

easyJet Traveller

Spanish Caviar

Caviar epitomises expensive, high-class dining, but new farming techniques in Spain have made the delicacy more affordable than ever

Featured June 10 Words by Laura Latham



if you think caviar is phenomenally expensive and eaten only by CEOs and oligarchs, think again. Changes to the way sturgeon are reared have brought good caviar within everyone's reach. Over-fishing of wild sturgeon in the Caspian Sea has brought them so close to extinction that suppliers have found alternative ways of providing the market with sturgeon eggs (roe). Caviar farms have sprung up across the globe and the product is gaining popularity.

"Most people know of beluga caviar [from beluga sturgeon], but we decided to farm Mediterranean sturgeon, which are native to Spain and areas of Italy," says Keith Jaggard of Riofrió, a producer of organic caviar in Granada province. "There are very few wild sturgeon left now, so farming is the best way to preserve the species. We're one of the few who farm completely organically with feed using no hormones and the fish in fresh water."

The company diverts a section of the River Frió through its habitation pools, so that its sturgeon receive only natural water, which is then filtered to remove waste before rejoining the river. Because the process is organic, Riofrió sturgeons take around 14 years to mature enough to produce the required quality. "Most producers mature their fish in half that time," explains Keith.

As a result, Riofrió's high-quality caviar has become a favourite with chefs across Europe. You will find it on the menu at Claridges Hotel in London and the famous Catalonia restaurant El Bulli. Keith says the caviar is less salty with a more delicate flavour than other brands, which can contain preservatives.

Unlike wild beluga caviar, which can sell for €10,000/kg, Riofrió retails from around €1,200, with the smallest 10g tins selling at around €12. "It's affordable as a special treat or gift," says Keith, "and the quality and flavour of our caviar is second to none."

His opinion is backed by Laura King, a caviar expert. She imports Riofrió to the UK through her company King's Fine Foods and says even people who don't eat caviar regularly can taste the difference between standard and Riofrió products.

Laura says it's difficult to explain the sensation of eating good caviar and people who have had a poor-quality product fail to understand its appeal. "When tasting caviar, you should be looking for a firm egg but one that just breaks on the tongue releasing the flavour, rather than popping as is generally believed," says Laura. "It should have a soft, creamy, texture."

Caviar should be eaten slightly warm. It's often said to pair well with potato or eggs, which won't overpower the delicate flavours. "It's superb on the soft yolk of a fried egg, or with blinis (buckwheat pancakes) but really it's best eaten on its own," says Keith.

You should never eat caviar with standard cutlery, as metal will spoil the taste. "A plastic spoon left over from a takeaway will do fine," says Keith. "Or eat it off the side of your hand - the area between your thumb and forefinger is best."

Farming sturgeon may have lost caviar some of its rock-star chic, but the fish is being saved from extinction and its roe available to all.

WHERE TO TASTE CAVIAR

CHEZ DOMINIQUE HELSINKI

Standing at number 21 in the world's top 50 restaurants, Chez Dominique is Helsinki's most exclusive dinner reservation. 4 *Rikhardinkatu*, tel: +358 (0)9 612 7393, www.chezdominique.com

LA TABLE DU LANCASTER PARIS

Chef Michel Troisgros only includes the finest ingredients on his menu and is a fan of Riofrió caviar. 7 *Rue de Berri*, Champs Élysées, tel: +33 (0)1 4076 4076, www.hotel-lancaster.fr

BOB BOB RICARD LONDON

At this classically elegant restaurant, skip the beluga and order Riofrió caviar alongside a vodka shot. 1 *Upper James Street*, W1, tel: +44 (0)20 3145 1000, www.bobbobricard.com

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