern interiors and a view along the river. I ordered the delectable octopus rice drizzled with kewpie mayo, accompanied by a glass of crisp white wine and the sound of friends catching up after a long workday. It's the kind of spot that makes you want to linger long after your plate is empty. I lingered, watching the city move around me while enjoying a sense of peace in the solitude. Not quite ready to end my night, I decided to order another favourite: tuna tartare.



The Japanese influence on Seville's cuisine has historical roots. In the early 20th Century, Japanese fishermen began settling in coastal Spain, bringing with them their culinary traditions. Over time, these influences found its way into Andalusian cuisine, creating a unique fusion that's now a hallmark of Seville's modern food scene.

As the week drew to a close, I found myself savouring the last few bites of my final meal in Seville at Restaurante Doña Rufina, washed down with a glass of Tinto de Verano. At 10pm, as the sun set behind the cathedral and the city prepared for another long, lively night, I realised that this trip had been more than a foodie getaway; it was a culinary journey back to a place that, in its own way, had always been home. **B**