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Take inspiration from the Canary Islands and invest in a selection of tapas - then everyone gets a bit of what they fancy

WORDS SUE LAWRENCE PHOTOGRAPHS PAUL DODDS

A HOLIDAY in Tenerife should be about more than year-round warmth and sunshine; it should also be about terrific food and fine wine. And it's not just Spanish and international dishes on offer here; there is a distinctive local cuisine that is really worth seeking out.

Although broadly Spanish-based, the food in Tenerife also has influences from nearby north Africa and the Americas, since the Canary Islands were a stop-over point for ships travelling between the Old and New Worlds. One of the best ways to discover the local cuisine is to take a gastronomic tour.

On a balmy Friday night, our local guide,

Victor, walked us round the capital, Santa Cruz, in the north of the island. Having sampled local white wine with crisply fried fish and ham p&té, we moved on to a second restaurant to try local rosé and red wines, accompanied by more fish dishes and almogrote - a cheese-and-paprika paste native to the nearby island of La Gomera. By the time we had reached our third restaurant, we were familiar not only with local food and wine, but I also noticed that my erstwhile non-existent Spanish was coming along nicely.

At the splendid Hotel Mencey, in Santa Cruz, I also tried a delicious dish of grilled fresh goat's cheese with mojo verde (green sauce), octopus salad with black potatoes

(potatoes are a speciality of the island) and another traditional dish, cherne, a type of sea bass served with Canarian tomatoes.

We moved on to the south of the island for a stay at die Jardin Tropical, on Costa Adeje. It's the perfect place to relax in the luxurious setting of beautiful Moorish architecture and lush gardens, and to enjoy the exquisite menu. For dinner at the hotel's Las Roques restaurant, I enjoyed baby squid with mojo, local fish grilled with crisply fried garlic, and ice-cream with palm honey from La Gomera.

On a visit to Tenerife, there is nothing finer than trying out the local culinary specialities, and washing them down with some equally good home-produced wine. Salud!

SQUID WITH RED MOJO

This is based on a wonderful dish that I had at the Hotel Jardin Tropical.

For the mojo

3 garlic cloves, peeled and chopped
half a red chilli, deseeded and chopped
1tbsp ground cumin
2 level tbsp paprika
1 tbsp red wine vinegar
5 tbsp (approx) extra-virgin olive oil
25g fresh coriander

For the squid

30g cleaned squid, cut into rings
40g (approx) seasoned flour
sunflower oil, to deep-fry

To make the mojo (sauce), place all the ingredients in a food processor and whizz until smooth. Then add salt to taste.

Toss the squid rings in the flour and then deep-fry in batches (at 190°C/370°F) for a couple of minutes, until crispy. Drain on kitchen paper and then serve with the mojo as a dip.

PARMESAN MAYONNAISE WITH POTATO WEDGES

Based on a dish served at the charmingly innovative Los Roques restaurant, this mayonnaise makes a good accompaniment to potato wedges or crudités.

1 large free-range egg yolk
1 tsp Dijon mustard
100ml (approx) sunflower oil
1 tbsp truffle oil

1 tsp fresh lemon juice
1 heaped tbsp freshly grated parmesan cheese
hot potato wedges, to serve

For the mayo, place the yolk and mustard in a small food processor and whizz briefly.

Next, very slowly trickle in the sunflower oil, adding enough to make a creamy mayonnaise. Then add the truffle oil.

Stop the machine and fold in the lemon juice and the cheese, plus freshly ground black pepper and salt to taste.

Decant the sauce into a bowl and serve with chunky potato wedges for dunking.



GRILLED CHEESE WITH CORIANDER MOJO

This green mojo can also be served with the traditional Tenerife speciality papas arrugadas - small wrinkled island potatoes cooked with handfuls of salt. These are then dipped into the coriander sauce. The mojo is also good served with grilled squid, prawns or chicken.

One of the best dishes I had was at the Mencey Hotel, where simply grilled fresh local goat's cheese was served with a creamier version of the green mojo. The creaminess was achieved by the addition of avocado, which should be incorporated only shortly before serving.

For the nearest in texture and taste to the goat's cheese I had at the Mencey, try halloumi.

40g fresh coriander leaves
2 garlic cloves, peeled and chopped
2 tsp ground cumin
1 tbsp white wine vinegar
6 tbsp (approx) extra-virgin olive oil
1 small avocado (optional)
lemon juice (optional)
250g pack of halloumi, cut into 8 slices

Place the coriander, garlic, cumin, vinegar and oil in a food processor and whizz until combined. Season with salt to taste.

Peel and chop the avocado, then add it to the blender with the lemon juice. Whizz again until the mixture becomes creamy.

Grill the cheese for about two minutes on each side, until it turns golden brown. Serve at once, drizzled with the mojo.