

# Where to Dance Bachata and Salsa in Madrid

Always wanted to learn how to dance bachata but didn't want to pay high costs for private lessons? Well, look no further!

It is *muy de moda*, or very popular to dance bachata right now in Spain. Each year there seems to be more meet-up groups and more bars offering *noches de bachata* or *noches latinas*. Located right by Templo de Debod, [The Host](#) offers three bachata classes followed by social dancing every Wednesday night.

For 8 euros you'll have entrance to the bar, access to three classes over the course of two hours and a drink (alcoholic or not) of your choice. You can choose to take all three classes or just one. If you're more of a "people watcher" there are plenty of seats at the bar and around the perimeter of the dance floor. Don't show up too early though because the first class starts when the bar opens at 9PM.



For new dancers, the first question often asked is “Do I need to bring a partner?” **You do not need to bring a partner but you can if you’d like!** The classes tend to begin with the basics, which everyone dances individually. Then, when you do partner up, the pairs rotate so often that by the end of the class you’ll have danced with nearly everyone, you might even remember a few names or have made a new friend by the end of the lesson. On this particular Wednesday, the classes were: modern bachata, Dominican bachata and lastly, sensual bachata.



After the classes end and the students watch or record as the dance instructors model all the steps learned, the social dancing starts! You get the chance to practice what you learned with friends from the class or meet others who are just arriving for the social dancing. The fun doesn't end until 3AM! **If you're more interested in salsa, you should join The Host on Thursdays for class (see below).** You'll also hear a little bit of salsa and kizomba throughout the night but Wednesdays are specifically for bachata at The Host!



## Info

- Address: Calle Ferraz 38
- Metro: Argüelles / Ventura Rodriguez / Plaza España
- [Facebook](#)

## Other classes at The Host:

Tuesday: Kizomba (classes 21:00-23:00 and social dancing until 3)

Wednesday: Bachata (classes 21:00- 23:00 and social dancing until 3)

Thursday: Salsa (classes 21:00-23:00 and social dancing until 3)

Friday: Bachata (classes 22:00-@24:00 and social dancing

until 5:30)

## Facebook pages and groups on Madrid's salsa and bachata scene:

1. [Salsa Madrid](#) (page)
2. [Salsa Madrid](#) (group)

## Here are some more salsa places to check out:

### [Azucar:](#)

For 8 euro you can enjoy classes and a drink at Azucar near Metro Atocha. It is a smaller nightclub but brings in dancers of many levels.

### [Tropical House:](#)

Near Metro Plaza de España is the best place to start dancing salsa or bachata as a beginner. Tropical also offers kizomba lessons on Fridays and Saturdays.

### [Cats:](#)

On Sundays at Cats (now called Sala Mitty) you can dance salsa and bachata. The crowd is great and there's plenty of room to dance as it doesn't get completely packed.

### [El Son:](#)

A close walk from Puerta del Sol, El Son offers classes from Monday through Thursday at 6 euro a class.

## [La Negra Tomasa:](#)

In Sol but doesn't feel like it. Live Cuban music every night and although there isn't a lot of space to dance, if you love salsa music, La Negra Tomasa is a must.

You may also like: [Where to get fit in Madrid](#)

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## **Café Barbieri: A 114-year-old Art Nouveau café in Lavapiés**

[Café Barbieri](#) first brought modernist charm to Madrid's working class district, Lavapiés, in 1902, and although the *barrio* has evolved dramatically over the last 114 years, the interior of this elegant bar hasn't changed one bit.

Some things have changed though – Café Barbieri is owned by a charismatic chap from New Delhi and staffed with bilingual youngthings. It also now has a small terrace, but this is not why you'd come here – its appeal is truly the interior.

The whole place is lined with mirrors which back then were a symbol of wealth. These mirrors are now aging well, stained a smoky bronze colour with dots of grey rust creeping in from the edges. The ceiling is framed with grids of ornate girders that are connected to decorative cast-iron beams, typical of older buildings in Lavapiés. Although never on, there are ceiling fans too – something increasingly rare in Madrid.

At the back of the bar is a grand piano on a small raised stage. Almost every evening there's a live music session often

featuring the piano, and this place does food too – typical Spanish stuff but with an edge.

The worn white marble table tops and red velvet seating lining the dining area mark this place out as opulent, but that's really not the vibe – it's chilled and cosy and attracts a spectrum of people, from the intrepid tourist who's braved it down the hill, to the unassuming local who fancies a read of one of the papers on offer.



Café Barbieri by day



Café Barbieri's beautiful ornate ceiling



The grand piano taking centre stage, and look at all those beautiful mirrors



Look at that original tiled floor!



The bar has a great selection of spirits & vermouth on tap



Café Barbieri by night

Café Barbieri is also on the same street as the Greek foodie place, [Egeo](#), so there you have it, your night is planned!

## Info

- C/Ave María 45
  - Metro: Lavapiés
  - [Website](#) [Facebook](#)
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# Manzana Mahou: Gourmet Art Experience

[Manzana Mahou](#) is the concept sponsored by Madrid's most iconic beer, Mahou. It's located in Malasaña (between metro stops Tribunal and Alonso Martinez) at Palacio de Santa Bárbara, a beautiful palace built in 1866. For the third consecutive year, the outdoor space has been turned into a popular terrace designed to provide an oasis during Madrid's warmest months.



The idea behind Manzanita Mahou is to bring together art, gourmet food and beer, to create a unique experience. It is open until October 8th, after which it will be temporarily closed until next summer. This year, the stars of the show will be chefs María Marte from [Allard Experience](#), Javier Goya, Javier Mayor and David Alfonso, from [Triciclo](#) and Roberto Ruiz

from [Cascabel](#) by Punto MX.



These top chefs will be in charge of creating [exclusive dinners](#) inspired by the four resident artists at Manzana Mahou. In addition to this, two restaurants, La Cabra and Tandem will offer a more casual dining experience. [La Cabra](#) is a Michelin Star restaurant that will also offer brunch on Sundays from 12pm to 4pm for only 25€, led by renowned chef Javier Aranda, who at just 29 is one of the most acclaimed chefs in Spain. Tandem, on the other hand, is Triciclo's little brother which has also become a leader in Madrid's restaurant scene.



This year, the outdoor space has expanded, enhancing the experience. Four artists will be exhibiting, Julia Llerena, María Platero, Françoise Vanneraud and PLAYdramaturgia. The latter are a group of artists that create a mix between visual and performing arts, while the first three are focused mainly on visual arts.



Entrance on Calle Hortaleza

Open Monday to Sunday, from 11am to 1am, Manzana Mahou is a great opportunity to try some of Madrid's greatest restaurants at a more affordable price while enjoying art and a few beers.

## Info

[Facebook](#) & [Website](#)

**Address:** Calle Hortaleza, 47

**Metro:** Alonso Martínez & Tribunal

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# Madrid with Kids! – Tips from a Mom

Whether you're planning a trip to Madrid or a long-time resident looking for new ideas, Madrid is full of great options to keep your little ones entertained.

You might also like my article on [workout tips for moms in Madrid](#).

## Parks

Madrid is home to several great parks that offer lots of fun activities.



**Madrid Rio:** Why not go for a run with your baby along the park lining the Manzanares River? Parents running with a jogging stroller in Spain used to get a lot of odd stares. The running boom has changed all that and made jogging strollers a trend that's here to stay. Get yours at [Baby Running](#) – an online store with top-of-the-line sport strollers.

**Casa de Campo:** Casa de Campo is a huge park housing the [amusement park](#), [zoo aquarium](#) with more than 6,000 animals, and a scenic lake with outdoor cafes and boats for rent. If you'd like to avoid traffic jams and screaming kids on the metro, try the [cable car](#) for a scenic view of Madrid along the way. You may want to make sure you are out of the park before it gets dark as escorts tend to make their appearance later in

the day.

**Retiro:** Look for a puppet show at the [outdoor theatre](#) on weekends and enjoy the many other street performers surrounding the pond at the center of the park. You can also rent row boats if you're feeling confident in your deltoids, or sit back and relax on the solar boat. If you are looking to get some exercise, [Diverbikes](#) across from the O'Donnell entrance rents all different kinds of bikes, and surreys.

Rain driving you and your kids up the wall? Check out the second floor of the [library](#) in the park for a space dedicated to babies and children.

## Theme parks and zoos

In addition to the amusement park and zoo aquarium in Casa de Campo, your children will also love seeing the animals at [Faunia](#) in Valdebernardo. Visitors can interact with cage-free animals, and even feed them. The manatee exhibit and petting zoo tend to be a big hit.

If you have a car, the 30 kilometer drive to [Warner Theme Park](#) is the worth the trip. With five different park areas, including Hollywood Boulevard, Superheroes World, Cartoon Village, the Old West and WB Movie World Studios, there are plenty of options to keep everyone in your family happy. Younger kids will love seeing Batman, Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck and Superman while older kids and parents check out the latest roller coasters, log fumes and rapid rivers.

You also have the largest water park in Europe about 15 minutes from Madrid in Villanueva de la Cañada. [Aquópolis](#) can get very packed during the peak season so you may be better off going to one of Madrid's [outdoor pools](#) on hot summer weekends.



Summer pool by UCM

## Sports fans

Kids dreaming of becoming the next Cristiano Ronaldo will forever thank you for taking them to the tour of the [Santiago Bernabeu stadium](#). Mini Real Madrid fans will be in heaven as they visit the players' locker room, the President's Balcony and even sit on the players' bench.

Little ones hoping to join Cholo's squad will love seeing the [Atlético de Madrid Museum](#). Atlético fans will adore looking at the trophies, memorabilia and collection of shoes and balls dating back to 1903.

## Kid-friendly museums

If your kids hear the word "museum" and start to groan, several museums in Madrid could change all that.

The [Wax Museum](#) has over 450 figures including Harry Potter, Snow White, The Simpsons and Frodo from “The Lord of the Rings”. Look online for special discounts for families.

The [Madrid Railway Museum](#) contains a selection of 19th century trains, related exhibits and a wide range of family friendly activities. Take a break afterwards and have a snack in the café located in a 1930s carriage. In Spring and Fall you can also take a ride to Aranjuez on an old-fashioned train, the [Strawberry Train](#) (*Tren de la Fresa*).

Madrid’s [Planetarium](#) lets little explorers observe other galaxies, planets, stars and black holes. Children’s workshops are also available for Spanish-speaking little ones.

With huge dinosaur skeletons and weekend workshops for children, the [National Museum of Natural Sciences](#) is another good option for families.

## Theatre and concerts for babies and kids

Madrid offers a wide range of theatre and concerts designed for babies and children. The bill is constantly changing so check [BabyTribu](#) and [Sapos y Princesas](#) for the latest options.

## Other ideas

Older kids who are into go-carts will love the [Carlos Sainz Center](#) in Madrid and Las Rozas.

Little ones may enjoy visiting [The Casa Museo del Ratoncito Pérez](#) – the Spanish version of the tooth fairy. The hours change so check their website before going.

Located inside the [Kinépolis](#) movie theatre, [The Magic Forest](#) is a children’s park with slides, climbing trees and mazes.

Nearly every neighborhood in Madrid has a **play center** (*ludoteca*). Find the one closest to you [here](#).

## By Marybeth Redheffer

Marybeth is the founder of [Baby Running](#), an online store selling sport strollers so you can stay fit with the little ones in the city! Check out her [website](#) and [facebook](#).

You might also like: [Workout tips for moms in Madrid!](#)

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# Breaking it to your parents that you're not going home (yet)

This is the time of year when many of us are forced to ask ourselves daunting questions such as: *Who am I? Where am I going? What am I doing with my life? Should I stay or should I go? Can I be this happy anywhere else? Am I happy now? Should I continue my education? Should I start my career? Should I be closer to my family?*

More often than not, we opt to *mañana mañana* these questions until this time next year by renewing our contracts as teaching assistants, switching Auxiliar programs, or continuing to hustle however we hustle and upholding the status quo of tapas, terrazas, low rent, and budget-friendly hedonism.



It is often difficult to break the news of your decision to stay abroad to your parents, especially if they believe with conviction that the *American Dream* is not only feasible, but that the pursuit of it is the only respectable way to live.

## **What your parents might expect of you:**

While success is subjective across generations and cultures, for many American parents the epitome of success for their offspring can entail any of the following:

- Acquiring a fancy masters degree and/or PhD
- Commitment to an uphill career path, working 65-80 hours per week
- Marriage to another real adult with ambition and drive

so that you can be a power couple

- Owning a house and a fondue set for entertaining guests
- Being able to do your own taxes and paperwork
- Assorted antiquated concepts of normalcy that you are critical of after growing accustomed to a simpler life that is lived on your own terms.



Some families want to have, or feel that they deserve, a say in the decision-making process of their progeny to steer them away from a life of permanent squalor. Understandably their patience for the *mañana mañana* mindset will inevitably run thin. With each additional year that their beloved child spends teaching abroad, earning a wage that would be considered below poverty-level in the United States, parents will inevitably go through the stages of grief for their child's futures as they were once envisioned.

Disclaimer: I'm well aware that there is no one-size-fits-all relationship between parents and kin. Just as there are parents who do not attempt to sway their offspring in any direction, there are kin who do not care whether or not their parents approve of their lifestyle.

# What your parents might say and how to respond:

Below are some predicted comments from your parents that will indicate what stage of grief they are in, accompanied by an advisable response to help them manage their expectations.

## **Denial: “This is just a phase, you’ll outgrow it.”**

- With Hemingway-esque detail, explain in depth your passion for your adopted city
- Perhaps Madrid stimulates you creatively in a way that is unmatched anywhere else
- Maybe your heart was stolen by a person, or the cuisine
- Teaching English is fulfilling (or at least more tolerable than any alternative)
- Once you leave, the neighboring European countries will never again be this accessible

## **Anger: “You’re out of touch with reality. TEFLing is not a Real Job™.”**

- You are constantly learning via exposure to other languages, cultures and ways of life
- You have either achieved bilingual status or are making progress towards it
- Your overworked friends back home often send you envious messages
- You are still nurturing valuable resume skills in your teaching jobs:
  - the ability to speak publicly, projecting your voice without fear
  - generating clients and operating your own brand with *clases particulares*
  - often adapting to changing circumstances

- Ask them to elaborate on what a real job entails and why having one is so important, seeing as it is common for elderly folks on their deathbeds to voice regretting the amount of time that they spent at the office
- Side effects of chasing the American dream include delusion, anxiety, and alienation



**Bargaining: “You can live at home with us while you get back on your feet, use the car and eat our food. We’ll keep the kitchen stocked with bagels.”**

- Express gratitude but don’t waver in the face of temptation



**Depression: “We had such high hopes for you.”**

- When faced with their disappointment, remind them that you have your own hopes and dreams, albeit unconventional ones.
- Reiterate that you love and appreciate them despite not seeing eye-to-eye on these matters
- Stress that while their approval is important to you, it would be a necessary sacrifice if weighed against the life abroad that you have created

**Acceptance: “Ok, make your own choices. We trust your judgment.”**

- At this stage thank them for their council throughout your decision-making process.

Although I’m certain that we collectively do not want Donald Trump to rise to the presidency, it would at least make a non-issue of the *Should I stay or Should I go* debate. Please feel free to share your own experiences breaking the news to your

parents in the comment section!

## You may also like:

- [Where to take your mom in Madrid](#)
  - [The quest for good bagels in Madrid](#)
  - [A window into the life of a Senegalese migrant in Lavapiés](#)
  - [Jewish culture in Madrid](#)
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# Courage on the corner: a window into the life of a Senegalese migrant and Baye Fall culture

**Barrio Lavapiés** can be personified by its many smells: the Indian curries and scents escaping from the ethnic restaurants and the grit of the infrequently cleaned streets. Least subtle of all is the lingering scent of weed and hash smoked by entrepreneurial gentlemen on the corner, who actively solicit the business of passersby. People of all ages congregate and *botellón* when the weather allows it. There is a strong sense of community here among the international and local residents. **In recent years the neighborhood of Lavapiés has become trendy and has been slowly undergoing the inevitable gentrification process.**



I was moved by a *Vice* documentary titled [“Storming Spain’s Razor-Wire Fence”](#) that depicts the odyssey undertaken by many African migrants in their attempts to enter mainland Spain via the border shared between Morocco & Ceuta y Melilla. The documentary provided a brutal window into their journeys but didn’t go into any detail as to how those who had succeeded would go on to assimilate. My curiosity was piqued as to **potential stories that could be shared by my neighbors in Lavapiés** if they were granted an adequate platform to do so.



My close friend Kam “El Profesoul” accompanied me as my barrio ambassador; together we scoured the block, my notebook in hand as we searched for subjects to interview. As an active musician and long-term resident of the neighborhood, Kam has befriended many members of the African community. One such friend of Kam’s was responsive to my interview request and invited us to join him and his crew on the smoky stairs where they were strategically perched. **Moha**, a bearded African with dignified posture, kept his eyes hidden behind yellow plastic sunglasses. In the background was [Zikr music](#) from Senegal playing softly. **Moha and his companions identify themselves as [Baye Falls](#), a sub-group of the Mouride Brotherhood that is prominent in Senegal.** The ensuing conversation took place in Spanish with my notes taken in English.

# **My interview with Moha**





## **Where are you from? Do you feel at home here?**

I am from Senegal and I am grateful to be a documented resident of Spain for five years. My family moved here before I did and I was fortunately granted permission to join them. Many of my friends were separated from their families during their journeys or after arriving here because without legal papers they cannot leave Spain. Every resource of value was taken from our Africa and we come here to have a better life. We've made this barrio our home. We bring our music, our food our culture and our love.

## **What do you want members of my community**

## to know about yours?

*Baye Fall* culture is about respect, love and valor. We don't steal. We love our neighbors. If we see one of our own misbehave, we confront them and put them on the right path. (During our conversation one of Moha's peers catcalled a passerby and was swiftly berated by the group, exemplifying these principles.) We believe in nonviolence and love. We're open to outsiders. See him? My white friend below, we're teaching him *Baye Fall*. We don't fight, when we do it's not with the world but within ourselves. "Su lucha es suya misma"

## What is a typical day like on the corner? What qualities have helped you survive here?

*"Si no trapicheos, no comes" – If we don't hustle, we can't eat.*

Many are obligated to stay in the game, whether or not it's what we want. We meet a lot of people this way. On a typical day we can work the corners and do our parts in peace and there is no problem. Sometimes we are confronted by the police. I have seen many friends detained and disappeared for not having their legal documents. Without my documents I would not have the freedom and peace that I am blessed with now. To avoid police, it helps to change our clothes several times throughout the day. Without papers, one must find alternatives to contracted work. Many of us have mastered a trade or art form. **We're painters, drummers, singers, sculptors, woodworkers.** We are many things. We gather on Sundays to teach our skills to each other and anyone else who seeks it.



The police interrogating my African neighbors in a previous Lavapies apartment

## **What can be done to improve the assimilation process in the future?**

We must be reminded that we are all equal. That we can forget our differences. **Opportunities that we create ourselves cannot be taken away from us.** We must not fall weak and be foolish. We must be able to ask for help when we need it and then give it back.

## **What is your happiest memory in the barrio?**

There is a [yearly grand party](#) of *Baye Falls*. The exact date depends on the lunar cycle; this past year it was in November.

People come from all over to celebrate and dance in the streets. It is beautiful.

**How do you feel that Lavapiés is now becoming a “trendy” neighborhood? Are you concerned that it will become gentrified and lose its charm and essence?**

The Spanish youth that live in the barrio are not affecting it in a negative way. The students and artists are innovative and have many ideas that could work. They have clear hearts and have *Baye Fall* in them even if they don't know it. **Lavapiés is the heart of Madrid, let's not forget that.**



**Please share any comments you may have, and stay tuned – Dan will be providing us with more special**

articles like this one over the coming months.

You may also like:

- [Baobab, an authentic Senegalese restaurant in Lavapiés](#)

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## Gluten free pastelerías in Madrid: Part 2 – La Oriental

[La Oriental](#) is a teeny tiny traditional *pastelería* that offers a whole array of gluten free goodies. Founded in 1950 and currently run by the fourth generation of bakers, here you'll find locally inspired *pasteles*, elaborated using traditional Madrileño methods and the best local ingredients. This is the place to go to step into the world of **traditional artisan pastries** and try some local specialities. Luckily for gluten free foodies, it is central to the city and just a short stroll from the Argüelles metro stop!

When you step into the bakery you are immediately surrounded at all heights by stacks of galletas, trays of mini pasteles, counters brimming with all sorts of chocolates, beautifully decorated tartas, light pink *meregues* and boxes of assorted **chocolate-dipped shortbreads**.





It is not hard to find the gluten free goodies as the shop is covered in '**sin gluten**' symbols to help you find your way around.

You'll find delicacies in every counter, including the tall fridge in front of the window, which is jam-packed with tartas, cheesecakes and birthday cakes (see the raspberry cheesecake above, yum!). There is also a counter with an entire selection of **rocas**, which are chocolates filled with caramelised nuts, in dark chocolate, milk chocolate, white chocolate... well, in every kind of chocolate that you could imagine.



Also sitting on nonchalantly on top of the counters, as if

they have no idea of the effect they'll have on you, are **boxes of assorted biscuits**, which are, indeed, gluten free too.

There are Viennese-style biscuits covered in jam and chopped nuts, star-shaped shortbreads, vanilla cookies topped in dark chocolate and sprinkles, and many more options. In addition to the boxes on the counters, there are also boxes behind the shop front, which the shop assistants will no sooner whisk out for you than you can say 'sin gluten'.



As well as the shop's excellent 'gluten free' signing, the best part of visiting the shop is being greeted by the shop's incredibly smiley fourth generation owner, or one of her friendly assistants. As soon as you mention that you are 'celiaca' or 'celiaco', a whole range of extra delights will be whisked out from the back and you'll wonder why you never came here before.

The pastel of choice on this visit was one of the 'bandejas' of mini pasteles, which I can say are without a doubt the most

delicious little morsels I have tried in my natural gluten-free, and non-gluten free, life.





Each tray is slightly different, with six rows of beautifully presented mini pasteles, each little pastel like a mini work of art. You can tell that at La Oriental they take their baking seriously. In this particular '*bandeja*', there were **six types of mini pasteles**: a custard-cream topped sponge; a light pastry sandwiched with chocolate cream; dark chocolate cups with vanilla custard filling and chocolate sprinkles; a profiterole-style pastry filled with dark chocolate cream; an orange cream square and, last but not least, dark chocolate cups filled with whipped cream and topped with a raspberry.



The mini selections of pastries like this *bandeja* are wrapped

up in a sweet little La Oriental box with reflective gold lining and tied up with string, making them the perfect treat to buy for a friend, gluten free or not gluten-free, or maybe, let's be honest, just for yourself.



In addition to this, the tartas in the tall fridge counter in front of the window can also be ordered for special occasions like birthdays, or just selected from the shop on the day (they all look delicious!).

## Extra notes

There are also sugar-free and lactose free options. Just ask the owner.

Extra tip: some of the boxes of biscuits already have prices on, but the rest are priced according to weight, so make sure you check with the owner before you select your box.

# Info

*Calle Ferraz, 47*

[Website](#)

*Tel: 91 559 70 45*

## Word of the post

I hope that you liked this post on La Oriental. Today's special word, in homage to the delicious nature of the post's content, is:

**natillas**– a creamy custard, yum.

## You'll also like:

- [Gluten free pastelerías in Madrid: Part 1, Confeterías Marqués](#)
- [El Riojano, Madrid's best pastry shop in the centre with a hidden tea room!](#)
- [María's – sensational sweets on Calle Zurbano](#)

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# Festival of San Isidro: All You Need to Know

# What is the Festival of San Isidro?

San Isidro is a citywide festival, pure and simple, but unlike San Fermín in Pamplona or Las Fallas in Valencia, it isn't really a great source of local pride or identity for the city of Madrid. Many residents take advantage of the three-day weekend to travel elsewhere—often back to their hometowns—or to get a bit of Spring cleaning done in the spare time off work. This should come as little surprise. Madrid is the great Spanish melting pot, a cultural and economic center that pulls people in from across the country but never fully instills in them the type of local identity that underpins the more famous Spanish festivals.

If anything, Gay Pride is the better candidate for Madrid's primary festival. It certainly draws more visitors and press to the capital, and seems to adequately reflect the anarchic, welcoming nature of the city—one that shrugs off regional Spanish identity to embrace anyone who's down to party.

But San Isidro does have its supporters. They're mostly residents with deep family roots in Madrid, proud Madrileños who dress up in traditional garb to eat the classic food and dance the chotis in parties scattered throughout the central barrios. The festival has some of the cultural posturing of the "castecismo madrileño," the Madrid castizo identity that's proudly Spanish, built on the rejection of the bourgeois French affectations of the elite, and the feeling still stands.

I have a special affinity for San Isidro myself, partly because of the contradictions in it—a festival that both represents the soul of Madrid and couldn't be further from it. The strong passion and utter indifference toward the holiday reflect the multiple layers of Madrid's identity, at once a

city and a collection of barrios, provincially Spanish and globally connected.

Or maybe we all just like beers in the park.

## **Great. Who the hell is San Isidro?**

Good question. Legend has it that one day, in the Moorish town of *Mayrit* (present-day Madrid), a day laborer named Isidro was ploughing his lord's field when he miraculously caused a spring to gush forth from the earth, like a teenager hitting a sprinkler head with the lawnmower.

In another instance, Isidro saved his son from a deep well by praying to raise the water level, thus bringing the child floating back to the top.

These are several of his many miracles that would end up lifting this humble and devout Madrileño to prominence and eventual sainthood—a move spearheaded by the Spanish monarchs who had a particular interest in the miracle worker. King Phillip II himself was supposedly cured of a grave ailment by drinking the water that flowed from a spring that San Isidro found. San Isidro's most famous miracles took place in Madrid and had to do with water, making this diviner, well-digger, and rainmaker the patron saint of both Spanish farmers and the city of Madrid.



San Isidro doing his thing.

Today, in what we now know as the Pradera de San Isidro (a park in the Carabanchel neighborhood south of the center-metro Marqués de Vadillo) his miraculous springs still flow. A hermitage dedicated to the saint was erected in the area during the 14th century, then rebuilt in 1725 near one of Isidro's famed springs, and believers still pay their respects and collect the healing water during the May festival thrown in his honor.

## **Uh-huh. So how should we celebrate it?**

While the festival historically takes place in the Pradera de San Isidro (a meadow in Carabanchel), it has since spread throughout the entire city. Activities sputter to a start during the week but officially kick off with the commencement speech (pregón) on Friday at 8pm in the Plaza de la Villa, attended by city officials and an invited celebrity—2016's is the musician Santiago Auserón, a staple of the Movida Madrileña. The celebrations will last until Monday evening.

# Top 10 things to do (2016):

**1. Grab a guide and find what you like:** [The official San Isidro guide](#) is the one true resource, praise be upon it.

**2. Go to a free open-air concert:** *(Everywhere throughout the long weekend)* There are many free open-air concerts throughout Madrid during San Isidro, including in the Plaza Mayor, Las Vistillas and Plaza de la Villa. On several nights at 9pm, for example, live classical music is played next to Templo De Dubod as the sun goes down. It's worth seeing. Again, [the official guide](#) is your best source here.

**3. Have yourself a class picnic in the Pradera** *(Sunday 15th is the big day – Pradera de San Isidro, though there are also events on Saturday and Monday)* This is the most emblematic part of the festival. In fact, the picnicking tradition here has purportedly been around since the 1600s, and by the time Goya used it as the subject of some paintings in the late 1700s the tradition was already widely referenced. The pradera area has many stands with food and drink of all sorts, so you can bring your own or buy food down there. It's an all-around good time.



Picnicking in the Pradera. I took this with a scratched-up iPhone 3GS!

*Warning: last year there were about 12 toilets stationed for the thousands of people at the Pradera, so be prepared to do the festival's traditional holding-it-in dance.*

**4. Party on the street "Paseo de 15 de Mayo"** (Primarily Sunday, the 15th, to a lesser extent Saturday and Monday / next to metro stop Marqués de Vadillo) The San Isidro Festival has a very prominent "barrio" feel to it, and the neighborhood next to the Pradera de San Isidro (Marqués de Vadillo Metro) reigns supreme. They even named the major

street that cuts through it after the date of the celebration, May 15th. Go here to drink wine and beer from the bars that set up stands along the street, then head onward to the Pradera for your picnic.

**5. Check out the tacky/amazing carnival** (Saturday, Sunday, Monday / Pradera de San Isidro): Like all carnivals, it has rides of questionable safety and hordes of roaming teenagers, but it's a good time nonetheless. Last year I enjoyed playing the childhood favorite, "shoot the single-serving alcohol bottle off a shelf with a cork gun." There's also a ferris wheel that offers a good view of the city.



Everyone's favorite childhood fair game, "shoot the

single-shot liquor bottles with a cork gun!” This was San Isidro a few years back. I won!

**6. Party in Las Vistillas** (*Friday, Sat, Sunday, Monday near Puerta de Toledo, Jardin de Las Vistillas*) This little park in La Latina plays annual host to another of the city’s “verbenas” (local parties), together with the Plaza Mayor and the Plaza de La Villa. The scenic gardens fill up with food stands, music, and people dancing the chotis. It’s usually one of the first things that comes to locals’ minds if you ask them about the holiday. (For acts taking place here, check the guide).

**7. Drink Wine Under Fireworks/ Music in Retiro** (*Saturday and Sunday, 8:30pm/dusk*): Bring a bottle of wine and a blanket, lay back and enjoy.



Fireworks in Retiro, a photo I stole from the internet because cell camera is incapable of this.

**8. Check out the bullfights:** (*Afternoons in Las Ventas*) San Isidro is traditionally the beginning of bullfighting season in Madrid, and it's actually the biggest bullfighting festival in the world. There are 24 afternoons of bullfights, including one specific day in which they all don Goyesco costumes, an event reasonably called *La corrida goyesca*. You can [find schedules online and tickets](#) for as low as 8 euros to some events. Others are quite popular and pricy, so get on those tickets ASAP if you're into the bloodsport.

**9. Watch the little Parade of Big-heads and Giants** (*Friday 13th at 6pm –Route: Plaza de Santo Domingo – Plaza de Callao – Puerta del Sol – Mercado de San Miguel – Plaza de la Villa*): This strange little parade has origins in the 16th century but was rediscovered in the 1800s—it marches larger-than-life figures down the main streets of the center of Madrid. The giants are four pairs of monarchs who represent Europe, Asia, Africa and America. (Author's note: I've never actually been to this, but it looks moderately interesting, very grammable.)



the parade (source: [www.madrid.es](http://www.madrid.es))

**10. Hit Up the Castizo Swing Festival in the Matadero** (*Saturday, May 14th, all day, The Matadero*) The endlessly hip Matadero can do no wrong. There will be dancing, singing and general rabble-rousing throughout the day and into the night on Friday, with live musical acts. [Check their website](#) for more details about the event.

**10.1. Stroll by the Feria de Cacharrerías** (*Sunday Afternoon, Plaza Comendadoras in Conde Duque / Malasaña*) Go get yourself a nice clay pot or something. You deserve it. [Here's a good lowdown.](#)

**Thanks for the tips! So what's typical of the festival?**

**Traditional Dance: El Chotis**

The history of the chotis dance is surprisingly recent,

arriving to the Spanish capital only around 1850 from Vienna, but it's now considered a cultural hallmark of Madrid. You'll see people dancing it on stages or in groups, particularly in The Pradera, the Plaza Mayor, or in Las Vistillas park. The men traditionally don't move much at all, and it's said you can dance it on a single tile.

In terms of music, my person favorite chotis song, and perhaps the best known, is [Madrid! Madrid! Madrid!](#) I once saw an old man singing this passionately at a now-defunct karaoke bar off the Plaza Mayor. It was pure magic.

### **Traditional Clothing: *El Chulapo***

The spirit of Goya's Madrid is alive and well in San Isidro with some revelers dressing up like the 18th-century subjects of the famous Madrileño painter's artwork, in a style fittingly known as "*Goyesco*."

You've probably seen little children running around these days in their traditional chulapo/ chulapa outfits. Kids and adults alike dress up in this 19th-century outfit and go to the major festival grounds around they city. They're all adorable. If you're anyone, you might consider buying yourself the traditional *palpusa* hat. I certainly might.



Chulapos y Chulapas (source: [www.barullo.com](http://www.barullo.com))

### **Traditional Food:**

**Rosquillas:** Little doughnuts, sold mainly during the festival, usually made with olive oil and a slight anise flavor. There are different names for each type.

**Las Listas:** rosquillas with powdered sugar on top.

**Las Tontas:** rosquillas without powdered sugar on top.

**Las de Santa Clara:** rosquillas with glazed sugar on top.

**Las Francesas:** rosquillas with glazed sugar and almonds on top.



Traditional food is sold throughout the pradera. Here are some olives I spotted.

***Fritura de gallinejas y entresijos:*** fried hen innards (A festival favorite of tons of people!)

***Barquillos:*** little cylindrical wafers, similar to an ice cream cone. The seller, known as a barquillero, dresses up in a chulapo outfit and plays a type of roulette on something that looks like a portable oxygen tank. If you win, you get two barquillos!

***Cocido Madrileño:*** the typical dish that comes out any time Madrid is feeling local pride.

**Encurtidos:** skewers of peppers, olives, cocktail onions, etc.

**Vino en bota:** a sac of wine. Like normal wine, but in a sack.

**Clara con limón:** Beer mixed with a carbonated lemon beverage.

## **Traditional Pilgrimage: Hermita de San Isidro**

This isn't much of a "pilgrimage" considering it's right next to the Pradera where you'll be hanging out, but if you're of a religious inclination and fancy stumbling over to pay homage to Madrid's patron saint, be prepared to wait in an excruciatingly long line of mainly elderly Madrileños and devout Catholics at the Hermita de San Isidro. Bring a botijo to collect some of the healing water and memorize this traditional prayer to say when kissing the box containing his relics:

*"San Isidro hermoso,  
patrón de Madrid,  
que el agua del risco  
hiciste salir"*



Hermita de San Isidro, the time of Goya and the time of Google Street View screenshots.

# **I want to whip out some interesting San Isidro facts while I sip a beer!**

You do? Are you sure that's wise?

You can start by listing all the *rosquilla* varieties, that's fun. Make sure to not stop, even as people begin wandering away from you. You could also half-heartedly suggest a visit to the San Isidro museum, which occupies—in what seems to be a bit of a historical 6-degrees-from-Kevin-Bacon—a 17th-century house built on the spot of an even older house that once pertained to the Vargas family, who were the lords of the miraculous day-laborer.

If anyone accepts your offer to go, feign appendicitis and stumble away.

# **I need even more fun facts, I plan on partying the whole day!**

Alright, settle down.

- The actual remains of San Isidro are kept in a prominent position behind the alter in the Almudena Cathedral, just in front of the Royal Palace in Madrid.

*“Cool!”*

- One of San Isidro's miracles involves feeding pigeons from a bag of grain that miraculously replenished itself.

*“Say whaaaa?”*

- One of his miracles was getting an angel to plow the field for him while he just sat around praying.

*“Clever!”*

His wife is known as Maria La Cabeza (the head) because her head was kept as a relic after her death, paraded around by believers to bring rain to the dry countryside.

*“Quaint!”*

- Someone in Queen Isabel’s court bit off one of his mummified toes in a religious fervor.

*“Understandable!”*

- Francisco Goya has painted several wildly different takes on the San Isidro pilgrimage and festival, including one in the grotesque style of his “Black Paintings” collection.

*“Educational!”*



*See? Look how much fun they’re having!*

- The “Puente de Toledo” bridge (also known as the “Puente de Praga” due to its resemblance to the Charles bridge in Prague) has a statue of San Isidro performing the miracle of saving

his son from the well. His son later died of other, non well-related causes.

*“huh.”*

That church visible from the Plaza Mayor as you walk down toward La Latina is called San Isidro church.



San Isidro church

*“How about we talk about something–”*

“Rosquillas” is how they translate “donuts” in the Castilian version of the Simpsons, and, Dunkin’ Donuts is known as Dunkin’ Coffee in Spain, all because “Donut” was already a registered trademark in the country.

*“Listen, I gotta go...”*

## I want some key vocabulary.

**Verbena:** a festival for a patron saint, usually with traditional dress and dancing. *"This verbena rocks!"*

**Romería:** a Catholic festival based on a pilgrimage to a hermitage or sanctuary. *"This Romeria rocks!"*

**Botijo:** clay jug-like thing to collect water from the sacred springs. *"Whoa, sick botijo. Botijos rock!"*

**Chulapo/a:** the name of both the people and the traditional costumes for San Isidro. *"Hey, those chulapos rock!"*

**Chotis:** The traditional dance. *"Chotis rocks!"*

**Goyesco:** Goya-esque. *"This all feels very goyesco, which rocks!"*

**Rosquillas** (la tonta, la lista, etc...): typical doughnuts. *"These rosquillas are fine, I guess."*

**Bota de vino:** a wine recipient. *"I shouldn't have drunk that rockin' bota de vino all by myself. How goyesco of me."*

## Where to find it on a map – "Pradera de San Isidro"

<M> Marqués de Vadillo (line 5)

[googlemaps

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/embed?mid=zGCIXzIDPGqs.kBmVv5oWRpGg&w=640&h=480>]

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# Stunning Local Olive Grove Tour, in English! – Proyecto Los Aires

In 2013, biologists **Guillermo and Laura** – Spain's newest generation of **olive farmers** – took over the family business and embarked on an innovative mission: to connect the local countryside with the city of Madrid and make farming a **sustainable way of life** once again.

## How it all started:

**Over a century ago**, in a small town in the region of **Toledo**, Guillermo's great grandfather planted his first grove of around 200 olive trees, and between the evenly spaced olive saplings grew rows of sun-drenched grapevines.

A hundred odd years later, only the footprints of the old vines are visible, but the olive trees have grown beautifully gnarled and twisted, with silver miniature leaves and shiny hard fruit, ready for the annual harvest of some of the tastiest **organic extra virgin olive oil** in Spain.



The centenarian olive trees

## Guillermo and Laura's story:

Olive farming has been in both of their families for generations, inspiring them to study biology at university, which is where they met. From early on, they drew sketches on scraps of paper illustrating grand ambitions to re-bond our booming capital with its rural backyard, enthusiastically telling anyone who will listen about the genius that is the organic farming ecosystem (it's genius).

By mid 2014, their dream had gathered enough steam for them to **quit their jobs** and make [Proyecto Los Aires](#) their life, and for being in the midst of an **economic depression**, it's incredible how much they've already achieved.

## The tour:

On Saturday, we headed out to their stunning olive grove in **Arcicóllar**, about an hour south of Madrid. When we arrived, we

met up with our fellow tour buddies and set off on our educational meander through the olive trees.

Guillermo and Laura led us around their oldest plot and explained the **process of creating olive oil**: from planting and harvesting to filtering and bottling. Their scientific angle on the entire practice is fascinating, but I won't say any more – the oohs and aahs are all part of the fun!



The walking tour begins



Taking a closer look at the trees

After the walking tour (and tanning opportunity), we sat down at a shaded table nestled idyllically among the centenarian trees. It was time for the **tasting**. This involved professionally sampling several olive oils in little blue glass cups, and learning how to tell the difference between generic **supermarket oil** and **top-quality organic oil** such as theirs.

And then came the food and wine. Through local connections and friends and family, Guillermo and Laura brought together a plethora of **Iberian foodie gems** for us to eat. A *mercado* on a table came to mind, and our tour companions' similarly delighted reactions included lots of "mmm"s and "oh my God"s and jokey squabbles over who liked the **pumpkin *morcilla*** most. We chatted, talking about Guillermo and Laura's endeavours as well as our own, then gratefully accepted Guillermo's offer of

a top-up of wine to accompany our final wander through the trees (and take a few grove-selfies). Finally, we had the opportunity to buy some of the delicious products we tasted that day.



The tasting (and eating and drinking)



The quaintest little market stall in the world

After an **eye-opening and mouth-watering experience**, we said our goodbyes to the lovely Guillermo and Laura and hopped on the bus back to Madrid, desperate to get the word out to you!

## The project explained:

[Proyecto Los Aires](#) aims to **promote local agriculture** by running **educational tours & tastings** on their farm and forging a direct link between urban consumers and the rural economy. Their oil (Los Aires Extra Virgin Olive Oil) can be found in **gourmet shops** such as Oleoteca Murúa at [Mercado San Antón](#). Guillermo and Laura also regularly sell their oil in **markets across Madrid** such as [Mercado de Motores](#), [Mercado Central de Diseño](#), [Nómada Market](#) and [Gastro Market](#). Next time you're there, **go and say hello!**



Los Aires olive groves

## How to get there:

The **meeting point** for the tour is the bus stop in the town of **Arcicóllar** (see location [here](#)). Regular buses (see timetable [here](#)) will get you there from Madrid's **Méndez Alvaro** bus station in **just over an hour**. If you're driving, it takes around **50 minutes** from central Madrid.

## Details & Contact Info:

Tours run **year-round** on **any day of the week or weekend** and must be booked at least **48 hours in advance**.

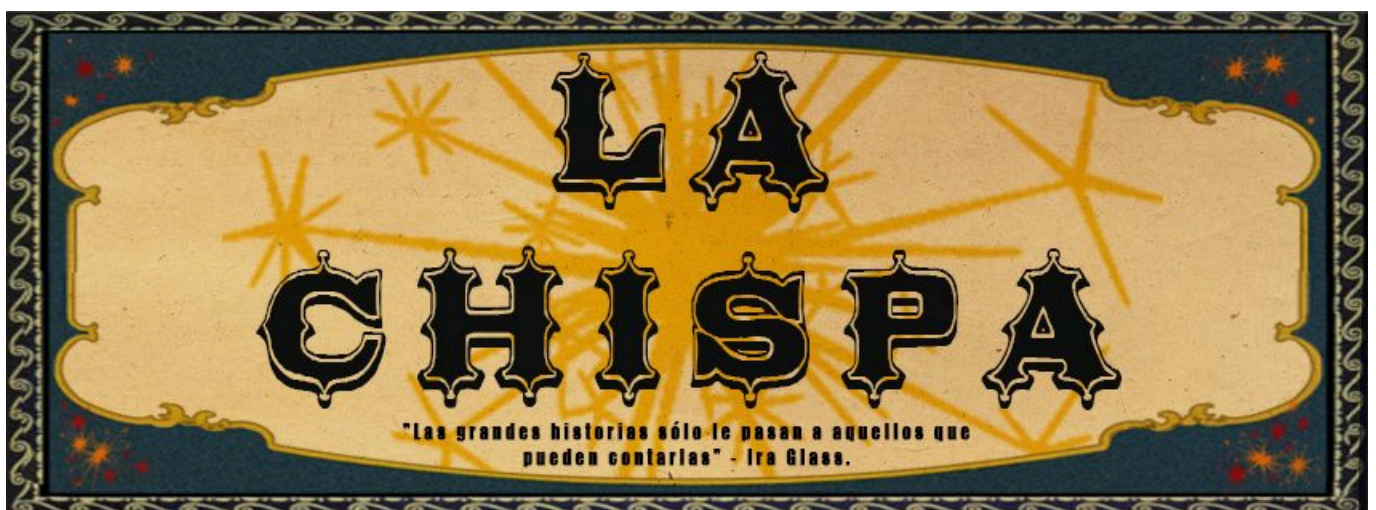
[Facebook](#) & [Web](#)

The website is in English and Spanish! For more information about the tour, pricing, and to book, click [here](#).

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# La Chispa, Live Storytelling in English and Spanish in Lavapiés

Misunderstanding—now there’s a theme to which everyone can relate. The fourth incarnation of [La Chispa](#), a live storytelling event held on March 1, offered storytellers a platform to share tales of malentendidos with an audience gathered at [Atelier Café de la Llana](#) in Lavapiés. La Chispa takes its inspiration from [The Moth](#), an organization that hosts storytelling events across the globe and radio and podcast editions as well. La Chispa’s coordinator, Natasha Yaworsky, gave birth to the idea of hosting a Moth-like event in Madrid after listening to many of the organization’s programs. “The stories are always good,” she explained when asked why The Moth had become an auditory staple in her life, “no matter what,” she added.



As event organizer Dan Catalan (featured in the photo above) put it, a “passionate and clever little team” started La Chispa and has been keeping it running since September of this

year. Animation student Diego Salas joins Yaworksy and Catalan to round out the co-founding group. The three started working on the idea for the event and from there, according to Salas, “our support network, friends, everyone stepped up to help.” After wandering around Lavapiés, it was decided that [Atelier Café de la Llana](#) was the most qualified space, and owner Enrique de la Llana was willing to offer the setting as a background for the event.



Natasha Yaworsky

At the most recent event, the theme of malentendidos produced narratives that produced laughs. Catalan explained, “there is always a theme to the events, but it is purposely vague so that storytellers have freedom to take it and run with it.” What better theme than malentendidos for a gathering with an audience heavily comprised of expats for whom life is a landmine of misunderstandings when daily interactions must be carried out in a foreign language? Not only are the themes meant to be broad, they are also meant to be widely relatable.

One story, dealt with a series of business interactions ridden with misunderstanding due to language difference. There was a moving account focusing on the themes of identity and acceptance all through an account of being misunderstood as a famous Asian prostitute while at a dance club in Tel Aviv. Another wove an elaborate saga about a misunderstanding that happened years ago in a summer camp bathroom. The stories ran the gamut, each with their own flair and intrigue.



Diego Salas

Storytellers participating in La Chispa are asked to keep their tales between 8 and 10 minutes. To mark the time, harmonica player extraordinaire, Diana Dwyer, alerted the speakers when their spot is about to end. If the harmonica sounds (pun-intended) kitschy, it did not seem at all out of place at the event. It was just another piece of the patchwork.

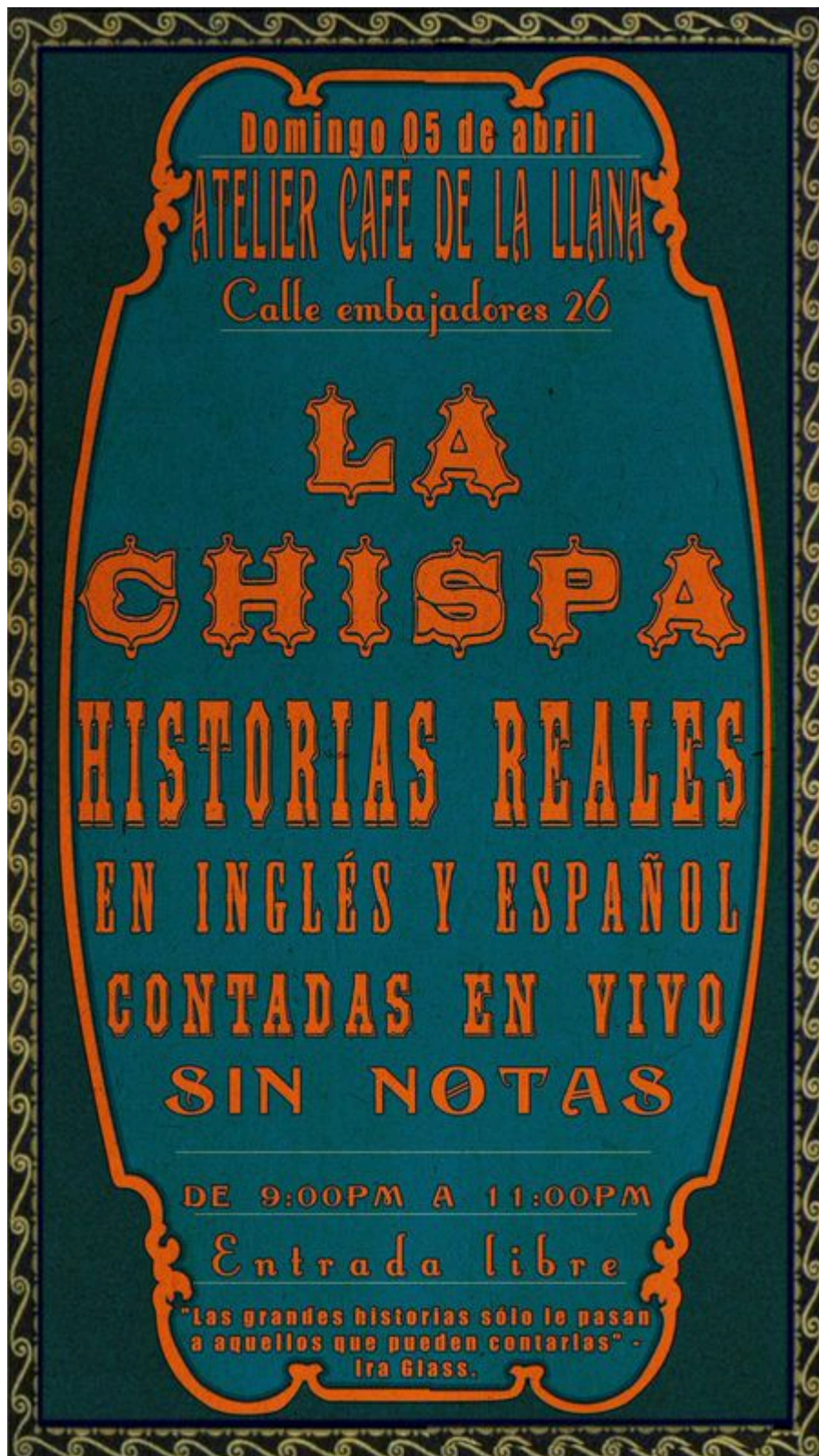


Inside the space, chairs were so crammed into the small cafe space that when one person would get up, another person would sit down in their chair, which also added to the collective ambience of the event. The pre-show period became a bit like a game of musical chairs, but what better way to circulate and share some of your own stories except not in front of a mic?



At La Chispa: Malentendidos, expats comprised most of the crowd, but according to various event-goers, the audience makeup has been different with each go-around. Yaworsky remarked that she liked the idea of hosting the event in Madrid because of its potential to **“offer a middle ground to English and Spanish speakers.”** Storytellers may tell their accounts in either English or Spanish (as long as they tell them without notes) and the pre-selected themes guarantee that speakers of either language will relate. The organizers expressed a desire for more Spanish storytellers to come forward and have their voices heard.

Another hope for future events is for the event to showcase stories from a broader range of perspectives, specifically and to have participants from a wider range of ages. Yaworsky’s ultimate goal for the project is to have The Moth come to Madrid and host an official event.



In the meantime, the event coordinators want to encourage storytellers—**seasoned and burgeoning alike**—to share their stories at upcoming events. The organizers were quick to acknowledge that the general public may think that they cannot tell a story, but were even quicker to offer assurances that story tellers will receive ample assistance in preparing for

the event.

Once the story tellers have committed, **the event organizers host workshops to rehearse the stories**, hash out details, and give performers the chance to work out how exactly they want to spin their tales. At the workshops, storytellers hear feedback on how to crystalize the three main parts of the story: the beginning, conflict, and end as well as receive tips on how to “pretzel” or tie it all together. The theme for the next scheduled La Chispa has been set for ‘Las desgracias nunca vienen solas’ or ‘When it rains, it pours.’”



The [event](#) will be held on **Sunday, April 5 at 9 pm**. Both storytellers and story-listeners are welcome. Yet another event is planned for Sunday, May 3. Keep an eye out for posters designed by Salas advertising the event. In the words of the event’s mastermind Nastasha Yaworksy: The more you

listen, the more you realize that you have a story to tell. The photographic services company, Imagimedia, was on site to video record the event and the stories will be available for viewing on YouTube and [Facebook](#).

**To find out about upcoming La Chispa events, check out:**

[La Chispa's Facebook group](#)

[Naked Madrid's event page](#)

[Atelier Café de la Llana \(event venue\)](#)