

Desperate Literature, for book lovers in Brooklyn, Santorini and now Madrid

Madrid has a new second-hand bookstore thanks to three men – Michael, Corey and Craig – whose unique concept to provide insatiable readers with good books and a literary haven has already won a loyal following in Santorini, Greece, and Brooklyn, New York. Just opened in May, [Desperate Literature](#) comes to Madrid as a new-found treasure for tourists, expats and Madrileños alike.

Editor's note: in 2018 we published a new article – [Desperate Literature: so much more than just a bookshop](#)

What's in stock?

[Desperate Literature](#) has a wide selection of **used books in English, Spanish and French**, and vinyls too. They get most of their books from library sales in New York and then ship them over, which is why half of their floor is currently usurped by boxes. The shelves are stocked with novels ranging from fiction and crime to philosophy and even *erotica*. Although they're not against best-sellers (you'll find **50 Shades of Grey** and **Game of Thrones**), the space is small, so they do turn down books, aiming for quality rather than quantity. When I walked in, the first three books I spotted were by **Franz Kafka**, **James Joyce** and **George Orwell**, to give you an idea.



on Calle Campomanes 13, near metros Opera, Callao and Santo Domingo

Why Desperate Literature?

As quoted by Joaquín Font on their [web](#), there are books for all occasions—for when you're bored, sad, or calm. Whatever mood you're in, if you're passing through Madrid or live here and find yourself desperate for a good read, you can either swap the book you've just finished or buy a new one for 3-9€. You can also say hi to Michael, the California-raised and Brooklyn-adopted owner; and Jamie, who works there and is also from Brooklyn. Plus they play good music and host events where they experiment with cocktails—one of the ways they're getting to know Madrid is by making homemade vermouth!

What's the story behind Desperate Literature?

All three partners are avid readers and part of the so-called *international booklovers connection*. Corey had sold books on the streets of New York for many years, where he met Michael, who joined in to open used bookshops in Brooklyn. Ten years ago, Craig started [Atlantis Books](#) in Santorini, Greece. **Atlantis** is an international bookshop that, despite being tiny and hidden away on the island of Santorini, is quite well-known. My mother bought her favorite book there—*East of Eden* by John Steinbeck. My sister, Amanda, actually lived and worked there for a month, as did my sister-in-law, Erin. Every Summer, **Atlantis** showcases a film festival on their roof, where the projector is set up against a backdrop of red sunsets and the Aegean Sea.

Of course there's more to the story, but the philosophy at **Atlantis Books** goes: if you're a book-loving traveller, you can work there and in turn, live and get taken care of for free. It's kind of like *WOOFING* for books instead of farms. It's also a place for travellers to meet, hang out and hold book readings and concerts. Under the same joint venture, these three young partners own two locations in Brooklyn, New York: [Book Thug Nation](#) and [Human Relations](#); and just opened [Desperate Literature](#) in Madrid in May.



Who came up with the whole idea?

It started with **Atlantis Books** in Santorini, opened by Craig and a bunch of friends (if you check out their [web](#), Atlantis' opening involved a lot of luck and a bit of whisky). Michael says the idea is based off [Shakespeare and Company](#), Paris' famous book store and writers' institution. Opened in 1919 by American expat, Sylvia Beach, **Shakespeare and Company** was frequented by the likes of Gertrude Stein, James Joyce and Ernest Hemingway, and became **a gathering place for literary culture**, selling high-quality English-language books, some of which were banned, such as Joyce's *Ulysses* and D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Although it was closed during WWII, it was reopened in 1956 by American expat, George Whitman, who had amassed a huge collection of English books and wanted to return the generosity he had experienced while travelling the world as a young *vagabond*, by creating a **friendly place for English-speaking expats and bohemian culture**, allowing writers to stay there if they helped out. Today, **Shakespeare & Company** is run by Whitman's daughter who continues the tradition.

Why did they open Desperate Literature in Madrid, and not... Amsterdam?

Michael says 'it was kind of happenstance.' He and Corey have an affinity for the Spanish language, and both knew people in Madrid. The location was perfect as it was an already-established international bookstore, Petras; and is situated a stone's throw from the Royal Palace.

At the moment, only Michael is living at **Desperate Literature** and hopefully Corey will take his place in November. Michael says that when he visits a city, even for a day, he always checks out the local book stores. He expects that visitors to Madrid will do the same and that **Desperate Literature** will be their literary home away from home.

They're here, so come and say hello!

Desperate Literature

- [Facebook](#) & [Web](#)

Hours: Mon-Sat 12pm-9pm

Address: Calle Campomanes, 13

Metro: Santo Domingo, Opera and Callao

Please also read our 2018 article – [Desperate Literature: so much more than a bookshop](#)

4 Best City Biking Routes for

Tourists in Madrid

There is no such thing as the best city in the world (even though New Yorkers like to claim the title). From what I can see, however, Madrid is getting pretty close. You've probably noticed that Madrid's public bike system, [BiciMad](#), is fully up and running. Madrid's public bikes are **electric-powered** which is awesome because you barely break a sweat while going up the city's many hills. This also means that you can see Madrid's most emblematic buildings, plazas, parks and river all in one day, on two wheels.

Now that cycling in Madrid has been made easy, **here are four beautiful cycling routes in the city-center!** I've attached a **google map** with each route, but you really can't get lost. Combine these routes as you wish, as they're not too long and meant to be enjoyed, so you can feel free to wander off and explore. Happy cycling!!!

If you want to know how [BiciMad](#) works, check out our post: [“Electric city bikes in Madrid, a city that's turning bike-friendly”](#)

1. Atocha – Paseo del Prado – Recoletos



This first route starts at "*Ministerio de Agricultura*" or Ministry of Agriculture building. This tour is very easy to bike because the streets are flat and wide. There is also a pretty boulevard which goes all the way up Paseo del Prado and Castellana. You will see some of the main buildings in the city like the Prado Museum, Caixa Forum and the National Library. You'll also pass through three of the most important and well-known squares (plazas) in Madrid: Neptuno, Cibeles and Colón.





Find the route on the map:

2. Cibeles – Alcalá – Retiro Park



While New York and London have, respectively, Central Park and Hyde Park, we *Madrileños* have **Retiro Park**. Maybe it's not that famous or was never featured in a Hollywood production, but we are as proud as can be of our city's beautiful green oasis. The route through Retiro is also really easy to bike, however, you can start it at "*Plaza de la Independencia*", also known as Puerta de Alcalá, to make it even easier. In Retiro Park, you'll see some of Madrid's most stunning places such as "*Palacio de Cristal*" (main pic at the top) and "*Retiro Lake*" where you can rent a rowboat.





Find the route in the map:

3. Palacio – Casa de Campo



What I like most about this route is that you get to leave the city for a while. We first start at the Madrid's Royal Palace and take a ride around to enjoy it in all its glory from front to back. Then, we head for "*Casa de Campo*", where there are always groups of mountain-bikers going up and down the park's infinite paths. If you're not familiar with Casa de Campo, it's much bigger than Retiro, and looks more like a forest– it has a great [public swimming pool](#) and lake where people do water sports. Of course, there are bars too. As for this route's level, I wouldn't say it's easy one but it's definitely doable. It all depends on how far you go into "*Casa de Campo*" .





Find the route in the map:

4. [Matadero](#) – Madrid Rio – Principe Pio



Just a few years ago, the **Manzanares River** was surrounded by an ugly highway. Thanks to Madrid's former mayor who spent who knows how much money on its renovation, now we are enjoying "*Madrid Rio*" to the max. Starting at **Principe Pio**, you will enter Madrid Rio to bike along different paths and stumble upon fun (and free) activities like a "*tirolina*" or zip-line, playgrounds (for adults too!) and one of Madrid's urban beaches, a.k.a. sprinklers, that we love when summer comes. Then you will end up at one of my favorite spots in the city, [Matadero Madrid](#), an old slaughterhouse which is now an awesome and free cultural center. Here is a link to our post on [El Matadero](#).





Find the route in the map:

Best Cafe-bookshops in Madrid, Round 1!

Coffee shops selling books? Bookshops selling coffee? However you call them, here are five wonderful café-bookshops in Madrid where you can enjoy a cup of coffee or a glass of wine while surrounded by good reads. (See [round two](#) for more!)

1. Ocho y Medio Libros de Cine



This charming bookshop (featured in the cover photo) specializes in cinema, and boasts a cozy café and outdoor seating area. I love going here for a drink and a *tosta* right before [seeing a film](#) at one of the independent movie theaters just across the street. All screenings are in original version with Spanish subtitles. A tip: this makes for a great date night!

- [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** Martín de los Heros, 11
- **Metro:** Plaza de España

Also read: [Where to enjoy good film in Madrid](#)

2. La Libre



This is my mom's favorite cafe in Madrid. Why? Because a few years ago while she was visiting me in the dead of winter, we went in to warm up after a visit to the [Reina Sofia Museum](#) around the corner. When she ordered a coffee, the server said, **"No ma'am, I think you need a whisky."** He couldn't have been more right! They also have nice teas and snacks to nibble on, from breakfast pastries to empanadas.

- [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** c/ Argumosa, 39
- **Metro:** Atocha

3. La Infinito



This little café-bookshop lies on a corner in Lavapiés and serves up coffee, books and art on a daily basis. Not only does it have a welcoming ambience and lots of light streaming in through its tall glass windows, but it also throws great events, from **micro-theater performances** (one of which took place in the café's bathroom!) to popular weekend brunches.

- *image from La Infinito*
- [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** c/ Tres Peces, 22
- **Metro:** Antón Martín & Lavapiés

4. [La Fugitiva](#)



Books are the centrepiece at this cafe, and I love how its window seats and tiny bar are nestled between towering bookshelves and overflowing tables displaying bestsellers and rare reads. La Fugitiva has all you need from a café (coffee and sweets) and all you could ask of a bookstore – readings, talks, workshops, and of course, that distinct smell of books.

- [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** c/ de Santa Isabel, 7
- **Metro:** Antón Martín

5. Tipos Infames. Libros y Vinos



Wine and books? Quite a killer combination in my opinion. Located right off the popular Calle Fuencarral, this trendy bookshop, café and wine bar is a favorite of many in Malasaña. Tipos Infames offers a much appreciated rest from the bustling shops and streets in the area. It has a lot of seating area, a full bar and high ceilings, making it feel open, friendly and comfortable. It's a great place to go with friends for a quieter conversation in the afternoon. Plus they throw fun events, so make sure to follow them on social media.

- [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** c/ San Joaquín, 3
- **Metro:** Tribunal

Keep reading Round 2 of Madrid's Best Cafe-bookshops

And if you're looking for a few of our favorite cafe in Madrid *without* books:

- [Pepe Botella, a coffee place where you can think](#)
- [Toma Café, fuel up, feel hip](#)
- [Acid Café, seasonal, minimalist and just good coffee](#)

El Campo de Cebada, a mix of live music, politics & drinking

I've been in Madrid for 5 months now and I want to share somewhere with you. There's nowhere as special to me as [El Campo de Cebada](#) for a place to relax. It's quite unique in

what it has to offer. It's a **free space** where you can lie in the sun, the shade, drink beer and listen to **live music** or play **sports**. It's even a place where green and reform-minded political groups go to spread their word. Oh, and they have a theatre. How awesome is that?

Any lover of sun, sociality and really cheap booze, should come to [El Campo de Cebada](#).



from [plataformaarquitectura.cl](#)

It's not just some commercialized private space. After the collapse of a sports complex in the same area, an association of neighborhoods bought the plot with a grant from the **City of Madrid**. From here, people in the surrounding area had a stake in how to invest the money.

The idea was to create an inclusive temporary space where the **community** could get involved and where they could create value. Instead of an empty disused space, the creation of **El Campo de Cebada** allows people to do **sport, socialize and pursue other projects**. But, yes you read correctly – temporary. Cebada is there to fill in the vacuum and it will leave when the community gets the funding for a new sports complex.

And this is one more reason for why it's special. It's not going to be there forever.



I promise you're yet to find anything like it. From your first encounter, by **La Latina Metro** you'll probably be surprised to see passers-by cramming around spy-holes in its graffitied walls and people flowing endlessly in and out of its gate. The hum of enjoyment comes from somewhere.

What could be so interesting?

If you go over for a peek...

First you hear the noise. Like a school when it breaks and you can hear the happy roar of children playing.

You see lots of people. **Football, basketball, socializing, Botellón** (people casually drinking outside) and of course, smoking. There's art all up the walls. There are people sat in wooden stands and others on benches. **All walks of life** can be found, from musicians, entrepreneurs, students, workers, the old and the young; from the sophisticated, to the -let's say-drunk.



I can't help but feel welcome. Everyone is sharing one place. They're all happy. The sun makes everything look good.

Plus, I get the pirate vibe from the makeshift **DIY atmosphere!** And that's hard to find, I assure you.

My advice: grab some **beer** or cold **drinks** and a friend. Take a **ball**, **Frisbee**, **guitar** or **book** (if your alone!) and go. Go and **relax**. Soak it in.

If there was ever a day made for this, that day is Sunday. Starting early, like 10am, you can walk around El Rastro and see all the goods and wares they have to offer in what is Madrid's massive open market. I managed to get a guitar for only €50! And then head for **Cebada**.

At around 1pm, **live music** begins. It's often similar faces keeping the spirit alive, with the odd newcomer in between. But it has always been exciting. I've seen an amazing barbershop quartet, a comedian guitarist, a charming folk singing couple, improvisation, blues and some Spanish classics.



from plataformaarquitectura.cl

Here until 3am is the perfect place to grab a Mahou and relax in the sun. You're welcome to stay all day and I like to make an afternoon of it.

On some weeks you can also find the same space (with the music!) turned into a **political hive-mind**. People from all parts of the (Leftist) political spectrum set up stalls to give you information. From memory there were anarchist stalls, socialist stalls, ones on green issues, democratic reform and women's rights (hot topic right now). I've even gone there and found a local ecological food market mixed with talks on green consumerism and responsible business models. If politics is your cup of tea – this place is too. You can also sharpen up on your Spanish.

There are always things going on at El Campo de Cebada. Check out their [website](#) from time to time. Up and coming is a festival from the 4th to the 9th and a [TEDx Madrid Salon](#) talk on July 14th (here's [TEDxMadrid's official site](#))

You know you've found somewhere special when you stumble across a space for bringing a community together for fun and for raising awareness about important issues affecting everyone. If there is one voice here, for me it says '**we are a community and we can act**'.

Sports and music, beer and politics, speaking Spanish. I really can say no more.

So, if you want to be somewhere and not feel like an anonymous person at a bar or club, go there. You want to chat in the sun with friends, beer and music? Go there. I've had some amazing experiences and I think you'd be missing out. **So, go, go, go!**

El Campo de Cebada

[Web](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Events Calendar](#)

Address: Plaza de la Cebada, 4