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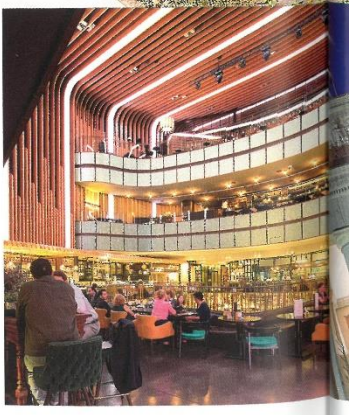
Mellow **Madrid**

Stuffy? No señor! Spain's capital makes a calm — but cool — getaway

Once seen as Barcelona's boring sibling, Madrid has been updating its image with subtle panache, as well as the input of gifted chefs and designers. Old tapas bars and clapped-out food markets host a new foodie generation and derelict factories live again with a fresh arts scene. The result? A city that's modish without being manic. **Melissa Twigg**



CUT-OUT-AND-GO GUIDE | MELLOW MADRID

SEE & DO

● Start on a visual high at the Museo Sorolla (museosorolla.mcu.es; £2.60; ① on map). A century ago Joaquín Sorolla, an Impressionist loved for his iridescent canvases, **lived and worked in this central, buttermilk-coloured townhouse**. Spend an afternoon perusing his paintings, living quarters and flower-filled gardens.

● Las Salesas, Madrid's on-trend, indie shopping area, is around the corner. **One store sells only cactuses, another oversized hats with ribbons that trail down your back**. Try Jápines (Calle de Fernando VI 2; japinesmadrid.es; ②) for antique perfume bottles, and Santa Rita (Calle del Barquillo 30; ③) for slinky red silk dresses you probably won't be brave enough to wear back home. Time for a snack? Nothing beats churros dipped in melted chocolate at the gilt-mirror-filled pastry shop La Duquesita (Calle de Fernando VI 2; ④).

● It's 25 minutes on foot to the Prado (museodelprado.es; £13; ⑤) — past the palatial edifices along Paseo de la Castellana or detouring around the lakes of Retiro Park ⑥. The Prado bears the fruit of relationships between the Spanish kings and their court painters. Pre-book online to skip queues and **use entrance two, which leads directly to the Velázquez and Goya paintings**. Home in on the latter's *Nude Maja*, which caused a stir with the Inquisition.

● Boost your energy with tapas at La Sanabresa (see Drink & Shop overleaf; ⑦), before one last art fix at the nearby Reina Sofía (museoreinasofia.es/en; £9; ⑧), the Modern Art museum that has part-swallowed an 18th-century former hospital. **It's head-swivellingly good-looking, and that's before you even get to the paintings** — Picasso's nightmarish war canvas, *Guernica*, is the highlight. Later, don your sunnies, order a *tinto de verano* (red wine and lemon fizz) and idle on the vine-clad terrace of Arzábal, at the museum.

● Leaning on a zinc bar with a glass of Rioja and a plate of *bocadillo de calamares* (calamari in a greasy baguette) gets the evening off to a serene start. Grab a spot at Casa Rúa (Calle de Ciudad Rodrigo 3; ⑨), under the arches just off the dusky-pink Plaza Mayor. Then dive into the La Latina medieval quarter, busy with bars. At La Taberna Sanlúcar (Calle de San Isidro Labrador; ⑩) **order spicy Andalucían sausages and watch locals flirting** under the disapproving gaze of the Virgins that line the walls.

● Next day, make for La Tabacalera de Lavapiés (Calle Embajadores 53; ⑪), an abandoned tobacco factory hipped up with murals, a coffee counter, tapas bar, bookshop, stage and gallery. Terrifyingly for us Brits, it's an interactive space, which means **that man you're drinking espressos next to might burst into song and rope you in!**

● It's a five-minute stroll to El Rastro ⑫, Madrid's prettiest antiques market, filling a timeless terracotta courtyard and **selling silk lampshades and ornate dressing tables at crazy-cheap prices**. Hold luggage only? Browse the market outside on the Plaza de Cascorro, for pretty espadrilles and straw hats on the cheap. Or follow the scent of almonds towards the bakery stall, which sells sweet slices of Tarta de Santiago with a dollop of cream.

● Play catch-up on the dining scene in the Salamanca district, with a gourmet blowout at Platea Madrid (platea madrid.com/en; ⑬). Once an Art Deco cinema, it's now an **arena for Spain's top chefs tempting you to their rival stalls for tapas and oysters**. There's live music, cold beers, bottles of wine lining the walls and spontaneous dancing throughout the evening. >

Green growth: strolling through Retiro Park; below, Platea Market for gourmet-food pit stops; statue of Velázquez outside the Prado Museum

EDITOR'S FAVOURITES

Don't miss Joachim Patinir's *Charon Crossing the Styx* for the contrast of a sulphurous hell and pastel-coloured heaven, and Titian's portrait of lust, *The Bacchanal of the Andrians*

EAT

● *Classic Spanish*

CERVECERIA ALEMANA

(Tapas about £5)

Because: At this cafe, with mahogany walls and haunches of cured meat on the bar, waiters in penguin suits plonk plates of salami and calamari on tables with jugs of red wine. ***Travel's tip:*** Sherry-crawl the bars that line Plaza de Santa Ana and nearby La Latina. *Plaza de Santa Ana 6; 00 34 914 297033, cerveceriaalemana.com;* ⑭.

● *Modern cool*

SALA DE DESPIECE *(Tapas about £9)*

Because: The dishes in this trendy spot near the Sorolla Museum are works of art: the carpaccio is sliced to near-transparency and folded around crushed truffles. ***Travel's tip:*** The dining room is, frankly, dull. Take a bar seat, where you can watch the chefs at work. *Calle de Ponzano 11; 00 34 917 526106, saladedespiece.com;* ⑮.

● *Country fare*

LOS HUEVOS DE LUCIO *(Mains about £12)*

Because: This rustic restaurant has perfected the art of rural food for glossy Madrileños. Try the *huevos rotos* — fried eggs smashed over a pile of chips and covered in sausage from the Basque region. ***Travel's tip:*** Try the *crema catalana* dessert — it's worth flying for. *Calle Cava Baja 30; 00 34 913 662984, loshuevosdelucio.com;* ⑯.

● *Peruvian delicacies*

RESTAURANTE AMAZONICO

(Mains about £12)

Because: The luminous stuffed peacocks are OTT, but the Peruvian cuisine is excellent (try the shrimp ceviche). ***Travel's tip:*** Retiro Park is close, so plan dinner here after a stroll. *Calle Jorge Juan 20; 00 34 915 154332, restauranteamazonico.com;* ⑰.

● *Nostalgic eating*

DOS CIELOS *(Mains about £24)*

Because: The delicious dishes (suckling pig, cod tripe braised with chickpeas) are inspired by centuries-old recipes. ***Travel's tip:*** Try and get a table outside and dine under the oak trees. *Gran Melia Palacio de los Duques, Cuesta de Santo Domingo 5; 00 34 915 416700, www1.melia.com/es/brands/dosCielos/index.htm;* ⑱.

WHAT TO ORDER...
It's strictly sherry only — but they serve it by the glass from the barrels, so you can sample away

WRITER'S ADVICE
Sizes run large here, so look for a size or two smaller than you'd normally wear

DANCE DATES
Don't miss the live jazz on weekends, all smooching couples and twenty-somethings looking to dance

DRINK & SHOP

● *Sherry break*

LA VENENCIA

Because: This musty sherry bar was once frequented by Hemingway and has clearly been untouched for 70 years. ***Travel's tip:*** Avoid the evening tourist hordes and come for lunch after the Prado (12.30pm-3.30pm). *Calle de Echegaray 7;* ⑲.

● *Great bar for vino*

LA SANABRESA

Because: This laid-back spot has one of the city's best wine lists. Prop up the bar with a carafe of hearty Campojuma red and some aubergine fritters. ***Travel's tip:*** The nearby Prado is free to enter after 6pm, so do a quick tour before drinks here. *Calle del Amor de Dios 12;* ⑦.

● *Quirky women's gear*

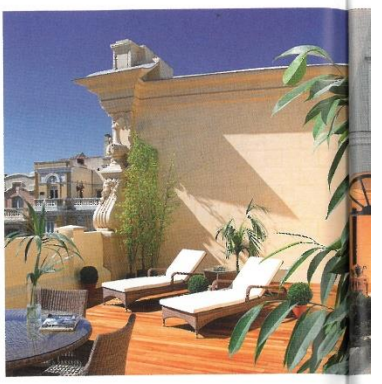
UTERQUE

Because: Its big jewellery pieces and candy-coloured accessories are ultra-creative and great value (often less than £85). ***Travel's tip:*** This is the Oxford Street of Madrid, so go early to avoid the crush — it's empty until at least midday. *Calle Serrano 40;* ⑳.

ASK THE LOCAL

Alberto de Juan is a lawyer who was born and brought up in Madrid

My golden rule is: **don't plan every moment; take it slowly.** Have a *café con leche* on Plaza de la Independencia ㉑, walk along Calle Serrano ㉒ and **discover the architecture of the Salamanca district.** I love to roam the streets in the Barrio de las Letras and **enjoy a very late lunch on Plaza de Santa Ana** ㉓. Food and drink is everything in Madrid. If you're unsure where to go, ask: Is it busy? Are there any locals? **My favourite spot is Cervecería Chamberí** (Calle de Luchana 36; ㉔) for *tortilla* with a glass of *tinto*. It also serves the best *zarangollo* (eggs and potato) and *empanadillas de berenjenas* (pastry filled with aubergine) in Madrid.



STAY

● *Drama queen*

CASUAL DEL TEATRO MADRID

(Doubles from £40, room-only)

Because: Set in the old headquarters of the Spanish Music Union, it's a theatrical hoot, with 37 rooms themed after the likes of *Mamma Mia!*, *Hamlet* or *Romeo and Juliet*. ***Travel's tip:*** No catering, alas. Head up the street to La Rollerie (larollerie.com) for a £5 menu of coffee, juice and churros. *Calle de Echegaray 1; casualhoteles.com;* ㉕.

● *Fictional fantasy*

ROOM MATE MARIO *(Doubles from £51, room-only)*

Because: Designed around the fictional Mario (a sexy jazz musician), this hotel is infectiously irreverent and just a few metres away from the Royal Palace. Amenities are good for a place so cheap (plush robes, slippers and well-lit desks), while beds are big. ***Travel's tip:*** Ask for a room with a bath (at no extra cost) — the showers have poor water pressure. *Calle de Campomanes 4; room-matehotels.com/en;* ㉖.

PHOTOGRAPHS: 4CORNERS, AWL IMAGES MAP: MAIDENHEAD CARTOGRAPHIC

Hotting up: clockwise from top left, a seat in the sun at Hotel Urso & Spa; alfresco dining at Dos Cielos; theatrical style at Casual del Teatro Madrid; truffles on the menu at Gran Meliá Palacio de los Duques; the bar at Totem hotel

● *Sleek Scandi style*

EXE MONCLOA *(Doubles from £52, B&B)*

Because: Its Danish-style cool has made the roof terrace (and plunge pool) *the* place for summer in the on-the-up Moncloa neighbourhood. Rooms are comfortable in a simple Nordic style — a theme echoed in the sauna in the basement. ***Travel's* tip:** Staying at the weekend? Say no to (noisy) street-facing rooms. *Calle Arcipreste de Hita 10; exehotels.co.uk;* ㉗.

● *Oasis of calm*

TOTEM *(Doubles from £132, B&B)*

Because: The leafy Salamanca district, with its upmarket bars and restaurants, is on the doorstep and the hotel's pale neutrals, wooden staircase and marble bathrooms are wonderfully soothing after a night out. ***Travel's* tip:** Double rooms are a squeeze for two adults, so unless you're on a strict budget, it's worth paying £20 extra for a Deluxe with a bit of wiggle room around the bed. *Calle de Hermosilla, 23; totem-madrid.com/en;* ㉘.

DUSK DRINKS

Libations are not officially served on the rooftop after 6pm — but staff turn a blind eye if you sneak them up yourself to watch the sunset

● *Outside in*

HOTEL URSO & SPA *(Doubles from £146, room-only)*

Because: It's a zen den in the heart of the city — all gleaming conservatories filled with hibiscus, vertical gardens and corridors bordered with bamboo. The mahogany lift and the stained-glass windows date back 100 years. ***Travel's* tip:** It's opposite the Barceló food market, so stock up on *jamón ibérico de bellota* (acorn-fed Iberian ham) and cream of anise liqueur. *Calle de Mejía Lequerica, 8; hotelurso.com/en;* ㉙.

● *Royal retreat*

GRAN MELIA PALACIO DE LOS DUQUES *(Doubles from £304, B&B)*

Because: It's a former palace and boasts a rooftop swimming pool overlooking its flower-filled gardens and the city's russet roofs. ***Travel's* tip:** Go B&B — it has a breakfast buffet of dreams. One waiter's job is to cut tissue-thin slices of *jamón* onto your plate; another, generous shavings of truffle. *Cuesta de Santo Domingo 5; melia.com/en;* ⑱.

GET ME THERE

GO INDEPENDENT

EasyJet flies from Gatwick, Luton, Bristol, Edinburgh and Liverpool from £25, one-way. **Ryanair** flies from Manchester, Stansted and Dublin from £18, one-way. **BA** has Heathrow flights from £35, one-way.

GO PACKAGED

Lastminute.com has two nights in a central four-star hotel from £220pp, room-only, with flights from Dublin, Manchester or Stansted. **BA** has two nights in a four-star from £207pp, room-only, with Heathrow flights.

GET AROUND

Madrid is an easy city to walk in and taxis are cheap and plentiful. If you plan on taking the metro or buses, you will need a **Multi Card**, which you can buy in all metro stations or tobacconists. Options include 10 rides (bus and metro) for £10.50, or a single-journey for £1.30. Or use **BiciMAD** — the city's electric-bike-sharing scheme, which operates like Santander Cycles in London. ■