

# Lockdown diaries: Margit, founder of Walk and Eat Spain, tells us how the tourism sector has been affected

For anyone working in the tourism sector, the lockdown has been a devastating blow that has inflicted uncertainty for when things will pick up again, says tour guide and hospitality entrepreneur Margit Sperling. A number of tour guests have asked her to postpone their tours rather than canceling outright, which is heartwarming and tremendous financial help.

Margit is the founder of [Walk and Eat Spain](#), a neighborhood food tour company that gives tourists a window into off-the-beaten-path local eateries. Originally from Seattle, she has been living in Spain for 13 years. As a chef and gastronomy expert, she has generously shared some recipes for those of us seeking to emerge from quarantine with elevated competency in the kitchen. She's also recommended some of her favorite local businesses to support right now.

## What your life like just before the lockdown vs. today?

Before the lockdown I was busy doing food tours, researching new local bars, cafés, and markets to feature my tours,

calling travel agents to confirm groups, emailing potential guests with tour plans, going on Madrid adventures to create content for my social media accounts, having fun market lunches with friends and generally being active.

I launched my food tour business in April of last year and was on course to have an amazing 2020 with 8 tours booked for March and a bunch of tours on the calendar for April and May and into the summer. Everything has stopped. All my tours for this month and the next to have been canceled or postponed. Who knows what will happen in the late spring and summer, tourism high season. I haven't had any new inquiries in weeks. For my business at least it's just me, and I'm not faced with the awful reality of having to lay people off.

## **What does your street look like?**

The streets in my neighborhood are quiet. I live in Malasaña so it's pretty different as there are normally tons of people out, walking to a from the bars in the area, hanging out on the street and generally doing the noisy business of life in a dense urban area. The quiet is simultaneously calming and ominous.

## **Have you observed any random acts of kindness or uplifting things around you?**

A number of tour guests have asked me to postpone their tours rather than canceling outright which is heartwarming and tremendous financial help. I've been living in my apartment for about 5 years and I didn't know many of my neighbors. The

nightly applause for health workers and other service workers has given us this moment to connect. We all say “hi” and check in on each other from our balconies. It’s a really beautiful part of every day.

## **How are you coping and what are your tips for others?**

I’ve been trying to keep myself busy. I made a daily schedule for myself with time slots for different projects and also a bit of at-home exercise (Pop Sugar Fitness has a number of dance class videos that are actually pretty fun). I made a list of items that have been on the bottom of my To-Do list to see what I can get through. When I launched my website, I aspired to have a food and travel blog, but I had only done 2 posts in a year. I put myself on a writing schedule and intend to produce a post daily. Phone and video calls with friends and family help me feel more connected. Mostly, I’ve been cooking and recording cooking videos. I’ve also had to remember to slow down and try to enjoy the downtime. I’m trying to respect an 8 PM computer shut down to not just spin my wheels.

## **What is the first thing you’ll do once the lockdown is over?**

I’ll go have too many glasses of wine at all my favorite bars on Calle Palma in Conde Duque. And check on the roses in the Rose Garden in Parque del Oeste. And have ceviche and *botellines* in Mercado de Mostenses.

**If you could tell the government one thing right now, what would it be?**

Please make sure that the help for *autónomos* is accessible and far-reaching. Many of us are really hurting. We're working on a Plan B (and C and D...) but we need help.

**Do you recommend any small businesses that have remained open for us to support?**

**Panic:** Great bread, call in advance to reserve your favorite loaf. I am partial towards the *Hogaza Integral*, the *Pan de Molde* is unreal and the *Pan Semillas* is a crowd-pleaser. @panic\_madrid

**Quesería Cultivo:** Amazing cheeses, shops in Conde Duque and La Latina

**Mercado de los Mostenses:** This local market continues to serve its community, I implore you to comply with all health recommendations when navigating its stalls.

**La Carbonera:** My favorite neighborhood restaurant, is offering delivery options for their wonderful seasonal cuisine. @LA\_CARBONERA\_MADRID

## **Margit's recipes for aspiring lockdown chefs:**

I've been doing a lot of cooking. Mostly comfort favorites like baked pasta dishes, pureed vegetable soups, roasted chicken and vegetables. I also love baking. I'm trying not to just make tons of cakes and cookies... but, If you want a fun baking project that uses pantry staples, this apple bread is a good one!



# Apple bread

You can substitute apples for pears, a mix of apple and carrot or zucchini. And a note about measurements: You can take a girl out of America, but you can't take cups and teaspoons out of the American (or something). I use an 8-ounce measuring cup and measuring spoons I brought in my suitcase from home when I moved here in 2007. You can now buy all that stuff here. If you want, you can convert measurements to metric or use a "vaso chato" for the one cup measure and a little spoon (level) for the teaspoons.

## Ingredients

- 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup white flour (pastry flour is great here but not necessary)
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon baking powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  cups grated fruit (use the large holes on a box grater. No need to peel the fruit if it's in good condition, if using older fruit, you can peel off any imperfections. This is a great way to avoid food waste!)
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup sunflower oil
- 1 cup white sugar
- 1 egg

## Directions:

- Pre-heat the oven to 350/175.
- Mix the flour, salt, baking soda, and cinnamon and set aside.

- In a large bowl, beat the egg with oil. Add the sugar and mix well. Toss in the grated fruit and stir to combine.
- Add the flour mixture to the fruit mixture and mix until the flour is all incorporated (but don't overmix or the cake will be gummy).
- Pour the mixture into a loaf pan lined with parchment paper or a greased with a little butter/oil.
- Bake for 50 minutes. Test with a toothpick (a few crumbs clinging to the toothpick means it's done).
- Try not to eat it in one sitting.

## **Asparagus and mushroom tortilla for two**



Want to make a tortilla but don't want to fry potatoes? This one is great. Feel free to substitute asparagus for other vegetables like a thinly sliced zucchini.

## **Ingredients:**

- 1 bunch green asparagus, trimmed and cut into 1-2 inch chunks
- 6 mushrooms, thinly sliced
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- 4 large eggs
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup grated manchego or similar hard cheese (optional)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Olive oil

## **Directions:**

- In a medium, heavy-bottomed non-stick skillet sauté garlic until fragrant.
- Add mushrooms and cook at medium-high for about 5 minutes, or until starting to brown. Toss in the asparagus chunks and cook for a 3-5 more minutes until bright green and easily pierced with a fork. Salt to taste. You can add black pepper if you like.
- While the veggies are cooking beat the eggs in a large bowl with the cheese (if using) and a pinch of salt (if using cheese be aware that the cheese has a lot of salt).
- Take the veggies off the heat and add them to the egg mixture. Reduce heat to medium.
- Pour a little splash of olive oil to coat the pan and then add the egg and veggie mixture. Move the edges around to cook the egg, giving the pan some good shakes so it doesn't stick.
- After the tortilla is almost set (about 3-4 minutes) put a large plate over the skillet (bigger than the diameter of the pan) and flip it onto the plate.
- Add another little splash of olive oil then gently put the tortilla back into the skillet to finish cooking the other side.
- Cook until its set, about 3 more minutes (you can

carefully poke the center of the tortilla when it's done it feels solid when you press on it).

- Enjoy! Serve with a plate of thickly sliced tomatoes drizzled with olive oil and a bit of salt or with a big green salad and bread. Lots of bread.

[Margit's website](#)

**Check out the other [Madrid Lockdown Series](#) stories!**

If you'd like to get involved and share a compelling story from this ongoing chapter of history, reach out to Daphne Binioris ([\*daphne@veracontent.com\*](mailto:daphne@veracontent.com) ) and Daniel Catalan ([\*a96039@aup.edu\*](mailto:a96039@aup.edu))