A Year of Menus Del Día in Madrid

Tapas get all the fame in Spain. Drinking wine, nibbling chorizo, sharing little bites late into the night—the tapa is romantic. Never mind that the definition is slippery and the quality unpredictable, or that an evening of tapa-hopping can cost you more in the end than sitting down for a proper meal.

But I'd like to take a moment to celebrate a lesser-known Spanish food tradition, one that's equally praiseworthy but seldom mentioned: the ***menu del día.*** These three magic words will get you a three-course meal, with bread and wine included, at an incredible fixed price.

Beginning as a government-mandated measure during the Franco years, this practical lunch tradition was designed to provide affordable meals to day laborers during the workweek. While no longer required by law, restaurants have carried the tradition full-force into the 21st Century, with even high-end establishments kneeling down to offer those of us on tighter budgets delicious lunches at bargain prices. **It's not as sexy or unique as the tapa, but the *menu del día* forms an integral part of the Spanish food culture and is perhaps one of Spain's best-kept secrets**.



The Club.

Over the last year some friends and I decided to take advantage of the *menus* around Madrid. I wouldn't call us a club (ignore that I just did) but rather a shifting group of buddies hanging out over a different meal every Friday. We would fluctuate between two and ten people, though it was always anchored by a couple die-hard members, myself included.

I recommend that anyone with the opportunity start their own tradition as well. It's a great way to try new food, see new corners of the city, and hang out with all the other no-goodnik three-day weekenders over something other than a bar stool.

We had only four rules. All menus had to be:

1. In one of the central barrios.
2. Less than 15 euros per person.
3. Good quality food.
4. Good quality people.

The Rankings.

This list is limited to our *menu del día* meet-ups over the past calendar year. I included both food and atmosphere in my decisions, though the process was by no means meticulous; I'm going off little more than my general impressions of each place. I also recognize this list skews toward trendy restaurants, which is partly because we liked to use the meet-up as an opportunity to get into otherwise busy spots (Friday lunch was normally little hassle), but also as a much-needed break from the every-day Spanish fare. It's worth noting that sometimes little Spanish joints in the outer barrios do the

best *menus* of all!

1. Bacira (Chamberí, 14 euros)



It’s pretty astounding that a restaurant with a waitlist of more than a month offers a 14-euro fixed-price meal. If that’s not a testament to the spirit of the *menú del día*, I don’t know what is. Make a reservation, wait it out, and go here. The food is a fresh take on the Mediterranean-Asian fusion that’s the rage in Spain these days (thanks, David Muñoz) and the dining room is bright and welcoming with all the touchstones of modern aesthetics (dangling bulbs, faded wood, dark blues and whites) without feeling hackneyed. The food is fresh, creative and delicious. We felt like sexy young business people at English teacher prices.

2. Gabriel. (Conde Duque, 14 euros)



You know you've chosen your restaurant well when you find yourself eating next to Javier Bardem. The rich and famous have good taste, much better than Joe Nobodies like us, but this place stands on its own. The cuisine consists of modern takes on Spanish classics though there are the occasional Asian influences (again, all the rage), and the desserts are incredible. It also has the nicest bathroom in Madrid—shit's straight out of a William Sonoma catalog. Atmosphere is cozy, intimate, and occasionally Bardem-ridden.

3. Momo (Chueca, 11.50 euros)

Unlike other restaurants that include maybe two or three options for a first and second course, Momo offers the entire

menu for the *menu del día*. The food is delicious and varied (again, some Mediterranean-Asian fusion going on—I'm spotting a trend). The dishes can sometimes be a bit sauce-heavy (or maybe my tastes are becoming more Spanish) but choose wisely and you'll love your meal. This is one of my go-to *menus del día* when I have visitors because of the wide selection. They also have a menu de noche for a reasonable 18 euros (same as the day menu), but if you're going to be in the area for a reasonably-priced dinner, I'd suggest **Baco y Beto**.

4. Badila (Lavapiés, 13.50 euros)



This restaurant is intimate and classic (the chef himself sometimes takes the orders) with faded white wood walls and a chalkboard listing the daily specials. The food is classic Spanish with a touch of 'lo moderno,' and everything is fresh

and seasonal. It's still the best *crema de verduras* I've had in Madrid (had seasonal squash with a couple slices of intense chorizo), which says a lot in a city obsessed with creaming vegetables. Here's a previous post on Badila.

5. La casa dei Pazzi (chueca, 11.50 euros)



Casa dei Pazza

Just to switch things up here, let's focus on quantity. Casa dei Pazzi offers a substantial salad as a starter and then a whole Italian-style pizza for your main course. There's also wine, bread and dessert. You'll wonder how you got away with paying only 11 euros, half-expecting to look over your shoulder as you leave and see an angry Italian chef charging after you with a pizza paddle.

6. Los Chuchis (Lavapies, 11 euros)



Maybe the most charming atmosphere in the list, it feels a bit like an old diner, with a few tables around a large bar and counter in the middle, the hustle and bustle of the waiters running around and the steady chatter of regulars. The food's great too. We showed up at 1:30 and it was fine, but it filled up quickly. Check out our previous post on Los Chuchis.

7. Bar Galleta (Malasaña, 11.50 euros)



This trendy restaurant in Malasaña has a similar feel to Maricastaña (see below), with both doing modern takes on classic spanish food, though Galleta's menu skews a bit more French. They're also on the same street, so if you don't like the look of one *menu,* try the other. I prefer the atmosphere here though—the warm gold lighting, the wide French doors to the street, the wood and brick interior with wild flowers in vases around the restaurant. When we went the food was classic Spanish but good (crema starter, *entrecot*, a fruit desert) but *the menu del día* seems to change frequently and dramatically, so you can probably catch it on a great day.

8. Maricastaña (Malasaña, 11.50 euros)



The food is classic *menu del día* —your typical *crema de*

verduras starter (or hummus or a salad) with a protein-focused second (*lomo, entrecot, meluza*)—but what they do, they do well. It has a bit of that same late-2000s trendy look to it—exposed brick, sanded wood shelves, dangling lightbulbs and fading white paint—but they manage to pull it off. Galleta wins by a hair, but they're both nice dining experiences.

9. La Candelita (Alonso Martinez, 12 euros)



We all enjoyed this place. They describe their cuisine as "Latin Criollo" (though it leaned more Spanish than Latin American) with a warm Latin-inspired atmosphere. They publish examples of their *menú del día* right on the website http://lacandelita.es/carta/menu-del-dia/ so you don't have to take my word for it!

10. TukTuk (Chamberí or Chueca, 10.50 euros)



TukTuk doesn't even need mentioning on an English-language Madrid blog. They do a nice variety of Southeast Asian dishes and have great quantity and quality menu for the price, so it's always a popular suggestion in the expat community. If you've lived here for over a year, you've definitely heard the typical "let's all go TuckTak! Takatuk! TACKATACKATUKKA!" They're pronouncing it wrong, though—it's "tuktuk." Read our full post on Tuk Tuk.

11. La Tragantúa (Huertas, 12 euros)



(photo credit Carlos Olmo Minube.com)

This place was consistently called the best menú del día in Madrid on TripAdvisor last year, and it might still have that reputation, but the second time I went, the quality and presentation seemed to have slipped. Who knows, it may have been an off day. I don't know how you would characterize their food—it's a bit of a Spanish-and-everything fusion. I would sum it up as "rich." Be careful to mix up the starter and second course, otherwise you'll be like "why'd I order fried cheese in blueberry sauce as an appetizer for pesto-smothered pork?"

12. My Veg (Malasaña, 15 euros)



I bumped My Veg down a couple notches because they didn't include a drink with the *menu del día,* which is an insult to the very tradition! The final cost was closer to 18 euros, making it the most expensive *menu* we had all year. In terms of quality, it would be closer to the top. All the food was market fresh (they pride themselves on "tomatoes that taste like tomatoes") and the presentation modern and meticulous. It's a much fancier place than the outside suggests. Just ignore the terrible name.

13. El Apartmento (Huertas, 12 euros)



I came here after a particularly intense bike ride and without showering, so my memory is one of me hunching over my plate apologetically avoiding eye contact with all the well-dressed businessmen eating around us. The food was delicious though, Spanish food with a modern twist. I managed to take this blurry photo before losing all control and smashing my face into my plate in a black-out feeding frenzy.

14. Siam (Conde Duque, 11.61 euros)

I'm a sucker for Thai food and this place does a decent job for the (oddly specific) price. They include tom yum soup or pad thai as a starter, then a stirfry or curry as a second. The atmosphere is a bit odd, it feels a bit like a theme restaurant. While we're on the topic of thai food, I actually prefer the menú del día at **Maiia Thai (Plaza de España),** though it doesn't rotate much, and sometimes the new **BambuBox (Chueca)** has Tom Kha as a starter, which is nice. I

haven’t included either of those on the list because they weren’t done as a menu with the group. Also: **Krachai (Alonso Martinez)** has very high quality food and some Michelin nods, though the menu is expensive, doesn’t include soup, and doesn’t rotate much.

15. Taberna DNorte (Sol, 10 euros)



So this place has a surprisingly nice interior and the food wasn’t bad (a decent-sized burger, a pisto starter for me, someone got a salad) but it’s located in an exceptionally ugly plaza between Sol and Gran Via and attached to a drab little hotel. It’s the kind of place you’d expect to see a man in a disheveled suit drinking a mid-morning cocktail and nervously waiting to meet his mistress.

16.Vietnam 24 (Chueca, 11 euros)



The menu food isn’t bad, but it’s not particularly noteworthy. We all had some type of chicken or beef stir-fry but they seemed to lack those bright fundamental vietnamese tastes (mint, lime, basil). I also would’ve liked to see pho as a menu option, but that’s wishful thinking. I prefer **La Petit Hanoi** in malasaña.

17. El b_US (Sol, 10 euros)



Everyone else loved this place (including TripAdvisor, where it has some pretty outstanding rankings). It has a unique design concept I guess, but I was not blown away by the food. I also have no idea how we're supposed to pronounce it. "El bus?" "El beh- OOS?" I end up saying it like I'm hesitant to recommend it, which I guess I am: "El b'us."

18. Vivares (chueca, 9.90 euro / 12 euros veg option)



This restaurant is popular for lunch in Chueca, but I can’t figure out why, exactly. We experienced so-so food in a chaotic environment, nothing extraordinary, and the menu felt a bit too long for them to focus on any type of seasonal speciality. My strongest memory is that it was too loud. “Alright, gramps” you’re probably thinking, but the sensation was like being in an adult Chuck-E-Cheese without any of the cool robot puppets.

19. La Mucca (Malasaña, 10 euros)



I enjoy La Mucca for dinner. They have a good boletus pizza and some quality appetizers, and it’s lively and fun in the evening. For lunch, this place disappointed. It was the first *menu del día* where someone had to set aside a dish—a greasy open-faced sandwich with an odd flavor. We were also sitting on the slanting terraza with the harsh mid-afternoon February sunlight blinding our eyes and giving the greasy *Tosta* an even more washed-out, dreary look. The highlight was this salad, but even that can be made easily at home for much cheaper. We sat there dreaming of all the better places on this list, knowing that next week was a fresh start.

Final Thoughts:

You might have noticed almost none of these get awful reviews, but that’s simply because none of these places were awful. Maybe it’s a testament to our rigorous selection process, or maybe we just enjoyed ourselves everywhere. If a place were awful, I would have said so.

I think of Homer the food critic: “I’m giving this my worst review ever: seven thumbs up.”

I have more recommendations for *menús* around Madrid that were not included in this list because we did not go there in our Friday group. I had to set a limit for the list somewhere. **Please add your suggestions below or on Facebook and we can compile another post.**

Gallery

(all photos were snapped on scene with an iPhone, unless otherwise indicated)



Asian-fusion ceviche at Bacira



Duck confit at Gabriel



Bacira dessert



Stew as the main course at Bacira



Bacira appetizer



Vivares Salad



Vietnam 24



Del Norte



Casa dei Pazza



Badila



Badila crema de calabacín



TukTuk



El Apartamento



La Candelita



Bar Galleta



Bar Galleta



Bar Galleta crema



Bar Galleta



Greek salad starter at La Mucca, Malasaña



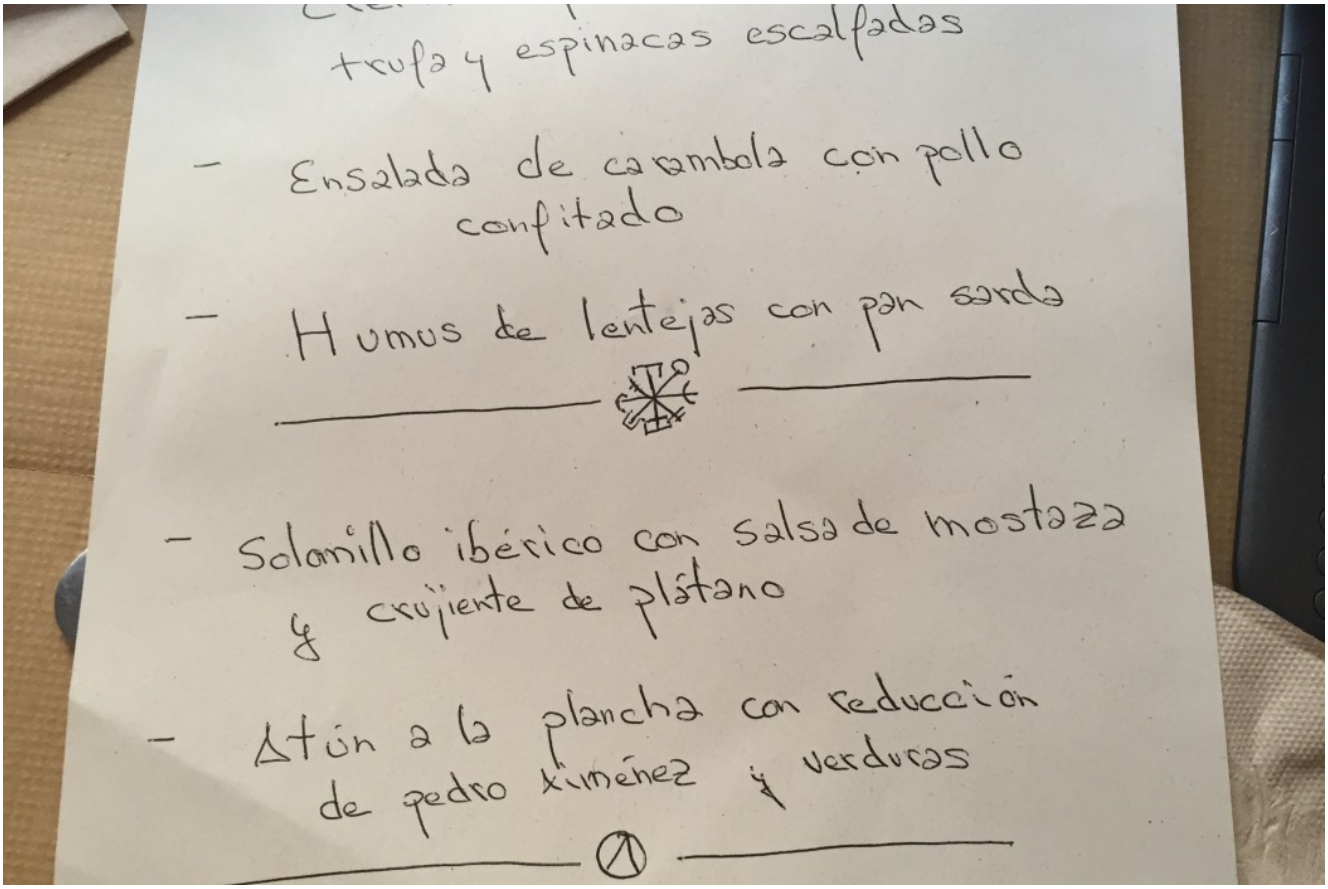
Gabriel



Gabriel crema



Gabriel Menú





Maricastaña



Gabriel dessert



Gabriel dessert



Maricastaña

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 Duti, 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 (Peñagrande)

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

---

La Barraca, an upscale Valencian restaurant in downtown Madrid

It is easy to be skeptical about the quality of the seafood in Madrid due to its severe lack of an ocean; I would write off most locations that serve paella as tourist traps while advising visitors to seek out their paella in Valencia or elsewhere. However, after sampling the ***arroz negre*** at **La Barraca** I am more optimistic about the state of paella affairs in Madrid and strongly recommend this stellar location.



My first time visiting Madrid was in August of 2008. This excursion with my grandmother, “Safta” Lucy, was a present for my acceptance to college. At that time I never would have fathomed that shortly after finishing my undergraduate degree I would go on to call Madrid my home. Back then I was not nearly as adventurous of an eater as I am now – I have ***verguenza*** that I had an aversion to seafood when Safta Lucy originally brought me to **La Barraca, an upscale location in Madrid devoted to seafood and rice dishes.**

In the present day, 7 years later, Safta Lucy and her friend Semita were passing through Madrid together as a stop on their journey between Mexico and Israel. Lucy made a reservation for us once again at **La Barraca**, which my stomach now had the refined maturity to appreciate. The walls of this establishment are decorated with **tasteful ceramic art** as well as photos of the **famous clientele**.



Our starters consisted of ***gambas al ajillo, gallos a la madrileña,*** **and** ***mejillones relleñadas.*** **Garlic prawns** are my favorite ***marisco*** and I jump at any opportunity to eat them during visits to coastal cities. The **gallos** were hearty and filling while the **mussels** were both meaty and delicate in texture.





For the main course we shared ***arroz negre***, a paella dish served with squids with the rice blackened by their ink. The ink is a delicacy that contributes positively to the flavor and texture of the rice.



And of course dessert, a **cheesecake** to end on a sweet note.



Info

Website

Address: Calle de la Reina

Phone: 915 32 71 54
Reservations advised.

You'll also like:

- La Maruca, a swanky Cantabrian restaurant in Barrio Salamanca

Lambuzo, a family-run Andalusian restaurant in the heart of Madrid

- **Cozy wine bars in La Latina (with gluten free options!)**

Banibanoo, an Iranian Market-style Restaurant in the Center of Madrid!

I have to admit that when I was first invited to try a new Persian food restaurant in Madrid, I had my doubts. Until then my knowledge of Persian food was very limited. But if there is something that I love it is trying new things. So of course, I accepted.

Banibanoo describes itself as a restaurant offering Persian market cuisine. It is owned by a young woman named Banafsheh who, after working six years in marketing, decided to pursue her dream of becoming a chef and restaurant owner. One day she left her job and went to London to study in Le Cordon Bleu School. Upon returning to Madrid, she discovered that Iranian food was little known in the Spanish capital. So she decided to open her very own restaurant where people could enjoy these wonderful dishes.

The name of the restaurant is also very personal: *Bani* is short for her full name Banafsheh and *Banoo* means Miss. So Banibanoo means *Miss Bani*.



Banibanoo’s owner Banafsheh



The restaurant is small and cozy, perfect for a fantastic meal with friends or with your partner. Apart from the food, what I love the most about Banibanoo is how bright it is and that the food is on display at the bar. That way, you can see all the food they serve before you order. It also has an intimate and familiar feeling, as if you were entering a market and wanted to eat something from a particular stand.



Banibanoo.



Fresh ingredients and beautiful homemade dishes are all the decorations you need



Banibanoo

According to Banafsheh, Iranian shares a lot in common with Mediterrean cuisine; the ingredients are all very similar. But

for me, each dish at Banibanoo tastes unique and exotic, for the mixture of flavors and variety of ingredients on each plate.



Food on display



Food on display

The food

Banibanoo offers a simple menu, consisting of traditional and original dishes, all made with fresh ingredients and a lot of love. If you're the kind of person who struggles when it comes to ordering, no problem. At Banibanoo you have the option of choosing a menu with three different dishes on one plate. Banafsheh likes to change up the menu every two weeks, offering different recipes along with the old ones. Banibanoo also offers wonderful breakfasts. On Saturday and Sunday, for example, she offers a very special breakfast that will be the highlight of your weekend: a "burnt" brioche bun with cream cheese and jam.

When I went for lunch with two friends, Banafsheh suggested we

try out different dishes so we could all share. I have to say that was a fantastic idea. The first three dishes we tried were: *broccoli with roasted cherry tomato in a yogurt sauce and tahini*; *beetroot hummus with feta cheese and hazelnuts*; and *gourmet purple potatoes with yogurt sauce, cherry tomatoes and cardamum*.



Menu 1

For the second place, we ordered: *sweet potato with red onions, yogurt sauce, almonds and pomegranate seeds*; *couscous with cheese, mint sauce, cilantro and parsley*; and *Kuku Kadoo: zucchini 'frittata' with mint and cheese*.



Menu 2

Our last plate included: *roasted beets with cherry tomatoes, feta cheese and a pomegranate and Sumac sauce*; *Shirin Polo, Persian rice, saffron, orange zest, carrot and pistachio* (this was one my favorite, amazing!); and *Kuku Sabzi: similar to a 'frittata' with herbs, walnuts and cockles*.



Menu 3

For dessert we had an incredible carrot cake (really, please try it!) and a brownie-like chocolate cake. Also delicious.



Carrot cake



Guinness Chocolate cake

All this feast of food could only be accompanied by a typical ***Iranian drink, infused with cucumber, flowers and other refreshing ingredients.*** How can you describe something that tastes so good? They now have two different drinks based on this one: One is call ***Tejebin:*** The same drink but with tea and ***Cafejebin***: The same but with coffee.



Banibanoo drink

What can I say? If you want to enjoy healthy and traditional food with an exotic taste, this is your place! Fantastic Recommendation – thank you Jose and María for taking me to this wonderful place.

INFO

Address: Calle Martires Concepcionistas 19, Madrid

Price: €12.95, *3-dish menu plus coffee and drink during the week;* **€13.95** *During the weekend, without drinks; Breakfast goes from €2.50 with coffee or tea to €5.50.*

Facebook

Instagram (@banibanoomadrid)

Gluten free pastelerías in Madrid: Part 1- Confitería Marqués

Sugar dusted pastries, chocolate dipped palmeras and fruit filled tarts: gluten free friends, the search is over. If you're a foodie who just happens to be of the gluten free inclination, finding delicious confectionary in the city can be a little, shall we say, challenging.

We all know that there are the international coffee shops that serve the same chocolate brownie and the supermarket aisles that sell the same two or three packaged cookies, but where do you go when your **traveller, foodie heart** wants to spring out into the city and explore its **homemade artisan treats**?

This series is dedicated to **Madrid's best hidden corners for delicious homemade cakes and cookies, gluten free style**. You can even take your non-gluten free friends, and I promise you that they will not be able to tell the difference; they may even find their new favourite spot!

Confitería Marqués

Tucked away on Fernando el Católico, Confitería Marqués is the little Madrid bakery where it feels like everything has been made especially for you. With its tea party bunting and dainty glass cake stands, it has an element of the Alice and Wonderland to it, with everything in miniature.

There are **fruit tarts, mini croissants, individual loaf cakes, savoury empanadas, palmeritas, apple slices, jam tarts, and more**.

The sheer selection that they offer is fantastic for any gluten free Madrid foodie, as well as any foreigner in Madrid that wants to try some local pasteles with a reminder of home. Everything is made in the pasteleria and tastes as homemade as it sounds.





As well as all of the above, another reason why Confitería Marqués is so unique is that it also makes savoury food such as **empanadas**, filled with cheese, vegetables, fish and meat. These crispy, buttery little pastry puffs make for a delectable little lunch.



Then there are the pastries, tarts, palmeritas, fruit slices and loaf cakes. Each are exactly as they should be, and some are even better.

The **apple loaf cakes** have a base of sweet apple pieces and raisins, are soft on the inside and scented with vanilla. The **palmeritas** are crispy and flaky and come traditionally plain, or coated in dark chocolate. Plus, the **chocolate orange tart** is rich and decadent, filled with dark chocolate cream, and hints of citrusy orange.



The owner of the shop is extremely friendly and can help you pick out something from the counter, or choose something from the incredible handmade confectionary that they have to the left of the counter and throughout the rest of the shop, including **small boxes of cookies** and **beautifully presented chocolates**. These would be perfect as a thoughtful little gift or -why not- a special treat for yourself.

You can even buy **a homemade birthday cake, chilled desserts or a traditional Christmas Roscón de Reyes** from the tall stand to the right of the counter; any would make a great surprise for a gluten free friend on a special occasion or a delicious traditional dessert to share after a meal at home with friends.

Another little tip is that they can make **gluten free bread** in house to order; just ask the lady at the counter when you would like it for.

Info

Web: www.confiteriamarques.com
Address: Calle Fernando Católico, 76
Metro: Argüelles

Extra notes

Don't forget to ask about the delicious foods available for **lactose and nut allergies**. You can go with all of your friends!

You'll also like:

- **Cosy Wine Bars in La Latina – with gluten-free options!**
- **Rayen Vegano – a vegan "gem" of a restaurant in Huertas**

Lady Madonna – take a day off the diet

It's very easy when living in Madrid to slide into a certain pattern and become all about the booze. Wine's cheaper than water (seriously, I've paid more for a Perrier than I have for a Pinot on more than one occasion). Cañas replace coffee and without realising, you've wound up on an unintentional liquid

diet that's bad for both your purse strings (as well as your head).



Having said that, there are times when you want to chow on down without breaking the bank and dress up for dinner – **Lady Madonna** has got this nailed. Tucked away on Calle Orellana 6 (a stone's throw from Alonso Martinez metro) it is a little oasis amongst the local eating options that include Burger King *that said there's a time and place for a Whopper but maybe not on a Friday night!

First discovered on a random Thursday whilst on a quest for a trendy *terrazza*, I experienced what can only be described as the **best cake that I have ever had in Madrid**. It involved Chocolate. It involved Guinness. Weird you say? Nope, more like a party in your boca and everyone should be invited. There literally aren't enough superlatives to describe its deliciousness – instead I suggest you order it on arrival and wrap up your dins with another one come desert time (again,

speaking from experience).



Not only is the food borderline orgasmic (not just my opinion, it’s been uttered by my dining companions if I seem too easily pleased) but the décor is literally like something torn from the pages of Wallpaper Magazine. In other words, not a piece of Ikea furniture in sight and somewhere that I’d quite happily move into after kicking out time. You’re greeted with gorgeous tiled floors, plates that almost got swiped and popped into my handbag and lighting that seemed to create an Instagram filter effect which is never a bad thing in my book. **Lady Madonna** is completely cornering that New York warehouse

vibe.



I’m steadily working my way through the menu but the following things stood out as being calories well spent: the **Gambones a la Brasa** managed to tempt a confirmed carnivore into seafood submission, whereas the **Ensalada de Burrata** even had me eating my greens. If like me, dinner isn’t a delight without some decent red action fear not, **a glass of Rioja is “una ganga” at 2 euros 50 a pop**.



Gambones a la brasa – grilled shrimp

I was warned by the hip (but not scarily so staff) that if you want a table on a Saturday night you need to be booking up about a week in advance. My concern is that after a rave review that might up the ante to a fortnight. Either way, Lady Madonna is the kind of place that cocoons you with its culinary chicness but has you pining for your Oysho jammies by the time you pay the bill (or maybe that's just me/an attack of my eyes being bigger than my belly!).

Try it, you might like it.

All images from Lady Madonna

Lady Madonna

- **Facebook & Instagram: @ladymadonna_restaurante**
- **Address:** Calle Orellana, 6
- **Metro:** Alonso Martínez

- **Phone:** 915 02 41 82

Soy Kitchen – a Fusion of Asian Flavors

Previously, I wrote about **StreetXO**, a hip Asian fusion restaurant in Salamanca helmed by culinary wild child, David Muñoz. Though the food was intriguing more than delicious, I thought it was a decent and fun effort on Muñoz's part – I also thought I'd probably found the best Asian fusion in Madrid.

Then I went to **Soy Kitchen**.



Located in a old area around Grand Via, in **Plaza de los Montenses**, Soy Kitchen looks unassumingly like a typical neighborhood bar. Inconspicuously sitting in a familiar list

of *cocktails*, *vinos*, and *vermut* sits ***tapas asiáticas,*** the only indication that this place serves altogether different fare than most bars. The lower half of the establishment serves drinks and tapas, the upper portion is the restaurant. The decor is simple, but that’s where the simplicity ends.



The popularity of Soy Kitchen rests solely on the machinations of proprietor and sole chef, **Julio**. Born in Shanghai and educated in Hong Kong, Julio’s career in Spain began when he moved to Pamplona and won a prestigious tapas award. If you get a chance to speak to him, do. Julio is just like the dishes he serves: an eclectic mix of Asian flavors in a

thoroughly Spanish setting.



There is **no menu** (though they always check with the customer if they have any preferences/allergies), which means you are

left in the hands of the chef – and what incredibly capable hands they are. This is Asian fusion done by an Asian, and you can taste the difference.

The image above is a noodle dish that comes with a peanut sauce made with four different types of soy, a lovely mild spice, and many other little secrets that I wish I knew. The image below is a coconut filled with a medley of seafood, and the image below that is a whole garlic and soy lobster that was finger-sucking good.





Throughout the ten course meal (yes, Julio single-handedly cooks ten courses for each and every one of his tables), I was continuously surprised and impressed by the harmony of flavors. As I said earlier, I tend to be suspicious of fusions

because they often reflect an ignorance about the diversity in Asian cuisine.

Every bite was an explosion of so many different flavors from all over Asia I kept expecting them to clash or become too overwhelming, but they never did. Julio is a master chef and finds the perfect balance between spicy, sweet, sour, and savory in each of his dishes.



Julio serves up at least eight dishes, and if you're still hungry you can have an additional meat option of beef or fish. I had the beef. The chef himself came out to stir up the tender pieces in a hot pot and place the perfectly cooked meat on grilled rice cakes.

If you manage to get a reservation, my only suggestion is that you come hungry and stay for an after-dinner *vermut* downstairs – your palette will have gone around Asia and landed firmly back in Spain in a single night.

Info

Facebook
Address: Plaza Montenses, 4
Metro: Plaza de España

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**
- **Chuka Ramen Bar – Madrid's hottest ramen restaurant**
- **Hattori Hanzo – Japanese food, straight up. No sushi.**
- **Nippon 2 – top quality yet affordable sushi, finally!**
- **Krachai – A cozy and elegant Thai restaurant in Alonso Martínez**

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!

Los Chuchis Bar, Downright Good Food in Lavapiés

Los Chuchis is a sweet little bistro bar that sits on calle Amparo, one of those typically narrow and sloping streets in

Lavapiés. The bar lures you in with its white-and-blue-striped awning and funky decorations. Although it seats no more than fifty people – you may have to squeeze in at the bar or pounce on one of the few tables – what it lacks in size, it truly makes up for in quality. If you are a foodie, then dining at **Los Chuchis** is a must.



Los Chuchis was opened by Scott, an Englishman who has called Madrid home for about three years. Scott not only owns and runs the restaurant, but the kitchen, too. **Los Chuchis**' cuisine is British at heart; many dishes are inspired by Jamie Oliver, although touches of Spain can be noticed in its ingredients, drink selection and ambience.



The first time I heard of **Los Chuchis** was when Spain's newspaper, **El País**, came out with an article on **10 Madrid Expats' Favorite Bars**. A photo of **Los Chuchis and Scott** was featured at the top of the article. That photo stuck with me.



Since **Los Chuchis** had been lingering on my list for weeks,

James and I went for a ***menú del día*** (€11.50), which, I can assure you, is the best time to go. When I saw the menu, I was blown away by the number of succulent ingredients in each and every dish. Everything was so fresh and the presentation was delightful. I was smitten.

After much deliberation, here's what we ordered for lunch:

For starters, I had a salad with fresh greens, watermelon and fetta cheese. James went for the cold avocado soup.





For the main course, I ordered **hake fish with pesto and clams** and James got the **breaded veal with a lovely side salad of mango, tomato, avocado and onion**.





While we could have written this post right then and there, we decided that it was only fair that we try out **Los Chuchis** for dinner too. We just wanted to make sure it was as good as we thought it was. So we went back for dinner the other night and guess what? It was.

Dinner at Los Chuchis means *raciones* with friends

At night, **Los Cuchis** serves ***raciones*** (large dishes which you can either share or eat on your own). As we entered the bar on a Tuesday night, James and I were hit with all types of wonderful smells and instantly started gazing over at the patrons beside us, admiring the dishes they were devouring. The star dish that kept on coming out of the kitchen was the **potato skins with sour cream and hot sauce** (€8.50)**.**

The menu also featured tantalizing concoctions such as **Stinking Bishop cheese with grapes** (€13,50), **Isle of Mull**

cheddar with chilli peppers (€13.50)**, oven-baked Camembert cheese with roasted garlic and rosemary** (€12.50)**.** Then there were the more classic dishes such as **roasted chicken with lemon and rosemary (€10.50)** as well as **arugula salad with roasted tomato, red onion and Stilton cheese** (€11.50).

James and I decided to share the **lamb chops with yogurt and mint sauce** (€14.50). James liked the sauce so much that he took it home with him in a coffee cup.



Los Chuchis should be on the top of your list if you're into food, want to satisfy your tastebuds and appetite, and like discovering unique little restaurants that truly surprise you.

I recommend making a reservation for lunch and dinner. You can eat at the bar too.

Price range & hours:

- Lunch: *menú del día* – weekdays €11.50 & weekends €14.50. From 2pm-4pm.
- Dinner: *raciones* – 20-25€/person. Kitchen opens at 8:30pm.

Facebook

Address: c/ Amparo, 82

Metro: Lavapiés

Phone: 911 27 66 06

Dating in Madrid for Foodies, part 3

Covered some art, some nice trees and parks but really **you are a foodie deep down inside.** If your stomach is empty you are not going anywhere except for the next all-you-can-eat buffet. The route is a collection of little restaurants to enjoy the tapas culture that exists in Madrid. Not going to beat around the bush, **this is my preferred type of date**. I love food and talking about food. It is also nearly impossible to not talk about food, what food your mother always cooked or what local delicacies freaked out your foreign friends the first time you told them the recipe.

This route is also the most flexible and varied. I have named some of **my favourite restaurants** below, which I have visited frequently and allow for some bites to eat without having to order the coffee and dessert. Go for **3 relatively different restaurants**, not only makes it more exciting for your taste

buds but it will give you a lot more to talk about. Now it might seem strange to invite someone to 3 different restaurants rather than just have the 3 courses at one.

However, we don't want this to be a regular run of the mill date; this has to be more memorable and make you change from place to place. Plus it makes splitting the bill so much less awkward as you can pay the first bill, your date then gets the next and dessert will be handled by the organiser. After all, if you make it to dessert you will want to leave a good impression.

ACT ONE. The Starter. Naïf.



Image from Naif's FB

Naïf in Calle San Joaquin 16 <m> Tribunal

This restaurant, just like your attitude to the first date, is understated and cool; not trying too hard to impress and it has a terrace. You will want to ask the waiter to put you on the waiting list if the terrace is full. For extra brownie points you will do this 10 minutes before you expect your date

to arrive so you already have a table waiting for him/her. The starters I recommend would be the **mini hamburgers** (that arrive multicoloured) as well as **the hummus**. All the starters are very nice and not too large. One quick warning—please do not order the white wine, as me and my friends have never had a positive experience. **Red wine** and ***Tinto de Verano*** (red wine mixed with lemonade) are both great alternatives.



Image from Nanai's FB

Alternative: **Nänai in Calle Barco 26 <m> Tribunal**

No terrace but also has a very alternative, understated and cool interior to start your date. Have 7 dishes to share with the **tztaziki**, **cheese selection** and **hummus**, all ideal choices to start the dinner experience. This bar will be exhibiting different works of art in their restaurant during the month.

ACT TWO: The Main Course. Olé Lola or

Mercado de San Anton

Honestly both options are just as great. It depends on what you want for your date, if you prefer some intimacy then choose **Olé Lola** if you prefer variety and greater stimulus of the senses choose the **Mercado** (which has a great rooftop bar).



Image from Olé Lola on google

Olé Lola in Calle de San Mateo 28 <m> Tribunal & Alonso Martínez

This restaurant/bar is a very popular place on weekends so try to arrive a little earlier than 21h. The brilliant reason to go to this restaurant is how the chefs are fusing the traditional Spanish kitchen with more contemporary elements, my favourite being the **duck breast served with a puree of pear and pistachio**. The dishes range between €6 – 14 and are not too large in size to miss out on dessert. Adding the good selection of wines on offer, this restaurant boasts many advantages. Yet this still isn't the best reason to visit. The interior of **Ole Lola** makes it very easy for couples to have a little privacy. Small tables all situated one after another means you don't have someone left or right listening in on your conversation.



Mercado de San Anton in Calle de Augusto Figueroa 24 <m>
Chueca

Here you have the hustle and bustle of a market with everyone looking for the right tapas to suit their appetite. The choice of food is enormous and if you are unsure of your date's culinary likes and dislikes, then this is the safer choice. Plus it is exciting; you can start with some sushi, move onto a **burrata** (mozzarella), head to a **salmon sandwich** and finish with **jamón**. The different stalls on the 2nd floor offer a great variety and it also induces some energy, as you have to get up off the table.

FINAL ACT. Dessert.



Image from La Cocina de mi Vecina’s FB

La cocina de mi vecina in Calle Corredera alta de San Pablo 15 <m> Tribunal

Our final destination is specifically geared towards delicious cakes, brownies and cookies. The **carrot cake** is one of the best that I have had in Madrid and all cakes are homemade. The service is friendly and helpful to make a recommendation if you can’t choose.



Image from Greek&Shop's FB

Alternative: **Greek&Shop in Calle Corredera alta de San Pablo 9 <m> Tribunal**

This Greek delicacy shop offers a brilliant Greek nut tart or *kataifi*, also a Greek dessert made of nuts and cream. The shop is a mix between a take away and a sit-down shop, so sitting inside is an experience in itself.

If you've missed them, here's "Madrid Best Date Ideas", the series, part 1 and part 2