

Understand Madrid

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Madrid has been at the epicentre of *la crisis*, and the country's recovery.

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From its origins as a Muslim garrison town through to the modern metropolis you see today, Madrid has a fascinating story.

CITY OF PAINTERS 194

One of Europe's more artistically rich capitals, Madrid boasts Goya, Velázquez and Picasso as essential elements of its heritage.

ARCHITECTURE 197

Madrid is one of Europe's more underrated architectural cities, boasting its own version of baroque, the belle époque and much more.

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Pedro Almodóvar has made Madrid his own, and Madrid's starring cinematic role boasts Oscar winners too.

FLAMENCO 201

Flamenco was born in Spain's south but it finds its most prestigious stage in Madrid.

Madrid Today

It takes more than nearly a decade of economic crisis to shake Madrid from its stride. Yes, the city has suffered from Spain's dire economic numbers. But it was in Madrid where the fightback began, first with the *indignados* (those who are indignant) and their sit-in protest that served as an inspiration to the worldwide Occupy phenomenon. Then came an electoral storm that in 2015 swept away Madrid's old political order.

Best on Film

Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón (1980) Early Almodóvar film showcasing 1980s Madrid in all its madness.

La colmena (1982) Faithful rendering of Camilo José Cela's Madrid during the grim 1950s.

La comunidad (2000) Cheerfully off-the-wall tale of greed in a Madrid apartment block.

Los fantasmas de Goya (2006) Goya, the Spanish Inquisition and the painter's many scandals.

Volver (2006) Heart-warming Almodóvar film starring Penélope Cruz.

Best in Print

A Heart So White (Javier Marías) A tale of subtle family intrigue.

Madrid: A Cultural and Literary History (Elizabeth Nash) Joyfully written account of the city's past and present.

Winter in Madrid (CJ Sansom) Easy-to-read spy thriller set in post-Spanish Civil War Madrid.

Historias del Kronen (José Ángel Mañas) Cult novel about alienated urban Madrid youth.

A Load of Bull: An Englishman's Adventures in Madrid (Tim Parfitt) Humorous love letter to Madrid in the 1980s and beyond.

Boom to Bust

It can be difficult to remember now, but Spain was, not so long ago, the envy of Europe. Its economy was booming and the whole country seemed brimful of optimism. Then things fell apart. In 2008, unemployment stood at around 6%. Seven years later, one out of every four Spaniards (over 5.5 million people) can't find work. Old-timers you speak to can't remember a time this bad, with businesses closing their doors forever, including many that weathered civil war and dictatorship down through the decades.

Madrid is doing slightly better than the rest of the country (in 2015, the capital's unemployment rate stood at 17.79%, still stubbornly high but better than the 23% country-wide). But with nearly one in five *madrileños* (people from Madrid) looking for work, no one is celebrating.

Where did it all go wrong? Spain's (and to a large extent Madrid's) economy was heavily reliant on construction and tourism, two industries that are exceptionally susceptible to economic downturns. Spain's property market also spiralled out of control for far too long – prices rose exponentially, prompting banks to hand out money to those who simply couldn't afford to pay it back. What began in 2008 shows only tentative signs of abating, but those signs are nonetheless important. Business owners report a slow but steady rise in consumer confidence and restaurant owners state that the number of those eating out is growing. Yes, it's slow, but the economy may finally have bottomed out and be once again on the rise.

Young People

If Spain's economic numbers make for depressing reading, those relating to the country's younger generation can seem catastrophic. More than half of young Span-