

INTRODUCING MADRID



A monument to Felipe III keeps watch over life day and night on the Plaza Mayor (p61)

No city on earth is more alive than Madrid, a beguiling place whose sheer energy carries a simple message: this is one city which really knows how to live.

If Madrid were a woman, she'd be a cross between Penélope Cruz (beautiful and quintessentially Spanish) and Madonna (sassy, getting better with age). If it were a man, it would have to be Javier Bardem (not the world's most handsome but with that special, irresistible something). And if you could distil the city to its essence, it would be this: Madrid is a rebellious ex-convent schoolgirl who grew up, got sophisticated but never forgot how to have a good time.

Madrid is a city that becomes truly great once you get to know its unique barrios. There you'll discover that Madrid is an idea, a diverse city whose contradictory impulses are legion. Spain's capital is a wonderful city year-round, but you'll especially appreciate being here when the weather's warm and the kaleidoscopic variety of life Madrid-style courses through the streets or takes up residence in the city's plazas.

Madrid's calling cards are many: astonishing art galleries, relentless nightlife, its transformation into Spain's premier style city, an exceptional live music scene, a feast of fine restaurants and tapas bars, and a population that's mastered the art of living the good life. It's not that other cities don't have some of these things. It's just that Madrid has all of them in bucketloads.

CITY LIFE

It's often said that Madrid is the most Spanish of Spain's cities. Very few madrileños come from here originally, a vast number having moved here from elsewhere in Spain and other parts of the world. Consequently, this may just be Europe's most open and welcoming capital. If this can be summed up in a single phrase, it's the oft-heard, 'If you're in Madrid, you're from Madrid'. It's not that madrileños will knock you over with the warmth of their welcome. Rather, you'll find yourself in a bar or lost somewhere and in need of directions, and you'll suddenly be made to feel like one of their own. Just as suddenly, without knowing exactly when it happened, you'll realise that you never want to leave.

This is a city on the upswing and there's a real feeling on the streets that Madrid's time is now. Having spent a decade in the shadow of Barcelona, Madrid is rapidly reclaiming the title of Spain's most exciting city. All things Spanish may be taking the world by storm, but it's here in Madrid that you'll find the laboratory of Spanish innovation, whether in the world of fashion, food or, increasingly, architecture. Dare we say it, Madrid long ago became the new Barcelona.

Further changes to the city include a marked rise in the number of newly arrived madrileños. In 1999 immigrants amounted to just 2% of the city's population. That figure now stands closer to 15% – the country received as many immigrants in five years as France did in four decades. This massive demographic shift is unsettling for some, but Madrid is still defined by its tolerance.

There are challenges though. As Spain's economy slows, madrileños are casting an uncertain eye on the future. Salaries in Madrid may be higher than in the rest of Spain, but they're pitiful by European standards and prices are rising to match those elsewhere on the continent. With a large proportion of the city's population mortgaged to the hilt, the question of how to pay the bills is one of the few issues guaranteed to keep madrileños awake at night for reasons other than revelry. They also worry that the country's politicians are trying to turn Spaniards into, as they themselves say, 'good Europeans', whether it's stricter antismoking laws or the slow death of the siesta. 'Leave us alone to be who we are' is a typical madrileño response.

How Madrid – which has always been a window on the soul of the Spanish heartland – reacts to these challenges will most likely determine the direction of Spain's future.



Get a taste for the local speciality cocido a la madrileña (meat and chickpea stew) at Malacatín (p164)

GETTING STARTED

A trip to Madrid doesn't require too much advance planning – it's the sort of city where you can just dive in and make it up as you go along. Apart from booking your flight (p259) and accommodation (p228), just about everything else can be sorted out upon your arrival. Then again, the planning stage of your trip to Madrid can be part of the pleasure and any preparation you do beforehand will surely only enhance your experience of this intoxicating city.

You want to see Real Madrid play live in front of 80,000 screaming fans or you really want to see a bullfight to see what all of the fuss is about? No problem. Turn to p220 for information on how to book ahead. You've heard that Madrid's live music and jazz scenes are the best in southern Europe? Easy, simply turn to p207 and p206 respectively. Not quite sure which barrio (neighbourhood) in Madrid best suits your personality and where you'd like to be based? We've reduced the barrios to their essence in the boxed text on p67. In short, everything you could possibly want in Madrid is covered in this book. For a quick overview of some of the advance planning you may want to do, see the boxed text on p21.

When it comes to planning your budget Madrid is a destination that's well suited to all pockets with hotels and hostels spanning the full spectrum of traveller means (from terrific backpackers' hang-outs to luxurious palaces) and restaurants ranging from quick meals on the run to all that's innovative (and expensive) about nouvelle Spanish cuisine.

WHEN TO GO

There's no bad time to visit Madrid. Given that there's always something going on, the weather can be an important factor when planning your visit. In winter Madrid most often enjoys cool but crystal-clear days, although cold winds blow in off the Sierra del Guadarrama and cold snaps can be bitterly cold (snowfalls are rare but do happen). In July and August expect unremitting heat with occasional, apocalyptic storms. In August Madrid's frenetic energy takes a break and the city is uncharacteristically quiet. City streets empty, some restaurants close and offices run in neutral as locals head for the coast in search of a sea breeze or the hills in pursuit of high-altitude respite.

For more advice on Madrid's climate, turn to p268, while a full list of official public holidays in Madrid is covered in the Directory (p270).

If you have some flexibility about when you travel to Madrid, or you've a specialised interest, planning your trip around one of Madrid's many festivals (right) will be an important consideration.

If you're only here for a short stay, consider making it a weekend (ie Thursday to Sunday) when Madrid's nightclubs (p200) will have you dancing till dawn. If you're here for the major art galleries and museums, avoid Mondays when many are closed; the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (p82) is a notable exception, clos-

ing on Tuesdays. If El Rastro (p136), Europe's largest flea market, is your thing, you'll need to be in Madrid on a Sunday morning.

FESTIVALS

Madrileños love to party. Most often that means an impromptu night out. However, there are times when there's method in the madness, whether it's Carnival in the depths of February or the local fiestas in central Madrid's barrios in the stifling heat of August. What follows is a comprehensive guide to the major festivals, fairs and other important events in Madrid's calendar for which you may want to try to be in town. For a list of local fiestas in various Madrid barrios and surrounding towns, pick up a copy of the *Guía de Fiestas en la Comunidad de Madrid* (in Spanish) from the Comunidad de Madrid tourist office (p276).

January

AÑO NUEVO

1 Jan

Noche Vieja (New Year's Eve) is often celebrated at home with family, before people head out after midnight to paint the town red and all other sorts of colours. Many madrileños gather in Plaza de la Puerta del Sol to wait for the 12 *campanadas* (bell chimes) that signal Año Nuevo (New Year's Day), whereupon they try to stuff 12 grapes

(one for each chime) into their mouths and make a wish for the new year.

REYES

6 Jan

Epifanía (the Epiphany) is also known as the Día de los Reyes Magos (Three Kings' Day), or simply Reyes, perhaps the most important day on a madrileño kid's calendar. Although a December visit from Santa Claus has caught on, traditionally young Spaniards wait until Reyes. Three local politicians dress up as the three kings (three wise men) and lead a sweet-distributing frenzy of Cabalgata de Reyes, as horse-drawn carriages and floats make their way from the Parque del Buen Retiro to Plaza Mayor at 6pm on 5 January.

MADRID FUSION

www.madridfusion.net

All the Spanish chefs who have made it big on the national and international stage come to Madrid for this gastronomy summit. It's a cooking extravaganza where the masters of the Spanish kitchen show off their latest creations. Tickets can be difficult to come by, but your tastebuds will love you for it.

February

CARNAVAL

Carnaval spells several days of fancy-dress parades and merrymaking in many barrios across the Comunidad de Madrid, usually ending on the Tuesday, 47 days before Easter Sunday. Competitions for the best costume take place in the Círculo de Bellas Artes (p87). Carnival in Madrid is not quite as big as in other parts of Spain, such as Cádiz, but it can still be a wild time. Depending on when Easter falls, Carnival can spill over into March.

CAJA MADRID FLAMENCO FESTIVAL

A combination of big names and rising talents come together for five days of fine flamenco music in one of the city's theatres (often the Teatro Albéniz, but check). The dates are movable, but big names are guaranteed (in recent years including Enrique Morente and Pepe Habichuela).

PASARELA CIBELES

www.cibeles.ifema.es, in Spanish

The Pasarela Cibeles, staged in the Parque Ferial Juan Carlos I, is becoming an increas-

ingly important stop on the European fashion circuit, especially for spring and autumn collections; the latter take to the catwalk in September.

ARCO

www.arco.ifema.es, in Spanish

One of Europe's biggest celebrations of contemporary art, the Feria Internacional de Arte Contemporánea draws gallery reps and exhibitors from all over the world. It's staged around mid-February in the Parque Ferial Juan Carlos I exhibition centre and lasts for five days.

March & April

JUEVES SANTO

Jueves Santo (Good Thursday) kicks off the official holiday period known in Spain as *Semana Santa* (Holy Week). Local *cofradías* (lay fraternities) organise colourful and often solemn religious processions where hooded men and barefoot women dragging chains around their ankles and bearing crosses are among the parading figures. The main procession concludes by crossing the Plaza Mayor to the Basílica de Nuestra Señora del Buen Consejo. For many madrileños it also marks the start of a much-needed *punte* (bridge, or long weekend) and they take the chance to escape the city.

VIERNES SANTO

Viernes Santo (Good Friday) and Easter in general are celebrated with greater enthusiasm in some of the surrounding towns. Chinchón, Ávila and Toledo in particular, are known for their lavish Easter processions.

ARTEMANÍA

The Feria de Arte y Antigüedades sees antique dealers from all over Spain converge on the Palacio de Congresos y Exposiciones on Paseo de la Castellana. You can admire anything from Picasso lithographs to ancient pottery. The fair usually lasts for a week and takes place towards the end of April.

JAZZ ES PRIMAVERA

www.sanjuanevangalista.org

Three weeks of jazz in the leading jazz venues across the city. Tickets can be bought online through www.elcorteingles.es.

May

SUMA FLAMENCA

www.sumaflamenca.com/eng/index.asp

Another soul-filled flamenco festival that draws some of the biggest names in the genre. Again the Teatro Albéniz provides one of the stages, but the big names also appear in some of the better-known *tablaos* (small stage theatres; p204) and other venues across the city.

FIESTA DE LA COMUNIDAD DE MADRID

2 May

On El Dos de Mayo (2 May) in 1808 Napoleon's troops put down an uprising in Madrid, and commemorating this day has become an opportunity for much festivity. The day is celebrated with particular energy in the bars of Malasaña, so much so that in recent years, this fiesta has seen pitched battles between police and rowdy revellers in Malasaña, so keep your wits about you.

FIESTAS DE SAN ISIDRO LABRADOR

15 May

The merry month of May is nowhere merrier than in Madrid. In the wake of the Dos de Mayo festivities comes the city's big holiday on 15 May, when it celebrates the feast day of its patron saint, San Isidro (the 'peasant'). On this day the townsfolk gather in central Madrid to watch the colourful procession, which kicks off a week of cultural events across the city. Locals also traipse across the Puente de San Isidro to the saint's chapel and spend the day there picnicking; many are in traditional dress, and sip holy water and munch on *barquillos* (sweet pastries). Goya depicted this feast day by the river at the tail end of the 18th century. In those days you looked across green fields back to Madrid – that view is now largely obstructed by high-rises! The country's most prestigious *feria* (bullfighting season) also commences and continues for a month at the bullring Plaza de Toros Monumental de Las Ventas.

FESTIMAD

www.festimad.es, in Spanish

This is the biggest of Spain's year-round circuit of major music festivals. Bands from all over the country and beyond converge

on Móstoles or Leganés (on the MetroSur train network), just outside Madrid, for two days of indie music indulgence. Although usually held in May, Festimad sometimes spills over into (and even may begin in) June.

June

DÍA DE SAN JUAN

24 Jun

Celebrated in other parts of Spain with fireworks and considerable gusto, the eve of this holiday is a minor affair in Madrid. The action, such as it is, takes place in the Parque del Buen Retiro.

DÍA DEL ORGULLO DE GAYS, LESBIANAS Y TRANSEXUALES

www.orgullogay.org, in Spanish

The city's Gay and Lesbian Pride Festival and Parade take place on the last Saturday of the month. It's an international gig, with simultaneous parades taking place in cities across Europe, from Berlin to Paris. The inner-city barrio of Chueca is the place to be.

July

VERANOS DE LA VILLA

As if the traditional local fiestas weren't enough to amuse those madrileños forced to stay behind in the broiling city summer heat, the town authorities stage a series of cultural events, shows and exhibitions, known as 'Summers in the City'. Concerts, opera, dance and theatre are performed in the Centro Cultural de la Villa, in the Palacio del Conde Duque, the Jardines de Sabatini and outside the Templo de Debod, as well as other venues around town. The programme starts in July and runs to the end of August.

August

FIESTAS DE SAN LORENZO, SAN CAYETANO & LA VIRGEN DE LA PALOMA

These three local patron saints' festivities (which revolve around La Latina and Plaza de Lavapiés) keep the otherwise quiet central districts of Madrid busy during the first fortnight of August. An almighty din fills the hot night air as locals eat, drink, dance and generally let their hair down. Why not? It's too hot for sleep anyway.

LA ASUNCIÓN

15 Aug

Also known as the Fiesta de la Virgen de la Paloma, this is a solemn date in the city's religious calendar, celebrating the Assumption of the Virgin Mary.

September

LOCAL FIESTAS

Several local councils organise fiestas in the first and second weeks of September. They include Fuencarral-El Pardo, Vallecas, Arganzuela, Barajas, Moncloa-Aravaca and Usera. In the last week of the month you can check out the Fiesta de Otoño (Autumn Festival) in Chamartín. These are very local affairs and provide a rare insight into the barrio life of the average madrileño.

LA NOCHE EN BLANCO

'The White Night', first held in 2006 when it was a roaring success, is when Madrid (and many of its monuments, bars etc) stay open all night with a city-wide extravaganza of concerts and general revelry in 120 venues across the city. It's a participatory arts and culture festival and it rocks.

FIESTA DEL PCE

www.pce.es, in Spanish

In mid-September the Partido Comunista de España (PCE; Spanish Communist Party) holds its annual fundraiser in the Casa de Campo on the edge of the city. This mixed bag of regional-food pavilions, rock concerts and political soap-boxing lasts all weekend.

FIESTA DE OTOÑO

Since the early 1980s the city has thrown off the torpor of summer with the Autumn Festival, a busy calendar of musical and theatrical activity right up to the approach to Christmas. The nature and scope of the programme depends in no small measure on budget constraints.

November

DÍA DE LA VIRGEN DE LA ALMUDENA

9 Nov

Castizos (traditional madrileños) gather together in the Plaza Mayor to hear Mass on the feast day of the city's female patron saint.

top picks

UNUSUAL EVENTS

- **Fiesta de San Antón** The blessing of the pets takes place at the Iglesia de San Antón (Map pp110–11), home church of the patron saint of animals, on 17 January.
- **Jesús de Medinaceli** Up to 100,000 people crowd the Iglesia de Jesús de Medinaceli (Map pp84–5) on the first Friday of Lent to kiss the right foot of a wooden sculpture of Christ (*besapié*, kissing of the foot). Pilgrims make three wishes to Jesus, of which he is said to grant one.
- **Fiestas de San Isidro Labrador** (opposite) This is Madrid's biggest party, when *chulapos* (born-and-bred madrileños) dress in short jackets and berets, and *manolas* (the female version of a once-common Lavapiés first name) don their finest *mantón de Manila* (embroidered silk shawl). If you're lucky, they'll even dance the *choti* (a traditional working-class dance not unlike the polka).
- **Fiesta de San Antonio** Young women (traditionally seamstresses) flock to the Ermita de San Antonio de la Florida (p124) on 13 June to petition for a partner. Whether spiritually inclined or not, the attitude seems to be 'why chance it?'
- **Fiesta de Vallecas** The mischievous Brotherhood of Sailors in the working-class barrio of Vallecas stages a 'naval battle', in other words a massive water fight, in July to demand that the government provide Madrid with a seaport.

EMOCIONA JAZZ

Madrid loves its jazz too much to be confined to just one festival (Jazz es Primavera in spring is the other one). Groups from far and wide converge on the capital for a series of concerts in venues across town.

December

FESTIVAL DE GOSPEL & NEGRO SPIRITUALS

In the week running up to Christmas Madrid is treated to a feast of jazz, blues and gospel, usually in the Centro Cultural de la Villa.

NAVIDAD

25 Dec

Navidad (Christmas) is a fairly quiet family time, with the main meal being served on Nochebuena (Christmas Eve). Elaborate

nativity scenes are set up in churches around the city and an exhibition of them is held in Plaza Mayor.

COSTS & MONEY

First, the bad news. Not so long ago, Madrid was the second-cheapest capital city in Europe. But soaring house prices and a significant rise in prices across the board since Spain adopted the euro in 2002 have made Madrid not only the most expensive city in Spain, but the 22nd most expensive city in the world in which to live.

Despite such a gloomy outlook Madrid remains generally cheaper for travellers than many major world capitals. If you're coming from Paris, London or New York, you may find most things cheaper than back home. Unlike elsewhere in cities of Madrid's stature, it's also still possible to find semi-luxurious boutique hotels for around €100 a double in the city centre. At the budget end of the market, dormitory beds shouldn't cost more than €20 and nice *hostales* (hostels) with private bathroom and TV rarely cost more than €60, sometimes even less. Eating out in a nice, midrange restaurant shouldn't cost much more than about €30 per person, although you can do it for a lot less, especially if you partake in the weekday lunchtime *menú del día* (see the boxed text, p159), a fixed-price, three-course set lunch that costs around €10. The *menú del día* is a great way to experience a more expensive restaurant without getting stung for à la carte prices. Transport (metro, city buses and even taxis) is still absurdly cheap and, if you time your visit well, it's possible to visit some mu-

HOW MUCH?

- El País newspaper €1
- Souvenir T-shirt €10 to €25
- Admission to the Prado €6
- 1L of mineral water in supermarket €0.50
- 10-trip metro ticket €6.70
- Cañā (small glass of beer) of Mahou €1.50 to €2.50
- Tapa €2.50 to €4.50
- Admission to dance clubs €10 to €20
- Normal letter (up to 20g) within Europe €1.07
- Cocktail €6.50 to €12

seums at no cost (see boxed text on p104 for more information), including the must-see Museo del Prado and the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía.

INTERNET RESOURCES

A Tapear (www.atapear.com, in Spanish) Customer reviews and rankings of tapas bars in Madrid (370 at last count) and other Spanish cities under its 'Guía de Bares de Tapas'.

EsMadrid.com (www.esmadrid.com) The Ayuntamiento's recently revamped website is super-sexy, although it can be a little tough to navigate (scroll down and try the 'Site Map' if you're having trouble). Lots of info on upcoming events.

In Madrid (www.in-madrid.com) A direct line to Madrid's expat community with upcoming events, nightlife reviews, articles, a forum, classifieds and some useful practical information.

La Netro (<http://madrid.lanetro.com>, in Spanish) Allows you to search for bars, restaurants, nightclubs and just about any kind of Madrid business and most have customer reviews. Its TOP La Netro section lists top tens across a range of categories as voted by users.

Le Cool (www.lecool.com) Weekly updates on upcoming events in Madrid with an emphasis on the alternative, offbeat and avant-garde. The name is pretty accurate.

Mad About Madrid (www.madaboutmadrid.com) Reasonably comprehensive site with blogs, history and advice on exploring the city.

Multi Madrid (www.multimadrid.com) Traveller-driven website with chat forums, classifieds and loads of practical information.

Turismo Madrid (www.turismomadrid.es) Portal of the regional Comunidad de Madrid tourist office that's especially good for areas outside the city but still within the Comunidad de Madrid.

SUSTAINABLE MADRID

Travelling to Madrid by train allows you to see so much more as well as minimising your impact upon the environment. While it used to take days to get to Madrid by train, the expansion of Spain's high-speed train system has drastically reduced travelling time. For more information, see p264. If you're coming from the UK, another option is to travel by boat (see p262) from Plymouth to Santander or from Portsmouth to Bilbao; from both Bilbao and Santander there are regular train services to Madrid.

ADVANCE PLANNING

To find out what's going to be happening in Madrid while you're there, start perusing the local Spanish-language websites that give a rundown of upcoming concerts, exhibitions and other events. The better ones include Guía del Ocio (www.guiadelocio.com), La Netro (<http://madrid.lanetro.com>) and Salir Urban (www.salirsalir.com). If Spanish is a road too far, try the Madrid page of www.whatsonwhen.com, In Madrid (www.in-madrid.com) or the Madrid town hall's excellent multilingual website (www.esmadrid.com). If you find something you like, turn to the boxed text on p212 of this guide to see if you can book your concert or theatre performance online.

Although it's unlikely you'll be able to book for the smaller venues, La Noche En Vivo (www.lanocheenvivo.com, in Spanish) and La Carega (www.lacarega.com, in Spanish) give a good rundown of where and when to turn up in time for live music.

For theatre performances, Real Madrid football games and bullfighting tickets, one recommended agency is Localidades Galicia (www.eol.es/lgalicia/). Tickets for football matches go on sale a week before the matches and we recommend trying to line up your tickets before arriving in town, especially if there's a big match on.

Most restaurants don't require bookings more than a day or two in advance during the week, but you should always book as early as possible for weekends – contact details for restaurants we recommend are found in the Eating chapter, which begins on p156. You should always book for the more expensive temples of gastronomy as soon as you know your travel dates. This is especially the case for Santceloni (p180), El Alborque (p162), Sergi Arola Gastro (p178), Jockey (p178) and Zalacaín (p180).

It's supremely easy to keep your environmental credentials intact while travelling within Madrid, as much of the city is manageable on foot, and walking is a remarkably pleasant way

to discover its unique barrios. Those areas not within walking distance are easily accessible on the city's excellent underground metro network (p263).

THE AUTHOR

Anthony Ham



After years of wandering the world Anthony has finally found his spiritual home. In 2001 he fell irretrievably in love with Madrid on his first visit to the city. Less than a year later he arrived here on a one-way ticket,

with not a word of Spanish and not knowing a single person in the city. Now Anthony speaks Spanish with a Madrid accent, is married to Marina, a madrileña, and, together with their baby daughter, Carlota, they live overlooking their favourite plaza in the city. He adores just about everything about his adopted home (with the possible exception of *cocido a la madrileña* – a meat and chickpea stew that madrileños drool over – but he’s working on it) and sometimes has to pinch himself to believe just how wonderfully life has turned out. When he’s not writing for Lonely Planet, Anthony is the Madrid stringer for Melbourne’s *Age* newspaper, and writes about and photographs Madrid, Africa and the Middle East for newspapers and magazines around the world.

ANTHONY’S TOP MADRID DAY

Madrid is not a city that gets up early and that suits me perfectly. I’d start with breakfast on Plaza de Olavide in Chamberí while I make my plans for the day. One of the things I love most about Madrid is that there’s a different barrio to explore depending on my mood. My best possible day begins with browsing the shops in the lanes of Malasaña, then a quick metro trip to La Latina for tapas, especially those at Almendro 13, Taberna Txacoli, Corazon Loco or the *tortilla de patatas* (potato tortilla) at Juanalaloca. After resting in one of the glorious plazas in the city centre or a stroll around the Parque del Buen Retiro (best on a Sunday), I’d get my dose of high culture at the Paseo del Prado. Ignoring my body’s demand for a siesta I’d head to Huertas for some live flamenco (Cardamomo is great), before cradling a *mojito* (rum with sugar and lashings of mint) in Café Belén in Chueca. I love the live music at Zanzibar, or any of the venues west of the Paseo de los Recoletos for that matter. After a late dinner along Calle de Manuela Malasaña, I’d be very happy to find myself nursing a *caipirinha* (Brazilian cocktail made with *cacheca*, sugar, lime and ice) in Conde Duque at Kabokla, before the city’s all-night clubs erase all thoughts of tomorrow.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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