

ATLANTA: AN INTERNATIONAL FOODIE CITY

Tapas, octopus and paella reign in the city's Iberian/Latin influenced restaurants

By Mary Welch

The diversity of Atlanta's restaurants boggles the mind. Everything from world-class Ethiopian to Peruvian to Thai to tapas to crepes to our own famed fried chicken can be found in the ATL (not to mention Varsity hot dogs!). Some of the country's best chefs have opened restaurants here and influenced generations of chefs — both professional and the at-home variety. Everyone from Anne Quatrano, Hugh Acheson, Ford Fry, Linton Hopkins, Kevin Rathbun, Fuyuhiko Ito, Billy Allin, Asha Gomez, Hector Santiago, and Pano Karatassos has put their culinary stamp on the city. And the tradition continues with Pinky Cole, whose Slutty Vegan restaurants are expanding throughout the state (and we hope eventually across the country).

Yes, Atlanta has a little bit of everything and at every price range. You can dress up, dress down — or even do take-out and eat in your jammies. Atlanta's restaurant scene is hot — and cool — and delicious.

Lately, there has been a trend in the city of Spanish/Iberian/Latin flavors where paella reigns and a sangria helps take fun to the next level. Among our favorite locally-owned Spanish/Latin-inspired restaurants are:

The **Iberian Pig** opened in Decatur over 10 years ago and while it might not be the first Iberian-influenced restaurant in Atlanta, it put the cuisine on the map. Now with a second location in Buckhead, the Iberian Pig delights diners with solomillo, ham and cheese croquettes, and cast-iron seared octopus. The Iberian Pig is part of the Castellucci Hospitality Group that also offers eclectic Latin American fare at **Bar Mercado**, which draws inspiration from the bold flavors of Latin America. Located at the Krog Street Market (one of the city's top food halls), Bar Mercado offers stunning dishes of empanadas, chilaquiles, chalet, and paella. They also offer family meals including make-your-own taco dinners and Pollo Asado, whole Peruvian-spiced chicken with Salvadoran slaw, lime-garlic aioli, and served with a salade, sofrito rice, and black beans.

Boasting a deck with one of the best views of the Atlanta skyline, **Estrella Rooftop** is a Latin-inspired local favorite that features fresh-squeezed margaritas, tacos, esquires (toasted corn), fantastic Ají Amarillo wings, and pork belly chicharron. The offerings are so mouth-watering delicious that you'll be tempted to order everything on the menu. We, frankly, wouldn't blame you. Downstairs is Brasserie at Bazatti, which has more of a French-American style ambiance and menu. Located on the EastSide BeltLine, Estrella often has live music or a hip DJ to take the party up another notch.

Botica, located in Midtown with a second one coming to Phipps Plaza in Buckhead, has taken the city by storm with its Wednesday paella, flamenco music, and Owner and Chef Mimmo Alboumeh's warm hospitality and obvious pride in his food. We love the appetizers including the mussels in champagne cream, the Spanish octopus and the Wagu Carpaccio, which is melt-in-your-mouth delicious. For those who want more, try the tacos (falafel, crispy fish and chilled shrimp are our favorites), while the enchiladas, fajita skillet, and quesadilla will warm hearts and fill stomachs. Make sure to top it off with croissant bread pudding.



The beef barbacoa taco is one of the many fan favorites over at Bar.bacoa, which is located in the popular and historic Virginia Highland neighborhood.

Bar.bacoa in Virginia-Highlands offers an eclectic-chic Spanish vibe that is perfect when meandering through one of the city's best loved neighborhoods. Dine inside with the local artwork and mood lighting or go outside on the covered patio (it's overlooking a parking lot but it's more fun than it sounds!). We love the tapas, including skillet baked queso, Spanish potatoes, blackened shrimp tostada, lamb tacos and (our favorite) albondigas (beef meatballs).

Buena Vida Tapas & Sol opened in the summer of 2021 to rave reviews and hungry diners wanting to enjoy the ceviche, Canary Island Wrinkly potatoes, Gambas Al Ajillo, and Pulpo á la parilla. Located near the BeltLine in the Old Fourth Ward, Buena Vida Tapas serves classic Spanish recipes, as well as unique dishes from the south of Spain and its islands with some some Colombian and Latin American specialties to make the dining experience truly memorable and international. When the the band is playing and the paella is being cooked outdoors, you'll think you're in Ibiza!

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It's just too hard to decide among the many delicious offerings at Buena Vida Tapas & Sol, a favorite restaurant off the BeltLine in the Old Fourth Ward. Photo courtesy of Milk + Butter.



Chef Mimmo Alboumeh is always happy to welcome guests to Botica, which will soon open a second location at Phipps Plaza.

Eclipse di Luna is a long-time local favorite for its traditional Spanish cuisine and live entertainment. Opened in 1997 by Chef Paul Luna and his partner James Ehrlick, this tapas-focused restaurant has two locations in Buckhead and Dunwoody. Make sure to order the costillas espanolas (Spanish-style ribs and aged balsamic vinaigrette); pescado rostizao (roasted whole fish); and pan Catalan (toasted ciabatta bread topped with tomato, garlic, and thyme puree).

El Viñedo Local offers South American coffee, wine and tapas and its location, near the Fabulous Fox Theatre, makes it perfect for a pre- or after-show dinner or snack. Uruguayan native Chef Bruno Vergara created a menu loaded with mouth-watering dishes such as arepas, guava pastries, and choripan.

The Gypsy Kitchen brings Spanish food (from Andalusia, to the Basque and Galician regions and Catalonia) — alongside influences from Gibraltar and India — to Buckhead with favorites such as adana lamb köfta, roasted brassicas, and roasted mushrooms and whipped goat cheese toast.

Azotea Cantina just opened in Atlantic Station, and although it's technically not Spanish nor Latin American, we wanted to include it because — well, the food is delicious. Azotea Cantina is a Mexico City-inspired cuisine, which is new to Atlanta. Enjoy redfish “on the half shell”, lots of tacos, and grilled Spanish octopus with avocado and salsa matcha. www.discoveratlanta.com

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