

Lockdown diaries: Lauren, co-founder of Devour Tours, on leading her business forward while raising twins

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Lauren Aloise, co-founder of [Devour Tours](#) and author of [Spanish Sabores](#), was just getting back to work full-time after maternity leave and adjusting to being away from her twins for the first time. She was also in the midst of expanding her food tours to cities across Europe. Then the world shut down... Now she's fighting the good fight, continuing to share her love for local gastronomy and culture, and advocating for small businesses, like her own, more than ever.

What was your life like just before the lockdown vs. today?



At the start of February I had just gone back to work after nearly six months of maternity leave. I was adjusting to the commute, figuring out how to pump at the office, and going through the emotions of being away from my newborn twins for the first time. I was also really excited to dive back into my job – I'd lived and breathed my work for over eight years before becoming a mom and maternity leave was quite lonely. My company, [Devour Tours](#), was in the middle of expanding our food tours to London and Florence, so it was a very exciting time. I was just about to take my first work trip away from the babies to a conference in Berlin when the world started shutting down. The conference was postponed, and my [business partner](#) and I jumped into crisis mode.

Today my days blend together as they are extremely repetitive. In some ways I feel like I'm back on maternity leave, with the

added pressure of work. I wake up around 6am when the babies do, and take care of them for the next couple of hours along with my husband. We take turns while the other cooks breakfast or takes a shower.

My mother-in-law is living with us through the lockdown which I am extremely grateful for. She had originally come to help out when I was supposed to go to the conference – little did she know! She gets up around 9am and my husband takes a work shift. A couple hours later it's my turn. I work for three solid hours then take care of the babies again until their bedtime around 6pm. If we're lucky they're down by 7pm – but often they'll be up and down fussing until nearly midnight.

I try to take advantage of little moments of downtime throughout the day to keep working, and lately I've been in charge of cooking dinner at 8pm. Cooking allows me to disconnect for an hour and is truly therapeutic.

I've found balancing work and childcare (even with three people) totally overwhelming. I really feel for all parents out there who are in this situation – it is not easy.

How has the lockdown impacted your industry?



The tours and activities industry has been impacted like never before. From one day to the next we went to zero revenue and thousands of refund requests. Like many operators, we've had to let go of a lot of staff, a heartbreaking process to go through. Many small businesses like ours will not be able to make it through this time, but we're going to fight the good fight. And instead of focusing on survival alone, we're looking at new ways to grow and thrive in this new environment. We've released an [e-cookbook of our favorite recipes](#) to keep bringing the food from our tours into peoples' kitchens around the world, we've launched [an online shop](#), and we've been offering [daily cooking classes and food and wine seminars online.](#)

How are you coping?

There are ups and downs. I definitely have FOMO when I see my

social media feeds filled with people who are bored – practicing their bread making skills, doing yoga, and reading books. I'm honestly very tired and often anxious about the future. But I'm also extremely grateful for my health at the moment, and I try to keep that gratitude front and center.

I cope by making my days as routine based as possible – this isn't easy but when we pull it off it really helps me feel more at peace. I make a healthy breakfast each morning (usually some sort of eggs and a good quality piece of toast). I enjoy a cup of tea and a snack mid-morning while working, it keeps my energy up and there's something calming for me about a hot cup of tea.

I have one hour to myself each night that I use to cook dinner (my personal therapy!). Every now and then I bake – last night [my mother's homemade apple crisp recipe](#) did the trick! I also take “walks” with the babies on our terrace. I know not everyone has access to the outdoors but any time spent outside helps my mood enormously.

Who are you in quarantine with? Any advice for people in your similar situation?



I'm with my seven-month-old babies, my husband, and my mother-in-law. My advice for other parents in lockdown is to remember that this will pass (soon I hope!) so when it gets rough just try to ground yourself with peaceful thoughts.

What goals are you hoping to achieve as our time in lockdown continues?

My main goals are to keep my kids happy and healthy and then to lead my business forward in spite of having the odds stacked against us.

Have you noticed any acts of kindness or uplifting things recently?

I love that people are taking the time to offer their services for free or at deep discounts to help others. Whether it's an exercise class to help people stay fit in quarantine or some free printable resources for entertaining kids, these actions inspired us to also offer [a schedule of free online events](#) to keep people entertained and educated in the world of food and wine!

Do you have any tips for how we can help those in need?

Shop small. It's harder than it sounds with the convenience of Amazon and your local supermarket. But our support for small business is more important than ever right now and without it our post-lockdown world will be missing a lot of the special small businesses that made it so special. Let's not let that happen!

If you are Madrid based, some places I have been supporting:

- [Moega](#) (homemade Galician bread and empanadas)
- [Queseria Cultivo](#) (artisanal cheeses – they shop throughout Spain!)
- [Mercado 47](#) (a website where you can order from the local Madrid markets)
- [Madrid & Darracott](#) (Luke & team will advise you on all your quarantine wine needs)

What's the first thing you'll do once this lockdown is over?

Take a long walk with the babies! I love being outside and exercise and fresh air fuel my creativity and energy. Not being outside has been one of the most difficult things about confinement.

If you could tell the government one thing right now, what would it be?

More help for small businesses please. We were unable to take advantage of any government aide which is really disappointing. For example, one of the requirements of the ERTE (temporary layoffs) was hiring people back on for at least six months. For a tourism business where revenue will be greatly affected for the next year or even longer, this is not a realistic requirement.

- Follow Lauren on IG [@spanishsabores](#) and [her website](#)
- Check out [Devour Tours' website](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) to stay up to date on their [online experiences](#)
- Check out the [Recipes from the Devour Tours Kitchen](#) digital cookbook
- Lauren's business partner at Devour, James, also did a lockdown diary recently. You can read [James Blick's diary here!](#)

Check out all [Madrid lockdown stories](#)