

Retrogusto Bar: My best-kept Madrid secret

I never thought I'd share this place with the world, but the time has come. Retrogusto is a little Italian bar and kitchen located near Plaza Mayor and Opera, right in the city center. Yet it doesn't feel that way. It feels more like you're in a small town, as it's situated in a quiet plaza with tables set out under a beautiful tree that provides warmth and shade.

I've been living in Madrid for over 12 years now, and this is by far one of my favorite spots in the city. One of the main reasons is that big tree! Another reason is because it's so simple and down to earth.



The restaurant has two terraces: one in the plaza; and the other under a residential building. The indoor area is small and cute, decorated with mis-matching vintage furniture and nicknacks.



You can sit anywhere and enjoy your time here. But that tree is something special; I've spent many wonderful evenings under its canopy...



James and I first stumbled upon Retrogusto when we were living near Sol a few years ago, and it quickly became our oasis. We'd always find a table under the tree on weeknights and order several glasses of wine or beer—each round would come with delicious olives, Italian cheese or a surprise *aperitivo* that was always good. For dinner, James would get the meatballs and I'd go for the piadina or eggplant parmesan.



But last time we went, the menu had changed so we tried something new. James got the pasta special with zucchini cream sauce that he's still dreaming about, no joke. I went for the Caprese salad—light and fresh.



We didn't get a spot under the tree last time either, because we went on the weekend for a change and it was full. Instead, we grabbed a seat in the other outdoor area, and now we know where all the owners' friends and regulars hang out!



Before leaving we asked the owner, Silvana, if she could tell us a bit about her story. She's originally from Sardinia, Italy, and came to Madrid 12 years ago, after living in Ireland and working in accounting. She wanted a change and decided that Spain was pretty similar to Italy, without it being Italy (if that makes sense).



Silvana started out working at a bar in La Latina. Her friends owned Retrogusto at the time, and she would come to hang out and help them. When they decided to leave Spain, she naturally took over and has been running it for seven years now. Her brother works in the kitchen and she's out front. "I don't cook," she says.

Our conversation went on for quite a while, covering the new laws restricting Madrid restaurants and business owners, to the lives of freelancers. I won't get into the details but I will say that she treated us to a round of shots by the end of our meal. Grazie!

Before leaving I asked Silvana what her favorite thing about the bar is: "Its simplicity. It's like being with your family

in a small town.”

I couldn't agree with her more. Although the secret's out, let's make sure it stays that way.

Retrogusto Bar:

- [Facebook](#) & IG: [@retrogustobar](#)
- Address: Plaza del Biombo
- Metro: Opera or Sol

Note: Because of the restricted closing hours for bars and restaurants right now (11pm) she's opening a little earlier lately, around 7:30pm.

4 Vegetarian and vegan-friendly eateries in Madrid

In the land where *jamón* and *queso manchego* prosper, it may at first seem difficult to survive as a vegan or vegetarian in Madrid. But fear not! Although it is true that Spanish food is typically meat and dairy-based, the city's restaurant scene has changed a lot over recent years. Today, Madrid's world-class vegetarian and vegan-friendly eateries will have individuals with all diets falling in love with Spanish food.

Here are a few Madrid restaurants that all offer delicious vegetarian and vegan-friendly dishes with a Spanish twist!

[Vega](#)



Located on Calle de la Luna, this restaurant prides itself in creating all organic, vegan, homemade dishes for guests to enjoy. Restaurant-goers will love the smoked aubergine tapas or the beetroot and strawberries Gazpacho for appetizers, both

vegan-friendly Spanish favorites. Visitors can enjoy [Vega](#)'s delicious salads, black rice with "squid", "chili con carne", or "Burrata" tapas. What is so special about Vega is their vegan twist on foods and dishes that are commonly enjoyed in Spain by the locals.

- **Image from** [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** Calle Luna 9
- **Metro:** Santo Domingo, Noviciado, Callao

[B13](#)



Enjoy typical Spanish tapas at [B13](#), on Calle de la Ballesta, with their mouthwatering *patatas bravas* (a local favorite), their "calamari", as well as their variety of vegetarian hamburgers. Whether you're in the mood for a Spanish tapas-style meal or want to feast on a delicious hamburger or

sandwich, B13 has what you're craving for your next vegetarian meal.

- Image from [Facebook](#)
- Address: Calle de la Ballesta 13
- Metro: Callao, Gran Vía

[Freedom Cakes](#)



[Freedom Cakes](#), also on Calle de la Luna, is known as the first vegan pastry shop in Madrid. It is truly a wonderful spot to enjoy a quality cup of coffee with any vegan milk that you prefer. Whether it be an iced soy latte during hot summer months or an almond milk cappuccino to warm you up on chilly autumn mornings, you'll love their delicious coffee options. Better yet, pair your coffee with one of their renowned vegan pastries, ranging from freshly baked cakes, cupcakes, muffins,

and cookies, all 100% vegetable-based!

- [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** Calle Luna 14
- **Metro:** Noviciado, Callao

[Sanissimo](#)



Last, but certainly not least, Sanissimo is a wonderful restaurant with a few locations in Madrid, that is pleased to offer an array of vegan and vegetarian dishes. Start your day off on the right foot with one of their juices and smoothies, or perhaps one of their popular bagels. Between their

refreshing fruit bowls, sweet bagel options, and rich pastries, you'll always enjoy starting your day at Sanissimo.

- **Image from** [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** Calle San Vicente Ferrer 28 / Calle Campomanes, 5
- **Metro:** Tribunal, Noviciado / Opera, Santo Domingo

Whether your diet be vegan, vegetarian, meat-based, or fish-based, you'll never have to fear missing out on the spectacular Spanish cuisine that the city of Madrid boasts. Enjoy mouthwatering vegan and vegetarian dishes, but with the same Spanish influence as what the locals are enjoying.

By Haley Grant

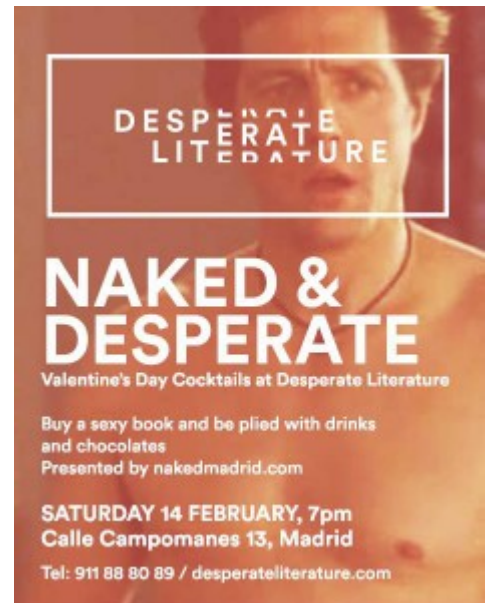
You may also like: [Veggie Nirvana at VivaBurger in La Latina](#)

Desperate Literature, so much more than a bookshop

Four years ago I stumbled upon a newly opened gem, [Desperate Literature](#). I immediately went in, spoke to the staff (who were practically still building the place), and wrote an article about it: [Desperate Literature, for book lovers in Brooklyn, Santorini and now Madrid.](#)

Something about it felt so homey to me. Perhaps it was the English-speaking staff, the familiar titles on the shelves, or the fact that they were playing my brother's kind of music. It just felt like I was stepping into an avid reader's living

room in New York rather than a bookshop in Madrid.



I haven't stopped going back since. Many of the times I've gone in with friends and family, we've either been offered a cup of green tea or a glass of whiskey. Naked Madrid even co-hosted a Valentine's event there in 2015. I remember there being lots of mulled wine, chocolate, and a discount in the erotica section.

So much has changed since then, yet the same wonderful vibe and essence remains. The staff is still rotating, international and friendly as ever. The book selection of both new and old titles in English, French and Spanish keeps on growing. With so many great additions, it was time for a new article, with updated pics too.

First some background info

For anyone who hasn't been yet, Desperate Literature sells by far the best selection of English books in the city, from art and philosophy to history and sociology. Plus a nice "boozy books" section where you get a shot of free whiskey with every purchase. You can also find titles in other languages, as well as handpicked rare editions, signed copies, tote bags, postcards, maps, and more. There's even a kids' section!

Desperate Literature was founded by hardcore book fanatics: Craig Walzer (UK), Corey Eastwood (US), Charlotte Delattre (France) and Terry Craven (UK). Between them, they also own [Atlantis Books](#) in Santorini, Greece, and [Book Thug Nation](#) and [Human Relations](#) in Brooklyn, New York.

Charlotte and Terry are currently running the shop (and living upstairs). Before coming to Madrid, they both worked for several years at the world-famous Paris bookshop [Shakespeare and Company](#). Lucky for us, they're bringing the same philosophy to Desperate Literature, making it much more than a bookshop – it's also a community, event space, publishing house, and a home. According to Terry:

“Desperate Literature’s aim is to create a place where people meet for and through literature and to that end we’re developing not only our stock, focusing on having the best literature in English, Spanish and French, but a whole array of literary events, a literary magazine and all types of literary collaborations.”



Great events: readings, concerts, and more

Desperate Literature has truly blossomed into an international haven for literature and art. It collaborates with local and expat writers, poets, musicians, and artists on a regular basis. They constantly put on cozy concerts, trivia nights, chess events, readings, and talks, as well as fun holiday-themed events like Bloomsday and Christmas sing-alongs. All these intimate events are healthily booze-infused, and usually cost just €3 entry including a drink.

Children's corner

In the back you'll find a very sweet children's corner full of class titles that will make you feel nostalgic, from Dr. Seuss to Roald Dahl. There's also a cute little couch where you can curl up with a good read.



First literary prize

Desperate Literature launched its very own short fiction [prize](#) this year, receiving over 450 entries. They offered a €1000 prize, a stay at the beautiful Civitella Ranieri foundation, and publication in various literary magazines, as well as events at Desperate Literature and Shakespeare and Company.

We'll be launching again in December 2018 and (hopefully) every year to come, with the aim of putting our small bookshop on the international scene for excellent experimental fiction written today.

And first magazine and book!

The shortlist from the fiction prize even led to the publishing of Desperate Literature's first book "[Eleven Stories](#)" in April. And they put out their first magazine last year, [La Errante](#).



While all these additions are undeniably impressive (and there's certainly more in store), what speaks to me most is that the shop continues to feel as warm and cozy as ever, almost as if you were walking into a friend's personal library. Plus the music is great, the signs are quirky, and you're likely to make a friend or get offered a drink if you stick around awhile.

If you're interested in getting to know more about Desperate Literature, definitely stop in and say hello. For more info, here's an insightful article written by Katie Dycus: [Portrait of a Bookstore: Desperate Literature \(Madrid\)](#).

Desperate Literature

- [Facebook](#), [Website](#) & [Instagram](#)

Address: Calle Campomanes, 13

Metro: Santo Domingo, Opera, and Callao

Casa Jaguar: a jungle paradise in central Madrid

After a long, hot summer, Madrid is starting to wake up again as people slowly trickle back from their holidays. If you've recently returned and the thought of going back to work or school is getting you down, then do not despair! There's a fabulous new restaurant in town called [Casa Jaguar](#) and it's the perfect antidote to those post-holiday blues.



Tucked away on a side street near Ópera, Casa Jaguar opened just before the summer. It's owned by four business partners, one of whom is also the owner of [Camoatí](#) (another of my favourite restaurants in Madrid, you must try it if you haven't already!). Walk through the door and you feel like you could be in another country. The huge Rousseau-inspired jungle mural, wicker chairs, wooden tables and palette of browns and greens blend perfectly to create an ambience that is both exotic and cosy.



The large, wooden-topped bar is the perfect place to sit and have a drink whilst chatting to the lovely Fabian (another of the owners). He'll whip you up a delicious cocktail, or you can choose from the large variety of Latin American beers and carefully curated wine list.



And that's before I even get started on the food. My goodness, the food! I've visited Casa Jaguar for both lunch and dinner, and everything I've tried has been exquisite. From Tuesday to Friday they offer a *menú del día* for the bargainous price of 12 euros, which includes a starter, a choice of two mains (one is always a veggie option) and dessert or coffee. Best of all, the menu changes every day so there's never a chance to get bored!



I went for dinner the other evening with a couple of friends and the food was *even* tastier. We ordered a starter of roasted potato and yucca wedges with guacamole and a Peruvian spicy cheese sauce, which we managed to polish off in about 30 seconds.



For my main course, I decided to stick with the vegetarian theme and ordered beetroot and sweetcorn risotto with spinach, sun-dried tomatoes and goat's cheese – absolutely divine.



Cat (a die-hard carnivore) opted for the beer and honey braised pork with sweet potato mash. This got a big thumbs-up from her.



Ella went for the tropical shrimp with pineapple, coconut milk and rum, with coriander rice on crunchy green banana. As delicious as it sounds (so delicious that she snaffled a piece of pineapple before I could take a photo!).



The whole menu is awash with delicious Latin American ingredients and flavours. The desserts looked amazing too, although we were all too full to try them! Everything is very reasonably priced and the service is fantastic. Jaguar you? After my visits to Casa Jaguar, very happy!



Info

- Casa Jaguar [Website](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)
- Address: Calle de los Caños del Peral 9
- Metro: Ópera, Callao, Santo Domingo
- Telephone: 910 245 712
- Opening hours: Tuesday-Thursday 13h-16:30h, 21h-00h, Friday-Saturday 13h-16:30h, 21h-01h, Closed Sunday and Monday (*Currently closed for lunch in August but full opening hours resuming 6th Sept onwards*)

(First photo courtesy of Casa Jaguar's [Facebook](#) page)