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FWS Foods and Wines from Spain #alimentosdespaña

CONDE NAST TRAVELLER PARTNERSHIP

The best mood-boosting foods from Spain

These Spanish foods would lift anyone's spirits

Good food – whether it's a bright burst of citrus in salad, a platter of cheese and cured meats, or a lavish home-cooked supper shared with friends – is essential to mental and physical wellbeing. And good food can't be made without quality ingredients. Luckily, Spain has these in abundance, with many products awarded PGI (protected geographical indication) and PDO (protected designation of origin) status. From carefully cultivated bananas to a good glass of wine, these are the best Spanish foods to lift your mood.

Fruit and vegetables

Research suggests that eating a diet high in fruit and vegetables isn't just healthy, it can actually make us happier. Spain's rich soil and enviable Mediterranean climate creates the ideal conditions for growing ingredients from peaches to Padrón peppers.

You could quite easily fill a fruit bowl with Spanish produce alone, from Plátano de Canarias (Canary Island bananas) – which thrive in the tropical heat and low rainfall of the islands and have their own PGI – to PDO Manzana Reineta del Bierzo, apples introduced to León by the Romans. Oranges aren't native to Spain, but they have thrived in the Mediterranean sun since the first seeds were planted more than 800 years ago, and the vibrant colour of Valencia's finest can't fail to put a smile on your face.

Grapefruits, lemons and tangerines are also harvested in their millions in Spain – so it's little wonder that the country is the world's leading exporter of citrus.

Spain also grows an incredible variety of vegetables with PDO status, from Alcachofa de Benicarló (artichokes), which are carefully nurtured and hand-picked for their characteristic round, compact shape, to Pemento de Herbón – also known as Padrón peppers – from Galicia, whose varying levels of spice make biting into one a surprise every time.

Comfort dishes

As the late, great chef, presenter and author Anthony Bourdain once said: 'Good food is very often, even most often, simple food.' It's an ethos that Spanish cuisine has upheld for centuries, and there's possibly no food group as simple as pulses. Chickpeas, lentils and beans are, perhaps, the unlikely stars of many Spanish dishes – inexpensive ingredients transformed by family recipes handed down through generations, cooked over hours of gentle simmering to create happiness in a bowl. The distinctively flavoured green PGI Lenteja de La Armuña (Armuña lentils) make an ideal base for soups, while PGI Garbanzo de Escacena (chickpeas, often paired with cod) are a filling addition to hearty homemade stews. On a cold winter evening nothing is quite as cheering for supper as a bowl of the famously rich fabada Asturiana, made with white beans and pork shoulder.

Meat and cheese

Sometimes, of course, only the finer things will do. Whether buying ingredients for a celebration or simply cheering yourself up after a hard day, any gourmand could quite happily fill their pantries and plates with Spain's extensive range of cured meats and cheeses.

More than 200 types of cheese are produced in Spain, many with PDO status, and there really is something for everyone: buttery, firm Queso Manchego; soft and creamy Galician Queso Tetilla (so named for its conical, breast-like shape); artisanal blue Cabrales cheese; or slightly smoked Queso Palmero,made from the milk of goats left to graze on the wild plants of La Palma in the Canary Islands. And though Spanish cured meats can be used as ingredients to add a salty, spicy note to any dish, they're just as delicious eaten on their own. Chorizo from Pamplona, PGI Cecina de León (dried beef) and thinly sliced ham (produced across regions such as Jabugo, Teruel and Guijuelo) are essential to any charcuterie platter.

Of course, there's no need to limit yourself to just meat and cheese. The joy of indulging is to do it to excess. Find it in a handful of marcona almonds or dates, a dish of sour, salty manzanilla or gordal olives, or the most traditional of Spanish treats – salted fish. Santoña anchovies and PGI Mojama de Barbate (salt-cured tuna) are both popular varieties for their cultural heritage and their powerful punch of flavour.

Wine

With almost a million hectares of cultivated vineyards, Spain knows a thing or two about wine – including the fact that nothing signals the start of a good time quite like the first sip. Some 140 Spanish wines have been awarded PGI or PDO status, including PDO such as Toro and Montilla-Moriles which join Sherry and Cava on the wine lists of renowned restaurants and in the cellars of the most discerning collectors. Paired with a cheese board, a selection of tapas, or a filling stew, you've got a mood-boosting combination right there.

To find out more about Spain's quality food and wines, visit Spain Food Nation.

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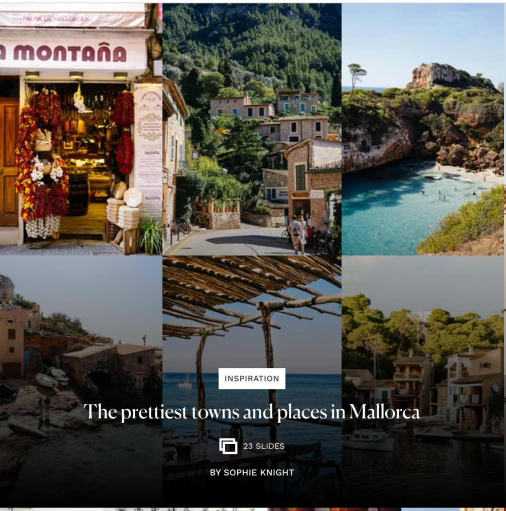

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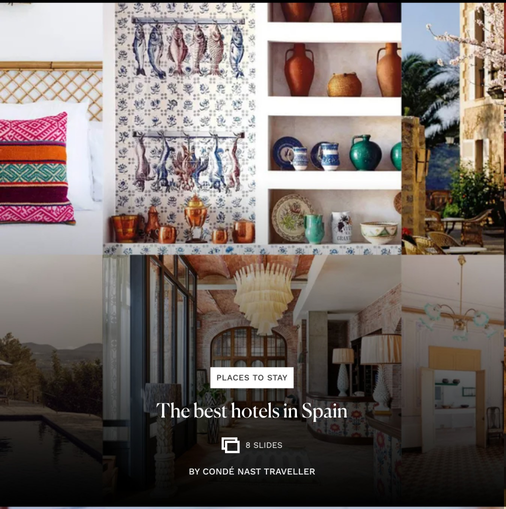

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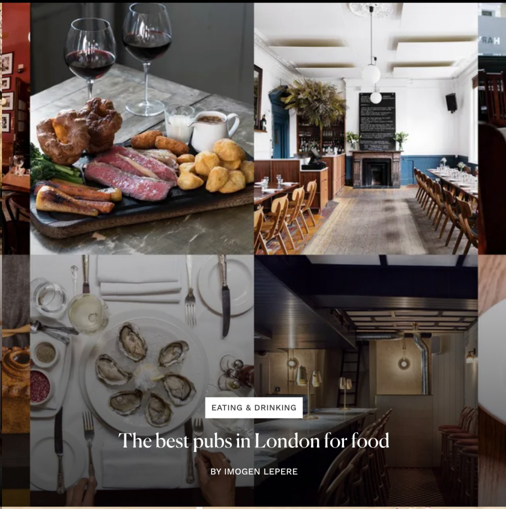

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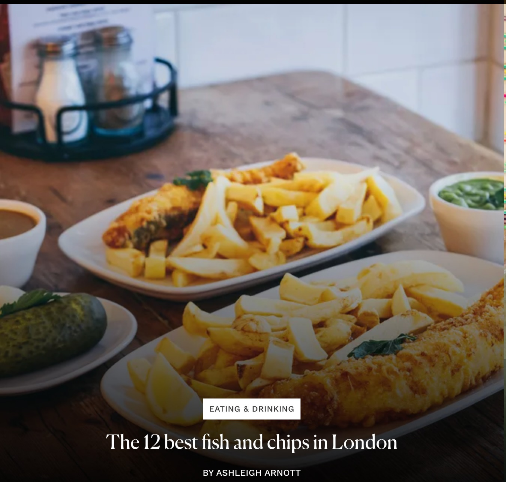

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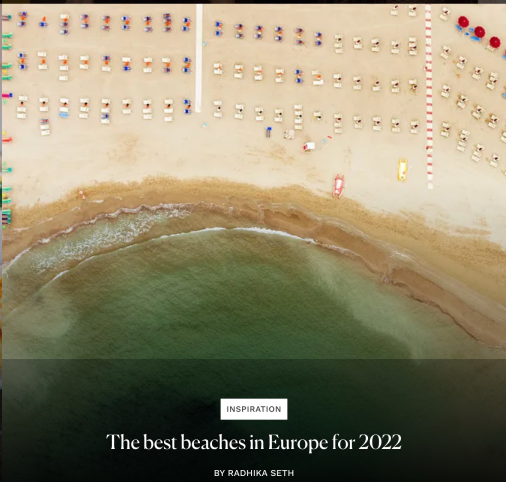

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