

ADVENTURE & TRAVEL

THEN

TIME CAPSULE

NOW

**IN THE 1930S**, exiles from the Spanish Civil War, living in New York, leased the Hotel Chelsea Restaurant, an eatery inside the decades-old apartment-hotel and artists' cooperative on 23rd Street. They renamed the space after Don Quixote, a nod to the hotel's literary cachet and created a fantasy shrine to their homeland. Highlights: a mural of Miguel de Cervantes' fictional hero tilting at windmills, paintings of bullfighters and flamenco dancers, and private dining rooms including one named after Cervantes himself. The 200-seat El Quijote also had a door next to the Chelsea's lobby, luring guests like Arthur Miller and Dylan Thomas with hearty portions of Spanish fare served by waiters in scarlet blazers. The 1960s ushered in the restaurant's real heyday, when then-unknowns Patti Smith and Robert Mapplethorpe could settle into a red-vinyl booth, subsist on cheap appetizers—"shrimp in green sauce" was a favorite—and rub shoulders with Leonard Cohen, Allen Ginsburg, Andy Warhol and other notables. (As Ms. Smith recalls in her memoir, "Just Kids," the pair would turn the lobster tails left over from their repasts into necklaces for sale, an enterprising example of "found art"). El Quijote remained a neighborhood favorite into the 21st century, despite its slide from shabby-chic to merely shabby, its linoleum floors and vinyl booths fraying, the statuettes of the Man of La Mancha over the bar coated in dust.

El Quijote, the restaurant in Manhattan's mythic Hotel Chelsea, is back and timelessly intact—but now the sangria is top shelf



**CLAWS FOR APPLAUSE** El Quijote reopened earlier this year with a more refined menu but the kitsch remains.

**RIPPLES OF CONCERN** ran through nostalgic bohemian circles when El Quijote closed for refurbishment in 2018. But when it reopened last March, following the reopening of the revived Hotel Chelsea itself, fans found its essence preserved and distilled. Diners still enter from 23rd Street beneath the original yellow metal awning and a neon sign. Although the sprawling restaurant has been reduced to a more intimate 45 seats (with 16 stools at the bar and 55 seats outside for seasonal dining) and only one private dining room, its spirit endures. The wooden bar still houses an array of Spanish tchotchkes and lobster-engraved mirrors. The red vinyl booths have been reupholstered, but the chandeliers, distressed ceiling and pastoral paintings are intact. Waiters still wear red, but sport snappy cotton jackets instead of formal blazers. The Don Quixote mural has been restored to its muddy glory and a wooden statue of the novel's hero still greets hotel guests coming in from the lobby. Among the most noticeable changes: The multipage menu of yore has been reduced to a single page with more contemporary (and pricier) Spanish dishes. The signature paella de mariscos is now cooked in a traditional Spanish pan rather than a pot. Once basic brews, the red and white sangrias are elaborate multi-ingredient concoctions, while the Quijote G+T is garnished with shavings of celery and pear. In a sign of optimism, the EXIT sign now reads EXITO—Spanish for success. —Tony Perrotet

F. MARTIN RAMIN/ THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (BARTENDER AND SANGRIA); DAVID MCCABE/HOTEL CHELSEA (ANDY WARHOL)

**Sangria-Fueled Synergy**

Artists, writers and musicians staying at Hotel Chelsea have long used El Quijote as their meeting place, giving it a *louche* cachet.

**1884** Chelsea Association Building opens as a Utopian cooperative with artists's studios, literary pretensions and communal dining rooms.

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**1930** After opening the eatery as the Hotel Chelsea Restaurant, the manager hires artist John McKiernan to paint murals; he chooses satirical images of American politicians, scandalizing hotel management. Soon



**WHERE ART MEETS GAMBAS** Andy Warhol at El Quijote in the 1960s.

after, refugees from the Spanish Civil War paint them over and rename the restaurant El Quijote.

**1945** Peggy Guggenheim introduces Jackson Pollock to art collectors in a dining room.

**1968** When actress Edie Sedgwick sets fire to her room, tenants gather for an "evacuation cocktail party" at El Quijote—the first of many.

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**1969** Woodstock performers Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin and Jefferson Airplane gather at El Quijote to fuel up on shrimp, sangria

and tequila before driving Upstate.

**1978** Nancy Spungen is murdered in Room 100, boosting the hotel's notoriety and creating a sense of malaise and decline, although the restaurant thrives and

even offers an informal delivery service to hotel guests.

**2018** After the Chelsea is purchased by trio of hoteliers, they acquire El Quijote and close it for renovation.

**2022** El Quijote reopens under new Brooklyn-based management.

**Japan, Back on the Map**

The country is set to fully reopen on Oct. 11. What to know before you book.



**FALL BACK** Sensoji Temple, one of the oldest temples in Tokyo and a favorite tourist attraction, in September.

**IN 2019, THE YEAR BEFORE** Japan sealed its borders, the country lured nearly 32 million tourists, a record high. Two and a half years later, it's one of the last countries to lift pandemic-related travel restrictions. Beginning Oct. 11, international tourists are finally free to roam the country on their own, without having to book a package tour. A few other notable changes:

**GO BLUE**

The country's border measures are color-coded and tourists traveling to Japan from countries on the "blue list," such as the U.S., Canada, Australia and some European Union nations, no longer have to quarantine or submit to on-site testing at the airport. Proof of vaccination is not required but it eliminates the need to produce a negative Covid-test result 72 hours before departure.

**TO MASK OR NOT TO MASK**

Wearing a mask during allergy and flu seasons was a way of life in Japan long

before the pandemic. Now masks are commonplace year round. Though Japan has no mask mandate, many places of business request you wear one indoors, and overwhelmingly people continue to cover up outdoors when traveling in a taxi and in crowded gatherings such as public transit. The general etiquette when dining is to remove your mask and place it in an envelope provided by the restaurant that is kept at your side, or put it away in your pocket or purse. You'll find no shortage of mask colors or styles for sale throughout the country.

**RATE OF RETURN**

A historically weaker yen means you can stretch that dollar a lot more than before, perhaps adding a few extra days to the itinerary. Stores, restaurants and tourist attractions are open for business, and travel within the country on the bullet train remains as efficient as ever.

—Suryatapa Bhattacharya

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