

# The Rogues Gallery part 1: 4 Recurring creepers you may encounter in Madrid

The [Auxiliares de Conversacion en Madrid](#) group on facebook is a hub where the 10,000+ (of past, present and future) members of the expatriate community congregate online to share advice, refer clients to one another, or collaborate on creative projects. It's not uncommon to see the occasional rant about the failings of Spanish bureaucracy, nor is it uncommon to read a thread of comments stemming from ruckus caused by provocative trolls. Community members can recommend establishments that they hold dear, or warn each other about the programs, academies and individuals that they've deemed exploitative and untrustworthy. Group members have shared their experiences with some of Madrid's more noticeably **curious characters**.

**Below is information that I have gathered about these usual Madrid suspects.**

## 1) The Birthday Boy

The modus operandi of the Birthday Boy is neither creative nor is it subtle. This **shadowy figure** prowls tusclasesparticulares.com in search of English and Italian lessons. Upon contacting female teachers he insists on having the class at night and on his birthday after confiding in them that he is a new arrival to Madrid and is responsible for taking care of his sick father. The **Birthday Boy** claims to be lonely as he has no friends to celebrate his birthday with. He calls the women he preys on at unseemly hours, fixated on arranging the class at the rendezvous point of the *Estatua del*

*Oso y Madroño* in Sol. **Countless women have come forward on the Auxiliares group to warn our community about his unnerving behavior.** What remains baffling to me is that the Birthday Boy continues to use the same story and schtick despite it being what makes him immediately recognizable. One can only speculate about his motivations and backstory. Perhaps he truly is cripplingly lonely, has a sick father, and was magically frozen in time to believe that each day is the anniversary of his birth.

## 2) Marta the blotchy-faced bandit



Marta, a **parasitic criminal** who can be identified by a blotchy

mark on her face, responds to apartment listings on idealista in order to subtly **steal** whatever she can upon the viewing. She has been active for years and clearly makes a living this way. **This woman has been reported to the police** countless times and is apparently well known to them as a career criminal. Upon hearing her description I initially theorized that the blotch pattern that is the defining feature of her face was applied with stage make-up, in order to make it harder for the authorities to identify her. I gave her too much credit, my theory was disproven when one of her victims encountered her in the street months after the crime, and unless she was coming directly from a job, her face is indeed her face. Whether the pattern is a birthmark or battle scar is yet to be revealed. It appalls me that she continues to elude capture despite being both easily recognizable and a known threat. A member of our community, who is the real MVP, managed to take her picture when she entered his home upon realizing who she was. If she attempts to enter your home under the guise of a flat-viewing my advice is to slam the door in her face and tell her “ya sé quien eres.”

### 3) The Note Man



The Note Man is a **quirky** absurdity. He operates out of **Malasaña**, but has been sighted in all parts of the city. He can be recognized by his Dumbledoresque beard and tattered clothing. He is known to approach people and present them with hand-written notes. Although I have never engaged him myself I have observed him perform his gimmick from a distance in **Plaza dos de Mayo** and have taken a picture of him in action. My friends Diana and Sean once wandered into the Note Man's path and he shadily handed them a menacing note that said "**DON'T RUN**". His origins and motivations are an enigma. It is unknown if he simply prefers nonverbal communication or if he is incapable of speech. **Approach with caution.**

## 4) La Cabra de Plaza Mayor





The “goat” of Plaza Mayor startled me when I first visited Madrid as a tourist in 2008. I was not surprised to see that it remained active when I returned in 2012. I can’t imagine **Plaza Mayor** without this shiny-bodied, wooden-faced, goat creature. The cabra is a **parasite** that envelopes a human host. It screeches to attract attention to itself in the hopes that passersby will give it their loose change . What does this goat-human creature spend its money on? What becomes of its host? Does it produce shiny cheese? How does it reproduce? These valid questions to be answered upon further research.

**Any other people to beware of in Madrid?**

---



# Where to Take Your Mom in Madrid – Part 1

Wondering where to take your mom when she comes to visit you in Madrid? Here's a list of places (aside from the Prado and the Royal Palace) that are all hand-picked, tested and approved, if not by me then by my friends. All these ideas have definitely worked – and not just for my mom, but for a lot of out-of-town guests and other family members, too. Here goes!

## 1. [Madrid Food Tour](#), for a culinary experience full of insight



I can't recommend this tour enough. The guys at [Madrid Food Tour](#) are young and passionate about the city's food culture and history. They offer a variety of tours that take you through the city's most authentic neighborhood markets, tapas bars and restaurants. Plus you get to walk around the city while the tour guides give you insights into Madrid's history. I went on the [Huertas market tour](#) and wrote about it in [a previous post](#).

But you can check out all the tours [here](#) and then choose the one that appeals to you most! The tours are given in English and can be personalized if you have particular food preferences or needs. Just ask them! Another note – I recommend **starting out the trip with this tour** so your mom can get a better feel for the city and its gastronomic offerings.

## 2. [Bar Lambuzo](#), a family-run Andalusian restaurant





This is one of **my favorite restaurants in Madrid**. What makes Lambuzo perfect is that it is an authentic, Andalusian-style taverna in the heart of Madrid, run by a whole family, and each member has his or her role. For example, you'll find Pepe, the father, working the front and Luis, one of the sons, working the bar. They specialize in food from the South of Spain, so get ready for a variety of fried fish, rice dishes and other delicious treats. Lambuzo now has two locations, although my favorite is the one near Opera, which you can read more about in my previous post [here](#).

### 3. [Museums](#), Museo Sorolla & Thyssen in particular

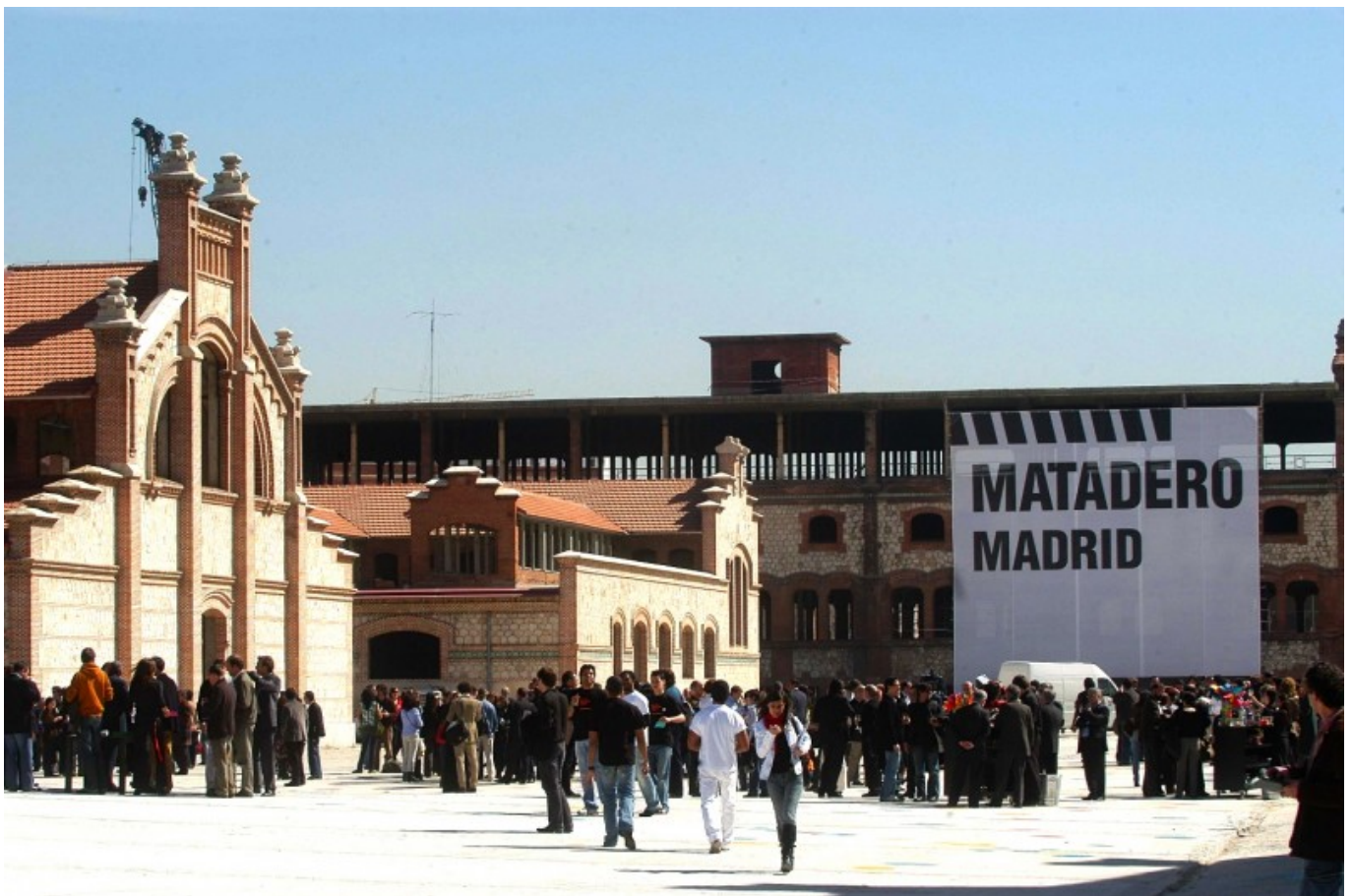


My mother has been to the **Prado and Reina Sofia** twice now and although they're of course worth visiting, she actually preferred the **Thyssen** (so did my brother and sisters) and **Sorolla museums**. While the Thyssen's collection is considered one of the best in the world, the Sorolla's is less



expected – it is in the painter's former home and houses an outstanding collection of pieces that you can see as you walk through the charming rooms. Here's a post on all of [Madrid's obvious and not-so-obvious arts institutions \(plus how to get in for free\)](#) so you can add more to your list.

#### 4. [El Matadero](#) & Madrid Río, for an off-the-beaten-path experience



I always jump at the chance to take friends and family to this place. A former slaughterhouse turned cultural center, **El Matadero** is a must for anyone into contemporary art and cultural activities. It is a huge space with different warehouses, each dedicated to their own type of art. For example, there's the theatre nave, the reading nave and the music nave, among many others. The Matadero also holds wonderful farmers' markets with local products and food trucks, as well as live music and activities for the little

ones. It's also situated along Madrid's river so if the weather is nice, I recommend taking a stroll afterwards or even hopping on a bike.

## 5. Casa Mingo, an old-school Asturian cider house



I have too many good memories of Casa Mingo, a century-old Asturian restaurant serving roasted chicken and cider by the bottle. Please take your mother here if she likes the good-old kind of restaurant that cannot be imitated no matter how hard you try. This is the real deal (plus it's incredibly cheap!) Here's a [previous post](#) I wrote on it.

## 6. Food markets, not just Mercado de San Miguel





Madrid has a thriving indoor and outdoor market culture. My mother's first experience with Madrid's market scene was Mercado de San Miguel, naturally. While I do suggest taking your mom there, don't forget about Madrid's other markets. On my mom's most recent visit, we went to [Mercado del San Ildefonso](#) in Malasaña and she was stunned by the architecture, vibrant food scene and open-air seating areas. Then there's [Mercado de San Antón](#) in Chueca which is never a bad idea for its gourmet food stands and amazing rooftop bar (check out other [rooftop bars here](#)). Plus, virtually every weekend there's an outdoor market (aside from **the Rastro**) and food festival in Madrid. Some of my suggestions are **Madreat**, **Mercado de Productores** and **Mercado de Motores**.



## 8. [Desperate Literature](#), a charming international bookstore



My mom adored this place, mainly because the owner, Craig, gave her a glass of whisky to drink as she browsed through the paperbacks and hardcovers, used and new. There's more to the story, though. [Desperate Literature](#) was opened in Madrid about a year ago by the guys who run a very special international bookstore in Santorini, Greece, where my mother had actually visited and my sister had previously worked for a summer. Maybe it's the music, the high quality book selection or the people from all over the world who run Desperate Literature with such care and love, or maybe it's because it's nestled in between the streets that bring you to Madrid's Royal Palace and Opera House.... I guess it just has that *je ne sais quoi*.

And if your mom is an avid reader, she'll get to donate the book she finished reading on her flight to Madrid and find herself a new one for the trip home! Here's a [full post on Desperate Literature](#).

## 9. [Toni 2](#) or [Bar Cock](#), for cocktails and more...



If you're wondering where to get a drink late at night, you can try [Toni 2](#), a sort of piano bar mostly for patrons of a "certain age" – only the classics are sung here, accompanied by a live pianist. It's an old-fashioned kind of bar with an extra long grand piano in the center (here's a full article on [Toni 2](#)). If your mother isn't so into the vintage karaoke scene, then I'd definitely recommend getting a cocktail at [Bar Cock](#), another beautiful old-fashioned bar off the Gran Vía. The only time I went here, Harrison Ford was there! Also,

across the street from Bar Cock is La Barraca, the restaurant mentioned next.

## 10. [La Barraca](#), for paella and other Valencian dishes



I've been asked a lot about where to get paella in Madrid and never knew what to say, until recently. One of Madrid's most active writers, [Dan Catalan](#), just discovered a place that his grandmother took him to in Madrid. It's a Valencian restaurant located in the city center called La Barraca, which specializes in rice and seafood dishes like paella, which he says is definitely mother-worthy. Just note that this restaurant is on the pricey side – maybe you'll take your mom here, but she'll have to pick up the tab... Check out Dan's post [here](#).



## 11. [Rooftop bars](#), like Casa Granada or Mercado de San Anton



Madrid has an impressive number of **rooftop bars** and we've written about 20 or so in our [4-part series](#). If I had to recommend just a few, I'd say [Palacio de Cibeles](#) and [Circulo de Bellas Artes](#) for stunning views, and then [Casa Granada](#) and [Mercado de San Anton](#) for great food and ambience. My mom loved **Casa Granada** back when it was in such desperate need of renovation that we actually felt our chairs were going to slip off the roof. It's since been refurbished so you'll still get the dining experience, just without the fear...

## 12. La Cava Baja, for “tapas bar” hopping



Lined with tapas bars and restaurants, La Cava Baja is the most happening street in La Latina. The first time I walked along it with my mother was during winter and it was very foggy outside. She said it looked like a fairy tale – as if a knight on a horse was going to appear riding through the mist. Even on a clear day, La Latina is a must if your mother (like mine) enjoys going into Madrid’s charming little bars and walking through the area’s old and windy streets. For specific recommendations on bars in La Latina, check out this article: [Coziest Wine Bars in La Latina \(with gluten free options!\)](#)

## 13. Flamenco, when in Spain...

I personally can’t recommend any particular flamenco performance in Madrid, but if you think your mother would



enjoy experiencing a tablao, our friends at [Madrid Food Tour](#) have compiled this list of [Where to See Flamenco in Madrid](#) and we trust them.

## 14. A nearby town, beyond Toledo



My mom went on a guided tour of Toledo a few years ago and didn't enjoy it so much because she didn't get to "roam around freely" as much as she would have liked. So while I'm not against taking a tour, I do think you should make sure to have enough time to wander around and explore the nooks and crannies of wherever you go. I've taken my mom on a number of day trips around Madrid and her favorite was when we drove to [Segovia](#) and [El Escorial](#) in one day. If you can get your hands on a car, I highly recommend it. You can also check out our article on [Madrid's 10 most beautiful surrounding towns](#) which all link to a description, map and transport details.

## 15. Pepe Botella & Plaza del Dos de



## Mayo, for coffee and tea



**Pepe Botella** has long been my **favorite café in Madrid**, as anyone who's ever visited me will already know. Its ambience, location and simple drink menu has always set it apart from the rest of Madrid's cafés, for me at least. I recommend going here either before or after lunch and sitting with a book or a newspaper, or just chatting away. When I go in the afternoon, I like starting with a **coffee or tea**, and then welcoming in the evening with a **glass of wine**. Here's a [full post on Pepe Botella](#).

**Any other suggestions? We'll be coming out with a part 2 so all recommendations**

are more than welcome!

## You'll also like:

- [Eating our way through Huertas with Madrid Food Tour!](#)
  - [Madrid's Obvious and Not-so-obvious Museums \(and how to get in for free\)](#)
  - [Madrid's 10 Most Beautiful Surrounding Towns \(and how to get to there\)](#)
  - [Madrid's best rooftop bars – part 1](#)
- 

## La Barraca, an upscale Valencian restaurant in downtown Madrid

It is easy to be skeptical about the quality of the seafood in Madrid due to its severe lack of an ocean; I would write off most locations that serve paella as tourist traps while advising visitors to seek out their paella in Valencia or elsewhere. However, after sampling the *arroz negro* at [La Barraca](#) I am more optimistic about the state of paella affairs in Madrid and strongly recommend this stellar location.



My first time visiting Madrid was in August of 2008. This excursion with my grandmother, “Safta” Lucy, was a present for my acceptance to college. At that time I never would have fathomed that shortly after finishing my undergraduate degree I would go on to call Madrid my home. Back then I was not nearly as adventurous of an eater as I am now – I have **vergüenza** that I had an aversion to seafood when Safta Lucy originally brought me to [La Barraca](#), an upscale location in Madrid devoted to seafood and rice dishes.

In the present day, 7 years later, Safta Lucy and her friend Semita were passing through Madrid together as a stop on their journey between Mexico and Israel. Lucy made a reservation for us once again at [La Barraca](#), which my stomach now had the refined maturity to appreciate. The walls of this establishment are decorated with **tasteful ceramic art** as well as photos of the **famous clientele**.





Our starters consisted of ***gambas al ajillo***, ***gallos a la madrileña***, and ***mejillones rellenas***. Garlic prawns are my favorite ***marisco*** and I jump at any opportunity to eat them during visits to coastal cities. The ***gallos*** were hearty and filling while the ***mussels*** were both meaty and delicate in texture.







For the main course we shared **arroz negro**, a paella dish served with squids with the rice blackened by their ink. The ink is a delicacy that contributes positively to the flavor and texture of the rice.



And of course dessert, a **cheesecake** to end on a sweet note.





## Info

[Website](#)

**Address:** Calle de la Reina

**Phone:** 915 32 71 54

**Reservations advised.**

## You'll also like:

- [La Maruca, a swanky Cantabrian restaurant in Barrio Salamanca](#)

Lambuzo, a family-run Andalusian restaurant in the heart of Madrid

- Cozy wine bars in La Latina (with gluten free options!)

▪