

FOCUS ON...

FOOD Spanish food is renowned for being unpretentious and simple. The subtlety of flavours and combinations make it unique and appetising, with Spanish cooking firmly rooted in the country's culture and tradition in the community.

SPANISH FOOD OVERTAKES ITALIAN?

Journalist Harry Wallop recently wrote in the Telegraph that there was significant evidence to suggest that Spanish food was now the vogue in the UK, with its produce selling exponentially, and its culture of sharing being fully embraced by the British people.

He cites that Tesco are selling two tons of Spanish chorizo every week compared to just 0.4 tons of Parma ham, and Spanish tortilla has become Tesco's best selling line on its deli counter with a 16% growth this year.¹ M&S are selling as much chorizo as salami and Asda sells 15,000 packs of Manchego cheese a week.

THE RISE OF LA TASCA

To support the evidence that British people are not just indulging in Spanish produce but also embracing Spain's eating culture, the growth of Tapas chain restaurant **La Tasca** is a good example, with 58 restaurants in the UK.

Owned by **UK Bay Restaurant Group** (who bought La Tasca in 2007) but demerged from the larger group they are



now a standalone company called La Tasca Holdings. They specialise in tapas and offer a taste of Spain for reasonable prices.

CEO Simon Wilkinson says:

*"La Tasca is a fantastic casual dining brand with the potential to tick all the boxes with current food trends. We have exciting plans for the brand both within the UK and internationally over the next few years."*²

Although La Tasca is popular due to its high street visibility and 50% online discounts vouchers, its success is a champion for Spanish food and culture, especially considering the plethora of affordable Italian chains like Pizza Express who it is competing with. However, our own Spanish members found it a popularisation of Spanish foods and were not too impressed by the quality.



Aside from La Tasca, there has been an emergence in popularity over the last couple of years for Spanish restaurants serving a fine dining experience. For example *Moro* in London serves award winning Moorish cuisine focusing on the meeting of European and Islamic cultures on the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa. Moro's success highlights the diverse culture of Spain and also the recognition of different Spanish cuisines in the UK.

London tapas restaurant **Brindisa** (regarded as authentic and high quality) provides unbeatable Spanish food. As well as the restaurants, Brindisa has a shop in London's Borough Market, and has tapped into the growing demand for Spanish produce by setting up an online shop and recipe blog.

Brindisa is not the only online wholesaler of quality Spanish produce, for example **Delicioso.co.uk** source authentic Spanish ingredients, food and drink to the UK for affordable prices – offering 'everything you'll need to make your cooking taste authentically Spanish!'³

RICK STEIN IN SPAIN

The popularity of celebrity TV chefs in the Rick Stein, celebrity chef and endorser of *Delicioso*, recently had a series on the BBC showcasing the delights of Spanish food. Over four episodes he travels the length and breadth of the country experiencing Spanish culture and demonstrating recipes for people at home to emulate with recipes on the BBC website. Stein quotes:

*"I've wanted to make a series in Spain for a long time. I love Spanish food, I've been going there since I was a young boy - but until quite recently I don't think people really took the food seriously. French and Italian cooking was felt to have more finesse. Thanks to a handful of really dedicated Spanish chefs and a growing enthusiasm for its rugged flavours, that has all begun to change. No one cooks fish with more respect or grills meat better."*⁴

Supporting what Wallop said in the Telegraph, Stein believes that the emerging trend of Spanish food in the UK is for good reason and down to the wide range of cuisines available (as restaurants like *Moro* finely point out). In Galicia and the Basque country he explores seafood, apples and cider. In Rioja, Navarra and Catalonia he takes on the Ebro river, Mediterranean seafood and snails. In Sueca, Valencia and La Mancha there is an abundance of Saffron, Manchego cheese and purple garlic. And in Extremadura, Guadalupe, Seville and Granada he takes on the Antiguas Abacerías and delights in Ibérico ham.

Stein's prime time programmes were an example of both a concerted effort to get Spanish food in British homes and also reflected the desire for all things Spanish. For instance *Spanishfoodworld.co.uk* is a website dedicated to UK lovers of Spanish food offering recipes, deals, magazines and guides.

A TASTE OF SPAIN

Curated by the Spanish tourist office and sponsored by major Spanish brands and the London Evening Standard 'A Taste of Spain' offers a glimpse of Spain – of which food is at the forefront as the best way to advertise and show off Spain's qualities. With shows in Liverpool, Leeds, London and Edinburgh the delights of Spain can surely only impress more people and hopefully become a staple in the home like Italian cuisine has become.

There is now a positive approach to the promotion of Spain and its food being translated into greater awareness and stronger import/export relations between the UK and Spain with particular regard to small business. **FoodsfromSpain.co.uk** promotes food products to the UK marketplace as well as developing the market for more established ones. They work with Spanish producers and exporters as well as British importers and distributors helping each side buy, promote and sell their products. Currently foods from Spain are

focusing on a campaign promoting several types of Spanish berries specifically for the British market; they taste good in winter and are the freshest you can buy during the colder months.

Similarly **Spanishfoodfinder.com** is a website listing importers from the UK and all over the world and a list of exporters in Spain who also share news about Spanish products and the Spanish market.

There is every reason to believe that Spanish food has the ability and the current impetus to take over Italian. With huge numbers of people visiting Spain every year, Spanish produce flooding supermarkets and a lasting culture in this country for appreciating foreign cuisines as much as our own, Spanish food will seemingly only grow in popularity in the future.

¹ Harry Wallop, Spanish food starts to overtake Italian, (15th August 2011) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/8565990/Spanish-food-starts-to-overtake-Italian.html>

² Simon Wilkinson, (20th January 2011) (http://www.peachreport.com/Latest/738222/bay_restaurants_to_demerge_la_tasca_chain_wilkinson_takes_over_as_ceo.html)

³ <http://delicioso.co.uk/index.php>

⁴ Rick Stein (<http://www.rickstein.com/Rick-Steins-Spain.html>)