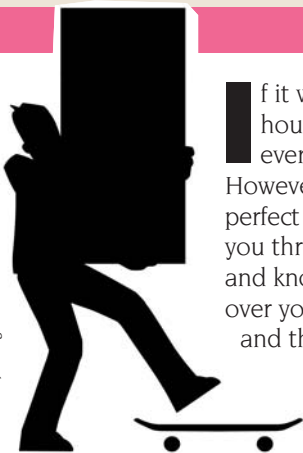


# accommodation

Illustration - Jon Fagence



If it was a choice between flat-hunting in Madrid and having three-hour root-canal work with no anaesthetic, it'd be the dentist's chair every time. Finding somewhere to live in Madrid is not fun.

However, you can take solace in the fact that once you've found that perfect flat, you've beaten one of the city's hardest challenges. To help you through this Mission Impossible, we've pooled all of our resources and knowledge to bring you a near-foolproof guide to getting a roof over your head. Firstly, we explain the basic rules of renting in Spain, and then we explain your rights as a tenant and tell you what to look out for in your rental contract. If all else fails there are always *hostales* should you need a temporary roof over your head. Wherever you end up living, we wish you good luck in your search!

## RENTING IN SPAIN – THE BASICS

### Contract

Many landlords will want you to sign a one-year contract (*contrato*). Make sure you read the contract thoroughly for any catches — if your Spanish isn't up to it, get a friend who's fluent to check it before you sign.

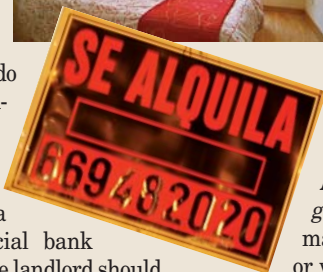
### Aval, nómina or university certificate?

As a guarantee of your reliability when renting, you will be asked to show your university certificate. If you are working, you will have to show your *nómina* (pay cheque) to prove that you have the income to pay the rent. If you do not have either of the above, landlords will often ask for an *aval*. To secure an *aval*, you must first produce and then agree to “freeze” the equivalent of three month's to a year's worth of rent in a special bank account. This money would go to the landlord should

you fail to pay the rent or leave the property before the end of the contract. They are complicated, costly and should be avoided if possible.

### Deposit

The norm is to pay a one- or two-month deposit. All deposits are redeemable at the end of the contract but some money may be kept by the landlord to pay for damage or wear and tear to the property. Be sure to get a receipt for the deposit when you hand over the cash.



### Taxes and bills

You usually have to pay community tax (*gastos de comunidad*), which will either be included in the rent or an extra cost, so it's important to ask. Also, check if the price is *con o sin gastos* (with or without bills), as you may have to pay for heating, electricity or water on top of your rent and tax.

# RIGHTS FOR RENTERS

Being a student doesn't mean that you have to rent a rundown and leaky hovel. Patricia Dawn Severenuk reviews the rights and obligations of tenants in Spain

In the end, my landlady was a lot more reasonable about the exploding washing machine than she could have been.

One Saturday morning in February, I wanted to put a couple of loads through before heading out to go shopping. Before I knew it, the door of the ancient washer had blown open, leaving the kitchen ankle-deep in soapy water. Luckily, Margarita's insurance policy covered the damage to the apartment (and the downstairs neighbour's kitchen ceiling) and within a week I had a new washing machine. That's not typical. Under Law 29/1994, I should have had to pay for the new appliance, since I was arguably the one who broke it.

Finding a place to live in Madrid can be tough enough, but knowing what your rights are when you do have one is fundamental.

## As good as the paper it's written on

Although Spanish law permits the use of both verbal and written agreements, it's best to get the terms of commitment put down in a *Contrato de Arrendamiento*, which states the details of both renter and rentee and should include basic information such as the length of contract, the items included in the flat at the time of rental, and the amount of rent to be paid every month.

The contract will also include when the rent must be paid to the owner; though the law allows for payment within the first seven days of the month, most owners request payment before the fifth of the month. Note that, by law, landlords are only allowed to increase the amount of rent in relation to the IPC, or cost of living, every fiscal year.

## Work it out

Landlords are required to perform whatever work is needed to guarantee that the property stays in liveable shape. That doesn't mean that you have to foot the bill for the work, unless you've been living in the apartment for at least five years. If that happens, the landlord cannot raise the amount of rent by more than 20 percent per year.

Also remember that tenants are not allowed to perform any kind of work that could compromise the structural integrity of the building or the flat, unless changes are being made to accommodate a tenant with special needs.

## No subs

One peculiarity of Spanish rental law is that subletting



apartments is technically illegal — so much so that being caught doing it can mean cancellation of the contract and being pushed out on the street. If you decide to move in with your friend(s) or significant other, the best thing to do is to get in touch with the owner of the flat and re-sign the contract so that everybody who's living in the place is named on the rental contract. That way, if something happens to one of the parties, the others won't lose their right to live there.

## Time out

Most rental contracts start out as annual agreements, and are automatically extended year after year for a maximum of five years (unless the initial contract is for a different time frame — an academic year of nine months, for instance.) Tenants can leave the contract after giving 30 days notice; if the tenant needs to leave before that time, the deposit (usually the equivalent of one month's rent) might not be returned.

Within those first five years, the flat is completely yours: the owner is not allowed to revoke the rental contract because a family member needs the flat, and he or she is not allowed to sell the flat without giving you first option to buy. After those first five years, however, the owner does have the right to take back the property for his use (or the use of his direct descendants), but must give the renter three month's notice, and the flat must be occupied within six months of the tenant moving out. For more information on renters' rights within the Comunidad de Madrid, see [www.madrid.org](http://www.madrid.org) or call 91 728 52 99.



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# GIMME SHELTER

Whether you just need a bed for a few nights, or you've got visitors coming to town, *InMadrid's* guide to hostels and *hostales\** will show you the best places to stay

## For the parents

Hostal Oriente, situated just a tortilla's toss from Metro Ópera, is just right to accommodate those people who gave you food and shelter for 18 years. Besides each room having an en-suite bathroom, air conditioning, a TV, a safe and a handy little hairdryer, Hostal Oriente's softly spoken and helpful staff ensure a pleasant stay. With plenty of sound-proofed rooms overlooking the bustling square at Ópera, Hostal Oriente regularly plays host to foreign parents visiting their kids in Madrid. With a recently installed lift, it's even perfect for grandma and grandpa. **Hostal Oriente, c/Arenal, 23, 1ª Izda, tel: 91 548 03 14 (Metro: Ópera). 24-hour reception. [www.geocitles.com/hostaloriente](http://www.geocitles.com/hostaloriente)**



Cat's Hostel

Photo: Natalie Muallem

## For the backpackers

Round-the-world trippers should head to Los Amigos Hostel, where the English-speaking staff can set them up in affordable, dormitory-style rooms designed with the backpacker in mind. The walls are plastered with information — in English and Spanish — about everything from where to join a football club to who to call if your shirt loses a button. There is even a guest book filled with notes left by happy guests ranging in nationality from Belgian to Korean. Zach from the States said: "Good place, good people, solid vibe. This is a haven of chilling hard. Chill hard everyone, chill hard." Well said, Zach. **Los Amigos, c/Campomanes, 6, 4ª Izda, tel: 91 547 17 07 (Metro: Ópera). 24-hour reception. [www.losamigoshostel.com](http://www.losamigoshostel.com)**

## For the party animals

Those who come to Madrid planning to ward off the heat by swimming in sangría belong at MuchoMadrid. You can't even stay in this dorm-style hostel — perched on the seventh floor overlooking Gran Vía — unless you're of "partying age", ie 18-40 years old. Besides being happy to facilitate the craziest weekend of your life, MuchoMadrid also offers a TV lounge and communal kitchen where you can recuperate afterwards with a cup of tea. **Hostal MuchoMadrid, c/Gran Vía, 59, 7ª, tel: 91 559 23 50 (Metro: Plaza de España). 24-hour reception.**

## For the tiquismiquis

This is for the guy who sends food back at restaurants. The persnickety traveller will be wowed by Cat's Hostel. Awarded the prize of 2005's "World's Best Hostel" by [hostelworld.com](http://hostelworld.com), this 18th-century palace-turned-hostel lives up to its heady title. Besides the important amenities that many other hostels have in Madrid — central location, 24-hour reception, reasonable price — Cat's goes one better by offering its own cave bar and courtyard, which literally crawl with world travellers. Twice a week, Cat's features international djs, taking this hostel from mere accommodation to an internationally known destination. **Cat's Hostel, c/Cañizares, 6, tel: 91 369 28 07 (Metro: Tirso de Molina). 24-hour reception. [www.catshostel.com](http://www.catshostel.com)**

## For the bargain-hunters

Having opened in April of 2006, Albergue Juvenil (AJ) offers guests both modern architecture and modern amenities at an affordable price. Daily continental breakfast, hostel-wide wi-fi, and use of AJ's exercise facilities, lounge, computer room and pool table are all included in the €18 per night room fee (€22 for people over 26). Use of the on-site washers and dryers, however, costs another €3. AJ also features weekly Thursday concerts and daily tours around the vibrant Malasaña neighbourhood where you can eat tapas and dance salsa with the hostel's "social motivator". **Albergue Juvenil, c/Mejía Lequerica, 21, tel: 91 593 96 88 (Metro: Alonso Martínez/Tribunal). 24-hour reception. [www.ajmadrid.es](http://www.ajmadrid.es)** ■ ERIE MEYER AND MARTY SATTELL

\* An *hostal* is something between a hostel and a hotel, usually offering accommodation of a similar standard to a hotel, but without amenities such as room service, breakfast, a bar, etc.

# NAILING THAT FLAT

Finding somewhere to live in Madrid can be tricky. Here is your 10-point plan to finding the perfect flat

## 1. Locate the appropriate tools

Check *InMadrid's* classifieds section each month (online or in the magazine) for a fine selection of rooms to rent — although get there quick, as by the first week of the month, most will be already rented. The magazine *Segundamano* or websites [www.idealista.com](http://www.idealista.com) and [www.loquo.com](http://www.loquo.com) should be your next ports of call. The flats for rent are organised by type (single room, flats, etc) and by price. The paper and websites are used by accommodation agencies, so beware of adverts that carry a reference number, and if possible, check if you're talking to an agent or a private landlord when you make the first call. Otherwise you'll be facing a finders-fee for the agent as well as your deposit and first month's rent.

## 2. Set your alarm

Spain is a country where getting out of bed late is written into the constitution — except when it comes to flat-hunting. Call at 10am and all the good places are either being seen or already rented out. It really is a good idea to call first thing in the morning and get to see them as quickly as you can.

## 3. Learn the lingo

If you don't have a good grasp of Spanish yet, you should still be able to see some flats with the most basic vocabulary. *Pisos compartidos* are shared flats in which individual rooms are available for rent. You may be asked to pay a *depósito* or *fianza*, customarily equal to one month's rent. If you're the only one in the queue of potential occupants who doesn't speak the language, unfortunately you're not likely to be in the running. When this happened to me, before I knew it, 600 euros of deposit was being handed over to the landlady by the Spaniard also being shown round. She did at least have the courtesy to say "*No hablas español, ¿verdad?*" to me as she shooed me out of the newly occupied flat.

## 4. Read the signs

Putting up signs is a great way to find a flat. The Mercado de Fuencarral has a good notice-board for people advertising and seeking flats, as does Petra's

International Bookshop, in calle Campomanos, in Ópera, and the various university buildings in the city.

## 5. Spread the word

Speak to everyone you know, and I mean everyone. Quite often someone knows someone who has<sup>pic knic</sup> a friend of a friend who is looking for a flatmate.

## 6. Be realistic

If you want to live in the centre, expect to pay between €250 and €400 for a decent place in shared accommodation. If you're prepared to live farther out, just watch the quality rise and the price tumble. Get an idea of your desired neighbourhoods before you start to look. That'll make it easier to find a place via *Segundamano*.

## 7. Check credentials

When you do find a place — or if you've rented a big place and are looking for people to share with — screen your potential roommates. International environments could be the best thing if you're a student, as you'll be on a similar timetable (ie out all night and up for a chat when you stagger back in at 6am).

## 8. Seek professional help

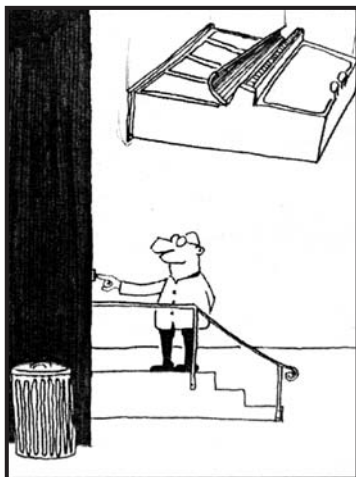
There are agencies that specialise in accommodation that are run by English speakers. Normally they charge you a fee at the beginning of the searching process. See the ads on the opposite page for starters.

## 9. Read the small print

Finally, before taking the plunge, be sure to check the contract with an enormous magnifying glass and a translator if necessary. Make sure you know what the utilities (*gastos*) will cost, how long the contract will last (if you have a contract) and how much it will cost you to break it if need be.

## 10. Settle into your new home

If you put the word out, persevere with making early-morning phone calls and cross the t's and dot the i's on the contract before accepting, you should be able to turn this normally painful process into a walk in the park.



# ad directory

## Madrid Flatmate

How does our accommodation service work?

1. Come to our office and tell us your room requirements.
2. We listen and show you pictures of our accommodation that we think match your requirements.
3. You choose up to three different rooms you would like to visit.
4. We phone the owner of the flat and arrange a time to visit.
5. Together we go to visit the rooms/flats that you have chosen and choose the room you most like.
6. Together we go through the contract point by point before you sign; this provides total transparency. No small print here!
7. Now you have your flat/room we can offer you help with baggage storage, mobile-phone rental, tourist information and pick-up service.

Madrid Flatmate Supplies "All That You Need" to help you start living in Madrid without worries or stress.

**Madrid Flatmate, c/Canarias, 28 Local A, tel/fax: 91 530 34 82 or 686 208 613 (Metro: Palos de la Frontera). Email: info@madrid-flatmate.com or see www.madridflatmate.com for more information. (See ad p15.)**

## Accommodation for Students in Madrid (AFS)

AFS was established in Madrid [2001] as a housing initiative for international students. They find accommodation to rent by offering independent guidance. AFS advertises approximately 22,000 bed-spaces in central Madrid every year. They currently hold around 8,000 properties in their database and most (80%) are located in city-centre districts: Centro, Chamberi and Moncloa. Turnover is high and fast, that is, what is available today may be taken by tomorrow so they review and update their lists daily. You can personally choose from their huge selection of properties and search for the somewhere to live that meets your requirements. Explore for housing within your maximum budget and desired location. AFS makes the hunt an easy process by acting on your behalf. They take care of all the phone calls and arrange the viewings (even on the same day). There is no limit as to the places you can visit until you decide which place to rent.

They have standard terms of business and offer a discount to *In-Madrid* readers. The fastest and most convenient way is to visit the AFS office in Madrid.

**Contact: Donald Timson-Herranz, AFS, Calle del General Alvarez de Castro, 11-13. Metro: Quevedo / Iglesia. Open: Mon-Fri, 11am-8pm. Tel: 678 041 445 / 661 249 770.**

**Email: rentaroominmadrid@gmail.com.**

**Web: <http://spain.accommodationforstudents.com>**



### In-Madrid [www.in-madrid.com](http://www.in-madrid.com)

Regularly updated site featuring articles from Madrid's premier monthly English-language magazine. Here you'll find interviews, nightlife guides, art and culture news and the on-line version of the famous in-madrid classifieds. You can also find out where to pick up your copy of the free monthly magazine.

### Madrid Virtual

<http://madrid-virtual.com>

A Spanish website that systematically lists accommodation and types of attractions in an easy-to-follow way. And, a list of businesses that including everything from plumbers to tarot card readers. Also includes general information about the council, the weather, local radio stations, and the distance in kilometres to a number of other Spanish cities.

### Gridskipper: Madrid

<http://gridskipper.com/tag/madrid/>

The hipster's answer to Google Map, takes on Madrid, as well as every other city with a population of tag-wielding bloggers. Generally, off-kilter lists dot Gridskipper like "Occult Paris", and Madrid's page doesn't disappoint with insider posts focusing on edgier neighbourhoods and niche classics. One gripe: not updated frequently enough.