

Eating Our Way through Huertas with Devour Tours

On a recent chilly Saturday morning, James and I set out on one of the city's best ranked activities, Devour Tours. I had never been on a food-inspired tour before, let alone in a city whose food culture I'm quite familiar with. Yet the chance to meet local honey and jam specialists, indulge in chocolate-soaked figs and hop from butchers' shops to tapas bars while learning historical tidbits did indeed change the way I look at the city I've called home for the past seven years.





While [Devours Tours](#) offers a bunch of different gastronomic routes throughout the city, we went on the one I consider the most enticing – [Huertas Neighborhood Food & Market Tour](#). The home of the tour was Barrio de las Letras, a central neighborhood named after the famous Spanish writers who once resided, scribbled and drank together there in the 1600's, such as Cervantes, Lope de Vega and Quevedo.

Those of us who live here today know the neighborhood as Huertas, coined after the bar-filled street that runs through it. Unlike many areas surrounding Sol or Plaza Mayor, this barrio upholds a charming and unchanged spirit thanks to its thriving delicatessens, tapas bars and traditional markets. Offerings of old and new spins on local cuisine await you as you walk through its gorgeous cobble-stoned streets. And Devour Tours will let you in on all its secrets.



Our tour guide, James Blick, was not only an expert on Madrid's history and food scene, but also made each and every person on the tour – which consisted of a young Scandinavian couple, two parents from Alabama visiting their daughter on her semester abroad and a group of middle-aged women from Ireland – feel comfortable by asking personal questions, encouraging conversation and creating a wonderful vibe throughout the three-and-a-half-hour event.

I also want to note that my husband, also James, doesn't like cheese (weird, I know) and had told the guys at Devour Tours beforehand. His eyes lit up as he saw a plate of cured meat awaiting him at the cheese tasting, showing how they clearly make it a point to accommodate different tastes and dietary needs.



James (the tour guide) also engaged in friendly chit chat with all the local market vendors and shop owners – something quintessentially Spanish, I must add. Wherever we stopped for a story and a bite, James knew the locals by name and the stories behind their businesses; those close-knit relationships make the tour truly delightful and offer insight into the city's day-to-day life. This kind of rapport and insider know-how can only be attained with a great deal of time and care.



Overall it was clear how much attention was put into designing this tour; every detail was planned to perfection, from the food portions and variety to the timing and storytelling. We had more than enough tapas to fill us all up, yet paced and served up just right so we never felt too full to keep us from walking or having a few more bites at the next stop!



Since I don't want to give too much away, I'll have to wrap things up here. The last thing I'll note is that I had walked by absolutely every place we visited on the tour on many occasions. Most of these places I had never stopped to think about nor even enter.

Now I know that as I stroll along the streets I often frequent such as Calle Huertas and Calle Leon, I'll see a different side of my adopted city. I'll also enjoy a handful of new eateries that are now going straight to the top of my list.



Madrid's best Italian restaurant is not in the likeliest of places.



So whether you're coming through Madrid for a weekend or already live here, let Devour Tours show you around for a few hours, especially if you're a foodie like me! Buen provecho!

To book a tour or read some of their tips on where to find the best food in the city, check out [Devour Tours website!](#)

Soy Kitchen – a Fusion of Asian Flavors

Previously, I wrote about [StreetX0](#), a hip Asian fusion restaurant in Salamanca helmed by culinary wild child, David Muñoz. Though the food was intriguing more than delicious, I thought it was a decent and fun effort on Muñoz's part – I also thought I'd probably found the best Asian fusion in Madrid.

Then I went to [Soy Kitchen](#).



Located in a old area around Grand Via, in **Plaza de los Montenses**, Soy Kitchen looks unassumingly like a typical neighborhood bar. Inconspicuously sitting in a familiar list

of *cocktails*, *vinos*, and *vermut* sits ***tapas asiáticas***, the only indication that this place serves altogether different fare than most bars. The lower half of the establishment serves drinks and tapas, the upper portion is the restaurant. The decor is simple, but that's where the simplicity ends.



The popularity of Soy Kitchen rests solely on the machinations of proprietor and sole chef, **Julio**. Born in Shanghai and educated in Hong Kong, Julio's career in Spain began when he moved to Pamplona and won a prestigious tapas award. If you get a chance to speak to him, do. Julio is just like the dishes he serves: an eclectic mix of Asian flavors in a

thoroughly Spanish setting.



There is **no menu** (though they always check with the customer if they have any preferences/allergies), which means you are

left in the hands of the chef – and what incredibly capable hands they are. This is Asian fusion done by an Asian, and you can taste the difference.

The image above is a noodle dish that comes with a peanut sauce made with four different types of soy, a lovely mild spice, and many other little secrets that I wish I knew. The image below is a coconut filled with a medley of seafood, and the image below that is a whole garlic and soy lobster that was finger-sucking good.





Throughout the ten course meal (yes, Julio single-handedly cooks ten courses for each and every one of his tables), I was continuously surprised and impressed by the harmony of flavors. As I said earlier, I tend to be suspicious of fusions

because they often reflect an ignorance about the diversity in Asian cuisine.

Every bite was an explosion of so many different flavors from all over Asia I kept expecting them to clash or become too overwhelming, but they never did. Julio is a master chef and finds the perfect balance between spicy, sweet, sour, and savory in each of his dishes.



Julio serves up at least eight dishes, and if you're still hungry you can have an additional meat option of beef or fish. I had the beef. The chef himself came out to stir up the tender pieces in a hot pot and place the perfectly cooked meat on grilled rice cakes.

If you manage to get a reservation, my only suggestion is that you come hungry and stay for an after-dinner *vermut* downstairs – your palette will have gone around Asia and landed firmly back in Spain in a single night.

Info

[Facebook](#)

Address: Plaza Montenses, 4

Metro: Plaza de España

More Asian restaurants featured on Naked Madrid:

- [Ramen Kagura, Madrid's \(almost\) perfect ramen bar](#)
 - [Kintaro – Oy Vey](#)
 - [Sumo – This Japanese restaurant's name says it all](#)
 - [Tuk Tuk – Asian-inspired street food](#)
 - [Chuka Ramen Bar – Madrid's hottest ramen restaurant](#)
 - [Hattori Hanzo – Japanese food, straight up. No sushi.](#)
 - [Nippon 2 – top quality yet affordable sushi, finally!](#)
 - [Krachai – A cozy and elegant Thai restaurant in Alonso Martínez](#)
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Cerveceria Catalana, Tapas and Raciones in Barcelona

I sing praises about [Barcelona](#), a city where I am accepted as an outsider by Catalan people due to the nature of my surname. [Cerveceria Catalana](#) is a popular *raciones* bar and restaurant located on Carrer de Mallorca, just off of Passeig de Gracia. A location that I discovered initially when visiting Barcelona with my parents, I now make a point of dining at this establishment during my excursions to the Catalan capital city.



They feature a broad variety of typical *raciones* and a bountiful selection of beers, wines and cavas. I am passionate about shrimp in all of their forms, and have acquired a taste for *pulpo gallego*.



Cerveceria Catalana does not accept reservations and diners must wait patiently for their names to be called in order to be seated. In one instance of good fortune, the host allowed me to bypass the line due to my surname. Diners can watch the paella chefs work their magic while ordering drinks at the bar.



The tasteful decoration and elegant dress of the crowd could mislead travelers into thinking that this is a *pijo* establishment and above their pay grade—this is absolutely not the case. Plates are affordable, each ranging between 4-6€.

[Facebook](#)

Address: Carrer de Mallorca 236

Phone: 932 16 03 68

Metro: Diagonal

Also check out our post on '[How to get to Barcelona from Madrid](#)' (in which we suggest another great neighborhood bar!)

Bocadillo de Jamón y Champán- Sandwiches with Substance

If I have learned anything during my time living in Madrid, I know the importance of *jamón*. It is a staple in the diet here, and the variety of forms, cuts, and quality can be overwhelming. Luckily, [Bocadillo de Jamón y Champán](#) recognizes the significance of this and offers a **simplified menu of assorted ham sandwiches and an impressive champagne selection.**



Located a short walk away from **Alonso Martínez**, the hanging mini-lights adorning the exterior of the restaurant tastefully illuminate hanging ham legs and bottles of champagne behind the bar.



Settle in at one of the tall tables inside, and consider yourself lucky if you don't have to wait to take a seat! Space is coveted at **this cozy restaurant**, making it a destination more suited to small groups, or for those who don't mind posting up at the countertops opposite the bar.



Each ham sandwich is given a name and comes in different sizes; ideal for trying more than one! The **Telmo** is filled with a creamy cheese, caramelized onions, and peppers, along with finely cut ham of course, while the **Antonito** is accompanied by Manchego.



Nothing is left to chance, with crispy fresh bread toasted to perfection to top it all off. For those preferring the straightforwardness of ham without the accoutrements, Bocadillo offers servings of different ham cuts as well without the fuss of bread.

The sandwiches are all reasonably priced, varying from €3.5 for a half sandwich, to €7.5 for the whole enchilada, or bocadillo so to speak, and glasses of champagne start at €2.5 but you could spend up to €9.



Although other beverages are on the menu at [Bocadillo de Jamón y Champán](#), the champagne is the obvious choice, served in long-stemmed glasses. Available options, either by the glass or bottle, are advertised on a chalkboard, allowing you to choose based on the occasion.

There is nothing snobby about [Bocadillo de Jamón y Champán](#). It is the perfect spot to indulge in the quality hams Spain is so known for, without needing the background of a connoisseur, or a study guide of the history of jamón—you can simply enjoy the delicious sandwich put in front of **you feeling like a true**

Madrileño.

[Facebook](#)

Address: Calle Fernando VI, 21, 28004 Madrid

Metro: Chueca & Alonso Martínez

**Looking for other nice spots in Madrid?
Check out:**

Cozy Wine Bars in La Latina (with gluten free options!)

Toma Café: Fuel up, Feel hip

Best Date Ideas for Foodies in Madrid

Best Brunch on a Budget in Madrid

Tribuetxe, a Basque Pinchos Bar in Lavapies

I was recommended [Tribuetxe](#) by one of my former students, a stoic Basque Señora, who wanted me to try the cuisine of her region's chefs. I haven't yet explored Pais Vasco, but I have every intention to due to the hype surrounding their food culture. I sampled Tribuetxe's fried shrimp tapa during Tapapies, the competitive international food festival of the barrio—I was not surprised to learn later on that they had

won .





A fairly new location, situated behind [Mercado San Fernando](#) on Calle Tribulete, [Tribuetxe](#) is always *petado*. I clearly understand why after consuming four of their excellent pinchos alongside glasses of vino tinto. One of my new years resolutions was to incorporate more **eggplant** into my diet after sampling their **berenjena pincho**. I followed this up with **duck**, a skewer of **shrimp** and **octopus** and a skewer of fried merluza. Each filling pincho costs between 3€ and 3.50€.







[Mercado San Fernando](#) is one of my favorite hubs of community within the barrio. If you are exploring that area on a pleasant weekend afternoon, I strongly advise you to venture to Tribuete for your daytime drinking and snack endeavors.

[Facebook](#)

Address: Calle de Tribuete 23

Metro: Lavapiés

Here's a full article on El Mercado de San Fernando, entitled: ['Lavapiés and its market: the real food emporium!'](#)

Another Basque pincho bar in Lavapiés and La Latina that we love is: [Lamiak](#)

If you're looking for wonderful wine bars in La Latina, check out: ['The cosiest wine bars in La Latina \(with gluten free options!\).'](#)

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