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 was a woman, she’d be a cross between Penélope Cruz and Madonna. If it was a man, it would have to be Javier Bardem. 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.

This is a city with few world-renowned landmarks and one that creeps up on you rather than necessarily overwhelming you at first. But in no time at all it is singing irresistibly in your ear. Its secret lies in its unique barrios where you’ll discover that Madrid is an idea, a diverse place whose contradictory impulses are legion. Spain’s capital is a wonderful year-round destination, 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 parks and 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.
MADRID LIFE

It’s often said that Madrid is the most Spanish of Spain’s cities. It’s also one of the country’s most open and tolerant. 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. 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 it be fashion, food or architecture. Dare we say it, Madrid long ago became the new Barcelona.

There are challenges though. A massive demographic shift in the past decade has seen immigrants from around the world arrive in unprecedented numbers. The global economic crisis has also shaken Spanish society to its core and the question of how to pay the bills is one of 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 ‘good Europeans’, whether it’s strict antismoking laws or the slow death of the siesta. ‘Leave us alone to be who we are’ is a typical 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. In the meantime, there is one simple mantra that unites madrileños wherever they come from: they remain convinced that they live in the greatest city on earth.

‘Madrid has always been a window on the soul of the Spanish heartland’
Anthony Ham

After years of wandering the world, Anthony has finally found his spiritual home. In 2001, Anthony fell irretrievably in love with Madrid on his first visit to the city. Less than a year later, he arrived 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 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, 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 writes about and photographs Spain, 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 I’m no exception. I’d start the day with breakfast on Plaza de Olavide (p118) in Chamberí while I plan my day. One of the things I love most about Madrid is that there’s a different barrio to explore depending on my mood. If I’ve shopping in mind, it has to be Malasaña (p138) or Salamanca (p136). If I need a dose of high culture, the Paseo del Prado (p135) or the centre has enough to occupy weeks of my time. If I fancy a tapas crawl, La Latina (p152) is my destination, while for restaurants, Malasaña (p161), Chueca (p165) or Huertas (p155) are brilliant, with even more places to stay out all night afterwards. Loving live music as I do, I could also take my pick of any barrio west of the Paseo de los Recoletos and Paseo del Prado.

My best possible day begins by wandering through the lanes of Malasaña, down through the centre and to La Latina for tapas, especially along Calle de la Cava Baja and the tortilla de patatas at Juana La Loca (p154). After resting in Plaza Mayor (p61) or Plaza de Santa Ana (p86), I’d head down to the Museo del Prado (p90). Nearby, I can never resist the Parque del Buen Retiro (p97), or the tapas at Estado Puro (p159). I should be thinking about a siesta, but instead I’d dive into the bars of Huertas (especially the live jazz or flamenco), before cradling a mojito in Café Belén (p192) in Chueca or at Delic (p182) on Plaza de la Paja in La Latina for some down time. A metro ride takes me to a late dinner along Calle de Manuela Malasaña. I’m always happy to find myself nursing a caipirinha in Conde Duque at Kabokla (p195), before the all-night nightclubs of downtown erase all thoughts of tomorrow.
A trip to Madrid doesn’t require much advance planning – it’s the type of city where you can just dive in and make it up as you go along. Apart from booking your flight (p250) and accommodation (p220), 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 only enhance your experience of the 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 p211 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 p175 and p176 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 p65. 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.

GETTING STARTED

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 unrelenting 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 grind almost to a halt 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 p257, while a list of all the official public holidays in Madrid is covered on p259.

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) may well be an important consideration.

If you’re only here for a short stay, consider making it a weekend (Thursday to Sunday) when Madrid’s nightclubs (p177) will have you dancing until dawn. If you’re here for the major art galleries and museums, avoid Mondays when many are closed; the Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (p82) is a notable exception, closing on Tuesdays. If El Rastro (p74), 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 Carnaval 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 annual Guía de Fiestas en la Comunidad de Madrid (in Spanish) from the Comunidad de Madrid tourist office (p265).

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 carouse and to start the new year as they mean to continue. 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**

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 waited 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](http://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**

**CARNIVAL**

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). Carnaval in Madrid is not quite as big as in other parts of Spain, such as Cádiz in Andalucía, but it can still be a wild time. Depending on when Easter falls, Carnaval can spill over into March.

**FESTIVAL FLAMENCO CAJA MADRID**

A combination of big names and rising talents come together for five days of fine flamenco music in one of the city’s theatres, usually the Teatro Circo Price (p204). The dates are movable, but big names are guaranteed (in recent years including Enrique Morente, Carmen Linares and Diego El Cigala). The main festival often spills over into discussions and occasional performances at La Casa Encendida (p80).

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**top picks**

**UNUSUAL EVENTS**

- **Fiesta de San Antón** The blessing of the pets takes place at the Iglesia de San Antón, 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 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 (p18)** 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 on 13 June to petition for a partner. Whether spiritually inclined or not, the attitude seems to be ‘why chance it?’ The tradition holds that a seamstress drops 13 pins into the baptismal font and dips her hand in – the number of pins that stick to her hand corresponds to the number of suitors she will have in the year ahead.
- **Batalla Naval 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, on the second or third Sunday in July to demand that the government provide Madrid with a seaport.

**PASARELA CIBELES**

[www.cibeles.ifema.es](http://www.cibeles.ifema.es), in Spanish

The Pasarela Cibeles, staged in the Parque Ferial Juan Carlos I, between the airport and the city centre, is becoming an increasingly 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](http://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**

dueñas (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 Plaza Mayor to the Basílica de Nuestra Señora del Buen Consejo. For many madrileños it also marks the start of a much-needed puente (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 March, but could spill into April.

**LA NOCHE DE LOS TEATROS**

On ‘The Night of the Theatres’, Madrid’s streets become the stage for all manner of performances, with a focus on comedy and children’s plays. It usually takes place on the last Saturday of March, and lasts from 5pm to midnight. Check www.esmadrid.com for details.

**JAZZ ES PRIMAVERA**

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

### May & June

**FIESTA DE LA COMUNIDAD DE MADRID**

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**

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 traipe 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.

**MADRID OPEN**

Formerly known as the Madrid Masters, this is Spain’s most important tennis tournament and draws most of the world’s big names. It usually takes place in the first half of the month.

**FESTIMAD**

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 April or May, Festimad
sometimes spills over into (and may even begin in) June.

**FIESTA DE OTOÑO EN PRIMAVERA**
This busy calendar of musical and theatrical activity was held in autumn (*otoño*, hence the name) since the 1980s, but in 2010 moved to spring, beginning in May and continuing into June. The name is likely to change to the Festival de Primavera (Spring Festival) in the future. Check www.esmadrid.com for details.

**FERIA DEL LIBRO**
http://www.ferialibromadrid.com
The northeastern corner of the Parque del Buen Retiro (p97) is taken over by the Madrid Book Fair, with hundreds of stalls set up by bookshops and publishing houses from Madrid and elsewhere in Spain. It draws massive crowds with book signings and discounts of around 10%. For more information, see the boxed text, p36.

**SUMA FLAMENCA**
Another soul-filled flamenco festival that draws some of the biggest names in the genre. The Teatros del Canal provides the main stage, but the big names may also appear in some of the better-known *tablao* (restaurants where flamenco is performed; p175), such as Casa Patas, Las Tablas and other venues across the city. After taking place in May for much of its history, in 2010 it ran over two weeks in 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**
http://www.orgullogay.org, in Spanish, or http://www.madridgaypride.com
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 occurring in cities across Europe, from Berlin to Paris. The extravagant floats begin their journey in Plaza de la Independencia, pass through Plaza de la Cibeles, head along Gran Vía before finishing in Plaza de España. At all other times, Chueca is the place to be.

**ROCK IN RIO MADRID**
http://www.rockinriomadrid.es
The Madrid version of one of the world’s foremost rock and electronica music festivals doesn’t happen every year, but it did so in 2008 and 2010 to great success and certainly will again.

**July**

**VERANOS DE LA VILLA**
http://www.esmadrid.com/veranosdelavilla
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 Plaza de España, the Antiguo Cuartel del Conde Duque, the Jardines de Sabatini and outside the Templo de Debod, as well as other venues around town. The program 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 to 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,
LonelyPlanet.com

GETTING STARTED

COSTS & MONEY

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

http://lanocheenblanco.esmadrid.com/lanocheenblanco

‘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.

November

DÍA DE LA VIRGEN DE LA ALMUDENA 9 Nov

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

FESTIVAL JAZZ MADRID

www.esmadrid.com/festivaljazzmadrid

Madrid loves its jazz too much to be confined to just one festival (Jazz es Primavera in spring is the other one). This one is arguably the more prestigious and groups from far and wide converge on the capital for a series of concerts in venues across town. Most of the headline acts take to the stage of Teatro Fernán Gómez (p205).

December

FESTIVAL DE GOSPEL & NEGRO SPIRITUALS

www.obrasocialcajamadrid.es

In the week running up to Christmas Madrid is treated to a feast of jazz, blues and gospel, usually in the Teatro Fernán Gómez (p205) and La Casa Encendida (p80).

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, which is otherwise taken over by a somewhat tacky, but wildly popular, Christmas market.

COSTS & MONEY

Despite significant price rises in recent years (Madrid is the second-most-expensive city in Spain, after Barcelona, and the 26th-most-expensive city in the world in which to live) Madrid remains generally cheaper for travellers than many major world capitals. Unlike elsewhere in cities of Madrid’s stature, it’s also still possible to find semiluxurious 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, mid-range restaurant shouldn’t cost much more than about €35 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, p150), 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

HOW MUCH?

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<tr>
<td>El País newspaper</td>
<td>€1.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Souvenir T-shirt</td>
<td>€10 to €20</td>
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<td>Admission to the Prado</td>
<td>€8</td>
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<td>1L of mineral water in supermarket</td>
<td>€0.60</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-trip metro ticket</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caña (small glass of beer) of Mahou</td>
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<td>Tapa</td>
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buses and even taxis) is still absurdly cheap and, if you time your visit well, it’s possible to visit some museums at no cost (see the boxed text, p123, for more information), including the must-see Museo del Prado and the Centro de Arte Reina Sofia.

INTERNET RESOURCES

A Tapear (www.atapear.com, in Spanish) Customer reviews and rankings of tapas bars in Madrid (407 at the last count) and other Spanish cities under its ‘Guía de Bares de Tapas’.

De Tapas por Madrid (www.tapaspormadrid.com, in Spanish) Occasional tapas routes (where you collect stamps in a booklet) offering discounted prices and signature tapas dishes from a range of bars.

EsMadrid.com (www.esmadrid.com) The Ayuntamiento’s 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. It also has a section ‘Donde comer en Madrid’, which gives an overview of emblematic restaurants and tapas bars.


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 ‘tops’ section lists top 10s 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.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) An overview of Madrid with hundreds of useful links, including to the Thorn Tree, Lonely Planet’s online bulletin board.

Restaurantes Madrid (www.restaurantesmadrid.net, in Spanish) Rankings and reviews by the public.

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.

Vive Madrid (www.guiavivemadrid.com) A privately run site that has some moderately useful info on bars, restaurants, hotels and transport, as well as a booking service.

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.guiaodelocio.com), La Netro (http://madrid.lanetro.com) and Metropoli (www.elmundo.es/metropolis). 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), which has a comprehensive calendar of events. If you find something you like, turn to the boxed text on p202 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) gives 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 game and we would 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 p145. 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 La Terraza del Casino (p149), Santceloni (p170), Sergi Arola Gastro (p168), Jockey (p168) and Zalacain (p170).