El Plaza Jazz Club, Free Latin Jazz & Swing Jam

El Plaza Jazz Club is a cozy bar located in the center of Madrid (near metro Plaza de España) where you can have a drink as you listen to live jazz, latin and swing music. So check out their free jam session this Sunday night!

Photo from their Facebook page

Best Cafe-bookshops in Madrid, Round 2!

Welcome to round two of the **best cafe-bookshops in Madrid**! As you may have noticed in **round one**, Madrid's central neighborhoods boast quite a lot of quaint coffee shops and bars that encourage drinking and reading under one roof.

There's something about drinking coffee or wine amidst a sea of books that makes me feel right at home. Whether you're looking for the perfect place to enjoy a quiet conversation or a good read, here are five more wonderful cafe-bookshops in Madrid that you're bound to fall in love with.

1. La Central de Callao



La Central (featured in the cover photo) is a trendy bookshop near Callao and hands down the most modern of all on this list. It boasts three floors, a happening café with a full menu and a selection of much more than books on offer. At La Central, you can also find funky mugs, quirky bags, useful calendars, board games, wrapping paper, you name it. It's a great place to get **gifts in Madrid**.

- **Facebook**
- **Address:** C/ Postigo de San Martín, 8
- **Metro:** Callao

2. J&J Books and Coffee





A long-time staple among Madrid's expat community, this corner bar has a downstairs bookstore selling a large selection of primarily used English-language books, including ESL resources. Up at the bar, you can get craft beer, wine, coffee, bagels and other things to munch on. Also check out J&J's free events, including language exchanges and pub quizzes (trivia nights). Lots of fun!

- **Facebook**
- **Address:** c/ Espíritu Santo, 47
- **Metro:** Noviciado

3. italiana_madrid





This Italian café and bookshop is located on one of Madrid's most vibrant streets – Corredera Baja de San Pablo – which is lined with great bars, cafes and restaurants, such as **Aió Pizzería**, **Elemental Bistro** and **Gymage** with its rooftop terrace. At **italiana_madrid**, you can get a strong espresso or Aperol Spritz, plus browse through a wide selection of Italian reads ranging from cookbooks to children's books. It's also across the street from one of the city's favorite theaters, Teatro Lara.

- **Facebook**
- **Address:** Corredera Baja de San Pablo, 10
- **Metro:** Gran Vía

4. La Ciudad Invisible



A travel bookshop selling food and drinks, this two-level cafe boasts huge windows, high ceilings, and plenty of large tables, couches and comfortable armchairs to choose from, making it a great place for getting work done and meeting friends. Plus it sells a killer **Rebujito for 2€** (a really refreshing yet deceptive drink from the South containing sherry, white wine and soda water). It's also across the street from one of my favorite restaurants in Madrid, **Bar Lambuzo**.

- ***Facebook***

- ***Address:*** *c/ Costanilla de los Ángeles, 7*
- ***Metro:*** *Opera & Santo Domingo*

5. María Pandora



María Pandora is one of my favorite spots in the city. Perched atop a hill overlooking Parque las Vistillas, behind the Royal Palace, here you'll find the perfect place to watch the sunset while enjoying a glass of champagne (the house specialty) or your drink of choice. Although María Pandora is more of a bar than a coffeeshop, it still deserves a spot on this list of literary cafés. It also holds events such as poetry nights, microtheater, and book readings. **Check out our full article on María Pandora here**.

- **Website & Facebook**
- **Phone:** +34 910 42 82 13

- **Address:** Plaza de Gabriel Miró, 1
- **Metro:** La Latina or Ópera

Make sure to read: "Best Cafe-Bookshops in Madrid, Round 1"

Also check out our favorite bookshop in the city, Desperate Literature

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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