

# JOIN our club

In San Sebastián, people have gathered together in secret gastronomic societies since the 19th century. Now these supper clubs have arrived in the UK – and Beronia Rioja wants you to get involved

Behind an unmarked door on a quiet street in Spain's San Sebastián lies a world of great food, great wine and great conversation. And it's not just one door: all over the city, these gastronomic societies – or txokos (pronounced "chock-ohs") – play host to members and their friends who want to come together to cook, eat, drink and be merry.

On the way to their San Sebastián club, members might wander through the city's vibrant marketplace, picking up seasonal vegetables from stalls groaning with a kaleidoscope of local produce, the freshest seafood and dangling legs of Ibérico ham. At the club, they'll cook alongside members while enjoying a glass or two of wine.

## Club talk

Txokos came about in the mid-19th century as a way for men to escape the control of women, who traditionally ran the households in Basque society. Even now, most members of the 119 societies throughout San Sebastián are men who like to socialise and exchange

news while they enjoy food and drink. There's only one rule: no talk of politics or religion, though talk of shared interests and passions is of course a given.

In fact, it's how one of Spain's favourite Rioja wines was born. In the 1970s, Basque families holidayed in La Rioja and a group

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of men took time out from the family to get together in the Riojan town of Ollauri. As wine fuelled their talk, conversation naturally turned to the beverage – instead of buying it from other wineries, what if they bought some vineyards and made it themselves? And so Bodegas Beronia was born. Fast forward to 2015 and some of the original founders are still involved with the company and still meet to enjoy txoko in Rioja.

Now, Beronia is working with restaurants

across the UK to bring this unique culinary experience to you, recently taking a group of restaurateurs to San Sebastián in search of inspiration. Cristina Garcia Catala, from Clapham's Lola Rojo and Rosita restaurants, loved the idea of taking diners to farmers' markets before returning to the restaurant to cook. "I didn't realise Beronia was created in a txoko; people can cook and at the same time, enjoy some great wines," she says.

## Culinary tradition

"Txokos are a great way for us to connect with our customers as they are an interactive experience. As a Spanish restaurant in London it's always great to see people getting involved in a long-standing culinary tradition," says John Scott of Boqueria in Brixton. "Txoko is all about great food, great wines, good company and community. Who doesn't like showing off their creativity in the kitchen?"

Meanwhile, Bar 44 in Wales has also hosted a few txokos. Co-owner Owen Morgan says attendees are now booking them for birthday celebrations. "We had done gourmet nights but we wanted to do something with a social, family-style dining aspect. Beronia told us about txokos and people love them."

Bar 44 hosts just 20 guests in an effort to preserve the essence of a txoko. Interaction comes in the form of sharing dishes, carving and family-style service. Among Morgan's favourite pairings is braised ox cheek with Beronia's fruity red Crianza or Reserva – not forgetting a side of fresh, homemade bread to mop up the sauce.

The heart of Beronia was born in a txoko and now Beronia is set to be at the heart of many txokos across the UK.



## BE A WINNER WITH BERONIA RIOJA

For a taste of the txokos in your own home, Beronia Rioja is offering one lucky reader the chance to win a mixed case of 12 bottles of Beronia wines, including Viura, Rueda Verdejo, Rosado, Beronia Crianza, Beronia Reserva and Beronia Gran Reserva. The winner will also receive a hamper of Spanish treats from specialist supplier San Sebastián Food. "Both San Sebastián Food and Beronia are committed to the good life: good friends, good food, and good wine. Together we have brought this to life in the San Sebastián Food Cooking school and Beronia Txoko," says Jon Warren at San Sebastián Food.

Book Basque Country culinary experiences and cooking classes at San Sebastián Food's new cooking school at [sansebastianfood.com](http://sansebastianfood.com)

### TO WIN SIMPLY ANSWER THIS QUESTION:

**In which Spanish city were txoko clubs established?**

Email your answer, with your name and address and a daytime telephone number to: [beronia@squaremeal.co.uk](mailto:beronia@squaremeal.co.uk)

**Deadline for entries: Friday 28 August**



## WHERE TO EXPERIENCE TXOKO

### ● 16 September

Boqueria, 192 Acre Lane, London, SW2 5UL; 020 7733 4408; [info@boqueriatapas.com](mailto:info@boqueriatapas.com)

### ● 29 September

Lola Rojo, 78 Northcote Road, London, SW11 6QL; 020 7350 2262; [info@lolarojo.net](http://info@lolarojo.net)