Panda by Hattori Hanzo: A sweet, Japanese merienda

Ah, the *merienda*. It's one of the best things about the Spanish eating schedule; one in between breakfast and lunch and another between lunch and dinner. While we normally think of a *merienda* as either a croissant or a *tostada con tomate* in the morning and then a pastry or sandwich in the afternoon, **a little place behind Gran Vía meters from Terraza Gymage has a way for your *merienda* to have a more Japanese flavor**. While for lunch and dinner **Hattori Hanzo** often requires a reservation at least 3 days in advance (see full restaurant post **here**), **during the sacred afternoon *merienda* hours from 5 to 8 PM, you can get a taste of the sweet side of Japan at Panda by Hattori Hanzo.**

It is the first Japanese pastry shop and *matcha* bar in the city and allows you to experience a different side of Japanese cuisine (but if you don't have a sweet tooth, never fear. There's also a savory

menu as well).

My friends and I found ourselves in awe with all of the choices of pastries, including **Japanese-style macarons, mochi balls, teas, frappés, and more**. Two main ingredients are highlighted in all of your options: **sakura (cherry blossom)** and **matcha (a type of green tea that is currently all of the rage for its health benefits)**. I fell in love with matcha during one of my last trips back to New York when I found myself in a hipster coffee shop across the street from the Strand Bookstore (enough said) and the appearance of matcha in certain places in Madrid makes me incredibly happy. Within the different categories on the menu, there was a matcha option, a sakura option, and a traditional chocolate option.

Let’s just say my choices followed a pattern: that they contained matcha.

After thoughtful deliberation, we resorted to asking our waitress, the one who knows the menu inside and out. After asking us about our preferences, she suggested that we try **the signature offering at Panda: the matcha swiss roll**. We followed her advice and we did not regret it one bit.

The matcha swiss roll is a matcha sponge cake with a mascarpone filling. There are droplets of red bean and matcha paste, crunchy raspberries, and a beautiful strawberry cut as if it were a rose. This is the star offering at Panda, and is definitely the perfect choice for your first time. It really gives you a sense what the most popular desserts are like in Japan: a perfect fusion of eastern and western flavors. And for someone who normally doesn’t eat things that are sweet, it was absolutely perfect.

For drinks, I chose an iced matcha latte, while one of my friends had one of the numerous Japanese teas on offer (expertly prepared and we were left with a timer so it could properly boil) and another had the sakura latte.

The matcha latte was naturally refreshing, and is creamier than a typical tea. The next time I go back I'll naturally

have it hot, but it’s something that you can have either in the summer or winter.

Are you ready to enjoy the sweet side of Japanese cuisine? Get a bunch of your friends for a fantastic afterwork and merienda at Panda.

Info

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