

SPAIN



LIVELY CITY: (clockwise from main) Central Madrid at night; Madrid street art; some of the fare at a tapas bar; rowing on the lake at Buen Retiro Park; the Royal Palace; and San Miguel Market. **Pictures:** Paul Ewart, iStock

48 hours in Madrid

Forget New York. Spanish capital Madrid trumps the Big Apple for the title of 'the city that never sleeps', writes **Paul Ewart**



WORLD-class museums, a great climate and arguably Europe's best nightlife.

Check, check and check.

Although the Spanish capital of Madrid could have long since succumbed to the budget, boozy British travellers who have infiltrated the rest of the country's sun-soaked coasts; thankfully it has remained firmly off the radar. Yes, Madrid's lost tourism dollar is our gain.

A bastion of culture; the city's unique fusion of diverse barrios (neighbourhoods) and small-town character, mean that there's something for everyone. And in 48 hours, you can see plenty.

Day One

9am: Get your coffee hit and sweet fix in one at La Mallorquina in Puerta del Sol. This place has been a favourite since it opened in 1894 and is renowned for serving the best torrijas (the Spanish version of french toast) in the city. Soak up the atmosphere by jostling with locals for standing space at the crowded counter. English isn't really spoken here, so it's a case of point and pay.

See pasteleriamallorquina.es

11am: Galvanise yourself for the long

day ahead with a morning stroll through the picturesque Parque del Buen Retiro. This expansive green space in the city's east was – until 1767 – the exclusive domain of Spain's royal family. Thankfully now, its sprawling lawns, sculptured cypress trees and manicured rose gardens are open to all. If you're feeling energetic, you can rent a rowing boat on the large man-made lake for a leisurely 45-minute paddle.

See esmadrid.com/en

1pm: Unless you've spent ample time in Spain, dining hours in Madrid may be different from what you're used to. Here, locals go big on a late lunch and then eat a smaller dinner late in the evening.

Kick-start your culinary adventure at the historic San Miguel market. A snacking paradise, the stalls in this century-old indoor food market sell everything from oysters and ruby-red slices of jamon to plump croquettes and traditional Spanish sweets.

See mercadosanmiguel.es

2pm: Continue your lunch market degustation by hopping on a metro to Chueca. Here, the hip gourmet market of Mercado San has one of the best selections of seafood in Madrid. Unsurprisingly, considering that the

city is home to the biggest fish market in the world outside of Tokyo. While a visit to the fish market itself isn't possible (tourists aren't allowed) a trip to Mercado San is the next best thing. Divided into three different levels, this is a fresh produce haven and the expansive seafood counter shows just how crazy Madrilenos are about fish.

See mercadosananton.com

3pm: Eschew the generic designer shoes of Salamanca and get your retail fix in the funky Barrio de las Salesas. The Madrid version of New York's SoHo, this area is an urban catwalk for some of the country's most up-and-coming independent designers.

See esmadrid.com/en

6pm: There's an abundance of spectacular rooftop bars here and taking in the sunset from one is an absolute must.

In the hip Santa Ana Square, The Roof at Hotel Me is the perfect spot for a sundowner. Accessed by a private lift, the crowd is achingly hip and – thanks to a roster of celebrity regulars – the bar is always busy, so make sure to arrive early enough to get a prime spot.

See melia.com

8pm: Follow in the footsteps of Ernest Hemingway and visit his favourite Madrid haunt. In the cobblestoned Calle de Echegaray, La Venencia is a dusty time capsule of a bar. The decor hasn't been touched since its 1930s heyday and its crowd is comprised primarily of flat-cap wearing old men, sipping glasses of sherry.

Back in Hemingway's time, La Venencia was frequented by Republican soldiers and the writer based himself here to get news from the front – information that would later lead to him write his best-selling novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

9pm: Having held out for dinner, join the crowds of locals for their evening tapas fix at Calle Cava de Baja in La Latina. A narrow street is renowned for its wall-to-wall tapas bars.

The food is usually displayed in a



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glass case on the bar itself, so if your Spanish isn't great you can simply point to the dish you want.

In many venues, free tapas comes with drinks, so wait until you get your freebie before ordering – surprisingly, many are often similar to what's offered on the menu.

Most importantly, don't stay in one place – you should aim to hit at least three to four venues in one night.

Day Two

9am: Make your way to Barrio de los Austrias to try one of Madrid's cafe institutions, the grand Cafe del Oriente. Find a table outside, soak in the view of the Royal Palace opposite and order a signature cafe con leche.

The menu is as traditional as they come, which is no bad thing. Take a lead from your elderly local dining companions and order a classic breakfast of tostada con tomate y aceite (bread with crushed tomato and olive oil). Delectable.

See grupolezama.es

10am: If you're lucky enough to be in town on a Sunday, then a visit to the open-air El Rastro flea market is a must. Hosted across a maze of streets, it's the largest of its kind in Europe. With an estimated 3500 stalls, it's the place to go for antiques, art, vintage clothing and everything in between.

See madrid.es/en

Noon: Museum hop in Madrid's art triangle where the best museums are handily located within easy walking distance of one another.

From Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, which offers some of the best examples of 20th-century art in the world,

including works from Dalí and Picasso's famous *Guernica* painting to the eclectic collection of European art at Thyssen-Bornemisza. The museum collections are so immense you could spend all day doing nothing else.

If you're time-poor, the city's most famous museum, the Prado, is a must-visit. Home to thousands of works from Spain's best artists, including Goya and Velazquez, its four floors house art spanning more than seven centuries.

See museodelprado.es/en

2pm: Discuss and dissect your favourite artworks over the ultimate lunchtime degustation at El Club Allard. The former members club, turned two Michelin-starred restaurant, still retains its exclusive air with formal service and crisp, white tablecloths.

Lauded as one of the major gastronomic venues in the city, its 10-course lunch is foodie heaven. From the truffle, spinach and quail egg cupcake to the slivers of duck, smoked over mini-lit charcoal in a ceramic volcano; it's an indulgent visual and tastebud feast.

See elcluballard.com

4pm: A brief walk away lies the largest palace in Western Europe, the Royal Palace of Madrid. Built on the site of the old Moorish Alcázar, this impressive Baroque pile is still the official residence of Spain's royal family, though it's only used for official occasions. About 50 of the palace's ostentatious 2500 rooms are open to the public and visitors can join a guided tour or explore independently.

See patrimonionacional.es

6pm: Indulge in a treatment at one of Spain's best day spas, Chi. With locations in Madrid and Barcelona, this sleek retreat is where weary locals come for a relaxing massage or some skincare TLC.

See thechispa.com

9pm: Earn future bragging rights by eating a meal in the world's oldest restaurant.

Recognised by Guinness World Records, El Botin has welcomed an A to Z of famous faces through its doors since opening in 1725.

Book a table in the vaulted cellar and order its most famous dishes: cordero asado (roast lamb) and cochinillo asado (roast suckling pig).

See botin.es

11pm: Jump in a cab to El Junco to get a taste of Madrid's renowned nightlife. This intimate, laid-back jazz club draws a mixed crowd of music lovers with its nightly live performances.

Bands generally take to the stage about 11.30pm, but the place is buzzing all night long and, with a closing time of 6am, you can easily linger here.

See eljunco.com

1am: End the night the way madrileños do, with sugary churros and hot chocolate – the quintessential Madrid late night treat – at Chocolateria San Ginés.

Founded in 1894, this 24-hour cafe is tucked down a quiet alley next to the San Ginés church.

Don't be surprised if you see bleary-eyed revellers sitting alongside parents with their kids.

This is, after all, a city that only truly comes alive at night.

See chocolateriasangines.com



ESCAPE ROUTE

MADRID

GETTING THERE

Etihad Airways offers four weekly one-stop connections to Madrid from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth via Abu Dhabi.

See etihad.com

STAY

Opposite the Prado and Thyssen-Bornemisza museums, the Westin Palace Madrid is perfectly located for sightseeing.

See westinpalacemadrid.com

MORE

See esmadrid.com/en



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