



What on earth was a train doing halfway down inner-city Brunswick Street? In a brand new tapas restaurant? Fortunately we weren't viewing a catastrophic derailment but rather a sushi-train conveyor belt, embedded in a sizeable timber benchtop and transporting tapas to waiting diners.

After an initial double-take during which we wondered if the place was totally off-track, we pulled up stools at the bench. After all, if a motorised lazy susan can bear sushi, then why not an assortment of Spain's greatest tapas hits?

The restaurant derives its name from the *pintxo* (peen-cho), which means "spike" in the Basque language and refers to the toothpicks used to hold the food together as well as being that region's name for tapas. Apparently laws prevent plates of tapas being displayed on counter-tops here in the fabulous Spanish way, hence the train idea was born.

Our waitress opened the bottle of rioja that we'd picked up en route and explained that the cold tapas selection would be motoring past and that hot tapas could be ordered from her. Plates are colour-coded and priced \$3.50-5.50.



We picked up a passing plate sporting two decent-sized wedges of tortilla: a flavoursome version of the traditional Spanish omelette, complete with red peppers, peas and caramelised onion. We also enjoyed skewers of manchego cheese with quince paste and others spiking a combination of olives, white anchovies and pepper.

By then our hot dishes had begun to arrive – tasty Cordoban pork rolls (crumbed pork fillet stuffed with jamon serrano, peppers and manchego), empanadas (pastry parcels filled with beef and lamb with a spicy red dipping sauce), marinated prawns wrapped in burnt-around-the-edges pancetta with a tomato-based

romesco sauce, slices of chorizo cooked in a sweet cider and some crumbed calamari, which was okay but a little rubbery.

Desserts the day we visited were freshly made churros (Spanish doughnuts) served with a saucer of room temperature chocolate sauce and a crème caramel, also with chocolate sauce.

On the other side of the room, diners at the smart maroon banquettes and tables are offered a choice of four banquets, all for two or more people, except for the vegetarian option. All offer various sequences of tapas, with the addition of a Spanish salad and breads.

The restaurant is owned by Melissa Telecian, with Argentinian-born Vanesa Arjona heading up the kitchen. Telecian plans to start opening for lunch on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from next week and although she has applied for a liquor licence, she will allow the banquet part of the room to remain BYO.

Pintxo might be trying something new with the tapas train but it's not trying to reinvent the wheel with the food, which is fairly conventional fare. However, the bench seating offers a cheap, informal way to snack and drink, and you may find that's enough to blow your whistle.