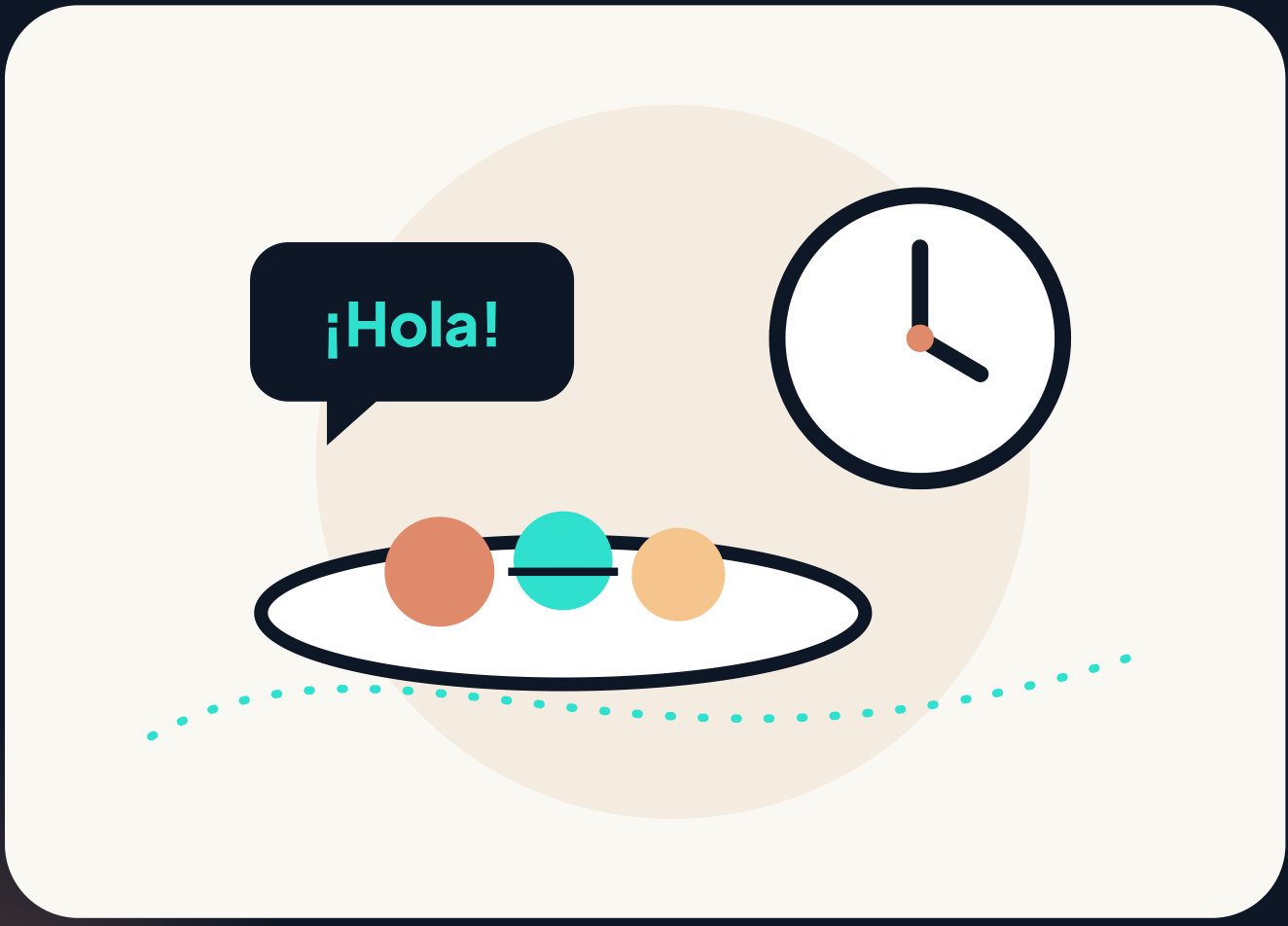
NOA

07

MADRID GUIDE · 07

Understanding Spanish culture

You don't need to change who you are. Just understand the city's rhythm to enjoy it more.



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How to read the labels: Official information from a public administration. Checked by NOA checked in several sources, not official. Students' experience advice from the community.

The rhythm of the day

- **People eat late:** lunch, the main meal, is between 14:00 and 16:00, and dinner between 21:00 and 22:30. Many restaurant kitchens close between lunch and dinner.
- **The "menú del día"** (starter, main course, dessert and drink for a fixed price, at lunchtime on weekdays) is an affordable way to eat well.
- **The sobremesa** (staying at the table chatting after a meal) is part of the culture. It's not wasting time.
- **The siesta** is more myth than reality in the city, but you'll notice social life starts late.

Relationships and manners

- **Greetings:** among friends and acquaintances, **two kisses** are common (right cheek first). In formal settings, or if you're not comfortable, a handshake is perfectly fine.
- **Tú and usted:** young people always use "tú". "Usted" is for older people or very formal situations.
- **Speaking directly** isn't being rude. People tend to give their opinions clearly and loudly.
- **Punctuality:** plans with friends are a bit flexible; for classes, exams, official appointments and work, be on time.

Calendar

- **Key holidays:** Christmas and New Year's Eve (with the **grapes at Puerta del Sol**), Three Kings' Day (6 January, very important), Easter and **San Isidro** (15 May), Madrid's patron saint festival.
- **August:** the city empties and many small businesses close for the holidays.

Tips and payments

- Tipping **isn't compulsory**. Leaving some change for good service is a nice gesture, not a rule.
- You can pay by card almost everywhere.

If you're family

At first they may tell you that "everything here is late" or that "people talk really loudly". It's part of normal culture shock, which usually passes within a few weeks. If sadness or isolation lasts beyond the first month, it deserves a calm conversation and, if needed, contacting their university's guidance service.

Checklist

- [ ] Try a menú del día
- [ ] Learn 10 basic Madrid expressions
- [ ] Note the year's public holidays

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