

Have your cake with coffee or gin at La Prima Lejana

Thanks to waking up early for work during the week, I'm pretty much a guaranteed earlybird at the weekends. Luckily for me, this meant that last Saturday I had first dibs of the delectable treats on offer at La Prima Lejana. The cool little cafe that's just a stone's throw from C/ Huertas and offers up 'gram worthy decor and cakes worth setting an alarm for.

A venture that's the birthchild of three friends hailing from Galicia, La Prima Lejana combines two of my great loves – cake that's worth the calories and gin. The gin needs no further explanation. Forget strawberries and cream, bangers and mash, fish and chips, there's no pairing that I could love more. Especially when all of the gins on offer are Spanish, including one of my current fave, Nordes.



Now don't get me wrong, I didn't swerve my Saturday morning spin class to swig gin before midday, there's great coffee on offer as well as fresh lemonades in a variety of flavours – I opted for lemon and ginger which was zingy and fresh and was an attempt to offset the cake-shaped goodies.



Now, onto the decor which was basically my own version of utopia. A mix of pinks, gold and marble –essentially the mood board for my own recent flat renovation – had me hot footing it to Maison du Monde to snap up the same shelving that they have there. The attention to detail is second to none, partly due to one of the lovely business partners being an architect, and clearly one with excellent taste.



I often find Spanish cakes waaaaay too sickly sweet but the cakes here were some of (if not the best) that I've tasted in

the capital. I had carrot cake which was inhaled at breakneck speed and we also tried the courgette cake with lemon icing. Again, the plate was all but licked clean.



La Prima Lejana is as pleasing to the eye as it was to the tastebuds and I plan to work my way through their menu, I urge you to do the same.

La Prima Lejana

- [Website](#), [Facebook](#) & IG: [@laprimalejanamad](#)
 - **Address:** Calle Lope de Vega, 7
 - **Metro:** Antón Martín
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Context Tavernas and Tapas, a culinary tour through the bars of Huertas

If you've done any traveling lately, you might have noticed that **food tours are rapidly becoming a global trend**. Companies around the world now offer guided visits to restaurants, bars, and markets, promising to let you in on culinary secrets or show you how to eat like a local. Madrid is no exception. In fact, this city has more than its share of options, thanks to its vibrant dining scene and world-famous cuisine.

I recently had the chance to participate in a food tour for the very first time, thanks to [Context Travel](#). The company offers "**tours for the intellectually curious**" in cities across the world, including several in the Spanish capital. Many are focused on history or art, but this one was especially intriguing: [Savoring Madrid: Tavernas and Tapas](#).

According to the Context website, the goal of this culinary tour is to define the concept of tapas through tastings at *tavernas* in the city center. Like all of their [Madrid](#)

[tours](#), it's meant to offer an in-depth look at local culture, customs, and in this case, cuisine. But considering the dozens of bars, restaurants, and specialty dishes that are scattered throughout the city, how could it be possible to cover such a broad topic in just 3 hours? That's what I intended to find out.



Intricate mosaics decorate the exterior of one of the many historic bars in Huertas.

Hungry for history

The tour began at 7pm outside the Westin Palace hotel, close to many of Madrid's main tourist attractions. Context limits the size of their tours to create a personalized experience—this one consisted only of me and a couple who were on vacation.

Our guide was Tessy Carrada, a culinary journalist of Mexican

origin who moved to Madrid a few years ago. She started off by explaining the basics, with the help of maps and diagrams: **what are tapas, where did they come from, and how are they eaten?** What makes Spain's cuisine unique? What can you expect when you go out for tapas in Madrid?

Next she told us how the tour would work. We'd visit three or four places, all in the Huertas neighborhood (also known as [Barrio de las Letras](#)). The idea was to show us non-touristy spots, the kinds of places locals go, where we'd get a **true taste of the local culture**. At each place, she would order a few tapas to share, taking into account our preferences, interests, and appetites. With the ground rules laid out, we set off into the city.

Cervecería Cervantes



First up was a true classic, a place that was packed with

customers even at the early hour of 7:30pm. We ordered drinks, and Tessy explained the particularities of Spanish brewing as we admired the collection of beer cans displayed on the restaurant's walls. The waiter brought out a plate of giant olives and mussels, exemplifying the tradition of providing something to snack on along with every drink.





Tessy then ordered several *raciones* to share: **ham croquetas with padrón peppers, manchego cheese, and jamón ibérico.** As we ate, she offered insight on each and every item: how to make *croquetas*, what makes Spanish ham so special, and how to distinguish true *manchego* from imitations.



I've lived in Spain for a while, and I've eaten (more than) my share of all of these classic tapas, but I'm not exaggerating when I say this might've been the best ham and cheese of my life. It took a lot of self-discipline to restrain myself and save room for the next destination...

La Fábrica



As soon as we entered this colorful, crowded locale we were welcomed with the sights and smells of seafood. We gathered around an old barrel-turned-table and ordered **albariño** wine to accompany the **salpicón** (a kind of seafood salad) and **boquerones** (marinated anchovies) that Tessy suggested. I was quickly reminded of one of the most pleasant discoveries I've made in Madrid: despite my preconceived notions about slimy, stinky seafood, here it's a true delicacy.



The *salpicón* consisted of shrimp, mussels, and octopus swimming in olive oil with tomatoes, peppers, and onions. It was fresh, light, and incredibly delicious. A loaf of crusty bread was brought to the table, and Tessy encouraged us to break off pieces and soak them in the flavorful oil.



The *boquerones* were perfectly seasoned and accompanied by olives and crispy potato chips. We were also served a small plate of cheese and chorizo—but it couldn't compete with the perfection we'd already experienced at Cervantes. The star here was most certainly the seafood.

La Vinoteca

Although we attempted to find a spot at the renowned Casa Alberto, at 9pm on a Saturday night it proved difficult. Instead we went to La Vinoteca, which had a much more **modern and upscale atmosphere** than the previous bars. We ordered wine and cava from an impressively long and detailed list.



To round out the night, Tessy ordered **patatas bravas** (fried potatoes smothered in slightly spicy sauce) and two **pinchos** (small toasts): one topped with spinach, goat cheese, and caramelized onions, and another with potato cake and duck magret.

Although the ambience here was lovely and the wine exceptional, I have to admit that the tapas weren't quite as impressive as their successors. That being said, they were still delicious, and certainly provided a well-rounded sampling of some of Spain's most famous specialties.



For the last course of the evening, Tessy chose a **layered trifle of chocolate and cream**, as well as a sort of **mini apple pie** topped with vanilla ice cream. Although these were pretty standard sweets that didn't exactly scream "Spain," it's hard to complain when there's chocolate involved. After devouring dessert, we parted ways for the night with full bellies, satisfied palates, and a whole lot of newfound knowledge.

An interesting aftertaste

For me the best part of this tour, surprisingly, was not the food itself (although of course it was incredible). As a resident of Madrid, I can get authentic tapas whenever I want, on nearly every street corner. What this experience offered me was the chance to engage with the food I was eating on an intellectual level: to learn why tapas are called tapas, what distinguishes *jamón ibérico* from *jamón serrano*, and so much

more. **It was a lesson in being conscious of what I eat and the history and culture it reflects.**

For travelers who only have a few days to sample the best of local cuisine, who don't speak Spanish, or who simply don't know where to begin, Context provides an ideal solution. **Tessy's insider knowledge and impeccable taste made for an interesting, entertaining, and thoroughly authentic journey through the taverns of Huertas.**

Whether you're a tourist who wants to experience the tapas culture firsthand, or a seasoned local who wants to learn more about the city you love, you'll find what you're looking for in the Context Tavernas and Tapas tour.

To learn more about Context or book a tour, click [here](#).

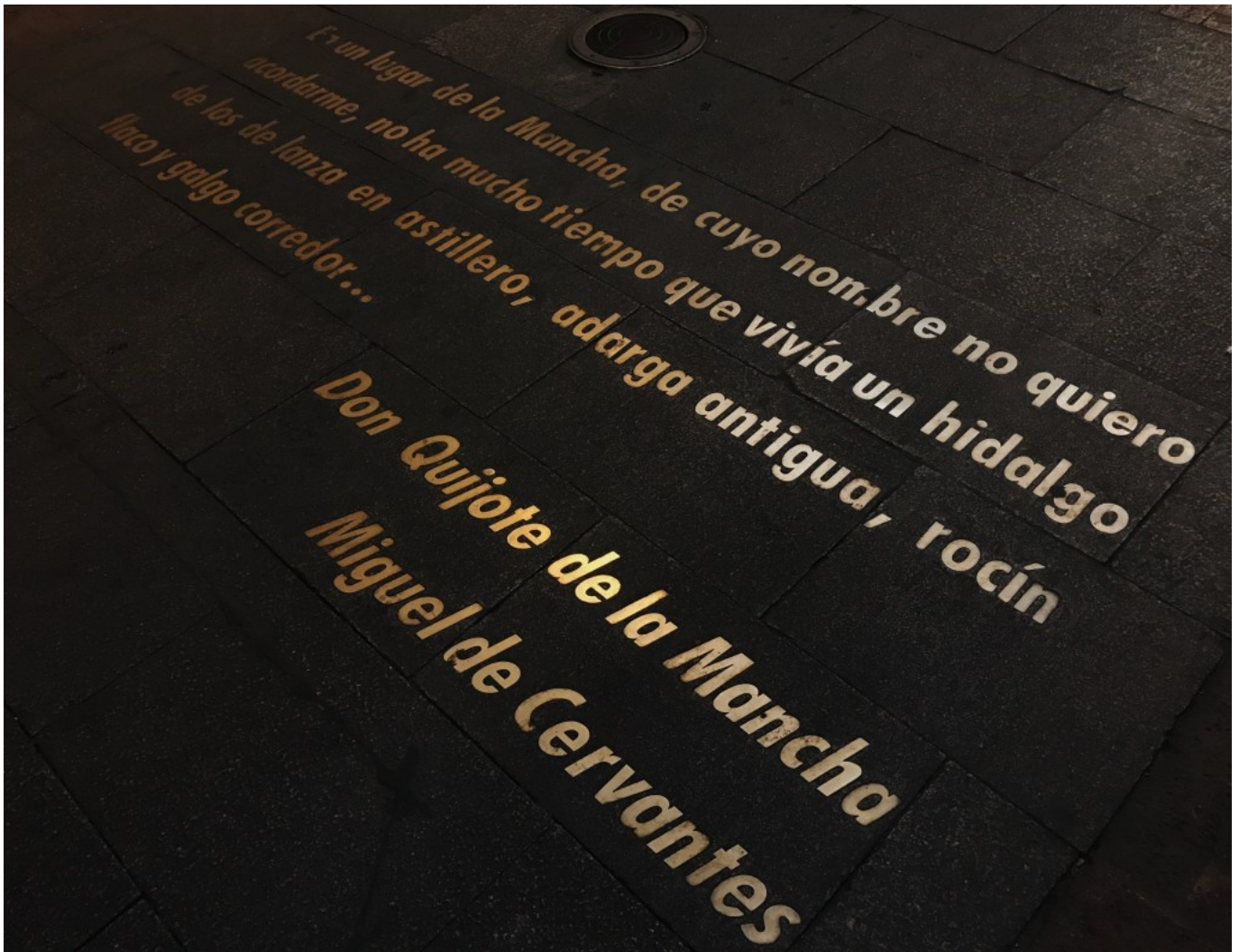
What to See in Barrio de Las Letras

Madrid's [Barrio de las Letras](#) is a timeless neighborhood that stays true to its Spanish roots, while still giving a modern feel that leaves visitors coming back for more. With its amazing food, culture, and ambience, you can't go wrong when it comes to exploring this classic barrio.

Here are a few insights into its history, [hotspots](#) and 3 restaurant recommendations!

History with a Modern Twist

Barrio de las Letras, also known as Huertas, is less than a 10-minute walk from Sol and was once home to some of the greatest Spanish writers. The streets are paved with recognizable quotes from writers such as, Miguel Cervantes and José Echegaray.



There are even plazas and streets dedicated to writers such as Plaza Jacinto Benavente and Calle Lope de Vega. The houses of some of these writers still stand today and are open to the public, such as [Casa Museo Lope de Vega](#) which offers free guided tours.



Plaza Jacinto Benavente



Calle Lope de Vega

Nowadays, this historic neighborhood has become a trendy spot for people to get together and have a drink paired with a few tapas. Calle de las Huertas is the main street where you can easily find great shops, cafes, and some of Madrid's finest eateries.





While exploring the side streets that branch off the main road, keep an eye out for the various boutiques, art galleries, bookstores, and antique shops that make this neighborhood so authentic.





Must-Sees in Barrio de las Letras

Plaza Santa Ana is a well-known hangout spot in this neighborhood. Here you can find a number of restaurants with outdoor seating areas that are perfect for enjoying the ambience with a nice wine or beer.





Plaza Santa Ana is also where you can find monuments of Calderón de la Barca, Federico García Lorca, and the Teatro Español, making it a popular spot for tourists.



Monument Calderon de La Barca



Monument Federico Garcia Lorca



Teatro Español—Madrid's oldest theater

3 Restaurants in Barrio de las Letras

This neighborhood is a hot spot for some of Madrid's oldest taverns and restaurants that serve typical Spanish dishes and tapas. Here are some of the best ones.

[Cervecería Cervantes](#) is a favorite among the locals. It's decorated with beautiful tiles that give a traditional Spanish feel. Every time I walk past this bar, it's always packed with people enjoying tapas and beer. This *cervecería* is known for its seafood that can be ordered in small portions. So stop in and try them all!



Another go-to place is [El Lacón](#) on Calle de Manuel Fernández y González. This place has been around since the 60s and has been considered a classic ever since. It's known for its drink and tapa deal, meaning that with each beer you order, the waiter will bring a small plate of tapas to your table. Not only is this restaurant famous for its incredible deal, but it's also known for its full plates such as, *cocido Madrileño* and the meat or fish *tablas* that can easily feed 3 people or more.



And if you're looking for a place that has it all, [Casa Alberto](#) is the place for you. This restaurant is hard to miss with its red exterior, antique writing, and open door which allows people to take a peek inside.



When first entering **Casa Alberto**, it's hard to get past the crowd of people drinking and ordering tapas at the bar. But once you're in the dining room, you are guaranteed a great sit-down meal. For starters, the *croquetas de jamón* are an amazing way to start your meal. Another great starter is the *gazpacho de melon* with a prawn tartar. This gazpacho gives a modern twist on the classic Spanish plate by creating a sweet but savory infusion.

Not only are their appetizers high quality, but so are their main dishes. Casa Alberto makes an incredibly flavorful and hearty *callos a la Madrileña* that's perfect for a mid-day feast. As a U.S. Midwestern girl who loves red meat, I had to second guess myself after trying the *ventresca de bonito*. This fish plate was grilled to perfection topped with quality olive oil, fresh garlic, and a side of potatoes.

Make sure to leave room for dessert because **Casa Alberto** won't disappoint. Their cream-filled crepes topped with homemade blueberry and cheese ice cream are the perfect go-to dessert. But if you're looking for something with a bit of an alcoholic twist, the apple and cider sorbet is highly recommended.



Check out [all the spots in Barrio de Las Letras](#) featured on Naked Madrid!

Fogg Bar, Spanish Craft Beer and Artisanal Cheese in Huertas

[Madrid's craft beer scene](#) has been flourishing in recent years with several bars and vendors popping up to meet an increasing demand. [Fogg Bar](#), a new establishment situated on C/ Moratin in Huertas, stands out for **servicing exclusively Spanish-made artisanal beer on tap** along with delicious cheeses.



My friend Diana and I ventured in on a quiet Tuesday night and perched ourselves at the bar. We were able to chat with the charming proprietor, Marisol, who helped us decide which beers to sample. She and her husband opened this bar in September.



They take a lot of pride in **collaborating with smaller breweries and cheese distributors**, often hosting tastings and gatherings where attendees can meet the brewers.



First I sipped #5, the Columbus Goes North, an IPA from La Quince, a brewery in Madrid. This was followed up by #6, the Sweet Milk Stout from Four Lions, a distributor in León.



I was impressed with the presentation of the tapas that accompanied each drink, as well as the **butifarra**, a **typical Catalan sausage**. I was quite taken by this establishment and recommend it to all craft beer aficionados looking to taste Spanish-made beers.

Info

- [Facebook](#)
- [Website](#)
- **Address:** C/Moratin 5
- **Metro:** Anton Martin

For more on Madrid craft beer, check out:

- [Beer State of Mind in Madrid](#)
 - [Heightened Beer State of Mind in Madrid](#)
 - [La Buena Cerveza, all things beer in Madrid](#)
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DecorAcción 2015 – Interior Design Market in Barrio de Las Letras

El Barrio de las Letras – one of Madrid’s most central neighborhoods, also known as Huertas – is celebrating its sixth edition of [DecorAcción 2015](#). This festival aims to showcase the works of local artists and interior designers. Expect outdoor flea markets, pop-up markets, food trucks, master classes and a “Best Balcony Competition.” Here’s the [program](#).

It’s a really nice excuse to go out for a walk, enjoy the beautiful neighborhood of El Barrio de Las Letras and support the city’s local art scene!

Munchies, late-night burger joint and snack bar in Huertas

My friend Natasha would often sing praises of Munchies, an American-style snack bar situated in Huertas that is open for business until 6am. Always ecstatic to have more options besides kebabs & pizzas during late-night outings in my new barrio, I sampled this location in order to share my findings with my beloved expat community. Munchies lives up to its namesake, hitting the spot during intoxicated bouts of hunger. It is a cozy and charming spot reminiscent of the American small town diners that I am ever so fond of.





This location provides swift and efficient service, and although I've only tasted their burgers, they also offer arepas, salads, hotdogs, homemade cakes and other sweets. Amber, the owner and culinary master of this establishment, gently applies condiments and toppings to the burgers with *cariño*. I admire her discipline, remaining awake and alert into the wee hours of the night in order to aid drunk people as they preemptively combat the next day's hangover with greasy edibles. It is for that reason that I bestow upon this establishment the Dcat Seal of Approval.





Info

[Website](#)

[Facebook](#)

Hours: 2pm to 6am

Address: Calle de las Huertas 25

Metro: Anton Martin or Sol

Maya, a cozy Taqueria &

Mexican product store in Huertas

[Maya](#) is a new Mexican establishment, situated on C/Echegaray in Huertas. The owner & chef, Jose Manuel, hails from Mexico City. Jose previously worked in [the hidden burrito shop in Lavapies](#), notably wearing a customized chef's hat. We met during his tenure there and became fast friends due to his approachable nature. After having not seen him in several months, I was taking a stroll through Huertas with a friend and we both noticed a Taqueria. She and I pondered whether it was new or had always been there. Jose surfaced and summoned us to the bar, inviting us to a drink in order to catch up and show us his new business endeavor. Jose's grand ambition is to make **quality Mexican products** more accessible to consumers in Madrid.







Knowing that Americans are always on the prowl for new places to satisfy their taco cravings, I took it upon myself to do my community a service and sample a handful of Jose's creations in order to share my findings.

First I sampled the *taco de pastor*, cilantro and onion with green lime.



The second specimen was *Cochinita de Pibil* with achiote.



The last taco was *Fajitas Alambre de ternera*



All of these treats were followed by a Tamale served on a plantain leaf.



They were all yummy, my favorite being the *taco de pastor*. I found everything about the establishment quite familiar. Their regular, a pipe-smoking elderly writer, took pride in presenting me with a poetry anthology that had his face on the back cover. This location is young, and thus the experience is quite personalized. For those of you who are seeking a venue for your taco Tuesdays, or a place to find unique Mexican ingredients to be used in your culinary endeavors at home, I strongly recommend this establishment.

Info

[Facebook](#)

Where: Calle Echegaray 29

Metro: Anton Martin

Contact: 600 68 73 51

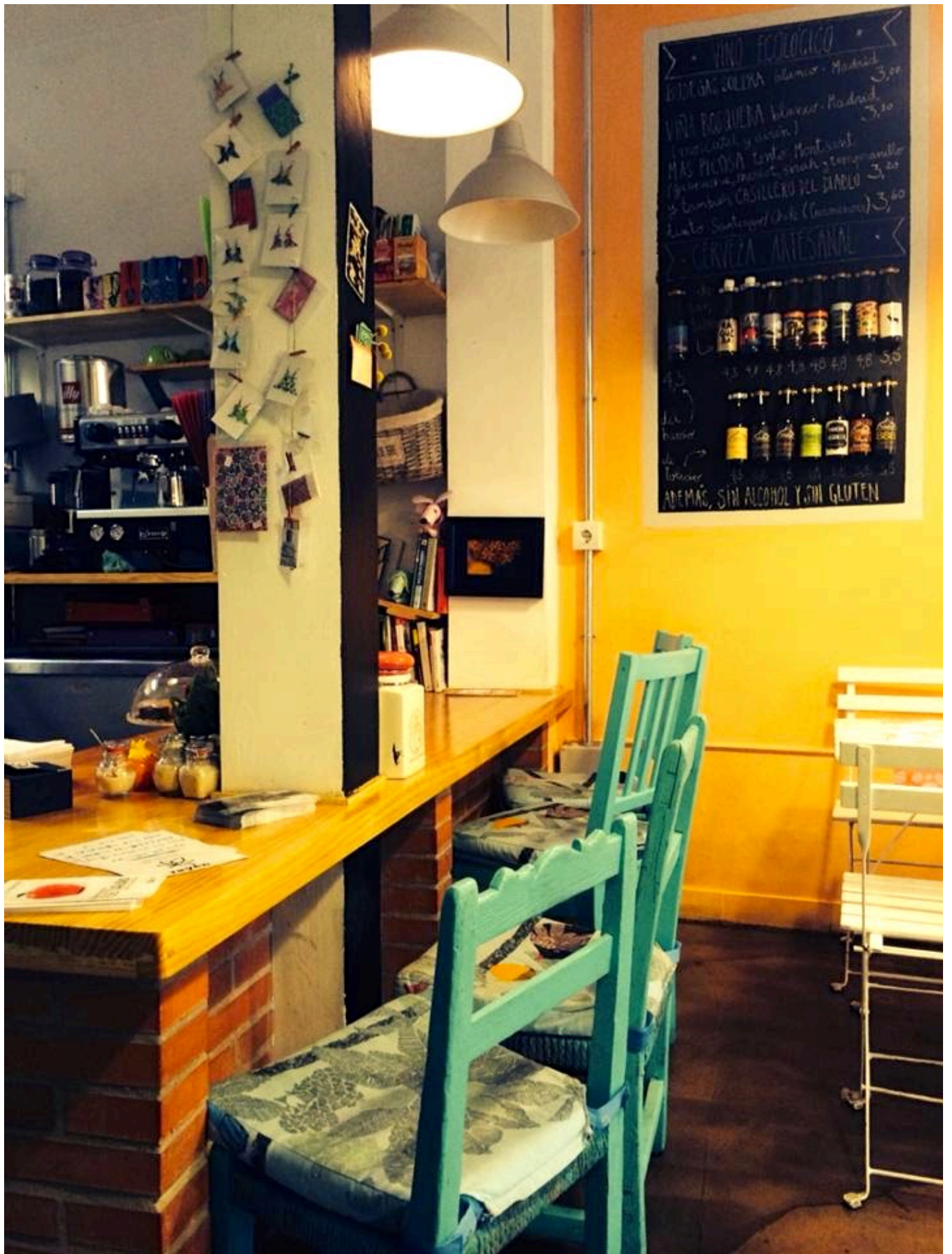
Also check out:

Best Mexican Joints in Madrid

Perdizione – a hidden hole-in-the-wall burrito bar in Lavapiés

Rayen Vegano – A Vegan Gem You Can't Miss Out On

This was the first vegan restaurant I've visited in Madrid and to this day it remains my favourite. Whilst the food is moderately priced, it's certainly unique. And you absolutely have to try the sharing plate of vegan cheeses!



[Rayen Vegano](#) can get surprisingly busy, so make sure you come during early lunch hours if you haven't made a reservation.

Their menu changes daily and they offer homemade bread, cakes and, of course, fresh food.



Even their food changes daily – I’ve ordered ‘Brunchito’ twice and both times the plating was completely different, which is something I’ve never seen before, but it’s welcoming. The waitress speaks English (you can even get the English version of their menu) and the restaurant is extremely passionate about vegan ethics – it shows even through their wifi password.



Everything is cute here, from the little decorative touches on each table to the 'Happy hour para perros' sign outside with a dog bowl full of water and their mission statement – “Change the world, become a vegan.”



And the best part? All vegan and vegetarian restaurants in the area support each other. In front of [Rayen Vegano](#) you'll be able to find a bunch of business cards from other restaurants and shops along with information about meditation and yoga classes.

Info:

[Facebook](#)

Address: Calle Lope de Vega 7

Phone: 675382072

By Mandy Lutman

Eating Our Way through Huertas with Devour Tours

On a recent chilly Saturday morning, James and I set out on one of the city's best ranked activities, [Devour Tours](#). I had never been on a food-inspired tour before, let alone in a city whose food culture I'm quite familiar with. Yet the chance to meet local honey and jam specialists, indulge in chocolate-soaked figs and hop from butchers' shops to tapas bars while learning historical tidbits did indeed change the way I look at the city I've called home for the past seven years.





While [Devours Tours](#) offers a bunch of different gastronomic routes throughout the city, we went on the one I consider the most enticing – [Huertas Neighborhood Food & Market Tour](#). The home of the tour was Barrio de las Letras, a central neighborhood named after the famous Spanish writers who once resided, scribbled and drank together there in the 1600's, such as Cervantes, Lope de Vega and Quevedo.

Those of us who live here today know the neighborhood as Huertas, coined after the bar-filled street that runs through it. Unlike many areas surrounding Sol or Plaza Mayor, this barrio upholds a charming and unchanged spirit thanks to its thriving delicatessens, tapas bars and traditional markets. Offerings of old and new spins on local cuisine await you as you walk through its gorgeous cobble-stoned streets. And Devour Tours will let you in on all its secrets.



Our tour guide, James Blick, was not only an expert on Madrid's history and food scene, but also made each and every person on the tour – which consisted of a young Scandinavian couple, two parents from Alabama visiting their daughter on her semester abroad and a group of middle-aged women from Ireland – feel comfortable by asking personal questions, encouraging conversation and creating a wonderful vibe throughout the three-and-a-half-hour event.

I also want to note that my husband, also James, doesn't like cheese (weird, I know) and had told the guys at Devour Tours beforehand. His eyes lit up as he saw a plate of cured meat awaiting him at the cheese tasting, showing how they clearly make it a point to accommodate different tastes and dietary needs.



James (the tour guide) also engaged in friendly chit chat with all the local market vendors and shop owners – something quintessentially Spanish, I must add. Wherever we stopped for a story and a bite, James knew the locals by name and the stories behind their businesses; those close-knit relationships make the tour truly delightful and offer insight into the city's day-to-day life. This kind of rapport and insider know-how can only be attained with a great deal of time and care.



Overall it was clear how much attention was put into designing this tour; every detail was planned to perfection, from the food portions and variety to the timing and storytelling. We had more than enough tapas to fill us all up, yet paced and served up just right so we never felt too full to keep us from walking or having a few more bites at the next stop!



Since I don't want to give too much away, I'll have to wrap things up here. The last thing I'll note is that I had walked by absolutely every place we visited on the tour on many occasions. Most of these places I had never stopped to think about nor even enter.

Now I know that as I stroll along the streets I often frequent such as Calle Huertas and Calle Leon, I'll see a different side of my adopted city. I'll also enjoy a handful of new eateries that are now going straight to the top of my list.



Madrid's best Italian restaurant is not in the likeliest of places.



So whether you're coming through Madrid for a weekend or already live here, let Devour Tours show you around for a few hours, especially if you're a foodie like me! Buen provecho!

To book a tour or read some of their tips on where to find the best food in the city, check out [Devour Tours website!](#)