Guide to all things Persian in Madrid, from restaurants to cultural happenings

One of the things I love about living in Madrid is that it's a bustling international city, and when it comes to food you can find just about any kind of cuisine your heart desires. As an Iranian American living in Madrid for over five years and founder of the **Madrid Persian Food Lovers Facebook group**, I thought it was about time that I shared this guide to all things Persian in Madrid.

Here's all of the knowledge I've gained about Persian restaurants and cultural happenings across the city:

FOOD

Banibanoo



Photo from Banibanoo – also in the feature image

For something totally different, check out this modern and casual restaurant, whose name translates to “Miss Bani” in reference to its young owner, Banefsheh. What’s unique about this restaurant is that it serves up dishes usually only found in Persian homes.

The menu changes regularly, but some things you might typically find are sweet rice with chicken (*shirin polo*), egg frittata with a mix of herbs (*kuku sabsi*), or eggplant dip with walnuts and strained yogurt (*kashke bademjan*), each with the chef’s own creative spin.

Order the combo meal, and choose three items from the colorful variety of items on display behind the counter. Stay for dessert and typical drinks, such as Persian lemonade or cucumber and rose water. **Also check out our previous review of Banibanoo**.

- **Facebook & Instagram: @banibanoomadrid**
- **Address:** Calle de las Mártires Concepcionistas, 19
- **Nearest metro:** Manuel Becerra

Mesón Persa Mr. Kabab



Photo from Mr. Kabab

Don’t be confused by its name. The kebab served at this traditional Persian sit-down restaurant has little to do with its fast-food cousin, the Turkish doner kebab. In Iran, the term kebab, or kabab, is used to refer to meat skewers cooked over an open flame. Mr. Kabab is a favorite of the Iranian community in Madrid, and in addition to delicious kebabs made of tender beef, lamb, seasoned ground beef (*kubideh*), and chicken marinated in Persian spices, you can also find traditional Persian stews and appetizers. The owner, Mustafah, also runs the Persian store next door where you can find a selection of Iranian dry and canned goods to make your own creations at home.

- **Website**
- **Address:** Calle de los Artistas
- **Nearest metro:** Cuatro Caminos

La Palmera del Retiro

I was so excited to learn that Mina Rashidi, the former owner and chef at my absolute favorite Persian restaurant in Madrid, has a new project. Her previous venture, the very traditional Tehran restaurant in Salamanca, sadly shut its doors in 2012 during the recession.

Her new Spanish-Persian tapas bar concept offers a limited menu, but everything as delicious as you'd expect from Mina. Among the Persian tapas she typically serves are an eggplant dip known as *kashke bademjan*, as well as stuffed grape leaves, or *dolmeh*. It's a great place to stop for a caña and a tasty snack after a stroll in nearby Retiro.

- **Website**
- **Address:** Av. de Menéndez Pelayo, 53
- **Nearest metro:** Ibiza

Sabor Azafrán



Photo from Sabor Azafrán

This restaurant is another great place to try typical Persian cuisine. It's a bit off the beaten path, in Madrid's Cuidad Lineal neighborhood, however it's well worth the visit. Try one of the delicious stews (khoresh), such as one made with meat, potato and split peas (*khoresh gaimeh*), or another with a mix of herbs, meat and red beans (khoresh gormeh sabsi).

Of course, as any good traditional Persian restaurant, this one also has all the variety of kebab you would expect, served up with steamed saffron rice and roasted tomatoes. This place

is great for large groups, as it has a very large dining room, and long tables.

- **Website**, **Facebook** & **Instagram**: **@sabor.azafran**
- **Address:** Calle del General Aranaz, 65
- **Nearest metro:** Cuidad Lineal

Stop Pizza



Photo from Mohammad Riahi

You wouldn’t know it from the outside, but this unsuspecting pizza and doner kebab take-away stand is a landmark for Madrid’s Persian community. Call ahead and the owner, Mehdi, will prepare you some traditional Persian *barberi* bread in his pizza oven. Or stop in any time for a pizza served on crust that has a texture suspiciously similar to *barberi*, giving the pizza its own unique taste. You can also find typical Persian

stuffed grape leaves (*dolmeh*). Finish it all off with a strong black tea served from a traditional Persian tea pot. Note: there's nothing Persian about the rest of the menu.

- **Website**
- **Address:** Calle del Dr. Santero, 6
- **Nearest metro:** Cuatro Caminos

Restaurante Esfahan



Photo from Restaurante Persa Esfahan

The most central of Madrid's traditional Persian restaurants, this one is located right around the corner from Plaza España. Its menu contains some Middle Eastern fusion, with dishes like hummus and pita bread and salmon with orange sauce. However, they also feature many of Iran's most typical dishes, and even some you can't find in other Iranian restaurants in Madrid.

Standout dishes are the herbed rice with roasted lamb (*bagali polo*) and barley soup (*soupe jo*), which is a common staple in any Persian home. The restaurant’s walls are covered with traditional Persian paintings and handicrafts, including woven carpets that cover the lower part of the walls. That, along with the traditional music played in the background, will make you feel like you’ve been transported to Iran.

- **Facebook**
- **Address:** Calle de San Bernardino, 1
- **Nearest metro:** Plaza de España or Noviciado

CULTURE

Tried the food, and hungry to learn more about Persian culture? Check out these cultural institutions:

Centro Persepolis



Photos from [Centro Persepolis]

A Persian cultural center that hosts cultural events, a bazaar where they sell Persian handicrafts, and organizes trips to Iran. They also host talks on Iranian art and literature, including poem recitation sessions in Spanish and Farsi.



Each year they organize a few concerts in Madrid, both by Iranian bands or those made to connect Iranian and non-Iranian music. These events have included some outstanding Iranian musicians, such as Shahram Nazeri, Hossein Alizadeh and Alireza Ghorbani to name a few.

- **Website** & **Facebook**
- **Address:** Calle Sta. María, 20
- **Nearest metro:** Anton Martin

Casa Persa



Photo from Casa Persa

The Casa Persa is an association dedicated to the diffusion and teaching of Persian mysticism, poetry and music. Every Saturday it hosts an improvized performance of Sufí music and dancing. The regular performers, Majid Javadi, Antonio Fernández and Carmen Sánchez, are often joined by other musicians from the community. It's recommended to reserve by phone ahead of time, as space is limited. There is an entry fee of 15 euros, and includes wine.

- **Website & Facebook**
- **Address:** Calle Silva nº5, 5ª planta
- **Nearest metro:** Santo Domingo or Callao

MORE

When it comes to finding Persian products, whatever you can't find at the **Mr. Kebab** shop in Cuatro Caminos mentioned above, you might also look for at one of the many **Arabic shops**

surrounding the Islamic Cultural Center of Madrid. Many of these shops carry Iranian products, including the coveted **sweet, black dates from the region of Bam**.



Photo from esmadrid.com

Interested in hearing an innovative blend of traditional Iranian and Flamenco music? Then check out the band **Baramu**, made up of Babak Kamgar, Pedro Pedrosa and Manuel Espinosa, collectively representing Iran, Extremadura and Andalucía. Based in Madrid, they regularly play events around the city. The trio mix traditional instruments from Iran and Spain to create a sound you'd be hard-pressed to find anywhere else in the world.



Photo from Baramú

La Tasca is a Spanish bar near Príncipe Pio run by a Persian family. There's no Persian food on the menu, but it's great for a beer and a tapa, and if you mention you love Iranian culture, you may get invited to some tea on the house.

If you make your way out to Alcobendas, a suburb northeast of Madrid, then you might check out **Nuevo Espacio**. It's a Persian restaurant founded by a former cook from Mr. Kebab that was so successful he opened a second location, also in Alcobendas. It's also worth noting that Alcobendas is home to a substantial Persian community, and hosts Persian New Year celebrations, among other cultural events throughout the year.

Know of anything else that should be included in this guide to all things Persian in Madrid? Let us know in the comments!