Mazál Bagels – authentic New York bagels in Madrid, finally

Whenever I would visit my home to New York my primary mission would be to devour as many real bagels as possible with a strong sense of urgency knowing that I would not be able to find them in my regular day-to-day life in Madrid. That has been the case until now.

I learned of **Mazál Bagels** via word of mouth, this new establishment opened in Mid-January. I jumped at the opportunity to interview its founder, Tamara Cohen from Philadelphia, to showcase her inspiring pivot from English Teaching to baking and entrepreneurship.



Tamara originally arrived in Madrid as many of us do, to teach English via the *Auxiliar de Conversacion* program back in 2015.

Upon realizing that Madrid was lacking in the area of authentic pumpkin pies at Thanksgiving, Tamara filled this niche by selling homemade pumpkin pies and other baked goods to the international community, taking orders at first via social media and later a website devoted to her craft called Bruja’s Bakery.



After the Thanksgiving influx of demand came to an end, Tamara contemplated other products that she could bake that would appeal to her audience year-round. With her creative spark ignited, she became a self-taught bagel baker, selling bagels made at home three at a time in the toaster of her tiny Madrid apartment. Tamara thrived in the digital space, releasing bagel-themed content to social media to garner visibility. Demand for her bagels skyrocketed and her small-scale operation quickly became a full-time job. This permitted Tamara to step away from the teaching sector to focus on her passion for gastronomy.



As an American Jew of Sephardic origins, Tamara was eligible for and proceeded to obtain Spanish nationality via the Law of Return after a complex three-year legal process. Now a citizen of her adopted country, Tamara set forth to expand her baking operations by opening Mazál Bagels in Madrid’s Chamberí neighborhood. Her storefront is equipped with a proper commercial kitchen, enabling the production of bagels in larger batches to satiate the masses with comfort food.



The origin of the name Mazál is that Tamara wanted her business to have a name that was easy to pronounce in both languages while holding cultural significance. “Mazel” is the Hebrew word for “luck” and mazál (spelled with the accent) is the Sephardic pronunciation of the word.

Tamara wants to make it very clear that true bagels have a long fermentation period and are then boiled and baked. “Bread with a hole in it is not a bagel.” As an ambassador of Jewish gastronomy, Tamara’s bagels are crafted with love, and the sandwiches she prepares are built with precision, with their presentation in mind.



I sampled an everything bagel, served with lox, capers, onions, and plain cream cheese. This bagel’s texture and flavor lived up to my expectations, outshining any competitors whose works that I’ve sampled here in Madrid or during my time in Paris.



Mazál offers the following cream cheeses: Herbal with dill and parsley, salmon, chive, and honey cinnamon nut. Her bagel selection includes sesame, poppy seed, plain, everything, and cinnamon raisin with daily special bagels such as jalapeño cheddar, onion, garlic, pumpkin, gingerbread, and blueberry.

> *There's a learning curve as Spanish people have heard of this product, but are yet to try it themselves and don't know how to properly eat it. Recently I had a customer come in and for a pan con tomate on a bagel. I wasn't offering this but it sounded like a good idea. I would like to find creative ways to blend the bagel with Spanish gastronomy.*

As I sat in the freshly opened shop, many joyous anglophones entered, thrilled to savor Tamara's culinary gems and Spanish people passing by would peer in to see what all of the commotions were about. Tamara would charismatically explain to curious locals what this niche foreign product is, in a flawless Spanish accent, which can be attributed to her

Madrileño partner who played an instrumental role in navigating the red-tape of opening a business.

What became clear was that at Mazál Bagels, Americans, local Spaniards, and the international community can gather in an environment where they can feel at home.


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Mazál Bagels

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