

## Spain's campaign to get some peace and quiet at dinner

An initiative encouraging diners not to be so noisy when enjoying meals out with friends has even signed up some Michelin-starred restaurants



People dine in a busy restaurant in Spain Photo: Alamy

By James Badcock, Madrid

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In a country known for its enthusiasm for raucous restaurants, a backlash is forming among Spaniards who like some peace and quiet over dinner. An initiative encouraging diners not to be so noisy when enjoying meals out with friends has signed up several restaurants, including some **with Michelin stars**. The initiative, called Eating Without Noise, hopes to provide diners with a more relaxed **restaurant experience**, especially when they are eating top quality food. So far, 22 restaurants across the country have signed up, declaring

themselves to be “quiet dining” venues, including Michelin-starred eateries such as Restaurante Martín Berasategui in the Basque town of Lasarte-Oria and Hotel Único in Madrid.

Svante Borjesson, director of a Spanish foundation called Oir es Clave (Hearing is Key), started the initiative. He said the country had a tendency towards lively conversation, which while convivial could also sometimes create an unpleasant atmosphere for diners.

“Without a doubt we have a problem with noise here in Spain,” Mr Borjesson said. “According to the World Health Organisation, Spain is the second noisiest country in the world, behind Japan.”

Mr Borjesson believes changes to table layouts and the use of building materials that do not the reverberate sound could also improve dining experiences.



People dine outside at a restaurant in Spain Photo: Alamy

“When you go north people are not only quieter, here you get this effect whereby the more people arrive in a restaurant, the louder people have to speak to be heard above the next table until, in the end, everyone is screaming. It’s a noisy country, but if the acoustics were better, we wouldn’t need to get used to screaming.”

The **Eating Without Noise campaign** recommends proper sound insulation, as well as the use of elements inside restaurants to absorb noise and larger spaces between tables.

The campaign has attracted big names, including the chef Ramón Freixa, of Hotel Único. “Gastronomy is an experience of the senses and noise can harm that pleasure,” he said.



Ramón Freixa of Hotel Único Photo: Alamy

James Blick, the co-founder of Devour Spain, a company that offers food tours, agreed that many Spanish eateries had acoustic issues due to the construction materials used. But while Mr Blick accepted that “anyone who goes out to eat in a real restaurant is right to expect a proper experience”, he argued that the hustle and bustle in small taverns and tapas bars was all part of a unique atmosphere.

“It can be noisy with the sound of the coffee cups slamming down on the marble bar top and people shouting. People on our tours sometimes jump as if shots

were being fired. But tapas bars are like a fast-flowing river, and once you learn to keep your head above water, it's an exhilarating experience.”



A traditional Spanish restaurant in Barcelona Photo: Alamy

Despite the fact that small bars and eateries might find it difficult to bring noise levels down, as they need to pack customers into small spaces, Mr Borjesson said he hoped there would be a “trickle down” effect to small establishments. “We would like famous food guides like the **Michelin Guide** to also take [quiet dining] criteria into consideration, and that one day acoustic comfort will be just as important in the evaluation of a restaurant and will appear in reviews,” Mr Borjesson said.