



FLAMENCA

Not jetting off for sunnier climes any time soon? No matter. Head to Flamenca for a bit of warm Spanish hospitality...

*Words by Harriet Noble
Photos by Katie Davies*

Spanish tapas restaurants, at their best, are all about the buzz, right? They feel busy, with people rushing past with huge round trays; a blur of plates flying off and on them. Every time a new wave of nosh arrives, it's all arms-in to reshuffle and fit in the jigsaw of glasses, cutlery and what-not. The sharing nature of the plates, too, fosters a communal and enriched shared experience. I dig this kind of informal and lively vibe; this is a party I always want to be at.

Which is precisely what I am reminded of when I visit Flamenca, the Spanish restaurant in Princesshay, previously known as Coal. The place exudes a warm and welcoming vibe that perfectly encapsulates the essence of tapas dining. Launched as a pop-up in Exeter last summer, the restaurant has now taken up permanent residence in the city. Like its similarly glass-fronted next-door neighbour, Margoux, the restaurant is large, modern and a bit swish; the interiors feature a floating staircase, front-and-centre bar, and a profusion of ivy cascading over the walls.

As for the food, the menu features all the tapas classics you'd expect, from fried squid to bright green peppers, aubergines with honey to ham croquettes.

My friend and I kick off out with shards of crumbling, nutty Manchego with homemade jam. Delicious on this cold day, I could happily devour this cheese until hallucination clouds in.

But on we press with warm sourdough bread, with freshly crushed tomatoes and allioli, followed by crispy potatoes with allioli and spicy sauce, chorizo cooked in cider, meatballs in tomato sauce, and marinated chicken skewers with romesco sauce. Fit to burst but trojaning



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on, we dive into the desserts: my pal has the Basque-style cheesecake, while I have the churros that comes dusted in cinnamon sugar with chocolate sauce. Both delicious. There are no airs, graces, mousses or crumbs – praise be – with these dishes, but then that's not what tapas is about. The food is straight-up tasty, hearty Spanish fare; you can sit back and just savour the fresh flavours. (If there is a hero amongst these dishes it is the sauces. Everything is mopped up or soaked in sun-kissed sauces.)

The team behind Flamenca – childhood friends Pau and Pepe from Burriana in Valencia, along with head chef Ernesto and his partner Ray – have done a great job of creating a really fun, buzzy restaurant.

I have strong I'm-on-holiday vibes here, and my friend and I find ourselves lingering for hours, ordering more red wine and chatting through every bite.

Leaving, I make a mental note to come back on a Friday, when there is live music with a mix of jazz, Flamenco and Spanish music.

Flamenca is the epitome of what a tapas restaurant should be – a convivial and lively dining experience that leaves your tummy and your soul nourished – with a slightly fuzzy head the next day. Definitely worth it. ■



DINING DETAILS

Flamenca Spanish Bar and Restaurant
Exeter, Bedford Street (Princesshay),
Exeter; www.flamenca.co.uk

Food options Classic tapas plates featuring veg, meat and fish. Gluten-free and vegetarian options available

Prices Tapas dishes £3.50-£12.50 (most priced between £5-£7)

Drinks Good choice of Spanish wines, sherries, beers and cocktails. Wine by the glass starts at £7; bottles at £24

Atmosphere Warm, fun and relaxed

Anything else Happy hour is every day from 3pm – 5pm including weekends