

An insider's guide to Sol: avoid the tourist traps and beat the Christmas crowds

Madrid is a fantastic place to be at Christmas and nowhere is more festive, and more popular, than the area around Puerta del Sol, Ópera and Plaza Mayor. As well as the usual hordes of foreign tourists, Spaniards from all over Madrid and beyond flock to the city centre to see the Christmas lights, queue up at Doña Manolita for their lottery tickets, shop for nativity supplies in Plaza Mayor and take in the spectacle of Cortylandia.

If you plan on doing any of these things, my top piece of advice would be avoid going at the weekends, as the whole centre is utter chaos. During last year's December *punte* they even had to temporarily suspend metro services to Sol and make people get off at neighbouring stations, due to the sheer volume of people already in the plaza and surrounding streets.

Whatever day you embark upon your festive jaunt, you'll no doubt be in need of a break and some refreshment after a while. Christmas shopping can be thirsty work! Many of the bars and restaurants around Puerta del Sol are incredibly touristy or incredibly busy (or both!), so how do you find a decent spot?

Read on for our insider's guide to the hidden gems of the Madrid's centre.

If you want breakfast...



You'll need a decent desayuno to set you up for a busy day of shopping and sightseeing, and in time-honoured tradition you might head to [San Ginés](#) (Pasadizo de San Ginés 5) or [Valor](#) (Calle Postigo de San Martín 7) for some chocolate con churros. Go early if you do, and certainly don't visit at merienda time as the queues are out of the door. Alternatively, you could try one of these lesser-known spots for breakfast:

[Ferpal](#) (Calle Arenal 7)



Many tourists eye up the delicious meats, cheeses and other treats in the windows of this top-quality delicatessen, but few realise there's also a bar inside. They serve delicious coffee, croissants, bocatas and sandwiches, all for only a couple of euros. Kill two birds with one stone and pick up a few tasty Christmas presents while you're here. They normally close on Sundays but will be open over the festive season.

[El Riojano](#) (Calle Mayor 10)



Ok, so it's not exactly a hidden gem, but did you know that this famous pastry shop has a secret tea room in the back? If you have a sweet tooth and you fancy a more relaxing experience than the scrum at [La Mallorquina](#) (another must-see, although perhaps at a quieter time of year!), then this is most definitely your place. Read Laura's more detailed [post on El Riojano here](#).

If you fancy a drink...

Battling your way to the front of the Cortylandia crowd on a Saturday afternoon is enough to make anyone need an alcoholic beverage! (If you've never heard of Cortylandia I won't go into details other than that it's one of those Spanish traditions that you probably need to see for yourselves. Oh, and this year, it's penguins.) Here are a couple of my favourite places:

[La Torre del Oro](#) (Plaza Mayor 26)



If you've been shopping for your Christmas tree or the moss for your nativity, then this bar is extremely handy for a quick beer. The terraza outside is like any other, you need to go inside for the decor that makes this bar special. The waiters are all extremely jolly and dish out tasty tapas with every drink. An Andalusian classic hidden slap-bang in the centre of Madrid.

Matador (Calle de la Cruz 39)



Another bull-themed bar with interesting stuff on the walls, I love this place for its cosy atmosphere, great-value drinks and generous tapas. Its cave-like interior is pretty small so it can get crowded, but if you're lucky enough to grab a stool you might end up forgetting the shopping and spending all afternoon here!

If you're hungry...

There are times when tapas just won't do and you need something more substantial. Try one of these spots for some tasty grub:

[El Ñeru](#) (Calle Bordadores 5)



Cachopo at El Ñeru. Image from [El Ñeru's Facebook](#)

There are plenty of Asturian restaurants around this area but this one is my favourite. You can stand at the bar upstairs and gorge yourself on free tapas (try the cabrales cheese one) and dishes such as their magnificent cachopo, or you can take the weight off your feet and dine in the cavernous restaurant downstairs. It isn't the cheapest but it's worth it for the exquisite (and extremely filling!) food and excellent service.

Bar Lambuzo (Calle de las Conchas 9)



Image from [Lambuzo's Web](#)

If you fancy something a little lighter, stop by this delightful restaurant run by a family from Cadiz. From salmorejo to croquetas to a whole array of pescadito frito, everything on the menu is absolutely delicious, extremely reasonably-priced and will inject a little ray of Andalusian sunshine into even the darkest winter day. Check out Daphne's [post for more information on Bar Lambuzo](#).

If you need to get away from it all...

Even for the most die-hard Christmas fans, the crowds can sometimes get a bit much. All of these bars are just a short walk from Puerta del Sol and each provides a much-needed oasis of tranquility away from the masses.

Anticafe (Calle Unión 2)



Image from [Anticafe's Facebook](#)

Tucked away on a quiet street near Ópera, Anticafe is a great place to chill out with a coffee, caña or cocktail. The music

is great and the decor wonderfully quirky, so just sink into one of their mismatched armchairs, put your feet up and forget all about your festive to-do list.

Casa Pueblo (Calle León 3)



Image from [Casa Pueblo's Facebook](#)

This cosy bar is the perfect antidote to the madness of the Christmas crowds. Let the friendly staff whip you up one of their delicious mojitos or order a tasty slice of cake if you're in need of some sugar. If you're lucky you might catch one of their live jazz sessions too.

Plaza Menor (Calle Gómez de Mora 3)



Head to this fantastic little drinking den nestled right behind Plaza Mayor for a cocktail, a copa or just a cup of tea. The interior is a maze of low-roofed caves so grab a spot and maybe some of their yummy carrot cake and lose yourself for a couple of hours.

Know of any other hidden gems in the centre of Madrid? Let us know!

Taberna Alipio Ramos

I'm not so much a picky eater as extremely finicky about when my food arrives. There is a specific window between having ordered and the food actually arriving that is crucial to my enjoyment of a restaurant meal. If I ever find myself thinking

that, really, my order should have arrived by now, the meal starts to go downhill from that moment on – regardless of the dish that eventually arrives.

You could place the finest cuisine in the world in front of me but if the wait has been just *slightly* too long, you've lost me. The best restaurants in my book deliver the meal moments before the "where's our food?" thought has had a chance to cross anyone's mind.

In regard to The Taberna Alipio Ramos, it wasn't only their timing that was perfect.

An old friend and I had decided to take a long weekend break in Madrid. We wanted to say our farewells to another old friend who had died the Christmas before and to spend some time with his wife and two grown-up children. Our Galician hostess, Lines, had laid on a delicious buffet lunch for us and this was to be my introduction to Iberico ham – and what a wonderful experience that was. I have never tasted cooked meat quite like it and, together with French (Spanish?) bread, great company and a delicious salad, we were welcomed to Madrid.

We'd made no plans for our last day in the city but Chris had come armed with the addresses of two or three Galician restaurants which had been recommended by a friend in the United States. The only information on the scruffy piece of paper advised that the Taberna Alipio Ramos: "*...did a good seafood special*". We had no idea where Ponzano was except somewhere in the North of the city and a taxi dumped us in an unremarkable one-way street just off the main drag. None of the restaurants appeared open and had I been on my own, might well have gone round the corner to a Macdonalds instead.

But it was 1pm and that's the time us Brits need to eat. So eat we must.

The Spanish dine late and we quite surprised the young girl

behind the bar when we walked in. Entering a restaurant which appears unprepared for guests is a bad sign in my book.

“Yes, we’re open...but we weren’t expecting customers!”

Certainly in England, the sudden presence of people who want to eat in an otherwise empty restaurant seems to immediately engender resentment by staff at the intrusion and not least from an invisible chef heard taking it out on the pots and pans in the kitchen. Had this been an English establishment in an English town we’d probably have walked straight out, avoiding a sub-standard meal and surly service.

The waitress was business-like and showed us to a small area towards the back of the restaurant. There was only a Spanish menu (I don’t remember one in English) but somehow we successfully ordered drinks and the seafood special. Both arrived almost seconds later.

At this point in the review I am supposed to start listing the types of seafood contained in the special, the sauces, side salads and the dressings. But I can’t. I’m afraid you are just going to have to go there and experience it for yourselves. All I can remember are the Razor clams. Mmmm...mmm.

There must have been fish, prawns, yet more clams, possibly lobster, crab, (yes, I’m sure there was crab) but my only true recollection is that the dish the Alipio Ramos served up that lunchtime— and at lightning speed — was perfect in every way. Stunning fresh ingredients and simple sauces thrown into a pan and served up way before my stomach had even the slightest chance to grumble.

And at the end of the delicious meal, while toasting our dear friend, Paul — the reason for us being in Madrid in the first place — we couldn’t help but wonder if perhaps he just might have had a hand in guiding us to this place, filling our glasses, and preparing the food.

And I have one niggling thought that keeps running through my head when I think back to that lunch. Perhaps, just perhaps, the Taberna Alipio Ramos is not alone and that we could have eaten almost as well in a hundred Madrid restaurants and enjoyed similar fabulous cooking. So, even if I've reviewed completely the wrong restaurant (the card lists three names) I have absolutely no doubt you will eat well.

But for Chris and I it was the spontaneity and unexpectedness of such a great meal that made lunch at the Taberna Alipio Ramos so perfect. And isn't that what life is all about?

By Hugh Trethowan.

[Taberna Alipio Ramos](#)

Address: Calle Ponzano, 30

Metro: Ríos Rosas or Alonso Cano

Tel: 91 441 49 61

For more on our favorite *tabernas* in Madrid, check out:

- [Bodegas Rosell](#)
 - [Bar Lambuzo](#)
 - [Taberna Lamiak](#)
 - [Casa Mingo](#)
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Gourmet Experience at El Corte Ingles in Callao

Spain's major department store, El Corte Inglés, first opened in the 1940's. Today, many of us Spaniards love El Corte Inglés as it sells virtually anything under the sun, from your laptop and underwear to your mattress and plane ticket. A little outdated indeed, one of the stores decided it was time for a facelift – a few months ago, the Corte Inglés in Callao converted the top floor into **Gourmet Experience**, a tantalizing food hall with stunning views of Madrid's Gran Vía and the emblematic Schweppes sign.



But why is it so special it? First off, we have a variety of food stalls serving anything you can think of – sushi, pizza, quesadillas, pinchos and hamburgers, etc. – all in the same space. You can also have your meal at each individual stall, or in the main dining area where the views will take your breath away. On the same floor, there's also a supermarket specializing in international gourmet products, like sauces, jams and olive oil, just to name a few.





Here's a look at all the food stalls you can find at this gourmet heaven:

1. HAMBURGUESA NOSTRA



Hamburguesa Nostra is one of the most popular stalls. Trying to ask for a burger during the weekend can be a complicated task. And we're not surprised. HN offers us a variety of more than **30 types of meat, as well as sauces and unique breads**. Yet, surprisingly enough, it's easy to order! You just have to choose the burger meat you want and customise it with your choice of bread sauce and other garnishes. Then wait for the call so you can pick it. You won't regret it ... we always end up returning.

Prices range from 9€ for a basic burger to 13€ for a gourmet burger. For 0.50€ and 1€ euro you can customize it.

STREET XS0



Street XS0 serves modern and contemporary food. Chicken marinated in sweet chilli, smoked razor clams in olive oil and grilled tataki butter fish are just some of the wonderful dishes that you can enjoy in this great stand.

LA MAQUINA



If you're in the mood for traditional Spanish cuisine, then go to La Maquina, where you can find delicious tapas and pinchos. Tortilla de patatas, *pincho de jamón*, cheese, and delicious *bocadillos*. We love the food but we love the prices even more. What truly stands out about La Maquina is its simplicity and good quality food.

CENTRAL MEXICANA



One of our favourites is always crowded and don't get me wrong, I understand why. On the menu, we can find all types of delicious Mexican dishes, from traditional enchiladas to wonderful tacos. And let's not forget about the generous salads and nachos topped with cheese and guacamole. My favorite dishes are the chicken taco Coyoacan and the nachos with guacamole. The prices are very reasonable. You can get two tacos for 6€.

TSE YANG DIMSUM CLUB



If you love sushi and Japanese cuisine in general, then TYDC is for you!

AMORINO



If you've got a sweet tooth, Amorino will be your parries. Here you can enjoy ice cream, sorbets, waffles and pancakes with an infinite variety of topppings. They also serve great drinks, like milk shakes and frappes. Now they also sell macaroons that are out of this world!

AL CUADRADO



There can be no Gourmet space without a place for pizzas and the ones here are simply delicious. These are served "*al corte*" and "*al taglio*" as the Italians say, and the price depends on the weight. What we like the most about this pizza place is that they try to innovate, although always with a very Mediterranean touch.

HARINA



Perfect for breakfast, lunch, dinner or an afternoon tea. Many Madrileños already know this space because it's not the only Harina. We love how they mix the minimalist touch of their decoration with the more traditional cuisine. The breads and cakes are simply delicious. Our suggestion: "empanada de bonito" (tuna empanada) and a cup of coffee.

JUANILLO CLUB



A 1950's-style cocktail bar located in the heart of Madrid! Here you can enjoy traditional cocktails as the caipirinha, mojitos, bloody marries, cosmopolitans, etc., to the most avant-garde cocktails. In addition, you can accompany them with some delicious oysters. What else can you ask for?

ASADORES IMANOL



Here we can find a piece of San Sebastian and its traditional “pintxos”. We’ve fallen in love with their simple and unpretentious menu. Our suggestions: For cold pintxos, go with the Iberian ham and *boqueron en vinagres* (anchovies in vinegar). For hot pintxos, go with the croquettes and *solomillo* (pork tenderloin). When it comes to tapas: We are passionate about the *tortilla española* (Spanish potato omelet) and *huevos rotos con jamón* (french fries topped with two fried eggs and ham).

Plus, the prices are more than reasonable: 2.35€ and 2.50€ for any of the pintxos. 4.90€ for desserts. The price on tapas ranges from 8 to 11 euros.

So, what do you think? Are you going to leave Madrid without having had a gourmet experience atop El Corte Inglés?

Where: Corte Inglés Callao. 9th floor.

Metros: Callao, Sol and Gran Vía.

**The Table By: A new
gastronomic concept to bring
restaurants from across Spain
(including chefs and
utensils) to Madrid!**

The Table: a new gastronomic concept

Over the next six months, six leading restaurants from across Spain will come to Madrid for one month at a time. Along with them, they'll be bringing their very own dishes, cuisine, local products and chefs to offer a truly unique gastronomic experience in the heart of the Spanish capital. [**The Table**](#) calls itself a pop-up restaurant, although it's much more; it is a new gastronomic adventure that is taking the idea of "pop-up" to a whole new level.

THE TABLE

BY

ABASTOS 2.0



Image from: [The Table By](#)

The Team: [Better](#)

[Better](#) is the young and creative team behind [The Table](#). An unconventional agency that organizes pop up markets and events, Better's projects have one thing in common: they are unique, creative and innovative. On this occasion, Better is creating **The Table** in collaboration with Hotel Urso and Alejandra Anson, Director of Elite Gourmet. Together they have brought a new concept to Madrid.

The Place: [Hotel Urso](#)



Image from: [URSO Hotel & Spa Madrid](#)

Located in the center of Madrid, [Hotel Urso](#) opened its doors in August and its building dates from 1915. Urso was a fine choice to host such an event, as it is one of the most

beautiful hotels I have ever seen.

The Idea: Bring a whole restaurant to Madrid

The core idea behind **The Table** is essentially common – hotels invite star chefs to their kitchens all the time. However, Better has gone even further, as they thought: **Why only bring a chef when you can bring the whole restaurant?**

The Table invites restaurants to come to Madrid for a month to serve their dishes while using their own utensils and products, as well as promote their region's cuisine. What's more, the team at Better visits the original restaurant prior to the event to get inspiration from its surroundings and decorate the space at Hotel Urso accordingly. So it's as if you were transported to a restaurant in Galicia, Bilbao, Barcelona, Cantabria

What's on now: Abastos 2.0 from Galicia

For this first event, **The Table** is recreating Galicia. Until November 23rd, you can enjoy authentic dishes by two young Galician chefs, Marcos Cerqueiro and Iago Pazos, from [Abastos 2.0](#), a restaurant that has three locations: Taberna, Galphón and 0 Loxe.



The decor is also original, elegant and minimalist.



For this first occasion, the team bought bottles, buckets, plates, etc., and pasted them to the wall to reflect different cultural traits of the region.

Abastos is located in the wonderful city of **Santiago de Compostela**. Their kitchen is 100% Galician, and so is the wine. You'll notice that the products they use are not only fresh but also completely authentic. Here in Madrid, at Hotel Urso, you'll find yourself eating the same fish from the same fishmonger that the restaurant uses back home in Galicia, as they made sure to get it delivered to Madrid for The Table.



This is a “recogedor de migas de pan” (a crumb duster), the original one that the restaurant uses in their galician restaurant.

Galicia’s cuisine is known for its “materia prima” (raw material) which is why the tasting menu focuses on just a few star ingredients from the region, such as octopus (pulpo), pan gallego (Galician bread), and marisco (seafood). The restaurant has prepared two typically Galician tasting menus for the event. The first menu consists of **9 dishes (45€)** and the second, **12 dishes (60€)**. Wine is not included.

So, friends, if you want to enjoy a bit of different Spanish cuisine, do not miss out on **The Table**.

We will let you know about future restaurants, but we’ll give you a hint now: the next event is scheduled for December and will be Basque-inspired..

Details:

Make a reservation at [The Table](#)

[URSO Hotel & Spa](#)

Location: Mejía Lequerica, 8

Metro: Chueca or Tribunal

Bodegas Rosell, one of Madrid's best tabernas

Madrid is a fascinating city. We see so many new restaurants and bars opening up every week and yet, the city's good-old *tabernas* and more traditional bars are also thriving. When I crave the latter (which is quite often), one of my go-to spots is Bodegas Rosell.

Bodegas Rosell, one of my favorite old taverns in Madrid

[Bodegas Rosell](#) is one of those havens that I like to go to when I want to get away from the city's newer spots. Located close to Atocha, everything about **Bodegas Rosell** screams Madrid; you can breathe in tradition as soon as you walk in.

This wonderful place was founded in 1920 by the Rosell family, who converted a former wine shop into a neighborhood *taberna*. Today, **Bodegas Rosell** preserves the spirit of the old, traditional taverns that were so popular in another time. Its decor, food, portions, staff and service will take you a step

back in time.

The Decor

When you arrive and stand in front of its facade, you realize you're in a special place. The facade's tiles are a genuine work of art, painted by Alfonso Romero, who also painted altar pieces in the **Plaza de Toros de las Ventas** (Madrid's iconic bullfighting ring).



While the exterior oozes with tradition, the interior doesn't leave you unimpressed either. It's not a particularly large place, which makes it even more charming. The walls are decorated with guitars, photographs of the Rosell Family, bottles of wine, and of course, we can't forget about

the great map of the Community of Madrid. Can it be more traditional?

Bodegas Rosell is just perfect for a quick snack on a stool at any of the *barrel tables*; or for a quieter lunch or dinner at any of their *4-legged tables*. They also have private salons, so it won't be a problem if you are a large group.

The Food

Bodegas Rosell offers a traditional menu with generous portions. Specializing in meat dishes, one of their star dishes is *solomillo* (**pork tenderloin**). Another favourite is *bacalao* (**cod**) prepared *al horno* (oven-baked) or *rebozado* (fried in an egg and flour batter). And of course, you can also find excellent **canned seafood**, such as *mejillones* (**mussels**), *berberechos* (**cockles**) and *anchoas* (**anchovies**).



I'm not very fond of fish, but this *bacalao* was superb.



The *entrecot* was so big that we had to ask the waiter to split it in two. This pic only shows half.



The *albóndigas* (meatballs) were amazing!

My favorite thing to order here is the plate of *embutidos ibéricos* (**Iberian cured meats**) and the **cheeses**. You can have various types of cheese such as **Manchego, olive oil, Idiazabal, goat, sheep**, so I recommend ordering the **cheese board** for those undecided or who like all of them. The Iberian cured meats are wonderful, such as *jamón serrano, chorizo, lomo* and *salchichón*. I also recommend ordering the *tabla de ibéricos* (**cured meat platter with all of them**).

Of course we also have the typical salads and vegetable dishes for those who aren't so keen on meat or cheese.



Mixed salad

Special mention; the fantastic *tostas* and *tapas*; perfect to accompany a refreshing *caña* (small draft beer). My favorite tapa is the *boquerones en vinagre* (**white anchovies in**

vinegar).

The house specialties are also fantastic: My favorites are the homemade, absolutely delicious **croquettes**, not to mention the typical *callos a la madrileña* (**Madrid-style tripe**) and the Spanish *tortilla* (**egg and potato omelet**).



The house croquettes are wonderful, probably one of the best I've ever had in Madrid.

Despite all of these scrumptious dishes, Bodega Rosell's main attraction remains the **Cocido Madrileño** (a very typical and hearty stew prepared with garbanzo beans and all types of sausage) that they prepare by order.

Although the food menu is wide and varied, the dessert menu is smaller yet equally delicious; *leche frita* (**fried milk**) or *natillas* (**custard**) are some of the delights that Bodegas Rosell offers to end a delicious meal.



Cheesecake



Flan

All that's left to say is that if you're looking for an **authentic Spanish tavern**, then you've found it!

Price & Contact Info

The price range is varied and quite affordable. You can have a *tosta* or tapa for **€2.90** or a great steak for **€13.50**.

- [Websit](#) & [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** c/ General Lacy, 14
- **Phone:** 914 67 84 58

Here are some of our other favorite Madrid taverns & Spanish restaurants:

- [Taberna Lamiak](#) (Basque-style pincho bar)
 - [Bar Lambuzo](#) (Family-run Andalusian restaurant)
 - [Casa Mingo](#) (Asturian cider house!)
-

Los Chuchis Bar, Downright Good Food in Lavapiés

[Los Chuchis](#) is a sweet little bistro bar that sits on calle Amparo, one of those typically narrow and sloping streets in Lavapiés. The bar lures you in with its white-and-blue-striped awning and funky decorations. Although it seats no more than fifty people – you may have to squeeze in at the bar or pounce on one of the few tables – what it lacks in size, it truly makes up for in quality. If you are a foodie, then dining at **Los Chuchis** is a must.



Los Chuchis was opened by Scott, an Englishman who has called Madrid home for about three years. Scott not only owns and runs the restaurant, but the kitchen, too. **Los Chuchis'** cuisine is British at heart; many dishes are inspired by Jamie Oliver, although touches of Spain can be noticed in its ingredients, drink selection and ambience.



The first time I heard of [Los Chuchis](#) was when Spain's newspaper, **El País**, came out with an article on [10 Madrid Expats' Favorite Bars](#). A photo of **Los Chuchis** and **Scott** was featured at the top of the article. That photo stuck with me.



Since **Los Chuchis** had been lingering on my list for weeks,

James and I went for a *menú del día* (€11.50), which, I can assure you, is the best time to go. When I saw the menu, I was blown away by the number of succulent ingredients in each and every dish. Everything was so fresh and the presentation was delightful. I was smitten.

After much deliberation, here's what we ordered for lunch:

For starters, I had a salad with fresh greens, watermelon and fetta cheese. James went for the cold avocado soup.





For the main course, I ordered **hake fish with pesto and clams** and James got the **breaded veal with a lovely side salad of mango, tomato, avocado and onion**.





While we could have written this post right then and there, we decided that it was only fair that we try out **Los Chuchis** for dinner too. We just wanted to make sure it was as good as we thought it was. So we went back for dinner the other night and guess what? It was.

Dinner at Los Chuchis means *raciones* with friends

At night, **Los Cuchis** serves *raciones* (large dishes which you can either share or eat on your own). As we entered the bar on a Tuesday night, James and I were hit with all types of wonderful smells and instantly started gazing over at the patrons beside us, admiring the dishes they were devouring. The star dish that kept on coming out of the kitchen was the **potato skins with sour cream and hot sauce** (€8.50).

The menu also featured tantalizing concoctions such as **Stinking Bishop cheese with grapes** (€13,50), **Isle of Mull**

cheddar with chilli peppers (€13.50), oven-baked Camembert cheese with roasted garlic and rosemary (€12.50). Then there were the more classic dishes such as **roasted chicken with lemon and rosemary (€10.50)** as well as **arugula salad with roasted tomato, red onion and Stilton cheese (€11.50).**

James and I decided to share the **lamb chops with yogurt and mint sauce (€14.50).** James liked the sauce so much that he took it home with him in a coffee cup.



Los Chuchis should be on the top of your list if you're into food, want to satisfy your tastebuds and appetite, and like discovering unique little restaurants that truly surprise you.

I recommend making a reservation for lunch and dinner. You can eat at the bar too.

Price range & hours:

- Lunch: *menú del día* – weekdays €11.50 & weekends €14.50. From 2pm-4pm.
- Dinner: *raciones* – 20-25€/person. Kitchen opens at 8:30pm.

[Facebook](#)

Address: c/ Amparo, 82

Metro: Lavapiés

Phone: 911 27 66 06

Dating in Madrid for Foodies, part 3

Covered some art, some nice trees and parks but really **you are a foodie deep down inside**. If your stomach is empty you are not going anywhere except for the next all-you-can-eat buffet. The route is a collection of little restaurants to enjoy the tapas culture that exists in Madrid. Not going to beat around the bush, **this is my preferred type of date**. I love food and talking about food. It is also nearly impossible to not talk about food, what food your mother always cooked or what local delicacies freaked out your foreign friends the first time you told them the recipe.

This route is also the most flexible and varied. I have named some of **my favourite restaurants** below, which I have visited frequently and allow for some bites to eat without having to order the coffee and dessert. Go for **3 relatively different restaurants**, not only makes it more exciting for your taste

buds but it will give you a lot more to talk about. Now it might seem strange to invite someone to 3 different restaurants rather than just have the 3 courses at one.

However, we don't want this to be a regular run of the mill date; this has to be more memorable and make you change from place to place. Plus it makes splitting the bill so much less awkward as you can pay the first bill, your date then gets the next and dessert will be handled by the organiser. After all, if you make it to dessert you will want to leave a good impression.

ACT ONE. The Starter. Naïf.



Image from [Naïf's FB](#)

[Naïf in Calle San Joaquin 16](#) <m> Tribunal

This restaurant, just like your attitude to the first date, is understated and cool; not trying too hard to impress and it has a terrace. You will want to ask the waiter to put you on the waiting list if the terrace is full. For extra brownie points you will do this 10 minutes before you expect your date

to arrive so you already have a table waiting for him/her. The starters I recommend would be the **mini hamburgers** (that arrive multicoloured) as well as **the hummus**. All the starters are very nice and not too large. One quick warning—please do not order the white wine, as me and my friends have never had a positive experience. **Red wine** and **Tinto de Verano** (red wine mixed with lemonade) are both great alternatives.



Image from [Nanai's FB](#)

Alternative: [Nänai in Calle Barco 26](#) <m> Tribunal

No terrace but also has a very alternative, understated and cool interior to start your date. Have 7 dishes to share with the **tztaziki**, **cheese selection** and **hummus**, all ideal choices to start the dinner experience. This bar will be exhibiting different works of art in their restaurant during the month.

ACT TWO: The Main Course. Olé Lola or

Mercado de San Anton

Honestly both options are just as great. It depends on what you want for your date, if you prefer some intimacy then choose **Olé Lola** if you prefer variety and greater stimulus of the senses choose the **Mercado** (which has a great rooftop bar).



Image from Olé Lola on [google](#)

[Olé Lola in Calle de San Mateo 28](#) <m> Tribunal & Alonso
Martínez

This restaurant/bar is a very popular place on weekends so try to arrive a little earlier than 21h. The brilliant reason to go to this restaurant is how the chefs are fusing the traditional Spanish kitchen with more contemporary elements, my favourite being the **duck breast served with a puree of pear and pistachio**. The dishes range between €6 – 14 and are not too large in size to miss out on dessert. Adding the good selection of wines on offer, this restaurant boasts many advantages. Yet this still isn't the best reason to visit. The interior of **Olé Lola** makes it very easy for couples to have a little privacy. Small tables all situated one after another means you don't have someone left or right listening in on your conversation.



[Mercado de San Anton in Calle de Augusto Figueroa 24](#) <m>
Chueca

Here you have the hustle and bustle of a market with everyone looking for the right tapas to suit their appetite. The choice of food is enormous and if you are unsure of your date's culinary likes and dislikes, then this is the safer choice. Plus it is exciting; you can start with some sushi, move onto a **burrata** (mozzarella), head to a **salmon sandwich** and finish with **jamón**. The different stalls on the 2nd floor offer a great variety and it also induces some energy, as you have to get up off the table.

FINAL ACT. Dessert.



Image from [La Cocina de mi Vecina's FB](#)

[La cocina de mi vecina in Calle Corredera alta de San Pablo](#)
[15](#) <m> Tribunal

Our final destination is specifically geared towards delicious cakes, brownies and cookies. The **carrot cake** is one of the best that I have had in Madrid and all cakes are homemade. The service is friendly and helpful to make a recommendation if you can't choose.



Image from [Greek&Shop's FB](#)

Alternative: [Greek&Shop in Calle Corredera alta de San Pablo 9](#) <m> Tribunal

This Greek delicacy shop offers a brilliant Greek nut tart or *kataifi*, also a Greek dessert made of nuts and cream. The shop is a mix between a take away and a sit-down shop, so sitting inside is an experience in itself.

If you've missed them, here's "Madrid Best Date Ideas", the series, [part 1](#) and [part 2](#)

Taberna Lamiak, my favorite

Basque pintxo bar with Tuesday night wine tastings

If you've got the urge to fight those beginning-of-the-week blues, go to Taberna Lamiak on Tuesday nights for a free wine tasting and a few heavenly tostas. You will love it.

A few months ago, my sister-in-law, [Laura](#), told me I had to go to this bar called [Lamiak](#), and write about it for Naked Madrid. So I went, and ever since, Lamiak has turned into one of those bars that I actually have cravings for. This beloved Basque tavern has two locations—one near metro Antón Martín and the other on La Latina's most popular street, La Cava Baja. Both locations boast brick walls, tiny stools, a great wine list and delicious food.





[Taberna Lamiak](#) serves some of the tastiest **tostas** and **pintxos** I've ever had in this city (better than [Lateral](#)'s), and they only cost **€1,90 each**. The photos below can attest to the beauty and generous portions of these simple, yet delicious treats. And while a picture alone may speak a thousand words, I still hope you'll trust me when I say that the food here at Lamiak is so good, I sometimes wonder why it is that I ever eat anywhere else. It would seem the word is already out. **Lamiak's** divine offerings are no secret amongst Madrileños, who keep the place packed every night, clamouring for their weekly pintxo fix! Don't let the hungry throngs stop you, as this boisterous atmosphere is all part of the fun.

My favorite tostas here are the **queso de cabra con tomate y cebolla caramelizada** (goat cheese with caramelized onions and tomato) and the **empanada de confit de pato con pasas** (duck and raisin empanada). James' favorite is the **solomillo con cebolla y oporto** (pork tenderloin with onions cooked in a port wine sauce). James is a big meat eater, so he also orders the **jamón**

ibérico con tomate (Iberian cured ham with tomato), but there are plenty of **vegetarian options** here too, such as roasted vegetables, smoked salmon, cod and hummus.





Last Tuesday night, as I had my usual craving for Lamiak, James and I went to get my goat cheese fix at the location near Antón Martín, and were lucky enough to find a seat. At 9pm, mid-way through our second round of drinks and *tostas*, a man from [Vinocora](#) came up to us and said they were about to give a free wine tasting. Everybody in the bar got a free glass of Rioja to drink during the 30-min presentation. After that, a glass of that same wine cost just €1 for the rest of the night. What a lovely surprise!









[Facebook](#)

Locations:

- C/ Cava Baja, 42. Metro: La Latina
 - C/ de la Rosa, 10. Metro: Antón Martín
-

Best Cafe-bookshops in Madrid, Round 1!

Coffee shops selling books? Bookshops selling coffee? However you call them, here are five wonderful café-bookshops in Madrid where you can enjoy a cup of coffee or a glass of wine while surrounded by good reads. (See [round two](#) for more!)

1. [Ocho y Medio Libros de Cine](#)



This charming bookshop (featured in the cover photo) specializes in cinema, and boasts a cozy café and outdoor seating area. I love going here for a drink and a *tosta* right before [seeing a film](#) at one of the independent movie theaters just across the street. All screenings are in original version with Spanish subtitles. A tip: this makes for a great date night!

- [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** Martín de los Heros, 11
- **Metro:** Plaza de España

Also read: [Where to enjoy good film in Madrid](#)

2. La Libre



This is my mom's favorite cafe in Madrid. Why? Because a few years ago while she was visiting me in the dead of winter, we went in to warm up after a visit to the [Reina Sofia Museum](#) around the corner. When she ordered a coffee, the server said, **"No ma'am, I think you need a whisky."** He couldn't have been more right! They also have nice teas and snacks to nibble on, from breakfast pastries to empanadas.

- [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** c/ Argumosa, 39
- **Metro:** Atocha

3. La Infinito



This little café-bookshop lies on a corner in Lavapiés and serves up coffee, books and art on a daily basis. Not only does it have a welcoming ambience and lots of light streaming in through its tall glass windows, but it also throws great events, from **micro-theater performances** (one of which took place in the café's bathroom!) to popular weekend brunches.

- *image from La Infinito*
- [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** c/ Tres Peces, 22
- **Metro:** Antón Martín & Lavapiés

4. [La Fugitiva](#)



Books are the centrepiece at this cafe, and I love how its window seats and tiny bar are nestled between towering bookshelves and overflowing tables displaying bestsellers and rare reads. La Fugitiva has all you need from a café (coffee and sweets) and all you could ask of a bookstore – readings, talks, workshops, and of course, that distinct smell of books.

- [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** c/ de Santa Isabel, 7
- **Metro:** Antón Martín

5. Tipos Infames. Libros y Vinos



Wine and books? Quite a killer combination in my opinion. Located right off the popular Calle Fuencarral, this trendy bookshop, café and wine bar is a favorite of many in Malasaña. Tipos Infames offers a much appreciated rest from the bustling shops and streets in the area. It has a lot of seating area, a full bar and high ceilings, making it feel open, friendly and comfortable. It's a great place to go with friends for a quieter conversation in the afternoon. Plus they throw fun events, so make sure to follow them on social media.

- [Facebook](#)
- Address: c/ San Joaquín, 3
- Metro: Tribunal

Keep reading Round 2 of Madrid's Best Cafe-bookshops

And if you're looking for a few of our favorite cafe in Madrid *without* books:

- [Pepe Botella, a coffee place where you can think](#)
- [Toma Café, fuel up, feel hip](#)
- [Acid Café, seasonal, minimalist and just good coffee](#)

Chocolates are nice (but this first date is better) Part 2



So you don't like Da Vinci or Michelangelo and don't see what the fuss is about with graffiti artists like Banksy. I love that shit but not every girl is interested in it either. Again we want to take our date to **3 different places**, it keeps momentum flowing and builds new experiences between you two in a short time. This will not turn all pumpkin dates into shining diamond-studded carriages of awesomeness but it is harder to get bored when you are going to new places.

For **part 2** we will be exploring the **scenic route of Madrid**. Madrileños are crazy about their terrazas, so we will explore the skies and sights of this beautiful capital. The great thing about this is that you let the views do the talking rather than you. Any anecdote about the buildings you see always helps. One is that **Palacio de Cibeles** with its fountain of the Greek goddess Cybele is the unofficial party spot of Real Madrid. Any cup win will see thousands of supporters descend onto the roundabout. As with all routes you will be able to walk from one to the other. This route is one for the summer, which in Madrid you have plenty of. The views however do have their price and you pay something like a terraza tax. It is a price gladly paid.

Act One: Retiro park



Palacio de Cristal

It is an easy pick but a great place to start with because you get away from the noise and hectic life of the city. You invite your date for an aperitivo to the café (on paseo Venezuela) next to the pond in the centre of the park. However you shouldn't linger too long with the drinks. After the first copa you should take your date to **Palacio de Cristal** in Retiro or show them the now abandoned zoo that used to be in Retiro. For both do a little research and make sure how to get there because you can get easily lost. My personal favourite is the rose garden located towards the side of Av. De Menendez Pelayo. It is incredibly impressive when you walk along and are met by a resident peacock. It will also take you to the restaurant. If the sun is setting though take the route to **Palacio de Cristal**.

What time: 19h-20/21h

Alternative: no just take him/her to the park.

Act Two: [La Castela](#) in Calle del Doctor Castelo, 22



This is a truly excellent restaurant. You have two options when you decide to have dinner here. You can eat at the front of the bar and join in with the crowd. Definitely my recommended option to get the adrenaline pumping after the quiet walk. Even with a minimal Spanish you will get by and be able to order the local delicacies. You can also book a table for two and will be seated at the back, which is much more quiet and intimate. The last time I went a boyfriend gave his girlfriend a necklace for their anniversary (I took the picture if you were wondering).

What time: 21-23h

Metro: Take a walk / Ibiza

Alternative: Platero & Co. A very stylish bar that is located right next to La Castela. The restaurant was designed the Catalan interior designer Inma Rull. Very nicely done.

Act Three: [Azotea](#) on top of **Circulo de Bellas Artes** in Calle de Alcalá, 42



Yes it is crowded with tourists, Spanish and everyone looking for a view but it still is an incredible view. On a first date confirmation is just as important as impressing. Further, walking by foot will give you an excuse to pass by la **Plaza de Independencia** at night down to **Palacio Cibeles** and up **Calle de Alcalá**, which is one of the most beautiful walks in Madrid once it's gone dark. Once you arrive step ahead and pay for both entry tickets (3 euros each). It is a small token of chivalry, especially if you just split the bill 50/50. Once at the top you really have two main choices depending on your comfort level. On the right going down the stairs is an area where you can sit/lie and it is easier to get closer to one another. On the left are high seats with small tables. Daring wins the game in my eyes and I choose the right. It makes your intentions clear in a subtle way.

What time: 23h to 02h

Alternative: [Room Mate Óscar](#) in Plaza Vázquez de Mella 12



The terrace at the top of this hotel has just been renovated. Good thing too because the white plastic surface has been replaced with wooden planks. The special thing about this terrace is that it has a pool but if you fancy a dip you will need to reserve. The terrace has a nice feel due to the artificial grass spread across the ground. Also not a cheaper option as a gin tonic will cost 12 euros and a glass of wine 5 euros.

Metro: Gran Via / Banco de España

Read on...

- For more **first date ideas in Madrid**, check out **part 1** of this article, [Flowers are nice \(but the first date is better\)](#)
- For more on **rooftop terraces in Madrid**, check out our series on [Madrid's Best Rooftop Bars](#)