Tribuetxe, a Basque Pinchos Bar in Lavapies

I was recommended **Tribuetxe** by one of my former students, a stoic Basque Señora, who wanted me to try the cuisine of her region's chefs. I haven't yet explored Pais Vasco, but I have every intention to due to the hype surrounding their food culture. I sampled Tribuetxe's fried shrimp tapa during Tapapies, the competitive international food festival of the barrio—I was not surprised to learn later on that they had won.





A fairly new location, situated behind **Mercado San Fernando** on Calle Tribulete, **Tribuetxe** is always *petado*. I clearly understand why after consuming four of their excellent pinchos alongside glasses of vino tinto. One of my new years resolutions was to incorporate more **eggplant** into my diet after sampling their **berenjena pincho**. I followed this up with **duck**, a skewer of **shrimp** and **octopus** and a skewer of fried **merluza**. **Each filling pincho costs between 3€ and 3.50€.**







Mercado San Fernando is one of my favorite hubs of community within the barrio. If you are exploring that area on a pleasant weekend afternoon, I strongly advise you to venture to Tribuetxe for your daytime drinking and snack endeavors.

> ***Facebook***
> *Address: Calle de Tribulete 23*
> *Metro: Lavapiés*

Here's a full article on El Mercado de San Fernando, entitled: 'Lavapiés and its market: the real food emporium!'

Another Basque pincho bar in Lavapiés and La Latina that we love is: Lamiak

If you're looking for wonderful wine bars in La Latina, check out: 'The cosiest wine bars in La Latina (with gluten free options!)'

StreetXO – An Eclectic Fusion of High and Low, East and West

If you're a foodie living in Madrid, then you've probably heard of **DiverXO**, the Michelin three star gourmet restaurant born from the wild mind of Mohawk-totting creator and chef **David Muñoz**. If you haven't, watch **this video** first.

Muñoz has been omnipresent in gossip media ever since TV personality **Cristina Pedroche** recently confirmed rumors about their relationship on Twitter. Though, young, punkish, and charming, Muñoz is a celebrity in his own right – he even stars in his own **Mercedes ad**, playing cheeky about his Michelin accolades.

A quick look at DiverXO's reservations online shows there are no openings till June; however, luckily for those of us who don't have reservations or who can't wait to sample Muñoz's creations, there's **StreetXO**. Originally opened in 2012, StreetXO is Muñoz's more casual and affordable restaurant.



Recently relocated at **El Corte Ingles's Gourmet Experience** on Serrano 52, the restaurant boasts exciting decor, delicious cocktails, and intriguing food. It's no surprise that Muñoz serves up Asian-inspired dishes seeing as he cut his teeth at Nobu and Hakkasaan in London. His fare, though, is a little grittier, as the name of his new restaurant implies – the decor and the food are supposed conjure up a wet market in Hong Kong or a food alley in Singapore (minus the cockroaches). Upturned crates serve as bar stools and neon signs line the walls.





First things first, as soon as you sit down, somebody comes and gets your cocktail order – doesn't matter if you're coming

for lunch or dinner. The cocktails are beautiful, perfumed concoctions that put you in the right mood for the feast to come.



An open kitchen sits at the heart of the restaurant breathing hot and loud as chefs wearing straight-jacket-like coats call

out the orders and stoke the coals. Definitely try to get a bar seat, you'll get dinner and a show.





When you hear ‘**sandwich**‘ called out every few minutes you know that’s one thing on the menu you *have* to order.
The *Sandwich Club* sounds inconspicuous and unexciting compared

to the rest of the menu, but that is where your assumptions would be wrong.



Now, does that look like any club sandwich you've ever had? I thought not. The fried egg tops a Chinese *bao* filled with succulent, melt-in-your-mouth pork. Bizarre, unlikely, and strangely good. Then there's the Korean inspired wonton lasagna dish and the Mexican mole dish with obligatory chips drizzled over tender quail.





The mole is served on a thick, waxy paper, no plate. When you’re done, they just crumple the paper-plate up and take it away. If you’re craving desert after, you’ll have to take yourself to the frozen yogurt stand on the same floor, as StreetXO doesn’t serve sweets. But hey, who needs sweets when you have cocktails?



With the music pulsing in the background and a delicious, albeit expensive, cocktail list, it’s easy to see why this spot is so hot – no matter the time of day, there’s always a line. Atmosphere and energy trump food here, but the food is worth it, too, just be sure to get there very early (at least half-an-hour before opening) or very late (past nine-thirty) if you don’t want to have to wait in line.

Address: Serrano, 52
Times: Sun 11:00 am – 12:00 am. Mon – Sat 10:00 am – 12:00 am.

There’s also a happening [Gourmet Experience at the Corte

Inglés at Callao with an outdoor rooftop terrace. Check out our previous article on it here.

Best Brunch on a Budget in Madrid

It’s noon on a Sunday, you have just peeled off the covers and opened the blinds, and it’s decision time: breakfast or lunch? Who says you have to choose? Brunch, combining the best of both meals, is a concept quickly growing in Madrid, and with multiple affordable options, you don’t have to break the bank to enjoy a delicious meal!

1. Ojalá (featured in the cover photo and rightly so)



Located on one of Malasaña’s narrow streets, you might walk right past Ojalá without realizing the hidden treasure that lies inside. At first glance, this café appears to be another one of Malasaña’s trendy locales, with groovy colored light bulbs dispersed around the café, and bleacher-like seating across from the kitchen, with a clear window allowing a look inside as mouth-watering food is being prepared. Head downstairs for more seating, and you will find yourself being transported quite literally to a sandbar, with sand serving in place of carpet or wood flooring. Get comfy on the lounge

chairs and tables low to the ground, feeling warmed immediately by the heat lamps for added effect. A tikki bar completes the look at one end of the “beach.”



The extensive brunch menu offers a little something for everyone, and is all-encompassing, including a coffee or tea (taking care of caffeination needs), and the choice of juice, soda, beer or wine. No detail is overlooked, with fresh juice accompanied by a paper crafted straw served in a tasteful glass bottle.

As for the food, options include something for those looking for something on the sweeter side, with offerings of pastries and fresh fruits, or savory platters, including “World Mix”: organic cornbread with hummus, guacamole, poached egg, and a side of fruit salad and arugula lightly dressed, artfully served on a wooden plank.

It’s hard to leave the oasis that is Ojalá, but it provides the ultimate refuge for a weekend afternoon no matter the season, with outdoor seating when the weather permits.

Facebook
Price for brunch menu: €8-12€
Where: Calle de San Andres, 1
Metro: Noviciado/Tribunal

2. Little Big Café



With less than 10 tables inside, the Little Big Café is a cozy spot situated in Chamberí, with chalkboards inside advertising the expansive menu offerings. You are drawn in immediately by the cakes, pies, brownies, and other assorted bakery items displayed on the counter before you have even glanced at the brunch menu. (Don’t worry, the sweets are on that menu too).



This café, with the tagline “A little café with a big heart,” is just that, with friendly staff willing to spend time explaining the menu to you. Wooden benches and tables add to the neighborhood feel of the café, along with the bulletin board with Polaroid’s of the “Club VIP” of Little Big.



The brunch menu allows diners the “Menu Cerrado,” a hearty offering that includes both a savory and sweet dish, choice of beverage, a dessert (head to the counter to survey which pastries suit your fancy), and a coffee or tea. Alternatively, diners can pick and choose from sandwiches, French toast or pancakes with your choice of toppings, or the brunch classic Eggs Benedict. The Eggs Benedict don’t disappoint, with an accompanying delicate side salad, and the pancake topping selection is overwhelming, served alongside the thin “tortitas” that won’t last long on your plate.

But the real star of the show is the previously mentioned dessert. Options vary, but the carrot cake is perfection, while the chocolate frosted chocolate cake will delight chocoholics. The best thing about the vast selection of desserts: you'll have an excuse to return and try them all.

Facebook
Price of brunch menu: €16.50
When: offered Saturdays and Sundays-11am-4:30pm
Where: Calle Fernández de los Ríos, 61
Metro: Moncloa/Islas Filipinas/Quevedo

3. Martínez Bar

For those who have given up on finding any resemblance of a bagel in Madrid, wander over to Martinez on Sundays for a gourmet Bagel Brunch at a reasonable price. Soft jazz greets you as you enter Martinez, followed by mouth-watering smells you'll find yourself hoping are coming to your table. The aesthetically simple design of Martinez has an antiquated feel reminiscent of times past, and the small tables lining the restaurant make it an ideal destination for smaller groups.



Start off with a fresh orange or grapefruit juice, and then dive into the bagel selection. Bagels are served with a variety of accompaniments, including the salmon and cream cheese, hummus, or goat cheese and marmalade. The warm, freshly toasted bagel is presented on round wooden boards, with the option of a supplemental Bloody Mary or Mimosa to complement your meal. The bagel toppings are not overpowering, and allow diners to enjoy the simplicity of the bagel below at the same time.



The brunch concludes with a coffee of tea, and one of Martinez’s fresh desserts. The cheesecake, topped with a berry jam and a perfectly thick graham cracker crust is a guilty pleasure to be enjoyed slowly. Other dessert options include a brownie, carrot cake, or apple tart.



The simplicity of Martinez's Bagel Brunch is what makes it so enjoyable-minimal ingredients allow diners to enjoy fresh flavors without any unnecessary additions.

Facebook
Price of bagel brunch: €9.90
When: Sundays 1pm-4:30pm
Where: Calle Barco, 4
Metro: Gran Vía

4. Carmencita Bar

Located on an unassuming street in Malasaña, Carmencita is

anything but ordinary. Reservations are a must here, and you might even find yourself out of luck if you dare call past Thursday for the coming weekend. A popular expatriate hangout, you will hear a fair amount of English spoken here, and the restaurant offers a language exchange on Tuesday evenings starting at 9pm.



You can’t mention Carmencita without talking about the 1€ mimosa. Little hair of the dog never hurt anyone! You can treat yourself to one (or two, who’s counting?) without putting a dent in your wallet.



The brunch plates include Huevos Rancheros, Eggs Benedict, French Toast, and the “American Plate” complete with fried egg, sausage, bacon and hash browns. The fixed price brunch menu is generous: Eggs Benedict with your choice of salmon, avocado, or bacon, your preferred side (hash browns, potatoes, or salad), dessert of the day, coffee and mimosa.

The hollandaise sauce can be a bit excessive, but by the time you get to the hash browns you will have forgotten; these crispy potatoes are beyond compare, and a rare find in Madrid at that.



If you find yourself still having room left for a bit of dessert, you can’t go wrong with the dessert of the day. The fluffy cakes are featured on the counter of this small restaurant, so you will be tempted throughout your meal. Finishing the last sips of your mimosa you might find yourself already planning your next trip to Carmencita.

Facebook
Price for complete brunch menu: €14.
When: brunch served Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays 12pm-4:30pm.

Where: Calle San Vincente Ferrer, 51
Metro: Noviciado

La Gringa (Carmencita Bar's sister restaurant a few doors down)

Carmencita Bar has a sister location right down the street called **La Gringa** that serves the same delicious brunch. When it's not holding brunch, it's a fun Mexican restaurant that organizes language exchanges and offers great deals on Mexican beers, cocktails, *tacos, burritos* and *micheladas*. Here's a sneak peak of their brunch menu, filled with a variety of burgers, egg dishes and of course, mimosas and bloody marys.



Facebook
Where: San Vicente Ferrer 57
When: Saturday & Sunday 12pm-4:30pm. Best to make a reservation: 679 183 399
Metro: Noviciado

5. The Toast Café

From the hanging light bulbs encased in mason jars to the freshly squeezed orange juice served in champagne flutes, The Toast is an Instagrammer's paradise, and will satisfy your grumbling stomach too. Just one street over from the Little Big Café, The Toast is nearly always full of content diners lingering over the tasty two course brunch (coffee or tea and juice included) offered on weekends.



Start off with a generous Bloody Mary as you consult the

comprehensive brunch menu. The first plate options include pancakes, tostada, salad with light vinaigrette, or a croissant.



The fluffy pancakes don’t disappoint, while the mixed greens salad is artfully topped with fresh vegetables.

The first course is just a warm-up for the second plate options: the obligatory Eggs Benedict, Huevos Rancheros, Breakfast Burrito, omelet, or salmon bagel.

The breakfast burrito is complemented with guacamole, pico de

gallo, while the filling inside surprises with potatoes.

The Toast is a popular weekend destination, so make sure to reserve a table ahead of time, so that the toughest decision will be whether to top your Eggs Benedict with salmon, avocado, or bacon!

> ***Facebook***
> *Price for brunch: €14*
> *When: brunch served Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays 11am-5pm*
> *Where: Calle Fernando El Católico, 50*
> *Metro: Arguelles/Moncloa/Quevedo/Islas Filipinas*

By Meredith Parmalee

Harina, for something sweet or savoury

The temperature inside Harina is usually cranked well above the temperature of the street, thereby increasing the coziness factor. Within the walls of this white, bright, and charming locale lies one of the most satisfying menús in the city.



Available for both lunch and dinner, the menú begins with a luscious green salad dressed with sweet balsamic vinegar. The whole bowl of greens, a mealtime rarity when eating out in Spain, is like a pot of nutritious gold. Eating the salad, however, is just a warmup exercise for diving into a sprawling slab of pizza.



Keep gulping wine and it may feel as though the pizza has a magnetic force. The glowing light of the interior only becomes softer the less wine remaining in your glass. Thin crust, thick pieces of bacon, a runny fried egg perched in the middle—need I say more? Cut a piece away from the pie and cheese strings out like a game of cat’s cradle.



Other menu options do exist, but this one consistently pleases. Dessert is not included in the menu, rather a pot of tea or a cup of coffee seals the meal. Baked goods can wait for another day—maybe when an entire pizza is not taking up stomach real estate.



Harina is a merienda dream come true. Whatever sweet tooth whimsy you may harbor, sugary goodness awaits behind the glass cases. The meringues have rock hard shells, but they shatter into smithereens, and what is left is a sugary marshmallow pillow.



Other desserts can be hit or miss depending on how freshly they were baked. The carrot cake was dry on a recent visit, but Harina gets brownie points for presentation and a mediocre cake can be forgiven.



Multiple locations around the city, prices vary.

Here’s their **Facebook page** and **web**.

You’ll find one of their nicest locations inside **Plaza de la Independencia**, right next to **Puerta de Alcalá** and a hop skip away from **Plaza de Cibeles**.

After a trip to a nearby museum, you may want to pop into Harina for a coffee or snack. Here’s an article on **Madrid’s known and not-so-known art institutions**, many of which are located near Harina.

Taberna Griega, a real neighborhood Greek restaurant in Madrid

It took me seven years of searching, but only one bite to know I had finally discovered Madrid's most authentic Greek restaurant, **Taberna Griega**.

Although I grew up in New York City, my father was born and raised in Greece. Like many Greek-American families, we were the proud owners of a Greek restaurant. We also took regular month-long summer vacations to Greece, eating our way through small mountain villages, seaside spots and family gatherings large and small. So I do feel somewhat of an authority on Greek food to tell you that **Taberna Griega** is the real deal!



Taberna Griega is owned and run by Teo, a Greek man from Volos who has been living in Madrid for 37 years. Located in a residential neighborhood near metro Pacífico, this restaurant is the kind of place you won’t find out about in guidebooks, mainly because of its location and lack of modernity, which is precisely what gives it its charm. I only heard about it from a friend who lives in the area.



The after-dinner shot lit all our throats on fire, except for Kaloyan, who says it's nothing compared to some Bulgarian alcohols he's tried. I'll take his word for it.

My friends and I had been planning on getting Greek food for a while because we like to try each other's home cuisine. We've gone to **Taberna Bulgara** with Kaloyan, and to a Filipino restaurant with Lorelie. With James it's pretty easy, as he's from Spain. With Edison, however, it's a bit tricky as he's from Taiwan and there are no Taiwanese restaurants that we know of in Madrid. But since he's also of Japanese heritage, he makes us Japanese curry at home and we frequent Japanese restaurants like **Kintaro** and **Sumo**.

So it was time for us to eat Greek food in light of where my father's from. When we arrived at **Taberna Griega** on a rainy Sunday at 2pm, we instantly realized how wonderfully Greek this place was. The walls are painted blue and white to match

the Aegean sea. In case that’s not enough to tell you it’s Greek, you can also look around at the statues of Greek gods, or of course, at the Greek flags displayed in every corner.





But these over-the-top decorations shouldn’t surprise you if you’ve seen the film, ‘My Big Fat Greek Wedding’. What will surprise you, however, is the delicious meal you can get for under 20€.

We started with a round of drinks at the crowded bar alongside neighborhood patrons. Teo appreciated my effort to speak in the little Greek I remembered (my vocabulary is that of a three-year-old). Make sure to thank him and the staff with an enthusiastic *efharistó* (thanks) when leaving! When we moved to our table beside Aphrodite, we ordered four starters to share – a Greek peasant salad, taramá, tzatziki and spinach and cheese pies.



A typical way to start a Greek meal is with different dips, salads and pita bread.



Tzatziki is a dip made of yogurt, cucumber, garlic and dill. Absolutely delicious with pita bread.



Taramasalata is a creamy dip made of fish roe, usually mixed with either bread crumbs or mashed potatoes.



Spanakopita (spinach pie) and tiropita (cheese pie). On the menu you'll find them called 'empanadas griegas'

For the main course, Kaloyan ordered **souvlaki** (meat skewers), and I ordered **gemistá** (roasted red pepper stuffed with meat and rice). And James, Edison and Lorelie ordered the mixed meat platter of two chicken skewers, **befteki** (Greek hamburgers filled with feta cheese) and gyro meat.



Souvlaki, either lamb or veal skewers (Kalo ordered veal)



Gemistá, stuffed bell peppers filled with meat and rice. So good.



Mixed meat platter for 2-3 people

For dessert, we got the two most popular and delicious Greek sweets, **baklava** and **kataifi**, both made of honey, nuts and filo dough.



Baklavi



Kataifi

At the end of our meal, Teo gave us a round of shots to help us recover from what we had just devoured, and the bill came out to 20€ each. So if you've craving some real Greek food or want to experience an unpretentious neighborhood restaurant in Madrid, then here you are!

Facebook
Address: Juan de Urbieta, 6
Metro: Pacífico
Phone: 914 34 89 19

If you're looking for a more take-away Greek place in the center, you should definitely go to Greek & Shop in Malasaña.

And if you’re looking for an authentic Bulgarian restaurant, you must go to Taberna Bulgaria.

Cosy Wine Bars in La Latina (with gluten free options!)

If you´re looking for some dark and cosy wine bars to enjoy a glass of fantastic Spanish wine and some delicious tapas, then head to La Latina. Known as Madrid´s tapas district, this neighbourhood is famous for its lazy Sunday afternoon tradition of tapas-bar-hopping, up and down the winding streets of Cava Baja and Cava Alta.

But first, the history of Cava Baja has more to do with foreigners in Madrid than you might think.

Originally a deep trench that ran along the outside of the medieval city walls, Cava Baja protected the city from bandits and scoundrels, and allowed the people of Madrid to come and go freely without using the city gates. Soon the city boundaries spread, and local taverns sprung up along this stretch to lodge (and feed) travellers and farmers, who came to Madrid to sell their wares at market; You can still see the street sloping downhill and curving to follow the path of the old city wall.

This means that, for expats and visitors to the city, enjoying a glass of local wine and food amongst the higgledy piggledy bars and old taverns of Cava Baja is to not only enjoy La Latina, but also repeat the history of many a travelling peddler visiting Madrid.

El Tempranillo

For people that like Spanish wine: El Tempranillo. From the moment that you see the entire wall of wine bottle racks behind the bar, you know that you are in the right place.

Chic and modern from the outside but small and traditional on the inside, El Tempranillo has the perfect mix of low lighting, muted conversation and good Spanish wine- and a table to sit at if you order some tapas.



Compared with other wine and tapas bars in Cava Baja, El Tempranillo has something unique that is difficult to put your finger on.

Right in the heart of the hustle and bustle of Cava Baja, it is comparatively understated- but quietly confident. It has a real buzz of people under the dimmed lighting, but is surprisingly quiet. This muted conversation gives a sense of privacy in which you can enjoy your glass of wine, share a few

tapas and have a meaningful conversation with good friends- without having to raise your voice.

The tapas at El Tempranillo are addictive. Try the ´revuelto de champiñones salvajes´ (mushroom omelette), or the tostas. You might have to wait a little to order at peak times during the weekend or evenings, but the dishes come out quickly once ordered and are worth the wait.

Then, the wine. Order from the chalk board, which has an impressive selection of wine that comes from almost all the wine regions of Spain. Most exciting, though, is their larger than average selection of good Spanish wines available by the glass, with prices starting as low as 2,50€ and 2,70€. Arrive a little early, set up your company at a table, and enjoy some good wine.



Calle Cava Baja, 38

Juana La Loca

Juana La Loca makes a nod towards Juana, the ´mad queen of Castile´, who although was probably just another misunderstood female royal, still makes for a good story and name for a wine bar.



Small, dark, cosy and kinetic, Juana La Loca is perfect for a glass of Spanish wine and some delicious tapas.

Tightly packed inside, with small tables edging around the long bar, Juana La Loca mixes the worlds of both restaurant and wine bar into one dynamic space. With both bar and table enjoying tapas and wine, just with each enjoying more of one than the other, the two functions blend harmoniously into one shared space.

To start with a glass of wine, choose from the wine board behind the bar. Although the choices are slightly restricted and slightly pricier by the glass, the quality of the wine

makes up for the lack of selection. If you like deep, complex red wines, try a Ribera del Duero *Crianza* or *Reserva*.

Without a doubt, the most famous dish served at Juana La Loca is the *tortilla de patatas*: a buttery, melt-in-the-mouth tortilla, finished with a crispy outer layer and served on top of a slice of bread. If you are being visited by friends or family in Madrid who have not yet tried *tortilla de patatas*, this is the one to debut.

The *´huevos rotos´* are also to-die-for, either to share or as a *ración* for yourself: crispy, chewy, buttery fries topped with melting fried egg, small salty strips of *jamón*, salted *pimientos de padrón* and a shake of paprika, all served on a long plate.

Very well accompanied by a glass of fresh wine to clean your palate and a bowl of Juana La Loca´s moreish olives, these delicious options can also be served gluten free if you ask the waiter. The prices may be a little higher, but the quality of the wine and food are a step above the rest.

A little tip is to bring cash with you, as they do not accept cards. The small wine bar-restaurant also fills up quickly in the evenings; after 20:30 tables are only for a meal of tapas (plus wine) and bar spots are only for wine (plus a tapa). Arrive early enough to enjoy some good wine and conversation amongst the relaxed atmosphere, and feel the bar fill up with the buzz of evening service.



Plaza Puerta de Los Moros, 4
www.juanalalocamadrid.com

La Concha

If you like sherry, cava or vermouth, then you are in luck. This tiny mismatched bar with painted wood panels and creative details offers a great selection of Spanish fortified wines and sparkling cava from Cataluña. A refreshing take on the usual full-bodied red wine offered in La Latina, come to La Concha for something a little different.



La Concha has a nomadic feel, keeping in tune with the street´s history of travelling visitors, and offers both the upstairs bar for drinks and downstairs seating area for tapas.

If you have yet to try vermouth, a fortified wine infused with various roots, barks, flowers, seeds, herbs and spices, La Concha has ´Vermut Miró´, a Spanish vermouth from the northern Spanish city of Reús.

La concha also has a selection of Spanish Sherries, or ´Jerez´ in Spanish. Hailing from the D.O. wine region with the same name, Jerez de la Frontera, Jerez is unique in its elaboration; you cannot find a fortified wine like Sherry anywhere else in the world.



If you like bubbles: Cava. Spain´s answer to champagne, this bubbly sparkling wine can come in 4 different kinds: Cava, Cava Reserva (minimum 15 months ageing), Cava Gran Reserva (over 30 months ageing) and Rosé. La Concha has more than one of each kind, from different wineries, to try. Order a glass with one of their tapas. Although Cava traditionally matches well with fish or sweet fruity flavours, this is not necessarily the case; a Brut Nature Gran Reserva would go well with meat dishes, roasts or spicer foods.

On a week night you will easily find a spot here. Just head down the kooky stairs and order from their small tapas menu, which is also available completely gluten free.



Calle Cava Baja, 7
www.laconchataberna.com

Extra notes

If you would like to know what to look for in these wine and tapas bars, or are not sure what kinds of wines you like yet, you can also do some wine tasting in Madrid.

Wine word

Maridaje – food and wine pairing

Here are a few more articles you might like:

[Madrid’s 3 Best Wine Shops]

[Taberna Lamiak, another wonderful bar in La Latina]

[Madrid’s Best Cafe-Bookshops]

Chuka Ramen Bar, they take ramen seriously

I used to say I didn’t like Japanese cuisine because I mistakenly thought it was limited to sushi. But thankfully, my recent visits to three Japanese restaurants in Madrid – **Sumo**, **Hattori Hanzo** and now **Chuka Ramen Bar** – have turned me onto a whole new world of tantalising flavours and creations.

Last Tuesday, I went to **Chuka** with Daphne, Juan and Vanessa from the teams at **Naked Madrid** and **Las Mesas de Vanessa** (one of Madrid’s best restaurant blogs). Chuka is a wonderful new ramen bar situated near metro Sevilla and next door to one of Madrid’s oldest bars, **La Venencia**, where you should get yourself a glass of sherry either before or after your meal.



Chuka specializes in ramen yet also offers a number of other Japanese dishes you have to try. Our waiter was kind enough to walk us through the menu and thanks to him, I sipped on delicious Japanese beer and ordered the best dish of my life… So keep reading and make sure to do as we did.

We started with **Dok Boki**, which consists of rice balls with Korean chili and sesame. They tasted just perfect. Then we had some tasty **dumplings** filled with *butifarra* and Chinese chives.



Chuka Ramen Dok Boki



Once we finished the starters, I was already impressed. Then the main dishes arrived… We ordered two types of **Ramen: shoyu and hiyashi**. The first one, Shoyu, is prepared with noodles, bacon, boiled egg and Chinese chives. The soup had a mix of dashi and chicken with nori seaweed. It was insanely good.



The second ramen, **hiyashi**, the one I ordered, sent me straight to food heaven. As soon as I tasted it, I knew I couldn’t share and thus proceeded to devour it in a matter of minutes. Even though I had made a deal with Daphne to try each other’s dishes, I couldn’t bear the idea of giving up even one spoonful. It was made of cold noodles and ground sausage. All of it was covered with chilli oil, a boiled egg, some watercress and sugar-roasted cashews. The ingredients were perfectly cooked and well selected, making the dish truly unforgettable (seriously… I can’t get it out of my head).



According to Juan and Vanessa, who travel to Japan whenever they can, **Chuka Ramen Bar** has an authentic Japanese feel and look; there’s nothing pretentious about it and it’s a great spot for dinner with friends. Our recommendation is to get there early at night (they open at 8:30pm) and grab a table at the back. Be careful because the restaurant doesn’t take reservations and it gets packed! We arrived at 9:15pm and waited at the bar until 10pm when we were finally seated. It was totally worth it though, don’t worry.

Contact info

Facebook
Instagram
Web

Address

Address: C/ Echegaray, 9
Metro: Sevilla

Hours

Tuesday through Thursday: 8:30-11:30 pm
Friday & Saturday: 1:30-3.30 pm

Menu (In Spanish)

More Asian restaurants featured on Naked Madrid:

- **Ramen Kagura, Madrid's (almost) perfect ramen bar**
- **Kintaro – Oy Vey**
- **Sumo – This Japanese restaurant's name says it all**
- **Tuk Tuk – Asian-inspired street food**
- **Hattori Hanzo – Japanese food, straight up. No sushi.**
- **Nippon 2 – top quality yet affordable sushi, finally!**
- **Soy Kitchen – a fusion of Asian flavors**
- **Karachai – A cozy and elegant Thai restaurant in Alonso Martínez**

Greek and Shop in Malasaña

If you frequently find yourself in Malasaña, it will only be a matter of time before the *bocadillos* in the window of Greek and Shop seduce you into a Grecian gastronomical experience. They're displayed so darn nicely and no matter what time of

day – or night – they never fail to look appetizing.

Located in the heart of hipsterville (i.e. the barrio of Malsaña), Greek and Shop offers an array of Greek specialities in a bright, metropolitan locale. Take your pick from the bevy of options scrawled on the chalkboard behind the register. Here you'll find the likes of moussaka, gyros, and *bocadillos* filled with foodstuffs of the Mediterranean.





Plump chunks of chicken spiced with curry make up the meat of the **Andros bocadillo** (no pun intended), pictured above. Warm cheese and spicy arugula make it complete, and juicy sun-dried tomatoes impart a delectable tanginess. The hearty seed bread gives the sandwich the overall impression of wholesomeness. Reasonably priced at **3.50€**, the bocadillo is filling, but nevertheless, you might not be ready for it to end.



Sit at one of the high stools in the store and find yourself surrounded by jars of olives and artichokes. A multitude of treats and sweets such as halvah and baklava are never uncomfortably out of reach. You'll find that the tables are stocked with reading material if you are so inclined. Alternatively, the mustachioed passersby on Corredera Alta de San Pablo provide live people-watching entertainment.



No matter the time of day – breakfast, lunch, or dinner – Greek and Shop is bound to have something to whet your appetite. They have late-night eats covered too. A convenient take-out window opens up on the side of the shop for the night owl crowd. This may be a particularly apt time to give the super creamy, slightly zippy Greek yogurt ice cream a try. Just a suggestion.

Greek and Shop

- Facebook
- ***Where:*** *Corredera Alta de San Pablo, 9*
- ***Metro:*** *Tribunal*

Also check out: Egeo, our go-to Greek restaurant in Lavapiés

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

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

If you plan on doing any of these things, my top piece of advice would be avoid going at the weekends, as the whole centre is utter chaos. During last year's December *puente* they even had to temporarily suspend metro services to Sol and make

people get off at neighbouring stations, due to the sheer volume of people already in the plaza and surrounding streets.

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

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

If you want breakfast…



You'll need a decent desayuno to set you up for a busy day of shopping and sightseeing, and in time-honoured tradition you might head to San Ginés (Pasadizo de San Ginés 5) or Valor (Calle Postigo de San Martín 7) for some chocolate con churros. Go early if you do, and certainly don't visit at

merienda time as the queues are out of the door. Alternatively, you could try one of these lesser-known spots for breakfast:

Ferpal (Calle Arenal 7)



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

El Riojano (Calle Mayor 10)



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

If you fancy a drink…

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

La Torre del Oro (Plaza Mayor 26)



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

Matador (Calle de la Cruz 39)



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

If you're hungry…

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

El Ñeru (Calle Bordadores 5)



Cachopo at El Ñeru. Image from El Ñeru's Facebook

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

Bar Lambuzo (Calle de las Conchas 9)



Image from Lambuzo's Web

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

If you need to get away from it all…

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

Anticafe (Calle Unión 2)



Image from [Anticafe's Facebook]

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

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

Casa Pueblo (Calle León 3)



Image from Casa Pueblo's Facebook

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

Plaza Menor (Calle Gómez de Mora 3)



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

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

Taberna Alipio Ramos

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Spanish dine late and we quite surprised the young girl

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

"Yes, we're open…but we weren't expecting *customers!*"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

By Hugh Trethowan.

Taberna Alipio Ramos

Address: Calle Ponzano, 30

Metro: Ríos Rosas or Alonso Cano

Tel: 91 441 49 61

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

- Bodegas Rosell
- Bar Lambuzo
- Taberna Lamiak
- Casa Mingo