

Amada: Spanish Tapas with a View of the Atlantic

While some of you may be headed to the Delaware beaches for Memorial Day weekend, others may have their sights set on the Jersey shore. If you will be in the neighborhood of the world famous Atlantic City Boardwalk, make Amada — one of the signature restaurants in Revel resort and casino — a dining destination.

You may recognize Amada as the top-rated Spanish restaurant in Old City, Philadelphia, and the first of Iron Chef Jose Garces' restaurants that now total over one dozen around the country. Philly's Amada has been wowing diners for almost ten years with its tasty small plates. Now, gourmards and gamblers alike can enjoy Andalusian style tapas in a majestic oceanfront setting at the northernmost end of Atlantic City's boardwalk.

While many Atlantic City casino and resort restaurants do not take advantage of the spectacular views, Amada's floor to ceiling windows make the striking views of the Atlantic a focal point. Entering the restaurant from the casino level, the lantern lighting and expansive open kitchen create a warm ambiance. When I visited Amada for dinner last month with my husband and our friend, the curved banquette along the window where we were seated provided a cozy and relatively quiet atmosphere with a view of the action along the open kitchen counter.

Amada's menu is as extensive as the view of the boardwalk and beach...I mean shore...below. The offerings range from charcuterie including Serrano ham and white chorizo to Manchego, the most well known of Spanish cheeses, and La Peral, a blue cow and sheep's milk cheese aged just enough for the blue to develop. Iron Chef Garces' menu also contains traditional tapas such as ham croquettes and its version of revuelto (scrambled eggs) with shrimp and wild mushrooms. Diners can also enjoy a variety of fish and shellfish including Spanish sea bass and jumbo prawns as well as meats from roasted pork to seared foie gras.

Our exceptional server, Mile, recommended three dishes per person. My group of three decided to start with four...

- The "Dátiles Con Almendras" served as our amuse bouche. These bacon wrapped dates were plated with roasted pearl onions and crumbles of La Peral cheese. The saltiness of the bacon paired perfectly with the sweetness of the dates and cheese.

- The "Alcachofas y Setas" was an excellent choice for a flatbread. The crispy crust was topped with artichoke confit, wild mushrooms, black truffles and Manchego. The earthiness of the wild mushrooms and truffles was the star of this dish.

- The "Habas a la Catalana" was a refreshing element in the first course. This warm fava and lima bean salad was topped with shavings of Idiazabal, a hard and nutty sheep's milk cheese from the Basque region.

- The gnocchi special was the highlight of our first round and came highly recommended by Mile. It seemed curious that a Spanish tapas restaurant would feature gnocchi, but I hope Garces does it again, perhaps on your visit. Maitake mushrooms and sugar snap peas accompanied Amada's light potato gnocchi, and the dish was finished off with a Manchego espuma and mushroom purée. The perfect bite was a soft dumpling with a slice of slightly crisp hen of the woods, a piece of the sweet pea and a smear of the espuma.

After a pause, we decided on three more tastes...

- The "Amada's Empanada" of spinach, Manchego and artichoke escabeche was a tasty combination of crispy pastry and comforting melted cheese.

- The "Pulpo a la Gallega" was our favorite from the second round. The Spanish octopus was cut into cross sections of about one quarter inch thick so that it created a trompe l'oeil with the confit potato pieces. I enjoyed the surprise of not knowing whether I was biting into a melt in your mouth potato or a cooked to perfection piece of octopus.

- The "Ibérico," a 10 ounce piece of Iberian pork from the celebrated black pig, was tasty but rather chewy. The cut is known as the "Secreto," which is a shoulder muscle similar to the texture of a beef skirt steak.

From the beginning of the meal, we enjoyed our Priorat wine named Les Terrasses. I chose the wine with Mile's confirmation, as it is a blend of some of my favorite grapes — Grenache, Carignan, and Syrah. This full-bodied but smooth choice proved to be an excellent pairing with the myriad tastes in our tapas. The drink list had many other options including a variety of Riojas, Tempranillos and Priorats, as well as specialty cocktails and Sangria.

Although we were pleasantly full from our seven plates, we decided to end with something sweet. The doughnuts, covered with cinnamon sugar, were served with a fig compote and velvety honey ice cream. These hot treats were light and airy unlike many dessert doughnuts that weigh one down at the end of a meal.

I highly recommend Amada for a leisurely dining experience filled with creative and flavorful dishes. 🍷



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