

Madrid's Top Shopping Malls

Believe it or not, Madrid has some pretty fantastic shopping malls, with giant cinemas, mini-golf courses and even indoor ski slopes. And Ikea. If it's raining out (or simply too hot to stay outside), don't hesitate to check out one of our favourite shopping centres!

1. [Centro Comercial Príncipe Pío](#)



Principe Pio is one of my favorite malls in Madrid because it's located right in the city center. I love it because you can spend the whole day here, shopping, eating and ending the day with a good movie. Among the many shops you can find here are Zara, Massimo Dutti, Mango, Oysho, Pull & Bear, Zara Home, etc. Restaurants: Vips, Burger King, MacDonald's, Wok Wok, etc

Opening hours

- *Monday to Saturday: From 10 to 22:00*
- *Sunday: 11 to 22:00*

How to get there

- *Metro lines: 6, 10 or “ramal” (from Opera), Línea 6 – Circular*
- *Cercanías lines: C1, C7, C10*
- *Bus lines: 25, 39, 41, 46, 75, 138, Circular 1, Circular*

2. La Gavia



La Gavia is one of the greatest shopping centres in Spain and even in Europe, where you can find everything you want under the sun. Some of the most popular stores are IKEA, Primark, Zara, Massimo Dutti, FNAC, etc.

How to get there?

- ***Bus lines: 142 and 145***

- **Metro line:** *Las suertes*

OPENING HOURS

- **SHOPS:** *Monday to Sunday from 10:00 to 22:00 hours * On Sundays and holidays from February to November the center opens at 11:00
- **RESTAURANTS:** Sunday through Thursday from 10:00 to 01:00 hours. Fridays, Saturdays and on public holidays from 10:00 to 03:00
- **IKEA:** Monday to Sunday from 10:00 to 22:00 hours. The restaurant is open from 09:30 to 21:30

3. [La Vaguada](#)



La Vaguada is a large shopping mall located in Barrio del Pilar. It's big enough to offer several shops and restaurants, but small enough so you won't get lost and you can spend a quiet afternoon.

How to get there?

- **Bus lines:** 42 , 49 , 67,83 , 124, 126 , 127, 128 , 132,

133 , 134, 135, 137 , 147 , N18 , N19

- **Metro lines:** 9 (Barrio del Pilar Herrera Oria) & 7 (Peña grande)

OPENING HOURS

- *Shopping area:* Monday through Saturday: 10:00 h to 22:00h; Sundays and holidays: 11:00 h to 21:00 h
- *Dining and entertainment area:* Monday through Thursday: 10:00 h to 01:00 h; Friday and Saturday: 10:00 to 02:00 h Sunday: 10:00 h to 01:00 h

4. Madrid Xanadú



Xanadu is one of the best malls I have ever visited. They have everything you want, **even a ski slope**. In addition to clothing stores and restaurants, here you'll find tons of fun

activities like bowling, mini golf, a ski slope, and much more!

OPENING HOURS

- Shops: Monday through Sunday from 10 to 22h
- *Entertainment and dining area*: From Sunday to Thursday from 10 to 01h Fridays and Saturdays from 12 to 03h

How to get there?

- Bus: From Príncipe Pío: 528, 534, 539, 541, 545, 546, 547 y 548

5. Centro Comercial Plaza Norte 2



Another huge mall located outside the center, Plaza Norte has tons of shops, restaurants, cinemas, you name it.

Opening hours

- Shopping area: Monday through Sunday from 10 to 22h

- Entertainment and dining area: Sunday through Thursday from 10 to 01:30h; Fridays and Saturdays from 12 to 03h

How to get there

- Buses: 171 and 156 (from Plaza de Castilla)
- Nearest metro: Reyes Católicos (Line 10)

6. Centro Comercial Plenilúnio



Plenilúnio is also situated in the outskirts, it has more than 180 shops, in addition to numerous restaurants, as many cinemas.

Opening hours

- Shops: Monday to Saturday, from 10 to 22h; on Sundays and public holidays from 12 to 21h
- Restaurants: Sunday to Thursday from 10 to 01 h; on Fridays and Saturdays from 12 to 03h

How to get there

- Bus: From Avenida de America: 221, 222, 223, 224, 224A, 226, 227, 228, 229, 281, 282, 283 and 284 from Ciudad Lineal: EMT no. 77

7. Centro Comercial Parquesur



In addition to the usual, here you'll find an **Apple store** outside the city centre.

OPENING HOURS

- Monday to sunday From 10 to 22:00h
- Restaurants: Friday and Saturday From 10 to 2. Sunday from 10 to 1.

How to get there?

- By bus: 432,481,483,485,488,497
- Nearest metro: Line 12. El Carrascal

8. [Islazul](#)

OPENING HOURS

- Commercial area: Monday through Sunday from 10 to 22h
- Entertainment and dining area: Sunday to Thursday from 10 to 01h; Fridays and Saturdays from 12 to 03h

How to get there:

- By Bus: 35 and 118. 5 minuts from the shopping center: 108, 155, 480, 484 and 485
- Nearest metro: Line 11: La peseta, San Francisco and Carabanchel Alto Stations.

Pictures: [Hola](#), [Un Buen día](#), [El país](#), flickr, [AbsoluteMadrid](#), [Dolce City](#), [Urbanity](#)

Where to Take Your Mom in Madrid – Part 1

Wondering where to take your mom when she comes to visit you in Madrid? Here's a list of places (aside from the Prado and the Royal Palace) that are all hand-picked, tested and approved, if not by me then by my friends. All these ideas have definitely worked – and not just for my mom, but for a lot of out-of-town guests and other family members, too. Here goes!

1. [Madrid Food Tour](#), for a culinary

experience full of insight



I can't recommend this tour enough. The guys at [Madrid Food Tour](#) are young and passionate about the city's food culture and history. They offer a variety of tours that take you through the city's most authentic neighborhood markets, tapas bars and restaurants. Plus you get to walk around the city while the tour guides give you insights into Madrid's history. I went on the [Huertas market tour](#) and wrote about it in [a previous post](#).

But you can check out all the tours [here](#) and then choose the one that appeals to you most! The tours are given in English and can be personalized if you have particular food preferences or needs. Just ask them! Another note – I recommend **starting out the trip with this tour** so your mom can

get a better feel for the city and its gastronomic offerings.

2. [Bar Lambuzo](#), a family-run Andalusian restaurant



This is one of **my favorite restaurants in Madrid**. What makes Lambuzo perfect is that it is an authentic, Andalucían-style taverna in the heart of Madrid, run by a whole family, and each member has his or her role. For example, you'll find Pepe, the father, working the front and Luis, one of the sons, working the bar. They specialize in food from the South of Spain, so get ready for a variety of fried fish, rice dishes and other delicious treats. Lambuzo now has two locations, although my favorite is the one near Opera, which you can read more about in my previous post [here](#).

3. Museums, Museo Sorolla & Thyssen in particular



My mother has been to the **Prado and Reina Sofia** twice now and although they're of course worth visiting, she actually preferred the **Thyssen** (so did my brother and sisters) and **Sorolla museums**. While the Thyssen's collection is considered one of the best in the world, the Sorolla's is less expected – it is in the painter's former home and houses an outstanding collection of pieces that you can see as you walk through the charming rooms. Here's a post on all of [Madrid's obvious and not-so-obvious arts institutions \(plus how to get in for free\)](#) so you can add more to your list.

4. El Matadero & Madrid Río, for an off-the-beaten-path experience



I always jump at the chance to take friends and family to this place. A former slaughterhouse turned cultural center, **El Matadero** is a must for anyone into contemporary art and cultural activities. It is a huge space with different warehouses, each dedicated to their own type of art. For example, there's the theatre nave, the reading nave and the music nave, among many others. The Matadero also holds wonderful farmers' markets with local products and food trucks, as well as live music and activities for the little ones. It's also situated along Madrid's river so if the weather is nice, I recommend taking a stroll afterwards or even hopping on a bike.

5. Casa Mingo, an old-school Asturian cider house



I have too many good memories of Casa Mingo, a century-old Asturian restaurant serving roasted chicken and cider by the bottle. Please take your mother here if she likes the good-old kind of restaurant that cannot be imitated no matter how hard you try. This is the real deal (plus it's incredibly cheap!) Here's a [previous post](#) I wrote on it.

6. Food markets, not just Mercado de San Miguel



Madrid has a thriving indoor and outdoor market culture. My mother's first experience with Madrid's market scene was Mercado de San Miguel, naturally. While I do suggest taking your mom there, don't forget about Madrid's other markets. On my mom's most recent visit, we went to [Mercado del San Ildefonso](#) in Malasaña and she was stunned by the architecture, vibrant food scene and open-air seating areas. Then there's [Mercado de San Antón](#) in Chueca which is never a bad idea for its gourmet food stands and amazing rooftop bar (check out other [rooftop bars here](#)). Plus, virtually every weekend there's an outdoor market (aside from **the Rastro**) and food festival in Madrid. Some of my suggestions are **Madreat**, **Mercado de Productores** and **Mercado de Motores**.

8. [Desperate Literature](#), a charming international bookstore



My mom adored this place, mainly because the owner, Craig, gave her a glass of whisky to drink as she browsed through the paperbacks and hardcovers, used and new. There's more to the story, though. [Desperate Literature](#) was opened in Madrid about a year ago by the guys who run a very special international bookstore in Santorini, Greece, where my mother had actually visited and my sister had previously worked for a summer. Maybe it's the music, the high quality book selection or the people from all over the world who run Desperate Literature with such care and love, or maybe it's because it's nestled in between the streets that bring you to Madrid's Royal Palace and Opera House.... I guess it just has that *je ne sais quoi*.

And if your mom is an avid reader, she'll get to donate the book she finished reading on her flight to Madrid and find herself a new one for the trip home! Here's a [full post on Desperate Literature](#).

9. [Toni 2](#) or [Bar Cock](#), for cocktails and more...



If you're wondering where to get a drink late at night, you can try [Toni 2](#), a sort of piano bar mostly for patrons of a "certain age" – only the classics are sung here, accompanied by a live pianist. It's an old-fashioned kind of bar with an extra long grand piano in the center (here's a full article on [Toni 2](#)). If your mother isn't so into the vintage karaoke scene, then I'd definitely recommend getting a cocktail at [Bar Cock](#), another beautiful old-fashioned bar off the Gran Vía. The only time I went here, Harrison Ford was there! Also,

across the street from Bar Cock is La Barraca, the restaurant mentioned next.

10. [La Barraca](#), for paella and other Valencian dishes



I've been asked a lot about where to get paella in Madrid and never knew what to say, until recently. One of Madrid's most active writers, [Dan Catalan](#), just discovered a place that his grandmother took him to in Madrid. It's a Valencian restaurant located in the city center called La Barraca, which specializes in rice and seafood dishes like paella, which he says is definitely mother-worthy. Just note that this restaurant is on the pricey side – maybe you'll take your mom here, but she'll have to pick up the tab... Check out Dan's post [here](#).

11. [Rooftop bars](#), like Casa Granada or Mercado de San Anton



Madrid has an impressive number of **rooftop bars** and we've written about 20 or so in our [4-part series](#). If I had to recommend just a few, I'd say [Palacio de Cibeles](#) and [Circulo de Bellas Artes](#) for stunning views, and then [Casa Granada](#) and [Mercado de San Anton](#) for great food and ambience. My mom loved **Casa Granada** back when it was in such desperate need of renovation that we actually felt our chairs were going to slip off the roof. It's since been refurbished so you'll still get the dining experience, just without the fear...

12. La Cava Baja, for “tapas bar” hopping



Lined with tapas bars and restaurants, La Cava Baja is the most happening street in La Latina. The first time I walked along it with my mother was during winter and it was very foggy outside. She said it looked like a fairy tale – as if a knight on a horse was going to appear riding through the mist. Even on a clear day, La Latina is a must if your mother (like mine) enjoys going into Madrid’s charming little bars and walking through the area’s old and windy streets. For specific recommendations on bars in La Latina, check out this article: [Coziest Wine Bars in La Latina \(with gluten free options!\)](#)

13. Flamenco, when in Spain...

I personally can’t recommend any particular flamenco performance in Madrid, but if you think your mother would

enjoy experiencing a tablao, our friends at [Madrid Food Tour](#) have compiled this list of [Where to See Flamenco in Madrid](#) and we trust them.

14. A nearby town, beyond Toledo



My mom went on a guided tour of Toledo a few years ago and didn't enjoy it so much because she didn't get to "roam around freely" as much as she would have liked. So while I'm not against taking a tour, I do think you should make sure to have enough time to wander around and explore the nooks and crannies of wherever you go. I've taken my mom on a number of day trips around Madrid and her favorite was when we drove to [Segovia](#) and [El Escorial](#) in one day. If you can get your hands on a car, I highly recommend it. You can also check out our article on [Madrid's 10 most beautiful surrounding towns](#) which all link to a description, map and transport details.

15. Pepe Botella & Plaza del Dos de

Mayo, for coffee and tea



Pepe Botella has long been my **favorite café in Madrid**, as anyone who's ever visited me will already know. Its ambience, location and simple drink menu has always set it apart from the rest of Madrid's cafés, for me at least. I recommend going here either before or after lunch and sitting with a book or a newspaper, or just chatting away. When I go in the afternoon, I like starting with a **coffee or tea**, and then welcoming in the evening with a **glass of wine**. Here's a [full post on Pepe Botella](#).

Any other suggestions? We'll be coming out with a part 2 so all recommendations

are more than welcome!

You'll also like:

- [Eating our way through Huertas with Madrid Food Tour!](#)
 - [Madrid's Obvious and Not-so-obvious Museums \(and how to get in for free\)](#)
 - [Madrid's 10 Most Beautiful Surrounding Towns \(and how to get to there\)](#)
 - [Madrid's best rooftop bars – part 1](#)
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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:

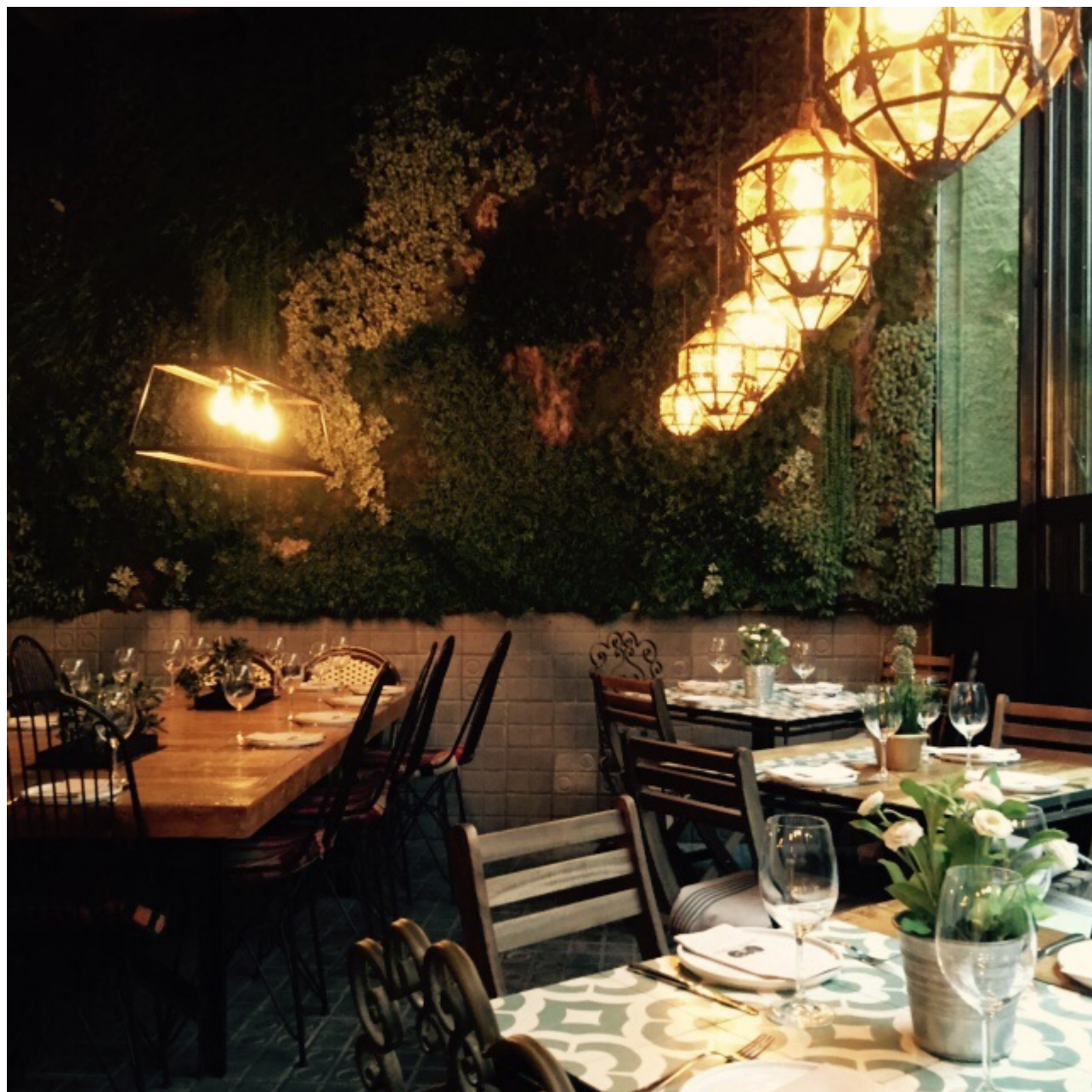
- [Gluten free pastelerías in Madrid: Part 1, Confeterías Marqués](#)
- [El Riojano, Madrid's best pastry shop in the centre with a hidden tea room!](#)
- [María's – sensational sweets on Calle Zurbano](#)

El Patio De Fisgon – Feel like you've discovered Narnia

My blog posts would imply that I pretty much do nothing but eat in Madrid but I assure you that's not the case. Also

ranking high on my to-do's are drinking, tanning, exercising (this is a new found passion that's surprised me more than most) and just general all round gallivanting... But it has to be said that going out for dins is one of my very favourite pastimes and I never need much encourage to ditch home cooking in favour of being waited on. To this end, I am constantly on the prowl for somewhere that will satiate my appetite and not break the bank.

This leads me onto my current fave, [El Patio De Fisgon](#). Not an obvious choice for lovers of Malasaña/Chueca as it tucked away on a swanky side street just off of Calle Ortega y Gasset (but it's most definitely worth the 5 or so euros in a cab) to find yourself in what felt like something out of The Secret Garden. *All twinkly lights, scented candles and the like – you can picture the scene.



The quest for somewhere simple yet swanky came about upon realising that I was hostessing three rather glam PR gals for the weekend, whose tastes are definitely more Balthazar than Burger King. Suffice to say El Patio impressed on all counts. Gorgeous food (and hefty portions), attentive staff (but not claustrophobic-ally so), wine in abundance (and cheap at that) ensured that my crown as a Madrid aficionado remained intact. We ate, drank and were merry for the grand total of 70 euros; coming from London where a soggy sarnie can set you back a fiver this was beyond bargainous. Post dinner drinks followed at the similarly gorgeous Punk Back which is sadly not quite as purse friendly – but equally swish. We're not talking the

need to remortgage a casa for a copa but it's definitely at the higher end of the scale price for Madrid. Saying that, if you like to sip your gins surrounded by the beautiful people then it's worth letting your wallet take a hit.





El Patio wise, I recommend requesting a table out on the terrazza to fully enjoy the 'see and be seen vibe' and let's face it, we all look that little bit better when illuminated by the soft focus glow of a fairy light. So what's been one of my best kept secrets looks set to be no more. I suggest you book a table and for the record, the rollitos artesanos de pato are worth every gluttonous cal.

Slight disclaimer alert Having recently gone back for a second visit, I have to red flag that the 8.30pm dinner sitting results in your being kicked off your table (rather

unceremoniously) by 10pm so defo book a later dins if you can...

Info

[Facebook](#)

Address: *Calle de Don Ramón de la Cruz, 26, 28006 Madrid*

Phone: *915 77 63 74*

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)

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 the 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)

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>]

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:

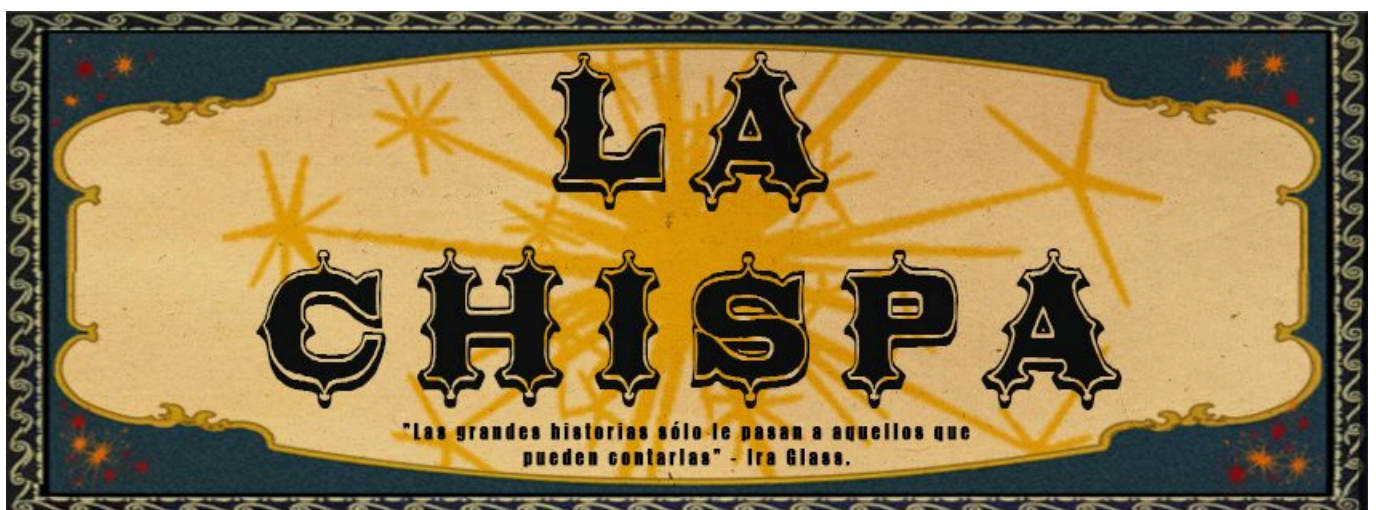
Tours run **year-round** on **any day of the week or weekend** and must be booked at least **48 hours in advance**.

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

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

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 Lavapies, 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.

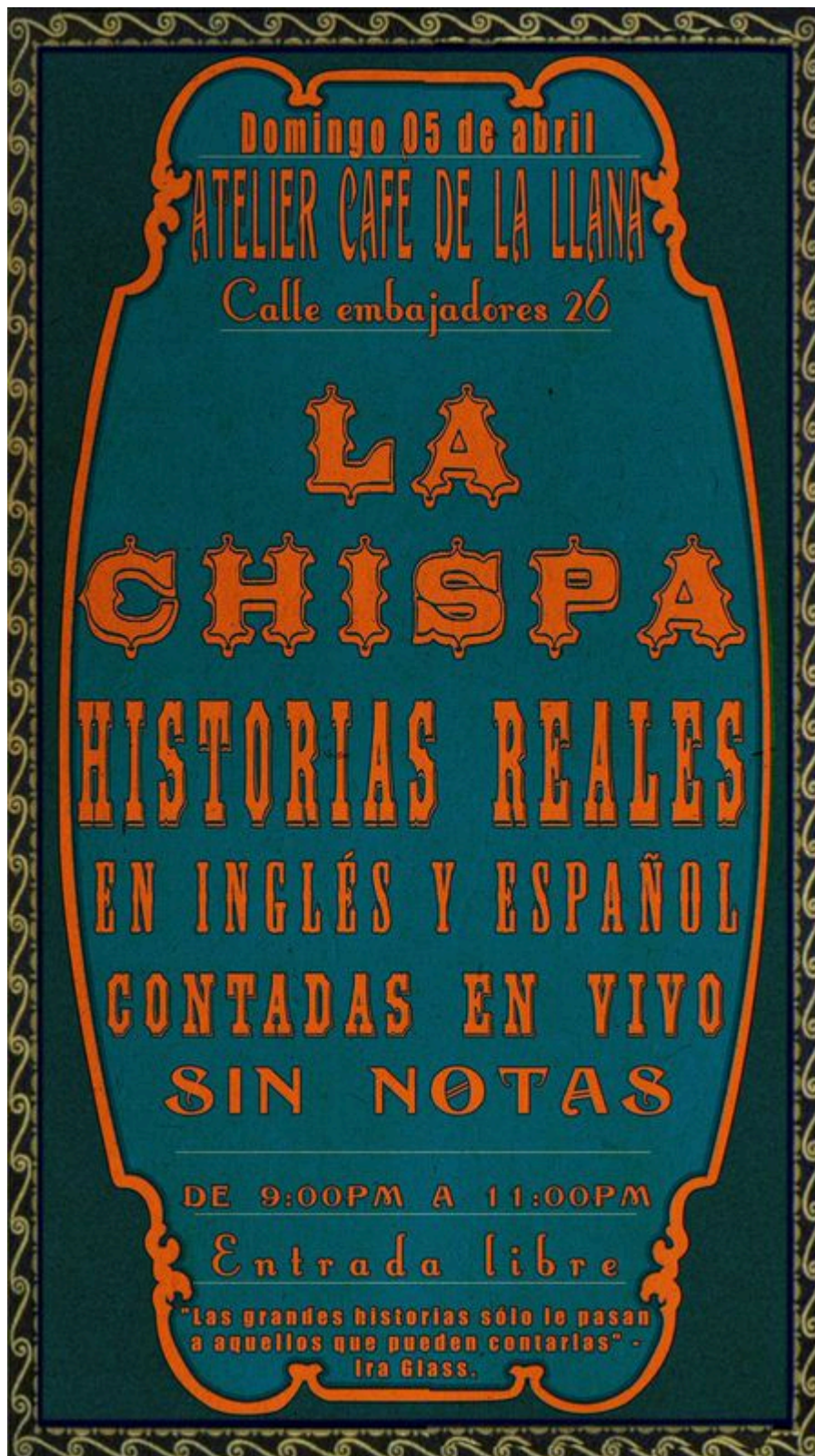


Inside the space, chairs were so crammed into the small cafe space that when one person would get up, another person would sit down in their chair, which also added to the collective ambience of the event. The pre-show period became a bit like a game of musical chairs, but what better way to circulate 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 \(event venue\)](#)

Eating Our Way through Huertas with Devour Tours

On a recent chilly Saturday morning, James and I set out on one of the city's best ranked activities, [Devour Tours](#). I had never been on a food-inspired tour before, let alone in a city whose food culture I'm quite familiar with. Yet the chance to meet local honey and jam specialists, indulge in chocolate-soaked figs and hop from butchers' shops to tapas bars while learning historical tidbits did indeed change the way I look at the city I've called home for the past seven years.





While [Devours Tours](#) offers a bunch of different gastronomic routes throughout the city, we went on the one I consider the most enticing – [Huertas Neighborhood Food & Market Tour](#). The home of the tour was Barrio de las Letras, a central neighborhood named after the famous Spanish writers who once resided, scribbled and drank together there in the 1600's, such as Cervantes, Lope de Vega and Quevedo.

Those of us who live here today know the neighborhood as Huertas, coined after the bar-filled street that runs through it. Unlike many areas surrounding Sol or Plaza Mayor, this barrio upholds a charming and unchanged spirit thanks to its thriving delicatessens, tapas bars and traditional markets. Offerings of old and new spins on local cuisine await you as you walk through its gorgeous cobble-stoned streets. And Devour Tours will let you in on all its secrets.



Our tour guide, James Blick, was not only an expert on Madrid's history and food scene, but also made each and every person on the tour – which consisted of a young Scandinavian couple, two parents from Alabama visiting their daughter on her semester abroad and a group of middle-aged women from Ireland – feel comfortable by asking personal questions, encouraging conversation and creating a wonderful vibe throughout the three-and-a-half-hour event.

I also want to note that my husband, also James, doesn't like cheese (weird, I know) and had told the guys at Devour Tours beforehand. His eyes lit up as he saw a plate of cured meat awaiting him at the cheese tasting, showing how they clearly make it a point to accommodate different tastes and dietary needs.



James (the tour guide) also engaged in friendly chit chat with all the local market vendors and shop owners – something quintessentially Spanish, I must add. Wherever we stopped for a story and a bite, James knew the locals by name and the stories behind their businesses; those close-knit relationships make the tour truly delightful and offer insight into the city's day-to-day life. This kind of rapport and insider know-how can only be attained with a great deal of time and care.



Overall it was clear how much attention was put into designing this tour; every detail was planned to perfection, from the food portions and variety to the timing and storytelling. We had more than enough tapas to fill us all up, yet paced and served up just right so we never felt too full to keep us from walking or having a few more bites at the next stop!



Since I don't want to give too much away, I'll have to wrap things up here. The last thing I'll note is that I had walked by absolutely every place we visited on the tour on many occasions. Most of these places I had never stopped to think about nor even enter.

Now I know that as I stroll along the streets I often frequent such as Calle Huertas and Calle Leon, I'll see a different side of my adopted city. I'll also enjoy a handful of new eateries that are now going straight to the top of my list.



Madrid's best Italian restaurant is not in the likeliest of places.



So whether you're coming through Madrid for a weekend or already live here, let Devour Tours show you around for a few hours, especially if you're a foodie like me! Buen provecho!

To book a tour or read some of their tips on where to find the best food in the city, check out [Devour Tours website!](#)

Running Events in Madrid: February

Put your running shoes on this February! From cross country routes, to half marathons and duathlons...whatever floats your boat!

As always, Madrid has come up trumps this month with a range of different runs to choose from. I have listed all the runs I could find, some in central Madrid, while others are further afield in **Torrejón de Ardos**, **San Sebastian de Los Reyes** and **Parla**, to name a few.

I'm getting nervous already for my second half marathon ([10a Media Maratón de La Latina](#)), as I've already signed up for it, no going back now...

So here is what February has in store for you:

1. Corre por una causa

Distance: 10 kilometres

When: Sunday, 1st February, 9:30 am

Where: Lago at Casa de Campo

[Website](#)

2. II Maratón Via Verde del Tajuna

Distance: 42 kilometres (21 k & 30 k also possible)

When: Sunday, 1st February, 8:50 am

Where: Madrid, Metro: Arganda del Rey

[Website](#)

3. I Carrera Popular villa de Brunete

Distance: 42 kilometres (21 k & 30 k also possible)

When: Sunday, 1st February, 11:00 am

Where: Madrid, Metro: Arganda del Rey

[Website](#)

4. XV Dos Leguas Fuente de La Chopera

Distance: 10 kilometres

When: Sunday, 1st February, 10:45 am

Where: Leganes, Madrid, Parque de la Chopera

[Website](#)

5. I Campeonato Duatlon Circuito del Jarama Gran Premio Fangio

Distance: 10 kilometres

When: Sunday, 1st February, 11:00 am

Where: San Sebastian de los Reyes, Madrid

[Website](#)

6. XIII Cross del Rector de La Universidad Camilo Jose Cela

Distance: 4 & 8 kilometres (cross country)

When: Saturday, 7th February, 12:00 am

Where: Villafranca del Castillo, Madrid

[Website](#)

7. IV Carrera Solidaria Manos Unidas

Distance: 5 kilometres

When: Saturday, 7th February, 12:00 am

Where: Torrejón de Ardoz, Parque del Ocio, Madrid

[Website](#)

8. II We Run 10k Ciudad de Parla

Distance: 10 kilometres

When: Sunday, 8th February, 10:00 am

Where: Parla, Los Prados

[Website](#)

9. Medio Maraton Distrito de Fuencarral

Distance: 21 kilometres

When: Sunday, 8th February, 9:00 am

Where: Madrid

[Website](#)

10. III Maratón de Cobena

Distance: 42 kilometres

When: Saturday, 14th February, 12:30 am

Where: Cobena, Madrid

11. Cross Universidad de Alcalá de Henares

Distance: 4 & 8 kilometres (cross country)

When: Saturday, 14th February, 12:00 am

Where: Alcalá de Henares, Madrid

12. Patones Xtrem 2015

Distance: 14 kilometres (mountain running)

When: Sunday, 15th February, 10:00 am

Where: Frontón de Patones de Abajo

[Website](#)

13. 1a Carrera Popular Cerro Tablado

Distance: 10 kilometres (cross country)

When: Sunday, 15th February, 10:00 am

Where: Granja Cerro Tablado

[Website](#)

14. Cross de Valdebebas

Distance: 10 kilometres (cross country)

When: Sunday, 15th February, 10:00 am

Where: Madrid

[Website](#)

15. V Raid Villa de Madrid

Distance: 20 kilometres

When: Saturday, 21st February, 08:30 am

Where: Jardines de Sabatina, Madrid

[Website](#)

16. XI Combi-Dos Torrejón

Distance: 25 kilometres

When: Sunday, 22nd February, 10:30 am

Where: Torrejón de Ardoz, Madrid

[Website](#)

17. 10a Media Maratón de La Latina

Distance: 21 kilometres

When: Sunday, 22nd February, 9:30 am

Where: Madrid, C/ Guareña, Metro: Aluche

[Website](#)

18. II Carrera Solidaria Medula para Mateo

Distance: 5 & 10 kilometres

When: Saturday, 28th February, 10:00 am

Where: Parque Juan Carlos I, Madrid

[Website](#)

If you are interested in staying up to date on running events in Madrid, or reading my “running diary” please subscribe to [GoGuri](http://www.gogui.com) (www.gogui.com) my personal running blog.



Let's hit the slopes! Ski and snowboard in Madrid

Yep, that's right. Just when you thought Madrid couldn't get any better, that it was a city purely of terrazas, tapas,

cañas and sunshine, winter rolls around and you discover it has yet more to offer. What's not to love about a place where you can soak up the sun by the pool in the summer, then ski the hell out of some mountains in the winter? After an unseasonably warm start to the season, it looks like we're finally in for some snow, so get your gear on and let's go!

Where?

There are three ski areas near the capital:

[Puerto de Navacerrada](#)



Image from [Puerto de Navacerrada's Facebook](#)

Puerto de Navacerrada is the closest ski area to Madrid, around 65km away, but it's also the smallest. You can download

the piste map [here](#).

[Valdesquí](#)



Image from [Valdesquí's Facebook](#)

Valdesquí is around 75km from Madrid, in the next valley over from Puerto de Navacerrada. Although it's a little further away, it's worth the extra mileage as it's a lot bigger than its neighbour (see the piste map [here](#)). However, its proximity to the capital means it can get very busy.

[La Pinilla](#)



Image from [La Pinilla's Facebook](#)

La Pinilla is located just over the border in Castilla y León and is the furthest ski area from the capital, around 120km away. It also covers a fairly large area (piste map [here](#)) but there are usually fewer people, due to its more remote location. Most of the people I know who ski or snowboard in Madrid say this is the best area to go to.

How do I get there?

I'm not going to lie, the easiest way to get to all three areas is by car, particularly if you're taking ski or snowboard equipment with you. If you haven't got a car, you could rent one, persuade a nice friend with a car to take you or use a service like [BlaBlaCar](#). Or steal one if you have to. Seriously though, it is possible to get there on public

transport but it takes a while and the buses and trains aren't at the most convenient times, especially at weekends. You can get the Cercanías Line C8b to Cercedilla then jump on line C9, getting off at the Puerto de Navacerrada stop or the Cotos stop for Valdesquí, but you still have to take a taxi or a shuttle bus to get to the actual ski areas. Bus 691 from Moncloa is also an option but takes about 90 minutes and only goes once an hour at weekends. La Pinilla is even harder to get to on public transport, with just a few Alsa buses going to Riaza, a nearby village. However, there is a company which runs a shuttle bus at weekends from Atocha and Plaza de Castilla. More info [here](#).

When can I go?

All the ski areas are now open and will be every day until March or whenever the snow disappears, maybe April if we're lucky. However, they're sometimes forced to close due to strong winds or other adverse weather conditions, so make sure you check the website or ring beforehand. Whether you're going by car or by public transport, and I can't stress this enough, get there AS EARLY AS YOU CAN. Although the ski areas don't open until 9am, I wouldn't recommend leaving Madrid any later than 7am. Once the car parks are full, they stop letting people in and you'll be going home disappointed. Some of my friends like to head up even earlier and enjoy a leisurely breakfast there, thereby avoiding queues and stress.

What facilities do the ski areas have?

All the ski areas have all the normal facilities you'd expect: ski and snowboard rental, restaurants, bars, hotels, etc. You

might want to consider renting equipment in Madrid before you go, as the official rental places in the ski areas can have pretty long queues and some of the other non-official places, although quicker, often don't have such good equipment. Another option would be to go up the day before, sort out equipment rental and ski passes in the afternoon and stay the night in a hotel, meaning you're all ready to catch that first chairlift in the morning!

How much does it cost?

The price of ski passes, or *forfaits*, varies depending on the ski area and how many days you want to go for, but the usual cost is around 30-40 euros per day. Food and drink are typically expensive at the ski areas, so take your own if you want to save money.

Other options

[Madrid SnowZone at Xanadú](#)



Image from [Madrid SnowZone's Facebook](#)

Of course, you don't have to limit yourself to skiing in the winter. At Madrid SnowZone in the Xanadú shopping centre you can ski and snowboard all year round if you want. It's not quite the same as being in the great outdoors surrounded by snow-capped mountains, but it's great for learning to ski or just practising your technique. You can get there on buses 528, 534 and 539 from Príncipe Pío. Check out their website for offers, classes and more.

[Club Amistad](#)

Madrid's oldest and largest ski club organises buses to the ski areas, classes and equipment rental, amongst other things. They also organise trips to ski areas in other parts of Spain and abroad. Check out their website for details.

Further afield

While the ski areas in Madrid aren't bad for a day trip, they can get extremely busy and the snow isn't always the best. There are ski areas all over Spain, so if you have a weekend or a few days to spare, I'd recommend going to one of the following:

[Sierra Nevada](#) (Andalucía)



Image from [Sierra Nevada's Facebook](#)

The big daddy of southern Spain, Sierra Nevada is a massive ski area just outside Granada (see piste map [here](#)). It often has sunny weather and is very popular with Spaniards, with a fantastic après-ski scene. They get a lot of snow but because of the temperature cycles it can quickly get icy. Not the best place if you're looking for powder.

Formigal (Aragón)



Formigal is the biggest ski area in Spain and generally has more reliable and better-quality snow than the south. Your *forfait* also includes the neighbouring resort of Panticosa, so when everything is open that's 176km of skiable terrain (see piste map [here](#)). The nearby village of Formigal is pretty small so it can get booked up quickly. The same company also owns another great resort called [Cerler](#), which more difficult to get to but generally has better snow and fewer people.

Astún (Aragón)



Powder day in Astún!

Smaller than Formigal and less crowded, if you get Astún on the right day the snow can be incredible (see piste map [here](#)). You can stay in the town of Jaca and get a bus, so it's perhaps slightly easier for a last-minute trip than Formigal. There's another resort right next to Astún called [Candanchú](#) which is also excellent, although the terrain is considerably more challenging.

Even further afield...

Of course, you don't have to stop there! There are plenty of resorts in Catalonia ([Baqueira/Beret](#) is the most famous one) and Andorra has some fantastic areas such as [Grand Valira](#).

See you on the slopes!