

La Ración: Supplying Madrid with Spanish comfort foods during the lockdown

Food is a source of pleasure for many right now. It's a privilege to be able to bring a little bit of joy into people's lives.

For those craving Spanish bar food like fresh *tortilla de patata*, *croquetas* and *empanadas* during the lockdown, look no further than [La Ración](#). The delivery-only restaurant was started by friends of mine, Iñigo Vega and Miguel Moreno, last year. While I don't usually order much take-out, the lockdown seemed like a good chance to give their food a try. And it was well worth it.

La Ración offers delivery of freshly-made Spanish specialties across central Madrid. While the menu is minimalistic with just a few items, I was impressed by the customizability of the *tortilla de patata* (Spanish omelette). I ordered mine "juicy" (*jugosa*) and with added onion. There was also the ability to add several other ingredients, such as red pepper, cheese, *chorizo* sausage, and Spanish ham.



I wasn't disappointed with the results, the *tortilla* arrived warm, and seemed fresh out of the pan, nothing to do with store-bought, pre-made *tortilla*. As you can see in the photos, the egg was "juicy" as requested! I also really enjoyed the ham *croquetas*, which had a great texture and fresh, homemade taste. I also tried the tiramisu, which was creamy and delicious, although very light – I ate it in a couple of bites!



“Tortilla de patata is going to be the new pizza”

The food sector has been one of the hardest hit by the state of alarm caused by COVID-19 that has put Madrid’s 3 million residents into lockdown. Strict hygienic protocols were put into effect overnight, meaning restaurant owners had to quickly adapt, or shut their doors.

Iñigo and Miguel’s business – which they launched just last year – had an advantage, since they were already focused on selling via online delivery platforms such as Deliveroo, as well as directly through their own website, laracion.menu.

I asked Iñigo about his experience adapting to the current environment, and he said that at first he wasn’t sure what the

impact of the lockdown would be.

“There was a lot of fear at first, and business dropped,” he said. At the same time, he had to invest in following all the protocols: getting masks, gloves and disinfecting gels to use daily in their kitchen.

However, about a week into the lockdown, orders started to increase.

“People have gotten tired of cooking and since they can’t go out they are turning to delivery,” he said. “There is a huge demand for traditional food like: *croquetas*, *tortilla de patata*, so we were in a really good position with our concept.”



Questions over whether it's safe to order delivery, have since been quelled through informative news articles. La Ración has gone above and beyond what's required by law, and they include a list of the measures they take on each delivery.

Now, they are seeing a trend of people buying food for others as a special surprise. "We see a lot of people making orders for their parents," Iñigo said. "Food is a source of pleasure for many right now. It's a privilege to be able to bring a little bit of joy into people's lives."

With the lockdown extended until at least April 26, these

trends seem likely to continue in the near term. And, with many people eating more take-out than ever these days, many could continue to order from their favorite restaurants, even in the longer term.

That's the hope of business owners like Iñigo who have made a strong bet on delivery. "*Tortilla de patata* is going to be the new pizza," he said.

Personally, I've ordered more take-out in the last few weeks than in the entire year prior. So, he might be onto something! Although, after this lockdown, one of the first things I'll do is head to my favorite neighborhood bar and enjoy Spanish bar food in its natural habitat.

La Ración

- [Website](#), [Facebook](#) & IG: [@laracion.menu](#)
- Delivery only

Check out our [Lockdown Diary](#) series for more tips

Guide to all things Persian in Madrid, from restaurants to cultural happenings

One of the things I love about living in Madrid is that it's a bustling international city, and when it comes to food you can find just about any kind of cuisine your heart desires. As an Iranian American living in Madrid for over five years and founder of the [Madrid Persian Food Lovers Facebook group](#), I thought it was about time that I shared this guide to all things Persian in Madrid.

Here's all of the knowledge I've gained about Persian restaurants and cultural happenings across the city:

FOOD

Banibanoo



Photo from [Banibanoo](#) – also in the feature image

For something totally different, check out this modern and casual restaurant, whose name translates to “Miss Bani” in reference to its young owner, Banefsheh. What’s unique about this restaurant is that it serves up dishes usually only found in Persian homes.

The menu changes regularly, but some things you might typically find are sweet rice with chicken (*shirin polo*), egg frittata with a mix of herbs (*kuku sabzi*), or eggplant dip with walnuts and strained yogurt (*kashke bademjan*), each with the chef’s own creative spin.

Order the combo meal, and choose three items from the colorful variety of items on display behind the counter. Stay for dessert and typical drinks, such as Persian lemonade or cucumber and rose water. [Also check out our previous review of Banibanoo.](#)

- [Facebook](#) & [Instagram](#): [@banibanoomadrid](#)
- **Address:** Calle de las Mártires Concepcionistas, 19
- **Nearest metro:** Manuel Becerra

Mesón Persa Mr. Kabab



Photo from [Mr. Kabab](#)

Don't be confused by its name. The kebab served at this traditional Persian sit-down restaurant has little to do with its fast-food cousin, the Turkish doner kebab. In Iran, the term kebab, or kabab, is used to refer to meat skewers cooked over an open flame. Mr. Kabab is a favorite of the Iranian community in Madrid, and in addition to delicious kebabs made of tender beef, lamb, seasoned ground beef (*kubideh*), and chicken marinated in Persian spices, you can also find traditional Persian stews and appetizers. The owner, Mustafah, also runs the Persian store next door where you can find a selection of Iranian dry and canned goods to make your own creations at home.

- [Website](#)
- **Address:** Calle de los Artistas
- **Nearest metro:** Cuatro Caminos

La Palmera del Retiro

I was so excited to learn that Mina Rashidi, the former owner and chef at my absolute favorite Persian restaurant in Madrid, has a new project. Her previous venture, the very traditional Tehran restaurant in Salamanca, sadly shut its doors in 2012 during the recession.

Her new Spanish-Persian tapas bar concept offers a limited menu, but everything as delicious as you'd expect from Mina. Among the Persian tapas she typically serves are an eggplant dip known as *kashke bademjan*, as well as stuffed grape leaves, or *dolmeh*. It's a great place to stop for a caña and a tasty snack after a stroll in nearby Retiro.

- [Website](#)
- **Address:** Av. de Menéndez Pelayo, 53
- **Nearest metro:** Ibiza

Sabor Azafrán



Photo from [Sabor Azafrán](#)

This restaurant is another great place to try typical Persian cuisine. It's a bit off the beaten path, in Madrid's Ciudad Lineal neighborhood, however it's well worth the visit. Try one of the delicious stews (*khores*h), such as one made with meat, potato and split peas (*khores*h *gaim*eh), or another with a mix of herbs, meat and red beans (*khores*h *gorm*eh *sabsi*).

Of course, as any good traditional Persian restaurant, this one also has all the variety of kebab you would expect, served up with steamed saffron rice and roasted tomatoes. This place

is great for large groups, as it has a very large dining room, and long tables.

- [Website](#), [Facebook](#) & Instagram: [@sabor.azafran](#)
- **Address:** Calle del General Aranzaz, 65
- **Nearest metro:** Ciudad Lineal

Stop Pizza



Photo from Mohammad Riahi

You wouldn't know it from the outside, but this unsuspecting pizza and doner kebab take-away stand is a landmark for Madrid's Persian community. Call ahead and the owner, Mehdi, will prepare you some traditional Persian *barberi* bread in his pizza oven. Or stop in any time for a pizza served on crust that has a texture suspiciously similar to *barberi*, giving the pizza its own unique taste. You can also find typical Persian

stuffed grape leaves (*dolmeh*). Finish it all off with a strong black tea served from a traditional Persian tea pot. Note: there's nothing Persian about the rest of the menu.

- [Website](#)
- **Address:** Calle del Dr. Santero, 6
- **Nearest metro:** Cuatro Caminos

Restaurante Esfahan



Photo from [Restaurante Persa Esfahan](#)

The most central of Madrid's traditional Persian restaurants, this one is located right around the corner from Plaza España. Its menu contains some Middle Eastern fusion, with dishes like hummus and pita bread and salmon with orange sauce. However, they also feature many of Iran's most typical dishes, and even some you can't find in other Iranian restaurants in Madrid.

Standout dishes are the herbed rice with roasted lamb (*bagali polo*) and barley soup (*soupe jo*), which is a common staple in any Persian home. The restaurant's walls are covered with traditional Persian paintings and handicrafts, including woven carpets that cover the lower part of the walls. That, along with the traditional music played in the background, will make you feel like you've been transported to Iran.

- [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** Calle de San Bernardino, 1
- **Nearest metro:** Plaza de España or Noviciado

CULTURE

Tried the food, and hungry to learn more about Persian culture? Check out these cultural institutions:

Centro Persepolis



Photos from [Centro Persepolis](#)

A Persian cultural center that hosts cultural events, a bazaar where they sell Persian handicrafts, and organizes trips to Iran. They also host talks on Iranian art and literature, including poem recitation sessions in Spanish and Farsi.



Each year they organize a few concerts in Madrid, both by Iranian bands or those made to connect Iranian and non-Iranian music. These events have included some outstanding Iranian musicians, such as Shahram Nazeri, Hossein Alizadeh and Alireza Ghorbani to name a few.

- [Website](#) & [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** Calle Sta. María, 20
- **Nearest metro:** Anton Martin

Casa Persa



Photo from [Casa Persa](#)

The Casa Persa is an association dedicated to the diffusion and teaching of Persian mysticism, poetry and music. Every Saturday it hosts an improvised performance of Sufí music and dancing. The regular performers, Majid Javadi, Antonio Fernández and Carmen Sánchez, are often joined by other musicians from the community. It's recommended to reserve by phone ahead of time, as space is limited. There is an entry fee of 15 euros, and includes wine.

- [Website](#) & [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** Calle Silva nº5, 5ª planta
- **Nearest metro:** Santo Domingo or Callao

MORE

When it comes to finding Persian products, whatever you can't find at the **Mr. Kebab** shop in Cuatro Caminos mentioned above, you might also look for at one of the many **Arabic shops**

surrounding the [Islamic Cultural Center of Madrid](#). Many of these shops carry Iranian products, including the coveted sweet, black dates from the region of Bam.



Photo from esmadrid.com

Interested in hearing an **innovative blend of traditional Iranian and Flamenco music**? Then check out the band [Baramu](#), made up of Babak Kamgar, Pedro Pedrosa and Manuel Espinosa, collectively representing Iran, Extremadura and Andalucía. Based in Madrid, they regularly play events around the city. The trio mix traditional instruments from Iran and Spain to create a sound you'd be hard-pressed to find anywhere else in the world.



Photo from [Baramú](#)

[La Tasca](#) is a Spanish bar near Príncipe Pio run by a Persian family. There's no Persian food on the menu, but it's great for a beer and a tapa, and if you mention you love Iranian culture, you may get invited to some tea on the house.

If you make your way out to Alcobendas, a suburb northeast of Madrid, then you might check out [Nuevo Espacio](#). It's a Persian restaurant founded by a former cook from Mr. Kebab that was so successful he opened a second location, also in Alcobendas. It's also worth noting that Alcobendas is home to a substantial Persian community, and hosts Persian New Year celebrations, among other cultural events throughout the year.

Know of anything else that should be included in this guide to all things Persian in Madrid? Let us know in the comments!

7 Reasons Alcalá de Henares is worth more than a day trip from Madrid

I recently organized a weekend [getaway for WABAS, a writers' group](#) that I form a part of, and we decided to hold it in the beautiful city of Alcalá de Henares. As a Madrid resident, I've met a lot of people from Alcalá over the years, and even gone there for the day on more than one occasion. However, it wasn't until staying there for a full two nights that I truly got to know the city.

Being only 35 kilometers from Madrid – and a quick 40-minute local train ride away – many of those who live in the area take for granted that we have this jewel in our backyard. Alcalá is often thought of as a commuter city more than a tourist destination.

It's home to nearly 200,000 inhabitants (making it about the same size as Granada!), many of whom commute into Madrid every day on the many trains and buses that go into the big city. However, Alcalá is certainly an important city in its own right – one with a LOT to see and do and that's on par with other historical cities in central Spain.

I thought I'd share some of the reasons I think it's totally worth staying in Alcalá de Henares for a night or two.

1. Breathe in the history



From the hotel, to the meeting rooms, to the streets and restaurants – every place I stepped into during my weekend in Alcalá was filled with historic charm. I stayed at the [Evenia Alcalá Boutique](#), a three-star hotel housed in a 16th-century building with a charming courtyard located near the city's Cathedral.

The pedestrian **Calle Mayor** is a main street of shops and restaurants that connects the Cathedral to the city's main **Plaza de Cervantes**. Its cobble stones and wood-framed buildings take you back in time. It is on this street that **the birth house of Miguel de Cervantes** can be found, right next to the medieval hospital where his father used to work.



And of course, you have the **Archiepiscopal Palace of Alcalá de Henares**, which is famed for being the place where Christopher Columbus first met with Monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella. For our writers' meeting, the city of Alcalá was gracious enough to loan us a meeting room in the Casa de la Entrevista, which is a medieval monastery that has been converted into an exhibition space. I could feel the history literally everywhere we went.



It makes sense for a city that was completely rebuilt and planned as a university city in the 15th century. Many of the buildings from that era are still in use today. While Alcalá's University of Complutense was moved to Madrid in 1836, today it is a university town once again. The [University of Alcalá](#) opened there in 1977 and brought many of the original university's buildings back to academic use. The original university was named after the Roman city of Complutum that was the original city built on the site in the 1st century BC.

To learn more about the region's ancient history, be sure to visit the [Archeological Museum of the Madrid Region](#), also located in Alcalá.

2. Enjoy free tapas with your drinks



The tradition of receiving a **complimentary tapa** (small plate) with your drink order may have died out in much of Spain – but not in Alcalá! Several places in Alcalá still take part in this fabulous tradition. [Indalo](#) is by far the most famous place in town to go for a tapa. You order a drink and then you can choose a generous tapa from the menu, all for 2.50 euros, if my memory serves me right.

We also visited [La Posada Magistral](#) which gives you a surprise tapa with each drink (they also have a very economical set menu, even on weekends, that they serve in their upstairs dining room). Other bars, such as [La Taberna de Rusty](#), charge separately for the tapas, but at very modest prices.

3. Party all night long



By staying overnight in Alcalá I was able to discover how bustling the place is after dark! I didn't expect for there to be so much happening at night; but I guess thanks to its large population – which includes students of the University of Alcalá – there are a ton of options.

The most emblematic of Alcalá's night spots is [The Green Irish Pub](#). But, don't be fooled, this isn't your typical Irish bar – it's a proper nightclub. There's a little something for everyone at The Green Tavern and it attracts a diverse crowd. The first floor features rock music and a pub-like atmosphere, but with a massive dance floor, and the second floor is more of a traditional club scene with latin pop and dance music.

In case you get late-night munchies, you don't even have to leave the party complex: in between the two different zones there is a stand selling hot dogs and other snacks.

Meanwhile, the youngsters flock to [Bar TDK](#). Here you'll find cheap mixed drinks at 4 euros (and even a bit cheaper if you show a valid student ID!), as well as pool tables, dart boards and foosball, that will keep you entertained all night long.

If you're looking for a more upscale evening, you can check out the [Hanoi House](#). Here you'll find a more mature crowd, and a bit pricier cocktails in a large club fitted with Vietnamese-themed decor. It's definitely worth visiting in summer for its fantastic outdoor bar and terrace that offer nice views.

Like many cities in Spain, on any weekend night you can find lots of party people traversing the streets. You can make lots of new friends without even entering a club! I only went out one night in Alcalá so I didn't get to try everywhere, but other places that looked interesting were [La Champa 2.0 Karaoke Bar](#) and [Mi Niña Lola](#). I'll have to stay another night soon to try them out!

4. Experience fine dining without breaking the bank



While researching different possibilities for lunch and dinner in Alcalá, I came across several excellent options, it was difficult to choose. We ended up having lunch at [El Hemisferio Loft](#) and it was an amazing choice. The service and the quality of the food were excellent. But make sure to book ahead – the place gets packed!

On the weekend, you're able to choose from different set menus for lunch or for dinner, which are an excellent value. Our group chose el "Menu de temporada" which included an amuse bouche, a starter, a main dish, a dessert and a coffee for 25 euros. I ordered a seafood rice dish as the starter, and sea bass with mashed potatoes as the main and both were excellent. On weekdays a similar set menu goes for only 15 euros.

We also enjoyed dining at [El Tempranillo](#), which was right by our hotel and has a fantastic wine selection. We had a light

dinner of croquetas, as well as a plate of meats and cheeses. They also had a nice selection of entrees, for a more formal sit-down dinner. The owner, Inma, is very friendly and an excellent sommelier, who makes you feel at home in a cute and cozy atmosphere.

Other restaurants that came highly recommended were [Lucrecia](#) and [Martilota](#). I definitely plan to check them out the next time I'm in town.

5. Take part in Alcalá's many cultural events



When I was trying to choose which weekend to go to Alcalá, I was hard-pressed to find a weekend where there wasn't some kind of special event happening. I chose the only weekend of the season that was relatively calm (sandwiched between the

Alcalá Film Festival, and the **Don Juan performance**, when hotel prices were higher). Even so, we still caught celebrations for the **20th Anniversary of Alcalá being named a UNESCO World Heritage site** (which took place on December 2, 1998), as well as a pre-Christmas parade.

If you're planning a trip to Alcalá, make sure to check [the city's cultural calendar](#) and find out what may be going on at that time. Among the most well-known events is the city's **Mercado Cervantino**, or **Medieval fair**, where the Calle Mayor is filled with old-fashioned stands and people dressed in period attire. Definitely worth checking out if your timing lines up.

6. See (and hear) storks!



Ok, so you can see them whether or not you stay the night in Alcalá, but **I can't write an article about Alcalá without mentioning the storks**. Alcalá de Henares is said to be home to

around 90 pairs of migrating white storks – although each year they are said to stay longer. The best time to see them is between mid-October and the beginning of August, when you'll hear them snapping their beaks like castanets throughout the city. They love this place, thanks to the many steeples that are perfect for building their nests.

You can spot the large birds circling over the city and perched atop buildings. The the city's tourism office has even created a special ["Storks Route" touristic itinerary](#) that features the birds' most notable nesting spots atop already impressive historical buildings and around the beautiful Plaza de Cervantes.

7. Indulge in sweet treats



If you like Spanish sweets, [Alcalá is one of the best places](#)

[to try them!](#) A must-visit is the **Convent of the Clarisas of San Diego** where the cloistered nuns sell candied almonds from behind a small door without showing their faces. In addition to candied nuts, convents across the city sell homemade marzipan, similar to nearby Toledo.

Another typical sweet from Alcalá is a flaky puff pastry called **costrada**. It has a sweet cream filling and is covered in soft meringue that is finally topped with crushed sugared almonds. *Costrada* is said to have originated from the famous **Pastelería Salinas** in La Plaza de Cervantes. You can find it in their window display, as well as those in several other bakeries across town – where it's usually just as delicious!

And, you can't leave Alcalá without trying a **Rosquilla de Alcalá**, a round puff pastry glazed in sugary egg yolk. Try one at **Pastelería Lupe**. It's a level up from a glazed doughnut, that is sure to leave you in a sugar coma.

How to get to Alcalá de Henares from Madrid

Alcalá de Henares is super easy to get to. Here are the different options:

▪ By train

Take a Cercanías commuter train (Line 2 or Line 7) from Atocha Station to the Alcalá de Henares train station. During rush hour, trains depart every 5-10 minutes, and the journey lasts about 40 minutes.

▪ By bus

There is also a bus that leaves from Avenida de America bus station. It is line 223 run by Continental Auto, Line 223, and tickets are sold near the bus stop. The bus ride takes about one hour.

▪ From the airport

If you are coming from the Adolfo Suárez Madrid–Barajas Airport, I recommend going by taxi. While it's more expensive, it's worth the time savings. It's only about a 25-minute drive from Barajas to Alcalá. There is no direct public transportation line from the airport to Alcalá. You'd have to first go into the city of Madrid, and then take the aforementioned bus or train, which would take over an hour and a half.

▪ By car

Of course, if you have access to a car, Alcalá is just a short drive away.

As you can see, Alcalá is no sleepy commuter town. While it's an easy day trip; there's also enough to see and do to make it worth spending a night or two. I hope my experience helps you get the most out of your time in Alcalá de Henares.

Looking for more places to visit near Madrid? Check out our list of [Madrid's 10 beautiful surrounding towns](#).

Thank you Russ Pearce from [anythingbutpaella.com](#) for many of these lovely photos!