

Taberna Alipio Ramos

I'm not so much a picky eater as extremely finicky about when my food arrives. There is a specific window between having ordered and the food actually arriving that is crucial to my enjoyment of a restaurant meal. If I ever find myself thinking that, really, my order should have arrived by now, the meal starts to go downhill from that moment on – regardless of the dish that eventually arrives.

You could place the finest cuisine in the world in front of me but if the wait has been just *slightly* too long, you've lost me. The best restaurants in my book deliver the meal moments before the "where's our food?" thought has had a chance to cross anyone's mind.

In regard to The Taberna Alipio Ramos, it wasn't only their timing that was perfect.

An old friend and I had decided to take a long weekend break in Madrid. We wanted to say our farewells to another old friend who had died the Christmas before and to spend some time with his wife and two grown-up children. Our Galician hostess, Lines, had laid on a delicious buffet lunch for us and this was to be my introduction to Iberico ham – and what a wonderful experience that was. I have never tasted cooked meat quite like it and, together with French (Spanish?) bread, great company and a delicious salad, we were welcomed to Madrid.

We'd made no plans for our last day in the city but Chris had come armed with the addresses of two or three Galician restaurants which had been recommended by a friend in the United States. The only information on the scruffy piece of paper advised that the Taberna Alipio Ramos: "*...did a good seafood special*". We had no idea where Ponzano was except somewhere in the North of the city and a taxi dumped us in an

unremarkable one-way street just off the main drag. None of the restaurants appeared open and had I been on my own, might well have gone round the corner to a Macdonalds instead.

But it was 1pm and that's the time us Brits need to eat. So eat we must.

The Spanish dine late and we quite surprised the young girl behind the bar when we walked in. Entering a restaurant which appears unprepared for guests is a bad sign in my book.

"Yes, we're open...but we weren't expecting customers!"

Certainly in England, the sudden presence of people who want to eat in an otherwise empty restaurant seems to immediately engender resentment by staff at the intrusion and not least from an invisible chef heard taking it out on the pots and pans in the kitchen. Had this been an English establishment in an English town we'd probably have walked straight out, avoiding a sub-standard meal and surly service.

The waitress was business-like and showed us to a small area towards the back of the restaurant. There was only a Spanish menu (I don't remember one in English) but somehow we successfully ordered drinks and the seafood special. Both arrived almost seconds later.

At this point in the review I am supposed to start listing the types of seafood contained in the special, the sauces, side salads and the dressings. But I can't. I'm afraid you are just going to have to go there and experience it for yourselves. All I can remember are the Razor clams. Mmmm...mmm.

There must have been fish, prawns, yet more clams, possibly lobster, crab, (yes, I'm sure there was crab) but my only true recollection is that the dish the Alipio Ramos served up that lunchtime— and at lightning speed — was perfect in every way. Stunning fresh ingredients and simple sauces thrown into a pan

and served up way before my stomach had even the slightest chance to grumble.

And at the end of the delicious meal, while toasting our dear friend, Paul – the reason for us being in Madrid in the first place – we couldn't help but wonder if perhaps he just might have had a hand in guiding us to this place, filling our glasses, and preparing the food.

And I have one niggling thought that keeps running through my head when I think back to that lunch. Perhaps, just perhaps, the Taberna Alipio Ramos is not alone and that we could have eaten almost as well in a hundred Madrid restaurants and enjoyed similar fabulous cooking. So, even if I've reviewed completely the wrong restaurant (the card lists three names) I have absolutely no doubt you will eat well.

But for Chris and I it was the spontaneity and unexpectedness of such a great meal that made lunch at the Taberna Alipio Ramos so perfect. And isn't that what life is all about?

By Hugh Trethowan.

[Taberna Alipio Ramos](#)

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