

Tapas Barinn

It was almost like Barcelona...

The atmosphere was right. Tapas Barinn, Reykjavík's premiere Spanish eatery, has "rustic" down to a tee, beginning with its unobtrusive cellar entrance into a little hideaway of dark wooden beams, brass fixtures, coloured windows and tiled floors.

The weather was wrong. The lively rhythms and passionate lyrics of Spanish music filled the space - but Reykjavík spring was at least 10 degrees too cold to make these sounds appropriate, even if we were seated inside.

Still, Tapas Barinn is a pretty good attempt at a genuine Spanish experience, even with the occasional Nordic accent.

The menu is a nightmare for the indecisive: offerings include chicken in chilli crumbs with blue cheese sauce; Spanish omelette; teriyaki beef; scallops and dates wrapped in bacon (heavenly!); paella catalana; numerous versions of salt fish; lobster, squid and scallops; lamb in a liquorice sauce; escargots; fried monkfish; aubergine, fennel or mushrooms and tomatoes with pesto.

A little overwhelmed, I asked my server for recommendations. A shorter Nordic version of Angelina Jolie, she was very knowledgeable about combinations and flavours.

There is also a selection of larger main dishes - but I hope you stay with the spirit of the place and enjoy the tapas instead. One disappointment is the lack of a Spanish-style egg custard dessert (like crême Catalan) - it seems every restaurant in town wants to offer chocolate cake instead. Bravo for the grilled goat's cheese with honey, though.

Once the difficult choices have been made, the experience can also be intimidating for the selfish. Of course tapas are meant to be shared, but if the thought of slicing your small wedge of bacalao into four equal portions is too much, try some of Tapas Barinn's menu options. You can select themed courses which present you with about five different tapas, any of which would leave you satisfied.

So satisfied, in fact, it took a while to get Angelina's attention to bring dessert menus - I doubt many people would be willing to attempt a sweet course.

Despite visiting during the city's first spring heat wave, the only thing I felt was missing was a bit of Spanish sol. Tapas Barinn's sole liability for that lies from when its owners decided to open their restaurant at 64 degrees north. I'll forgive them that - and I'll be back when the sun beckons again.

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