

# Forget the Ratty

## A Swanky Epcot Center: gorgeous dining at “Spain” in Cranston

*Story by Jane Froenik*

### SPAIN RESTAURANT & LOUNGE

1073 Reservoir Avenue

Cranston, RI

Entrees \$6.50-9.50 (vegetarian)

\$10.95-18.95

(chicken, meats, & fish)

\$24.95-29.95

(dishes for two)

(401) 946-8686

I thought that I could beat the usual Saturday night throngs of restaurant-goers this past weekend by trying Spain Restaurant. Yes, I had eaten their food at a Spanish House cocktail party they catered, but all really I knew about Spain (the restaurant) was that their string beans and carrots in garlic and butter sauce were excellent. However, Spain would not accept a reservation for my party of three, but since we were not in a rush, we drove down anyway.

It takes only about 10 minutes to get to Spain, located in Cranston (I-95 south to exit 16), but once there, I felt like we had arrived at a stop in Epcot Center. The outside of Spain Restaurant is a modernized combination of a typical Spanish villa, complete with the rounded roof clay tiles and a well-lit mini-castle.

Inside, the effect continues: the walls have large photographs of Spanish landmarks and are painted with maps of the Old and New Worlds. The entire dining space looks like the courtyard of a Spanish mansion. Spain has created its own “waterfall” with a small pool of moving water reflecting light against a wall and the second floor. Seating is also available up there, on the wrought-iron balconies that overhang the “courtyard.”

As we perused the long, diverse menu, which offers more than two dozen entrees—including both traditionally Spanish and more generally European cuisine—waiters served us crusty white and raisin breads with garlic and chive butter. Three entree specials were also available: pasta, veal, and swordfish.

We began with the Spain Salad and Gambas al Ajillo. The salad was served on a large plate with mushrooms, lettuce, tomato, and a champagne vinaigrette. The chef cooked Gambas al Ajillo (sautéed shrimp served with olive oil, garlic, and spices) almost to an al dente point, so that the shrimp were still a little crunchy. There are also several other salads, two soups, and various hot and cold appetizers on the menu.

Our entrees, as well as the many we saw around us, featured more-than-generous portions. I tasted the Mariscada Salsa Verde—Native lobster, clams, sea scallops, shrimp, and mussels in a garlic, parsley, and white wine sauce served in a large kettle-like dish with a side of rice. The broth’s combination of fish stock, brandy, and spinach made the shellfish uniquely delicious.

I also tried Gallinela Serrano, a free range Cornish hen stuffed with pine nuts, spinach, serrano ham, and spices and served with a Dijon mustard sauce. This was gamey—it tasted more like duck or pheasant—and a bit spicy because of the ham in the stuffing. The purposefully-lumpy mashed potatoes that accompanied this dish included the red potato skins—and even rivaled Al Forno’s own highly-touted spuds!

The Pollo a la Gallega consisted of two boneless chicken cutlets pan sautéed with mushrooms, olives, and Spanish pimientos in a fresh, light tomato-cognac sauce. Although it tasted wonderfully rich, the sauce was actually very light. The dish was complemented by saffron rice and the same string beans and carrots I savored at the Spanish House feast.

For dessert, as an accompaniment to the strong coffee served, we selected the Frangelico cheesecake, a cream cheese-based mocha cake with a nut and sugar crust, and the pecan cake, two layers of fluffy cake filled with crushed pecan meats and layered with whipped cream. The cheesecake was very good, but the pecan cake was aptly described as “heavenly”—it tasted so light and not too sweet.

Looking for a restaurant next Parents’ Weekend (or graduation), a great way to really impress a significant other, or a reason to splurge? Spain Restaurant is fantastic. The food, service, and atmosphere are unique enough to justify both the wait and the trip to Cranston.