

Varsovia Bar – Cocktail o'clock in the run-up to Christmas

It's safe to say that bars in Malasaña are pretty much ten a penny. There's possibly more bars than beards, and that's saying something. What's not so common though, is to find a bar that looks super appealing from the street, yet for one reason or another you're yet to make it inside.

This had been the case with [Varsovia](#) for literally, months. I'd strolled past it almost daily either on the way to work or the gym, however, I'd never actually been. So feeling high on hump day vibes last Wednesday, I decided to suggest it to a friend for a long overdue catch up, and to see if what was on the inside was as engaging as the exterior.



It was rammed. This might be partly due to Madrileños being on a countdown to Christmas and therefore not really needing to have their arm twisted when it comes to a post work *copa*. But even at 8pm (a slightly weird time to be boozing here) – not quite after work, definitely not post dinner – but the atmosphere was buzzing.

We quickly discovered that it was one of the waitresses' birthdays so a chorus of *Cumpleaños Feliz* rang out as we entered, and a cake appeared from nowhere – which the lovely Virginia even offered to share. First impressions count and the immediate feeling was one of friendliness and very much that it was a local bar, for local people.

The cocktail list is extensive but we thought we'd pace ourselves and start with a gin. Virginia kindly recommended that we sample a Nordes (one of my faves hailing from the North West of Spain) which even came with a little tapa of manchego cheese.



I'm always beyond thrilled when you're offered a food freebie in Madrid, as whilst it remains commonplace in the south of Spain, it's a lot less common in the capital unless you're offered some bog standard olives. Manchego cheese has become a cheese of choice for me and for this reason alone I was delighted.

Gins slurped, we thought we'd then sample some of the hard stuff. A gin cocktail that was nameless (we explained that it was our spirit soulmate) and we were promptly presented with a concoction that was gin based but laced with juicy apple flavours.

Cocktails in hand, we were able to chat whilst appreciating the background tunes which weren't offensively loud , as can

so often be the case. I was told that come weekends, DJs frequently take to the decks and kick-out doesn't happen until 3am – leaving you plenty of time to get the party started.



Varsovia seemed to offer something for everyone. Cocktails for those looking for some for weekday (or weekend) glamour. As well as vermouth for those who like their tipples to be a little more traditional.

Don't make my mistake of walking on by. Stick your head in and give it a try (apologies for the terrible rhyme, clearly there's a frustrated poet in me itching to get out).

Varsovia Info

- [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** Calle San Andrés 33
- **Metro:** Bilbao

Crackers for Caramba

Is it just me or does the run up to Christmas turn into a complete whirlwind of eating, drinking and being very, very merry – and that's all before the main event has even started. By the time December 25th rolls round you're often fit to collapse thanks to the endless festive functions that have filled your diary from the get go of the month.

However, where's the fun in being all 'bah humbug' about the excuse to crack open the bubbles and swerve the gym? There's none. So in the spirit of embracing the delirium of December, I booked a dinner at [Caramba](#) with a visiting friend and headed out to celebrate the most manic of months.



[Caramba](#) hails from the well known Grupo Larumba; which means that a stylish setting is a guarantee. Close to Puerta de Alcalá, it's perfectly placed for locals and tourists alike.

Should you have spent the day pounding the pavements in an attempt to soak up the city you can easily grab a tasty treat at the end of your day.



Alternatively, it's an ideal place to enjoy a leisurely lunch before mooching around the nearby stores on Gran Via. The menu is a mix of Spanish traditional, modern classics and an Asian twist. For instance, we indulged in *croquetas de jamón* (a nod to Spain's finest), but we also had some delectable Japanese style prawns that remained on the plate for all of about 13 seconds.

Next up came a tuna tartare that made us feel slightly more virtuous on the old health front (having polished off some golden, crispy chicken fingers beforehand that were almost wholly responsible for me now reaching for the old spanx). We concluded the sumptuous savoury side of things with a beef tenderloin that was as tasty as any steak that I've sampled in Argentina.



However, what got my pulse racing was the quirky list of cocktails; of which my personal favourite was the rather

novelty named 'De Madrid Al Cielo' – a magical mix of violet flavoured gin, lime juice and egg white – it was as pleasing on the palate as it was on the eye. Speaking of all things aesthetically pleasing, the decor was as lovely as the almond cake that we concluded the evening with.

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If Madrid has something special, it's the spectacular sky it has, and we'll bring it put it on your lips.

Violet and Ginger Gin *

Lime juice

Peppers and Jasmine Orgeat *

Egg white

In a country where sadly the service often leaves a nasty taste in the mouth (anyone else feel like they have to beg for

a bill?!), our server, Cata, deserves a special shout out. Attentive but not overbearing, he asked my friend what her tipple of choice was (gin, I mean she's a Brit, it's in our DNA) and with no questions asked he whipped her up her own personalised cocktail. A nice touch, I'm sure you'll agree.

Caramba, much like other hotspots in the Larumba group, is certainly not a case of style over substance. The food was delish. The cocktails a delight. And the service – the jewel in Caramba's crown.

Caramba Madrid

- [Facebook](#), [Website](#) & [Instagram](#)
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Satisfaction Guaranteed at Santo Pecado

Among my friends it's no secret that in the summer you can't keep me in. I'm more than happy to play the part of being a social butterfly and my flat is rarely where you'll find me between the months of May to September. But as the temps start to drop and the dark nights draw in, it becomes harder and harder to prise me off the sofa and to step away from the cocoon of scented candles, red wine and of course, Netflix.

But you know, a girl's gotta eat. So when I heard about a new burger place that was literally a mere hop, skip and a jump from where I reside, I switched my pyjamas for a playsuit and headed out on the town.



The place in question was [Santo Pecado](#). At first glance it could easily be dismissed as just another place to grab a burger, but appearances can be deceptive and [Santo Pecado](#) is not your average burger joint. First things first, the owners are serious about the good stuff, aka – the meat. The beef hails from a farm in Toledo and there is nothing remotely McDonalds-esque here about what's between the buns.



All organic and responsibly sourced, the taste of the meat (having been cooked over carbon) was most definitely worth leaving the toasty confines of my casa. Next came the burger toppings. If you're indecisive (quite possibly one of my worst afflictions), trying to decide what was going to delicately rest upon my beaut of a burger was not an easy choice. Along with all your standard options, cheese, bacon and the like – there was foie gras on offer – meaning that you could quite literally pimp your dins so to speak.



Aside from the Toledo hailing beef, Santo Pecado boasts having Wagyu beef on the menu – see, I told you this was pretty far removed from Maccies. My friend assured me that the Wagyu option melted in the mouth and was essentially accountable for us not having room for dessert (although that could also be partly due to us indulging in both nachos and chicken fingers to start – both of which were equally delicious).



The restaurant loving folks of Madrid can be a tough crowd. In these post crisis days (of which we're all grateful for), you really need to have something that little bit special to cut it in an increasingly crowded market place. There are literally more restaurants popping up on a weekly basis in Madders, than Elizabeth Taylor had diamonds. So if you don't have that USP nailed – you'll struggle to survive. The fact that Santo Pecado has taken the humble hamburger and elevated it to gourmet status, suggests to me that they have what it takes.

Again, located in the ever increasingly popular barrio of Chamberí, there's no shortage of nearby bars, making it the ideal place to line your tum before a night of drinking, dancing and debauchery. If good meat equals good times in your language, halt that Netflix binge momentarily and binge on a burger instead.

Santo Pecado

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That's Amore at Aió

Following numerous debates, with numerous friends, I've come to the conclusion that Tuesdays are officially THE worst day of the week. Mondays, well, I can just about grin and bear them – especially if you're still all warm and fuzzy from weekend based fun.

But by Tuesday, the forthcoming weekend just feels way out of reach and if you're like me, it's the day when you decide to haul yourself back to the gym – usually after a couple of days of complete over indulgence.

In light of this newly held belief, a good friend of mine suggested that we should always have dinner together on a Tuesday; purely to take the sting out of its tail. **So last Tuesday we found ourselves happily ensconced at [Aió](#), my local Italian in Malasaña that could give any spaghetti serving spot in Sardinia a run for its money.**



To kick off proceedings we both opted for a Negroni to transport us to sunnier days spent in Italy, rather than a somewhat chilly and crisp November evening in Madrid. The spritz alone raised a smile and that was before the eating part of the evening had commenced, of which there was a lot.

Where Italian food is concerned, I can exercise next to no self restraint – suffice to say, we feasted. With such a tempting menu on offer, boasting all the well loved (and well known) classics, it would have been hard not to.



Like many other semi foodies, I've found myself arguing with pretty much every Spaniard on Earth regarding the fiercely coveted title of 'the best cuisine in the world' – because of course, it comes as no surprise that Spaniards (in general) feel that they deserve the crown.



But I beg of you (and please don't kill me for saying so) that in my humble opinion, Italian food is where it's at. Nobody does comfort food better and on a Winters evening, a big bowl of pasta feels like being enveloped in a hearty hug; and I'm all for a cuddle when it's cold.



We split a **burrata** and a **carpaccio** because quite frankly, any good Italian joint worth its salt should be able to deliver deliciousness on both. Aió didn't disappoint, both were inhaled without a second thought in all their luscious, lovely glory.



The starters were followed up with a glorious **gorgonzola based pasta dish** that was **peppered with prawns** and a **quattro formaggi pizza** (half of which came home with me in a doggy bag) as my eyes had clearly been bigger than my belly at this point.



Saying that though, is anyone capable of saying no to a cheeky

pudding? I'm evidently not, as we rounded off the previously nicknamed 'Bluesday Tuesday' with a **tiramisu** and a **gin tonic** for the road. We left with vows of friendship having been reaffirmed, appetites having been satiated and the edge having been well and truly taken off a potentially terrible Tuesday.

Aiό's charm is found in the home cooked feel of the food and the fizz in their Aperol spritz.

Info

- [Facebook](#) & [Instagram](#)
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Also check out a previous [Naked Madrid post on Aiό](#)