



PHOTOGRAPHY: © ICEX/TOYA LEGIDO

CURED WITH LOVE

Spain's cured meats are a highlight of its culinary culture – but you don't need to fly overseas to experience their magic

From sun-drenched olives and rich cheeses to acclaimed wines, Spain is home to a range of delicious produce. And while each offering is unique, there is one key ingredient that lies at the heart of all Spanish foods: passion.

Cured meat, of course, is one of Spain's most popular exports, and nothing captures the essence of Spain's gastronomy quite like the vast and varied selection on offer. The food preservation and flavouring process that involves using salt, and usually other spices, to draw out moisture and cure meat

is a longstanding tradition in Spain – one that is steeped in geography, history, culture and even religion. To this day, the country remains the largest producer and consumer of ham, without having compromised its centuries-old, artisan cooking methods.

If you'd like to bring an authentic taste of Spain to your dinner table, serrano and iberico hams are undoubtedly the way to go. But how can you tell if you're getting the best quality, and what should you enjoy them with?

SERRANO HAM

One of the country's most popular cured meats, this soft and sweet ham derives mainly from white pigs, particularly the Duroc, Landrace and Large White breeds. When cut, a good serrano ham will be shiny in appearance, though its colour can range from a subtle pink to a purplish red. The texture should be firm and the flavour intense, though its slight saltiness should never dominate your palate.

For a refreshing hit, try accompanying the serrano with perfectly ripe tomatoes or melon, or use it as a garnish for cold soups like salmorejo (a traditional Spanish purée consisting of tomato and bread). When it comes to wine, try one of Spain's crisp whites, such as albariño or verdejo, both of which should be stocked at large supermarkets.

IBERICO HAM

Renowned for its inimitable flavour, there's a reason this cured meat is often labelled the finest in the world. Sourced from the Iberico black pig, which grazes on acorns from the ancient oak pastures of Spain, this Spanish delicacy is beautifully rich and nuanced in taste. The meat is dark red and well marbled, and usually served in paper-thin slices. On first bite, you'll detect sweet and nutty notes, though as the fat melts away on your tongue, it unlocks aromas that are rich and complex.

To eat this cherished meat with anything else would be considered a crime in Spain, but an accompanying fine wine, cava or a dry sherry is always welcomed! The bold reds of Ribera del Duero, Toro and Rioja complement iberico perfectly and are all available to buy in the UK.

FWS Foods and Wines
from Spain

#alimentosdespaña

To find out more about Spain's quality food and wines, visit foodswinesfromspain.com/spainfoodnation