Desserts

Madridleños are true connoisseurs of desserts--or as they say in Spanish, dulces. The variety of desserts to be had in Spain is astounding, and the selection differs by where you are and the time of the year. Torrejas, or bread soaked in sugar and sweet syrup, is a typical dessert during the Semana Santa (Holy Week) in the spring. During the winter holidays, many madridleños keep their pantries stocked with mazapan, or marzipan.

One dessert enjoyed in Spain year-round is chocolate con churros. Unlike the churros found in the U.S., Spanish churros are doughy and less sweet, and are usually served with a cup of dark chocolate.

Here are some of my favorite dessert spots in Madrid:

Chocolateria y Bomboneria Valor

Valor is your one-stop shop for all your dessert needs. In addition to serving typical Spanish dessert fare, Valor is the perfect place to visit when you’re missing good old American sweets such as chocolate pie and banana splits. They are reasonably priced and have large plates, making Valor the ideal place for a sugar-deprived student abroad.

San Gines

San Gines is at the tip of most everyone’s tongue when talking about churros. Located in the heart of Madrid, San Gines is featured in almost every tourism guide imaginable. It can often get crowded, but is open all night until 7 AM, so if you have a little time to spare, San Gines a picturesque place for a late night snack.
**Llao llao**

Need your froyo fix? Look no further than Llao llao. In city where ice cream is the frozen treat of choice, Llao llao frozen yogurt is a refreshing and healthy alternative to the many gelato option in Madrid.

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**Panaderías**

As any madrileño will tell you, bread is a staple of the Spanish diet. Most madrileños forgo buying bread at the grocery store and instead purchase their *pan* at *panaderías*, or bakeries, where they can get the best, freshest bread and the greatest variety.

While I was living in Madrid with my housemother, I would often run out in the evening and buy bread for our dinner. Here are some of my housemother’s tried and trusted panaderías:

**Uvepan**

Uvepan is a household name in Madrid, and with good reason. They start baking early in the morning, and if you’re lucky enough to live near one (as I was) you can smell the fresh *pan* from down the street. I would often duck into Uvepan on the way to class and buy an empanada to eat on the go.

**Artesano Valpan**

Valpan has locations all around Madrid, so you’re never too far from a good snack if you’re hungry and in a rush. They also serve sandwiches and sweets.

**Cosmen and Keiles**

If you take your bread seriously, this is the place to go. Cosmen and Keiles serve high quality bread and have an excellent variety, so if you’re willing to shell out a little extra money for a great deal of quality, Cosmen and Keiles is worth a visit.
Restaurants

Spanish cuisine is too delicious to resist, so it’s worth finding places where you can eat out and enjoy the rich, delicious food—without breaking the bank.

*Café Segre*

Café Segre is the go-to spot for any NYU student in Madrid. Conveniently located down the street from the NYU Madrid building, Café Segre is perfect when you need to grab lunch in between classes. They are very affordable, and offer a wide variety of *bocadillos* for any taste. The staff is used to NYU students, and is considerate and good-natured at our attempts to order food in Spanish (a nerve-wracking experience). They also serve coffee to go, which is almost unheard of among Spaniards, who prefer to sit down to eat and drink.

*Lord Chaste*

Lord Chaste is the place to go when you’re craving a quintessential staple of American cuisine—the hamburger. Not easily found in Madrid restaurants, the Lord Chaste hamburger is hearty and satisfying, and well-needed taste of home. They also have typical *bocadillos* and other Spanish food if you’re in the mood.

*Rodilla*

Rodilla is the madrileño equivalent of fast food (everyone has those days, admit it) and is great when you’re in a hurry. They serve sandwiches, sweets, and coffee—no fuss, grab and go.
Bars

Madridleño culture celebrates and embraces nightlife, and it’s not just an end-of-the-week affair. Any night in Madrid is bound to be one to remember. Here are some places to have a great time and make some memories.

**El Tigre**

El Tigre usually becomes everyone’s favorite bar, and with good reason. The environment is always lively and exciting, and the crowd is friendly and diverse. American students studying abroad from other universities also frequent El Tigre, which makes it a great place to make new friends from back home. El Tigre also serves free tapas with every drink, letting you have a night on the town without having to worry about facing your bank account the next morning.

**Docamar**

Docamar is known not only for their affordable drink selection, but for serving the best *patatas bravas* in town. Patatas bravas are potato slices drizzled in a spicy sauce, and give a whole new meaning to the phrase “bar food.” Patatas bravas can be a little hot for those who don’t have much experience with spicy foods; fortunately, Docamar’s drink menu is ready and waiting for you.

**El Chapandaz**

El Chapandaz is one of the most unique bars to visit in Madrid. Covered from floor to ceiling in stalagmites, stalagtites, and other rock formations, El Chapandaz takes “cave
bar” to an entirely new and literal level. El Chapandaz is well-known among tourists and locals alike, and the drinks are priced accordingly, but the novelty of this bar is well worth a visit or two.

Hanging Out

Madrid is a sprawling city, but there are always nooks and crannies that make great places to hang out with friends.

El Corte Inglés

For all those for whom “hanging out” consists of shopping with friends until your arms are full and your wallets are empty, look no further than El Corte Inglés, Madrid’s only American-inspired mall. Like the gigantic department stores in the United States, El Corte Inglés is filled with almost every type of store imaginable—books, clothing, technology, food, and even a salon. Shopaholics unite!

J and J Books and Coffee

This hole-in-the-wall cafe and bookstore is one of Madrid’s hidden treasures. Inside, you can find Spanish as well as English classic literature, as well as books on worldwide bestseller lists. What’s more, the owners are American and know how to make the specialty coffee drinks that you will soon be missing after a couple of weeks among Spaniards who drink their coffee black. J and J Books and Coffee is a great place to spend a quiet afternoon with a friend.

El Parque de Buen Retiro
El Retiro is to Madrid what Central Park is to New York City, and you will no doubt spend many an afternoon lazily lying on the lush green grass, or reading on one of the benches that line the many side-paths and walkways. One of the best parts of El Retiro is the large lake, where you can rent boats and row your way around the park with a friend.

**El Rastro**

El Rastro is a large open-air market that sells every type of good imaginable: scarves, clothing, hats, leather goods, and all manner of trinkets and souvenirs. El Rastro is only open on Sundays, so grab a friend and take care of all of your souvenir needs at very affordable prices.

**Malasaña**

If you're looking to enjoy a leisurely stroll with friends on a lazy weekend, walk down the cobbled, windy streets of Malasaña. In the daytime, Malasaña is one of the quieter areas of Madrid, with stone streets lined with quaint cafés and corner shops, and you can spend the day persusing interesting odds and ends. At night, however, Malasaña is famous for its rock concerts and music—the hipster capital of Madrid.

### Places to Visit

**Museo del Prado**

The Prado is the center of art and culture in Madrid, housing some of the most renowned examples of European art in the world. The museum is vast, and you can definitely spend an entire day walking these halls of history.

**Museo Reina Sofia**

If modern art is more your cup of tea, stop by the Reina Sofia, which houses many of the newest and most intriguing modern art installations in Madrid. This museum often conducts themed exhibits that are always changing, making the Reina Sofia certainly worth more one visit.

**El Palacio Real de Madrid**

Madrid is a very modern city, and sometimes it may hard to find that old European feel. Look no further than the Palacio Real, or the Royal Palace, to be transported back to a time of kings, queens, and royalty. The palace itself is majestic to behold, and is one of the most striking sites in Madrid.

**Plaza Mayor**
El Plaza Mayor is another dynamic remnant of Madrid's rich architectural history. The Plaza Mayor served as the political and cultural heart of Madrid for centuries, hosting soccer games, markets, and bullfights. Today, it is a major tourist site, surrounded by quaint shops and restaurants. Despite its popularity, El Plaza Mayor has retained its Old European charm.

**Gran Via**

Gran Via is to Madrid what Rodeo Drive is to Beverly Hills. Lined with every type of shop imaginable, Gran Via lights up like a jewel at night, beckoning awed shoppers to walk (and spend) on this bright, colorful strip.