

## Foods of the World

by

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When we lived in Italy a few years ago, and Chico was just a baby (and was then called ‘Guido’), how he loved the foods: great bowls of *ragù*, pasta of all types, marinated vegetables and fish for *antipasti*, and of course, *gelati*, especially his favourite, *tartufo*. In the Portuguese Algarve he has always enjoyed with us platters of the lovely, sweet small clams known as *ameijôas*, steamed simply in garlic, olive oil, and wine, and sprinkled with *coentra*— freshly chopped coriander.

But this summer in Spain, Chico has not particularly been enjoying the foods. Now that he is four he is more strong-minded, and will no longer eat whatever is put in front of him, simply because we want him to.

“But Dad, I don’t like it,” he whined, when he tried the *pruebas de morcilla*, an exquisite *cazuelita* of spicy fried blood sausage from Extremadura.

Or else, at the famous Casa Bigote in Sanlúcar de Barrameda, he sealed his lips together tightly and wouldn’t so much as even taste the *guiso de pulpo*. You would have thought we were trying to feed him poison instead of that exquisite seafood medley of tender octopus stewed in spices and wine.

Admittedly, it was my mistake that morning when he and I cycled into Puerto de Santa María for mid-morning *tapas* (Kim was in bed, struck down after a surfeit of *mariscos*), and I ordered *menudo*. The tripe and chickpeas were abit strong even for me, but delicious nonetheless.

Chico, though, is beginning to come good. At Romerijo’s, we purchased paper-wrapped cones of fried *puntillitas* (the tiniest, sweetest baby squid you can imagine),

*pijotas* (baby hake which you eat, bones and all), and *chocos* (small cuttlefish), and enjoyed them down by the waterfront, eating them with our fingers, me washing down that simple repast with a half bottle of *Quinta fino*, he with a freshly-squeezed *zummo de naranja*. By the Coto de Doñana, he ate with gusto the most delicious baked fish *maccarones*. And, on a balmy, late-spring evening, we sat at an outdoor table under the stars, the water virtually lapping at our feet, and tucked lustily into a platter of *almejas a la marinera*.

At first, he refused even to try one.

“Chico,” I said, frowning, “I thought you were a boy of the world.”

“I am a boy of the world,” he rejoined, and sucked the sweet clams noisily, one at a time, until he had a small mound of empty shells proudly in front of him.

On our return to England after five months on the road, his mother asked him what he would most like for tea.

The boy of the world held his chin in his hand, and considered deeply the myriad options.

“I think,” he said, after some moments of serious consideration and deliberation, “I think... a dippy egg.”