

Gorgeous Gazpacho

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Spanish Tit-Bits



Gazpacho is more than just a simple, albeit extremely tasty soup. For many people it is the embodiment of the Spanish summer itself. As the temperatures rise across the country, the humble gazpacho starts to appear on the daily menus of ventas all over Spain, as it acts as a hydrating, cooling and nourishing antidote to the Mediterranean sun.

The ripe combination of fresh tomatoes, crunchy cucumbers, peppers, a hint of garlic, and the richness of olive oil that are the basic ingredients of gazpacho, not only offer some respite from the heat, but is also incredibly healthy for you. If you are looking for your “five-a-day”, gazpacho pretty much has you covered!

When you have lived in Spain for a while, you soon realise that almost everything has a fascinating background story, and gazpacho is no different. As with many aspects of Spanish life, it starts with the Romans. Legend has it that Roman soldiers used to carry stale bread, garlic, salt, olive oil and vinegar with them as they travelled from one part of the Empire to another. When they were hungry, they would make a soup out of the ingredients with a mortar and pestle.

The Moors, who were the next significant rulers of what they called al-andalus, made a similar soup using almonds called Ajo Blanco. As these easy-to-make soups became more popular, fresh vegetables were added to make it more nutritious and filling.

The real gastronomic game changer, however, came in 1521, when Spain most famous conquistador, Cortes,

introduced the Peruvian tomato to Spain. Peppers also arrived from the New World, and the gazpacho that we know today was born.

Incredibly, the first recipe does not appear until Juan de la Mata published his *Arte de Reposteria* in 1747. Perhaps until then gazpacho had been regarded as a simple agricultural dish that people would not dream of making in their own homes. Tomatoes did not appear in recipes until the 19th century, when the dish was made popular elsewhere in Europe by Eugenia de Montijo. The last Empress of the French and wife of Napoleon III, Eugenia grew up in Granada and so knew all about the hot Andalusian summers.

The best known version of gazpacho is gazpacho al andalus, or Andalusian-style gazpacho. . Traditionally made with bread in the soup base, it comprises of tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, garlic and sherry vinegar.

But there are variations on this theme. Salmorejo, which originated in Cordoba, is a thicker, creamier variant of Gazpacho. It includes red tomatoes, bread, garlic, and olive oil, but omits cucumbers and peppers,. Salmorejo is typically served with toppings such as chopped hard-boiled eggs and serrano ham, adding another layer of flavour and texture to the dish.

Also known as 'white gazpacho,' Ajo Blanco hails from Malaga and Granada. This unique version predates the tomato-based gazpachos, tracing its history back to the Moors. A blend of almonds, garlic, olive oil, stale bread, and sometimes grapes or melon, Ajo Blanco is creamy and slightly garlicky with a nutty undertone.

There has even been a modern twist on the gazpacho. Spain currently has a superb reputation as a culinary centre, so it was only a matter of time!

Gazpacho de Sandía, incorporates watermelon into the recipe, with the sweetness of the watermelon pairing beautifully with the acidity of the tomatoes, resulting in a wonderfully balanced and refreshing soup.

So with summer now upon us, enjoy this traditional dish, and don't work about putting on a few kilos. As the Andalusian saying puts it, "No one gets fat eating gazpacho."