



## Málaga: a flourishing food scene

by Great British Chefs  
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*The food and drink culture in Málaga has blossomed over the last two decades and today it is home to vibrant restaurants and tapas bars and excellent local produce. Rachel McCormack visits the city to find out more.*

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Málaga has been an important Mediterranean city since the Phoenicians settled there in the eighth century BC, at first looking for a strategic harbour and then discovering sea snails there which were a source of the famous Tyrian purple natural dye. Later settlers in Málaga have also left their historical mark on the city; there are the remains of a Roman theatre, the Alcazaba, one of best-preserved Moorish palatial fortifications in Spain, and the huge imposing cathedral and other religious buildings spanning back to the Christian Reconquest in 1487. Like most of the rest of the Costa del Sol, modern settlers tend to be tourists – the very rich ones can be seen aboard their luxury yachts, which are often moored at Málaga’s ultra-modern marina between the beach and the old town. Over the past 20 years, though, officials have made a concerted effort to entice tourists away from only enjoying the surrounding beaches by creating an impressive array of food and cultural offerings. Málaga now has 40 museums, the most important being the Picasso museum, a branch of the Pompidou Centre and The Carmen Thyssen museum, and a myriad of good restaurants and bars.

As is the case across a lot of the south of Spain, people crowd into tapas bars to share dishes of everything from the Russian salad at El Refectorium to plates of cold prawns and tiny tube glasses of Málaga and Moscatel wines directly from the barrel at La Antigua Casa de la Guardia. Everywhere you go in Málaga there is a sense that being a cultural centre has made Malagueños take more pride and interest in their culinary culture – and, as a result, the city’s offerings get better and better. One of the most celebrated foods of Málaga is the concha fina, known highly poetically as queen of the sands. A species of giant clam, it can be found throughout the city and is typically served raw on ice with a squeeze of lemon and black pepper. Another famous seafood dish, which you can go to beachside bars to enjoy, is the sardine espeto. Six sardines are skewered on a spike and then stuck into sand to be cooked by fire. It’s a Málaga tradition which is thought to go back to the Phoenicians, although it was more recently revived in the nineteenth century, and the beachside espeto cooking of the city now extends to other types of fish.



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While meat from across Spain is available in Málaga’s restaurants, one of the specialities of the province is the highly-prized goat meat from the native Málaga breed. Its milk is used for high quality cheeses, including El Albarejo and El Pastor Del Valle. Like most of the rest of Andalusia, ham and other pork charcuterie is highly regarded in Málaga, with protected designation of origin (PDO) ham from Trevélez in Granada, Iberico ham from PDO Jabugo, and other PDO pork products from across Spain taking pride of place.

When it comes to wine, Málaga is famous for its sweet fortified wine, which is named after the city itself and made from Pedro Ximénez and Moscatel grapes. Internationally famous since the seventeenth century, a designation of origin (DO) for Málaga wine was created in 1933 to protect the name and one for its sibling, DO Sierras de Málaga, named after the inland mountain range where most of the wine is produced, was created in 2001 to oversee the production of lighter unfortified wines. DO Sierras de Málaga is now regarded as one of the most exciting new wine regions in Spain and the bars and restaurants in the city are listing increasing amounts as production grows and improves. Málaga has turned itself into one of the must visit cities of Spain for both artistic culture and great food and drink, and great pride is taken to showcase the best of what the province and the region of Andalusia has to offer. Here are four of the best:

**Uvedoble:** Located opposite the Alcazaba, Uvedoble is a tapas bar where chef patron Willie Orellana serves traditional tapas such as Russian salad alongside more modern, personal dishes such as swordfish ceviche with local avocado. The wine list has a range from across Spain, with a large number of local Sierras de Málaga wines, many of which are available by the glass. A favourite with Malagueños, it’s best to reserve or arrive early.

**Kaleja:** Located in Málaga’s old Jewish quarter and named after the Sephardic word for alley, chef **Dani Carnero’s** flagship restaurant and a recent winner of a Michelin star is one of the must visits of Málaga. It is a marriage of traditional Málaga dishes, modern innovation and outstanding local produce, often cooked over embers. There are two tasting menus available at both lunch and dinner with matching wines.

**Anyway Wine Bar:** With more than 100 wines available by the glass, owner of Anyway David Camino showcases the highest quality of modern Spanish winemaking, with a focus on both natural wine and the best of Sierras de Málaga. You taste before making your choice and to accompany your glass Anyway offers charcuterie and cheese from small artisan producers from across Spain, as well as a changing daily menu.

**Meson Iberico:** This is one of the best traditional tapas bars of Málaga and if you want a space at the bar it’s best to get there early. Otherwise, you can sit in the back of the restaurant. Choose from the best that Andalusia has to offer, from ham, black pudding and chorizo to fresh tuna or concha fina clams. There is a good traditional wine list with a strong focus on Ribera del Duero reds.

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