## ;Delicioso! Five gourmet favourites from Spain



Tangy manchego, fragrant olive oil, succulent slivers of Ibérico ham, new age or vintage vinegars and sweet, sticky turrón... these Spanish offerings are at their best when tasted at source

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its alta cocina. All good meals, be they from fancy chefs or cosy tabernas, start with the best ingredients - and those grown in

Spain are tended with passion. Marrying ancient techniques with modern technology for sophisticated results, Spain's eco-friendly practices have made it Europe's number one producer of organic food and wine. And as artisans across the country are happy to share their wares with hungry visitors, here are five of the best Spanish ingredients - the foundations of many a delicious dish...

At the heart of traditional Spanish cooking are the star products of



summers, Spain produces around half of the world's olive oil.

## Advanced growing systems, drip irrigation and environmentally

friendly practices create fantastic fruit harvested at optimum ripeness, capturing the best aromas and flavours. In Andalusia, olive orchards grow on broad plains beside cork oaks and cling to mountain slopes amid pine forests, where the native picual variety is the star. Traditionally slightly bitter with notes of fig, earlier harvesting now produces fragrant, green, fruitier oils. Olive groves ring Cordoba, and the old Moorish capital is a hub

of rutas de aceite (olive oil trails), each with its own character. In Baena, the honey-coloured oil is so delicate, you can drizzle it on fruit salad. Cornicabra olives, grown mostly in central Spain, produce thick

fruity oil, great for blends, while the sweetness of oil from

Catalonia's arbequina variety is sometimes complemented with botanical blends such as orange blossom and thyme, or cardamom, clementine and apple.



areas) on the sierras of Extremadura, feeding on acorns. Aficionados of the cured meat make pilgrimages - to the towns of Jabugo, in the

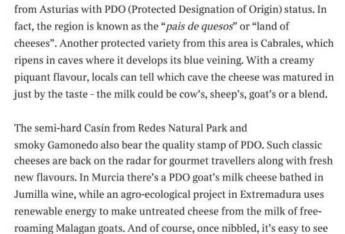
Anadalusian province of Huelva, or Guijuelo, in the Castillian

province of Salamanca - to sample different styles and tap into the passions of local producers still using ancient methods of salting, drying and curing. Waxy legs are hung in drying chambers, slowly

maturing for more than 18 months. "Bellota" on the label guarantees a pig was fed on acorns and "puro" refers to a pure rather than crossbred animal. Nose-to-tail cooking means no part of the animal is wasted: forelegs are cured, hung and sold as shoulder ham or paleta (hams are made from the back legs) and international chefs use the remaining meat and offal. Melt-in-your-mouth slivers are expertly carved and served at the counters of tiny bars where the lingering acorn-laden flavour teams perfectly with a chilled glass of fino sherry.

The blue note: sharp Cabrales cheese is ripened in Asturias caves (© ICEX / Antonio de Benito) 3. Queso crazy: artisan cheese

Afuega'l pitu is one of the oldest Spanish cheeses and one of four



why the intense manchego is still Spain's bestselling cheese.





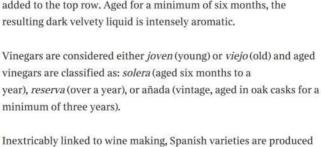
ust for Christmas: crunchy Alicante and smooth Jijona turrón (© ICEX / Juan Manuel Sanz)

Moorish in origin, there are two main types - the soft, smooth Jijona version, and hard Alicante turrón, which is dry and firm with pieces of almond.

Sweet turrón or almond nougat is a Spanish festive favourite. Originally from the small Alicante town of Jijona, where the nut

nougat made from white chocolate ganache and ale coated in milk chocolate. In Asturias, turrón is made with marzipan, sweet apple paste and local cider.





under PDO designations made from the correspondingly protected wines, and special techniques vary the vinegar's characteristics. In DO Vinagre de Condado de Huelva, where the white grape Zalema

orchards carpet the valley, the 500-year-old recipe combines almonds, honey, sugar and egg whites.

5. It's the nuts: turrón

New takes include toasted peanuts, hazelnuts or walnuts, candied fruit or chocolate. Creative spins from tops chef Albert Adriá include turrón made with cabernet sauvignon, and a beer

To discover more of Spain's delicious gourmet products and find the artisans behind them, visit

foodswinesfromspain.com/spainfoodnation