

# How one man overcame travel restrictions to leave the US for Portugal amid the pandemic

*Recently, I put out a call because I'm writing a piece on international remote workers who have chosen to relocate during the pandemic, like myself. And a man got in touch with me whose story I'd like to share in the [Lockdown Diaries](#) series. Coincidentally, we had both lived in Madrid and we now both live in Portugal, yet how we got here is very different. Although I'll keep his name anonymous, he has given me permission to share his story with you.*

This is the story of a man who discreetly left the United States for greener pastures in Europe during the pandemic. He didn't feel like he could be his truest self in America—being gay and Black, especially in the South where he's from. Nor did the work culture appeal to him. As he had lived abroad before in Madrid, and gained a taste of freedom and acceptance there, reintegrating back into the US afterward weighed heavily on him.

Back in January, he had a sense of dread that something terrible would happen in the US, so he began plotting his exit strategy. And as a singer and a teacher who gives classes online, he knew he could work from anywhere with internet access. .

Despite border closures between the US and Europe in July, he

took action and flew a convoluted route from his city in the southern US to Belgrade, as Serbia is one of the only locations that is currently accepting travelers from the US. He missed his initial bus to Paris and spent a few more days in Belgrade than intended.

He was the only person of color on the 25-hour journey from Belgrade to Paris; several passengers asked him where he was from and made small talk. Three older Serbian men warmly extended their hands in friendship in the form of a cigarette that escalated into drinking together during the intermissions at rest stops where they would also generously share their food. This random act of kindness validated his commitment to the mission of leaving home; in his region of the US, this sort of inclusive camaraderie would not have occurred.

His passport was glanced at by customs agents in Serbia, Austria, and Germany. At one point, he was waiting in a security line alongside a French traveler and they made small talk as they waited. His intuition led him to stall and choose the gentler seeming guard at this checkpoint. The French traveler had the misfortune of being checked by a stricter guard and was not allowed through.

He presented his expired student visa from his previous chapter spent living abroad and when asked, claimed that he was currently living in Europe and that his final destination was the country that issued this expired visa. This story was accepted during these checks.

He recalls that when stoically facing law enforcement in Austria that, to put him at ease, they told him:

**“This is not the United States, we are not going to hurt you.”**

After arriving in Paris, he was no longer asked to present his passport at any checkpoints. From there, he took a 10-hour bus to San Sebastian in northern Spain where he immediately caught another 10-hour bus to the Portuguese countryside where he now lives off of the grid in a mobile van owned by a British family situated on their property.



There are several mobile vans on this plot of land and they've formed a small community. As a remote worker who teaches English online, he is location-independent and can thrive in Portugal where the cost of living is low and the quality of life is high. He plans to purchase a van of his own and use it to travel all over the countryside after learning how to

manage a stick-shift vehicle. He intends to learn Portuguese and eventually gain residence in Portugal.

He implores his fellow Americans to follow their hearts and break free from what he calls the artificial matrix of a life devoted purely to work, productivity, and profit.

*\*This is one man's personal story, it is not to say that Europe is perfect.*

*If you have a unique story from this chapter of world history that you'd like to share, get in touch with me at: [catalandaniel01@gmail.com](mailto:catalandaniel01@gmail.com)*

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## **Against all odds: How 4 new small businesses in Madrid are staying afloat**

Small businesses in Madrid are more at risk than ever of having to shut their doors. And perhaps the most unlucky of all are the ones that opened up just a short time before the lockdown—some only a week before.

Despite having the odds against them, these four newly-opened businesses are putting on a brave face and determined to keep their shops open and their dreams alive. Here are their

stories on how they've managed to stay afloat throughout the lockdown and how they're continuing to fight the good fight. They also offer sage advice for other businesses on how to survive a global pandemic.

## 1. Naji Specialty Coffee



After working in the hospitality industry for 20 years—mainly in cafes as a barista—Naji Alasil dreamed of one day owning his own coffee shop. After spending months searching for the perfect place and doing extensive renovations, his dream came true when he opened Naji Specialty Coffee in the charming central neighborhood of Chamberí in January 2020.

Naji quickly grew popular with people flocking to the beautifully adorned shop to sip on delicious coffee and unique concoctions, such as lime espresso and Naji's famous pistachio latte.



Naji was only open for 40 days when Madrid went into lockdown. Obviously, this was a devastating blow after all of the time, money, and effort Naji spent to open up his dream cafe. However, he didn't lose hope.

**“Of course I was sad that we went into lockdown straight away after I had opened. Nevertheless I was very happy that I managed to open the cafe prior to the lockdown—at least I saw my dream realised. And I knew once the lockdown [was] lifted, my customers would come back. I just kept a very positive outlook altogether.”**

As soon as businesses could start operating again, Naji jumped into full swing, serving takeaway coffee from 9am-9pm most days. He was one of the first coffee shops to reopen on a full-time schedule because he wanted to make up for time lost during the lockdown. Slowly but surely he's rebuilding the momentum he had before the lockdown began.

Undoubtedly, his positive attitude and hustle were his biggest tools for getting through the lockdown and helping see Naji Specialty Coffee through to the new world.

**His advice for small businesses?**

**Prioritize your customers and their safety, be patient, take each day as it comes, and never give up no matter the obstacle at hand (even a global pandemic!)**

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## 2. Tidbit



Canadian business partners Shawn and Arthur had successfully been running a North American-style coffee and dessert shop in Alicante for five years when they decided to pack up and head for the big city. They moved to Madrid, rebranded their business from Canada Cupcake Café to Tidbit, and opened shop in Fall 2019.

They began acquiring a loyal customer base who would come to

enjoy their array of delicious treats—largely vegan—including cookies, cakes, ice cream, brownies, and cinnamon rolls as well as specialty coffee and teas. Their reputation for being one of Madrid’s best suppliers of treats (vegan and regular) was swiftly growing, and then COVID-19 brought momentum to a halt.

Arthur and Shawn were greatly concerned about their business and the economy in general, but tried to focus on moving forward instead of on fear. They shifted their focus to the takeaway part of the business and polished their online ordering system to accommodate the lack of walk-ins due to the lockdown. They also offered their products through popular takeaway services such as UberEats and Deliveroo, and in the later quarantine phases began to start up takeaway service.

Now that Madrid is no longer under lockdown, businesses are slowly coming back to life and Tidbit has once again opened its doors for customers to pop in for a treat in their tiny but cozy interior or call ahead for pick-up or an eco-friendly bike delivery.

Shawn and Arthur hope the love and support for small businesses only gets stronger, especially now when these shops that make our cities so special need it more than ever.

**Their advice to other businesses during these trying times?**

**“Plan ahead, be aware of the time needed to recover, focus on the offer and demand in your area. This is the ‘chair swap’ game, when all businesses close, relocate or rebrand.”**



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### **3. EatMyTrip**



After finding success opening her first restaurant in Barcelona two years ago, Evgeniya Sukhacheva decided to branch out and open the second location of her trendy brunch spot, EatMyTrip, in Madrid. Evgeniya announced the opening of the

second location in the beginning of March 2020—days before coronavirus sent Madrid and Barcelona into an indefinite lockdown.

Like many people, Evgeniya initially thought that the media was blowing the situation out of proportion and that normal life would soon resume. However, when it became apparent that the situation was serious and that the city would be locked down for a while, Evgeniya and her husband started to think of creative ways they could keep their business afloat.

The first idea they came up with was to start an online shop with delivery options for their Barcelona location which already had a following. Then they shifted to takeaway options before being allowed to reopen with limited capacity, a smaller menu, and a two-person staff (just them). Now, EatMyTrip's employees who were under *ERTE* (furlough) are slowly being incorporated back into the Barcelona business while Evgeniya is trying to figure out how they'll be able to open Madrid location and get it off the ground, (while also focusing on paying the rent, bills, and the loans for both locations).

Although the Madrid location remains closed indefinitely, Evgeniya hopes to be able to open it one day soon. In the meantime, the Barcelona location (C. del Consell de Cent, 378) is back to 70% capacity with more customers returning everyday.

**Despite all of the adversities, Evgeniya remains positive and offers wisdom for other businesses in similar situations:**



“Nothing lasts forever. We can plan something, but life can change everything. It’s [best to] take everything as it is, and try to smile at it, otherwise you will go mad. If you already created a successful business you’ll be able to do it again in the future. Just don’t lose yourself, and don’t forget about your health—it’s the most important thing.”

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## 4. Mazál



Tamara Cohen—originally from Philadelphia, USA—moved to Madrid in 2015 to teach English. She soon settled into a side gig

baking hard-to-find American treats such as pumpkin pies and bagels and selling them to fellow expatriates before opening up an online shop to the public. Her small shop, Bruja's Bakery, quickly became the go-to place for American treats—especially bagels, which are hard to find abroad (and of good quality).

After making the spontaneous leap from English teacher to expert at-home bagel maker, she finally turned her side hustle into a full-time business with the opening of Mazál Bagels & Café in the central neighborhood of Chamberí in January 2020.

The opening of Mazál was highly anticipated and instantly a hit. The cozy brick-interior eatery would fill up fast with people eager to dive into a bagel brunch complete with mimosas and coffee, as well as delicious challah, cookies, and cakes. However, when lockdown fell over Madrid in early March, Mazál was forced to shut its doors and think of a plan B.

Like many people, Tamara initially didn't think the situation was that serious or would last long. But as the situation quickly became grave, she became worried about her ability to pay the bills and stay above water.

Mazál was closed for a few days before they jumped into action and hired a delivery driver and started taking orders over social media, which became their saving grace. Their delivery driver, Juan Pablo, was with them for over three months, and proved integral to Mazál's survival in lockdown, covering over 3300 km doing deliveries during the three months.

Tamara says that before all of this, Mazál was primarily



focused on growing as fast as possible, which meant doing as much as they could at once. However, priorities have since shifted—Mazál has now drastically simplified what they do which has helped them to stay organized and reach more people.

**Although these circumstances have been anything but ideal for a new business, Tamara has remained positive, upbeat, and grateful:**

**“This is a strange time for everyone. At times, it’s hard not to think that things might be ‘weird’ like this for a very, very long time. But if we have learned anything, it’s to remember that things are weird for *everyone* and to take it one day at a time. You’re doing great, we are all doing great, and we will get through it together. And thank you to [everyone] from the bottom of our hearts for [the support].”**

A positive attitude, gratitude, and resilience are undoubtedly a recipe for success.

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**By Mary Kresge ([LinkedIn](#) & IG: [@marelixb](#))**

You may also like:

- [5 Best places to order vegan and vegetarian takeout](#)

[during lockdown](#)

- [Maintaining the momentum: Supporting Madrid's Black-owned businesses](#)
  - [Eat Out Madrid's top 5 places for takeaway and delivery](#)
  - [Visiting Madrid's museums in times of corona](#)
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## **Living Room Concerts: Fighting for Madrid's artists with virtual concerts, small gatherings and more**

Madrid music artists need your help! The five-year-old concert experience project [Living Room Concerts](#) had to cancel their entire spring season of in-person live concerts and did a reboot to online interactive virtual concerts. They have refocused their aim to focus on independent singer-songwriters, bands, composers and musicians who make their living mainly or solely from their music and who are now struggling.

The struggle is very real with the entire arts and entertainment industry for these performers to pay rent, bills and buy food. Living Room Concerts (LRC) made a full pivot to online concerts but we will begin having small concerts in

open-air spaces this summer. To ensure the safety of those who would like to attend, we will follow strict protocol in regards to gatherings.

In the beginning of the pandemic, LRC took two months off to develop an online model that allows for live-streamed performances while keeping the key aspect of the experience—bringing people together to socialize and meet new friends. Another important aspect that was incorporated was to make it a ticketed event that would both support the artists and give people a private virtual space to interact with other people in an intimate and relaxed atmosphere.

**Many music artists were and still are giving their art away for free online, and this is a battle [Living Room Concerts](#) has been fighting on behalf of music artists for five years now...**

LRC strives to educate the public in understanding that making and performing music is a job, and that job should be compensated, not just in promotion, but with money—just like anyone else with a job. They have always priced their concert experiences very reasonably to make them as accessible and affordable as possible to all.

LRC is committed to highlighting music performers and entertainers in Madrid (or who have once lived in Madrid) in their regular concerts in-person and online. Concerts will be held all through June and into July. August is not yet decided, but in September they will return to a full programmed fall schedule, beginning the sixth series of the project. Concerts will be a mix of small in-person gatherings

and virtual live streaming as needed.

Karla, LRC virtual concert attendee, says:

*This was one of the most fun experiences I've had in a long time. Who knew a livestream could be so much fun... I loved the intimacy, the collaborations, the stories. The (virtual) hugs!!! #mustdoagain*

## Upcoming show with Feroza Cayetano

This Saturday, talented singer-songwriter, entertainer and performer [Feroza Cayetano is performing a full virtual concert](#). In her music you will find strength, peace, love, beauty, an appreciation of self and the world, shelter from the storm. You can watch a [video of Feroza performing here](#).

[Feroza Cayetano](#) is a singer-songwriter whose roots are in Central America. Originally from Belize by way of Honduras and Guatemala, she has spent much of her life living as a foreigner in foreign lands—Jamaica, the US, Brazil, Trinidad & Tobago and now Spain. Her experiences of “otherness” had a deep emotional impact, and it was through song and melody that she learned to understand and harness her emotions.

With her guitar as her main medium, she write songs that come from the depths of her soul—songs of healing, light and darkness. Feroza writes about her personal truths and struggles with the hope that she is not alone in her feelings.

Feroza believes in creating space for introspection and healing, and she encourages listeners to encounter their own emotions through hers.

She has been featured at the Belize International Yoga Festival 2017, the New Fire Festival 2018 and has performed on many platforms across the Caribbean. Two weeks ago, [Feroza was interviewed on live TV for the Open Your Eyes morning show in Belize](#), her homeland, talking about her latest single, “Prayer Song”, her Garifuna roots, her creative process during the lockdown in Spain, and the process of working on her upcoming album.

Feroza and the organizers at [Living Room Concerts](#) understand that everyone is itching to be outside after so many days inside, so they have three viewing options for attendees to help them support the project and the artist to keep both going.

## **Viewing options:**

### **1. Full Immersion**

- *Join the livestream, participate in the online chat or organize a small watchparty with friends in-person in accordance with Madrid's rules on gatherings.*

### **2. Just Listening**

- *Watch the livestream only. The same as above but skip*



*the online chat either at home or wherever you go with your mobile device.*

### **3. Watch Later**

- *See the live recording of the concert later at your convenience.*

All you need to do is to [click the ticket link in the Facebook event](#) to join concert-goers from all over the world online and [support this incredible independent music artist](#) by attending her live broadcast livestream show this Saturday.

## **A history of the live concert series and new horizons**

[Living Room Concerts](#) began as a members-only music group on Meetup of 2000+ members and hail from all different walks of life in Madrid, connected by our love and desire for indie singer-songwriters creating and performing their own original compositions for us. They ask unknown, little known, emerging, up-and-coming artists to come perform acoustic unplugged intimate concerts in private homes and unique spaces with attendance maximums of 20–50 people, depending on the size of the host's space.

[The LRC Meetup group](#) was started in June 2015 with three purposes in mind. The first is to discover new original music. The second is to remove the stage and have a more direct interaction and connection between performer and audience. The

third is to create a space where concert-goers can meet new people and form genuine connections.

Over a year later they created a [Facebook page](#), [Instagram](#) account, and brought the option of attending to AirBnB Experiences. They were one of the first three music experiences in Madrid to appear on the AirBnB platform for the region.

And now that Living Room Concerts has moved their unique experience to the virtual world, they continue to bring the same intimate experience that made the unique experience so special and loved in the first place. Also, [Living Room Concerts](#) has some other offshoot branches with city- or country-specific focus on its roster for 2020: Tiny Kitchen Concerts, Living Room Concerts NYC, Living Room Concerts Dubai, Living Room Concerts Amsterdam and Living Room Concerts Turkey.

**[Tiny Kitchen Concerts](#): baking and music combined**

# ORANGE ROSE BUD TART



[The first Tiny Kitchen Concert](#) scheduled is to happen this Sunday at 6pm Madrid-time and is open to the international online backing and music-loving community. [Living Room Concerts](#) has teamed up with three other collaborators to offer a new international virtual experience of an integrated baking class and music concert, combined. Here's the event link on Facebook: [Baking an Orange Rose Bud Tart // Tiny Kitchen Concert LIVestream](#)

The experience takes those bits of time to rest, chill in the fridge or baking in the oven and fills those moments in with a live music performance and opportunities for conversation with other people in the class. Attendees can get to know people who share their same passions—music, baking and more. With this first offering, the dish is an original recipe of an [Orange Rose Bud Tart](#) created by chef [Florence Elisabeth](#) of [Slowpastry](#), and the original music of singer-songwriter [Spencer Ayscue](#) of the Americana band [Migrant Birds](#) who will be streaming and playing live direct from his kitchen in Winston-Salem North Carolina.

What do an entertainer from North Carolina (US) and a French pastry chef have in common?



Spencer, who once lived in Madrid, and was a part of the emerging singer-songwriter music scene, performed for [Living Room Concerts](#) in 2015 and 2016 and was one of the first six concerts that helped LRC become what it is today. Chef [Florence Elizabeth](#) is a French pastry chef who lives here in Madrid and is a member of [Valentina Ruffoni](#)'s group [Eat In](#)

[Madrid](#) to which [Nichole Hastings](#) of [Living Room Concerts](#) also belongs.

Singer-songwriter Spencer says:

*Some songs are enjoyable because of a catchy melody, and some because of good beat or riff, but it seems like the songs that really stick with you, the ones that come to you in the quiet moments or the raw moments, are the ones whose lyrics mean something, that tell a story or strike that emotional chord.*

Chef Florence says:

*My goal is to transmit my passion for high-quality pastry and demonstrate its power to create connections!*

The organizing team of [Tiny Kitchen Concerts](#) believe that food and music bring people together, create connections, and those moments mean everything ... their memories stay with you like the last note of a song hanging in the air which lingers like a delicious flavor on your tongue.

For those who want a next-level virtual experience where you get the benefit of learning to bake a French pastry dish from a French pastry chef, hear some new and original music, and meet interesting people from all over the world, need only to [visit the website to see the full description of the experience and register](#).



# Living Room Concerts around the world



The other four offshoot branches—Living Room Concerts NYC, Living Room Concerts Dubai, and Living Room Concerts Turkey, Living Room Concerts Amsterdam—are currently in development, with a focus on jazz music with artists who have been out of work since the beginning of lockdowns due to the pandemic crisis, and will be releasing virtual concert experiences soon.

A live virtual festival, *Yalla Festival* will kick off the concert series in Dubai on July 10th and 11th. Announcements for all of these will be made on the [LRC's website](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). Stay tuned, follow them on social media, Bookmark their website or [sign up for an experience today!](#)

## LRC press coverage:

- <https://youtu.be/IB2goUiRWxE>
- [http://cadenaser.com/programa/2018/01/10/fuego\\_y\\_chinchetas/1515601425\\_343482.html](http://cadenaser.com/programa/2018/01/10/fuego_y_chinchetas/1515601425_343482.html)
- <http://www.nakedmadrid.com/2018/01/23/weekend-planazo-living-room-concerts/>
- [https://www.instagram.com/p/BgWgHqFj0\\_W/?taken-by=localeur](https://www.instagram.com/p/BgWgHqFj0_W/?taken-by=localeur)

## LRC social media & websites:

- Meetup – [www.meetup.com/living-room-concerts-official](http://www.meetup.com/living-room-concerts-official)
- Website – [www.stylemylife.us/livingroomconcerts/](http://www.stylemylife.us/livingroomconcerts/)
- Facebook – [www.facebook.com/pg/livingroomconcerts/](http://www.facebook.com/pg/livingroomconcerts/)
- Instagram – [www.instagram.com/livingroomconcerts/](http://www.instagram.com/livingroomconcerts/)
- Youtube – [youtu.be/Vg6A0FZmhG0](https://youtu.be/Vg6A0FZmhG0)

## By Nichole Hastings

*You can connect with Nichole on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#) & [Twitter](#). Here's Nichole's [website](#) (her ceramic artist page).*

*Feature image by @TillyMayPhotography: [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) & [Website](#)*

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# Visiting Madrid's museums in the age of corona

*Your relationship with the art definitely changes. There's less art and more space, so you're able to take a few extra minutes in front of each painting.*

Madrid's museums are finally open and the city feels alive again! The Thyssen, Reina Sofía and Prado—known as the “Golden Triangle of Art”—closed mid-March and reopened on June 6th, with the caveat of accepting only 30% of their regular capacities.

New safety measures have been put in place. Guided tours, group visits and audio guides are unavailable and several exhibits remain closed. Due to the limited availability, finding tickets is also difficult, especially during the free hours. But despite the drawbacks, the experience is actually better in certain ways.

I recently visited the [Reina Sofía](#) museum, while my friend Covadonga Romero, who is the President of [IE University's Arts & Business Club](#), was able to visit the [Prado](#). Here's what our experiences were like.



Climbing the stairs of the Lavapiés metro station and making my way down Calle Argumosa on a sunny summer evening, I notice Madrid's resilience manifesting itself in the form of friends gathering and enjoying a caña on a terraza. The happiness and laughter emanating from the streets is contagious, and with every step I take towards Reina Sofía, I feel my anticipation rise. This is my first visit to a museum since the start of the lockdown, and I was beyond excited to take it all in again.





I enter through the back entrance of the museum, encountering absolutely no one until I go through the customary security check and then am let in through to the exhibits. I was surprised to not undergo any more safety checks. Cova had reported that at the Prado, each visitor's temperature was taken using a scanner before being allowed to enter the museum. "It gave me a greater sense of security, it kind of felt like going through an airport," she tells me.

The lack of heightened checks at Reina Sofia may have concerned me had it not taken me passing by several rooms before encountering another visitor. I'm also reassured by signs indicating the safety precautions taken by the museum and the constant reminder to maintain two meters of distance from an apparently imaginary visitor who's in proximity.



I pass through several rooms of a temporary Jorg Immendorf exhibit that was unfortunately ending the very same day. The silence and emptiness allow me to flow through the rooms in a more natural way, not having to worry about bumping into someone or taking too long in front of a painting. Cova has warned me of this but it still feels uniquely unfamiliar: "Your relationship with the art definitely changes. There's less art and more space, so you're able to take a few extra minutes in front of each painting."



I start to get used to viewing art in this setting, comparing it to the usual experience of zig-zagging my way through a guided tour group to get a better view of Picasso's Guernica. In fact, the room where I encounter the most people is the one that exhibits the Guernica, but even that room has only around 20 people in it.

As vast sections of the museums remain closed (only the first and second floor of Reina Sofía is open to the public, whereas only approximately a third of the Prado is open), many of the main pieces of the permanent exhibitions have been moved to be included in the smaller space. This has both positive and negative effects on the museum experience.

“You’re able to see most of the main showpieces of the Prado in a few hours and you don’t have to walk as much whereas normally you’d have to spend all day to see them,” says Cova. “But it also slightly takes away from the experience. The way the art works were positioned before had a logical, historical and artistic flow to it. Now it’s all kind of mixed up.”

As an example, Cova mentions how El Bosco’s *The Garden of Earthly Delight*, the *Table of the Seven Deadly Sins* and other works were previously all situated in one room. Now, the *Table of the Seven Deadly Sins* is placed in a hallway and *The Garden of Earthly Delights* is not even exhibited.

Cova gives another example: “Earlier, when you would see Goya’s paintings, you would first see the paintings depicting battle scenes, then you’d walk into a dark room where you would see the 14 Black Paintings that were taken from the walls of his house. Now, only three of those paintings are exhibited and are spread around in random rooms with paintings that have nothing to do with the theme. It takes away from the effect that walking into the darkened room has, and changes the atmosphere entirely.”





I complete my visit to Reina Sofia at the exact time that the museum closes. Two hours is all it took to view all that's displayed. As we are ushered out, I sit down on a step in Plaza de Juan Goytisolo in front of the museum, trying to take it all in. The pinkish blue sunset sky with its white wispy clouds remind me of a Magritte painting. It serves as the perfect backdrop to Madrid's bubbling life; young children playing and cycling, abuelos having a drink at the terraza and a few young boys practicing parkour.

Madrid feels alive again. I'm extremely grateful for this experience, and would absolutely recommend visiting the museums, especially while Madrid's treasures are solely for Madrid's residents, before the city is overrun with tourists once again.

By *Rishabh Agrawal* (IG: [@rishabh.a](#))

Also read our article on [Madrid's museums: The obvious and not-so-obvious \(and how to get in for free\)](#)

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# James' ongoing guide to killing time at home in Madrid

Step zero. Chill. There's nothing better than drinking a few beers or having some wine with your besties – your cats, maybe dogs, and occasionally, a few humans (inspired by Niki). Once you've got this down, you're ready to start my personal ongoing guide to killing time in Madrid while supporting local business at the same time. Let's go!

## Treat yourself to good food and drinks

### 1. Get local beer delivered to your home

My go-to beer is from Madrid's local brewery [Cervezas La Virgen](#). It's definitely more expensive than my also-beloved Mahou, but also a lot better. Check out their *Jamonera* beer and the classic *Lager*. Thanks for the inspiration, [Helen](#).

## 2. Learn from the real food experts, Devour Tours



Back in 2015, we went on one of Devour's awesome tours ([Huertas neighborhood food and market tour](#)) and Lauren Aloise and James Blick's team have been just killing it ever since then.

Today, they're also offering tons of [online food experiences](#) where their local tour guides tell you how to make their city's classic dishes over Zoom. And you get to cook with them in real time. I just took the "Cook Pasta Like a Roman with Abbie" where I learned how to make two Italian sauces. Here's a glimpse of the end result – I was way too hungry to set up better pics but wow, they were good.





I also want to give a shout-out to my good friend Melissa who lives in Lisbon. She's giving an online tour called [Discover Portugal's History Through 10 Dishes](#). I haven't taken it yet but knowing her, I can only expect an absolutely kick-ass experience full of passion (inspired by Melissa, *claro*).

### **3. Make your own bread**



Lots of my friends have taken up bread-making these past few months and sharing mouthwatering photos with me. So I started making my own recently, too. Although I'm far from becoming an expert on this, here's an easy way to start:

- Take two cups of flour: I mix strong bread flour – ask for *harina de fuerza* at Spanish supermarkets – and wheat flour.
- Add two teaspoons of yeast (I guess it won't be the end of the world if you can't find it, but your bread won't rise as much), olive oil (one spoon is fine!), sugar and salt (plus a little pepper if you're like me).
- Mix it with one cup of beer (I made it once with *La Jazonera* mentioned above, and it rocked my world). You can also mix it with water, which is... *meh*.
- Let it rise for a couple hours in a bowl covered with



dry cloth. Then deflate the air (check this [technique](#) out) and let it rise again.

- Last step: put your dough in a pot (make sure you add some flour so the dough doesn't stick to the bottom) and make a cut in the dough with a knife. Then cover it and put it in your oven at 225° C for 45 minutes. After that, take the cover off and keep it in the oven for 10 more minutes.

Perhaps “easy” wasn't the right word. But trust me, it seems more difficult than it actually is (I made it after all!). Let it cool for a bit and you're good to go (inspired by Carmen and Joss).

**4. Add even more great carbs to your diet (why not??) by making your own pizza from scratch**



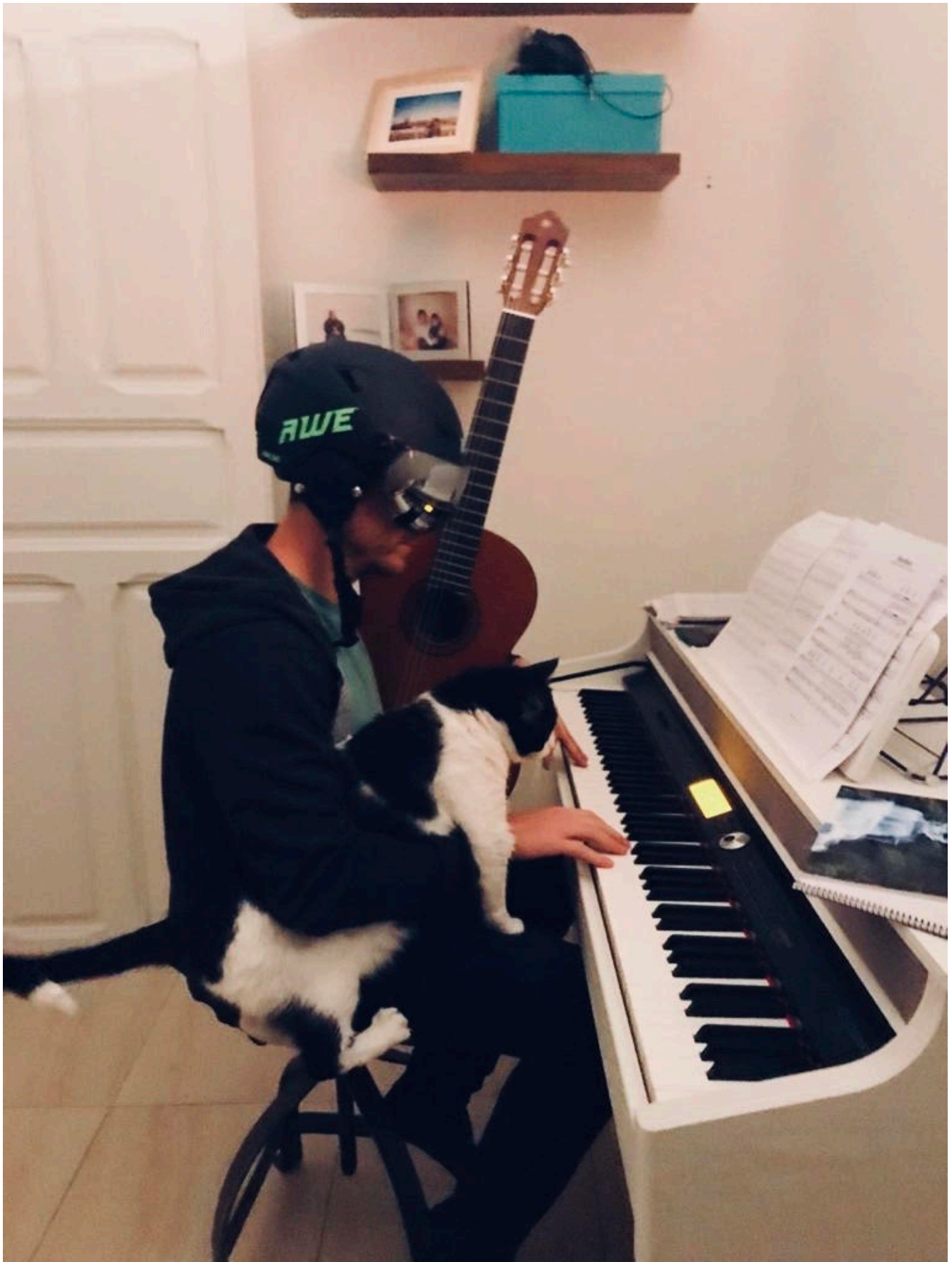
To make my own pizza dough, I followed Jaime Oliver's [5-min recipe](#) (I used beer instead of water, because beer simply makes everything better). I also added my family's *Bolognese* sauce recipe – meat, onions, soy and “Worcestershire” sauce (or “*salsa perrins*” for my Spaniards out there who also find that to be the most frightening word to pronounce in English). Feel free to add whatever else works for you (arugula is also great, inspired by Jake).

## **Burn those extra *kilos* at home**

Get moving with [Stacy Quick \(Mustard Fitness\)](#)'s home workouts. I briefly met this guy a few years ago, and I can only say the dude is legit. Stacy contacted me a few days ago with his [free](#)

[home workouts](#) and they're bananas!

**Put some art in your life**



**1. Practice your (new?) favorite instrument**

I've been having regular piano and violin classes online with my private teachers. But if you're looking to start from scratch or learn a new instrument on your own, [Fender is offering a free trial period](#). I normally use [Ultimate Guitar](#) to learn my favorite songs, yet the Fender app is useful when it comes to picking up a new instrument (inspired by Meag and Bea).

## **2. Join my local choir!**

Singers in Madrid, join me and my choir buddies at the [Coralavapies](#) (Lavapiés Choir), a non-profit organization founded by Osvaldo Ciccioli in 2003. Me and my ridiculous friend Kyler found out about them a couple months ago. Ever since, we've been singing mostly Spanish folk songs, every Wednesday night. Followed by drinks, of course (inspired by Kyler).

## **3. Get interactive with the [Mad Improv](#) crew!**

Mad Improv is a local English-speaking theater group that usually performs in theaters around the city and holds really fun workshops. Now they're offering online classes. For more info contact [Steve Loader](#) (inspired by Daphne).

## **4. Get your dance groove on every day at 6pm**

My friend Martín, who happens to be a professional DJ (and teaches people how to mix), has been broadcasting [live DJ sessions](#) daily at 6pm, Madrid time. Watch big Helen and small Helen get their groove on (you'll understand when you join the



party).

Thanks for reading. Can't wait to hug you all again.

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## **Fighting back for this amazing city – support Madrid's local businesses and community**

We're gradually reclaiming the streets – but something's missing. From the traditional taverns of Huertas to the high-end cocktail bars of Chueca, many of our favorite hangouts remain shuttered from sight.

We can finally see some socially distanced light at the end of what has been an unprecedented tunnel, but the sad truth is that many small businesses just can't keep their doors open much longer. Those alfresco *cañas* might (almost) be within touching distance, but strict capacity regulations mean our local haunts won't be able to survive on in-house activity alone.

So the question is, what can we do to stop our



## favorite tapas bars disappearing from the Madrid landscape?

For starters (no pun intended!), ordering takeout a couple of nights a week is a great way to help keep the cash flowing. And with most places having hooked up with the likes of [Deliveroo](#) and [UberEats](#), you won't even need to run the face-masked gauntlet.

But if you think ordering in your usual Friday night *ración* of *patatas bravas* might be a little too much for your emotions to handle right now (cue memories of balmy nights on outdoor terraces with friends flooding back), then check out the [Cuando Volvamos](#) scheme.

This ingenious, non-profit initiative is the brainchild of a group of experts from the business design company [Igeneris](#). Here, you can purchase all manner of activities and products from small businesses across the city that can be used (or collected) once things get back to normal.

And the good news is we're not just talking food here (let's be honest: lockdown hasn't done our waistlines any favors). There's everything from [driving lessons](#) to [furniture restoration courses](#) available.

We reckon the platform also makes for a great source of original, altruistic birthday presents. After all, who'd say no to a [massage](#) once all this is over? You could say, they're the very definition of gifts that keep on giving.

Of course, it's not just small businesses that need our support, it's our community too. The sad reality is that ordering takeout couldn't be further from the minds of so many people in Madrid right now.

[Dragones de Lavapiés](#) is just one food bank that has sprung up since the pandemic took hold. What was once a local football club for migrant children, is now a precious lifeline for endless counts of vulnerable families in the neighborhood.



Image from [Madrid No Frills' story](#) on Dragones de Lavapiés and its sister platform La CuBa

With demand showing no signs of waning and charities pushed to

the limit, these places desperately need our help more than ever. Let's be honest: if we can afford a chai latte to-go, then what's a couple of bags of rice?

So, let's dig deep. With Madrid's official food bank having set up an [online donations page](#), you don't even have to risk an extra trip to the store. **It's time for us all to pull together.**

**By Helen Hadley ([LinkedIn](#))**

- Contact Jorge (+34 695 973 652) from [Dragones de Lavapiés](#) to find out more about volunteering opportunities, or make a donation via bank transfer (ES9000730100510503058640).
- Feeling hungry? Check out my top choices for [vegan and vegetarian takeout during lockdown](#).
- Also follow our top choices for [takeaway and delivery in Madrid](#)!

*Know of any other ways to support Madrid's local businesses and community? Get in touch with [daphne@veracontent.com](mailto:daphne@veracontent.com)*

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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!](#)

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# Lockdown diaries: Rosie, recently engaged and managing two international language schools in Madrid

*If you've been brave enough to live abroad, learn a new language and launch a career in a new country, then you're set to survive some bumps and changes along the way!*

Rosie was planning her wedding, managing two international language schools, and enjoying *sidra* in San Sebastián with friends just before the lockdown hit. When she got back to work the next day in Madrid, everything changed...

Originally from Liverpool, [Rosie Hegarty](#) has lived in Madrid for seven years. She's the Marketing Director for [LAE Madrid](#) and [LAE Kids](#) (the boutique Spanish Academy) and [TtMadrid](#) (TEFL school), and has spent many years working in international marketing in both the UK and Spain.

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

My fiancée and I work full time and we were so independent and active. We had just got engaged in February and were preparing budgets and viewings for venues to get married in 2021. We spend a lot of time traveling and visiting family in Madrid,

Liverpool and Zamora and had three trips booked for March, April and May that we've obviously had to cancel.

When the lockdown happened it was such a shock and everything happened so fast. We spent the weekend before in San Sebastián at a cider house with friends. We were laughing and joking about having to use hand sanitiser whenever we took a drink and we took the scenic route back to Madrid, driving down the coast and dipping our feet in the sea when we stopped for fresh fish. When I went to work the next day, it hit me that things were really serious.

It's been a bit of a bump into reality from that weekend of fresh air and eating out in the north of Spain. We live near Plaza Castilla in a little apartment – we're lucky to have our space separated into different rooms (and with lots of light) but it's definitely been a challenge now that we're together and confined 24/7.

Our days are split between work and trying to keep active: baking things that never look as good as the photo in the book, fitness videos of people who have more than 5m<sup>2</sup> to work with, and taking our little dog just far enough that he'll perform before coming back. Our wedding is probably going to be on hold (and a lot smaller than what we were planning!) and we had to cancel our engagement parties too.



## **How did the lockdown affect your work life?**

I work at TtMadrid (a TEFL course provider) and LAE Madrid (a boutique Spanish school), managing the day-to-day of the school and international marketing, under the guidance of owner and founder, [Natasha Mason](#). She started the company 15



years ago and we've been a necessary hub for our students ever since. We offer them somewhere to come to print, access materials, give them general help with legal paperwork, translate calls or emails in Spanish, etc. or just offer them somewhere to escape from their housemates.

**When you work with students from all over the world, it sounds really corny I know, but you don't just give them a language or training course, you help them adapt to their new life in Spain and support them through some really difficult and uncertain moments.**

With so much information coming from the government and so many changes on what seemed like an hourly basis, we were inundated with current and past students emailing, phoning and popping in to see if we could give them information. We spent the next couple of days helping students organise return travel plans and generally making lots of cups of tea – reassuring parents or students themselves that everything was going to be ok.

The whole thing was a massive shock for them AND us. We decided to take all of our classes online the day that public schools shut down. We weren't legally obliged to close and knew it would be a huge financial hit for us but we just knew deep down that the safety of our students and staff was the most important thing, especially with rising anxiety about public transport and moving around the city.

By the time the lockdown was announced on Friday, we had cleared everything out of the school, made sure staff had everything they needed to work from home and were set to start online classes the following Monday. I don't know how we

managed to get it all done but the adrenaline of the situation seemed to help us through and on Saturday morning my desk was set up at my dining table.

## **Now, six weeks later, how are your language schools adapting to the new reality?**

In the space of six weeks, we've gone from a small business that is ticking along well and employing around 30 local and international people, to seeing practically no income whatsoever. We offer Spanish immersion courses for kids and adults in Madrid and a TEFL course that's super practical and a great way for people from all over the world to start their career as an English teacher here. But both rely on international travel, so neither will grow or flourish without tourism over the next 12 months.

We've tried to keep as many staff on as possible and we're working hard to make sure that our community stays together to continue to offer courses for many years to come. We've launched online Spanish courses – both group and individual classes – for anyone who wants to get working on their Spanish. We've also put the finishing touches to a project we've been working on for a while: a Virtual TEFL, to continue to train ESL teachers as it's a solid market to work in during uncertain times and now anyone can take our course, wherever they are.

We've had to put on hold our wonderful Spanish Summer Camp for kids and we probably won't be able to go ahead with it but we're trying to offer online classes for kids to make sure

they still have contact with Spanish. Needless to say, we're latecomers to giving online classes and courses so it's difficult to make a long-term plan right now and even harder to imagine how we'll get back up and running until international travel is running fluidly again.

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

Any kindness during these very difficult moments is something that we should be very grateful for. Managing a business and being a part of someone's life's work means that any setbacks are very difficult to overcome. The owner, Natasha, has spent 15 years working to build up this small business that brings together an international community of people that are passionate about travel, languages and teaching. This is devastating for anyone working with tourists or relying on international travel; and we're no different.

We've been very lucky to have built a special connection with thousands of students in the last 15 years and I've had messages from students and old co-workers from all over the world wishing us luck and offering words of support that came at just the right time. It's been a gradual realisation for us and a lot of our community that the world we all took for granted is going to be very different, for a while at least, so we'd best make the most of what we have and be grateful for it.

## **Who are you in quarantine with? Any**

## **advice for people in your similar situation?**

My fiance and I, along with our little dog. I made sure I had a solid schedule every day. We get up before 9am, shower (very, very important when cohabiting) and start work or do chores, have lunch and dinner around the same time and make sure we do an activity each day. We also go to bed at the pre-lockdown time mid-week, get a good night's sleep and make sure weekends are different to weekdays so it breaks the week up.

There've been moments when we've been so bored. I mean, bored to the point of us both standing in the hallway trying to think of some way to kill the next couple of hours before dinner. I suppose we've managed to find new things to try and we've made an effort to be kind to each other and do as much as we can to make life easier for the other person.

## **Have there been any comical moments in this unprecedented time?**

One of my favourite moments of the day that always makes me laugh is when we go outside to clap at 8pm. There's an elderly lady who lives across from our building who comes out everyday. As there are lots of us in our building all facing onto her terrace she's the only person we can really see properly that's close. When we started going out during the first couple of days, we all waved and asked how she was and we sort of just carried on doing it every day.

After doing this every day for the last six weeks she now gives us all a very regal wave individually. There must be like 20 of my neighbours saying hi to her so she's the closest thing to a celebrity we've got from our window, and I imagine it's just as much a highlight of her day as it is mine.

## **How are you coping?**

I'm quite resilient in general and I think that if you've been brave enough to live abroad, learn a new language and launch a career in a new country then you're set to survive some bumps and changes along the way!

I feel it's important to remember how lucky I am and why we're having to stay inside in the first place. People are grieving loved ones and having to cope with not being able to be with them in their final moments. My problems don't seem so important when you think about everything that's happening right now.

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

Try and get through it as best as I can. I started out writing this huge list of things to do over the weeks in confinement but it's a challenging and uncertain time for us all. I feel like the best I can hope for is to finish lockdown and get back to work, travel, see friends and family and get married. I'm not sure I need anything else right now.



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

If England is still in lockdown and I can't buy a ticket and get on the first plane there, we'll go to Zamora to see my fiancée's family. We're both very family-centric so not being able to see either side of the family for so long has been really tough.

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

If you're in a position to continue to support local and small businesses, then do. It may not seem like much but it will make a massive difference to the team of people behind it.

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

Keep going and keep listening to experts.

## **What's going on in your hometown and would you like to send them a message?**

The people from Liverpool in England are the kindest and most selfless people, so I know that everyone will be doing their bit to help their neighbours and friends to get through this.

- Connect with [Rosie on LinkedIn](#)
- Follow her language schools: [LAE Madrid](#) & [LAE Kids](#) (Spanish Academy) and [TtMadrid](#) (TEFL school)

Check out all [Madrid lockdown stories](#)

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## 5 best places to order vegan and vegetarian takeout in Madrid

If you cast your mind back to pre-lockdown Madrid, pollution alerts on public transport, *the brown cloud*, and fiery political debates on the future of *Madrid Central* were as much part of everyday life as *la hora del vermut*. Let's be honest though: a lot's changed since then.

It's hard (sometimes impossible) to find positives in this "new normal." But aside from the politicians and medical staff, there's someone else who's pretty grateful we're all staying safe at home – Mother Nature. The city's air is the cleanest it's been in decades and as a result, life's returning to our green areas. If that sounds like something worth celebrating, then why not hang up your apron for the evening and order some takeout?

We know, that doesn't exactly sound like eco-friendly advice.

However, as the city's once burgeoning vegan and vegetarian restaurant scene fights for survival, with owners desperately clambering to adhere to new hygiene laws in order to keep their doors open, there's no need to beat yourself up about (slightly) increasing your carbon footprint.

After all, if we want these sustainable eateries to remain part of Madrid's cosmopolitan culinary revolution, then they need our support now more than ever. So, if you've tried out enough new recipes to last a lifetime and you're craving some fresh falafel, here's a round-up of the best vegan and vegetarian eateries offering home delivery during lockdown (and beyond)!

## **1. Bunny's Deli – the eco warrior's paradise!**



[Source](#)

If saving the planet's pretty high on your list of priorities (shouldn't it be on everyone's?), then order something tasty from Bunny's Deli. Not only is all of their packaging completely compostable, this family-run business is fully powered by renewable energy.

- Instagram: [@bunnys\\_deli](#)
- Address: Calle San Gregorio, 17, 28004, Madrid
- Phone: 648 73 27 83
- Delivery: [Uber Eats](#)

## 2. The Vegan Burger – who needs meat?



The Vegan Burger is one of the Salamanca barrio's up-and-coming haunts. Though it may not be quite as “trendy” as some of its neighbors, it's certainly popular with young *madrileños* eager to jump on the vegan bandwagon. And with burgers this good, who can blame them?

- Facebook: [@theveganburger](#)
- Address: Calle del Gral Oraá, 34, 28006 Madrid, Spain
- Phone: 913 95 27 25
- Delivery: [just-eat.es](#), [chatfood.io](#)

### 3. La Huerta de Almería – bringing the coast a little closer



[Source](#)

For all of us in Madrid right now, the delights of the coast seem far from reach. But don't despair – there's a glimmer of hope in sight! This rustic corner of Malasaña is offering nutritious, coastal-inspired *menús del día* straight to your door from Monday to Friday. It's the perfect midday pick-me-up when you're working from home.

- Instagram & Facebook: [@lahuerta\\_de\\_almeria](#)
- Address: Corredera Baja de San Pablo, 47, 28004 Madrid, Spain
- Phone: 912 79 92 58
- Delivery: [just-eat.es](#), [Deliveroo](#), [Uber Eats](#)

### 4. Rajasthan – spice up your lockdown life!



[Source](#)

Had your summer backpacking adventure put on hold? With food this good delivered to your doorstep, you'll (almost) feel like you're there. They have a wide range of spice levels to suit all tastes and their peshwari naan bread always hits the spot.



- Facebook: [@rajamahal2003](#)
- Address: Calle de Atocha, 47, 28012 Madrid, Spain
- Delivery: [just-eat.es](#)

## 5. Plantarse – a helping hand for local farmers



[Source](#) (feature image too)

If you've overdone it on the junk food and you're feeling a little "out of whack," Plantarse will help get your body back on track. Its plant-based delights are designed to offer inner peace through healthy living – and we all need some of that right now. The best bit: the majority of this delivery-only kitchen's ingredients are locally sourced.

- Instagram & Facebook: [@plantarse.pb](#)
- Address: Calle Francisco de Rojas 7, 28010, Madrid
- Delivery: [just-eat.es](#), [Deliveroo](#), [Uber Eats](#), [Glovo](#)

Article by [Helen Hadley](#)

Also check out:

- [La Ración: Supplying Madrid with Spanish comfort food during lockdown](#)
- [Mercado Acre, shop small to keep dreams big](#)
- [Order pizza from Lab 84 and take the sting out of lockdown](#)

Where are you ordering takeout during lockdown?  
Let us know!

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

*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.*

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](#)**