

MARIBEL'S DINING GUIDE TO THE MARINA ALTA & ALICANTE

DÉNIA

Casual

***El Baret de Miquel

This was the most eagerly anticipated food event of our recent trip, since it is one of the toughest reservations in Spain to book—3 months out in winter and at least 6 months out in summer. We booked online exactly three months ahead for our March 5 lunch and left a credit card deposit of €20/p, returnable if one cancels 24 hrs in advance.

The owner/chef, Miquel Ruiz, abandoned his Michelin-starred restaurant (actually 2 of them) to open this small, unpretentious bar, “*baret*”, located on an unassuming narrow street in Dénia to present without pretensions his highly inventive tapas and small plates dishes, that change according to whatever is freshest at the market that day.

The small space has only 9 tables with mismatched chairs and a whimsical, “vintage” décor that displays the chef’s collection of sifones, some books, plants and miniature chairs. Several disappointed potential diners were turned away while we dined. There are also four bar stools but not set for dining that day. We were the only “tourists” in attendance pre-Fallas.

Miquel greets his diners at the door, his wife Puri Codes patiently explains the 7-10 daily specials, along with the 20 tapas items on the printed menu, and advises diners only to order four dishes (plus dessert), and the friendly son takes the orders. We immediately felt comfortable and “at home” with such lovely hosts.

We began with the complimentary *aperitivo* of homemade potato chips topped with a creamy cockle and lime sauce, then the chef’s famous *patatas bravas*: 15 roasted fingerling potatoes with skins intact, each topped with a stewed cherry tomato, bursting with flavor, and a black olive, sitting on a bed of *ali oli* and crushed corn nuts, then came two large, creamy, heavenly *buñuelos de bacalo* (cod fritters) on a bed of ñora pepper sauce and topped with *ali oli*, then *berenjenas a la brasa*, the tenderest of eggplant topped with honey, and finally a tuna tartar, *tartar de bonito* with leeks, all accompanied by a bottle of Finca Chardonnay. 90% of the wines on the short wine list are local.

Miquel’s reinterpreted *tarta de manzana* is legendary, looking nothing like an apple tart, made of two large slices of puff pastry filled with sliced raw apples, pastry cream and dulce de leche or vanilla ice cream, topped with honey. Despite its fame, we couldn’t manage dessert.

His other signature dishes include the *brazo gitano of ensaladilla rusa*, feeding four, (at least 1,000 calories per bite!), *figatell de sepia* (somewhere between a sausage and hamburger filled with squid), *pastisset de hígado de pato and boniato* (looks like an ice

cream sandwich, made of duck liver and sweet potato, served between two cinnamon cookies), *fesols i naps* (local beans with turnips), *sashimi de caballa* (mackerel) with artichokes in 3 textures, *caramelos de hueva de atún* with caramelized hazelnuts (balls of tuna roe wrapped in colored tin foil, like caramels, and served on a miniature clothes line). Bite into them and they burst with flavor!

No matter what you order, you look around at the other tables and feel that you're missing something even greater!! This is an incredible gastronomic treat!

The wine list is quite modestly priced and features small, local producers only. In the future Miquel hopes to open a non-reservations vermouth bar across the street. You'll find this amazing spot tucked away in the Casc Antic on an unprepossing street not far from the market. The restaurant boasts one Repsol sun. Closed Sunday/Monday and the entire month of August. At Avenida de Burjassot 54.

El Faralló, in the suburb of Les Rotes, founded in 2001 in the middle of a forest (no sea views) is widely considered the temple of the acclaimed Dénia *gamba roja* (red prawn) and a pilgrimage site for lovers of this specimen. The restaurant sells between 15 and 20 kilos of these much treasured, large prawns each day, served either gently boiled or grilled.

The restaurant also serves wonderful rice dishes prepared by the chef's wife Julia Lozano, *puplo seco* (cured octopus), spiny lobster, *tellinas* (local baby clams) and *sepionets* (cuttlefish)-an homage to the sea and its fishermen.

For dessert: pumpkin and chocolate cake.

The chef-owner, Javier, Alguacil, goes to the fish market daily to choose only the very best of the day's bounty.

This is a favorite dining spot of 3-Michelin starred chef David Muñoz of DiverXO (proclaimed "best chef in the world").

Open for lunch only and closed **Mondays**. Repsol guide recommended.

At Carrer del Fénix 10 in Les Rotes

El Pegolí, at Calle Fénix 13 in Les Rotes, since 1943, is a favorite of Quique Dacosta when dining with friends. It's famous for its lobster, red prawns and rice dishes in addition to its beautiful seaside setting. The founder, the late José Piera, known locally as Pepe el Pegolí (from the town of Pego) was the local restaurateur who elevated the fame of this original *baret* (dive bar) above the beach of Les Rotes to "the gamba roja cathedral" on the coast. His daughters and granddaughters now carry on his legacy.

Open from October to June, Tuesday-Sunday, from 12-4 pm.

In July and August, open Tuesday-Sunday from 12-4 and for dinner on Thursday, Friday, Saturday only, from 8:30-10:30

Closed from December 23 until February 1.

Peix i Brases, next to the Dènia port, come here for fusion, “Mediterrasian” tapas and small plates in the downstairs gastrobar and tasting menus in the Peix i Brases restaurant with elegant seasonal rooftop terrace. Chef José Manuel López was the former chef de cuisine for Quique Dacosta. The restaurant has earned two Repsol suns and one Michelin star.

Here two tasting menus are served, priced at €82 and €110, in addition to the a la carte menu.

Open **daily**.

At Plaça Benidorm

Casa Federico, a Dènia classic, open since 1980, sits at Carrer Ausiàs March 22, at the Playa de las Marinas, in the shadow of the castle. This Cervera Devesa family-run restaurant offers a large variety of traditional rice dishes (23 different types, dry, creamy and soupy), fish and crustaceans brought straight from the pier, vegetables from their own garden, a varied selection of tapas and homemade desserts. It comes Repsol guide recommended, offers an expansive terrace for al fresco dining and opens daily except **Tuesday**. Moderate prices.

Pont Sec on the highway, the Camí Vell de Gandía a Denia, one kilometer from town, is the “go to” place on the coast for *cocas*, the catalán version of pizza. The owner Pepe Romany is an institution, the Valencian “coca king”, although he also serves up delectable rice dishes in his farmhouse with vine covered terrace surrounded by orange and almond trees. His signature *coca*, the *tomacat*. Stand out desserts, along with his dessert *cocas*: goat cheese ice cream topped with black fig marmalade. Closed **Mondays**. Repsol Guide recommended.

ELCHE

La Finca

Arguably the finest haute cuisine dining venue in this city, just a half-hour’s drive (27 kilometers) from Alicante, Susi Díaz’s La Finca sports one Michelin star, 2 Repsol suns and a green sun for sustainability. This self-taught chef, owner of La Finca for 25 years and author of Sentidos has received over her career numerous awards, including the Premio Nacional de Hostelería. Susi cultivates own fruit/herbs/vegetable garden/laboratory, of which 80% is edible, plus she keeps her own free range chickens. For 5 seasons Susi served as a member of the jury of “Top Chef”. Her children, Irene and Chema, have now taken on many of the restaurant’s responsibilities.

One can create one’s own tasting menu (including Beluga caviar) or opt for two established menus, priced at €115 or €149, which must be ordered by the entire table. One of her “greatest hits”: a starter of asparagus ice cream. All desserts are priced at €14. The restaurant’s craft cocktails are also legendary.

Lunch in July/August is served from Tuesday-Saturday between 1:30-3:30. From September to June, Wednesday-Sunday from 1:30-3:30. Dinner in July/August is

served Tuesday-Saturday from 8:30-10:30 and from September to June, Saturday and Sunday nights only, fro 8:30-10:30.

La Finca receives a 9.7 rating on The Fork.

Mesón El Granaíno

A recommendation of Susi Díaz for dining informally on traditional fare in the photo-lined, formal dining room or for tapas at the bar (one of the best in the entire province) in the center of town, at Josep María Buck 40. Open since 1964. The owner/chef, Odón Martínez, honed his skills at El Cellar de Can Roca. Closed Sunday/Monday.

ALICANTE/ALACANT

Alicante is blessed with some of the best gastro bars in the entire country!

Casual

****Taberna del Gourmet**

This highly successful, casual spot run by the Perramón-San Román family of noted restaurateurs since 1979, extremely popular with locals, offered us one of our best, most memorable, casual meals of our trip.

One can dine at the bar on a wide variety of tapas, *salazones* (salted, cured fish), Iberian ham/artisan charcuterie or cheese platters, a *bikini* (ham and cheese) sandwich with truffles or opt for a sit-down meal in one of the two informal dining rooms. Vegetables come from their own organic garden, their homemade breads are sublime, they have their own network of fishermen, an excellent wine list, and superb rice dishes can be ordered either *secos* (dry) or *melosos* (creamy).

There is something wonderful for everyone here with many half portions to share, plus the service is warm and friendly. We enjoyed the *arroz a banda* served with a side of ali oli, *alcachofas a la plancha* (grilled artichokes), *solomillo con salsa de setas* (pork loin with mushroom sauce) and *patatas a lo pobre* (heavenly oven baked potatoes) and lemon ice cream with extra virgin arbequina olive oil.

For lunch one can also simply come in for an *ensaladilla rusa*, cod fritters, homemade croquettes, a draft beer or glass of wine or a stew of the day. It boasts one Repsol sun and comes Michelin recommended.

La Terraza del Gourmet is their outdoor terrace on the esplanade.

Open **daily** from 12:30-midnight.

At Calle San Fernando 10 in the heart of town.

****El Portal**

This *très chic*, super cool glamour spot, a “place to see and be seen” is the other most popular of all the fashionable Alicante restaurants, and it even changes its lavish décor twice a year. It’s elegant and sophisticated and offers a fine dining experience, or one can simply enjoy gourmet tapas at the always crowded bar.

Thus, one can dine for 25+ euros at the 20-seat bar or splurge for 200+ in the lavishly decorated dining room.

The wine cellar houses 40 different champagnes (Krug being the “house” label) and 300 wine labels presented on an iPad. It also houses one of Spain’s great cocktail bars (Forbes magazine has called it the best in the country) and offers DJ spun music at night. For a space in the dining room one must reserve far in advance. El Portal has been awarded one Repsol sun and is recommended by Michelin.

Open **daily** and continuously from 1 pm-1 am and until 2 am on Fridays/Saturdays.
At Calle Bilbao 2

****Manero**

This is the more “casual”, but quite elegant delicatessen/gastro bar owned by El Portal, sitting next door. It’s been designed in a rather *Belle Epoque* Parisian style, a real jewel box of a gourmet deli, selling the finest quality products Spain has to offer under their own label, and serving beautiful tapas in a narrow but delightful setting. The friendly, white jacketed waiters tend to the crowds with great skill.

We dined here twice at night because we were attracted by the lively vibe and the superbly executed tapas. We enjoyed their tomato and ventresca salad, the incredible *rabo de toro* (oxtail), *jamón ibérico*, Gorgonzola croquettes, the *canalón* filled with tuna, tomato and spinach pasta and the *Bikini Manero con trufa* sandwich, among many other fine dishes.

There is also a list of seafood specialties (*gamba roja de Dénia*, *navajas*, *berberechos*, *quisquillas*) on the bilingual menu, along with plenty of items to please a vegetarian and a fabulous *torrija* (pain perdu) with ice cream for dessert. Like at sister El Portal, the barman produces fine cocktails.

Go early, **before** 8 pm, because it becomes extremely crowded later one, especially on weekends, and there will be a wait list, or better still, reserve online.

At the end of the bar there is a members only “speakeasy”, Club Manero Dom Perignon.

Bar Manero has recently received a *solete* from the Repsol guide and comes Michelin recommended.

The owners have opened a branch, Bikini Cocktail Bar, in the city’s theater, Teatro Principal and have an equally glamorous branch in Madrid on Calle Claudio Coello in the posh Salamanca district, with a “super Manero” coming soon to Calle Marqués de Cubas.

At Calle Médico Manero Mollà 7

Terre

Here you have another sleek, contemporary, soaring, designer-done space with open kitchen and large glass enclosed wine cellar that draws the crowds with its enviable portion on the Esplanade. It’s another “hip” Alicante institution, similar but less lavish than El Portal, serving as a restaurant, a wine bar and a cocktail lounge. The signature dishes here are their several preparations of blue fin tuna and their smoked rice with Iberian pork loin and vegetables.

It comes Repsol guide recommended.
Open **daily** from 1:00 pm-1:00 am.
At Passeig Esplanada d'Espanya 11

***Abarrote**

The small, casual gourmet deli/gastrobar par excellence of the Murri group that owns Terre above, Abarrote (meaning “groceries” in Mexico) serves up tapas, original sandwiches and also functions as a take-away shop, selling the highest quality canned goods (*conservas*) and their artisan breads. We also dined here twice at night at the counter, as one can order as little or as much as one’s hunger requires. One can dine on the stew of the day, a delicious “Porky” sandwich (*entrepan*), home cured tuna belly, chicken salad, baked rice or a *canelón* with truffles and mushrooms, a most unusual rendition of *patatas bravas*, oven baked rice, cheese or charcuterie platter, salads, wines by the glass, a cocktail or enjoy a tapas tasting menu for two. Every dish is unique and delicious. Again, come early at 8 pm when it opens to snag a space or reserve online. High table seating in the front, low tables in the back.

Open **daily** from 1:00 pm until 1:00 am.
At the Passeig Esplanada d'Espanya 12.

Pro Bar-el Buen Bar

The chef, Dani Frías of La Ereta (see below) is a co-owner of this casual downtown gastrobar. The chef was a candidate for producing the “best croquette in the world” at Madrid Fusion '19.

Come here for canapés (*tostas*), *cocas*, sandwiches, salads and Spanish omelets (*tortillas*), small plates meant to be ‘tried’ (“probar”) and shared. This gastro bar has received a *solete* from the Repsol guide.

Open Monday to Sunday from 8:00 pm- 11:30 pm.
Open at noon on Friday/Saturday/Sunday from 1:30 pm-4:00 pm.
At Calle Bazán 34

*****Nou Manolín**

This is the torchbearer of the Alicante fine dining scene, a classic founded in 1971 by the Castelló family, and one that can be enjoyed again and again, both at its lively, rustic style downstairs bar, simply the best traditional bar in town, and in the elegant upstairs dining room. It was also a favorite of the late Parisian chef Joel Roubouchon, and Nou Manolín inspired him to create his own Atelier. Every dish here shines: the crustaceans arriving fresh from the piers of Santa Pola and Dénia: *gamba roja*, *quisquillas*, *sepionets*, *cigalas*, *dentón*, *berberechos*, their version of Russian salad, *ensaladilla rusa*, (a copious portion meant to be shared), the signature pork sandwich, “Piripi” (copied by Seville’s Bodeguita Romero), and as can be expected, the much applauded rice dishes sing.

The kitchen closes at 3:30 pm for lunch and for dinner at 11:00 pm. For the dining room it’s essential to reserve; for the bar it’s best to arrive early, promptly at 1:00 for

lunch and 8:15 for dinner if one hopes to snag a seat. You won't find a quick turn over at the bar because diners tend to linger and order more and more of the kitchen's wonderfully executed dishes.

For upstairs dining, one should reserve in advance online due to its popularity with locals and savvy visitors alike. Nou Manolín comes Michelin recommended and has received 2 Repsol stars.

Open **daily**. At Calle Villegas 3

***Piripi

Nou Manolín's younger sister restaurant, opened in 1994 and run by Vicente Castelló's son, Juan José, offering essentially the same menu of well crafted dishes both with an upstairs dining room and lively bar (no reservations at the bar).

Here we enjoyed another fine lunch at the bar consisting of a lovely dish of cockles and artichokes in sauce, *gambas al ajillo* (garlic prawns), and since our trip coincided with artichoke season, two vegetable dishes, fried artichokes and an artichoke and Parmesan salad.

Although it's not indicated on the menu, one can order almost any item in half portion size so that couples can share more dishes. And when gazing at the plates of other diners, you'll be inclined to order more and more (fear of missing out!)—a plate of Joselito Iberian ham with fried potatoes and Padrón peppers, a tartar of red tuna, a rice dish, a Swarosky sandwich, a Raf tomato and avocado salad... To accompany your meal, you can choose from a wine list of over 200 labels.

We arrived promptly at 1:00 pm on a Friday with locals waiting at the door, and within 15 minutes the bar stools were all occupied. Like at Nou Manolín, the service is extremely attentive and welcoming. It boasts one Repsol star and comes Michelin recommended.

Open **daily**.

At Avenida Oscar Esplá 30

Koiné

Juanlu Parra, after 8 years working under the tutelage of Dani García, decided to fly solo opening in 2022 his Koiné Bistró at Calle Bazán, 45 at the doorstep of the Mercat Central.

Standout dishes, most meant to be shared, include his *ajoblanco* soup of coconut and almond, green gazpacho with baby vegetables and Santa Polo prawns, *ensaladilla* (Russian salad) with bluefin tuna and fried egg, steak tartar, creamy rice with duck, wild sea bass (*corvina*) and for dessert, his Payoyo cheesecake topped with strawberries.

He accompanies his creations with artisan bread from Horno Rafelet served with Castillo de Canena olive oil and sheep's butter. For dessert the chef serves an outstanding payoyo cheesecake.

Plus he offers a wine cellar of 60 references, all from small producers.

Repsol and Michelin guide recommended and bookable on The Fork.

Open Monday through Saturday for lunch from 1:30-4:00 pm and for dinner from 8:00 to midnight.

Steki

This new spot, serves Mediterranean cuisine with Greek and Mexican touches. The owners are Mexican chef Fernando Azael & his Greek partner, Olivia Papachristou, who met while working at La Ereta. Although it doesn't serve a tasting menu, there is a minimum order of 5 plates (meant to be shared by two) among the 10 dishes on the menu, plus 3 desserts. And the restaurant seats only 16.

"Steki" means "meaning point" in Greek.

At Argensola 8. It comes Michelin and Repsol guide recommended.

Open for dinner only and closed **Friday/Saturday** nights.

***Open**

With an open kitchen (including a table for 6), a Japanese style bar and offering highly inventive dishes, this casual newcomer was opened 7 years ago by chefs Javier Prados and Alberto Calleiros, serving market-driven cuisine and sitting just a few meters from the Mercado Central.

Michelin and Repsol guide recommended and moderately priced with an original wine list. Stand out dishes: the *catalana* of blue fin tuna, the *pepito de pluma ibérica*, and the *rabo de toro* (oxtail) with Granny Smith apple and foie.

At Manuel Antón 12.

Closed **Sunday/Monday**

Michelin starred

Baeza & Rufete

One of the new jewels in the hot Alicante restaurant scene, this small gastronomic space is located in the suburb of San Juan next to the beach, ten minutes from the city center.

Chef Joaquín Baeza Rufete, who trained with 12 Michelin-starred Martín Berasategui, was awarded Valencia's Best Chef of the Year award in 2014. And here he has received one Michelin star and one Repsol sun. The chef is noted for his use of the very finest olive oils and aromatic herbs and locally sourced ingredients, constantly changing with the seasons. Here he serves two tasting menus, priced at €89 and €159 along with his a la carte menu.

Open Monday through Saturday for **lunch only**; closed **Sunday**.

At Avenida Ansaldo 31

Gastronomic, chef-driven

Monastrell

This is the gastronomic space of chef María José San Román, owner of La Taberna del Gourmet and Asador La Vaquería. It's located in the port, next to the Royal Regatta Club. Vegetables come from the family's garden and all products are locally sourced,

kilometer zero, including the superb fish straight from the pier. Here chef San Román serves tasting menus only, priced at, and euros.

Although the chef lost her Michelin star in 2021, she maintains her one prestigious Repsol sun.

In 2021 she decided to create an informal space downstairs, La Cubierta, where diners can enjoy an a la carte menu featuring four of her acclaimed rice dishes, or create their own 3-course menu for €65. Her gastronomic experience continues upstairs where she serves her eponymous tasting menu, *Menú María José Román*, priced at €119, the *Menú Monastrell* for €89, the *Menú Alicante* for €69 and a vegetarian menu for €105 .

Closed **Sunday** dinner and all day **Monday**. Open Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday for dinner only and Friday/Saturday for lunch and dinner.

At Avenida del Almirante Julio Guillén Tato 1 at the harbour.

La Ereta

At the foot of the Castillo Santa Bárbara in La Ereta Park, 10 minutes from the town center, this sleek chef-owned restaurant affords fabulous views overlooking the sea from its floor to ceiling windows, suspended 150 meters above the city. In this minimalist space chef Daniel Frías offers a tasting menu only, priced at €95 with an additional wine pairing for €45. Rice dishes are the chef's forte. La Ereta has been bestowed with one Repsol sun.

Open for lunch only on Monday/Tuesday/Wednesday and both lunch and dinner Thursday/Friday/Saturday but closed **Sunday**.

At Parque de la Ereta