

GAY & LESBIAN MADRID

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GAY & LESBIAN MADRID

Madrid has always been one of Europe's most gay-friendly cities. The city's gay community is credited with reinvigorating the once down-at-heel inner-city barrio of Chueca, where Madrid didn't just come out of the closet, it ripped the doors off in the process. Today the barrio is one of Madrid's most vibrant and it's very much the heart and soul of gay Madrid. Cafes, bars and nightclubs clearly oriented to a gay clientele abound, and new book, video and adult-toy shops aimed at gay people continue to spring up in and around Chueca, as well as gay-friendly hostels. But there's nothing ghetto-like about Chueca. Its extravagantly gay-and-lesbian personality is anything but exclusive and the crowd is almost always mixed gay-straight. As gay and lesbian residents like to say, Chueca isn't gay-friendly, it's hetero-friendly.

It's a great time to be gay in Madrid. Under laws passed by the Spanish Congress in June 2005, same-sex marriages now enjoy the same legal protection as those between heterosexual partners. At the time there was a conservative backlash, but opinion polls showed that the reforms were supported by more than two-thirds of Spaniards. The best time of all to be in town if you're gay or lesbian is around the last Saturday in June for Madrid's gay and lesbian pride march (p19).

On the pages that follow, we have covered the best shopping, nightlife and sleeping options. For eating choices, just about every restaurant in Chueca is a gay meeting place of sorts – see p165 for full listings.

SHOPPING

LIBRERÍA BERKANA Map p110 Bookshop

☎ 91 522 55 99; www.libreriaberkana.com, in Spanish; Calle de Hortaleza 64; ☎ 10.30am-9pm Mon-Fri, 11.30am-9pm Sat, noon-2pm & 5-9pm Sun; M Chueca

One of the most important gay and lesbian bookshops in Madrid, Librería Berkana stocks gay books, movies, magazines, music, clothing, and a host of free magazines for nightlife and other gay-focused activities in Madrid and around Spain; this is the place to pick up your copy of *Shanguide*, *Shangay Express* and *MENSual* (see p218).

A DIFFERENT LIFE Map p110 Sex Shop

☎ 91 532 96 52; www.adifferentlife.es, in Spanish; Calle de Pelayo 30; ☎ 11am-10pm Mon-Fri, 11am-midnight Sat, 11am-3pm & 5-10pm Sun; M Chueca
Yes, A Different Life has the usual sex-shop products – DVDs, magazines and erotic gifts – but it also does a line in gay novels and DVDs focusing on gay themes or with predominantly gay characters. As such, it's somewhat less in-your-face than other shops.

NIGHTLIFE

Chueca lives for the night and the possibilities are endless. The action fans out from the Plaza de Chueca (Map p110), and this is where

you should get your bearings and linger at the outdoor tables as you plan your night. Apart from the Chueca landmarks that follow, other good watering holes with a partly gay or lesbian vibe include Antigua Casa Ángel Sierra (p193) and Diurno (p191).

CAFES & FIRST DRINKS

Any bar in Chueca (and arguably most bars in Madrid whatever the barrio) can be considered reliably gay-friendly. One with a particularly strong following among the gay community is the sleek Splash Óscar (p193), with views out over the rooftops.

B AIRES CAFÉ Map p110 Cafe-Bar

☎ 91 532 98 79; Calle de Gravina 4; ☎ 3pm-1am Sun-Wed, to 2am Thu & Fri, to 2.30am Sat; M Chueca
This oasis of sophistication in anything-goes Chueca is perfect for a quiet conversation, and most gays and lesbians passing through Chueca spend some time here, either resting from nights of partying, taking some down time in preparation for the night ahead or simply as an end in itself.

CAFÉ ACUARELA Map p110 Cafe-Bar

☎ 91 522 21 43; Calle de Gravina 10; ☎ 11pm-2am Sun-Thu, 11pm-3am Fri & Sat; M Chueca
A few steps up the hill from Plaza de Chueca and long a centrepiece of gay

Madrid – a huge statue of a nude male angel guards the doorway – this is an agreeable, dimly lit salon decorated with, among other things, religious icons! It's ideal for quiet conversation and catching the weekend buzz as people plan their forays into the more clamorous clubs in the vicinity.

Café LA TROJE Map p110 Cafe-Bar

☎ 91 531 05 35; Calle de Pelayo 26; ☎ 2pm-2am; **M** Chueca

A gay reference point for a quiet drink in Chueca, this lovely cafe with ochre shades and candles on the tables is a more sedate alternative to the nonstop action elsewhere in Chueca. Apart from coffee and alcohol, it serves more than 50 different types of tea.

MAMÁ INÉS Map p110 Cafe-Bar

☎ 91 523 23 33; Calle de Hortaleza 22; ☎ 10am-2am Sun-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat; **M** Gran Vía or Chueca

A gay meeting place with its low lights and low music, this cafe-bar is never sleazy and has a laid-back ambience by day and a romantic air by night. You can get breakfast, yummy pastries and all the gossip on where that night's hot spot will be. There's a steady stream of people coming and going throughout the day and they turn the lights down low and crank up the music as evening turns into night.

UNTIL 3AM

In addition to the places listed here, **Polyester** (p195) is another good choice.

CLUB 54 STUDIO Map p110 Nightclub

www.studio54madrid.com, in Spanish; Calle de Barbieri 7; ☎ 11.30pm-3.30am Thu-Sat; **M** Chueca
Modelled on the famous New York club Studio 54, this nightclub draws a predominantly gay crowd, but its target market (and door policy) is more upmarket than many in the barrio. Unlike other Madrid nightclubs where paid dancers up on stage try to get things moving, here they let the punters set the pace.

LIQUID MADRID Map p110 Nightclub

www.liquid.es; Calle de Barbieri 7; ☎ 9am-3am Mon-Thu, 9am-3.30am Fri & Sat; **M** Chueca
An essential stop on any gay itinerary through Chueca, Liquid is a little overwhelming with its multiple video screens and endless movement of people (mostly men, mostly

gay, but it's friendly and inclusive whatever your gender or orientation).

AFTER 3AM

A number of Madrid's biggest and best nightclubs have nights aimed squarely at the gay community. For example, Saturday ('Royal') night at Cool (p180) is one of the biggest events on Madrid's weekly gay calendar, as is Saturday ('Sunflowers') night at Macumba (p199). The same could also be said of every night at Why Not? (p197).

SALA BASH/OHM Map pp108-9 Nightclub

Sala Bash; ☎ 91 531 01 32; Plaza del Callao 4; ☎ midnight-6am Fri & Sat; **M** Callao

The DJs who get you waving your hands in the air like you just don't care have made this club, and its sessions that go by the name of 'Ohm', arguably the No 1 nightspot for Madrid's gay community. The music never strays far from techno-house. Saturdays are slightly more mixed, but it remains a gay icon.

BLACK & WHITE Map p110 Nightclub

☎ 91 531 11 41; www.discoblack-white.net; Calle de la Libertad 34; ☎ 10pm-5.30am Sun-Thu, 10pm-6am Fri & Sat; **M** Chueca

People still talk about the opening party of Black & White way back in 1982 and ever since, it has been a pioneer of Chueca's gay nights. This place is extravagantly gay with drag acts, male strippers (every night except Saturday) and a refreshingly no-holds-barred approach to life. From Wednesday to Saturday, resident DJs Kike Medina and Daniel Colombo prize younger punters out of their embraces and onto the lower dance floor for the Rainbow Party Zone.

SLEEPING

Most Madrid hotels won't bat an eyelid if you're a same-sex couple asking for a double bed. In addition to the budget options listed below, two places that go out of their way to make gay couples welcome are Me by Melía (p224) and Hotel Óscar (p228). For a guide to price symbols, see p221.

ATRIUM Map pp108-9 Hostel €

☎ 91 523 47 78; www.atriummadrid.es; 3rd fl, Calle de Valverde 3; s/d/tr from €40/60/90; **M** Gran Vía

Playfully bright colours dominate the rooms at this lovely little *hostal* (hostel) which receives an almost exclusively gay clientele. Some of the single rooms are a little small, but it's a five-minute walk from most of the Chueca action and rooms have air-con, a safe and free internet.

CASA CHUECA Map p110 Hostel €

☎ 91 523 81 27; www.casachueca.com; 2nd fl, Calle de San Bartolomé 4; s/d/tr from €40/55/75; Gran Vía

If you don't mind lugging your suitcase up to the 2nd floor, Casa Chueca is outstanding. The rooms are modern, colourful and a cut above your average *hostal*; in keeping with the barrio that it calls home, Casa Chueca places a premium on style. Add casual, friendly service and you'd be hard pressed to find a better price-to-quality ratio anywhere in central Madrid.

CHUECA PENSIÓN Map p110 Hostel €

☎ 91 523 14 73; www.chuecapension.com; 2nd fl, Calle de Gravina 4; s/d/tr €40/60/85; Gran Vía

There are few better Chueca bases than this lovely *pensión*. Features include hardwood floors, free wi-fi and large rooms, while the bright bedspreads add a splash of colour lacking in many *hostales* in this price range. Best of all, Beni Uriá, the owner, is a welcoming host. There's no lift (elevator).

HOSTAL LA ZONA Map pp108-9 Hostel €

☎ 91 521 99 04; www.hostallazona.com; 1st fl, Calle de Valverde 7; s/d/tr from €50/60/85; Gran Vía

Catering primarily to a gay clientele, the stylish Hostal La Zona has exposed brickwork, subtle colour shades and wooden pillars. We like a place where a sleep-in is encouraged – breakfast is served from 9am to noon, which is exactly the understanding Madrid's nightlife merits. There's free internet and wi-fi, Arnaldo and Vincent are friendly hosts, and every room has air-con and heating.

FURTHER RESOURCES MAGAZINES

A few informative free magazines are in circulation in gay bookshops (especially Librería

Berkana (p216), and gay-friendly bars. One is the biweekly *Shanguide*, which is jammed with listings (including saunas and hardcore clubs) and contact ads. Its companion publication *Shangay Express* is better for articles, with a handful of listings and ads. The *Mapa Gaya de Madrid* lists gay bars, clubs and saunas. Also useful is the *Punto Guía de España para Gays y Lesbianas*, a guide for gay and gay-friendly bars, restaurants, hotels and shops around the country. The monthly *MENSual* costs €2.20 at newsstands; there's a web version at www.mensual.com.

WEBSITES

You can also check out the following sites: **Chueca.com** (www.chueca.com, in Spanish) Forums, news and reviews.

Gay Madrid 4 U (www.gaymadrid4u.com) A good overview of gay bars and nightclubs.

Night Tours.com (www.nighttours.com/madrid/) A reasonably good guide to gay nightlife and other attractions in Madrid.

Orgullo Gay (www.orgullogay.org, in Spanish, www.gaypridemadrid.com) Website for the gay and lesbian pride march and links to gay organisations across the country.

Shangay (www.shangay.com, in Spanish) Good for upcoming events, music and other reviews.

ORGANISATIONS

The **Colectivo de Gais y Lesbianas de Madrid** (Cogam; Map pp108-9; ☎ 91 522 45 17; www.cogam.es; Calle de la Puebla 9; Callao or Gran Vía) offers activities, has an info office and social centre, and runs an **information line** (☎ 91 523 00 70; ☎ 5-9pm Mon-Fri).

The Comunidad de Madrid's **Programa de Información y Atención a Homosexuales y Transexuales** (Map pp84-5; ☎ 91 701 07 88; 5th fl, Calle de Alcalá 22; ☎ 9am-9pm mid-Sep–mid-Jun, 8am-3pm Mon-Fri mid-Jun–mid-Sep; Sol or Sevilla) also has a toll-free **information line** (☎ 900 720 569).

The **Federación Estatal de Lesbianas, Gays, Transexuales & Bisexuales** (Felgt; Map p110; ☎ 91 360 46 05; www.felgt.org; 1st fl, Calle de las Infantas 40; Chueca) is a national advocacy group that played a leading role in lobbying for the legalisation of gay marriages.

Fundación Triángulo (Map pp116-17; ☎ 91 593 05 40; www.fundaciontriangulo.es; 1st fl, Calle de Melendez Valdés 52; Iglesia) is another source of information on gay issues; it has a separate information line, **Información LesGai** (☎ 91 44 66 394).

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