

Introduction to the Spanish ham

Spanish ham is one of the most popular foods in Spain and is a worldwide famous Spanish Tapas dish, but there are many different Spanish ham varieties, qualities and prices that we should take into account to appreciate this gastronomic delight!

Spain is the largest producer of cured ham and has the highest number of consumers in the world. So passionate are Spaniards about their favorite cured meat, that the country even boasts an entire chain of ham museums.

No surprises then that Spaniards are willing to spend a high price for good quality Spanish ham - or Jamon and you will find several different varieties in Spanish supermarkets and restaurants. The most popular by far is Serrano ham (mountain ham) which is an everyday staple. Less common is the much prized Pata Negra (Iberian ham) which is widely recognized to be the finest of Spanish hams and the best cured ham in the world!

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Serrano Ham or Jamon Serrano

Serrano Ham or Jamon Serrano is taken from the hind legs of white pigs and subjected to drying and salting under strictly controlled conditions. The meat is cured from 7 to 16 months. There are almost 2,000 producers of Serrano ham in Spain and the name Jamon Serrano is now controlled by the European Union, to ensure authentic processing.

Pata negra or Jamon Iberico

The most exquisite of Spanish hams is Pata Negra or Jamon Iberico. This ham is made in south western Spain and comes from the Iberian pig and Pata Negra refers to the animal`s black hooves. The pigs are free to roam the countryside and feed on acorns which help to give the ham its distinct nutty taste and melt in the mouth quality. Jamon Iberico is cured from 14 to 36 months.

Spanish ham does not require cooking. It has a very mild flavor with a relatively low salt content. This ham can be eaten straight, or drizzled with olive oil and eaten with a slice of Spanish cheese or bread, melon, olives, tomatoes and other appetizers. It can also be used for cooking in recipes, although too much cooking may destroy its delicate flavor. Spanish ham is best served at room temperature.

How to store and slice your Spanish ham

Bone-in Jamon should be stored in a cool, dry place and can be hung on a rope or placed in a special ham holder (Jamonero), which will keep the joint secure, while you carve it. When you are ready to begin carving it, remove the rind on the part you are planning to use. A Spanish ham knife is perfect for the job, or failing that a strong cook`s knife will do. The ham should be carved into wafer-thin slices and eaten immediately. You will also need to cover the exposed area on the remaining joint.

Whether you choose to try Serrano or Pata Negra, the strict quality control will ensure your ham is of superior quality and will deliver a superb flavor

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