Madrid Artist Showcase: Local Composer and Violinist Santiago Vokram

Madrid's vibrant music scene is full of gems and untold stories. Despite winter taking hold, there are many upcoming gigs with emerging artists and performers. For each of these, there is an untold story waiting to be showcased. **Santiago Vokram** is a local performing artist who wields a violin to serenade his audiences. I have had the good fortune to witness him in action and interview him about his life and creative journey.

My first impression of him was that his attire and unique sense of style reflected that **he is a person who breathes in creative energy.** He can take the sound to areas I didn't think violins were capable.

So without further ado, here's his story and upcoming dates so you, too, can experience his music.

Santiago Vokram's musical story and style

Hailing from Mexico City, Santiago began his career as a musician there in Rock-Celtic fusion band *La Agonia de Leonara at* 13. He devoted himself fully to practicing the violin, and growing as a performer, citing it as an escape from the empty spaces of life. He would go on to study music at Mexico's elite *Escuela Nacional de Musica.*

Santi reminisced on how in his youth he was inspired by the Spanish band *Mago de Oz* and when he learned that the group had split, he relocated to Madrid to join José Andrëa & *Uróoboros*, the next project of original *Mago de Oz* members.

Santi remained modest when describing his ascension to **dreaming of meeting his heroes and then having the opportunity to create alongside them** in his newly adopted country. He became deeply embedded in Madrid's thriving creative scene and began performing alongside other revered local artists such as ***Ataca Paca***, and on the international circuit with renowned Gypsy musician **Robby Lakatos**.

Where he is now



Santi's current band, which reflects his personal expression, is *La Sonrisa de Cibeles.* This trio seeks to create something unprecedented as a cross-over fusion of world-classical and pop music. Its members are **Santi on Violin, Benja Bravo on Double Bass and Germán Nuñez on Guitar.** Their goal is to help a younger audience expand their perception of "classical" music and to disrupt the local music scene by introducing sounds with less precedent.

Santi's style as a performer ranges from classical to

unconventional. The violin is an essential part of traditional mariachi groups and can be weaved into classical jazz, rock, folk and other improvisational contexts. In addition to his solo-acts and collaboration with other artists, Santi performs at upscale events and in luxury hotels seeking to provide a stylized ambiance. Notably, **Netflix has utilized Santiago as a creative asset** in the mariachi ensemble featured in *Narcos Mexico.*

Our connection

What Santiago and I share is that both of us have collaborated on creative projects with the versatile public relations strategist, programmer, event planner, and art instructor Vesta Rounsaville. Vesta manages Santi's social media presence and coordinates his routine concerts in Madrid's venues. With her help, he has managed to expand his circle of collaborators to Madrid's international community of musicians, comedians, and actors. Additionally, his concerts have raised funds for **Madrid for Refugees**, a prominent volunteer group.

Santi confided in me that as his visibility increased, he became exposed to uglier elements of the music scene noting that "adoration can become insanity or envy." He went on to say that **"If you have a vision, you need to improve it little by little."**

Despite a lack of a conventional road map to follow, coupled with at times a lack of financial security, **Santi never wavered in his pursuits** despite sometimes deeply missing his parents in Mexico, or his loved ones whenever he'd tour for prolonged periods.

Upcoming shows

You can be captivated by Santiago's stage personality and violin prowess at Teatro-Bar Hipócritas (La Latina) this

Saturday the 23rd at 22:00 where La Sonrisa de Cibeles will enchant their audience.

You can also catch them at **Microteatro Por Dinero**'s mini-concert festival Microsound in December (Malasaña/Gran Vía). Tickets for the concert in Teatro-Bar Hipócritas can be purchased via **Entradium**.


Santiago Vokram
y
La Sonrisa de Cibeles
POP jazz fusión Latina clásica
3 + 10 + 17 diciembre
microteatro

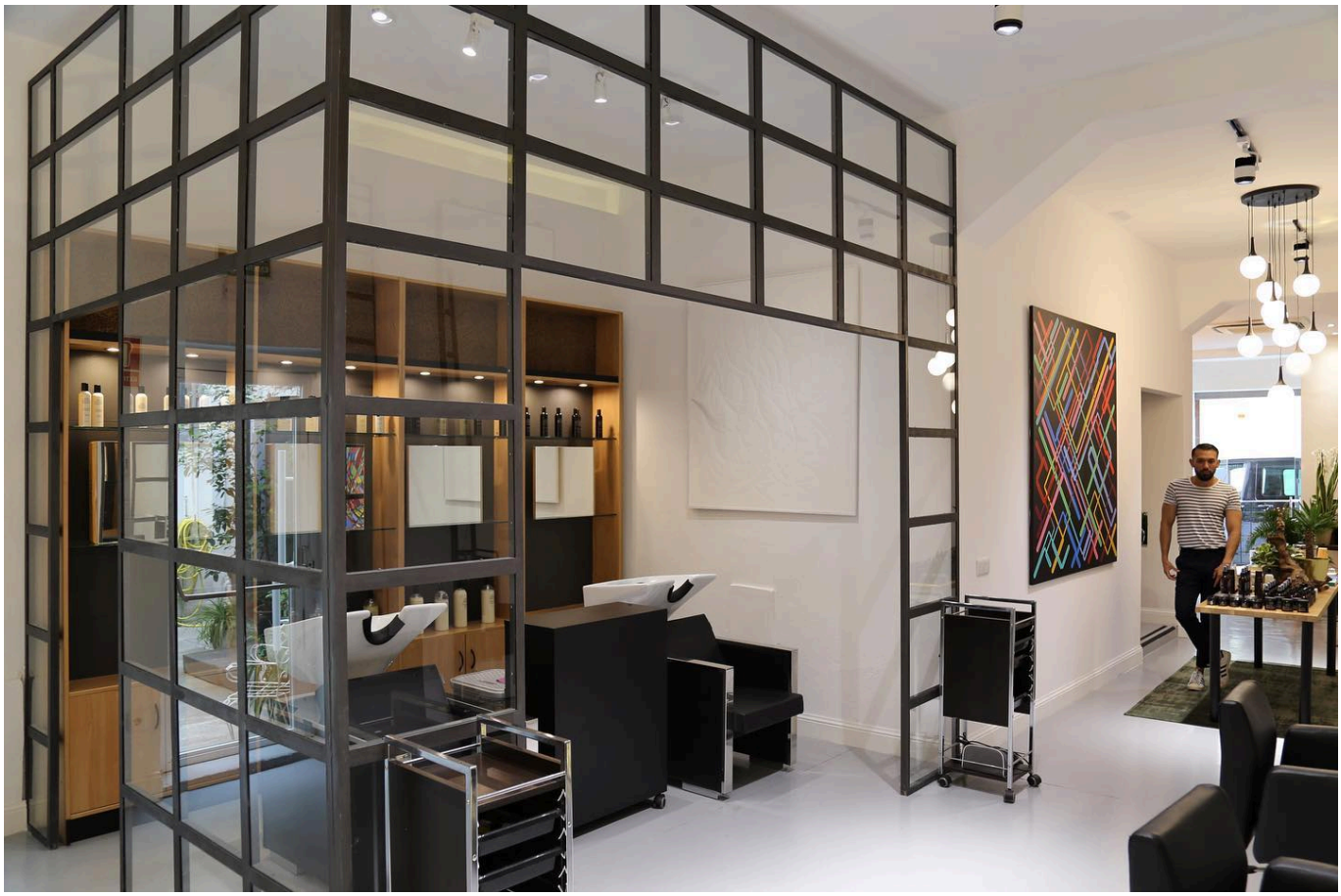
Contact

If you would like for Santiago Vokram to perform at an event, or to utilize his work for branded content, contact **Vesta Rounsaville.**

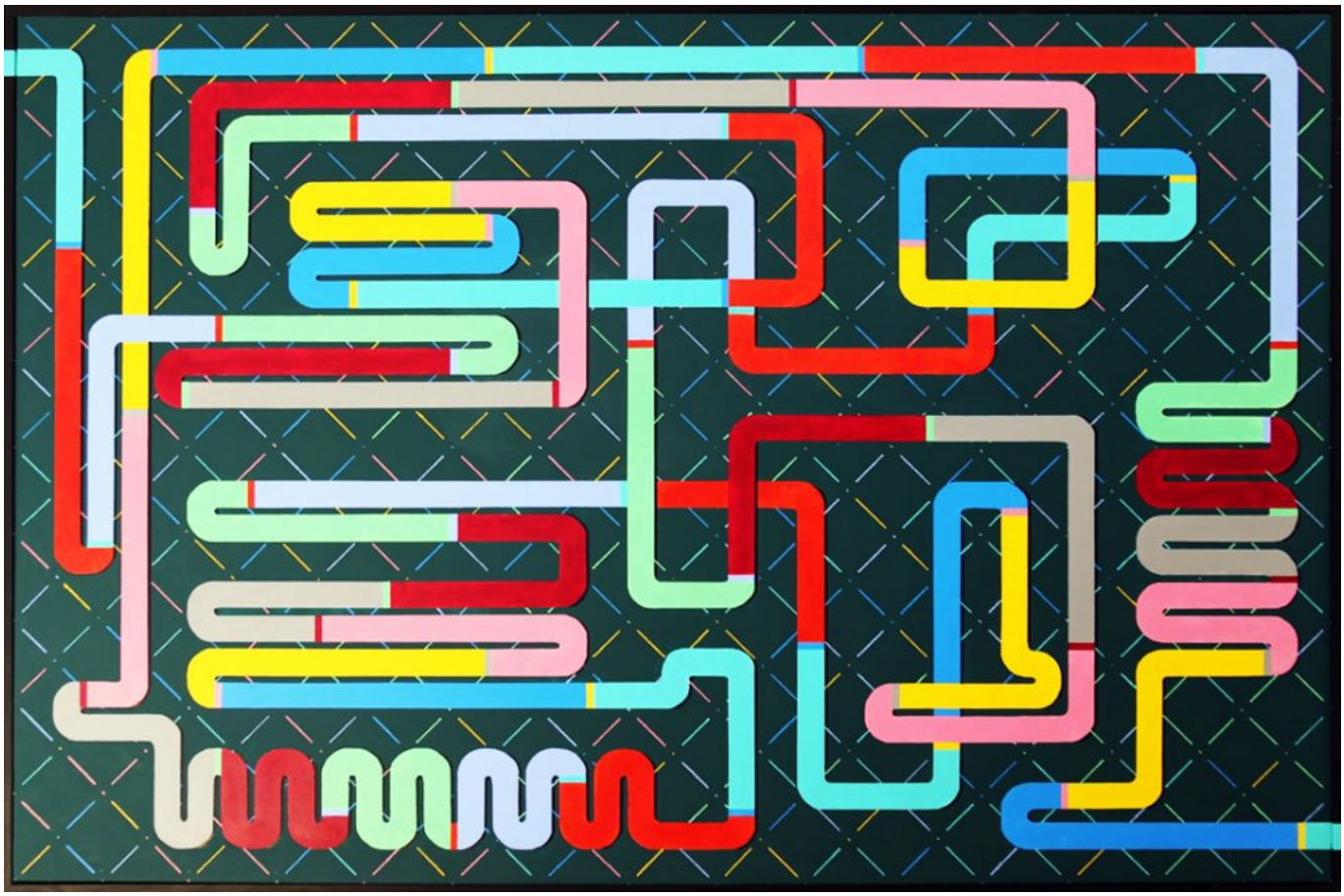
If you know of any other Madrid-based artists that you'd like to showcase on Naked Madrid, don't hesitate to get in touch with us to submit a post.

Ara Crinis – indulge in an artful hair salon experience

Soft lights. Greens. Pastels and contemporary art. Not something you expect of a hair and styling salon! Thus you're greeted by a surprise which then transforms into an inexplicable comfort – a place as delightful and friendly as its kind and charismatic owners.



As you walk in, you have the beautiful exhibit of contemporary artist Tomas Gracia. This particular one has been designed around the concept of chaos seeking its own natural order.



The more you reflect on it, the more lost you seem. Lines and hues seem to be in search of their own destinies. Maybe that’s the exact point of the exhibit – to have your internal chaos muse over the edgy lines and vibrant tones of Tomas’ artwork.



The exhibits are temporary and will include all categories of art and literature in the future, they tell me. The open patio will also house many interesting events.



The area of the salon is beautifully decorated with lively greens and flowery tones, immediately transporting you into a spring-like feeling. The collection of books on display and the smell of freshly-brewed coffee add to the urbanism of the ambience.



The serene patio at the end, of course, completes the place beautifully.



As distinct as its name, *Ara Crinis* (which literally translates from Latin into ‘a beautiful lock of hair’) is the delightful service and experience you receive here. The salon works with the concept of aromatherapy and organics around every service they offer. The cherry on top are the very artful Neo and Carlo, who are the heart of the place.



Hop on over either for a walk around their artful decor, a pleasant cup of coffee with the owners, an exhibit of the next talented artist of the month or an indulgent hair experience – this little spot in Chueca is unlikely to disappoint.

By Arabdha Sudhir

Photos by Carlo Calzolari

Ara Crinis

- **Website** **Facebook** **& Instagram:** **@ara.crinis**
- **Address:** Calle San Lorenzo, 5
- **Metro:** Tribunal or Alonso Martínez

Guide to all things Persian in Madrid, from restaurants to cultural happenings

One of the things I love about living in Madrid is that it's a bustling international city, and when it comes to food you can find just about any kind of cuisine your heart desires. As an Iranian American living in Madrid for over five years and founder of the **Madrid Persian Food Lovers Facebook group**, I thought it was about time that I shared this guide to all things Persian in Madrid.

Here's all of the knowledge I've gained about Persian restaurants and cultural happenings across the city:

FOOD

Banibanoo



Photo from Banibanoo – also in the feature image

For something totally different, check out this modern and casual restaurant, whose name translates to “Miss Bani” in reference to its young owner, Banefsheh. What’s unique about this restaurant is that it serves up dishes usually only found in Persian homes.

The menu changes regularly, but some things you might typically find are sweet rice with chicken (*shirin polo*), egg frittata with a mix of herbs (*kuku sabsi*), or eggplant dip with walnuts and strained yogurt (*kashke bademjan*), each with the chef’s own creative spin.

Order the combo meal, and choose three items from the colorful variety of items on display behind the counter. Stay for dessert and typical drinks, such as Persian lemonade or cucumber and rose water. **Also check out our previous review of Banibanoo**.

- **Facebook & Instagram: @banibanoomadrid**
- **Address:** Calle de las Mártires Concepcionistas, 19
- **Nearest metro:** Manuel Becerra

Mesón Persa Mr. Kabab



Photo from Mr. Kabab

Don’t be confused by its name. The kebab served at this traditional Persian sit-down restaurant has little to do with its fast-food cousin, the Turkish doner kebab. In Iran, the term kebab, or kabab, is used to refer to meat skewers cooked over an open flame. Mr. Kabab is a favorite of the Iranian community in Madrid, and in addition to delicious kebabs made of tender beef, lamb, seasoned ground beef (*kubideh*), and chicken marinated in Persian spices, you can also find traditional Persian stews and appetizers. The owner, Mustafah, also runs the Persian store next door where you can find a selection of Iranian dry and canned goods to make your own creations at home.

- **Website**
- **Address:** Calle de los Artistas
- **Nearest metro:** Cuatro Caminos

La Palmera del Retiro

I was so excited to learn that Mina Rashidi, the former owner and chef at my absolute favorite Persian restaurant in Madrid, has a new project. Her previous venture, the very traditional Tehran restaurant in Salamanca, sadly shut its doors in 2012 during the recession.

Her new Spanish-Persian tapas bar concept offers a limited menu, but everything as delicious as you'd expect from Mina. Among the Persian tapas she typically serves are an eggplant dip known as *kashke bademjan*, as well as stuffed grape leaves, or *dolmeh*. It's a great place to stop for a caña and a tasty snack after a stroll in nearby Retiro.

- **Website**
- **Address:** Av. de Menéndez Pelayo, 53
- **Nearest metro:** Ibiza

Sabor Azafrán



Photo from Sabor Azafrán

This restaurant is another great place to try typical Persian cuisine. It's a bit off the beaten path, in Madrid's Cuidad Lineal neighborhood, however it's well worth the visit. Try one of the delicious stews (khoresh), such as one made with meat, potato and split peas (*khoresh gaimeh*), or another with a mix of herbs, meat and red beans (khoresh gormeh sabsi).

Of course, as any good traditional Persian restaurant, this one also has all the variety of kebab you would expect, served up with steamed saffron rice and roasted tomatoes. This place

is great for large groups, as it has a very large dining room, and long tables.

- **Website**, **Facebook** & **Instagram**: **@sabor.azafran**
- **Address:** Calle del General Aranaz, 65
- **Nearest metro:** Cuidad Lineal

Stop Pizza



Photo from Mohammad Riahi

You wouldn’t know it from the outside, but this unsuspecting pizza and doner kebab take-away stand is a landmark for Madrid’s Persian community. Call ahead and the owner, Mehdi, will prepare you some traditional Persian *barberi* bread in his pizza oven. Or stop in any time for a pizza served on crust that has a texture suspiciously similar to *barberi*, giving the pizza its own unique taste. You can also find typical Persian

stuffed grape leaves (*dolmeh*). Finish it all off with a strong black tea served from a traditional Persian tea pot. Note: there's nothing Persian about the rest of the menu.

- **Website**
- **Address:** Calle del Dr. Santero, 6
- **Nearest metro:** Cuatro Caminos

Restaurante Esfahan



Photo from Restaurante Persa Esfahan

The most central of Madrid's traditional Persian restaurants, this one is located right around the corner from Plaza España. Its menu contains some Middle Eastern fusion, with dishes like hummus and pita bread and salmon with orange sauce. However, they also feature many of Iran's most typical dishes, and even some you can't find in other Iranian restaurants in Madrid.

Standout dishes are the herbed rice with roasted lamb (*bagali polo*) and barley soup (*soupe jo*), which is a common staple in any Persian home. The restaurant’s walls are covered with traditional Persian paintings and handicrafts, including woven carpets that cover the lower part of the walls. That, along with the traditional music played in the background, will make you feel like you’ve been transported to Iran.

- **Facebook**
- **Address:** Calle de San Bernardino, 1
- **Nearest metro:** Plaza de España or Noviciado

CULTURE

Tried the food, and hungry to learn more about Persian culture? Check out these cultural institutions:

Centro Persepolis



Photos from [Centro Persepolis]

A Persian cultural center that hosts cultural events, a bazaar where they sell Persian handicrafts, and organizes trips to Iran. They also host talks on Iranian art and literature, including poem recitation sessions in Spanish and Farsi.



Each year they organize a few concerts in Madrid, both by Iranian bands or those made to connect Iranian and non-Iranian music. These events have included some outstanding Iranian musicians, such as Shahram Nazeri, Hossein Alizadeh and Alireza Ghorbani to name a few.

- **Website** & **Facebook**
- **Address:** Calle Sta. María, 20
- **Nearest metro:** Anton Martin

Casa Persa



Photo from Casa Persa

The Casa Persa is an association dedicated to the diffusion and teaching of Persian mysticism, poetry and music. Every Saturday it hosts an improvized performance of Sufí music and dancing. The regular performers, Majid Javadi, Antonio Fernández and Carmen Sánchez, are often joined by other musicians from the community. It's recommended to reserve by phone ahead of time, as space is limited. There is an entry fee of 15 euros, and includes wine.

- **Website & Facebook**
- **Address:** Calle Silva nº5, 5ª planta
- **Nearest metro:** Santo Domingo or Callao

MORE

When it comes to finding Persian products, whatever you can't find at the **Mr. Kebab** shop in Cuatro Caminos mentioned above, you might also look for at one of the many **Arabic shops**

surrounding the Islamic Cultural Center of Madrid. Many of these shops carry Iranian products, including the coveted **sweet, black dates from the region of Bam**.



Photo from esmadrid.com

Interested in hearing an innovative blend of traditional Iranian and Flamenco music? Then check out the band **Baramu**, made up of Babak Kamgar, Pedro Pedrosa and Manuel Espinosa, collectively representing Iran, Extremadura and Andalucía. Based in Madrid, they regularly play events around the city. The trio mix traditional instruments from Iran and Spain to create a sound you'd be hard-pressed to find anywhere else in the world.



Photo from Baramú

La Tasca is a Spanish bar near Príncipe Pio run by a Persian family. There's no Persian food on the menu, but it's great for a beer and a tapa, and if you mention you love Iranian culture, you may get invited to some tea on the house.

If you make your way out to Alcobendas, a suburb northeast of Madrid, then you might check out **Nuevo Espacio**. It's a Persian restaurant founded by a former cook from Mr. Kebab that was so successful he opened a second location, also in Alcobendas. It's also worth noting that Alcobendas is home to a substantial Persian community, and hosts Persian New Year celebrations, among other cultural events throughout the year.

Know of anything else that should be included in this guide to all things Persian in Madrid? Let us know in the comments!

Living Room Concerts – Weekend “Planazo” in Madrid

In Madrid there are hundreds, if not thousands of things to do on any given weekend. Doing a quick Google search for live music, for example, will show you multiple Top Ten lists of the most well-known spots. However, you won’t find a live music venue more intimate than that of **Living Room Concerts**. It’s just like it sounds: concerts held in people’s living rooms and you’re invited.



Born in, yes, a living room, it was Nichole Hastings’ idea to bring emerging and little known artists and their original

music into the spotlight. In nomadic spirit, **LRC** moves around Madrid to different pre-approved flats in all barrios spreading new independent music around the city to as many guests as the particular living room (and guest list) can hold.



LRC has even put down roots in one fixed location in Malasaña, a cultural community center called **el Salón del Artista**. On arrival, be prepared to be ushered in with a warm welcome from the owner of the flat and then find a seat so you can comfortably listen to the original music and stories behind the songs from, often bilingual, artists.



Once inside, it’s easy to see that the diverse crowd has arrived expecting to meet new people and listen to original music that they couldn’t hear anywhere else.



During any given concert you could hear independent Spanish artists singing in English or a multicultural group singing in some combination of languages. Because of this, the concerts feel inclusive and not limited to any particular group or musical taste.



If you're in Madrid alone or with friends, LRC will sit you within feet of an independent artist and among members of the Living Room Concerts' community in Madrid.

Info

- **Follow** LRC on **Facebook** & **Instagram**
- **To attend,** the reservations work on the honor system but you do have to sign up through their **Facebook** page or their **MeetUp.com** page.
- **Price:** The event has a very reasonable cover which can

be turned into a “cover + open bar” for 3 euros more. Towards the end of the concert you can make a donation which goes right to the artists you’ve just met.

- **Links to artists** who’ve recently performed: [Taiacore](), [BeMyFiasco](), [David Roma]()

By Caitlin Mackenzie

Context Tavernas and Tapas, a culinary tour through the bars of Huertas

If you’ve done any traveling lately, you might have noticed that **food tours are rapidly becoming a global trend**. Companies around the world now offer guided visits to restaurants, bars, and markets, promising to let you in on culinary secrets or show you how to eat like a local. Madrid is no exception. In fact, this city has more than its share of options, thanks to its vibrant dining scene and world-famous cuisine.

I recently had the chance to participate in a food tour for the very first time, thanks to **Context Travel**. The company offers **“tours for the intellectually curious”** in cities across the world, including several in the Spanish capital. Many are focused on history or art, but this one was especially intriguing: **Savoring Madrid: Tavernas and Tapas**.

According to the Context website, the goal of this culinary tour is to define the concept of tapas through tastings at *tavernas* in the city center. Like all of their **Madrid tours**, it’s meant to offer an in-depth look at local culture, customs, and in this case, cuisine. But considering the dozens

of bars, restaurants, and specialty dishes that are scattered throughout the city, how could it be possible to cover such a broad topic in just 3 hours? That's what I intended to find out.



Intricate mosaics decorate the exterior of one of the many historic bars in Huertas.

Hungry for history

The tour began at 7pm outside the Westin Palace hotel, close to many of Madrid's main tourist attractions. Context limits the size of their tours to create a personalized experience—this one consisted only of me and a couple who were on vacation.

Our guide was Tessy Carrada, a culinary journalist of Mexican origin who moved to Madrid a few years ago. She started off by explaining the basics, with the help of maps and

diagrams: **what are tapas, where did they come from, and how are they eaten?** What makes Spain's cuisine unique? What can you expect when you go out for tapas in Madrid?

Next she told us how the tour would work. We'd visit three or four places, all in the Huertas neighborhood (also known as **Barrio de las Letras**). The idea was to show us non-touristy spots, the kinds of places locals go, where we'd get a **true taste of the local culture**. At each place, she would order a few tapas to share, taking into account our preferences, interests, and appetites. With the ground rules laid out, we set off into the city.

Cervecería Cervantes



First up was a true classic, a place that was packed with customers even at the early hour of 7:30pm. We ordered drinks, and Tessy explained the particularities of Spanish brewing as

we admired the collection of beer cans displayed on the restaurant’s walls. The waiter brought out a plate of giant olives and mussels, exemplifying the tradition of providing something to snack on along with every drink.





Tessy then ordered several *raciones* to share: **ham *croquetas* with *padrón* peppers, *manchego* cheese, and *jamón ibérico*.** As we ate, she offered insight on each and every item: how to make *croquetas*, what makes Spanish ham so special, and how to distinguish true *manchego* from imitations.





I’ve lived in Spain for a while, and I’ve eaten (more than) my share of all of these classic tapas, but I’m not exaggerating when I say this might’ve been the best ham and cheese of my life. It took a lot of self-discipline to restrain myself and save room for the next destination…

La Fábrica



As soon as we entered this colorful, crowded locale we were welcomed with the sights and smells of seafood. We gathered around an old barrel-turned-table and ordered ***albariño* wine** to accompany the ***salpicón*** (a kind of seafood salad) and ***boquerones*** (marinated anchovies) that Tessy suggested. I was quickly reminded of one of the most pleasant discoveries I've made in Madrid: despite my preconceived notions about slimy, stinky seafood, here it's a true delicacy.



The *salpicón* consisted of shrimp, mussels, and octopus swimming in olive oil with tomatoes, peppers, and onions. It was fresh, light, and incredibly delicious. A loaf of crusty bread was brought to the table, and Tessy encouraged us to break off pieces and soak them in the flavorful oil.



The *boquerones* were perfectly seasoned and accompanied by olives and crispy potato chips. We were also served a small plate of cheese and chorizo—but it couldn't compete with the perfection we'd already experienced at Cervantes. The star here was most certainly the seafood.

La Vinoteca

Although we attempted to find a spot at the renowned Casa Alberto, at 9pm on a Saturday night it proved difficult. Instead we went to La Vinoteca, which had a much more **modern and upscale atmosphere** than the previous bars. We ordered wine and cava from an impressively long and detailed list.



To round out the night, Tessy ordered ***patatas bravas*** (fried potatoes smothered in slightly spicy sauce) and two ***pinchos*** (small toasts): one topped with spinach, goat cheese, and caramelized onions, and another with potato cake and duck magret.

Although the ambience here was lovely and the wine exceptional, I have to admit that the tapas weren't quite as impressive as their successors. That being said, they were still delicious, and certainly provided a well-rounded sampling of some of Spain's most famous specialties.



For the last course of the evening, Tessy chose a **layered trifle of chocolate and cream**, as well as a sort of **mini apple pie** topped with vanilla ice cream. Although these were pretty standard sweets that didn't exactly scream "Spain," it's hard to complain when there's chocolate involved. After devouring dessert, we parted ways for the night with full bellies, satisfied palates, and a whole lot of newfound knowledge.

An interesting aftertaste

For me the best part of this tour, surprisingly, was not the food itself (although of course it was incredible). As a resident of Madrid, I can get authentic tapas whenever I want, on nearly every street corner. What this experience offered me was the chance to engage with the food I was eating on an intellectual level: to learn why tapas are called tapas, what distinguishes *jamón ibérico* from *jamón serrano*, and so much

more. **It was a lesson in being conscious of what I eat and the history and culture it reflects**.

For travelers who only have a few days to sample the best of local cuisine, who don't speak Spanish, or who simply don't know where to begin, Context provides an ideal solution. **Tessy's insider knowledge and impeccable taste made for an interesting, entertaining, and thoroughly authentic journey through the taverns of Huertas**.

Whether you're a tourist who wants to experience the tapas culture firsthand, or a seasoned local who wants to learn more about the city you love, you'll find what you're looking for in the Context Tavernas and Tapas tour.

To learn more about Context or book a tour, click here.

Tapapiés: a guide to everyone's favorite food and culture festival in Lavapiés

It's that time of year again. The air is turning chilly, the leaves are starting to change, and the millennial obsession with all things autumn is taking over social media. But here in Madrid, there's a whole different reason to be excited. With October comes **Tapapiés**, **the annual festival that inundates the streets of the Lavapiés neighborhood with delicious food, cheap drinks, and live music**.

For 11 days at the end of October (this year's 7th edition lasts from October 19–29), dozens of restaurants and bars in

Lavapiés offer a very special deal. Each one develops their own **signature tapa**, and offers it to the public for just **€1.50**. For an extra euro, you can also get a *botellín* (a 250 ml bottle of beer) to wash it down. The **event** is sponsored by Barcelona's Estrella Damm, and at most places you can choose between a regular beer or Damm Lemon (beer and lemon soda).



A bar advertises its participation in Tapapiés with the festival's official poster.

Lavapiés is known for its incredible cultural diversity, with large immigrant populations from all over Africa, South America, the Middle East, and Central Asia. As a result, it's full of **international eateries** offering everything from **Senegalese *thieboudienne*** to Syrian sweets. A good number of these establishments participate in **Tapapiés**, which means that in one night you can practically eat your way around the

world, just by exploring the neighborhood’s sloping streets.



The delicious “Crepioca” tapa from Saboor Tapioca

In other words, **this festival is every adventurous foodie’s dream come true**. There are various strategies for tackling the overwhelming amount of options (**122 tapas in total**) and chaotic crowds. You can simply wander around, dropping into whatever bars you come across and trying your luck. Each one usually advertises a photograph of their tapa with a huge poster out front, so you’ll know more or less what to expect. Don’t forget to stop by **Mercado de San Fernando** and Mercado Antón Martín, where several vendors also participate.



A tray of tapas at Toscanaccio Italian bakery: marinated eggplant, walnuts, goat cheese, and sun-dried tomato pesto on spelt bread

If you're (A) a picky/allergy-prone eater or (B) determined to try as many different tapas as possible, you might want to consider a more organized strategy. Ask for a brochure at any of the participating places—you'll get **a pocket-sized booklet that contains a list of every single tapa being offered**, as well as a color photograph and a detailed ingredients list for each. They're all plotted on a numbered map, so you can plan out your ideal route. Be warned, though: it's hard to stick to a set plan when there are so many tempting options around every corner.



Dishing out the special tapa at Maloka Bar Brasileiro: yuca in a coconut milk sauce with peanut pesto

My advice? Grab a group of friends who aren't afraid to elbow their way through some crowds and try as many new things as possible. This is not an activity for those who would rather settle in at a cozy restaurant for a relaxed dinner.

Expect to eat standing up while balancing a beer in one hand a a tapa in the other, and shouting at each other just to be heard. **It's messy, it's crazy, it's loud—and it's totally worth it.** The frenetic and colorful spirit of the neighborhood is never more alive than on a night of **Tapapiés**.



“Carrillada melosa” from Maldito Querer: braised beef cheeks in a sauce of caramelized onion, garlic, herbs, and Pedro Ximénez reduction

To complete the experience, it’s essential to attend one of the **various outdoor performances** by local musicians, dancers, and entertainers that take place throughout the event. On Friday, Saturday, and Sunday afternoons and evenings, you can catch live music and shows at nine different designated spots (a full schedule is included in the brochure). There’s also the simultaneous **Chollopiés** festival, which **spotlights the neighborhood’s local businesses** by offering **special discounts** on certain products.



Maybe you live in Lavapiés and want to get to know your *barrio* better. Maybe you've never been and want to see what all the hype is about. Or maybe you're just hungry, thirsty, and low on cash. Whatever the case, **Tapapiés** is bound to become one of your favorite events in Madrid. If you go into it with **the right mindset, a healthy appetite, and a handful of coins**, I guarantee that come next October, there'll only be one thing on your mind. Who needs pumpkin spice lattes, anyway?

Info

- **Facebook**
- **Website**
- **Instagram**

Check out our roundup of Tapapiés' offerings last year!

Take a Peek Inside 5 Historical Madrid Bars

Madrid is full of amazing bars that have played a role in Spanish history. Whether it's art, literature, or the Spanish Civil War, these bars hold some sort of significance to Spain's past and are definitely worth the visit.

Here's a sneak peek into the stories behind our favorite historical Madrid bars.

Fatigas del Querer



Located in Sol is a restaurant with an exterior as beautiful as its interior dating back to the 1920s. This restaurant will grab your attention with its beautiful Andalusian tiles dedicated to Spanish painter Julio Romero de Torres. Even one of his paintings is depicted on these beautifully detailed tiles.



Typical free Spanish tapa

Not only is this bar related to historical Spanish art, but it also has an impressively large menu of Spanish dishes such as ***setas empanadas con alioli***. These fried mushrooms with alioli sauce would go great with one of the many ***vermuts*** that **Fatigas del Querer** has to offer.

- **Address:** Calle de la Cruz, 17
- **Metro:** Sol
- **Phone:** +34 915 23 21 31

La Casa del Abuelo



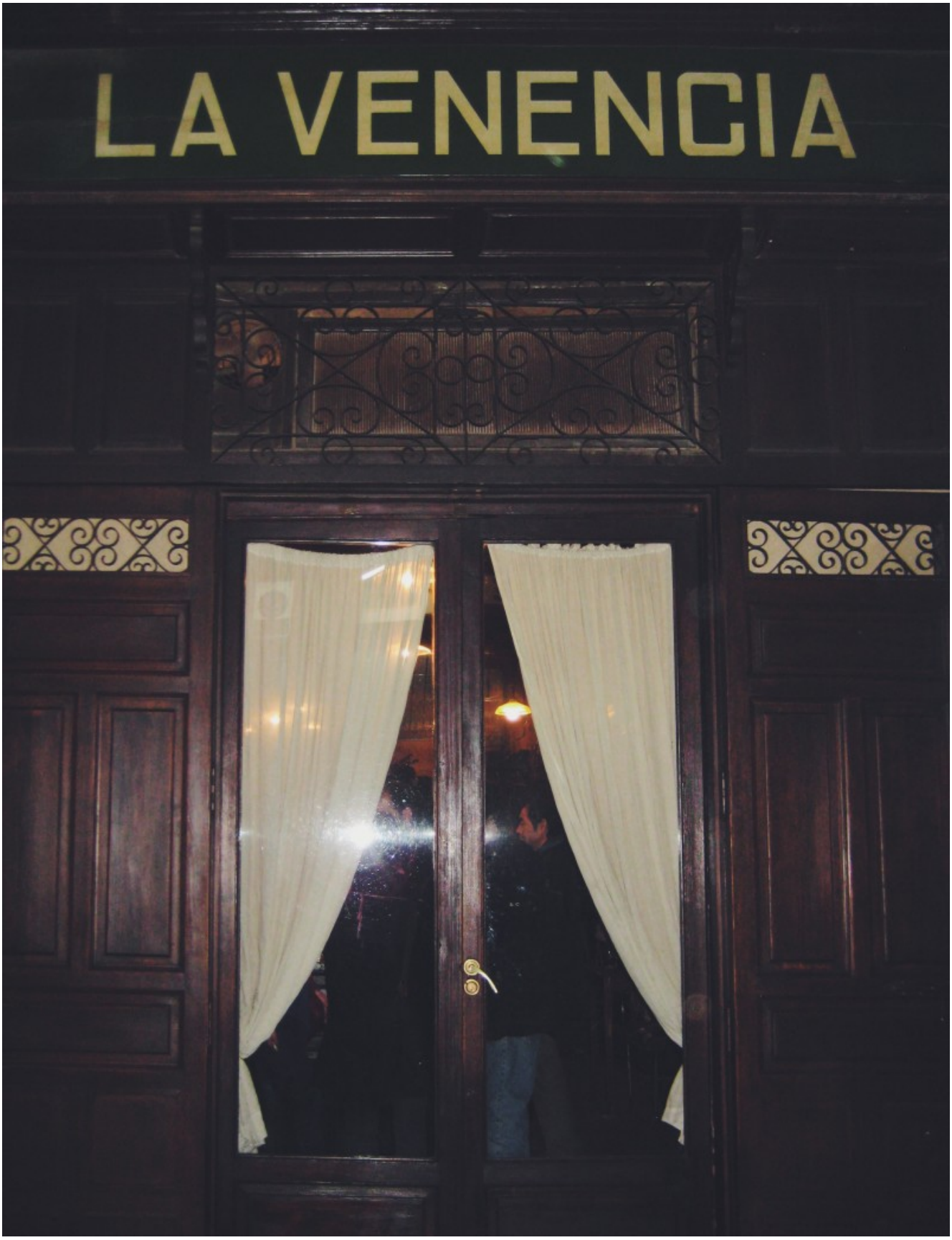
Just by the name alone, it’s clear that this bar has stood the test of time and still remains a Madrid classic.



Established in 1906, [La Casa del Abuelo] has seen Spain at the best of times and the worst of times, including the Spanish Civil War. During this time, La Casa del Abuelo only served garlic or grilled shrimp paired with a Spanish sweet wine due to the food shortage. Since then, this bar's ***gambas al ajillo*** and ***gambas a la plancha*** have become a delicious specialty.

- **Web & Facebook**
- **Address:** Calle de la Victoria, 12
- **Metro:** Sol
- **Phone:** +34 910 00 01 33

La Venencia



Source

During the height of the Spanish Civil War, this bar was one of the few spots where Republican soldiers and other anti-

fascists, such as Ernest Hemingway would go. Taking photos has been prohibited since the 1930’s just in case there were any fascist spies around.

Nevertheless, this bar is incredibly beautiful with its antique bottles and large barrels of wine that haven’t changed since this historical time period. And if you’re a sherry lover, known as *Jerez* in Spanish, this bar has an amazing variety to choose from.

- ***Cash only***
- **Address:** Calle Echegaray, 7
- **Metro:** Sol, Sevilla
- **Phone:** +34 914 29 73 13

1912 Museo Bar



Westin Palace Hotel

Located inside the Westin Palace Hotel is the perfect bar if you're in the mood for an elegant night out. Rumor has it that this high-end bar has had a fair number of influential guests such as Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí, and Ernest Hemingway.



Established in 1912, this bar still maintains a museum-like appearance with old photographs of the history of the hotel and life in Spain. The bar itself has some of the most high-end alcohols that you can find here in Madrid. Although this place is a little bit on the pricey side, you won’t be disappointed by the service or the selection.

- **Address:** Plaza de las Cortes, 7
- **Metro:** Banco de España, Sevilla, Antón Martín
- **Phone:** +34 913 60 80 00

San Ginés



And if you're looking for a break from all the alcohol and tapas, this chocolatería is the perfect place to switch it up. San Ginés has been a Madrid classic since 1894 and is easy to miss while walking through the crowded center of the city. It had even been named "La escondida", or "the hidden one" by some during the Second Republic of Spain. Regardless, this café has gained a lot of fame over the years and has even been mentioned in great works of literature, such as Ramón del Valle-Inclán's Bohemian Lights.



Original image by: @carlas.abreu via Instagram

San Ginés has by far the best ***chocolate con churros*** in Madrid. The menu also consists of ***porras***, known as giant churros, a variety of coffees, and even chocolate liqueur. So if you haven't already, head on over to San Ginés and get your sugar fix.

- **Web & Facebook**
- **Address:** Pasadizo de San Gines, 5
- **Metro:** Sol

- **Phone:** +34 913 65 65 46

You might also like: 5 authentic Madrid bars loved by locals

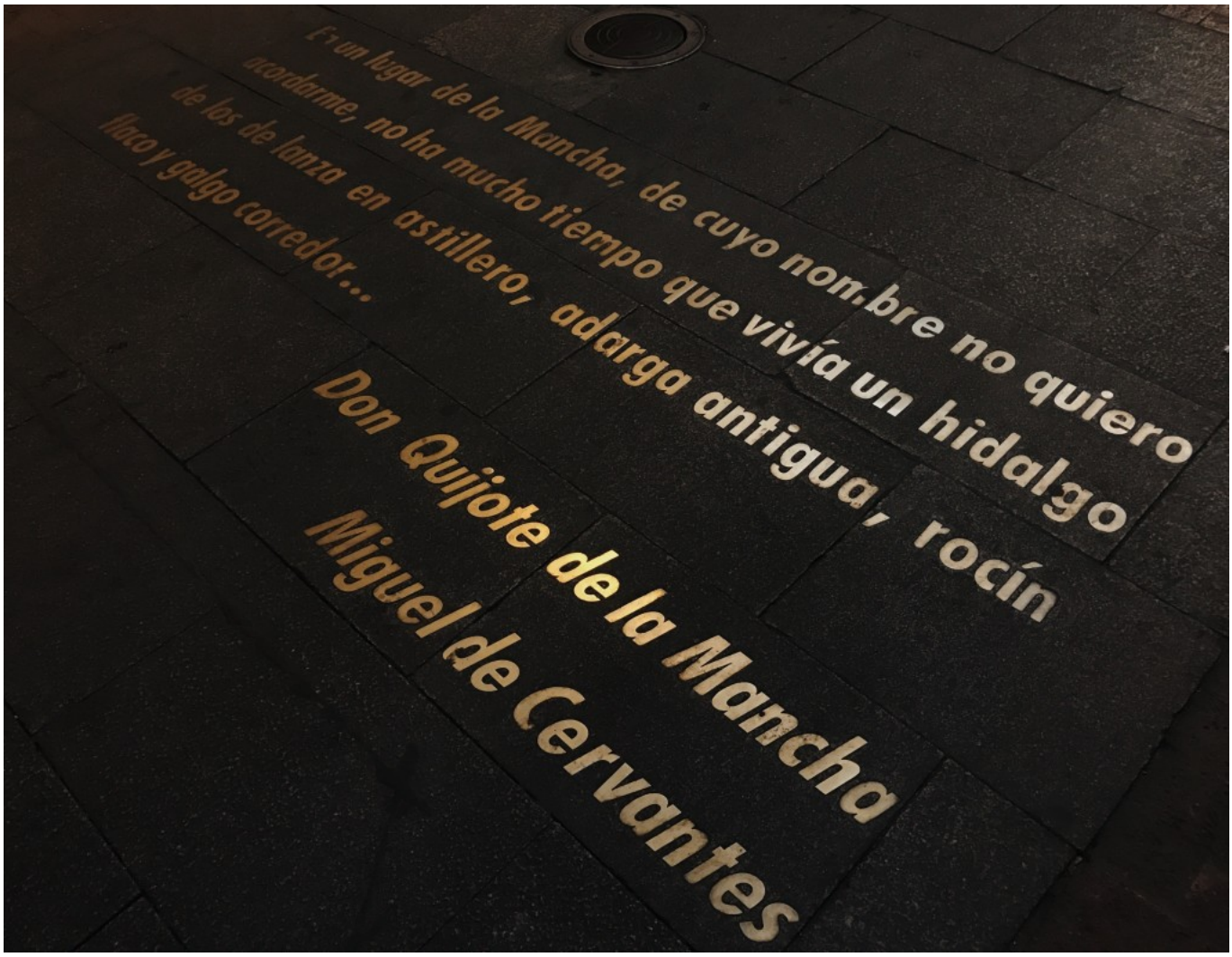
What to See in Barrio de Las Letras

Madrid's Barrio de las Letras is a timeless neighborhood that stays true to its Spanish roots, while still giving a modern feel that leaves visitors coming back for more. With its amazing food, culture, and ambience, you can't go wrong when it comes to exploring this classic barrio.

Here are a few insights into its history, **hotspots** and 3 restaurant recommendations!

History with a Modern Twist

Barrio de las Letras, also known as Huertas, is less than a 10-minute walk from Sol and was once home to some of the greatest Spanish writers. The streets are paved with recognizable quotes from writers such as, Miguel Cervantes and José Echegaray.



There are even plazas and streets dedicated to writers such as Plaza Jacinto Benavente and Calle Lope de Vega. The houses of some of these writers still stand today and are open to the public, such as Casa Museo Lope de Vega which offers free guided tours.



Plaza Jacinto Benavente



Calle Lope de Vega

Nowadays, this historic neighborhood has become a trendy spot for people to get together and have a drink paired with a few tapas. Calle de las Huertas is the main street where you can easily find great shops, cafes, and some of Madrid’s finest eateries.


la intrusa



While exploring the side streets that branch off the main road, keep an eye out for the various boutiques, art galleries, bookstores, and antique shops that make this neighborhood so authentic.


ANTIGÜEDADES
JOYERÍA - PLATERÍA
OBJETOS DE ARTE
ALMONEDA



Must-Sees in Barrio de las Letras

Plaza Santa Ana is a well-known hangout spot in this neighborhood. Here you can find a number of restaurants with outdoor seating areas that are perfect for enjoying the ambience with a nice wine or beer.





Plaza Santa Ana is also where you can find monuments of Calderón de la Barca, Federico García Lorca, and the Teatro Español, making it a popular spot for tourists.



Monument Calderon de La Barca



Monument Federico Garcia Lorca



Teatro Español—Madrid's oldest theater

3 Restaurants in Barrio de las Letras

This neighborhood is a hot spot for some of Madrid's oldest taverns and restaurants that serve typical Spanish dishes and tapas. Here are some of the best ones.

Cervecería Cervantes is a favorite among the locals. It's decorated with beautiful tiles that give a traditional Spanish feel. Every time I walk past this bar, it's always packed with people enjoying tapas and beer. This *cervecería* is known for its seafood that can be ordered in small portions. So stop in and try them all!



Another go-to place is **El Lacón** on Calle de Manuel Fernández y González. This place has been around since the 60s and has been considered a classic ever since. It's known for its drink and tapa deal, meaning that with each beer you order, the waiter will bring a small plate of tapas to your table. Not only is this restaurant famous for its incredible deal, but it's also known for its full plates such as, *cocido Madrileño* and the meat or fish *tablas* that can easily feed 3 people or more.



And if you’re looking for a place that has it all, **Casa Alberto** is the place for you. This restaurant is hard to miss with its red exterior, antique writing, and open door which allows people to take a peek inside.



When first entering **Casa Alberto,** it's hard to get past the crowd of people drinking and ordering tapas at the bar. But once you're in the dining room, you are guaranteed a great sit-down meal. For starters, the *croquetas de jamón* are an amazing way to start your meal. Another great starter is the *gazpacho de melon* with a prawn tartar. This gazpacho gives a modern twist on the classic Spanish plate by creating a sweet but savory infusion.

Not only are their appetizers high quality, but so are their main dishes. Casa Alberto makes an incredibly flavorful and hearty *callos a la Madrileña* that's perfect for a mid-day feast. As a U.S. Midwestern girl who loves red meat, I had to second guess myself after trying the *ventresca de bonito*. This fish plate was grilled to perfection topped with quality olive oil, fresh garlic, and a side of potatoes.

Make sure to leave room for dessert because **Casa Alberto** won't disappoint. Their cream-filled crepes topped with homemade blueberry and cheese ice cream are the perfect go-to dessert. But if you're looking for something with a bit of an alcoholic twist, the apple and cider sorbet is highly recommended.



Check out all the spots in Barrio de Las Letras featured on Naked Madrid!

Get interactive at “Mad Improv” theater workshops and shows!

Madrid’s theater scene is brimming with activity. You’ll find live micro-theater being performed in bathrooms and lingerie stores, as well as acting classes and alternative shows scheduled daily throughout the city.

But there isn’t much available in English, which is why I want to introduce you to **Mad Improv**, an English-speaking improv group that’s been shaking things up in Madrid’s interactive theater scene since 2014.



Mad Improv hosts shows and workshops on a regular basis, all

run by its cast members in English. **Free improv workshops – called "gyms" – are held on Sundays from 5pm-7pm**. Gyms are purely donation-based and absolutely everyone is welcome so you never know who might show up. People have even come in on flight layovers!



They also hold **monthly open shows – called "jams"** – where anyone can get up on stage and play improv games. Jams cost €3 with a drink (which probably comes in handy).



Locations for gyms and jams vary from **Fundación First Team** in Sol to Retiro when the weather allows. And right now they have a new set of **upcoming shows** at La Escalera de Jacob!

So check out their **Meetup**, **Facebook** and **Twitter** pages to stay up to date. Once you attend an event you can also ask one of the organizers to add you to the whatsapp group.

My experience – great way to step out of your comfort zone

I had secretly always wanted to drop in on an acting class, but never got around to it until this summer when two friends, Riju (India) and Laura (Spain), enthusiastically agreed to join me at one of the Sunday gyms. This was in August so the workshop was held in Retiro behind the Palacio de Cristal.



An international group of about 15 people showed up – the different backgrounds and languages definitely added an element of fun and spontaneity to the mix. And our organizer, Summer Banks (in the photo below), did a great job at including everyone and making sure the exercises were easy to follow.



What started out with simple warm-up games quickly gave way to more challenging improv activities that admittedly made me feel ridiculous. But it’s a wonderful way to get out of your comfort zone, connect with people and laugh a lot. My friends and I left with the feeling that we wanted to try our hands at improv again (and hopefully do it better next time), which meant **the fun far outweighed the awkwardness!**

Chat with the founder, Ben



Just before going to the workshop, I had met up with Mad Improv's founder Ben Nathan-Serio at the newly opened **Plántate Café**. After studying drama in NYC and working in the field, Ben moved to Barcelona where he first started working in children's theater. Four years in he launched his own interactive theater production, *The Barcelona Time Detectives,* and was also a founding member of **BIG, The Barcelona Improv Group**.

When Ben came to Madrid, he quickly became involved in Madrid's English-speaking theater scene and founded Mad Improv in 2014. Ben says, "The reason I started Mad Improv was because there was no improv community here; I wanted to reach out to the community in a bigger way, to get people involved."

What makes improv and interactive theater so special is that it's empowering, says Ben, as it allows for genuine human interaction and connection. Not to mention, getting out of your comfort zone is both invigorating and fun.

LOMBARDI CASE

ASESINATO EN LA MOVIDA



LIVE IN THEATER
INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCES NYC

24 y 29 de Junio - 19:00h

La industrial - C/ San Vicente Ferrer 33

Tickets: Oficinas de La Industrial c/ San Andrés 8 Local

Tickets Online: www.liveintheater.com/madrid

CAN YOU SOLVE THE CASE?

AN INTERACTIVE MURDER MYSTERY

SPANISH & ENGLISH

In addition to Mad Improv, Ben also recently co-founded **Live in Theater Madrid**, a NYC-based group whose hit interactive show, *The Lombardi Case*, debuted here in summer. It's a truly unique and entertaining two-hour event where the audience tries to solve a murder mystery – **read our previous article about *The Lombardi Case* on Naked Madrid**!

More to come

While Mad Improv and Live in Theater are alive and kicking in Madrid, Ben just relocated to Austin, Texas, where he's taking part in a 9-month research lab called **The Interactive Deep Dive**. And he can't wait to "come back with some very fresh, invigorating ideas for Live In Theater, Mad Improv and just the city in general."

So stayed tuned, because we'll make sure to fill you in on what's in store.

Mad Improv Info:

- **Facebook**
- **Website**
- **Meetup**

Museo Cerralbo, an art lover's dream house

If you're looking to explore **Madrid's museum scene** beyond the famous Prado and Reina Sofia, I recommend starting with **Los Cinco Museos**, five former mansions that are all perfectly restored and house outstanding art collections: Cerralbo,

Lázaro Galdiano, Artes Decorativas, Sorolla and Romanticismo.

These five museums take you on a journey to a different era, allowing you to see and feel what life might have been like when they were occupied. While each one is worth visiting, **Museo Cerralbo** is my personal favorite. I've been here twice – first on my own and then on a **guided tour** – and both times I was blown away by the museum's special charm.



Tucked away on a side street near Plaza de España and Templo de Debod, this museum is one of the former residences of the

Marquis of Cerralbo, who lived here with his family in the 19th century. Today, everything remains exactly in tact, from the furniture and art pieces to the wall colors and lighting.



As you walk through its many rooms and corridors, let your imagination run wild, picturing what life was like when this

house was actually a home.



The Marquis was a well known archeologist and passionate art lover. He amassed a collection of art, furniture and objects from Spain and around the world that you can see in every nook and cranny. You'll see beautiful paintings, mirrors, chandeliers and clocks dispersed throughout, and so much more.



The house has two floors. The first floor was where the family actually lived their normal lives, while the second floor is

where you'll find the extravagant ballroom and dining room, for example, that were meant to be shown off to guests.



Each particular room had a different purpose and decor, acting as a unique exhibition space. Here are a few examples.

The armor collection

After going up the gorgeous stairway (the house was actually designed to accommodate for a unique wooden banister), guests would step into the hallway displaying the Marquis's armor collection. This is my favorite exhibit.







The ballroom

To the right of the armor collection you'll find the stunning ballroom. I would certainly like to dance here one day…



As you can see, the Marquis was particularly fond of playing with lighting and mirrors to add as much depth to each room as

possible. And not an inch of the house was left unadorned.



The library

The library features British-style decor and houses an impressive collection of books in several different languages, some dating back as far as the 15th century. Here you'll also find one of the largest coin collections in Spain.





The billiard room

Right off the dining room you’ll find the billiard room. In that time, women weren’t expected to join in on the game, so there was a seating area designed just for them to watch as the men played.



Snapshots of more rooms and objects

There are so many little rooms and corridors to check out, each one providing a window into another era and giving your eyes plenty to marvel at. I don’t want to give away too much, so here are just a few more images to give you a glimpse of the Cerralbo Museum’s collection. But please don’t pass up the chance to see it in person!









Photography by Jose Luis Magaña from @asecond.art

Info

- **Website**, **Facebook** & **Instagram**
- I highly recommend **booking a guided tour** in English, Spanish or French
- **Address**: Calle Ventura Rodríguez, 17
- **Hours:** Tues–Sat 9:30am-3pm; Thursday also from 5-8pm; Sundays and holidays from 10am-3pm
- **Metro:** Plaza de España
- **Los Cinco Museos** pass: if you want to visit all five of these former mansions turned museums, you can purchase a €12 pass called **Los Cinco Museos** at any of their ticket offices. The pass gives you unlimited access to all five museums for 10 days, and after that you can enter on Saturdays with a plus one for the rest of the year.

You may also like:

- **Madrid's obvious and not-so-obvious museums (and how to get in for free!)**