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FOOD & BEVERAGE

Spanish seal of approval



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Where does one find authentically good Spanish cuisine? Look for places with a "Restaurants from Spain" certification, says Antonio Garcia, Economic and Trade Counsellor from the Spanish Embassy in Singapore.

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Home to some of Europe's most diverse produce and vast array of epicurean delicacies, Spain is a melting pot of gastronomy delights. Anyone who has travelled there would know just how important the role of food plays in the country's culture. And lucky for us, there's just so many options for good Spanish cuisine here in Singapore.

The real question is, if you're not in the know, how does one define high-quality, authentic Spanish cuisine? To guide us along, the Spain Trade and Investment Agency (ICEX) has set up a Restaurants of Spain Certification to recognise

restaurants outside of Spain who can best present themselves as global ambassadors of Spanish cuisine.

A joint committee that analyses and validates the restaurants – based on objectivity, traceability and transparency -- is made up of official institutions and sectoral associations strongly linked to gastronomy. They include the Royal Academy of Gastronomy, Ministry of Agriculture, FACYRE, Regulatory Council for Sherry Wines, ANFACO, INTERPORC, the Spanish Wine Federation, REPSOL Guide and the Ministry of Tourism of Castilla La Mancha.

To meet the certificate's criteria, staff must be able to explain the restaurant concept and its main dishes, and the chef 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.

Set up in 2020, the certification program is practised in various parts of Europe, like Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland Belgium and United Kingdom, as well as China and Japan. Singapore was the first country in Asia to dish out certificates in 2021. In the past year, 15 Spanish restaurants have been awarded, which include mid-to fine dining establishments like Asador, Binomio, Esquina, the FOC group, Gaig, Kulto, Next Door Spanish Café, Olivia Restaurant & Lounge, Pura Brasa, Tapas,24, Tapas Club group, and UNA at The Alkaff Mansion.

With its meteoric rise in popularity, Spanish cuisine is taking off in a big way all over the world with more and more restaurant openings. For the not-so-discerning, the Restaurants from Spain Certification is an incredibly useful tool for customers looking for authenticity and quality. For industry folk, having a certificate by ICEX also means receiving on-going support from the Spanish government, from training programmes to meeting suppliers.

See also: [Japan Foods unit suspended from applying for new work passes and renewing existing work passes](#)



To shed light on the criteria and eligibility of the Restaurants of Spain certification, as well as share plans for Spain's National Day celebrations this month, Antonio Garcia, Economic and Trade Counsellor from the Spanish Embassy in Singapore, speaks with *Options* here.

What exactly is Spanish cuisine?

See also: [Where to eat around the F1 circuit before you head out for race-related festivities](#)

Spain is synonymous with passion in the international imagination. This passion can be seen in its hospitable lifestyle, the openness of its people, the warmth of its welcome or the value it places on friendship. From its best-known cultural manifestations - its music, its architecture and its gastronomy - everything about Spain is alluring. This allure in gastronomy includes passion for quality, passion for work and the commitment it represents, passion for caring for our suffering planet, and passion for living unique experiences with remarkable products.

Spanish food is incredibly varied, the first recipes were written in the fourteenth century and the cuisine was in turns enriched by the Moors, Arabs, Sephardic Jews, French and Italians, as well as the voyages of discovery to the New World, which resulted in a huge range of new ingredients. These things, combined with the differences across the country in terms of geography, culture and climate, have led to a diverse cuisine that is hard to generalise about too much.



How do you explain the rising interest in Spanish food and wines?

New chefs and restaurants in the last 20 years have become extremely popular all over the world as a proof of our long history, culture and traditions together with the best ingredients as an important producer of vegetables, fruits, meat and fish.

Do you have a favourite Spanish dish?

The Cocido Madrileño -- a Madrid style stew.

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Why is there a need to promote the Restaurants from Spain Certification program?

The Certification is an instrument for the support and recognition of restaurant initiatives that are focused on cuisine, guaranteeing the level of quality of these establishments. The idea is to establish quality standards and criteria for the consumer who is looking for elevated Spanish cuisine, as well as models that can be followed by restaurateurs who may wish to offer our cuisine in other parts of the world. The Spanish government wants to provide an assurance to foreign consumers about the quality and authenticity of Spanish gastronomy.

What does the certification program consist of?

The evaluation of a concept such as "authentic quality Spanish cuisine" is not an easy task, nor is it exempt from debate. For this reason, we have used technical criteria inspired by auditing methods and quality Certifications applying the principles of objectivity, verification, practicality and transparency. It is an annual review of the background of chefs, recipes, ingredients and marketing to verify they are genuine and representative of actual Spanish gastronomy.

What will this certification mean for the restaurants?

A guarantee to their customers about its quality and Spanish authenticity. As an awardee, there are many benefits to the certification. It helps to promote greater knowledge of the restaurant and boost occupation rates; provide access to producers so they can extend their offer of Spanish products; extend greater skills

attainment for the service crew from culinary workshops to sommelier classes; and offer the restaurant greater visibility through various media channels and publications.

It's Spain's National Day on Oct 12. How are you celebrating it?

The Embassy of Spain and Spain Tourism Board have partnered with Gardens by the Bay in a month-long celebration, which captures the spirit and passion of Spain through a garden display of Andalusian blooms such as sunflowers, olive trees, and popular Spanish garden blooms like pelargonium and petunias. There will also be a representation of Sevilla and Cordoba historical monuments, and flamenco dance to capture the Spanish flavour of the festivities.

Singapore's Certified "Restaurants from Spain"

Asador

Binomio

Esquina

FOC Restaurant

FOC Sentosa

Gaig

Kulto

Next Door Spanish Café

Olivia Restaurant & Lounge

Pura Brasa

Tapas,24

Tapas Club Jewel

Tapas Club Orchard Central

Tapas Club VivoCity

UNA at The Alkaff Mansion

PHOTOS: *Embassy of Spain in Singapore*

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SPANISH CUISINE FOOD GASTRONOMY

FOOD & BEVERAGE

Japan Foods unit suspended from applying for new work passes and renewing existing work passes

Goola Warden

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Japan Foods' unit has been suspended from applying for new work passes, and renewing current work passes

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Japan Foods Holding announced on Oct 4 that the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) is investigating a subsidiary of the group, Japan Foods Enterprises (JFE) under the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act 1990 of Singapore. The company says the investigation relates to certain past hiring and payroll practices in JFE which has since been ceased.

As the Investigation is still ongoing, until further notice from the MOM, JFE has been suspended from applying for new work passes and renewing existing work passes. The Group is taking active steps to mitigate the impact of the suspension, such as the streamlining of operational work-flow at its outlets and the employment of more part-timers and contract staff.

"JFE is also in the process of right-balancing its talent pool. With these measures, management does not currently foresee that any of the Group's existing operating outlets will be impacted by closure in the short term. The Group is committed to cooperating fully with MOM in the Investigation. The Board will monitor the progress of the Investigations and will update shareholders as and when there is any material developments," the statement says.

Japan Foods is listed on Catalist and operates a chain of more than 50 restaurants under various franchise as well as self-developed brands. The Group's franchise restaurant brands include "Ajisen Ramen", "Kazokutei", "Menya Musashi" and "Osaka Ohsho" brands.

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