

40 hours



Madrid

From grand masters to graffiti artists, the Spanish capital is a magnet for art lovers, finds **Katie McGonagle**

It's not an object – it's a comment, it's a memory and it's human heritage,"

says art expert Miriam Barbosa, as she leads us through the galleries of the Reina Sofia towards one of Picasso's best-known pieces, *Guernica*.

It's every bit as impressive as I'd expected – and yet this world-famous painting is just one of the artistic highlights of Madrid, known for its 'golden triangle' of art museums, with El Prado and the Thyssen-Bornemisza making up the other points. Add to that its burgeoning street-art talent, serious culinary creativity and a strong live-music scene, and it's clear the Spanish capital's artistic side is on the up. ➤



PICTURE: Shutterstock/Vivvi Smak

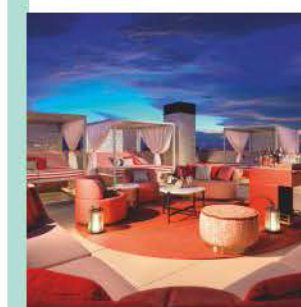


HARD ROCK HOTEL MADRID

The latest Hard Rock outpost opened in a central spot in the museum triangle last July, becoming the brand's first fully managed property in Europe. The love of music is evident, starting with a three-storey-high guitar that dominates the lobby and a huge mural of music icons including David Bowie and Prince taking over the wall of the lobby bar. Dotted around each floor, you'll find music memorabilia ranging from a figure-hugging dress worn by Rihanna to Chuck Berry's Gibson guitar.

The hotel has 161 rooms, including four suites, where the attention to detail is clear, from the tiny guitars woven into the bedspreads to the funky artwork on the wall. Sessions restaurant is open all day, and offers a weekend brunch with a difference, where an array of breakfast items are served to the table in a guitar case for added Instagram value. Hard Rock is set to open properties in Budapest and New York in March.

Book it: Rooms at Hard Rock Hotel Madrid start at €145. For bookings, visit: hardrockhotels.com



PICTURE: Roberto Lara Fotografía



FROM FAR LEFT: Las Letras, home of Miguel de Cervantes; Plaza de Santa Ana; squid sandwich; Reina Sofia Museum; historical buildings in Madrid; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia; Lavapiés is well known for urban art
PICTURES: Shutterstock/Wuju Planet, Yivvi Smak, DanielCz, Julia-Bogdanova, estudio, ItzaYu, Enriacapas

DAY ONE

10.00: There are more famous artworks than you can count in each of Madrid's main museums, so the only decision visitors face is which one to go to first. I made a beeline for the Reina Sofia to see *Guernica* – strolling past works by Salvador Dali, Joan Miró and many more of the 20th century's top artists to catch my first glimpse. The enormous black and white canvas fills almost the entire wall, full of tortured figures twisted in agony, animals and humans crowded together in despair during the bombing of the eponymous Basque town in 1937 in the Spanish Civil War. Picasso painted the huge canvas in just 25 days, and just as fascinating as the work itself are the photos of the painting in progress and the early sketches for each element. It's not the only notable piece in the Reina Sofia, an 18th-century hospital that was restored and opened as a museum in the early 1990s. You could spend hours staring at

The Endless Enigma by Dali or at *Un Mundo* by surrealist artist Angeles Santos, and still not spot all of their intricate details, while the likes of Maria Blanchard's *Woman with a Fan* or *La Guitare* by Juan Gris are excellent examples of the cubist movement. The best advice you could offer clients is not to rush – take some time to discover new artists across each of the museum's six floors. Entry is €10.

13.00: Go for one of Madrid's famous calamari sandwiches, a simple snack of squid rings in a white baguette. Head just across the square from the Reina Sofia to *El Brillante*, one of the best-known spots to try the signature sandwich, or take a 10-minute walk to Plaza Mayor where every cafe and restaurant – either on the square or down one of the tiny side streets – will have its own version.

14.00: Wander from the Plaza Mayor through the literary neighbourhood of Las Letras,

which has been home to some of Spain's most famous writers over the centuries, including Miguel de Cervantes. Key quotes are scattered across the cobblestones, while plaques commemorate notable events, including the spot where Cervantes' landmark novel, *Don Quixote*, was printed.

15.00: That will take visitors to the edge of El Retiro Park, a sprawling expanse of green space in the heart of the city. It features a huge lake often criss-crossed with rowing boats, and a series of tree-lined paths beloved by runners and roller-bladers alike. There are monuments dotted around the park including the Palacio de Velázquez, which frequently puts on free-to-enter art exhibitions. It's currently hosting a series of works by Argentinian painter Vivian Suter in a show set to run until early May.

20.00: After freshening up back at your hotel, it's time to eat – and the Green Room experience at the

new Hard Rock Hotel Madrid offers top-notch dining and entertainment rolled into one. Starting off in the lobby with a hibiscus flower cocktail, guests are led in darkness into a small private room just off the main Sessions restaurant, where a theatrical display of lights and music – along with a nine-course wine-paired tasting menu – awaits. It has been carefully crafted to tell the life story of head chef Juan Perez, who came to Madrid from his native Venezuela, and each dish represents a chapter in his life – from the creamed-com *crème brûlée* and oyster ceviche (so deliciously salty it's like being immersed in the sea) to kimchi-covered *patatas bravas* and squid with green mojo (sauce). It costs €150 a head for up to six people sharing.

DAY TWO

10.00: Start the day with another dose of art at the Prado Museum, which houses more masterpieces than you could feasibly see in just

one visit. They include *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by Hieronymus Bosch, *Las Meninas* by Diego Velázquez and a whole floor dedicated to Francisco Goya, along with many more by Titian, Rubens, El Greco and more. Entry is €15.

13.00: After those hours spent indoors, enjoy a stroll in the fresh air past the Puerta de Alcalá gate to award-winning restaurant Casa Dani in the Mercado de la Paz. It has two branches within the covered market, one inside, one with outdoor space, and there's a reason that queues snake around the corner. The tortilla (Spanish omelette) at Casa Dani is a triumph of melt-in-the-mouth potato and soft, gooey egg, while the ham croquetas and octopus salad are a worthy second in the best-dish stakes. Hold out for a table or do as the locals do and perch at the bar.

14.00: Next, take a stroll through the swish Salamanca neighbourhood, where boutiques

and charming pavement cafes rub shoulders with international embassies. Pop into Tiffany's for a spot of retail therapy, or enjoy the vicarious thrill of window shopping in one of Madrid's swankiest spots.

15.00: If you want to complete Madrid's art triangle, it's time to head to the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, which takes visitors on an incredible journey through one artistic era after another: from early Flemish artists such as van Eyck, through the Renaissance and Baroque periods with the likes of Titian, Caravaggio, Rubens and van Dyck up to the 20th century, when Jackson Pollock, Picasso, Edvard Munch and Magritte take centre stage. You could spend a week in here, never mind an afternoon, and still not see it all. Entry is €13.

18.00: After an education in art history, it's time to bring things bang up to date with an urban art tour around Lavapiés. Guide Gerardo, who hails from Mexico City, tells

the stories behind the street art that dots every available surface of this multicultural district, pointing out shop and restaurant frontages adorned with thought-provoking images through to satirical pieces of pixel art affixed at each street corner. One highlight is the 'sharing wall' by street artist Zeta, which brings in elements of Chinese and Arab heritage in a cool, colourful array of images that capture the area's diversity.

21.00: The locals eat late, so there's no point showing up at restaurant La Burlona any earlier than this. Serving a host of traditional dishes – simple, but executed with perfection – this place gets the stamp of approval from the locals. After dinner, head downstairs to the basement cocktail bar, or back to the Hard Rock Hotel Madrid where rooftop bar RT60 (pictured right) offers cocktails, live music, a 'ham and cheese station' and an oyster bar all with a view of the Madrid skyline – the perfect way to end a weekend. **TW**