

dining

You can say what you like — and believe us, we've heard it all before — but we really think that Spanish cuisine is simply the finest in the world. In what other country can you eat so well, so cheaply? What other people can talk so endlessly, so untiringly, about food? Because for the Spanish, there is no more essential part of life than enjoying a good meal. To make the most of it, you need to cast off any inhibitions you may have about trying something out of the ordinary. For this is

the land of suckling pig, blood sausage and *callos* (tripe). Read on then, for an introduction to the best of Spanish cuisine. Despite our encouragement though, there'll still be some of you missing that taste of home. So we've listed all the best places to find your brownie mix or your Szechwan chicken. Good luck with those *callos*.



CHEAP EATS

It happens to the best of us: hunger hits, you reach into your pocket and — only a few coins. Fear not, here the best places around the city to grab a bite on a budget

El Tigre. If you can elbow your way through the crowds to the bar, you'll find beer or cider for €1.50, immediately followed by a plate of hot tapas: croquettes, *patatas bravas* and *tostadas* galore. Amazingly, the bar staff never repeat the dishes that accompany each round. *C/Infantas, 30 (Metro: Chueca/Banco de España).*

Maoz. Famished and impoverished vegetarians need look no further than Maoz, where nothing on the menu is over €5. Pick up a falafel pita and cram it with as many fresh toppings and sauces from the DIY bar as you can handle. Seating is limit-

ed, so grab something to take away. *C/ Hortaleza, 7 (Metro: Chueca/Gran Vía).*

Cervecería 100 Montaditos. This chain offers a list of 100 small sandwiches, all at just €1. Fillings range from basic *jamón* to fresh cheese and caviar. Two or three make a meal, and are all served with crisps. *C/Mayor, 22 (Metro: Sol), c/Fuencarral, 96 (Metro: Bilbao).*

Casa Camuñas. Another affordable Spanish chain, Casa Camuñas offers generous *tostas* in the €2-3 range and delicious potato dishes topped with

jamón, chorizo and eggs for around €6. *C/Alonso Cano, 101 (Metro: Nuevos Ministerios); c/Juan de Olías, 39 (Metro: Estrecho).*

La Taberna de la Tía Cebolla. Perched on the hill between Sol and Plaza Santa Ana, La Tía Cebolla (auntie onion) serves fantastic *tortilla española* (€4) and generous slabs of homemade *empanada* (tuna- or mincemeat-filled pie) for just €2.50. Plus, the friendly waiters bring fresh bread, chorizo and cheese free with each drink. *C/de la Cruz, 27 (Metro: Sol).*

LATE NIGHT EATS

The hectic social scene in Madrid means that you'll have to keep on fuelling yourself with food. **Emily Jarvis** and **Noor Multani** scoured the city to find the best places to eat in the wee small hours

La Negra Tomasa

Step into La Negra Tomasa, and for a second, you'll forget you're in Madrid. The live Cuban music, waitresses garbed in traditional outfits and the unmistakable smell of delicious Cuban cuisine makes for an atmosphere much like any Havana restaurant. The food is great, the mojitos flow and the music doesn't stop until 5.30am, so get your get your appetite ready and don't forget those salsa moves you learned from *Dirty Dancing*. **C/Cádlz, 9, tel: 91 523 58 30 (Metro: Sol). Open: Sun-Thur, 1.30pm-3am; Fri-Sat, 1.30pm-5am. Average cost per head: €15-24.**

Cafetería Galatea

For those of you who aren't craving churros, but need an early morning bite after a long night at the discotecas, stop by Cafetería Galatea. Located in Salamanca, this eatery is famous for its generously sized hot dogs and is sure to hit the spot. **C/Príncipe de Vergara, 4, tel: 91 431.15 01 (Metro: Príncipe de Vergara). Open: Sun-Thur, 7am-1am; Fri-Sat, 7am-2am. Average cost per head: €5-12.**

Gula Gula

Looking to spice up your night? Visit Gula Gula, with its unique cuisine and a distinctive cross-dressing waiters, who not only serve up delectable dishes such as salmon with almonds and passion fruit sauce, but also a racy show. Be prepared for an experience unparalleled to any other restaurant in Madrid. **Gran Vía, 1, tel: 91 522 87 64 (Metro: Banco de España). Open: Sun-Thur, 9-2am; Fri-Sat, 9-3am. Closed Mon. Average cost per head: €15-20.**



La Carreta

Need a place with an intimate atmosphere or just a late night bite? Try La Carreta, which specialises in traditional Argentinean meats, with an assortment of pasta dishes for you and your bohemian friends. Weekends offer live Latin music, which might just have you boogieing there all night. **C/Barbieri, 10, tel: 91 53 27 042 (Metro: Chueca). Open: daily 1pm-5pm; 9pm-3am. Average cost per head: €10-20.**



Vips

After working up an appetite at the local bars, head to VIPs for some late night culinary gems. The affordable American style menu is sure to satisfy any fast food cravings with a classier edge. Indulge in the bacon cheeseburger and delight your sweet tooth with a "copa swimming", a three tiered sorbet experience that is sure to make your mouth water. **Locations around Madrid, try Plaza de Cánovas del Castillo, 5, tel: 91 275 21 84 (Metro: Banco de España). Open: daily 8am-2am. Average cost per head: €8-15.**

La Taberna de San Bernardo

Head to La Taberna de San Bernardo where you're sure to find some traditional Spanish tapas and locals alike. You know this place is good because you'll be fighting for a spot against the regulars who are chowing down on a plethora of pinchos y raciones. **C/San Bernardo, 85, tel: 91 445 41 70 (Metro: San Bernardo/Noviciado). Open: daily 2.30pm-4.30pm and 8.30pm-2.30am. Average cost per head: €8-18.**

www.guiadelocio.com/estrargonvegetariano

METRO: LA LATINA. TEL: 91 365 89 82

PLAZA de la PATA, 10 — MADRID de los AUSTRIAS

WHO AREN'T VEGETARIANS
SURPRISING TO THOSE

NOW OFFERING FREE INTERNET

TABERNA + RESTAURANTE

EL ESTRAGÓN Vegetariano

Vegetarian Restaurant

Artemisa

y algo más

Ventura de la Vega, 4 (Frente a las Cortes) Tel.: 91 429 50 92 MADRID

Tres Cruces, 4 (Pza. del Carmen) Tel.: 91 521 87 21 MADRID

Organic Produce

A classic on the Madrid vegetarian scene

SIAM

Thai Restaurant

The authentic taste of Thailand in Madrid

c/San Bernardino, 6. Metro: Plaza de España.
Tel: 91 559 83 15

THE SPICE OF LIFE

Craving curry and desperate for dhal? From Chinese chow to British bangers, let *InMadrid* direct you to all those international grocery stores



So you're fed up with *jamón* and *lentejas*? Well don't fear. Thanks to a rising immigrant population in Madrid, exotic *alimentaciones* are sprouting up all over the Spanish capital — you just need to know where to find them. If you've been hankering for Indian ingredients, you'll find everything you need in Lavapiés. You can locate Middle Eastern delights just east of Avenida de la Paz, near the Centro Cultural Islámico. And if you'd like to try your hand at cooking Chinese delicacies rather than eating them from a take-out box, head to Plaza de España, where a secret cove of Chinese stores is tucked into a corridor below the plaza. Mexican food is a tasty alternative, and a few good stores have popped up in La Latina and Chueca. And if it's a taste of home you need, head to one of the American or British importers to banish those homesick blues.

Indian

Hossain SL. All your Indian spices in one place. Save big on bulk buys of cumin, turmeric, coriander and curry. *C/Miguel Servet, 5, tel: 91 528 04 63 (Metro: Lavaplés/Embajadores).* Open: every day, 10am-11pm. **Nasima Store Alimentación.** Across the street from their friends at Hossain SL you'll find Nasima, specialising in Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi rice and teas. (English spoken.) *C/Miguel Servet, 6, tel: 91 468 38 17 (Metro: Lavaplés/Embajadores).* Open: every day, 10am-10pm.

Chinese

Dong Fang Extremo Oriente. Chinese, Japanese and Korean ingredients, plus foodstuffs from the Philippines. Pick up Chinese-language magazines and free press too. *Galería Subterráneo, Parking Plaza de España, s/n, tel: 91 542 14 64 (Metro: Plaza de España).* Open: every day, 10am-2.30pm and 4.30-8.30pm.

Mexican

La Tiendita. Buy your Mexican speciality salsas to go with your dried chilli peppers. And don't forget everyone's favourite beer, known as Coronita in Spain, Corona everywhere else. *C/Libertad, 11, tel: 91 524 13 79 (Metro: Chueca)* Open: every day, 11am-10.30pm. See www.lapanzaesprimero.com for more information.

Canasta Mexicana. Pick up all of your Mexican cooking basics or buy your enchiladas from the adjoining Taquería del Alamillo. And don't forget to bring home the hand-made piñata for your South-of-the-Border theme party. *C/Segovia, 15, tel: 91 366 57 94 (Metro: La Latina).* Open: Tues-Fri, 11am-2pm and 4.30-9pm; Sat and Sun, 12.2.30pm and 4.30-8pm.

Middle Eastern

Alimentación Al-Nur. Classic favourites such as mint tea and *baklava* are available, along with new things to try, such as the Egyptian soup *Mulukheya* (to be found in the freezer!). *C/Antonio Calvo, 11, tel: 91 326 09 01 (Metro: Barlo de la Concepción/Parque de las Avenidas).* Open: every day, 10.30am-10.30pm.

American

Taste of America. Friendly owners Dana and Alicia stock the beef jerky, Pop Tarts and that brownie mix you've been pining for, and is the exclusive distributor in Spain of Hershey's, Pepperidge Farm and Newman's Own. *C/Serrano, 149, tel: 91 562 16 32 (Metro: República Argentina).* See www.tasteofamerica.es for more information. **The American Store.** The good Aunt Jemima fairy has blessed this store with the necessities for a Sunday breakfast. Pillsbury mixes and baking essentials will ease your aching sweet tooth. *C/Paseo de San Francisco de Sales, 3, tel: 91 544 27 03 (Metro: Islas Filipinas).* Open: Mon-Sat, 9am-9pm. See www.theamericanstore.es for more information.

British

The Food Hall. Hop on the Cercanías to go there in person, or order online to get your Walkers Crisps, Cadbury's Chocolate Buttons and Newcastle Brown Ale. *C/Isa de la Aleganza, 6, Nave 38, San Sebastián de los Reyes, tel: 902 431 136.* Open: Mon-Fri, 10am-8.30pm; Sat, 11am-9pm. See www.thefoodhall.es for more information. **The Things You Miss.** Not only the things, but the brand names you miss too: McVities, Heinz, Rowntrees, Sharwood's and Tetley. *C/Juan de Austria, 11, tel: 91 447 07 85 (Metro: Iglesia).* Open: Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2.30pm and 5.30-8.30pm; Sat, 10am-2.30pm. See www.thethingsyoumiss.com for more information. ■ KERINA PHARR

VEG IT

Vegetarian food has come a long way since the days of lettuce and lentils. **Kirsty Tuxford** investigates

Vegetarianism is catching on in Madrid. It'll never replace the Spanish love of *jamón*, but veggies will be pleased to know that they finally have somewhere to go where they can order a dish *sin carne* and not have to worry that there'll be sneaky bits of ham hidden away somewhere. Here's where to go . . .

Viva la Vida

This is a tiny health food shop and eat-in or take-away buffet with a handful of stools and a couple of benches outside, meaning you can dine al fresco. You help yourself and pay for your food depending on the weight on your plate. The food gains top marks for healthfulness alone, never mind the delectable mixture of flavours. **Viva la Vida, Las Huertas, 57, tel: 91 369 72 54 (Metro: Antón Martín). Open: Mon-Thurs, 11am-midnight; Fri-Sun, 11am-midnight (later if there is demand). Average cost per head: €15. Also: Plaza de la Paja (next to Dellec) (Metro: La Latina).**

Artemisa

A homely restaurant with a warm decor and pleasant background music. Try the paté, which is tasty, thick and creamy, but go steady, as the portions here are also massive. You must save enough space to fit in their Tiramisu!



If you want to learn what to do with your vegetables to make them taste as good as they do at Artemisa, then you can sign up for one of their cookery courses. **Artemisa, Ventura de la Vega, 4, tel: 91 429 50 92 (Metro: Sevilla). Also at Tres Cruces, 4, tel: 91 521 87 21 (Metro: Sol). Open: Mon-Sun, 1.30-4pm and 9pm-midnight. Average cost per head: €25. Menú del día (changes daily. Never the same twice): €10.75. Menú de degustación for two: €23.95.**

La Bio Tika

You can't get much healthier than a vegetarian, macrobiotic restaurant that offers a menu based on an ancient yogic diet. That means not only no meat or fish, but no egg, lactose, garlic, onion or mushrooms either. The



Photos: Kirsty Tuxford

result is surprisingly full-flavoured thanks to the freshness of the ingredients and the clever use of herbs.

Try their "fake" chocolate tart. It tastes like chocolate (not quite as sweet) and it looks like chocolate, but it's made from carob beans — much healthier. **La Bio Tika, Amor de Dios, 3, tel: 91 429 07 80 (Metro: Antón Martín). Open: Mon-Sun, 1-4.30pm and 8-11.30pm. Menú del día: €9.40; evenings, weekends and fiestas: €11.50. Wider variety of dishes available at weekends. No smoking.**

Vegaviana

This is vegetarian heaven, with an option for non-veg-gies of free-range chicken. The portions are enormous and it's excellent value.

There's a Mexican twist to some dishes, such as the *tortitas*, which are wafer-thin and crispy and topped with flavoursome vegetables including courgettes, red peppers, onion, aubergines, delicious sweet potato with a crunchy parmesan topping.

The only problem you'll have here, is fitting three courses into your stomach! **Vegaviana, c/Pelayo, 35, tel: 91 308 03 81 (Metro: Chueca). Open: Tues-Thurs, 1.30-4pm and 9-11.30pm; Fri-Sat, 1.30-4pm and 9pm-midnight. Average cost per head: €15. Menú del día (choices available): €8.90. Menú de degustación for two: €17. No smoking.**

El Estragón

El Estragón is an appealing restaurant with candlelit ambiance and chilled music. It's a long-standing favourite among La Latina residents, mainly thanks to their innovative menu, which includes dishes such as: lettuce, spinach, cashews, courgettes, green olives and feta cheese, dressed in light and creamy tartar sauce, and *Crêpes à la Mouselina*: three thick crêpes stuffed with bursting with mixed vegetables, quinoa and dried fruit, all smothered in a creamy, garlicky sauce. **El Estragón, Plaza de la Paja, 10, tel: 91 365 89 82 (Metro: La Latina). Open: Mon-Thurs, 1.30-4.30pm and 8pm-12.30am; Fri-Sun, 1.30-4.30pm and 8pm-1.30am. Average cost per head: €35. Menú del día: €19. Smoking permitted.**

TOP TAPAS

There's an art to getting free grub in Madrid: the tapas crawl. We give you a few pointers on how to get your fill of food and drink as you tour the barrios of Madrid

A *tapa* — literally, “lid” — originated as a device to keep flies out of your drink. Place a piece of bread with cheese over a glass of wine, and *voilà* — insect-free imbibing. How the art of tapas has evolved. Today, you can start off at one of the city's many taverns work your way down the street sampling all kinds of tapas and *pinchos* as you go. Here are a few of Madrid's finest.

Around Sol

Two bars under the same ownership, **Taberna Alhambra** and **Venta El Buscón**, have genuine Spanish décor and genuine Iberian tapas, such as oil-drenched tuna and *albondi-gas* (meatballs), all at affordable prices. Right down the street is **La Casa del Abuelo**, which is still churning out delicious tapas after more than 100 years — don't leave without trying the grilled shrimp *alioli*.

La Latina

After a morning at the Rastro, feed your flea-market appetite at **El Almendro** or **Los Huevos de Lucio** for some *huevos estrellados* (literally “smashed eggs”) or head next door to **Casa Lucas** for their tasty stewed mushrooms and fried seafood.

The Chueca Scene

Los Jiménez keeps the free tapas coming, but you must try their *flamenquines*, an Andalusian combination of fried pork loin and cheese served with dipping sauce. Closer to Plaza Chueca is **Santander**, a small hangout with all of their barely-a-euro tapas on display at the counter.

Feed me, I'm a uni student

Among the many affordable spots in Argüelles, **La Cervecería de San Julián** is a good choice, with a great mix of students from ICADE and the Complutense, as well as older locals stopping in for their daily slice of tortilla.

Malasaña

Located near Plaza Dos de Mayo, **El Cangrejero** features a wide beer selection to go with their yummy tapas. **Albur**'s menu features tapas from northern Spain, such as roasted red peppers stuffed with cod, and opens on Sundays.

Restaurante Boñar de Leon has become famous for fill-



Photo: Noah Shaye

ing Madrid's most cavernous stomachs without breaking its scrawniest purses. A three-euro caña at this bar comes with a generous tapa such as paella, chicken wings, or cocido. Order from the menu on “Cocido” Mondays when anyone who finishes a full plate gets an all-expensies-paid-trip to the Canaries.

Post-museum munchies

In the square near the entrance of the Reina Sofia, **El Brillante** has a great selection of no-frills tapas, such as tender *pulpo a la gallega* (Galician-style octopus) and fantastic fried calamari.

Eat like a Spaniard

Ok, so it's a bit off the beaten path, (Ciudad Lineal district) and maybe not quite shiny enough to make many Madrid guidebooks, but if you're looking for some good food and drink on the cheap, any local will tell you the three bars that comprise the **Triangulo de Tapas (Los Amigos, Lus Enemigos, and Los Aperitivos)** are among the city's best. With one caña you'll get at least five plates tapas including, *calamares*, *patatas bravas*, *salchichas*, *queso* and of course, *chorizo*.

Your tapas tour starts here:



Taberna Alhambra, c/Victoria, 9 (Metro: Sol).

Venta El Buscón, c/Victoria, 5 (Metro: Sol).

La Casa del Abuelo, c/Victoria, 12 (Metro: Sol).

El Almendro, c/Almendra, 13 (Metro: La Latina).

Los Huevos de Lucio, Cava Baja, 30

(Metro: La Latina/Tirso de Molina).

Casa Lucas, Cava Baja, 30 (Metro: La Latina/Tirso de Molina).

Los Jiménez, c/Barbieri, 14 (Metro: Chueca).

Santander, c/Augusto Figueroa, 25 (Metro: Chueca).

La Cervecería de San Julián, c/Alberto Aguilera, 30

(Metro: Argüelles).

El Cangrejero, c/Amaniel, 25 (Metro: Noviciado).

Restaurante Boñar de Leon, c/Cruz Verde, 16

(Metro: Noviciado).

Albur, c/Mañuela Malasaña, 15 (Metro: Tribunal).

El Brillante, Pl. Emperador Carlos V, 8

(Metro: Atocha).

Triangulo de Tapas, cruce de las calles San Fidel y Ezequiel Solana (Metro: Ascao).

KNOW YOUR BARRIO

Every neighbourhood in Madrid has a distinct flavour – check our guide to each one to find your natural habitat

Ópera: This gorgeous barrio is home to the Royal Palace. Check out the gardens and enjoy a stroll with the tourists around its quaint streets. Great for cafés and restaurants, but be warned — eating and drinking here will hit your wallet hard.

Gran Vía: Once called Calle Generalísimo, named after the dictator Franco. Madrid's "Big Street" is now lined with bars, restaurants and mega-stores such as H&M and Zara. Check out Museo Chicote, a haunt where Hemingway and other war correspondents would shelter as shells whistled down the street during the civil war.

Malasaña: Known for its nightlife and very young crowd, Malasaña offers a more grungy vibe than frenetic Chueca. The Plaza Dos de Mayo has been the focal point for the ongoing battle between Spanish youth and the police for the right to drink on the streets. Stocked full of rockers, metal-heads and punks.

Chueca: A refuge for "public sinners" in the 18th century and a shady haven for drug addicts in the 80s. Now Chueca is one of Europe's finest gay quarters, and currently counts as Madrid's coolest neighbourhood. Perhaps best avoided during Gay Pride in June, when it's impossible to swing a platform shoe without knocking over 50 trannies, and the streets are converted into some kind of open sewer.



Photo: Andrew Losowsky

Salamanca: The posh area, where you can pick up a fur coat or some designer threads. Expect typically Spanish nightlife complete with a strict dress-code policy, as well as boutique after boutique stocking designer labels.

Prado: It's mainly expensive hotels that line the streets of this area — and of course Madrid's most famous art museum, the Prado. Great for a Sunday wander as you head to the Retiro.

Huertas: The party zone. Walk the streets at night and you'll be accosted by a million PRs offering you free drinks in exchange for your custom.

Live here at your peril — you'll never get any sleep, and will have to dodge the pools of vomit as you walk to the Metro.

Lavapiés: The most international neighbourhood in Madrid. They may look a bit shabby, but it's here that you'll find some of the best Chinese, Indian and Moroccan restaurants in this melting pot of a barrio.

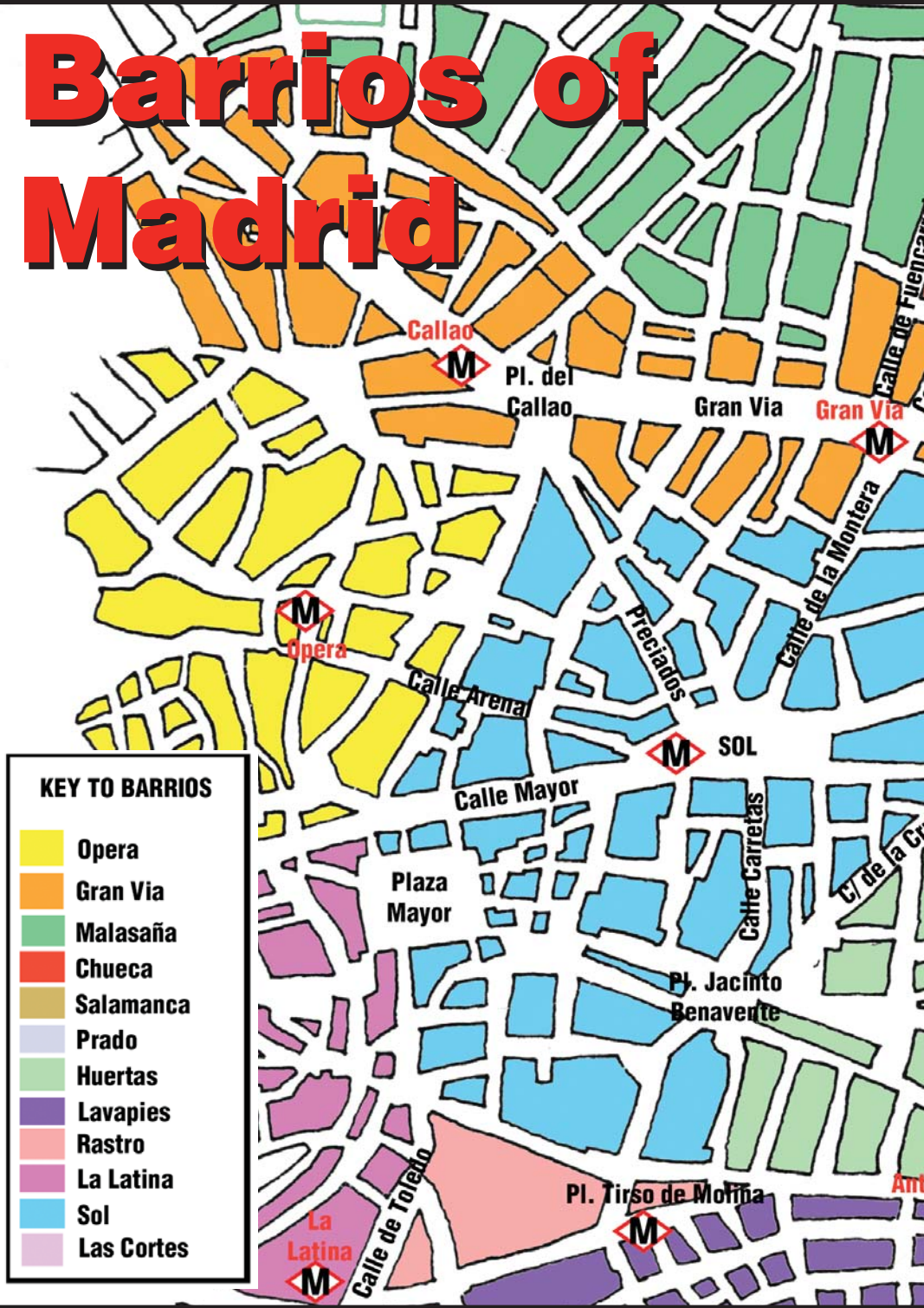
Rastro: Head here for antiques, photographic equipment, and on Sundays, the world-famous Rastro flea market. Watch your wallets and purses though — there are plenty of wannabe Fagins on the prowl for an open hand-bag.

La Latina: This trendy Spanish neighbourhood is the place to head on a Sunday afternoon, when

the whole of Madrid's young and funky crowd gets out on the street for some liquid refreshments. Perfect in summer, when the bongo drummers appear from nowhere and everyone seems to be clutching a litre bottle of Spanish *cerveza*.

Sol: The geographical — and tourist — centre of Madrid and Spain. When the roadworks finally finish, it'll be a fun place to go again, but for now it's full of people and short on space. It's also the place where all the demonstrators head — and Madrid has plenty of them. ■ KEITH MILES

Barrios of Madrid



KEY TO BARRIOS	
	Opera
	Gran Vía
	Malasaña
	Chueca
	Salamanca
	Prado
	Huertas
	Lavapiés
	Rastro
	La Latina
	Sol
	Las Cortes



EMERGENCY RECIPES

When you're running low on euros and the cupboard only contains stale bread, an onion and a questionably old piece of cheese, it's time to get creative in the kitchen. Follow these easy and cheap recipes to avoid starvation!



Asparagus and Chicken Pasta

Ingredients

450g pasta, such as penne
1 bunch of asparagus
4 chicken breasts. Skinned and boned
2tsp olive oil
½ tsp basil
Salt and pepper
½ cup Parmesan cheese
2 tsp white wine

Method

Cook the pasta in a large pot of salted, boiling water until al dente, for about eight minutes. Meanwhile, cut off and throw away the tough ends of the asparagus. Then, slice the spears into five-centimetre pieces. Set them aside to add to pasta during the last three minutes of cooking. Meanwhile, cut the chicken into strips. Heat the oil in a large frying pan placed over a medium heat. Now add the chicken. Keep stirring until it's cooked through. This should take about three minutes. Stir in the wine and seasoning. Drain the pasta and the asparagus and toss together with the chicken.

Roasted Vegetables

Ingredients

2 tbsp olive oil
1 aubergine
1 pepper
2-3 courgettes
2 red onions
3-4 whole peeled garlic cloves
1 tsp chopped fresh thyme (optional)

Method

Dice the vegetables so that they are all the same size. Drizzle the vegetables liberally with olive oil and sprinkle on a touch of thyme. Roast in a hot oven for 45 minutes or grill for 30-40 minutes tossing occasionally.



Garlic Potato Wedges

Ingredients

2 large potatoes
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 cloves crushed garlic
salt and pepper

Method

Leave the skin on the potatoes and wash thoroughly. Cut each potato into wedges lengthways. Make about six to eight wedges per potato. Place the wedges in a bowl and drizzle with olive oil and smother with crushed garlic. Season well, toss and then place on a tray skin-side down. Roast in a preheated oven at gas mark six (200 degrees Celsius) for 30-40 minutes, until they are soft and golden.

Lamb Meatballs in Tomato Sauce

Ingredients

Tomato sauce
450g minced lamb
1 tbsp chopped parsley
1/2 tsp chopped oregano
1 red onion finely diced
1 tsp paprika
1 large egg, beaten
60g breadcrumbs
2 tbsp tomato puree
Seasoning

Method

In a mixing bowl place the minced lamb, spices, herbs and onions and mix well. Add the egg and breadcrumbs, season and mix again. Mould in to small 2cm balls, sauté until cooked or oven bake for approximately 20 minutes at 200 degrees Celsius. Finish by pouring on the tomato sauce.



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Bangkok



*Excellent Thai
Cuisine*

c/Arenal, 15 (esquina Bordadores, 13) Tel: 915 591 696.
Metros Sol or Opera.

INTERNATIONAL EATERIES

There's no need to stick to one type of cuisine while you're in Madrid. Here's our pick of some of the best international restaurants



Photos: InMadrid

of which can be ordered in half-servings as a starter. The only gripe is the lack of pepper-grinder action — no Italian meal is complete without a huge mill being brandished by the waiter. Try the tiramisu (€4), which is wonderfully rich and creamy, and the chocolate cake (€4.50), which arrives crowned with fruits of the forest and drizzled with a raspberry coulis. Top marks for Mr Dias again and a special mention for the Illy espresso, one of the finest cups of coffee you'll find in Madrid. **Acquafredda, c/Maldonado, 15, tel: 91 411 63 14, (Metro: Núñez de Balboa). Open: Every day, 10am-9pm.**

■ SIMON HUNTER

Japanese: Nippon

Here you'll find a distinctly Zen atmosphere, with low tables and shelves of traditional zori sandals; you are in for a conventional experience. Their dishes offer an explosion of flavours and use a wide variety of ingredients, such as the chilled *hijiki* black seaweed salad, laced with a great combination of grilled tofu, chicken and carrot. Another hit is the bright red ahi tuna and pale hake drenched in tart lemon soya sauce and sprinkled with chives. And of course, there's tempura, which, when done wrong is just a fancy word for "ball of fried dough." Not Nippon's tempura. This is the most impossibly light, crispy, flavourful combination of courgette, carrots, onion and prawns in Madrid's city limits, and you'll be tempted to drink the sweet-and-salty plum sauce accompanying it. Finish your meal with a green tea, and your chi properly harnessed and feeling at one with the universe. **Nippon, c/Los Madrazo, 18, tel: 91 360 03 54 (Metro: Sevilla). Open: Everyday, 1.30-4pm and 8.30pm-midnight. Average cost per head: €25. Shabushabu fondue: €40 (Min. two people). Smoking permitted, credit cards accepted.**

■ KRISTEN BERNARDI



Nordic: Ølsen

Perhaps instead of Nordic, that should read "Vodka", because there are 40 different brands on offer at this stylish restaurant, decorated with blond wood and warm orange tones. The menu offers an interesting mix of blinis, sushi-style fish and open sandwiches. Some dishes even come accompanied with vodka shots. Head downstairs after your meal to enjoy the cool basement vodka lounge. **Ølsen, c/del Prado, 15, tel: 91 429 36 59 (Metro: Antón Martín/Banco de España). Open: Mon-Sun, 1pm-5pm and 8pm-2am; Fri-Sat, 1pm-5pm and 8pm-2.30am. Average cost per head: €35. Menú del día: €15.**

■ SIMON HUNTER



Mexican: La Catrina

La Catrina is a jumpin' little joint in Malasaña, which is intimate and crowded, like any good restaurant should be. It's been around for seven years, and is a favourite among the locals to stop in for a drink. This is the place to go for a few snacks and delightful cocktails — there are as many drinks as food items and five types of tequila alone — so it might be best to stick with appetisers and cocktails (€3-6). The margaritas are delicious: super foamy, but not frozen, with a kick at the end and just the right amount of salt. All the menu items are €7, not the cheapest meal, but at least there's no hidden extras. Besides, it's a really fun place; there are tons of cool dolls and masks to look at, and there's good music and pretty people. So if you stick to the drinks and a few small plates, you won't be disappointed. **La Catrina, c/Corredera Alta de San Pablo, 13, tel: 91 522 57 59 (Metro: Tribunal). Open daily from 7.30pm. Average price per head: €12.** ■ SARA STOLTZ

Moroccan: Cocina del Desierto

This is one of those great little Aladdin's cave type places that once you've discovered it, you don't want to tell anyone about it in case it becomes too popular and loses its charm. But what the hell. In the small front room you can sit on cushions and dine at low tables in true Moroccan style. The walls are whitewashed and there's Moroccan

paraphernalia all over the place: trumpets hang above the bar, lamps give off a cosy glow and African music completes the set up. Even the wait staff are in traditional African dress and you'll feel as though you've left Spain completely. The food is deliciously infused with herbs and spices and their scent fills the air. The hummus and aubergine cream are divine starters, and the falafel is fresh and slightly crunchy on the outside and moist and aromatic on the inside. Finish off with a traditional mint tea and a selection of sweet pastries. **Cocina del Desierto, c/Barbieri, 1, tel: 91 523 11 42 (Metro: Chueca). Open: Mon-Fri, 1.30-4.00pm and 9pm-12am; Sat-Sun, 1.30-4.30pm and 9pm-12.30am. Average cost per head: €23. Menu de degustación (min four people): €16.** ■ KIRSTY TUXFORD



Indian: Delhi

Delhi has a large, pleasant dining room featuring discreet decorations. The staff are attentive without being intrusive and it's a great place to go with groups or for a quiet dinner with your partner. Delhi specialises in tandoori, tikka masala and jalfrezi dishes and makes sumptuous basmati rice, too. Expect to find hearty quantities of food, free poppadums and a good quality-to-price ratio. **Delhi, c/Duque de Osuna, 6, tel: 91 542 84 51 (Metro: Plaza de España). Open daily 1.30-4pm and 8.30pm-midnight. Average price per head: €15-20. Menú de degustación: €17.95; vegetarian menú de degustación: €15.60. Menú del día: €9.95.** ■ KRISTEN BERNARDI

Korean: Seoul

This two-level restaurant is managed by Sonia, a helpful host who speaks Korean, Spanish and English. Like many traditional Korean restaurants, Seoul serves plenty of kimchi — spicy, pickled cabbage — as well as pickled cucumbers, seaweed and bean sprouts. Try the muhl nang myun: buckwheat noodles served in a chilled beef broth — perfect for the summer months. And to pass the time while you enjoy your meal, see if you can spot some of the dishes you're eating on the Korean soap operas that play on the flat-screen television in front of you. **Seoul, c/Ronda de Segovia, 25, tel: 91 365 00 87 (Metro: Puerta de Toledo). Open: every day, 1-4pm and 8pm-midnight. Average cost per head: €18.50. Menú del día: €12.90.** ■ SIMON HUNTER

ad directory

Artemisa

With a wholesome and creative menu, friendly service and a comfortable dining room, Artemisa is popular with Spaniards and *extranjeros* alike. Although the *menú del día* is excellent, it's worth opting for a leisurely evening meal. You can choose from one of 11 salads and *platos de degustación*, accompanied by freshly squeezed juice or organic wines. For dessert, try the *tarta* Artemisa, made from chocolate, soft cheese, coconut and dried fruit, or the homemade tiramisu. There are also free-range chicken dishes to satisfy semi- and non-vegetarian diners. *Menú del día* €10.

Artemisa, c/Ventura de la Vega, 4 and c/Tres Cruces, 4, tel: 91 429 50 92/91 521 87 21 (Metro: Sol/Sevilla). Open: daily, 1.30-4pm and 8.30-11.30pm. (See ad p29)

Bangkok

Centrally located between Metros Ópera and Sol, Bangkok serves Royal Thai Cuisine in an open and casual atmosphere. Situated on the first floor with picture windows overlooking the street, Bangkok is open seven days a week and is perfect for large groups or intimate dining. *Menú del día*: €9.50.

Bangkok, c/Bordadores, 13, tel: 91 559 16 96 (Metro: Opera/Sol). Open daily for lunch and dinner. (See ad p37)

El Estragón

On Plaza de la Paja, in the heart of Los Austrias, this is a friendly, cosy restaurant on two floors with Andalusian-influenced decor. They have a *menú del día*, which is available at lunchtime and in the evening, making it a very economical option. You can expect to pay from €9-18. The speciality is *crêpes a la muselina*, which is spinach, dried fruit and vegetables topped with cheese and served with garlic mayonnaise.

El Estragón, Pl de la Paja, 10, tel: 91 365 89 82 (Metro: La Latina). Open daily, 1-4pm and 8pm-12.30am. There are two sittings for dinner on Fri and Sat: 9pm and 11pm, and two sittings for Sun lunch: 2pm and 4pm. (See ad p29.)

Siam

Just behind Plaza de España, Siam evokes Thailand with the highest-quality fresh ingredients flown in from Thailand and an all-Thai cooking staff, giving dishes that unique flavour. Dining is a pleasure in the tranquil, exotic setting among golden Buddhas and silks. There's a great value *menú del día* (Mon-Sun lunchtime) or you could try a bit of everything with the *menú de degustación*. English, Spanish, French, German, Thai and Chinese spoken.

Siam, c/San Bernardino, 6 (behind Plaza España) tel: 91 559 83 15 (Metro: Pl de España/Noviciado). Open: daily, Fri and Sat dinner reservations until 9.30pm only. (See ad p29.)

Did you know?

After Tokyo, Madrid is the largest trader in fish in the world.

Madrid only became the capital of Spain in 1561.

Did you know the oldest restaurant in the world is in Madrid? It is called Botín and, according to the Guinness Book of Records, it has been operating for longer than any restaurant in any other in any country. Even though the structure of the basement is from the 13th century (believed to be an Arabic construction) and the business opened as some type of inn for travellers around 1600, Botín's earliest record as a place where food was served dates from 1725. As for checking the truth of this claim, visit Botín itself, where the award is on display.

It took 42 years for Picasso's iconic masterpiece *Guernica* to reach Spanish soil. Before becoming the jewel of Reina Sofia's collection, the piece hung in New York until the fall of Franco, in line with Picasso's wishes.