

Parks packed, terraces open as Madrid and Barcelona celebrate easing

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Hundreds of Madrid residents flooded to the city's parks as lockdown measures were finally eased in the Spanish capital and in Barcelona, while beaches reopened in parts of the country after months-long closures.

As well as reopening the gates of the capital's parks for the first time since mid-March, residents in the two cities can now meet in groups of up to 10 people in homes or on the terraces of bars and restaurants.

The easing measures come as the Madrid region, the city of Barcelona and large parts of Castile-Leon in the northwest, formally enter the first phase of rolling back one of the strictest lockdowns in the world.

These areas have been on a slower track as they bore the brunt of the pandemic in Spain, which has killed more than 28,700 people, one of the world's highest tolls.

In Madrid, hundreds of people turned out to enjoy an early-morning stroll in sun in the city's famous Retiro Park, with scores of runners jogging down its wide avenues and past the boating lake.

"The reopening of Retiro brings me a feeling of serenity, gives me comfort," said Rosa San Jose, a 50-year-old teacher wearing gym clothes and a mask who was out for a walk before starting the online school day.

Elsewhere in the city, the San Gines coffee shop, famed for its churros and chocolate, laid out six tables on the pavement, down from its normal 13 to ensure social distancing.

For now, the inside seating areas must remain shut.

"We've been open for 125 years and it's the first time we've ever had to close," manager Daniel Real told AFP.

"Soon we'll go back to being open 24 hours a day like before, but for now we're not working nights as there are no tourists and because the nightclub that brings us a lot of clients is closed."

Freedom, with limits

Elsewhere, regions incorporating just under half of Spain's nearly 47 million inhabitants were moving into phase two of the three-stage rollback that is due to be completed by the end of June.

For now, all new freedoms in public must be conducted while wearing a mask where it is not possible to keep a distance of two metres (six feet).

With the [summer heat](#) picking up, beaches along Spain's northern coastline as well as some areas in the south, including the Canary Islands and the Balearics, are now open for swimming, subject to [safety measures](#).

The health ministry recommends limiting the number of beachgoers, creating boundaries and spacing umbrellas four metres apart.

But for now, only locals will benefit, with travel between regions still forbidden and any foreign visitors landing in Spain compelled to undergo 14 days quarantine.

Spain has said it will open the borders to foreign tourists in July.

But the government's slow process of lifting the restrictions have a political backlash from rightwing parties as well as a growing wave of protest on the streets.

On Saturday, thousands joined protests in their cars in major Spanish cities at the call of the ultra-rightwing Vox, with drivers honking their horns, waving Spanish flags and banging saucepans to denounce the government's handling of the crisis.

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