

Welcome to Madrid

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

An Artistic City

Few cities boast an artistic pedigree quite as pure as Madrid's: many art lovers return here again and again. For centuries, Spanish royals showered praise and riches upon the finest artists of the day, from home-grown talents such as Goya and Velázquez to Flemish and Italian greats. Masterpieces by these and other Spanish painters such as Picasso, Dalí and Miró now adorn the walls of the city's world-class galleries. Three in particular are giants – the Museo del Prado, Centro de Arte Reina Sofía and Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza – but in Madrid these are merely good places to start.

A Culinary Capital

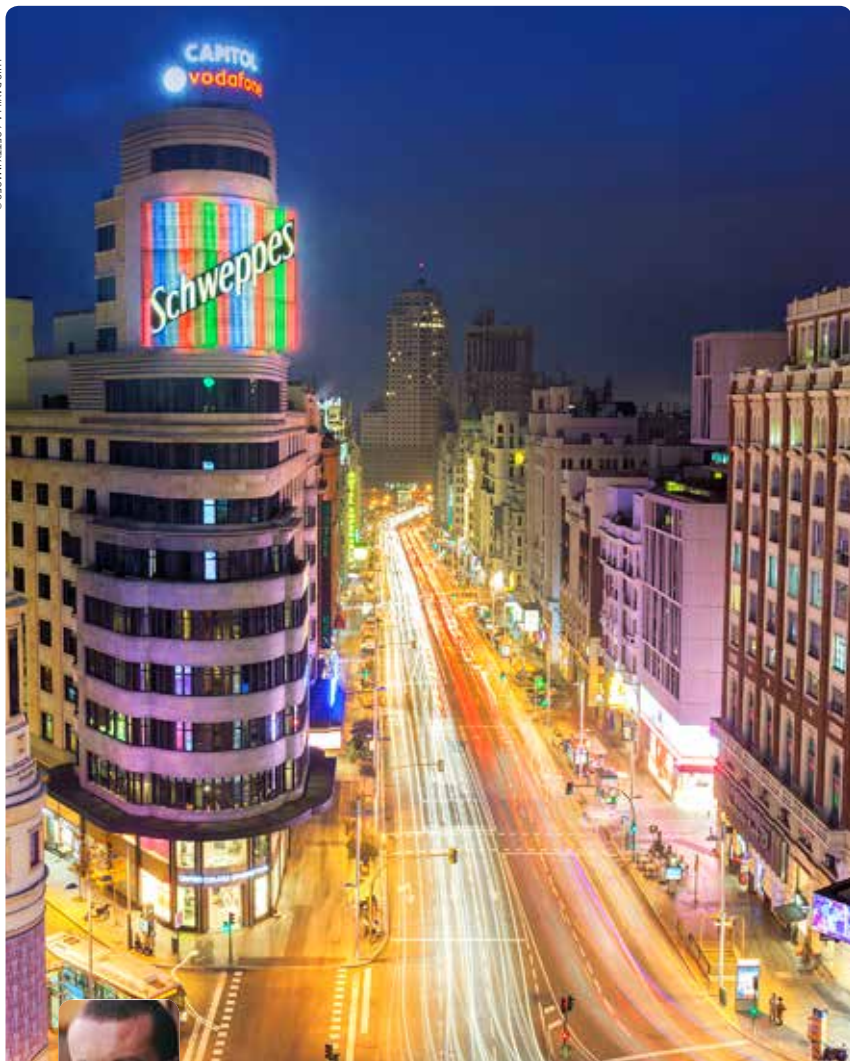
Rising above the humble claims of its local cuisine, Madrid has evolved into one of the richest culinary capitals of Europe. The city has wholeheartedly embraced all the creativity and innovation of Spain's gastro-nomic revolution. But this acceptance of the new is wedded to a passion for the enduring traditions of Spanish cooking, for the conviviality of the eating experience and for showcasing the infinite variety of food from every Spanish region. From tapas in sleek temples to all that's new to sit-down meals beneath centuries-old vaulted ceilings, eating in Madrid is a genuine pleasure.

Killing the Night

Madrid nights are the stuff of legend, and the perfect complement to the more sedate charms of fine arts and fine dining. The city may have more bars than any other city on earth – a collection of storied cocktail bars and nightclubs that combine a hint of glamour with non-stop *marcha* (action). But that only goes some way to explaining the appeal of after-dark Madrid. Step out into the night-time streets of many Madrid neighbourhoods and you'll find yourself swept along on a tide of people, accompanied by a happy crowd intent on dancing until dawn.

Beautiful Architecture

Madrid may lack the cachet of Paris, the monumental history of Rome, or Barcelona's reputation for Modernista masterpieces. And no, there is no equivalent of the Eiffel Tower, Colosseum or La Sagrada Família that you can point to and say 'this is Madrid'. But Madrid has its own particular beauty. Spain's broad sweep of architectural history provides a glorious backdrop to city life, from medieval mansions and royal palaces to the unimagined angles of Spanish contemporary architecture, from the sober brickwork and slate spires of Madrid baroque to the extravagant confections of the belle époque. Put simply, this is one beautiful city.



Why I Love Madrid

By Anthony Ham, Author

More than a decade after I fell for Madrid and decided to call it home, the life that courses relentlessly through the streets here still excites me. Here is a place where the passions of Europe's most passionate country are the fabric of daily life, a city with music in its soul and an unshakeable spring in its step. But Madrid is also one of the most open cities on earth and it doesn't matter where you're from for the oft-heard phrase to ring true: 'If you're in Madrid, you're from Madrid.'

For more about our author, see p256.