

Something's amiss in Pamis...



Pamis is a tiny village with something completely out of place.

It is, in fact, no more than a hamlet, the only constituent part of the never-flourishing Ondara Empire.

Pamis consists of a couple of narrow streets that go nowhere.

Although it is only a few hundred metres from the N-332, it feels totally remote and lost in time.

Nobody passes through without making the decision to do so, and there aren't many who do that either.

As an ancient Valencian village, it is surrounded by orange groves and its houses have stables out the back in which to keep the cows - a one-cow family is poor, a three-cow family loaded.

Its fiestas at the beginning of August include bull-running, paella-making, street parties and fireworks.

It has a quaint Valencian hermitage and an Indian restaurant.

And in accordance with local custom, the Indian restaurant is run by a Dutchman and an English woman.

Since we are in Catholic and superstitious Spain, it is also tradition for the restaurant to be called La Brujería - 'Witchcraft'.

"The locals were a bit wary of the name at the beginning, but they have got used to it now," admits Johan.

Everything about La Brujería is different, not least that its mouthwatering set menu has remained the same and at the same price for the past three years.

"People became very fed up and angry with sneaky price increases when the euro came

in. We were so angry we decided to keep our prices exactly the same," says Janet.

And when Janet and Johan make a decision about hospitality they have a top chance of getting it right because they have a wealth of experience and success here in Spain - first running the Annabis restaurant in Dénia for 12 years and now La Brujería for the past eight years.

Preparing La Brujería as a restaurant was not such an easy task at the beginning, however. It took Janet and Johan two years' hard labour to con-

vert the village house that had just one bedroom with dirt floor, a very flimsy upstairs floor for drying fruit, a well and a stable.

"We bought this when we still had Annabis. It was a ruin and our idea was to do it up slowly as a house in which to live. As work went on, however, we changed our minds..." adds Johan.

Although the street façade is the same as all the other houses, it is hard to imagine that ruin now, especially out the back where the original orange grove is now a large car

park and beautiful summer terrace.

But why 'Witchcraft' with the restaurant filled with scary witches and wizards? "We were looking for a theme, something different. It was quite novel then... this was pre-Harry Potter," laughs Janet.

And why Indian in Pamis? Well, it was Janet's speciality and she loves it as much as her diners.

La Brujería only serves one meal (unless you ask beforehand for vegetarian or fish dishes). The menu is called Thali

and although it has Malaysian influences, it was originally served at feasts and banquets in India.

This extraordinary meal just keeps coming... 22 different authentic dishes from various regions of India, served by Johan in a welcoming, friendly and rustic atmosphere.

The Thali is an explosion of tastes, sweet, sour, rich, plain, spicy, hot and right up to potatoes that bring tears to the eyes.

"It's a lot of work to prepare," Janet tells us. "It is all home-made and we grind all the spices. I only realised afterwards just how much work it is with so many hours of preparation. But our customers know exactly what they are going to get... and so far they keep coming back. I think we filled a gap in the market."

Those regular customers are a wonderful mix of nationalities including Swiss, German, Spanish, English and Dutch. "Sometimes we have diners of five different nationalities on one night. We have a very nice clientèle, a pleasure to work for," says Johan, who speaks all those languages, of course.

But what do Spanish diners - traditionally very conservative in their eating habits - make of all this? "If they are



under 25 or over 50, they can be frightened by the idea. But Spanish people in the age group of 25 to 45 like to try different tastes and there are many customers from different parts of Spain who always make a point of coming here when they are in the area."

La Brujería is not huge - with capacity for about 34 people - but all diners have plenty of space because the restaurant uses large Spanish tables.

It is only open on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings and only closed for the month of December. It is best to book for Fridays and Saturdays.

Pamis is signposted on the left just a couple of hundred metres from the 'hole-in-the-wall' turning from Ondara town centre towards Benidoleig.

The restaurant is beautiful, the meal a fantastic experience, the service and atmosphere

great - if you haven't tried it, you don't know what you are missing.

The CB Friday

La Brujería is at C/ Poeta García Lorca, 18. Please telephone for reservations to Janet or Johan on 96 576 73 53

(Just for the record, this is what you get for just 18.50 euros - mussels in sauce, flaky wholemeal bread, vegetable savoury pastry, papadums, prawn bhuna, Bombay potato, chicken curry, spicy pork curry, lentils in onion sauce, spinach with 8 spices, peppers, bananas and cashews, lamb biriani, white basmati rice, chicken tikka, lamb kebab, banana raita, toasted coconut, pineapple sambal, onion and coriander, mint raita, mango chutney, cucumber, coriander and walnut pickle.)