

Amicis Restaurant: Now's the time for Madrid locals to go to Sol

As in many cities around the globe, Madrid's city center has been transformed by tourism over the years. Several old taverns and traditional shops have been replaced by chains and souvenir stores, and the streets are usually packed with tourists—which is why locals often avoid the center. But there are independent businesses in and around Sol that are worth a visit, and now's the best time to go.

So, I decided to go on a little adventure with my food partner in crime and search for hidden gems near Sol. Our first stop: Amicis Restaurant.

A terrace that transports you to a small town in a big city

What first lured us in was Amicis' spacious terrace. Situated right across from Mercado de San Miguel and Plaza Mayor, Amicis has its own private square surrounded by centuries-old buildings and a pedestrian street. So it feels like you're dining anywhere but smack in the city center. We like that.



Fresh products straight from the market

Local, fresh ingredients are the base of all their dishes, and there's something on the menu for everyone. We started out with two recommendations from our server. First, the fresh guacamole that came in a mortar and pestle, so you get to smash the large chunks of avocado yourself and then slather them on your tortilla chips.



Guacamole in a mortar and pestle

Second, the Peking duck tacos that we'll be coming back for. You can't go wrong with either of these.



Peking duck tacos

As for the main dish, I have a rule now: “If they name a dish after the restaurant, I eat it.” For many years, I had problems deciding what to order, so I decided to always ask for anything that the restaurant considers deserving of its own name.

Today’s choice is the **Classic Amicis Burger**: a generous piece of meat, fresh tomato, arugula, melted cheese, caramelized

onion and the secret (I forgot to ask what it was) house sauce. It made me very happy.



Classic Amicis Hamburger

We also ordered the red tuna tataki that hit the spot.



Red tuna tataki with sashimi, avocado and wasabi mayonnaise.

After dinner, we had the chance to chat with one of the owners, Fabio, who's originally from the UK and has Italian and Spanish heritage. During our meal we saw him greeting everyone in different languages, including all the street musicians by name. Fabio knows about good service; he started working in hospitality at the age of 12, cleaning his father's Italian restaurant back in the UK.

Years later, Fabio and his partner Maria—who's also from the UK and grew up in a family food business—stumbled upon a closed taberna that was in desperate need of a renovation. They remodelled it entirely, including the downstairs bodega

which is now used as an intimate room for private dinners (apparently Fabio gives you an iPad with Spotify and lets you stay there for hours).

Fabio talks with passion about their restaurant, team and menu, and he hopes they can continue with their personal venture for many years to come.

Amicis restaurant:

- IG: [@amicisrestaurant_madrid](#)
- Web: <https://amicisrestaurants.com/>
- Address: Plaza del Conde de Miranda, 4
- Metro: Ópera
- Phone: +34 91 058 78 80
- Schedule:
 - **Bar** 13:00/00:00 (Fri & Sat 13:00-01:00)
 - **Kitchen** 13:00/16:00 · 20:00/00:00 (Sat & Sun 13:00/ 00:00)

Let's Raise a Toast to The Toast Café

If you're lucky enough to live in Madrid, as I do, it often feels like the city is your playground. There are exhibitions

to see, bars to frequent, parks to embrace, [restaurants](#) to sample and of course, come the weekend, long, lazy [brunches](#) to be had. I always have the intention to be one of those people who whips up breakfast without breaking a sweat.



I buy the eggs, the avo, occasionally the chorizo, but when Saturday morning rolls around, frankly, my working week is done and the desire to cook (or clean) for that matter often falls by the wayside. I want to go out. To get dressed up and to head to a place where the mimosas are free flowing and the washing up is SEP (someone else's problem). So to kick start a week off from work, I headed to [The Toast Café](#) so that someone else could poach the perfect egg on my behalf.



A sister restaurant of [Roll Madrid](#) (a [recent review](#) of mine), it's clear to see that good breakfasts run in the family. There's a fixed brunch menu, which my friend and I plumped for. Needless to say, I don't think either of us needed feeding again until the evening had swung round as the portion sizes were far from stingy.

We both had coffees to start (natch), followed by croissants, eggs benedict and an omelette respectively. We chased this up with multiple mimosas and to conclude our breakfast of champions we split a cheesecake which was as good as any that I'd had in the States: I'm a fan of a buttery base and this one was so delish that I could've eaten it twice.



With Halloween on the approach and the city turning its attention to all things gruesome and ghoulish, [Toast](#) is getting in on the act by offering its own version of a fright night. Order yourself a beer and the bartenders will toss a coin – if it lands on pay, you pay. But... if it lands on freebie, you get to enjoy your tipples on the house. There's nothing scary about that. Well, apart from maybe the hangover that'll follow come November 1st.



It's worth mentioning that the aforementioned [Roll](#), will also be on the Halloween bandwagon and are offering the exact same deal – pretty tempting with Madrid enjoying a bank holiday the following day. I fully expect most of the city will be nursing sore heads.

Fast forward to November and **Toast is hosting its very own Thanksgiving celebration** – I'm spotting a pattern, this is a place that likes a party, we'll get along well. With a menu that will appeal to people from not just across the pond, it's well worth a look if you know you'll be pining for turkey and for time spent with friends.

So if boozy brunches are your bag and potential freebies float your boat there's really only one thing for it. Check out The Toast Café. Great food, great service, and a great excuse to dodge doing the dishes.

Info

- [Facebook](#), [Website](#) & [Instagram](#)
 - **Address:** C/ Fernando el Católico 50
 - **Metro:** Moncloa, Arguelles, Quevedo
 - **Phone:** 915493802
-

Brunch at Roll Madrid – Gotta Roll With It

We've all had those Sunday (or indeed Saturday mornings) when you wake up, well, how should I phrase this – praying for death? Your mouth's dryer than the Sahara, there's nothing in the fridge to quell your sickness and it feels as though someone's taken a teeny, tiny jackhammer to your head. In situations such as the aforementioned (which happen far more frequently than I'd care to admit), **the only solution for me is a boozy brunch.**



When you just can't face waves of nausea coupled with beer fear, there's nothing for it in my view except for hair of the dog. If this sounds familiar, **let me introduce to to the perfect spot to cure your hangover; or perhaps indeed to just top up – [Roll](#)**. My friend and I pitched up a few Sundays ago, starved and in need of **Bloody Mary's**.



Luckily due to the ongoing Indian Summer, we were able to take advantage of the cute little terrace outside and enjoy some fresh air along with with our food. **Roll takes the business of brunch seriously.** The menu is akin to many that I've seen Stateside with plenty of choices that made deciding what to opt for quite the quandary.



In the end we plumped for **fried green tomatoes** (they were unbelievable and I'm a girl who rarely gets her 5 a day), **southern fried chicken** (with mac 'n cheese) and a **cheeseburger teamed with sweet potato fries** – I think you could've spotted our hangovers from 50 paces but the combo of carbs and cava sorted us right out.



I'm not saying that [Roll](#) is just a remedy for when you're feeling rough. Far from it. They do a roaring trade on the **craft beer** front and plenty of **tasty tacos** to boot.





Meaning that there really is something for everything menu wise. The staff were happy to make suggestions given our slightly fragile state but recommendations or not, I have no doubt that everything would've been lip-smackingly good.

If you're an American in the city I anticipate Roll alleviating some of your homesickness. However, yank or not, if you like good food and find yourself enjoying one too many canãs at the weekend, when you've enjoyed the rock side of things, head to Roll.

For more Madrid tidbits check out [@littlemissmadrid](#) on Instagram.

Info

- [Facebook](#) & [Website](#)
- Address: Calle Amainel, 23
- Metro: San Bernardo / Noviciado

- Phone: 918 057 930

You might also like:

- [Lady Madonna, because Sundays are made for brunching](#)
 - [Plenti, a great new coffee & brunch spot in Barrio de las Letras](#)
 - [Best brunch on a budget in Madrid](#)
 - [Federal Café Madrid – hipster in a very good way](#)
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Veggie Nirvana at VivaBurger in La Latina

In the foodie hotspot Plaza de la Paja, in *barrio* La Latina, lies a vegetarian oasis with an oddly beachy vibe, complete with pale teal walls, distressed white wood, and beaded curtains.



You can sit inside or at one of their lovely terrace tables in this little nook of La Latina. While there's almost always a

full house (and for good reason), the staff works like a well-oiled machine, and the owner treats everyone like family.



Everything on the menu is vegan or vegetarian—and seriously delicious. Being shamefully addicted to cheese, I was admittedly nervous to try their vegan burger of the day. But it exceeded my expectations in every way: **filling, creamy, and flavorful, it left me more than satisfied.** It comes with a salad or soup, fresh fries, and a drink (can be wine or beer too).







If you're not feeling a veggie burger, the eatery offers an **alternative *menú del día***: they celebrate a different country every day with a rotating international menu. Indian curry garam masala, Greek salad and musaka, Peruvian avocado ceviche, Moroccan couscous, Argentinian vegetable *parrillada* and empanadas... and about 20 others.







For dessert, I had a fresh mint green tea smoothie. Having a huge sweet tooth, it wasn't what I was expecting, but it was flavorful and refreshing, especially on such a hot day. If you order dessert a la carte, instead of with the lunch special, you have lots of other options like their scrumptious carrot cake or vegan ice cream.



Amazingly, the burger for the menú is apparently a more “basic” veggie burger. If that’s basic, I can only imagine the

full menu is mind-blowing. I'll for sure be back for more.

Info

- [Facebook](#)
 - **Website:** vivaburger.es
 - **Instagram:** @viva_burger
 - **Address:** Costanilla de San Andrés 16
 - **Phone:** 91 366 33 49
-

Jack Percoca: The Little Italian Joint with Big Hearty Food

"The amount of food on the plate says a lot about the person who put it on the plate," laughs Luca. "I serve my customers like I serve my family."

Naples-born Luca is a professional restaurateur. For eight years, he travelled around the world opening and running game-changing restaurants before finally settling in Madrid and opening Jack Percoca Bar & Kitchen, a cosy little Italian restaurant in the heart of the city's Conde Duque district.



The bar area



The cosy dining area with lots of natural light at lunchtime

The sheer wealth of experience Luca has picked up over the years becomes clear from the moment you walk in. A great deal of thought has gone into the style and layout: **the lighting is soft, there's no 'short-straw' table, the service is attentive, and the food is flawless.**

FOOD FOR FOUR (TO EIGHT)

To start, we ordered Burrata Tricolore, served on a bed of rocket with slices of perfectly ripe tomato and drizzled with Luca's famous basil pesto. We also ordered a bowl of "Smoking Bullets": deep-fried, cheese and ham-filled rigatoni, like an Italian take on croquettes. We loved the tomato-laden Bruschetta and, on the opposite end of all spectrums, the (intensely) Creamy Meatballs.



Smoking Bullets, Creamy Meatballs, Bruschetta and Burrata Tricolore



The Bruschetta

Feeling full yet? For mains, we had the Spaghetti Burger – a succulent home-made burger perched on a crispy basket of spaghetti – and the Steak Tartare with chunky chips. The Donna Sofia pizza is right up there with the best pizzas in Madrid, but the colossal **Truffle Mac and Cheese** was, as usual, the star of the show.



The Spaghetti Burger



The Truffle Mac 'n' Cheese

Despite being pretty full, we ordered the Margherita Cheesecake and the Amaretto Connection for all of us to share, because when a dessert is good enough (and you know what I'm talking about here), you'll find room for it.



The Amaretto Connection

WELCOME TO PROHIBITION-ERA NEW YORK

This excerpt from the menu sets the scene for the restaurant perfectly:

"It's the era of prohibition and the state has declared war on alcohol. Social downfall in America has reached rock bottom and liquor is squarely to blame. But New York City has been hit by a new wave of crime – the black market. The word on the street is that immoral men are brewing their own high-proof alcohol. Hip flasks of this "moonshine" are stuffed into the boots of liberated women to supply hundreds of "speakeasies". It's also the beginning of the underground jazz movement –

inspiration is thriving in these illegal alcohol-fueled parties, but only the coolest guys and dolls in town are in the know. It was here, in a speakeasy beneath the streets of New York, that Sandy met Jack..."

The infamous black market liquors of the Prohibition era echo throughout Luca's cocktails, which are **strong enough to cut through all three hearty courses and still leave you feeling merry.**



A selection of the classic cocktails

Jack Percoca Bar & Kitchen is humbly priced, but with big hearty food, strong cocktails and a charming atmosphere. This Little Italy eatery is determined to keep Madrid's restaurant

scene on its toes.

INFO

- Jack Percoca's [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)
 - Address: [Calle Conde Duque 14](#)
 - Call Luca to reserve: **915 13 50 44**
 - Opening hours: Mon-Sun 13.00 – 16.00 / 19.00 – 01.00
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Amargo, the city's best veggie burger (and much more)

The title says it all.

On a cozy corner in Malasaña, [Amargo Place To Be](#) lures you in with its fairytale facade, enveloped with ivy and illuminated by twinkle lights.

Inside, the vibe is both industrial and homey. Friendly faces will greet you (not always a given in the city) and you'll be overwhelmed by a menu **so international** you'll forget where you are.

Nigiris, Mexican nachos, giant *croquetas*, dim sum, lasagna with wonton pasta and pine nuts, duck magret over hummus and a raspberry coulis....

But as we're all biased—especially when it comes to food—what I wanna sell you on is their veggie burger.

I can't even bring myself to try anything else from the impressively diverse and delicious menu, because when I come to Amargo, I only have one thing on my mind: that thick and

savory soy burger piled high with zucchini in tempura, a fried egg, a thick slab of goat cheese, green shoots, caramelized onion, crispy onion crunch, and the special house sauce.



Go starving—just half of this monstrous burger fills me up.

They're open for breakfast, lunch and dinner (from 9am-2am every day!), have a fantastic *menú del día* (€11.90 M-F and €13.50 on weekends and holidays), and boast a lengthy drink list that includes signature cocktails and organic wine (!!!).

But wait, there's more.

If you venture downstairs (follow the 19th-century painting in which a stoic aristocrat dons some fly ass Nikes), you'll find the seating area where diners become audience members.



Since last year, **Amargo has hosted concerts** throughout the week. If you're dining in (make sure to make a reservation—it fills up!), it's just €2 to enjoy anything from flamenco to soul to acoustic while you eat. When I went, I was treated to [Chisara Agor](#)'s achingly soulful voice.

Check out this month's programming on Amargo's [website](#).



The mindblowingly talented Chisara Agor and the amazing Christian García-Fonseca Secher on cajón.

If you're somehow not yet experiencing sensory overload, the lower level also functions as a revolving art gallery. The current artwork is by local visual and urban artist [Misterpiro](#).



Just some pals having a very candid laugh.

In a hurry? Amargo also does **speedy-quick orders to go**.

You have no excuse.

Info

- [Website](#) & [Facebook](#)
 - Instagram: @amargoplacetobe
 - Address: Calle Pez, 2
 - Phone: 910 84 79 90
 - Metro: Callao, Noviciado, Tribunal
-

Café del Rey, an unexpected restaurant behind Príncipe Pío

Situated on an unassuming street behind Príncipe Pío lies [Café del Rey](#), a modern restaurant that's totally unexpected. Although it's a five-minute walk from the train station, as well as the Royal Palace, Templo Dubod and Plaza de España, the street it's located on is quite off the beaten path.

James and I went on a Saturday night when the center was uncomfortably crowded, as per usual. Dodging pedestrians left and right, we headed down Cuesta San Vicente. Just before reaching the station, we turned right onto a quiet street called Paseo del Rey and bam! We'd completely escaped the city's hustle and bustle and could finally breathe again.

Two minutes later we arrived at the restaurant, whose stylish decor stands out among the surrounding residential buildings. What is this modern restaurant doing here? It looks like it should be in Malasaña, Chueca, or even Salamanca. That said, we were happy it wasn't located in those neighborhoods because it gave us the chance to try something new and head in a different direction.



photo from their [Facebook](#), as are all the high-quality pics below!

The front part of the venue is a casual bar, delicatessen and

shop. You'll find sandwiches on baguettes, mouthwatering cakes and other treats on display, plus a great beer selection and wine list. We went for dinner so we sat in the dining area in the back, also chic and with plenty of space to remind us we weren't in an itty bitty bar in La Latina (which we love, just sometimes we crave some leg room).



As we were eating dinner, we couldn't help but talk about how oddly situated the restaurant was. How could anyone find it if they weren't looking for it? Bottom line is you couldn't. That's kind of why we like it. While in the summer I'm sure it's always packed because of its beach-themed outdoor terrace, during the wintertime I imagine the clientele is more from the neighborhood, as well as people coming in from Principe Pio or after spending the day along Madrid's river. They also hold events like wine and beer tastings that bring in patrons.



Back to our dinner: James got a burger (which the waiter recommended) and I went with the salmon with vegetables (I'm on a bit of a health kick these days), accompanied by a few glasses of red wine.



The table next to us was having a true feast and I must say the pasta and tuna dishes they ordered looked huge. We enjoyed our meal and the price range was reasonable. For example, the burgers cost €8-11. We didn't end up trying their famous cakes which I honestly regret. That's their specialty – the red velvet and carrot cake in particular – and they looked incredible!



The wait staff were also very friendly and attentive.

Since Café del Rey serves breakfast and brunch menus too, we've got plenty of reasons to go back. I also can't wait till summer to check out their outdoor seating areas.

Info

- [Facebook](#)
- [Website](#)
- Twitter/Instagram: @cafedelrey22

Federal Café Madrid – Hipster in a Very Good Way

Not too long ago, Madrid's breakfast scene was limited to traditional croissants, toast and churros. Now, however, it's rivalling cities like New York and London. How did this happen so quickly? Don't know. But boy are we loving it... One of the [best places for brunch in Madrid](#) is [Federal Café](#), which may look like a stylish restaurant in Soho, but it's actually located in Malasaña, near [Conde Duque](#).



Last Sunday, I went for brunch with three lovely ladies – [Cat](#), Aifric and [Helen](#).



We all started with fresh smoothies. Mine had pomegranate and organic apple juice – health in a glass.



To eat, I ordered toast with avocado, poppyseed and lemon.



Aifric got the same, although with poached eggs (smart choice).



Helen had a veggie burger with freshly squeezed orange juice.



Then there's Cat, who wins first prize by a landslide with her full-on plate of poached eggs, bacon, potatoes, sausage and toast. Damn.



The first time I went to [Federal](#) was actually over a year ago

with my friend, Nina (who's sitting in the window looking at the little kid). We stumbled upon [Federal](#) while strolling around and were instantly lured in by the comfy window seats that allowed us to dangle our legs onto the sidewalk.



We started with a coffee.



That ended quickly. The menu featured such a wide variety of dishes that were chock full of local, organic and fresh ingredients – we just couldn't help but order something to eat. I got a sandwich with feta cheese, spinach and olive tapenade. Nina had a burger. Simple but so good!





So if you're looking for a hip place with healthy food in the center of Madrid, I think you've found it!



Info

[Web](#)

[Facebook](#)

Address: [Pl. de las Comendadoras 9](#)

Metro: Noviciado

You may also like:

[Best Brunch on a Budget in Madrid](#)

[Little Big Café – my little big pick-me-up](#)

[Toma Café – Fuel Up, Feel Hip](#)

[Mamá Campo – a Restaurant/Market of Organic Delights in Plaza Olavide](#)

Munchies, late-night burger joint and snack bar in Huertas

My friend Natasha would often sing praises of Munchies, an American-style snack bar situated in Huertas that is open for business until 6am. Always ecstatic to have more options besides kebabs & pizzas during late-night outings in my new barrio, I sampled this location in order to share my findings with my beloved expat community. Munchies lives up to its namesake, hitting the spot during intoxicated bouts of hunger. It is a cozy and charming spot reminiscent of the American small town diners that I am ever so fond of.





This location provides swift and efficient service, and although I've only tasted their burgers, they also offer arepas, salads, hotdogs, homemade cakes and other sweets. Amber, the owner and culinary master of this establishment, gently applies condiments and toppings to the burgers with *cariño*. I admire her discipline, remaining awake and alert into the wee hours of the night in order to aid drunk people as they preemptively combat the next day's hangover with greasy edibles. It is for that reason that I bestow upon this establishment the Dcat Seal of Approval.





Info

[Website](#)

[Facebook](#)

Hours: 2pm to 6am

Address: Calle de las Huertas 25

Metro: Anton Martin or Sol

Naïf: King of Burgers

In a city so jam-packed with restaurants that one could eat out in a different place every meal and never repeat, it's

saying a lot to return to a place more than once, and then too many times to count. Such is the case with [Naif](#), a cozy/grunge burger spot nestled into Plaza de San Idelfonso serving burgers, with a side of sass. Ask for a glass of water and one of the snarky waiters will return saying they've run out of water, but they do have gin. Alternatively, copas of beer and wine are available for cheap and are a must for washing down the grub.



The jocular banter with the waiters, the hype that comes with having to (almost) yell over the music in order to be heard across the table, the flickering candles of the dining room, all contribute to making repeat [Naif](#) visits, but the real reason to return is for the burgers. Never a disappointment, never.



Here, the king of burgers, is, undoubtedly, the Hamburguesa de Trufa: **hamburger gold**. The rich flavor of truffles oozes out of the burger with every bite. La Ibérica also pleases with its hefty slices of jamón and manchego respectively. [Naif](#) has the Goldy Locks principle working to its advantage: the burgers are not too big, not too small— they're just right. Nevertheless, they can be a challenge to eat; baskets of napkins are placed on the tables for this very reason. Don't mind about minding manners.



A large chalkboard wall boasts nachos among the house specialities. What comes to the table is a **casserole dish of chips bathing in a tangy bath of cheese, plus some avocados and peppers for a spicy punch**. These are not skating rink nachos. They can be a meal in itself or something to share—cheesy fingers for all.



And beyond burgers, dessert awaits on the horizon. There is **carrot cake**, of course, as well as **cheesecake** and **American Pie**. It's not your mom's recipe, but it's pie! Inexplicably,

it lacks the bottom layer of crust, but there's a top. Let's not be too picky, now. The **carrot cake** benefits from the **addition of nutella and walnuts**.



Eating at [Naif](#) is addicting. You want to be there, wrapped up in this rough and rugged metropolitan environment, until closing time. [Naif](#) can serve as the backdrop for any social situation: **friends, dates, and parental visits alike**. The soundtrack somehow always fits the occasion and the dim lighting makes everything seem cooler than it probably is.



[Web](#)

[Facebook](#)

Where: Calle San Joaquín, 16

Phone: 910 07 20 71

Photos courtesy of Pablo Arias

**Looking for other cool spots in Malasaña?
Check out:**

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[Pepe Botella, a coffee place where you can think](#)

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Best Café-Bookshops in Madrid

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