

83 Hanover Street, Edinburgh

We'd been umm-ing and ah-ing all afternoon about where to eat. I wanted Italian and T wanted something a bit different (I'm all for being adventurous with my food, but carbs – in their purest, spiralised form and coated in sauce – will always be my first love).

It turns out this originally named Chilean tapas joint was the best choice we made all weekend.

Situated on a wide street in central Edinburgh that reminded me of New York, 83 Hanover Street offers a warm respite from the Scottish winter. Descend the stairs into this basement restaurant and you'll be welcomed with the homely waft of cooking. The place was relatively full which – given it was the first weekend of January – was the first good sign. The second came when we were seated next to a Spanish-speaking couple. You can be sure a restaurant's going to be great when natives are enjoying it.

We started with two pisco sours. I'd never had one before but the hype back in London, (it seems this South American cocktail was the 'it' drink of 2018), I thought it time I tried one. If you've also been under a rock, Pisco is a Peruvian white brandy – it tasted mezcal-like to my immature palette. Mix it with lemon juice, egg white and some syrup, and you have yourself one of the best drinks going. Since I'd just lost my Pisco virginity, I'm not best placed to comment on the authenticity of this one. But it was delicious all the same.

While we drank, we nibbled happily on some sopaipillas con pebre (£5). The perfect appetiser, sopaipillas are little, deep fried savoury pastries. The 'pebre' part is essentially an onion pickle – a little too raw-tasting for me, but a pretty good dunking partner nonetheless.

Fried calamari with merkén aioli (£7) followed. Fresh, crispy batter encasing squid with just the right amount of chew – none of that greasy, rubbery texture you get so often. Seriously moreish stuff.

My one regret is leaving without trying the haggis croquettes with mojo rojo & lima bean dip (£7). I'm a huge croquette fan (deep fried balls of molten cheese and potato – how can you not be?) but we'd eaten haggis for a late lunch just a few hours before dinner, so they seemed unnecessary.

The waitress recommended the ceviche of the day (£10) and we obliged without complaint. It was a salmon ceviche, delicate and tangy. It made a delicious palette cleanser before we moved onto a heartier dish.

I always find myself drawn more to the starters on the menu at a restaurant than the mains, but this was an exception. We finished with the sautéed wild mushrooms, toasted corn cake, baby corn and basil mojo verde (£12). How the chef managed to make mushrooms take on such a meat-like quality I'll never know. Simultaneously comforting and exotic, this dish was so good that T spent the following week trying to recreate it.