

Shooloongkan: Madrid's most authentic Chinese restaurant and hot pot experience

Finding Chinese food in Madrid is easy, but finding authentic Chinese food requires some work. It's normal for flavors to be subdued and menus to be adapted in order to please the local taste palate, but sometimes you just want to order the real deal. And even though inauthentic doesn't necessarily translate to a bad meal—just because they don't eat chow mein in China doesn't make it less delicious—there is a glorified quality about eating a meal as it's prepared in its home culture.

In the case of hot pot, that home culture is Sichuan province in southwest China. A quick Google search for “hot pot Madrid” brings up plenty of options to choose from, but if authenticity is what you're after, Xiaolongkan (sometimes spelled ShooLoongKan) in Legazpi has a leg up on the others: the restaurant actually comes from Sichuan.



“This is one of the only real Chinese restaurants in Madrid,” proclaims Ella, one of the restaurant’s managers. “Everything

you see inside here came directly from China,” she says, pointing to the stone tables, the paper lanterns, the bamboo dividers.

Xiaolongkan is a franchise that has roots in Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan. The Legazpi location opened in August 2020 in the middle of the pandemic and is the company’s debut in Spain. Just a stone’s throw away from Madrid’s Chinatown in Usera, the entire meal—from the ornate decor to the complimentary orange slices after eating—is designed to perfectly replicate an experience of eating hot pot in China.



One of the biggest obstacles to trying a new cuisine is the fear of not knowing what to do and committing some type of

faux pas. And while there is no way to stop that from happening—you just have to graciously accept it—there are **a few tips to keep in mind if you've never had hot pot so you don't feel completely clueless.**

1. Hot pot is a type of fondue, not a soup.

When you sit down with your placemat-sized paper menu, it's hard not to feel immediately overwhelmed by the number of options, especially if you're unsure of what hot pot is. You'll choose the type of broth and then an assortment of raw meats and vegetables, which are cooked by being dipped or bathed in the boiling liquid. You'll remove the cooked items, dip them in your sauce, and eat them, but you generally don't drink the broth, as with soup.



2. Don't be overeager with your level of spiciness.

The three broth options at Xiaolongkan are the traditional Sichuan chili broth, a mushroom broth, and a tomato broth. Only the Sichuan chili broth is spicy and you can choose the level of spice, from one chili pepper to three chili peppers. If you are clearly unfamiliar with the menu, the server will politely but assertively recommend you choose the one chili pepper option, and you should follow their advice.

Remember, this is a menu that was designed in Sichuan for Sichuanese tastes. If you want to add more spice later, you always can. You can also have multiple broths at your table if

you want to try more than one.

3. Explore options outside of your comfort zone for your dipping items.

If you've ever been curious about eating innards, this is the place to try them. After all, hot pot is all about playing with texture, since everything ends up tasting like your broth and dipping sauce. Many of the "recommended" menu items are visceral—thinly-sliced kidneys, blood sausage, duck gizzards—but only because they're crowd pleasers. If you have the stomach for it, give at least one of them a try.



4. Order your veggies à la carte.

The mixed plate of vegetables may look appetizing, but it includes an unnecessary amount of romaine lettuce. Don't skip your vegetables, just handpick the ones you most want to eat. And while an assortment of vegetables may sound ideal for non-meat eaters, none of the broths are vegetarian.

5. The sesame dipping sauce will be your best friend.

After a big pitcher of water, that is. The bowl of Chinese sesame paste you're given when you sit down is to dip your cooked items after pulling them from the chili broth, so the sweetness of the sesame paste can mellow out the intensity of the chilis. You can keep the sesame sauce as is or add to it from the buffet-style condiment bar with items like fresh cilantro leaves, chopped scallions, oyster sauce, different vinegars, or even more chili oil if you're feeling particularly intrepid.



Final thoughts on Shooloongkan (a.k.a. Xiaolongkan)

At Xiaolongkan, the ritual of preparing the food is just as enjoyable as actually eating it. There's a carnal satisfaction that comes from gliding a thinly sliced piece of Wagyu beef over the surface of the bubbling broth, watching as it literally cooks before your eyes.

And the highlight of your meal may very well be finding that meatball or mushroom that you had lost in the pot and completely forgotten about—until you unsuspectingly fish it back out 20 minutes later, imbued with the maximum amount of flavor it can possibly hold. Imagine the feeling when you find a five euro bill in your pocket, and the sensation is similar.

After a year that's been all about social distancing, there's something refreshing about a meal that's so brazenly communal. Hot pot is unavoidably served family-style, where everyone at the table flavors the same broth by dipping their food (there's a temperature check for everyone who enters and the boiling liquid is a natural disinfectant, so use the same precautions you would when visiting any restaurant). It's fun and sociable and authentic, but, above all, it's tasty.

Hot pot at Xiaolongkan checks all the boxes, just as long as you can withstand the heat.

Shooloongkan info

- IG: [Shooloongkan](#)
 - Address: Calle Maestro Arbos 3
 - Metro: Legazpi
 - Reservations recommended
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Gustazio: Enjoy pizza that isn't pizza near Legazpi

When I tell my friends they have to try the *pinsa* at Gustazio, one of Legazpi's most unique Italian restaurants, the response is always a confused stare. "Are you saying pizza?" they inevitably ask.

"No, *pinsa*."

And just like the subtle difference between the words pizza and *pinsa*, it's just as easy to mistake the physical foods, as well. The *pinsa* at Gustazio looks like, well, a pizza. It has a crusty bread base and most of the topping options sound familiar from any pizzeria—margherita, four cheese, vegetarian—but once someone begins to point out the differences, the *pinsa* begins to set itself apart.



What's the difference between pinsa and pizza?

For starters, pinsa dough is too delicate to be tossed like its pizza cousin, so it's stretched and squeezed by hand, resulting in an oval shape instead of the classic pizza pie circle. And while a Neapolitan pizza has a relatively smooth finish, **a defining feature of pinsa are the crackly hills and crevasses that crater the surface.**

The differences between them, however, are not just aesthetic. Traditional pizza dough is made entirely with wheat flour, while pinsa is made with a precise mix of wheat, rice, and soy flours and a lot more water, creating a **much lighter crust that's easier on the stomach.**



Anyone who's been to a [Neapolitan pizzeria](#) is no stranger to that moment after drinking a beer or two and eating three-quarters of a pizza where you just can't go on and you want to save the rest but then you regrettably wonder... *is it even worth saving just a quarter of a pizza?*

And even though you know the answer is yes, you decide no, it's not worth it, and persevere until your plate is empty and your insides are bloated, left only with a familiar and satisfying sense of self-loathing.



But after eating an entire *acciuga pinsa* topped with caramelized tomato, capers, black olives, and anchovies, I was full but not bursting. I even had room for a ricotta-filled and pistachio-topped cannoli dessert, which was just the sweet ending I needed.

In the wrong hands, pinsa can easily turn into something pretentious, like when you talk about sushi with a food snob friend (oh that isn't sushi you're eating, it's *nigiri*). Thankfully, the unassuming staff at Gustazio never cross that line.

The server Daniele, a native Roman, introduces himself and then the menu to each table with natural affability, educating

diners about pinsa without any hint that he's done so hundreds of times before and recommending a suitable wine or craft beer, all from Italy.

Should you need a drink to whet your appetite, Daniele pours an aperol spritz that's perfectly proportioned.



Pinsa is generally associated with Rome, but Gustazio's owners all hail from Milan. **Luca, Fabrizio, Brunella, and Vania**

opened their pinseria in 2018 in Legazpi, which also serves home-baked focaccias and fresh pasta that's imported directly from Italy.

Even though 2020 has been just as hard on them as other restaurants, all three expressed an endearing gratitude for the neighborhood.

"This barrio is amazing," Vania professed while talking about the support they've received. **"We're really lucky to be where we are."**

We can't wait for "aperitivo" nights to return

More than anything, the neighborhood is eagerly awaiting the return of the Wednesday aperitivo, a weekly event that's on hold until further notice due to COVID restrictions. In classic Milanese fashion, customers buy a drink and then have unlimited access to a revolving selection of appetizers, with options including tostadas topped with burrata and Sicilian pistachios, roasted slices of eggplant, various Italian cold cuts, and of course, pinsa.

Until aperitivo nights return, **Gustazio is open Wednesday to Sunday for lunch and dinner to dine in or pick up, and will be available for delivery via Glovo by the end of November.**

So the next time you have a craving for pizza, don't dismiss the idea of a pinsa from Gustazio to satisfy the urge. And

since you're choosing the "light" option, don't feel guilty about capping off the meal with a fluffy piece of tiramisu to reward yourself.

Gustazio

- [Website](#), [Facebook](#) & IG: [gastrobargustazio](#)
- **Hours:** Wednesday–Sunday for lunch and dinner (indoor dining and pickup); and delivery via Glovo will be available by end of November.
- **Address:** Calle Embajadores, 197
- **Metro:** Legazpi

Looking for more Italian spots in Madrid? Here's a few of our favorites:

- [Fratelli Figurato](#) (Alonso Cano)
 - [Nina Pasta Bar](#) (La Latina)
 - [Retrogusto Bar](#) (Ópera or Sol)
 - [Casa Picsa](#) (Rios Rosas)
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Eat Out Madrid's top 5 places for takeaway and delivery right now

It's been over 60 days since we've been able to go out and enjoy sitting and eating in our favourite places in Madrid. We've all gone through (or maybe you're still going through) the phase of cooking up a storm in the kitchen. I don't know about you... but I'm at a point where I've lost all the motivation, plus I'm so messy in the kitchen.

I'm Valentina, Founder of [Eat Out Madrid](#), an online community of over 6,700 food lovers on the search to find the best places to eat and drink in the capital. I started building the community back in August 2016 when I moved to Madrid. After feeling overwhelmed by all the choices around me, I thought – who better to ask than the expat community who are already here?

Almost four years later, we've grown immensely with people from all nationalities, some not even based in Madrid but may have plans in the future to visit or even those who used to live here wanting to stay connected with the incredible food and drink scene it has to offer.

Now of course, under lockdown and with the current restrictions, we haven't been able to support those restaurants we know and love by visiting them in person. But there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Many places have implemented delivery or continued to do so either through one of the many delivery apps or with their own service, and this has literally saved me, especially on the tough days.

[Eat Out Madrid](#) has always been fueled by its members sharing their recommendations and favourite places and now this couldn't be more important. We've even been [compiling a document to share the best delivery places](#), as well as how they deliver and their delivery areas to support each other.

I, of course, have my favourites too, so here are five of my go-to places for takeaway and delivery in Madrid right now:

1. Mazál Bagels



If you're craving some New York-style bagels, hand rolled and baked fresh each day, you have to try Mazál. They have so many different types to choose from (I love the everything bagels) and you can even order bagel sandwiches – cutting out any time

in the kitchen. If you want a cheeky treat after, be sure to order some of their chocolate chip cookies. They even sell a selection of America food products, too.

Note: you need to [order them in advance](#) to be picked up (you can't just walk in and take them on the spot).

Find out more about [Mazál Bagels' story in our previous Naked Madrid article](#)

- Instagram: [@mazalbagels](#)
- Delivery: Own delivery service. [Place orders through their website](#)
- Takeaway available
- Address: Calle Alonso Cano, 30
- Phone: 910 54 95 66

2. Asian Army



In the mood for a taste of Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore or Malaysia? Then Asian Army has you covered with an array of Southeast Asian dishes to keep that hunger at bay. They're currently operating out of a location in Legázpi (not their restaurant in Mercado Anton Martín) and even have a special "Hari Raya Eid" hamper for those celebrating at home this month.

You can also listen to my recent interview with the owner of Asian Army on [the new Eat Out Madrid podcast](#).

▪ Instagram: [@asianarmymadrid](#)

- Delivery: Uber Eats (3km from Legázpi)
- Address: Calle de Santa Isabel, 5 inside Mercado Anton Martin, Planta Baja, puesto 7-11
- Phone: 680 54 39 42

3. Pizzeria La Especial



Hot, fresh, tasty pizza... This is our local pizzeria and it's been our go-to Friday/Saturday night #cbf dinner. It's a stand-alone place with 3 or 4 employees and the co-owner delivers most of their pizzas. If you order through their website, you can get 15% off your first order.

- [Facebook](#)
- Delivery: Own delivery, [call or place orders through their website](#)
- Takeaway available
- Address: Avenida de la Gran Vía de Hortaleza, 68
- Phone: 680 54 39 42

4. Bite Me: Halo Artisans



Situated near Legázpi, this small café specializes in vegan donuts or “halos” as they call them. And they add two new flavours each week. You can even purchase their donut holes covered in cinnamon (they might even throw a few in with your order if you’re lucky). If you’re a super fan like me,

purchase their merchandise too to support them even more.

Find out more about [Bite Me: Halo Artisans' story in our previous Naked Madrid article](#)

- Instagram: [@biteme_madrid](#)
- Delivery: Own delivery, [order online through their website](#)
- Takeaway available
- Address: Plaza Beata María Ana de Jesús, 22
- Phone: 910 54 02 09

5. A'Fenestella



From fresh pasta to their wood-oven pizzas, if you're looking for the authentic taste of Italy, this is your place. My favourite is the Tagliatelle Bolognese – I've tried replicating this at home and nothing comes close!

- Delivery: [Deliveroo](#)
- Takeaway available
- Address: Calle de Torquemada, 25
- Phone: [913 82 56 80](#)

By **Valentina Ruffoni** ([LinkedIn](#)), founder of Eat

Out Madrid

- Join Valentina's online communities [Eat Out Madrid](#) & [Eat In Madrid](#), to take part in the conversation about the city's best food and drink options, and support local businesses while at it!
- [Check out this ongoing list of the best local spots that are open for takeout and delivery in Madrid](#)
- Also read [Valentina's lockdown diary](#) on Naked Madrid and her article our sister publication The Content Mix on how she [grew multiple online communities](#)

Check out more Naked Madrid articles on great delivery and takeaway places in Madrid:

- [5 best places to order vegan and vegetarian takeout during lockdown in Madrid](#)
- [Order pizza from Lab 84 and take the sting out of lockdown](#)
- [La Ración: Supplying Madrid with Spanish comfort foods during the lockdown](#)

Want to recommend any other delivery and takeout options in Madrid? [Get in touch with us!](#)

Bar Toboggan – best new terrace in Madrid's Arganzuela district

Bar Toboggan is one of the best new additions to the area of Arganzuela, located just around the corner from El Matadero. This lovely little restaurant is nestled between a courtyard and playground, so it's away from the cars and you feel like you've left the city – almost as if you were at the beach!





The outdoor seating area is spacious, and family- and pet-friendly. The restaurant itself is also very open, with high windows, and modern, colorful decor. The servers are young and friendly. As for the [menu](#), you'll find a great selection of options from small dishes to mains.



The last time we went, our drinks arrived with an extremely fresh and gooey *tortilla de patata* – a nice change from the potato chips and industrial olives that we're so used to these days.



We decided to order an array of small dishes to share: *patatas bravas* Toboggan, *croquetas de jamón*, *salmorejo*, and a *pepito palentino* – a filet of meat, a slice of brie cheese and sautéed green bell pepper on a baguette.





We were completely full by the end of the meal. In total, we had ordered four small dishes along with two drinks each, and our bill came out to less than 30€. A bargain in this city nowadays!



The first time we went, we ordered the Toboggan-style burger with brie, caramelized onions, bacon and mustard; and the tuna tartar with shrimp and avocado. But we didn't take pictures that day. Sorry! I definitely recommend them though.

Food aside, what stands out most about Bar Toboggan is the welcoming atmosphere and unbeatable terrace. Seriously, it might just be my favorite *terraza* in Madrid.

Bar Toboggan

- [Website](#), [Facebook](#) & Instagram: [@bar_toboggan](#)
- **Address:** Plaza Rutilio Gacis, 2
- **Metro:** Legazpi

Bite Me Café: Secretly Vegan, Obviously Delicious Donuts in Madrid

Let's be real, vegans are taking over. And us carnivores are left to use our survival tactics – shrewd sarcasm, vegan jokes and complete and utter avoidance. If you tell me you're taking me to a vegan restaurant, I will most likely find an excuse about my goldfish's birthday party and politely decline.

But when Bite Me opened in my neighborhood of Legazpi, my roommate and I decided that we had to try it as good neighbors should. We walked into the charming café and were instantly greeted by the owner, Joel and his warm, extremely hospitable Canadian-ness. He explained all of the flavors to us, passionately and meticulously as we ooh-ed and made the tough decision of picking a donut; much like giving the final rose on The Bachelor.

After I scarfed down my rich chocolate and red wine donut, I was broken the hard truth that Bite Me Café is indeed (gulp)... a vegan café. But the deliciousness of my donut negated every ounce of vegan distrust I had before.



I could have lived the rest of my life not knowing that it was a vegan donut – and that’s the point. The donuts boldly speak for themselves and the message is clear: they’re delicious. Period. Since then, Bite Me has become a neighborhood favorite of mine that I frequent often.

Joel (Canada) and Sandra (Spain), the donut-loving couple, opened Bite Me in October 2018 after a year and a half of making and donating donuts for events. Bite Me is a cute, quaint neighborhood café, full of exposed brick, tones of red, crooning of Freddie Mercury in the background and mix-match

chairs for a quirky charm. I was shyly greeted by their dog, Ferb, who spent most of his time sleeping in the corner. Yes, Bite Me is dog friendly.



The crafted flavors change weekly. The flavors of this week (just to name a few) are Wild Strawberry, Smoked Maple, Apple Pie, Chocolate and Hazelnut Cream and the limited-edition Torrija (a Spanish-style French Toast).

I greedily tried multiple, completely content with all of the flavors. The Apple Pie donut reminded me of everything

American – filled with fresh apple jam, cinnamon and a surge of flavor that I discovered was a hint of Jamaican all-spice.



The Chocolate Hazelnut Donut was way too good to be true, rich in flavor with a combination similar to Nutella on steroids.

My all-time favorite donut was a Valentine's Day Special of Strawberry Shortcake filled with handmade strawberry jam, decadently topped with whipped cream, strawberries and shortcake. And yes, this donut was my Valentine's Date.



But with Bite Me, there is one rule: You have to get there early as donuts sell out fast. I learned my lesson, so I now obsessively follow them on Instagram to ensure they are in stock and see the mouth-watering flavors of the week. Along with their amazing donuts, Bite Me sells coffee, a great selection of teas, La Virgen brews, and bagels on the weekends.

No matter how your eating habits define you, we can all agree of the simple truth that these donuts are damn good and made with pride from Joel and Sandra. Bite Me is an upcoming local

café where you will come for the donuts again and again.

By Rachel Thompson

To learn more about the author, check out her blog www.RachelInRoute.com or follow her on Instagram at @RachelInRoute

All images from [Bite Me's Facebook page](#)

Bite Me

- [Facebook](#) & Instagram: @biteme_madrid
- [Spotify playlist](#)
- Address: Plaza de la Beata Maria Ana de Jesus, 2 (Metro: Legazpi)
- Hours: Mon: 10-1:30, 4-9pm; Tues & Wed: Closed; Thurs: 10-1:30, 4-9pm; Fri: 10-1:30, 4-9pm; Sat & Sun: 10-9pm. *Hours may change for Summer*

Also check out: [4 vegetarian and vegan-friendly restaurants in Madrid](#)

Perdizione, a hidden Tex-Mex Burrito shop in Lavapies

Until quite recently, kebabs and falafels had the monopoly over nighttime snacks in Lavapies. My favorite new Tex-Mex hole in the wall is hidden due to its awkward branding.



Perdizione, a pizza franchise with another location in Legazpi, has partial ownership of this site—the sign above the door says “**Perdizione Pizzeria**” which causes passersby to be none the wiser that inside can be found hearty and filling burritos and other Mexican treats.



For **4 euros** you can get an **enormous burrito** of cochinita, vegetables or chicken, and for an additional €1.50 you can add on nachos, guacamole and a beer. **Tacos cost 1.50**. I smiled when I saw that they offered **Negra Modelo**, my Dad's favorite beer from his native city of Mexico D.F. The staff of this location have always been super *majo*.



Once I earned regular status I offered my council to the owner—this establishment needs to focus on its strengths and prioritize the burritos and its branding as a Mexican joint.

Info

[Facebook](#)

Where: Calle Miguel Servet 9

Metro: Lavapies, Embajadores

For more on Mexican food in Madrid, check out:

[Madrid's Best Mexican Joints](#)

Also in Lavapiés:

Baobab, an Authentic Senegalese Restaurant in Lavapiés

Tribuetxe, a Basque Pintxo Bar in Lavapiés

Cafelito, a trendy spot for coffee lovers in Lavapiés

El Matadero, a slaughterhouse turned phenomenal cultural hub

If you're looking for something as impressive as the Prado or the Reina Sofia, but off-the-beaten-path, it's [El Matadero](#). The perfect place to spend a leisurely afternoon alone or with friends in Madrid, here you can calmly diddle daddle through a maze of **art exhibits** and **designer market stands**. Then, enjoy a *café con leche* or a cold Madrid brew outside. **El Matadero** has it all—from Spain's national dance company performances to international innovation conferences.

What is it?

Just a 10-minute subway ride from Sol, **El Matadero** is a culture/innovation hub and architectural treasure. The **former slaughterhouse** (hence, the name) is now a public-private entity offering book-readings, theater and music performances, photography exhibits and independent cinema on a nightly basis, most of which are **free**.



on día internacional de la danza, image from Matadero's Facebook page

Not to be compared with any other space in the city, **El Matadero** is an ambitious project and the fruit of a most innovative and modern Madrid. **This cultural center** also provides ongoing activities for families as well as a space for local innovators to develop their projects, all of which you can see while wandering through its enormous labyrinth of warehouses (naves) and open work spaces.



There are six *naves*, each used for a different purpose. For example, the **Nave Español** holds theater and dance performances. The **Cineteca** showcases international and independent film festivals. The **Música Nave** holds concerts and recording studios.



The **old oven** has now been usurped by the café, **La Cantina**, that sells locally produced food and wines, and has the kind of atmosphere that makes you want to stay forever. Plus, it has one of the **best terrazas** (outdoor seating areas) in all of Madrid, in my opinion at least.



When the weather's nice, my husband and I like to go there by bike; it's a breezy 30-minute ride from *Principe Pio* along Madrid's river (*Madrid Río*), which the city has done an amazing job of revamping. The river is now lined with bike and pedestrian paths, unique bridges, playgrounds (for grown-ups too!), street workout equipment, sprawling green zones and sprinkler areas. Plus it's a straight shot to **El Matadero**.



Last summer I took my sister, Amanda, from New York, to **El Matadero** for the whole afternoon. We first slipped into what used to be the slaughterhouse's fridge area, where an odd fire exhibit was being showcased. When we stepped out onto the courtyard, a group of flamenco dancers were *zapateando* (stomping) and smoking in a circle, getting ready to go on stage in the **Nave Español**. Then we parked ourselves at **La Cantina** for a glass of wine and a plate of delicious vegetable dishes made from **Madrid's local gardens**.

Amanda was amazed how all of this was so open to the public, and that it wasn't even packed. She said that if this were to be opened in Brooklyn, lines would be stretching to Queens.

History

El Matadero was built in the 1920s as a pig slaughterhouse, and was turned into a cultural center in 2006. When they renovated the slaughterhouse, the goal was to keep the original columns, the beams, the ovens and exterior structure in tact. For example, the first room you see on the left of the entrance used to be the freezer. Now it's an exhibition space. The dark, sinister feel makes you ponder what really went on in there. The interior was designed to be versatile and sustainable – most of the walls can be rolled away or folded up to make way for projects and events of all scale.

What to do?

Even if you're in Madrid for a few days, don't be intimidated by the amount of things going on. I highly recommend checking out their [activities list](#) (which is in English) or just stopping by to see the architecture and the vibe. As you stroll through the different spaces, you'll stumble upon anything from an indoor garden to a conference on new technology. Activities are open to the public in the afternoon, and you're free to walk around the plaza, find a nook to study in or have a drink at the café anytime.

What's new?

Since October 2013, El Matadero has its own independent market—[El Mercado Central de Diseño](#).



El Matadero's monthly market—[El Mercado Central de Diseño](#)—is one of Madrid's first design markets for entrepreneurs in the worlds of fashion, design and arts & crafts. During the two-day market, various free **music concerts** and **events** are put on as well, making it a **hot spot** to go with friends on the weekend!



Information:

El Matadero

Facebook

Where: Paseo de la Chopera 14 Metro: Legazpi (line 3, yellow)

Hours: Tuesday to Friday from 4pm to 10pm Saturday to Sunday from 11am to 10pm

Telephone: 915 17 73 09