

Experience - Fine dining

Spanish seal of approval: the Restaurants from Spain certification

by Great British Chefs
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Introduced in 2020, The Restaurants from Spain certification is an initiative that both recognises and supports restaurants serving authentic and high-quality Spanish cuisine. We find out more about the certification and take a look at some of the restaurants that have been awarded the accolade.



Home to some of Europe's most amazing produce and known for its countless specialities, anyone who has ever set foot in Spain knows just how important a role food plays in the country's broader culture. But the popularity of Spanish food is by no means confined to Spain itself; over the years the cuisine has developed a global reputation and as a result, one no longer has to venture all the way over to Spain to experience truly exceptional takes on the country's food. However, with so many Spanish restaurants out there now, the difficulty comes in knowing which places actually offer an authentic take on the cuisine. Thanks to the Restaurants from Spain certification, that's no longer a problem.

Set up in 2020 by ICEX - Spain Trade and Investment (ICEX), the certification is awarded to restaurants outside of Spain that are deemed to be serving top quality Spanish cuisine. While the certification was predominantly launched to benefit those wanting to track down the finest Spanish food around, it also provides a model that can be followed by chefs and restaurateurs around the world wanting to offer Spanish food somewhere new. On top of this, the certification also helps the restaurants who've already been awarded it, with the Food and Wines from Spain division of ICEX providing them with ongoing support in the form of various benefits. These include everything from introducing the chefs to Spanish ingredient suppliers to giving them access to ICEX's range of training schemes.

The big question however, is how does one define high-quality, authentic Spanish cuisine? Those words, after all, mean very different things to different people. That's why a carefully thought through set of criteria have been put in place by Food and Wines from Spain, to guarantee that only the finest Spanish restaurants across the world are given the Restaurants from Spain certification. These criteria include that the staff must be able to explain the restaurant concept and its main dishes, and the chef, meanwhile, must be qualified to cook Spanish food. When it comes to the menu, there must be a predominance of Spanish recipes featuring protected ingredients, which can only legally be produced in Spain. This ensures that only restaurants which are a true representation of the cuisine are recognised.

Since its creation, a number of both independent restaurants and groups have been recognised by the Restaurants from Spain certification everywhere from India to the US. Here in the UK, there are currently ten groups of restaurants which have been certified including, amongst others, Pizarro restaurants, Ibérica restaurants, Arrós QD, Asador 44 and Curado Bar in Cardiff, and most recently the Barrafina Group and Brindisa. Whilst these all differ in their approach to Spanish food, they all share the same commitment to the cuisine and meet the certification's strict criteria.



Barrafina Coal Drops Yard
by Angel Zapata Martin



José Pizarro Broadgate
by José Pizarro

It should come as no surprise that one name that appeared on the list of certified restaurants very early on was **José Pizarro** – a chef who has been at the forefront of London's tapas scene for a number of years. Having grown up in Spain and trained at Michelin-starred restaurants in Madrid, José always had a very clear understanding of what authentic Spanish food was. And when he eventually moved to London in 1998, he realised that people didn't have the understanding of traditional Spanish cuisine that he thought they would. That's what led him to open up his first London restaurant, Bermondsey tapas bar José, in 2011, followed by two more restaurants in the next four years including José Pizarro in Broadgate Circus – to demonstrate classic Spanish flavours with a bit of creativity. This desire to bring the traditional Spanish food he fell in love with growing up, to the UK is what has led to all six of his London restaurants and bars being certified by ICEX.

A more recent addition to the growing number of certified restaurants in the UK is the Barrafina group, which now includes seven restaurants (five branches of Barrafina and two of Parillan), led by chef director **Ángel Zapata Martin**. Whilst his aim as a chef is to elevate traditional tapas – something which has won Barrafina a Michelin star every year since 2015 – Ángel's food is still grounded in the classic flavours and cooking traditions of Spain. One of the things that makes the Barrafina Group stand out is the way in which high quality Spanish ingredients are championed across the menu from the use of beautiful Ibérico pork to the choice of rice used in the restaurants' various arroz (rice) dishes. Ángel has proved that even when traditional dishes are taken to the next level and given added elegance, they can still remain authentic, and that's what's led to the group being certified.

As Spanish food continues its meteoric rise in popularity worldwide, only more people are going to start seeking out restaurants where they can enjoy it for themselves. The Restaurants from Spain certification, therefore, is an incredibly useful tool for those on the hunt for high-quality food that is also authentically Spanish. Not only does it provide guidance to those who already love the food, but it helps to continue spreading the word about one of Europe's best loved cuisines.



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