

La Bicicleta – Ultramodern Cycling Café and Workshop in Malasaña

It was love at first sight for me with La Bicicleta. [La Bicicleta Café](#) fills a void in a city filled to the brim with bars serving coffee, but sparsely populated with the type of homey workplaces that I hold dear to my heart. There is something comforting about spending hours holed up in a cafe, calmed by the stop and go of an espresso machine. I like to search out spots where I can stake out territory and sit while minutes tick into hours, my fingers hammering at a keyboard or eyes scanning over pages of a book. La Bicicleta is one such spot where this is possible and encouraged and might I say, all the rage. It fosters productivity and sociality and the consumption of caffeinated and alcoholic beverages: what could be better?



[La Bicileta](#) bustles at pretty much any given hour of the day. While the sun is still out, it functions more or less just as it bills itself: a cycling workplace and café. You will see people perched in the windowsills with their laptop and coffee within equal reach. Cyclists come and go with their bikes. They barge through the front door and head downstairs to where they store or repair their rides. All of this while waiters bustle about with salads and tostas, cañas and coffees. Once the sun goes down, it becomes progressively unlikely to find anyone doing work. The place metamorphosizes into a social hub with so much traffic that the entryway is hardly ever free of spillover customers.





Coffee drinks come in all shapes and sizes. The standards are available, but innocent intentions of ordering a cortado may be redirected upon a glance at the spunkier options on the menu like the oreo frappuccino, for example. As can happen at the Bicicleta, one may feel torn between alcohol and caffeine. Options abound on both listings. The food landscape includes sandwiches, salads, tostas, a [pricey] brunch menu on the weekends, and a display case stocked with baked goods: cookies, cakes, and the like.



As Yogi Berra once said: “Nobody goes there anymore. It’s too crowded.” Well, not quite. There are still plenty of people at La Bicileta; but Yogi was right, it’s definitely crowded. Real estate is hard to come by despite the plethora of sofas, elongated work tables, and quaint table and chair setups available to patrons. While it attracts a determinedly international crowd who may not (probably are not) natives to Madrid, it feels like that good ol’ neighborhood joint on the corner.

Info

[Facebook](#)

[Web](#)

***Where:** Plaza de San Ildefonso 9 (also known as Plaza del Grial o Plaza de la Niña)*

***Metro:** Tribunal, Gran Vía, Noviciado*

Just around the corner, you’ll find these amazing spots:

Mercado de San Ildefonso – Malasaña’s new food palace

Naif: King of Burgers

Greek & Shop in Malasaña

La Paca – the perfect Malasaña café

Aiò – Sardinia, pizza and bike haven in Malasaña

Cycling in Madrid: A Beginner's Guide

Madrid was, for quite some time, a cyclist's nightmare. While other cities around Spain and Europe were busy laying down networks of bike lanes for the growing number of urban cyclists, Madrileños dug in their heels and dismissed their city as an unbikeable exception—too many hills, they said, too many cars, and nobody's accustomed to those two-wheeled bastards in this kind of traffic.

But over the past two years, the culture has started to change. The ayuntamiento spearheaded a series of projects designed to embrace commuter cyclists, encouraging them to take to the streets that were once considered unnavigable death traps by the locals. The crown jewel of their push was [BiciMad](#), the public bike-share program modeled on similar ones in Paris, London and New York, which was unveiled last Spring in a shaky but ultimately successful launch. This was accompanied by a network of shared-use bike lanes slapped together throughout the city center, distinguished by a speed limit of 30 kilometers per hour and bike symbol painted on the asphalt, serving as both a safety measure and awareness campaign for honk-happy drivers not used to sharing the streets.



A recently-painted street last Fall, heading South through Malasaña. Priority bike lanes were part of the Ayuntamiento's push to make Madrid a bike-friendly city.

While not without its problems, the program has played a fundamental role in legitimizing and normalizing cycling in the capital. It's now safe to say that Madrid is a bike-friendly city. The cycling infrastructure is growing by the month, the mindset of the public has changed, and there now seems to be broad support for this healthy, fun, and sustainable means of transport.

I would also argue that there's a more subtle benefit to cycling here. Riding through the narrow streets of the central barrios offers a deeper sense of the layout of this city, a richer understanding of the space and distance that get warped behind car windows and destroyed in the tunnels of the metro. It's as if there were a rhythm behind the chaos of Madrid and cycling sets it all to the proper RPM, revealing a song too slow to be heard walking and too muddled at anything faster.

I hope you hear it too.

Every time I see an adult on a bicycle, I no longer despair for the future of the human race.”
– H. G. Wells

1. Learning (or re-learning) to ride a bike



Bici-Critica, a once-a-month protest to reclaim the streets for all types of alternative transport, features bikes and riders of all types.

Maybe you haven't ridden a bike in a couple years. Maybe you haven't done much of anything in years, and your physical activity has dwindled down to drunken dancing and raising toasts. That's no problem at all. You can learn to mount a bike again in no time, I promise. As they say, it's just like riding a bike: your motor memory is still intact, all you have to do is reactivate it. I'd suggest renting a bike or taking out a BiciMad and going for a lazy spin in a calm area, like Retiro or the Madrid Rio. You'll fall back into the groove of things almost immediately, and then it's simply a matter of building up your confidence.

As for those who have never learned to ride a bike, there's a [bike program run at the Matadero](#), the community and art space that can do no wrong. This program teaches adults of all ages to balance and ride using a safe, practical method. Even if you end up throwing your practice bike in the river in a fit of rage, you still get to hang out at the Matadero. There's nothing to lose. I ask that you consider this clichéd but ever pertinent proverb: "The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago; the second best time is now." Cycling is the sports equivalent of literacy, something most of us take for granted but which some just didn't learn in their youth. If you've never managed to get your feet off the ground and wobble into a steady balance on two wheels, that's fine. I've never eaten poutine. Let's not let these become deathbed regrets.

2. Choosing a type of bike

The type of bike you ride is a matter of lifestyle and personal preference, but keep the following in mind:

Madrid has hills. Calle Segovia, which climbs from the river into La Latina, is the perfect example of the plateaued nature of this city, but it's far from the one. These "cuestas" pretty much rule out anything as heavy as a cruiser (though

you do see some people rocking them, whom we all salute.) This could also make a Fixie a bit less appealing to some, though they are by no means uncommon here. My neighborhood is awash in them with more showing up every week, proving once again that, along with Edison bulbs and burritos, Madrid catches on to transatlantic trends a decade after they explode.



A trail weaving through Casa de Campo, just outside the city center. These types of trails are only really accessible on mountain bike.

Madrid has dirt trails. Some of the best biking available in Madrid is around Casa de Campo and the foothills outside the city. There are beautiful, secluded routes that weave through those shrubby Spanish oak trees, but the rocks and dirt pretty much limit them to mountain bikes. It's worth considering how important this is to you, and to balance it with drawbacks that might come with a mountain bike. If you have the money or space to afford more than one type, make this one of them.

Madrid has long-distance rides outside the city. There are some great bike routes that spread out from the center which might be more difficult without a traditional geared setup. Again, this is personal preference. I'm partial to my classic road bike with the suicide shifters and a good derailleur (price, flexibility, quality) though again, you have options. Fixies are sexy, good in the city, and their riders are avid defenders of the intimate handling they provide, but they might prove more difficult on these longer stretches.

Madrid has thieves. If you want to get a nice bike, or nice bike parts, be prepared to buy the security measures for them. Your Brooks saddle won't last a week if not properly secured. It's best to buy mid-range or lower if you plan on leaving your bike intact on the street, and if not you should have a plan to secure your things. It's not uncommon to see cyclists taking off their seats and carrying them into bars and shops with them.

Madrid has a bike-share program: If you only see yourself using your bike from time to time and mostly in the center, this could be your best option. Joining the program is covered [in another post](#), but be aware of their many drawbacks, from understocked stations to the limited range across the city.

3. Buying a bike

Once you know what you're looking for, you should decided if you'd like to buy a new or used bike, though realistically a used one is your best option. It just makes more sense in this theft-heavy city, particularly for the low-paid, transient English teachers that read this blog. I wouldn't pay more than 400 euros for one, though it's possible to pay much less. My early '90s Peugeot, for example, is in perfect shape and cost around 200 euros. You can go even cheaper.

The most common sources for used bikes are these Spanish equivalents to Craigslist:

1. [segundamano](#)
2. [milanuncios](#)



Mountain bikes are a good option in Madrid. This photo was taken in El Pardo on a Sunday ride, while I struggled behind the dirt trail on my road bike.

When searching online, pay attention to the style of bike you want and the rough frame size that fits you, which can be easily [calculated here](#). It's probably best to search with the bike type (tipo), frame size (talla), and possibly the brand (marca) as the main keywords. For example, search: "Bici carretera, talla 60." Here's some useful vocabulary when searching for a bike:

size – *talla*

brand – *marca*

type – *tipo de bici*

Fixed gear – *piñon fijo / fixie*

Road bike – *Bici carretera*

Racing bike – *Bici carrera*

Mountain bike – *Bici de montaña*

Be sure to ask about any potential problems or peculiarities the bike may have. It's best to go out and check the bike yourself, ride around a bit, and talk to the owner. It's not nearly as intimidating as it might sound. Be sure to haggle.

If you're looking to buy new, there are bike shops all over this city, so you have some options. This guide probably isn't your best resource, but I guess I'd recommend a few places in the center, like FixedLand (bikes as low as 400 euros), Bicis Noviciados, and La Calmera, but there are also some specialty shops with fancier bikes and bigger price tags peppered throughout Madrid. Do some research and look around.

4. Notes on Law, Safety, and

General Advice

- **Buy a lock:** This is so important that it could be a category by itself. If you plan on locking your bike up on the street at any point, a solid U-lock or something equally strong is your only safe option. Securing your frame with a cable lock is like putting “do not eat” on your tupperware chicken salad in the office fridge. It’s also smart to lock up your wheels with a cable and to unclip your lights. People will steal anything they can.
- **Helmet:** They’re not required by law yet but they’re a damn good idea.



Things to never leave your house without: U-lock, helmet,

cable lock, rear light, front light and bike tool.

- **Lights:** You are required to have a red back light and a white front light after dark according to Spanish law. It's also just smart. when I first started riding my bike through Madrid, I was given advice by a seasoned professional to wear "*más luces que un puticlub*." You might also consider a reflective vest if you are doing longer commutes in poorly-lit areas (they're cheap, most shops have them), though as far as I've researched they aren't required by law.
- **Bells:** Bells are actually required by law according to most sources I've come across, but they're a good idea regardless. Shouting doesn't seem to disperse pedestrians, but bells have a way of parting crowds like the Red Sea.
- **Hand signals:** Learn "right turn," "left turn" and "stop." These are particularly useful in heavier traffic or if a car is riding your ass.



Wine and biking can be a dangerous mix without moderation. Cuidate.

- **Cars, cabs and scooters:** Drivers have gotten much better in

the past couple of years, but there will always be jerks on the road. Don't let them intimidate you and know that you have the right to occupy the entire right lane of a road if you so choose. Let them bitch.

- **Pedestrians:** These are worse than cabs and scooters combined when it comes to bike awareness, so be very careful when they're roaming about. They cross the street by sound instead of sight in Madrid, so if they don't hear you coming, they won't even look up before stepping out in front of you. And, inevitably, it will be your fault.

- **Priority Bike lanes:** Frequently the priority bike lanes (30km with a bike logo) just end in the middle of nowhere, or suddenly jump over to a different lane with no warning, or let you out into a four-lane roundabout. Some cars pretty much ignore them. When you're in them you have the right of way, but if it's possible and safe, hang to the right so cars can pass with more room. You don't have to, but it's polite.

- **Streets without designated bike lanes:** It's best to stick to the far right lane (without going into the taxi-bus lane) and to occupy the entire lane so that cars don't try to split the lane with you. Occasionally they'll honk, but you have every right to be there. If you're feeling polite you can pull further right and let them pass, but this is not an obligation.

- **Bus-Taxi lanes:** It currently is not permitted to use these lanes on a bike.

- **One-way streets:** Try to ride with traffic at all times, or else dismount and walk your bike. This city has some very inconvenient one-way streets to discourage cars from going through the center, and unfortunately the rest of us get caught in the mess. The police have started to fine cyclists going the wrong way recently, so be very careful, particularly in on Corredera Baja right next the Plaza San Ildefonso (right

in front of La Bicicleta). It's a trap!

- **Traffic lights:** If you have time and feel safe, you should weave to the front of the cars for both a better position when the light turns green and for visibility reasons. (Be careful though—watch out for pedestrians and cab doors that might swing open.) This move is perfectly legal and sometimes there is even a designated space for bikes and scooters in front of the traffic. Aside from this, remember that you're considered “un vehículo más” on your bike, which means you have to obey all the same traffic laws as a car. The fine is 200 euros if you get caught running a light, 120 euros for running a stop sign.

- **Sidewalks and pedestrian areas:** It's illegal to ride on the sidewalks, so do it sparingly or not at all. I've heard rumors of a law excepting sidewalks wider than five meters, but enbicipormadrid.com offered a reward for anyone who could find the law and as far as I know, nothing turned up. Do not ride down Montera, the mall-like part of Fuencarral, or any other pedestrian walkway unless you are going very slowly or walking your bike. It's illegal and you can get ticketed (though I've never seen cops care too much here.) Usually there's a good parallel route, try to find that.

- **Roundabouts:** Unlike the rest of this city's bike and car infrastructure, I find these dangerous and try to avoid them at all costs. Some are five lanes wide and nobody seems to follow the rules. If you feel unsafe approaching a roundabout, abandon ship and walk your bike on the sidewalk. Remember, be a cyclist or a pedestrian, but try not to be both; it confuses drivers.



This new bike lane, cutting through Casa de Campo, is part of a growing push by the ayuntamiento to normalize cycling in the city and expand the existing infrastructure.

- **headphones:** Illegal while riding, even in one ear. (91 euro fine)
- **Cell phones:** Illegal while riding. (91 euro fine)
- **Cabs and car doors.** Watch out for these. If you want to ride to the front of cars waiting at a red light (which most do), ride slowly and carefully between the cars, and make sure they see you. If not, just hang back and wait for the light to change. Both are legal. Use your judgement.
- **Rain:** Rain makes this city slick. Very slick. Cobblestones, smooth white paint, big metal grates, pretty much everything is out to hurt you in the rain. For example, I fell this last weekend after a street cleaner hosed down the plaza to a squeaky-clean perfection, and my tire slipped out like socks on a linolium floor.
- **Drinking and riding:** Drinking and riding is a dangerous game. Know your limits and try not to do it at all. If you get caught weaving around drunkenly, you can get charged up to 500 euros.
- **Choosing a route:** Some bigger avenues have priority bike lanes but they're not always the fastest or safest route. Usually there's a parallel road that's calm and just as fast. Learn your routes.



The Royal Palace at Sunset, after a long bike ride through the city

- **Crossing Gran Via:** This one is oddly specific, but it took me ages to figure it out so I thought I would share: the best way to cross Gran Via from anywhere to the North is San Bernardo. Even if it seems out of the way, it'll save you time navigating through people or one-way streets going North. There is really no other way to cross that street without dismounting or riding on the sidewalk. The other direction (toward Malasaña) has many possible routes.

- **fines in Madrid:** Cops aren't everywhere and most of us have broken these rules from time to time, but these are the fines you can expect if you get caught doing any of the following:

- *Riding on the sidewalk: 60€*
- *Riding at night without lights: 60€*
- *Riding with headphones in: 91€*
- *Riding while on a cell phone: 91€*
- *Riding through a stop sign: 120€*

- *Riding the wrong way: 150€*
- *Running a red light: 200€*
- *Blowing positive when drunk: 500€*

(source: enbicipormadrid.es)

While you should take all of the above into account, it's really not as complicated as all that. Thousands of people of all types go riding through this city every day, and the numbers continue to grow. Get out there and join them!

Want to know more about cycling in Madrid? Check out these articles:

[Electric city-bikes in Madrid, a city that's turning biker friendly](#)

[4 Best Biking Routs in Madrid for tourists](#)

[Where to break a sweat in Madrid](#)

4 Best City Biking Routes for Tourists in Madrid

There is no such thing as the best city in the world (even though New Yorkers like to claim the title). From what I can see, however, Madrid is getting pretty close. You've probably noticed that Madrid's public bike system, [BiciMad](#), is fully up and running. Madrid's public bikes are **electric-powered** which is awesome because you barely break a sweat while going up the

city's many hills. This also means that you can see Madrid's most emblematic buildings, plazas, parks and river all in one day, on two wheels.

Now that cycling in Madrid has been made easy, **here are four beautiful cycling routes in the city-center!** I've attached a **google map** with each route, but you really can't get lost. Combine these routes as you wish, as they're not too long and meant to be enjoyed, so you can feel free to wander off and explore. Happy cycling!!!

If you want to know how [BiciMad](#) works, check out our post: [“Electric city bikes in Madrid, a city that's turning bike-friendly”](#)

1. Atocha – Paseo del Prado – Recoletos



This first route starts at "*Ministerio de Agricultura*" or Ministry of Agriculture building. This tour is very easy to bike because the streets are flat and wide. There is also a pretty boulevard which goes all the way up Paseo del Prado and Castellana. You will see some of the main buildings in the city like the Prado Museum, Caixa Forum and the National Library. You'll also pass through three of the most important and well-known squares (plazas) in Madrid: Neptuno, Cibeles and Colón.





Find the route on the map:

2. Cibeles – Alcalá – Retiro Park



While New York and London have, respectively, Central Park and Hyde Park, we *Madrileños* have **Retiro Park**. Maybe it's not that famous or was never featured in a Hollywood production, but we are as proud as can be of our city's beautiful green oasis. The route through Retiro is also really easy to bike, however, you can start it at "*Plaza de la Independencia*", also known as Puerta de Alcalá, to make it even easier. In Retiro Park, you'll see some of Madrid's most stunning places such as "*Palacio de Cristal*" (main pic at the top) and "*Retiro Lake*" where you can rent a rowboat.





Find the route in the map:

3. Palacio – Casa de Campo



What I like most about this route is that you get to leave the city for a while. We first start at the Madrid's Royal Palace and take a ride around to enjoy it in all its glory from front to back. Then, we head for "*Casa de Campo*", where there are always groups of mountain-bikers going up and down the park's infinite paths. If you're not familiar with Casa de Campo, it's much bigger than Retiro, and looks more like a forest– it has a great [public swimming pool](#) and lake where people do water sports. Of course, there are bars too. As for this route's level, I wouldn't say it's easy one but it's definitely doable. It all depends on how far you go into "*Casa de Campo*" .





Find the route in the map:

4. Matadero – Madrid Rio – Principe Pio



Just a few years ago, the **Manzanares River** was surrounded by an ugly highway. Thanks to Madrid's former mayor who spent who knows how much money on its renovation, now we are enjoying "*Madrid Rio*" to the max. Starting at **Principe Pio**, you will enter Madrid Rio to bike along different paths and stumble upon fun (and free) activities like a "*tirolina*" or zip-line, playgrounds (for adults too!) and one of Madrid's urban beaches, a.k.a. sprinklers, that we love when summer comes. Then you will end up at one of my favorite spots in the city, [Matadero Madrid](#), an old slaughterhouse which is now an awesome and free cultural center. Here is a link to our post on [El Matadero](#).





Find the route in the map:

Electric City Bikes in Madrid, a city that's turning bike-friendly

Madrid's public bike stations had been lonely for weeks, but yesterday morning we woke up to see the much-awaited electric bikes finally parked in their slots! So here's a look at all you need to know about getting tickets, finding stations and participating in Madrid's rising bike scene.

Although far from being comparable to Amsterdam, Madrid is in the midst of a fast transition towards becoming biker-friendly. In recent years, bike lanes have appeared on main streets such as **calle Alcalá** and **calle Mayor**. Community biking groups and blogs such as [En Bici Por Madrid](#), [Ecomovilidad](#) and [Ciclosfera](#) encourage city biking culture in Madrid by providing info on the best cycling routes, workshops and how to lock up your bike properly. [Bici Crítica](#) organizes a free meet-up on the last Thursday of every month at 8pm, when cyclists gather at **Plaza de Cibeles** for a pleasant ride around the city. Now the new **electric city bikes** should be another fun way to explore, get through traffic, and tackle those relentless hills!



What's BiciMAD?

[BiciMAD](#) is an initiative launched by Madrid's **Ayuntamiento** (City Hall) to provide affordable, public rental of electric-powered bikes, allowing city-dwellers to move around Madrid on **eco-friendly wheels 24/7**. Electric-powered means there's a small engine that helps you pedal, especially when starting off or going up hills. The engine automatically shuts off when you reach a speed of 16km/hr. The first phase of the initiative consists of 1,580 bikes and 123 stations, in the following neighborhoods: Center, Retiro, Salamanca, Arganzuela

and Moncloa.

Important links:

- BiciMAD's [web](#) and [facebook](#)
- [Madrid city's official info on BiciMAD](#)
- [Google map of all the electric bike stations](#)
- Interactive [map of Madrid for bikers](#), including calmest streets and bike paths

How does it work?

All transactions—registration, payment, getting and charging your card, bike pick-up & drop-off, and reporting of problems—can be carried out at each **bike station**, where you will find a machine (**tótem**) with instructions in English and Spanish. What's more, you'll be able to check availability and routes on your mobile device: IOS, Android and Windows P, and download a handy **app**.

How much does it cost?

Price depends on if you buy an annual pass (**abonado**) or not (**no abonado**).



For **abonados**, you will have to pay **25€/year** and only **15€/year** if you already have the monthly **abono transporte** (public train and bus pass), plus an additional cost per ride of 0,50€-0,60€ (see all rates above). For **no abonados**, also called *usuarios ocasionales*, rides up to an hour cost **2€-4€**.

All rates include insurance. Sanctions are established for abuse or misuse.

How do you sign up & get your card?

Whether you're an **annual user** or an **occasional user**, you still need to sign up. Here are the steps:

1. Sign up to get your code:

- [Online](#)
- At any station's totem
- By phoning 010
- In person at Línea Madrid offices

2. With the code, pick up your card (*tarjeta*) and charge it at the station

*As an annual user (*abono anual*), you're automatically part of the public bicycle club of Madrid ([Club de la Bicicleta Pública de Madrid](#)), a virtual forum for other biking fans to find out about events, workshops and exchange info.

How do you use it?

- Once you're signed up and put money on your card at the station, you're ready to start riding.
- To pick up the bike, there should be a Green light indicating that the bike is available. Swipe/hold your card close to the light until you hear a beep. Then gently remove the bike from its slot.
- To drop off the bike, there should be a red light at the slot meaning it's empty. Push the bike in until the light turns green, hear a beep and *voilà!* Just make sure that the bike is stationed well by pulling at it slightly.
- If it's blue, that means that the spot has been reserved by another user.
- If there's no light, it means that it's disconnected and you can't use it.

What happens if you return a bike and the station is full?

- Check in so you don't get penalized, and then you will be given 10 more minutes to go to the next station.

**We'll be updating this post as the new initiative sets in... stay tuned!*

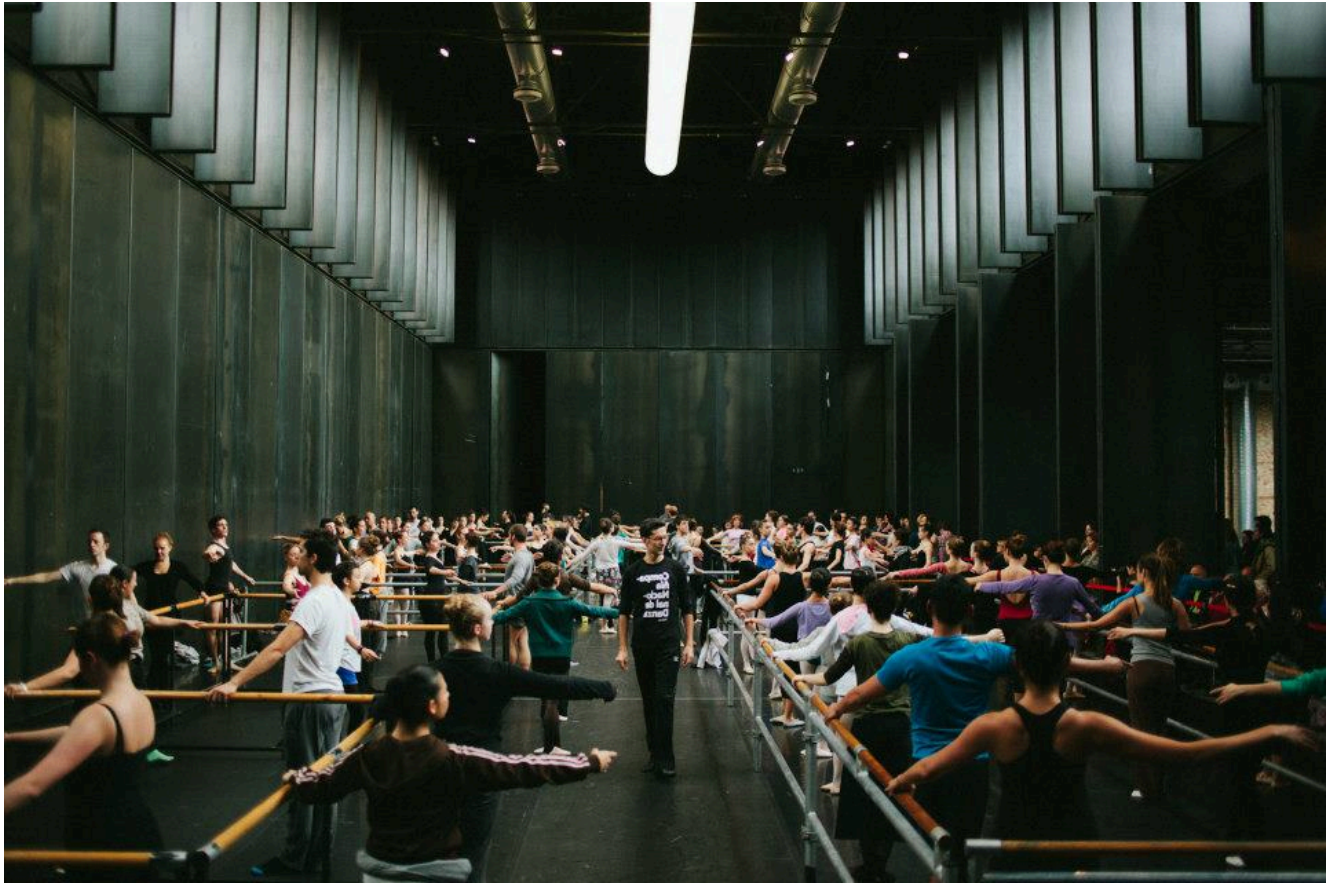
And if you're looking to take these city bikes out for a spin, check out: [4 Best City Biking Routes in Madrid](#)

El Matadero, a slaughterhouse turned phenomenal cultural hub

If you're looking for something as impressive as the Prado or the Reina Sofia, but off-the-beaten-path, it's [El Matadero](#). The perfect place to spend a leisurely afternoon alone or with friends in Madrid, here you can calmly diddle daddle through a maze of **art exhibits** and **designer market stands**. Then, enjoy a *café con leche* or a cold Madrid brew outside. **El Matadero** has it all—from Spain's national dance company performances to international innovation conferences.

What is it?

Just a 10-minute subway ride from Sol, **El Matadero** is a culture/innovation hub and architectural treasure. The **former slaughterhouse** (hence, the name) is now a public-private entity offering book-readings, theater and music performances, photography exhibits and independent cinema on a nightly basis, most of which are **free**.



on día internacional de la danza, image from Matadero's Facebook page

Not to be compared with any other space in the city, **El Matadero** is an ambitious project and the fruit of a most innovative and modern Madrid. **This cultural center** also provides ongoing activities for families as well as a space for local innovators to develop their projects, all of which you can see while wandering through its enormous labyrinth of warehouses (naves) and open work spaces.



There are six **naves**, each used for a different purpose. For example, the **Nave Español** holds theater and dance performances. The **Cineteca** showcases international and independent film festivals. The **Música Nave** holds concerts and recording studios.



The **old oven** has now been usurped by the café, **La Cantina**, that sells locally produced food and wines, and has the kind of atmosphere that makes you want to stay forever. Plus, it has one of the **best terrazas** (outdoor seating areas) in all of Madrid, in my opinion at least.



When the weather's nice, my husband and I like to go there by bike; it's a breezy 30-minute ride from *Principe Pio* along Madrid's river (*Madrid Río*), which the city has done an amazing job of revamping. The river is now lined with bike and pedestrian paths, unique bridges, playgrounds (for grown-ups too!), street workout equipment, sprawling green zones and sprinkler areas. Plus it's a straight shot to **El Matadero**.



Last summer I took my sister, Amanda, from New York, to **El Matadero** for the whole afternoon. We first slipped into what used to be the slaughterhouse's fridge area, where an odd fire exhibit was being showcased. When we stepped out onto the courtyard, a group of flamenco dancers were *zapateando* (stomping) and smoking in a circle, getting ready to go on stage in the **Nave Español**. Then we parked ourselves at **La Cantina** for a glass of wine and a plate of delicious vegetable dishes made from **Madrid's local gardens**.

Amanda was amazed how all of this was so open to the public, and that it wasn't even packed. She said that if this were to be opened in Brooklyn, lines would be stretching to Queens.

History

El Matadero was built in the 1920s as a pig slaughterhouse, and was turned into a cultural center in 2006. When they renovated the slaughterhouse, the goal was to keep the original columns, the beams, the ovens and exterior structure in tact. For example, the first room you see on the left of the entrance used to be the freezer. Now it's an exhibition space. The dark, sinister feel makes you ponder what really went on in there. The interior was designed to be versatile and sustainable – most of the walls can be rolled away or folded up to make way for projects and events of all scale.

What to do?

Even if you're in Madrid for a few days, don't be intimidated by the amount of things going on. I highly recommend checking out their [activities list](#) (which is in English) or just stopping by to see the architecture and the vibe. As you stroll through the different spaces, you'll stumble upon anything from an indoor garden to a conference on new technology. Activities are open to the public in the afternoon, and you're free to walk around the plaza, find a nook to study in or have a drink at the café anytime.

What's new?

Since October 2013, El Matadero has its own independent market—[El Mercado Central de Diseño](#).



El Matadero's monthly market—[El Mercado Central de Diseño](#)—is one of Madrid's first design markets for entrepreneurs in the worlds of fashion, design and arts & crafts. During the two-day market, various free **music concerts** and **events** are put on as well, making it a **hot spot** to go with friends on the weekend!



Information:

El Matadero

Facebook

Where: Paseo de la Chopera 14 Metro: Legazpi (line 3, yellow)

Hours: Tuesday to Friday from 4pm to 10pm Saturday to Sunday from 11am to 10pm

Telephone: 915 17 73 09

Aiό: Sardinia, pizza, and bike haven in Malasaña

Aiό in Sardinian means “let’s go” (or “venga vamos” in Spanish). Most likely, Andrea and Marcelo were thinking of this very expression when they decided to open a restaurant in Madrid three years ago. These two friends have brought their hometown of **Sardinia** with them to **Malasaña**, where they’ve

created a magnificent combination of **Italian food** and **true *madrileño* ambiance**. It is basically an extraordinary place.



It was love at first sight when I came here with my friend, Nina, from Austria. We had a ***menú del día*** for **9,50€** (11.50€ on weekends and holidays) that includes two dishes, a drink and dessert. They also have a **pizza menu** that comes with a salad, large pizza, drink and coffee for **10,50€**; and a Sardinian menu with different regional dishes for **14€**. On the weekends, it's better to make a reservation.

We ordered fresh pasta with fresh tomato and basil; a salad and a burger with caramelized onions and homemade fries. Only if the pictures could tell you how good they tasted.



When I travel outside Spain, I always like to look for local spots, and the best indication of that is always by seeing locals themselves. Similarly, when I'm in Madrid and I go to an Italian restaurant, I like to see Italian patrons—to me that's a sign of authenticity. At **Aiό** , you'll find people from all over the world, yet the clientele's dominant nationality is Italian, by far.



You'll also find a large **biking community** here. Users and lovers can find bikes hanging on the walls. Although they're nice decoration, the real reason they're on display is because they're **for sale**. However, if you're already happy with the bike you own, you can also park it here, as **Aío's downstairs area** is a **free bike drop-off point**.



Malasaña is my favorite neighbourhood to get a drink at after work. Thanks to Aío, the neighbourhood has just gotten even better. On Thursdays at 9pm (officially at 8:30pm), they offer **an all-you-can-eat Italian buffet**, called **Aperaió**. It only costs **4.50€**, including the drink of your choice. Last night, I went with my wife, Daphne, to check out the buffet. The first thing we noticed was that almost everyone was drinking the **Aperol Spritz**, the popular Italian aperitif that combines seltzer, champagne, Aperol, a slice of orange and plenty of ice. The drink is strong and stringent, but a feel-good hit for **summer**.

For this modest price, I thought the food wasn't going to blow my socks off. But I couldn't have been more wrong. We were lucky enough to grab a seat right by the counter. As the waiters brought out dish after dish of mouth-watering Italian

goodness, the patrons swarmed around the food and served themselves heaps of rice, pasta, salad and pizza. Although it was all good, the **pasta** was the star dish; it was creamy mushroom mini-shell pasta that the crowd just couldn't get enough of.



The salad was far from your average *ensalada mixta*, as it came with all types of greens, onions, green bell peppers,

cucumbers, apples, raisins and topped with a deliciously sweet vinaigrette dressing. This is officially the best deal you can find in Madrid on food and drinks.



We barely missed the pizza because it flew off the counter in a matter of seconds (that's why there's no picture, so you'll have to go see for yourself!).



[Facebook](#)

Address: [Calle Corredera Baja de San Pablo 25](#)

Tlfn: 910 09 64 69

Hours: M-F 9.00-1.30 /S-S 10.00-2.00

Breakfast: M-F 9.00-13.00 /S-S 10.00-13.00

Lunch: M-F 13.00-16.00

Aperaió (buffet): Thursdays at 20:30

