

How to Eat Like a Local in Menorca Spain

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You're either a mayo fan or you're not. But for those of us who are, it's a versatile, subtle, but flavorful condiment that adds to many dishes. But have you ever thought about where mayonnaise came from? How it's made (from scratch)? Or some of the unique ways it can be used? Writer Ann Yungmeyer went to beautiful Menorca, Spain, and found out, one delicious way after another, how we can enjoy mayo the way the locals do. Be sure to watch a video montage of Ann's culinary experiences in Menorca at the end of this article.



EAT LIKE A LOCAL IN

Menorca, Spain

Save this article to Pinterest so you'll know what to eat in Menorca, Spain. Photos by Ann N. Yungmeyer. Graphic by RealFoodTraveler.com.

How to Eat Like a Local in Menorca Spain? Start with Olive Oil Mayonnaise

Discover Menorca's diverse culinary heritage and foods you'll want to try

Belgians dip French fries in it, Americans spread it on sandwiches, and Spain fancies it as a sauce for broiled fish. This mother of all sauces, mayonnaise, is believed to have originated on the Spanish island of Menorca.

Local legend says that in 1756, following the French invasion of Menorca, the Duke of Richelieu stopped at a tavern to eat and, because of an apparent food shortage, he was served leftover meat with a sauce made of eggs, olive oil, salt, and lemon. The Duke declared it delicious and took the recipe to France, calling it “mahonnaise,” his tribute to victory in the Menorcan port city of Mahon.

Though the French also lay claim to the origin of the well-loved sauce, Menorcans are quick to point out that no historical references mention this specific sauce in any French cookbook or culinary document before the conquest of Menorca. Nevertheless, with the French influence, “mahonnaise” later became “mayonnaise,” elevated to the popular condiment we know today.

Menorca is one of Spain’s Balearic Islands in the western Mediterranean, and like its sister islands Mallorca and Ibiza, it boasts stunning beaches, natural beauty and a mild climate. But even as the quieter island, Menorca stands out because of its vast culinary heritage and recent focus on agritourism, earning it the designation, European Region of Gastronomy 2022.



Menorca has many unspoiled beaches in secluded coves, accessed by walking paths.

While visiting Menorca, I learned about the “birthplace of mayonnaise” at the lovely 18th century farmhouse hotel, Sant Joan de Binissaida, not far from Mahon. We arrived for an olive oil tasting and a look at the farm, which cultivates some 1300 olive trees and is known for sustainability and restoration projects. After strolling in the groves and sampling house-made oils, my group watched a demonstration of making mayonnaise in the classic method of whipping together ingredients until emulsification is achieved. As the chef steadily dripped the premium olive oil into egg yolks, whisking constantly, he shared the history of mayo and its many uses. (At one time it was used for medicinal purposes such as burn treatment.)



The Chef at Sant Joan de Binissaida prepares to make classic mayonnaise and offers other flavored mayonnaises to taste.

With Champagne, crackers and crudités, we then sampled the pure handmade mayonnaise, a savory yellow sauce, and tasted other mayonnaise recipes enhanced with flavors such as capers, prawn, and fig. The experience confirmed my sense that Menorcans are quite passionate about their foods and authentic ways.

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Menorcan cuisine is a blend of Catalan and Mediterranean flavors, drawing from various influences of the islands' early settlers and conquerors including the Romans, Arabs, English, French and Spanish. Island specialties abound, from seafood, pork, and lamb to citrus fruits, sea salt, saffron, honey, gin, wine, craft beer, and pastries.

Other Authentic Food & Drink to Experience

So what's on Menorcan menus? You'll find some island favorites here and how you can discover them:

Mahon-Menorca Cheese – The artisanal cheese that comes in square-shaped wheels are the island's best-known product, exported to 50 countries. You'll find it in markets and restaurant dishes throughout the island. It is made with raw milk from Menorcan cows, using time-honored traditional practices. For a wonderful immersive experience with an artisan cheesemaker, visit the private finca (farm) and production facility Son Piris, near Menorca's first capital city, [Ciutadella](#). In addition to a cheese-making demonstration, a feature of this visit is the hearty breakfast served on the farmhouse porch which includes fried cheese, various sausages, homemade pastries, and jams. Just when you think you've finished the last course, out comes the traditional spongy cake made by one of the owners and served the old-fashioned way for dipping into thick hot chocolate.

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Artisan cheesemaker explains the aging process and turning of Menorca-Mahon cheese at Son Piris.

Caldereta de Langosta – Pull on your bib for this lobster stew cooked in fired earthenware (caldereta.) In the seaside town of Fornells, Es Cranc is one of the best-known restaurants serving up the famous stew, in which large pieces of lobster feature in a tasty soup of pureed tomatoes, peppers, onions, garlic and parsley. The spiny lobsters are plentiful off the coast of Menorca and though it was once thought of as scrap catch – a food for fisherman’s families – it later became a delicacy served at established restaurants and at home for special occasions. Pro tip: The long-antennaed crustaceans are curious creatures – ask your waiter for an up-close look at the tanks holding fresh live catch.



Restaurant Es Cranc in the seaside town of Fornells is famous for its lobster stew.

[Hungry for more? Learn more about the benefits of a caldero pot when cooking.](#)

Sobrasada – Charcuteries and cured pork-based meats are a staple of Menorcan cuisine and throughout the Balearic Islands. There are many varieties, some recipes dating from ancient Roman times, but Sobrasada is the most prevalent, served many ways. The raw cured sausage is mixed with spicy paprika, then cured for a firm texture or made into a soft spread. You'll find it on lunch menus as a main dish ingredient or as a sumptuous appetizer at wine tastings, spread generously over toasted slices of baguette, drizzled with honey, topped with cheese and garnished with micro-greens.



*Sobrasada and other cold cuts pair well at breakfast
chez Son Piris, cheesemaker.*

Torrelbenc Wines – Since the days of Roman and Arab occupation Menorca cultivated grapes for producing wine, though quantities were severely diminished in the 19th century due to phylloxera. Recently, production has revived and there are several high-quality producers making wines from Merlot, Chardonnay, Cabernet-Sauvignon and other grape varieties. The chic vineyard-hotel Torrelbenc near Mahon is one of the newest producers,

and a well-known name with its wines served in island restaurants. Producing its own wine since 2016, the estate cultivates about 10 grape varieties. Take a stroll through the vines and enjoy a top-notch wine-paired meal at their award-winning restaurant.



Luxury hotel and winery Torrelbenc is a relaxing retreat to stay or have a meal with their top-rated estate wines.

Pomada – Menorca’s prized and refreshing island cocktail, sometimes called gin amb llimonada, is made with gin and lemonade. Yes, Menorcans developed a love for Gin, introduced during the British occupation in the 18th century. Traditional Menorcan gin is made in copper stills heated over wood fires, and the oldest working brand is Gin Xoriguer with a distillery in Mahon. You’ll even find pomada on dessert menus, served as a delectable sorbet.



Cova d'en Xoroi, a unique bar carved into a cliff, is the best place to discover Pomada, made with Menorcan gin.

Aubergine – The Mediterranean climate allows for growing a huge variety of fruits and vegetables, a mainstay of Menorcan cuisine. The aubergine (eggplant) is a standout out as a flavorful vegetable and key ingredient in many dishes. Menus often feature baked aubergine, sliced lengthwise and stuffed with a mixture of onions, ground meat, garlic, parsley and grated Mahon-Menorca cheese, topped with breadcrumbs.

[Hungry for more? Learn about the importance of saffron to Spain.](#)

Ensaimada and other pastries – From Arab and Jewish influence, the Ensaimada is to Menorca as the croissant is to France. The typical pastry of the Balearic Islands, it's a rounded bread-like pastry made with lard for a fluffy texture, sometimes with added flavors such as pumpkin jam, chocolate or almond paste made from local almonds. Menorcans' reputation for a sweet tooth became apparent in the late 1800s, when it's said that the island had 40 patissiers (pastry chefs) and three chocolatiers but only one dentist. Though the ratio

has undoubtedly changed, pastry sweets are ever popular, from petit cookies shaped like flowers called pastissets to the elegant coca bamba, sometimes called Ensaimada de Menorca, a domed cake with a spongy texture, typically served with hot chocolate.



The happy baker at Son Piris shares her beautiful coca bamba (Ensaimada de Menorca) with us!

Extra Virgin Olive Oil –Menorca oils, made from mainly four types of olives, are known for their excellent quality and fruity aroma with almond nuances, bitter or spicy flavors. A traditional product of the Balearic Islands, olive oil production and ancient presses found on the island hail back to when Menorca was on the olive oil maritime trade route from the Roman Empire to the Iberian Peninsula. Currently, there are some 20 artisan producers on the island, including Sant Joan de Binissaida mentioned above. The pure, flavorful oils are made to be enjoyed at meals as a tasty dipping oil with fresh baked breads and as a key ingredient to dressings and sauces, including made-in-Menorca mayonnaise.

Travel tips: For practical information, visit the Discover Menorca [website](#). For visits to artisan producers, hire a private guide through Menorcan Tourism or arrange with [Sa Cooperative del Camp](#), a farmers' cooperative of more than 500 producers focused on preserving authentic Menorca and its farm traditions.

-Story and photos by Ann N. Yungmeyer