

Arugula, a restaurant serving fantastic salads near Retiro park

Folks, it's getting to be that time of year when the sun is out, the grass is green, and the best way to eat is outside. This weather calls for picnicking! And what better place for a picnic than El Retiro park? Prices inside the park can run ludicrously high and the same can be said for many of the places around the perimeter. Of course, there exists the classic option of bringing a bocadillo, but for a step up, there's a gem of a place on Calle Velazquez called [Arugula](#) that will put together an A plus picnic for you and it's only a stone's throw away from the park.



A little over 10 euros can buy you a menú complete with soup, salad, beverage, and coffee. Other options beside salad are available including focaccias and wraps. It's a reasonably priced combination considering the salads are huge, not to mention delicious.



At Arugula, the customer takes the reigns when it comes to

creating the salads. To start, there are three options for the lettuce base (romaine, mesclun and arugula, or mesclun and spinach). After that, there exists the option to add pasta or rice to bulk up the salad.



Next, onto the toppings, which are divided into two categories: basic and premium. Here's where it can get tricky because all the toppings look tempting, colorfully arranged in

a patchwork spread behind the counter. The basic ingredients include avocado, bacon, egg, carrots, olives, and lentils to name a few. The premium ingredients are even more luxurious and include such items as goat cheese, salmon, serrano ham, and sun dried tomatoes. Chose three basic ingredients and one premium, and then it's onto the dressing.



The eight dressings can be mixed and matched just like the toppings to create scrumptious hybrids like pesto/roquefort, for example. For the indecisive, there are salads already

designed and listed (with pictures of the ingredients) on large posters hanging on the wall. To compliment the salad, add soup or yogurt, throw in a beverage and don't forget the coffee and voilà! Your picnic is ready. It's a lot of food, filling, but upon finishing the meal, you'll be left with the feeling that you've made a healthy choice.



When you order a menu to go, the staff at Arugula will wrap everything up for you and give you a sturdy bag to carry it all with you to the park. Even the coffee is accounted for;

they will put a piece of tape over the mouth of the cup to prevent spilling en route. Service is fast and you'll be picnicking in no time. It's about a five minute walk from the restaurant to the park.

Info

[Web](#) & [Facebook](#)

Address: Calle Velázquez, 9

YOKA LOKA

Squeezed between aisles of fruit vendors and meat merchants in the lively Mercado Antón Martín, you can find [Yoka Loka](#), a **sushi restaurant worth your euros.**



Their hours may not jive with the Spanish schedule of eating dinner around nine or ten p.m., (since the market in which the restaurant is located closes its doors at nine), but you may want to consider eating out earlier than usual to get a taste of the **maki** and **nigiri** rolling out of the kitchen. Or perhaps, it may be better suited for a lunch out on the town.

Happening upon this locale is delightful in itself. It is unexpected to find a sushi stall in the midst of the traditional market products. The restaurant is tiny; a small counter to place your order, a small matchbox kitchen, and a dining room that is comparable in size to a train car. Flanking the small dining area and kitchen are narrow bar areas set up to accommodate a few extra diners. If seated here, you can peek into the kitchen to see what the chefs are up to.



Prices aren't outrageous. For example, eleven euros will buy you the **Yoka Loka sampler box** with between nine and thirteen

pieces depending. Yoka Loka offers some of the truest-to-form sushi in Madrid. Rolls are not sullied by sugary rice or tasteless fish as some sushi establishments in the city are prone to do. Here, quality comes out of the kitchen and is presented beautifully to boot.



Order a bottle of Japanese beer to round out the meal and savor the taste of something different than Mahou.



Info

- [Web](#) & [Facebook](#)
 - Address: Calle Santa Isabel, 5 Planta Baja
 - Phone: +34 610 602 722
 - E-mail: hola@yokaloka.com
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La Bicicleta – Ultramodern Cycling Café and Workshop in Malasaña

It was love at first sight for me with La Bicicleta. [La Bicicleta Café](#) fills a void in a city filled to the brim with bars serving coffee, but sparsely populated with the type of homey workplaces that I hold dear to my heart. There is something comforting about spending hours holed up in a cafe, calmed by the stop and go of an espresso machine. I like to search out spots where I can stake out territory and sit while minutes tick into hours, my fingers hammering at a keyboard or eyes scanning over pages of a book. La Bicicleta is one such spot where this is possible and encouraged and might I say, all the rage. It fosters productivity and sociality and the consumption of caffeinated and alcoholic beverages: what could be better?



[La Bicileta](#) bustles at pretty much any given hour of the day. While the sun is still out, it functions more or less just as it bills itself: a cycling workplace and café. You will see people perched in the windowsills with their laptop and coffee within equal reach. Cyclists come and go with their bikes. They barge through the front door and head downstairs to where they store or repair their rides. All of this while waiters bustle about with salads and tostas, cañas and coffees. Once the sun goes down, it becomes progressively unlikely to find anyone doing work. The place metamorphosizes into a social hub with so much traffic that the entryway is hardly ever free of spillover customers.





Coffee drinks come in all shapes and sizes. The standards are available, but innocent intentions of ordering a cortado may be redirected upon a glance at the spunkier options on the menu like the oreo frappuccino, for example. As can happen at the Bicicleta, one may feel torn between alcohol and caffeine. Options abound on both listings. The food landscape includes sandwiches, salads, tostas, a [pricey] brunch menu on the weekends, and a display case stocked with baked goods: cookies, cakes, and the like.



As Yogi Berra once said: “Nobody goes there anymore. It’s too crowded.” Well, not quite. There are still plenty of people at La Bicileta; but Yogi was right, it’s definitely crowded. Real estate is hard to come by despite the plethora of sofas, elongated work tables, and quaint table and chair setups available to patrons. While it attracts a determinedly international crowd who may not (probably are not) natives to Madrid, it feels like that good ol’ neighborhood joint on the corner.

Info

[Facebook](#)

[Web](#)

Where: Plaza de San Ildefonso 9 (also known as Plaza del Grial o Plaza de la Niña)

Metro: Tribunal, Gran Vía, Noviciado

Just around the corner, you’ll find these amazing spots:

[Mercado de San Ildefonso – Malasaña’s new food palace](#)

[Naif: King of Burgers](#)

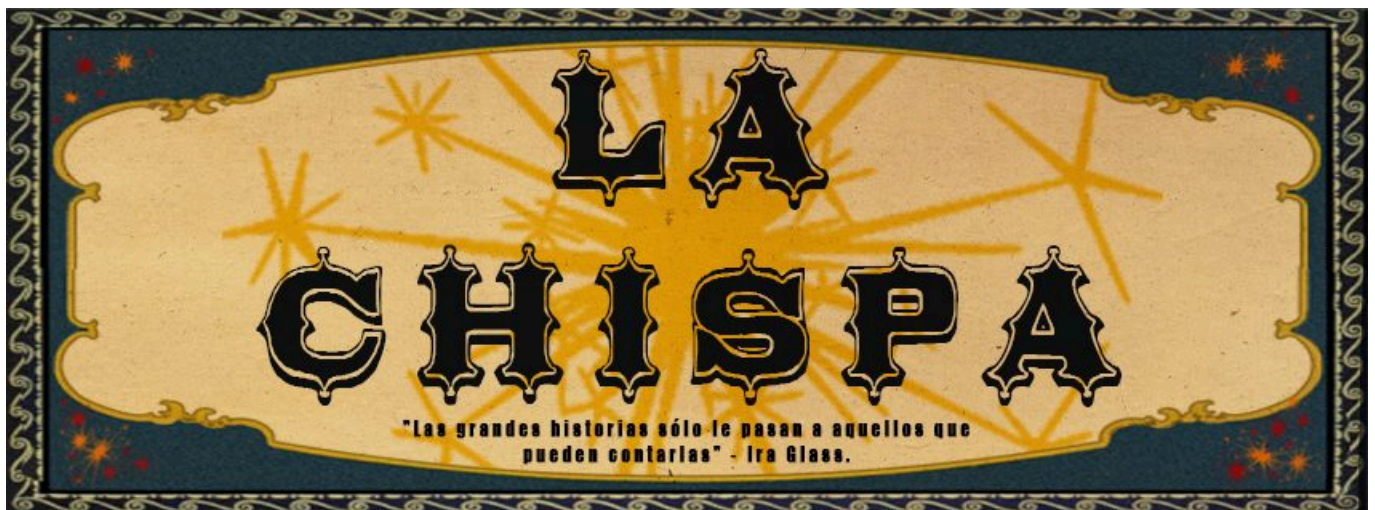
[Greek & Shop in Malasaña](#)

[La Paca – the perfect Malasaña café](#)

[Aiò – Sardinia, pizza and bike haven in Malasaña](#)

La Chispa, Live Storytelling in English and Spanish in Lavapiés

Misunderstanding—now there's a theme to which everyone can relate. The fourth incarnation of [La Chispa](#), a live storytelling event held on March 1, offered storytellers a platform to share tales of malentendidos with an audience gathered at [Atelier Café de la Llana](#) in Lavapiés. La Chispa takes its inspiration from [The Moth](#), an organization that hosts storytelling events across the globe and radio and podcast editions as well. La Chispa's coordinator, Natasha Yaworsky, gave birth to the idea of hosting a Moth-like event in Madrid after listening to many of the organization's programs. "The stories are always good," she explained when asked why The Moth had become an auditory staple in her life, "no matter what," she added.



As event organizer Dan Catalan (featured in the photo above) put it, a "passionate and clever little team" started La Chispa and has been keeping it running since September of this year. Animation student Diego Salas joins Yaworsky and Catalan to round out the co-founding group. The three started working on the idea for the event and from there, according to Salas,

“our support network, friends, everyone stepped up to help.” After wandering around Lavapiés, it was decided that [Atelier Café de la Llana](#) was the most qualified space, and owner Enrique de la Llana was willing to offer the setting as a background for the event.



Natasha Yaworsky

At the most recent event, the theme of malentendidos produced narratives that produced laughs. Catalan explained, “there is always a theme to the events, but it is purposely vague so that storytellers have freedom to take it and run with it.” What better theme than malentendidos for a gathering with an audience heavily comprised of expats for whom life is a landmine of misunderstandings when daily interactions must be carried out in a foreign language? Not only are the themes meant to be broad, they are also meant to be widely relatable. One story, dealt with a series of business interactions ridden with misunderstanding due to language difference. There was a moving account focusing on the themes of identity and

acceptance all through an account of being misunderstood as a famous Asian prostitute while at a dance club in Tel Aviv. Another wove an elaborate saga about a misunderstanding that happened years ago in a summer camp bathroom. The stories ran the gamut, each with their own flair and intrigue.



Diego Salas

Storytellers participating in La Chispa are asked to keep their tales between 8 and 10 minutes. To mark the time, harmonica player extraordinaire, Diana Dwyer, alerted the speakers when their spot is about to end. If the harmonica sounds (pun-intended) kitschy, it did not seem at all out of place at the event. It was just another piece of the patchwork.

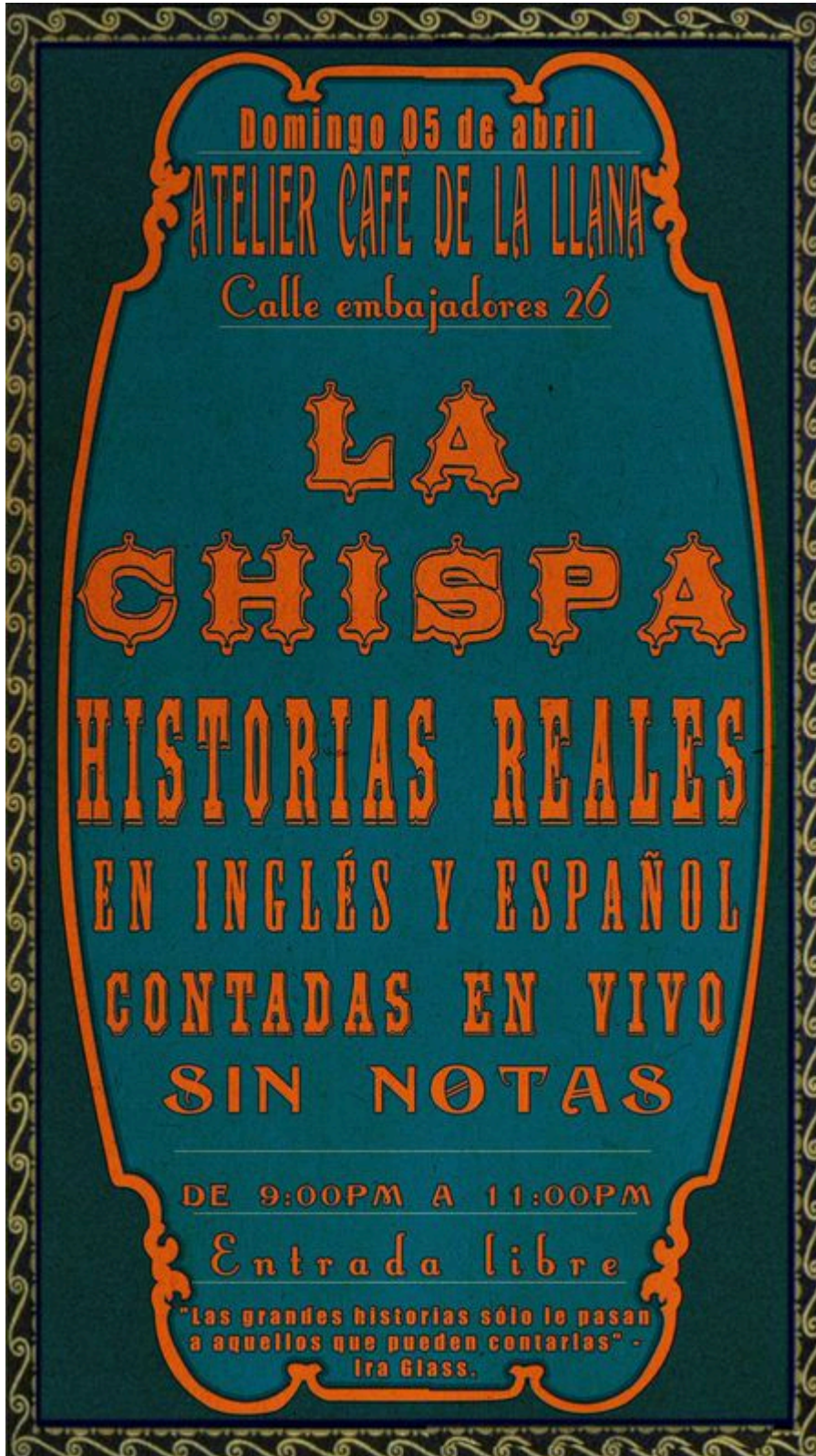


Inside the space, chairs were so crammed into the small cafe space that when one person would get up, another person would sit down in their chair, which also added to the collective ambience of the event. The pre-show period became a bit like a game of musical chairs, but what better way to circulate and share some of your own stories except not in front of a mic?



At La Chispa: Malentendidos, expats comprised most of the crowd, but according to various event-goers, the audience makeup has been different with each go-around. Yaworsky remarked that she liked the idea of hosting the event in Madrid because of its potential to **“offer a middle ground to English and Spanish speakers.”** Storytellers may tell their accounts in either English or Spanish (as long as they tell them without notes) and the pre-selected themes guarantee that speakers of either language will relate. The organizers expressed a desire for more Spanish storytellers to come forward and have their voices heard.

Another hope for future events is for the event to showcase stories from a broader range of perspectives, specifically and to have participants from a wider range of ages. Yaworsky’s ultimate goal for the project is to have The Moth come to Madrid and host an official event.



In the meantime, the event coordinators want to encourage storytellers—**seasoned and burgeoning alike**—to share their stories at upcoming events. The organizers were quick to acknowledge that the general public may think that they cannot tell a story, but were even quicker to offer assurances that story tellers will receive ample assistance in preparing for

the event.

Once the story tellers have committed, **the event organizers host workshops to rehearse the stories**, hash out details, and give performers the chance to work out how exactly they want to spin their tales. At the workshops, storytellers hear feedback on how to crystalize the three main parts of the story: the beginning, conflict, and end as well as receive tips on how to “pretzel” or tie it all together. The theme for the next scheduled La Chispa has been set for ‘Las desgracias nunca vienen solas’ or ‘When it rains, it pours.’”



The [event](#) will be held on **Sunday, April 5 at 9 pm**. Both storytellers and story-listeners are welcome. Yet another event is planned for Sunday, May 3. Keep an eye out for posters designed by Salas advertising the event. In the words of the event’s mastermind Nastasha Yaworksy: The more you

listen, the more you realize that you have a story to tell. The photographic services company, Imagimedia, was on site to video record the event and the stories will be available for viewing on YouTube and [Facebook](#).

To find out about upcoming La Chispa events, check out:

[La Chispa's Facebook group](#)

[Naked Madrid's event page](#)

[Atelier Café de la Llana \(event venue\)](#)

Naïf: King of Burgers

In a city so jam-packed with restaurants that one could eat out in a different place every meal and never repeat, it's saying a lot to return to a place more than once, and then too many times to count. Such is the case with [Naïf](#), a **cozy/grunge burger spot nestled into Plaza de San Idelfonso serving burgers, with a side of sass**. Ask for a glass of water and one of the snarky waiters will return saying they've run out of water, but they do have gin. Alternatively, copas of beer and wine are available for cheap and are a must for washing down the grub.



The jocular banter with the waiters, the hype that comes with having to (almost) yell over the music in order to be heard across the table, the flickering candles of the dining room, all contribute to making repeat [Naif](#) visits, **but the real reason to return is for the burgers. Never a disappointment, never.**



Here, the king of burgers, is, undoubtedly, the Hamburguesa de Trufa: hamburger gold. The rich flavor of truffles oozes out of the burger with every bite. La Ibérica also pleases with its hefty slices of jamón and manchego respectively. [Naif](#) has the Goldy Locks principle working to its advantage: the burgers are not too big, not too small— they're just right. Nevertheless, they can be a challenge to eat; baskets of napkins are placed on the tables for this very reason. Don't mind about minding manners.



A large chalkboard wall boasts nachos among the house specialities. What comes to the table is a **casserole dish of chips bathing in a tangy bath of cheese, plus some avocados and peppers for a spicy punch**. These are not skating rink nachos. They can be a meal in itself or something to share—cheesy fingers for all.



And beyond burgers, dessert awaits on the horizon. There is **carrot cake**, of course, as well as **cheesecake** and **American Pie**. It's not your mom's recipe, but it's pie! Inexplicably,

it lacks the bottom layer of crust, but there's a top. Let's not be too picky, now. The **carrot cake** benefits from the **addition of nutella and walnuts**.



Eating at [Naif](#) is addicting. You want to be there, wrapped up in this rough and rugged metropolitan environment, until closing time. [Naif](#) can serve as the backdrop for any social situation: **friends, dates, and parental visits alike**. The soundtrack somehow always fits the occasion and the dim lighting makes everything seem cooler than it probably is.



[Web](#)

[Facebook](#)

Where: Calle San Joaquín, 16

Phone: 910 07 20 71

Photos courtesy of Pablo Arias

**Looking for other cool spots in Malasaña?
Check out:**

[La Paca, the perfect Malasaña café and bar](#)

[Pepe Botella, a coffee place where you can think](#)

[Toma Café, Fuel up, Feel hip](#)

[Best Café-Bookshops in Madrid](#)

[Best First Date Ideas in Madrid for foodies](#)

Toma Café: fuel up, feel hip

[Toma Cafe](#) could very well be a coffee shop in a hipster mecca like San Francisco or Brooklyn. Upon wandering into the sparse space with narrow benches lining the walls and a bicycle dangling from the ceiling, one might wonder: “Have I wandered onto the set of Portlandia?”





People peck at their laptops while seated at teensy tables. The baristas take their posts at the helm of the espresso machine seriously. More seats can be found in the back, but space is rather cramped. One's daily dose of **espresso** can be consumed in various different forms. Options extend beyond the confines of *café con leche*.



A gem on the beverage menu: *chocolate picante*. In this concoction, bitter chocolate and prickly heat make ordinary chocolate seem lame.



A limited **breakfast** list exists offering a few variations on toast (tomato and olive oil, butter and jam, not much more). Alternatively, as Marie Antoinette famously did not say, *let them eat cake*. **The chocolate cake is made with Madrid's own Cerveza La Virgen**—what could be better for breakfast?



The omnipresent **carrot cake** also beckons from the pastry case. Here, the crowd-pleaser takes on a spicy character and the cream cheese frosting makes an already good cake better.



Luckily for those in search of a caffeinated workspace, **Toma Cafe** opens for breakfast at early hours. Come here to fuel up and to fill hip.



[Facebook](#)

[Web](#)

Address: calle La Palma 49

Metro: San Bernardo or Noviciado

Hours: M-F 8am-8pm. Sat & Sun 10am-8pm

Here are some more of our favorite cafes in Madrid:

[Pepe Botella, a Coffee Place Where You Can Think](#)

[La Paca, the Perfect Cafe in Malasaña](#)

[Best Cafe-Bookshops in Madrid, Round 1 & Round 2](#)

Harina, for something sweet or savoury

The temperature inside [Harina](#) is usually cranked well above the temperature of the street, thereby increasing the coziness factor. Within the walls of this white, bright, and charming locale lies one of the most satisfying menús in the city.



Available for both lunch and dinner, the menú begins with a luscious green salad dressed with sweet balsamic vinegar. The whole bowl of greens, a mealtime rarity when eating out in Spain, is like a pot of nutritious gold. Eating the salad, however, is just a warmup exercise for diving into a sprawling slab of pizza.



Keep gulping wine and it may feel as though the pizza has a magnetic force. The glowing light of the interior only becomes softer the less wine remaining in your glass. Thin crust, thick pieces of bacon, a runny fried egg perched in the middle—need I say more? Cut a piece away from the pie and cheese strings out like a game of cat's cradle.



Other menu options do exist, but this one consistently pleases. Dessert is not included in the menu, rather a pot of tea or a cup of coffee seals the meal. Baked goods can wait for another day—maybe when an entire pizza is not taking up stomach real estate.



Harina is a merienda dream come true. Whatever sweet tooth whimsy you may harbor, sugary goodness awaits behind the glass cases. The meringues have rock hard shells, but they shatter into smithereens, and what is left is a sugary marshmallow pillow.



Other desserts can be hit or miss depending on how freshly they were baked. The carrot cake was dry on a recent visit, but Harina gets brownie points for presentation and a mediocre cake can be forgiven.



Multiple locations around the city, prices vary.

Here's their [Facebook page](#) and [web](#).

You'll find one of their nicest locations inside **Plaza de la Independencia**, right next to **Puerta de Alcalá** and a hop skip away from **Plaza de Cibeles**.

After a trip to a nearby museum, you may want to pop into Harina for a coffee or snack. Here's an article on [Madrid's known and not-so-known art institutions](#), many of which are located near Harina.

Greek and Shop in Malasaña

If you frequently find yourself in Malasaña, it will only be a matter of time before the *bocadillos* in the window of Greek and Shop seduce you into a Grecian gastronomic experience. They're displayed so darn nicely and no matter what time of day – or night – they never fail to look appetizing.

Located in the heart of hipsterville (i.e. the barrio of Malasaña), Greek and Shop offers an array of Greek specialities in a bright, metropolitan locale. Take your pick from the bevy of options scrawled on the chalkboard behind the register. Here you'll find the likes of moussaka, gyros, and *bocadillos* filled with foodstuffs of the Mediterranean.





Plump chunks of chicken spiced with curry make up the meat of the **Andros bocadillo** (no pun intended), pictured above. Warm cheese and spicy arugula make it complete, and juicy sun-dried tomatoes impart a delectable tanginess. The hearty seed bread gives the sandwich the overall impression of wholesomeness. Reasonably priced at **3.50€**, the bocadillo is filling, but nevertheless, you might not be ready for it to end.



Sit at one of the high stools in the store and find yourself surrounded by jars of olives and artichokes. A multitude of treats and sweets such as halvah and baklava are never uncomfortably out of reach. You'll find that the tables are stocked with reading material if you are so inclined. Alternatively, the mustachioed passersby on Corredera Alta de San Pablo provide live people-watching entertainment.



No matter the time of day – breakfast, lunch, or dinner – [Greek and Shop](#) is bound to have something to whet your appetite. They have late-night eats covered too. A convenient take-out window opens up on the side of the shop for the night owl crowd. This may be a particularly apt time to give the super creamy, slightly zippy Greek yogurt ice cream a try. Just a suggestion.

Greek and Shop

- [Facebook](#)
- *Where: Corredera Alta de San Pablo, 9*
- *Metro: Tribunal*

Also check out: [Egeo, our go-to Greek restaurant in Lavapiés](#)