

Takos, A Love Letter

(Spec work)

By Grant Simms

When I was 17, my life changed. I went to Europe...and I'm actually gonna stop right there. That opening is cliché, I know, and although Europe was fun it didn't change my life. So don't worry, this article is not some preachy piece about how I found myself on Italian cobblestone streets. I'm also not about to give some lame advice about the best way to tour European countries. I expect most people have already received that unwanted advice, and if you haven't, YOU WILL mwahahaha! No but seriously...this article is really about how a restaurant in Madrid, Spain, didn't change my life, but did change my palette.

Madrid was the first place I visited on my post graduation trip. My friend and I were navigating a foreign place by ourselves for the first time. Once we finally checked into our hostel our hunger became unignorable, and we began looking for something to eat. We searched for any place with food that seemed like it wouldn't be completely foreign to us. I, in particular, was an extremely picky eater, and mostly stuck to eating very few food groups. Of the places that came up on Google one stood out. A restaurant called Takos al Pastor. It had tremendous reviews, we both knew what tacos were, we'd had them before, we liked them, and so it seemed a safe choice.

We took a short walk over to the place, and were greeted by an immense line. We were less than pleased. The commitment had been made however, and so we stuck it out until it was our turn. I looked at the menu, and being that it was in Spanish, I wasn't sure what anything was. So I just shrugged, and ordered 3 of the pastor tacos. I'd heard a few people in front of me order them so I figured they must be good. The total for the meal was 3 euros.

Our tacos came out quickly, and my eyes widened as I saw what was laid before me. Apparently al pastor is some kind of combination between pineapple and pork. I was very skeptical, but my friend, who had already tried one of his pastor tacos, was quite insistent I should give it a go, and so I did. The sensation was kind of like what happened to Remy in Ratatouille when he tried that strawberry with the cheese. It was a perfect experience. As good as the tacos were, I didn't think I'd ever go back. That large line was a big deterrent. Yet, to my friend's and my surprise, we were coming back from eating, and I guess we took a different route (I can't remember exactly), but to our shock we encountered another Takos shop. It had the same design, prices, and menu, the only difference was that this one was almost next to our hostel, and had zero line. It seemed like a mirage, a magical doorway into my own personal taco heaven.

Over the next 3 days I ate there 6 different times. On my last day I ordered every single taco they had on the menu. There were 10 in total, and each was an unforgettable experience.

Takos had such a profound effect on me that from then on I no longer feared trying anything. It was the opposite. I now wanted to try everything, and hoped one day I'd get an experience similar to the one I had when I was 17. But nothing has come close. I sometimes wonder if the tacos were actually as good as I remember them. It could have just been the moment, the euphoria of being young, on my own, and trying something new for the first time.

When I lived in Italy I considered taking a trip to Madrid just to have them again, and to see what the truth was, but...I ultimately decided against it. I'd rather never find out the answer to that question. I want my experience at Takos to live on in mystery. I don't need confirmation that it really is the best restaurant in the world. I just need the lessons it taught me. So for that Takos, I thank you.