Madrid, Spain’s Capital

Maribel’s Guide to Madrid ©

Maribel’s Guides for the Sophisticated Traveler ™

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Madrid’s Neighborhoods

Spain’s capital is a dynamic city of elegant, tree lined boulevards, a grand promenade, expansive, well maintained public parks, and renowned museums containing some of Europe’s best and most valuable art. A very walkable city, it’s also blessed with an excellent public transportation system.

Madrid de los Austrias

This, Madrid’s oldest, most historic and atmospheric quarter, with its evocative tiny cobblestoned streets and archways, was named for the 17th-century Spanish monarchs, the Hapsburg Dynasty, and is home to La Latina a lively nightlife neighborhood with its tapas bar filled Cava Baja that stretches south from the Plaza Mayor. Here is where madrileños gather on Sunday afternoons for taking a caña or vermú and a pre-lunch aperitivo after the El Rastro flea market shuts down.

In Los Austrias you’ll find several cloistered monasteries (Encarnación, Descalzas Reales) and lovely small churches (San Ginés), the Plaza Mayor, the Old City’s most grandiose public square, Old Madrid’s major thoroughfare, the Calle Mayor, Cuchilleros Street of Casa Botín fame and the Cava San Miguel, with its ancient taverns or mesones built within the bowels of
the Plaza Mayor. Here you’ll also find the tourist-filled iron and glass San Miguel Market and the Church of San Isidro, the patron saint of Madrid.

**Palacio Real and Opera**

The imposing, 3,000+ room Rococo style Bourbon Dynasty Royal Palace and its French-designed Sabatini Gardens dominate this section of the city, along with Almudena Cathedral, which hosted the wedding of King Felipe and Queen Letizia. Across the lovely square, the Plaza del Oriente, sits the neo-classical Royal Theater (Opera House) and further beyond the Senate.

**Barrio de las Letras**

Also referred as *Huertas*, which is actually the area below it, named for its bar and club filled main street. This “Literary Quarter” refers to the 17th-century Golden Age writers; Cervantes, Lope de Vega and Calderón de la Barca, who lived and wrote here. At its northern end sits the House of Parliament or Las Cortes and at its southern tip, Atocha rail station.

For the visitor it offers the most convenient neighborhood for a short visit to the city, as the major museums are nearby, it is blessed with an abundance of moderately priced hotels (One Shot, Ibis Styles, Vincci Soho, Room Mate Alicia, 3 members of Catalonia hotels), short term rental apartments, good value restaurants, from cheap to moderately priced (Terra Mundi, Maceiras, La Verónica, 3 members of the Oter group, Vinoteca Moratín, Triciclo and Tándem, Vi-Cool, Vietnam, La Huerta de Tudela), cafés for a quick and inexpensive breakfast (Huevos Rotos, Platería Bar Museo, El Azul de Fúcar, Chocolat), vegetarian-friendly eateries (La Biótica), a cool jazz club, Spain’s classical theater, a self-service laundry, and to equip a rental kitchen there are small markets, delis and wine shops.

**Gran Vía**

Madrid’s “Grand Old Way”, the entertainment epicenter of Madrid, is similar to Broadway, but sans skyscrapers, lined with many theaters, cinemas, fast food emporia, 3-4 star hotels, a FNAC and huge El Corte Inglés (at nearby Callao) and a few “working girls” on adjacent Calle Montera. At its lower end it boasts some stately 19th-century architecture capped with elegant sculpture. The Gran Vía feeds into the more noble Calle Alcalá at its southern end, and its northern tip it terminates at the Plaza de España with its statue of Don Quijote and Sancho Panza. Bustling at all hours, I find it not the quietest or most attractive place to stay given the constant frenzy of sidewalk activity and heavy traffic.

**Sol**

This is Madrid’s epicenter, “the gate of the sun” and “kilometer zero”, the dead center of Spain, from which all distances of Spain’s roads are measured, the middle point of the
country and where visitors will find a major underground transportation hub. It is also Madrid’s “Times Square”, where revelers come on New Year’s Eve to gather under the clock tower to drink a sip of cava and eat twelve grapes during the final countdown to ring in the New Year.

Populated by fast food joints, gold & silver buyers, a classic pastry shop, La Mallorquina, many chain stores, the main (and giant) branch of Spain’s only department store, El Corte Inglés, like the Gran Vía, it is a beehive of constant activity. Here sits Spain’s largest Apple Store, behind the much-loved statue of the Oso y el Madroño, the Bear and the Strawberry Tree. From here one can walk north to the Gran Vía, south to La Latina, east to the lower House of Parliament, or west to the Royal Palace.

Lavapiés
This slowly gentrifying, decidedly working class quarter (the city’s Jewish Quarter during the Middle Ages) is home to a large immigrant population, primarily from North Africa and the Middle East and is considered the most multicultural, diverse area of the city.

Decidedly blue collar, it appears both scruffy and endearingly bohemian and houses many cheap eateries (many offering vegetarian/vegan fare and Indian cuisine), Arab style teahouses, Arab baths (the Hammam Al Andalús) and beloved old time bars around the Ribera de Curtidores, where the Sunday morning flea market, El Rastro, is held, an excellent flamenco club, Casa Patas, the Cine Doré, the oldest cinema in the city, and two lively, and authentic covered markets.

Malasaña
A funky, counterculture, ultra hipster neighborhood for 20s and 30s somethings, some liken Malasaña to Manhattan’s East Village; others see a resemblance to Williamsburg, Brooklyn, while others think of it as Madrid’s version of Camden Town. Its main square is the Plaza Dos de Mayo, and it is nestled between the main streets of Fuencarral to the east and San Bernardo to the west. Just east of the trendy boutiques of Fuencarral, you’ll find the up-and-coming (formerly sketchy) hipster neighborhood of Triball, tucked between Malasaña and Chueca.

Like Chueca to the south, Malasaña abounds in “cheap eats” plus indie boutiques, tattoo parlors, vintage bookshops, one cute boutique hotel (Abalu) and a plethora of late night bars for Gin Tonics and Mojitos. It has also become the center of the craft beer craze (La Tape, Fábrica Maravillas, Irreale). In the post-Franco late 70s and early 80s it witnessed the birth of the cultural, drug and sexual rebellion, “La Movida”, immortalized in early Almodóvar movies.
Chueca
Madrid’s “gay” district since its gentrification in the 90s, home to its LGBT community, which celebrates a riotous Gay Pride Parade on the last Saturday of June, but is welcoming and friendly to those of all persuasions. A center of nightlife, it is blessed with a plethora of late night bars and clubs and is also home to some bargain restaurants (Momo, Bazaar) and renovated, classic taverns (La Carmencita), hip hotels (Room Mate Oscar and Only You), a hip “cheap sleep” (Sidorme Fuencarral 52), trendy boutiques on Calles Almirante and Fuencarral, shoe outlets on Calle Augusto Figueroa and an attractive street market, Mercado de San Ildefonso, and an interesting indoor market/food court, the Mercado de San Antón, with a hugely popular rooftop restaurant/bar.

Chamberí
To some this section is known as Justicia because the Justice Palace sits there, some refer to it as Salesas because of the proximity of the Plaza de las Salesas. Another lovely square in this neighborhood is the Plaza Olavide. This lower section of Chamberí appears a bit NYC Soho-like, with some of the city’s best food shopping (bakeries, pastry shops, chocolaterías), while the upper area of Chamberí, including Calles Almagro, Eduardo Dato and Fortuny, are as exclusive and lovely, architecture-wise, as Salamanca, with ultra chic restaurants and beautiful mansions, some which house foreign embassies. Here in upper Chamberí, you’ll find the jewel of small art museums, the Museo Sorolla.

Castellana-Recoletos-Paseo del Prado
These are the three names for the broad boulevard that divides Old Madrid from its modern expansion (Ensanche). It is the city’s major north-south axis, stretching from Atocha rail station in the south to the leaning twin towers at the Plaza de Castilla in the north. For the visitor it is on this north-south axis starting at the mid-section, the Plaza Colón and moving down to Puerta de Atocha, where one will find Madrid’s city hall/post office, the Palacio de Cibeles, and its major art museums/exhibit spaces: Fundación Mapfre Sala Recoletos, Thyssen-Bornemisza, Prado, Caixa Forum and finally, at its southern end, the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía.

On this avenue tourists will also find 5-star hotels (Hesperia, Intercontinental, Villamagna, Meliá Gran Fénix, Mandarin Oriental Ritz, Westin Palace) glamorous watering holes for the rich and famous (Tatel, Punk Bach, Otto, Ten con Ten), the American Embassy and the Botanical Gardens, which sit just south of the Prado.

Salamanca
Madrid’s most exclusive, affluent and elegant neighborhood was developed as an expansion to the city in second half of the 19th-century under the patronage of the Marquis de
Salamanca. This is where the city’s crème de la crème lives and does its luxury shopping in its posh international boutiques on the Golden Mile, between Calles Serrano and Ortega & Gasset. Here the visitor will also find distinguished 4-5 star hotels (Wellington, Unico, Adler), cosmopolitan restaurants on Calles Velázquez and Jorge Juan and beautiful architecture. New Yorkers may find it reminiscent of Manhattan’s Upper East Side.

It begins east of Castellana Boulevard and just north of Retiro Park. From a Salamanca area hotel one can take a very pleasant half-hour walk to the Prado and reach the Puerta del Sol, Madrid’s epicenter, via subway or bus in around 20 minutes. Here you will also find embassies, the Juan March Foundation and the lovely Fundación Lázaro Galdiano Museum.

**Chamartín**

Called such, as it is home to the northern city’s rail station, it is the primarily international business and financial section of the city but not convenient for lodging the short-term visitor. It houses a large executive ex-pat community and one of the city’s best indoor markets, along with elegant restaurants in the area around Calle Dr. Fleming, on its eastern side (DiverXO, 99 Sushi Bar, Sacha).

**Retiro**

This quiet, primarily upper middle class residential neighborhood sits directly east of Retiro Park, the city’s most beautiful green space, with its artificial lake for canoeing, puppet theater, bike rentals, street artists, its Glass Pavilion that houses special exhibits from the Museo Reina Sofia and is THE place to stroll on a sunny Sunday morning.

This district has also become a haven for gourmet small plates dining. Come here on the evening to indulge in a “moveable feast” at one of its highly regarded gastrobars (La Catapa, Taberna Marcano, La Raquetista). It’s also home to one of the city’s best *marisquerías* (seafood temples), Casa Rafa.

**Moncloa-Argüelles**

Madrid’s main public university, Universidad Complutense, is located in Moncloa on its northern end; thus, it’s a young person’s hangout with plenty of bars. On its main thoroughfare, Calle Princesa, you will find a large branch of El Corte Inglés and other Spanish chains. Its southern end abuts the Plaza de España. Paseo del Pintor Rosales, its prettiest promenade, faces the large Parque del Oeste, where one catches the cable car, Teleférico, to the Casa de Campo with its Zoo. At the southern end of Pintor Rosales at Ferraz you’ll see an Egyptian temple, the Templo de Debod, a gift from the Egyptian government to the city.
Getting Around

From Madrid-Barajas to the city center

There are several transfer options to get you from the airport to downtown Madrid.

You'll find a plethora of taxis waiting in the official line (taxi rank) outside terminals 1, 3 and 4 at the Adolfo Suárez Madrid-Barajas airport. Fares are a flat fee of 30€ between the airport (all terminals) and the city center (inside the Calle 30 ring road), with no additional supplements. You can ask for a larger taxi if there are more than 4 people in your family.

+ The taxi from T4 to the city center takes about 25 minutes in normal traffic, a few minutes longer during rush hour. There is a minimum fare of 20€ for destinations within 10 km of the airport, a 3€ supplement if going to or from a bus or rail station, and a supplement of 6,70€ on Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve-between 9:00 pm and 7:00 am. Taxi rates are posted on the window of the taxi and most taxis now accept credit cards. You can ask for a receipt on any taxi ride, regardless of the type of payment used.

Cabify & Uber services are both available to and from the airport, as well as in the city. You can contact them upon landing, but with the number of taxis available at the airport, there would be little need. We use both of these services when we are somewhere where taxis are
harder to find, the weather is bad, or when we are not near a taxi stand. The cost is generally comparable. Since you will need to set up an account with the service, no money ever changes hands and you always have a receipt.

The city bus route 200 goes from terminals T1, T2, T3 and T4 to the Avenida de América Transport Hub, where you can connect to other city and intercity bus routes and the metro, while the city bus route 101 runs from terminals T1, T2 and T3 to the Canillejas Transport Hub. One-way tickets are still only 1,50€.

The handy Airport Express Bus line 203 the "Exprés Aeropuerto", departs T4 (with stops at T1 and T2) to downtown Madrid with three stops; the first stop is on the corner of O’Donnell and Doctor Esquerdo in the Salamanca quarter, the second at Plaza de Cibeles, handy for many hotels and for the EMT night bus to Atocha station, and the third is at Atocha Station (between 6:00 am and 11:30 pm only). You can be at Atocha station in about 35 to 40 minutes in normal traffic. The bus runs every 15 minutes during the day, and every 35 minutes after 11:30 pm, 365 days of the year. Ticket are 5€. You can pay with cash on the bus or with the new contactless technology using a bank card or by mobile phone. These yellow buses have bilingual signage and are equipped with Wi Fi and luggage racks.

The Avanzabus departs from terminals T1 and T4 with direct routes to Ávila, Castellón, Salamanca, Valencia y Zamora. The Alsa bus departs from terminal T4 with services to the Zaragoza, Barcelona, Valladolid, León, Murcia, Alicante, Gijón, Oviedo, Lugo, Coruña, Santiago de Compostela, Burgos, Vitoria, San Sebastián, Santander, Bilbao, Logroño and Pamplona, among others.

The Madrid Underground, Metro Line 8, operates daily from 6:05 am to 1:30 am, has a station at T4, called “aeropuerto T4” with stops at T1, 2 and 3. Line 8 (pink line) goes from the airport to Nuevos Ministerios in 12-15 minutes. The single fare for Metro Zone A, plus the airport supplement of 3€, is 4,50€ to a maximum of 5€, depending on how many stations you need to travel to from the airport. Tickets, including the money saving 10-ride Metrobús pass (sharable), are available at the self-service machines located at the entrance to the metro station serving Terminals 1-3 and at Terminal 4. You can add as many stops to the 10-ride ticket as you need at a cost of 0,10€ each/stop. Passengers who already have a 10-ride Metrobús pass (12,20€) must pay the airport supplement to use Line 8 either to or from the airport.

From Nuevos Ministerios you can transfer to another line (or make two transfers) to reach your city center hotel. From the international arrivals area of Terminal 1 to the metro station, located between Terminals 2 and 3, is about a 15-minute walk. You can check the schedule for Line 8 at www.metromadrid.es, or download the free MetroMadrid app online.
Travelers holding the Madrid Card do not pay the supplement, but the pricey Madrid Card is seldom worth the money.

Note: Traveling via metro may be the lengthiest and often the most tedious way to go from the airport to your hotel, taking longer than the Cercanías light rail or the Airport Express bus, as during the morning and evening rush hours, metro cars can be jam packed and some lines are plagued with pickpockets. We do not recommend attempting this journey with a combination of bulky suitcases and jet lag. And remember, some metro stations do not have escalators or elevators, so climbing stairs can make a trip from airport to hotel with luggage a chore. As such, I recommend taking the metro only for backpackers and the budget minded with a full hour or so to spare to reach your downtown hotel. The journey from T-4 to the Sol metro stop, for those staying at hotels near the Puerta del Sol, takes just over 43 minutes and involves two transfers.

The suburban commuter rail line, Cercanías Line C1, runs every 30 minutes from T4 to the city center between 5:58 am and 10:57 pm: Chamartín station (13 min), Nuevos Ministerios (19 min), Atocha Renfe station (27 min), Méndez Álvaro (31 min) and Príncipe Pío stations (39 min) for bus connections. If your flight lands at Terminal 1 (Delta, Easy Jet, Ryanair), or Terminal 2 (Lufthansa, Alitalia, Air France, KLM), you can take the free shuttle bus outside the arrivals hall to T4 to catch the Cercanías. The Aeropuerto T4 station has wider turnstiles to allow for luggage.

The cost of a one-way ticket is 2,60€, but free for passengers with AVE tickets connecting with a flight. The ticket machines, red with an inverted C, have the option to choose English as your language. Choose your destination station, the number of tickets you wish to purchase, type of journey (one-way or return), and you’ll see the total price displayed on the screen. Insert euros (5€, 10€ or 20€ bill) and retrieve you tickets and change.

If traveling from the airport to a hotel/hostal near the Puerta del Sol, the quickest route is to take the C-1 Cercanías train from Terminal 4 to the Chamartín stop, then transfer to a C-4A, C-4B or C-3 train to the Sol commuter rail station. See the timetable at: www.renfe.com/viajeros/cercanias. You can also download the free Renfe Cercanías app at the iTunes Store.

There are several transfer services that are available including Sun Transfers, TaxiMercedes, and Limos4 Madrid. This is generally more than the cost of a taxi, but you’ll have an English speaking chauffeur waiting outside baggage claim with a placard with your name on it, ready to deliver.

City Transportation

Madrid taxis are relatively inexpensive and extremely plentiful. The official taxis are white with a diagonal red strip on the front door. The green light and a libre sign on the
windshield indicate that they are available. You can flag them down easily on the street except on New Year’s Eve, when taxi drivers don’t start working until 2:00 am. There are now over 16,000 taxis in the metropolitan area. The meter runs faster after 11:00 pm, and as mentioned above, there is a 3€ supplement for fares originating from train/bus station taxi ranks, also to or from the IFEMA congress center in the Parque Ferial Juan Carlos I. There is an additional 6,70€ surcharge on December 24 and 31 between 9:00 pm and 7:00 am. A maximum of six supplements can be charged for any taxi run except for those on Christmas and New Years eve/morning, when the number of supplements charged an be seven. There is no charge for luggage carried in the trunk. As of 2016 the minimum taxi fare is 4€. Tip up to 10% of the fare, but never more, Spaniards simply round up.

City buses operate from 6:00 am until midnight. Buses 14, 27 and 45 will transport you up and down Castellana Boulevard to the Thyssen, Prado, Caixa Forum and Reina Sofia museums. Bus 27, in fact, is a handy “northern Madrid sightseeing bus” since it runs from Atocha in the south all the way up north, past the Bernabeu soccer stadium, to the twin towers at the Plaza Castilla. But beware of pickpockets on this line. After midnight there is a system of búho (owl) buses that run every half hour from 3:00 am and every hour from 3:00 to 6:00 am, but they are usually of little use to the average tourist.

Please remember if purchasing a ticket when boarding a bus, the driver will not accept any bill larger then a 5€ note.

The Madrid Metro, open from 6:00 am to 1:30 am daily, is clean, user-friendly and efficient. Single metro rides cost the same as bus rides, 1,50€.

The 10-ride ticket, Metrobús, can be used on both the bus and underground metro system and only costs 12,20€, representing a significant savings off the cost of the individual tickets (1,50€ each). The Public Transport Card can be purchased at a ticket machines in any of the metro stations. The machines accept cash and credit cards. Multiple travelers can share this card. You can heck the balance on your card at any ticket machine.

Note: A Single Ticket, once loaded on any card, must be used on the day of purchase. If you attempt to use a Single Ticket the day after it was purchased, the turnstile will not accept it because it has expired. Single Tickets loaded from midnight until the end of service are also valid the following day until the end of the service. A Public Transport Card can hold up to 10 Single Tickets, which may be purchased all at once or separately. For the 10-Journey Tickets, One Public Transport Card can hold up to two 10-journey tickets with a maximum of 20 journeys of the same ticket type.

To find the best way to travel by bus, metro or suburban train from point A to point B, use the “Paths” route calculating service at CRTM. Select your language at the bottom of the page. You can also download the app on iTunes: Transporte de Madrid CRTM. For further

The Abono Transporte Turístico, or Tourist Travel Pass, is for non-residents only, which may or may not be a money saver for your visit. We usually just purchase the normal 10-ride ticket.

The Cercanías, commuter trains, connect Madrid with its suburbs from the new transportation hub beneath the Puerta del Sol and Madrid’s two major rail stations, Chamartín and Atocha via two underground lines traversing the city from north to south. One line passes through the Puerta del Sol and another makes two intermediate stops at Nuevos Ministerios and Recoletos.

You might use a Cercanías train if you arrive on a train from the north (Paris, León, Valladolid or Segovia) at Chamartín station and need to connect to Atocha station to catch the high speed AVE to Barcelona, Valencia, Córdoba, Sevilla or Málaga. The Cercanías fare between the two rail stations is 2,70€, and tickets can be purchased at red machines with an inverted C sign or at a designated Cercanías ticket booth. You might also use a Cercanías C3 train to travel from Madrid to El Escorial, departing from the Sol station or Chamartín. The C7 will take you to Alcalá de Henares, departing from Atocha, or take the C3 to Aranjuez, also departing from Sol or Atocha. For train schedules see Renfe. Click on Cercanías on the left side of the English home page then choose Madrid. Fares determined by zones.
Madrid Sites

Sights that can be visited on Mondays

• Reina Sofía National Museum of Modern Art - until 2:30 pm
• Thyssen Bornemisza Museum - permanent collection only, from noon to 4:00 pm
• Royal Palace, Campo del Moro Gardens and Sabatini Gardens
• Almudena Cathedral
• Retiro Park
• Lázaro Galdiano Museum - until 3:30 pm
• Royal Tapestry Factory Museum - until 2:00 pm
• Caixa Forum
• Casa del Campo for amusement park/zoo/aquarium
• Fundación Mapre Sala de Recoletos - special art exhibits
• Royal Botanical Gardens
• Bull fighting Museum (currently under renovation)
• Bernabéu soccer stadium

What’s Free and When

• **Prado Museum**: Monday-Saturday from 6:00 to 8:00 pm, Sundays and holiday from 5:00 to 7:00 pm, with a 50% discount for the temporary exhibits. Also free on May 18.
• **Reina Sofia Museum**: Monday and Wednesday-Saturdays from 7:00 to 9:00 pm, Sunday from 1:30 to 7:00 pm. Also free on April 18, May 18, October 12 and December 6, and free for those under 18, over 65 and the disabled.
• **Thyssen-Bornemisza**: Permanent collection is free every Monday from noon to 4:00 pm.
• **San Antonio de la Florida Hermitage**: Tuesday-Friday from 9:30 am to 8:00 pm. Saturday and Sunday from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm.
• **Archaeology Museum (MAN)**: Tuesday-Saturday from 9:30 am to 8:00 pm. Sundays and holidays from 9:30 am to 3:00 pm.
• **Templo de Debod**: Always free, but closed on Mondays. In August it’s only open from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm.
• **Lázaro Galdiano Museum**: Tuesday-Saturday from 3:30 pm to 4:30 pm, Sunday from 2:00 pm to 3:00 pm. Free to children under 12.
• **Sorolla Museum**: Saturdays after 2:00 pm. All day Sunday, May 18, October 12, November 16 and December 6. Free to those over 65, under 18 and the disabled.
San Fernando Royal Academy of Fine Arts: Wednesdays from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm.

Museum of Decorative Arts: Sundays, Thursday afternoons, May 18, November 16, October 12 and December 6. Free to those under 18, over 65, and the disabled.

Costume Museum: Saturdays after 2:30 pm, Sundays, April 18, May 18, October 12, and December 6. Free to those under 18, over 65, and the disabled.

The Americas Museum: Sundays, April 18, May 18, October 12, and December 6. Free to those under 18, over 65, and EU and Latin American citizens (ID required).

Fundación Caja Madrid (for joint art exhibits with the Thyssen): Always free.

Fundación Canal (for special exhibits): Always free.

Sala BBVA (art exhibits): Always free.

Fundación Mapfre Recoletos (art exhibits): Always free.

Fundación Juan March - Free lunchtime concerts on Mondays at noon. First Monday of each month at 7:00 pm, Saturday concerts at noon.

Fundación BBVA - Free concerts. One needs to reserve by phone: (+34) 913 745 400, or email: musica@fbbva.es.

Sights that children enjoy

Parque de Atracciones (Amusement Park) in the Casa de Campo

Retiro Park’s puppet theater

Teleférico (cable car)

Price Circus Theater

Museum on Natural Science

Dreams Ice Palace

Zoo-Aquarium in the Casa de Campo

Warner Brothers Park - open March-December

Faunia

Madrid Xanadú - for indoor skiing and giant shopping mall

Planetarium

Railroad Museum

Naval Museum - for hundreds of model ships

Wax Museum

Real Madrid’s Bernabeu soccer stadium

Aquápolis Water Park de Villanueva de la Cañada - open July-September. To reach the park, take bus line 627 (Madrid-Brunete).
17th-century Hapsburg Madrid

Taking a stroll through “El Madrid de los Austrias”

You can begin your morning stroll through Old Madrid of the Hapsburg Dynasty at the Plaza Mayor, the city’s most famous public square, completed in the first quarter of the 17th-century. This year marks its 400th anniversary. The original market square, built in the 15th-century, was called the Plaza del Arrabal and over the years the plaza has served as a bullring, an outdoor meat market, a theater and where carnivals took place. It was also a place for executions, the occasional autos de fe, a ritual of public penance, and coronations. On Sunday mornings now the plaza hosts a stamp and coin market and is an important social hub for Madrileños throughout the year. Do avoid the expensive bars and restaurants found on the plaza (and under it) for dining, as the prices are far too high for the quality you’ll receive for your euro. Order a beer, wine or coffee if you want to sit at one of the terraces and survey the scene.

Casa de la Panadería, the oldest building in the plaza, was once an important bakery and is now the home of the Madrid Tourist Office. Stop by and pick up brochures. There are also computers available for visitors to check their email.
Leaving the plaza, you pass through the Arco de Cuchilleros, the arch on the southwestern side of the plaza. On the street named after the knife makers who once practiced their trade here, you will find a contemporary art store, El Arco Artesanía, at #9 that has work from over 50 small local artisan workshops. At the bottom of the stairs, on your right, you’ll find the restaurant Cuevas de Luis Candelas (1949). Continuing on Calle de Cuchilleros, you’ll pass the legendary Antigua Casa Sobrinos de Botín, the oldest restaurant in the world (1725). When you reach the intersection at Puerta Cerrada, take a left onto Calle Tinteros, which will lead you to Calle de Toledo at Plaza de Segovia Nueva. The massive Baroque Colegiata de San Isidro, named for the patron saint of Madrid, Isidore the Laborer, sits on the corner of the plaza.

After a visit to the church, you turn south, strolling down Calle Toledo until you reach the Plaza de la Cebada, once the site of public executions. If you turn right you’ll find yourself in the heart of the Barrio de La Latina, where you’ll see a large covered market, Mercado de la Cebada. Don’t expect anything fancy here, but if you’re staying in the area, the food is plentiful and budget-friendly. Continue on past the market to the Plaza del Humilladero, at the southern end of Madrid’s famous Cava Baja. This is another small square that at noon and in the evenings is filled with lively terrazas and busy tapas bars.

If you were to go left instead of right at the Plaza de la Cebada, you’d come to the Plaza Cascorro, where you can walk down Calle Ribera de Curtidores for a few minutes and find yourself in the heart of the Sunday morning El Rastro flea market (see above).

Plaza del Humilladero is part of a series of small plazas that include Plaza Carros, Plaza de San Andrés, with its Church of San Andrés, one of the oldest churches in Madrid, and the Plaza Puerta de Moros, site of one of four gates in the medieval wall of Madrid’s Moorish quarter. The Museo de San Isidro is next door to the church of San Andrés.

From the Plaza Puerta de Moros, you walk down Carrera de San Francisco for a few minutes to the Plaza de San Francisco and the Neoclassic style Royal Basílica San Francisco el Grande, often depicted in painting by Goya. Inside you’ll find paintings by Zurbarán, an early work by Goya that includes a self-portrait of the artist, and one of the series of “Apostles” by Ribera in the sacristy, plus a spectacular dome, one of the largest in Spain. Entrance to the museum is 5€.

From Plaza de San Francisco it’s a short walk northwest up Calle San Buenaventura to the Plaza de Gabriel Miró and the Jardines de las Vistillas. From the hilltop here you’ll see looming in front of you the Cathedral of the Almudena, the seat of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Madrid, and the enormous 18th-century Royal Palace. This is my favorite viewpoint in Madrid, particularly at night. On your right is Calle de la Morería where you’ll find the oldest flamenco tablao (nightclub) in the world, the legendary Corral de la Morería.
From the gardens you can walk up Calle Bailén along the Viaducto de Segovia to the Palacio Real de Madrid, where you take a guided or self-guided tour. Only 50 of the 2,800 rooms can be visited, along with the pharmacy and the Royal Armory, reached via a separate entrance off the courtyard. When Napoleon first saw the Grand Staircase after installing his brother Joseph on the Spanish throne in 1808, he supposedly said: “Joseph, your lodgings will be better than mine”. It was occupied until 1931, when Alfonso XIII was forced to abdicate and the Republic established, five years before the start of the Spanish Civil War. The current King Juan Carlos and family live in the far more modest Palacio de la Zarzuela outside of the city. Children always enjoy the Royal Armory (Artillería Real) with its collection of 2000 weapons and suits of armor. The Royal Pharmacy (Botica Real) is a recreation of a 19th-century pharmacy with beautiful hand painted porcelain pharmacy jars from Talavera de la Reina.

The Palace is still used for official functions (visits by heads of state, summits, and various ceremonial occasions, so it closes on short notice. The Palace is open daily, April-September, from 10:00 am to 8:00 pm and until 6:00 pm from October-March. Closed January 1 and 6, May 1 and 15, August 15, October 12, November 9, and December 24, 25 and 31. Official closing dates change each year, so please check the Patrimonio Nacional website for this years closing dates.

For a coffee or lunch break, you can head across Calle Bailén to one of Madrid’s most emblematic taverns, the 107-year old Anciano Rey de los Vinos. You’ll feel like you’ve stepped back in time surrounded by its marble columns, elegant carved wood doorways, its brass lanterns, beautiful glazed green and white tiles and walls adorned with photographs and paintings of 19th-century Madrid. Do as the locals do and order a canapé and a draught vermouth, and soak up the ambiance. The tavern has a lovely, atmospheric dining room open for lunch and dinner, serving a wide variety of traditional specialties at affordable prices. There’s also a small outdoor terrace directly overlooking Almudena Cathedral. The bar and terrace are open from 10:00 am until midnight.

Or if crowds are too thick at the Anciano Rey de los Vinos, try La Trastienda de las Vistillas, on the opposite side of Calle Bailén, in the Vistillas Gardens at Travesía de las Vistillas 13. This relatively new spot serves great canapés, boquerones en vinagre, draught vermouth, Mahou beer and wines by the glass. Its outdoor terrace has lovely views of the gardens and of the Plaza Gabriel Miró.

If you happen to be at the Royal Palace on a Wednesday or Saturday between 11:00 am to 2:00 pm, there is a changing of the Royal Guard (except in July and August when it is from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm). It is held at the Prince’s Gate (Puerta del Príncipe), weather permitting. The guards are in full-dress uniform, replicas of the ones used during King Alfonso XIII’s reign, two foot guards and two mounted guards take their posts outside the
Prince’s Gate, accompanied by fifes and drums. Foot guards are changed every half hour, while the mounted guards are changed every hour, but not at the same time as the foot guards.

But for something even better, at 12:00 noon on the first Wednesday of each month (except in January, August and September) a far more elaborate spectacle is celebrated, the **Solemn Changing of the Royal Guard**. It’s a colorful pageant consisting of a cast of 429 guardsmen, 105 horses, marching bands and carriages. It begins with the setting of the Guard Posts in Armería Square, followed by the inspection of the new guard in Oriente Square. The old guard marches into Armería Square, after which the new guard parades and then also marches into Armería Square. Finally, the old guard marches back to the barracks. This free spectacle lasts for approximately 50 minutes. Bleachers are erected for only 600 spectators, so get there early!

After your visit, save time to stroll through the beautiful Campo del Moro Gardens, an English-style garden created for Queen Maria Cristina, on the west side of the Palace before leaving. After a walk through the garden, cross Calle Bailén to the Plaza del Oriente, with the bronze equestrian statue of Felipe IV and a sculpture collection of twenty Spanish kings, which in my opinion, is Madrid’s most picturesque squares. On the opposite side of the plaza from the Royal Palace is the 19th-century **Teatro Real**, the Royal Opera House.

To the right of entrance to the Opera metro on Plaza Isabel II, you’ll see steps leading up Calle Escalinata Bonetilla that will take you to Calle Mayor, one of the most ancient thoroughfares of the city. Here you’ll take a right turn onto Calle Mayor rather than a left up to the Puerta del Sol in order to walk down past the former city hall, Casa de la Villa on the pretty Plaza de la Villa, where the city hall once stood, and where you will find a statue in honor of **Álvaro de Bazán**, a famous naval admiral and Navarrese noble. This is Madrid’s oldest square, and its principal square before the creation of the Plaza Mayor.

For a little detour, turn right down Calle Codo to the Plaza Conde de Miranda and stop at the 17th-century Convento de las Carboneras, **Convento del Corpus Cristi**, where there is a small door to the right of the main entrance on Plaza del Conde de Miranda, 3, where the cloistered nuns sell their own baked goods to help support themselves. Ring the bell, and a nun will buzz you in. Inside is a small room with a lazy Susan on the wall, called a **torno**. Next to the lazy Susan is a price list. Ring the buzzer and a nun greet you and ask you what you wish to purchase. Give her your order and when it’s ready, the lazy Susan will turn and you’ll have your purchases. Place your money on the lazy Susan and turn it around for the nun to retrieve it. If you need change, the nun will put the change on the lazy Susan and turn it back towards you. Nearby at Calle del Cordón is a shop, El Jardín del Convento, where all the artisanal sweets baked by nuns from various convents all over Spain are sold.
After your visit with the nuns, return to the Plaza de la Villa square and walk up Calle Mayor in the direction of the Puerta del Sol, turning right on Called Escalinata to Plaza San Miguel, where another turn-of-the-century, wrought iron covered market, the Mercado de San Miguel, has been transformed into a sophisticated gourmet shopping complex, always buzzing, especially on Sundays before lunch. From here you stroll down the pedestrian Cava San Miguel past the cave-like taverns under the Plaza Mayor, called the mesones, on your left, popular with university students and tourists at night. Then walk back up the steps and through the Arco of Cuchilleros, at the Cuevas de Luis Candelas, into the Plaza Mayor. Exit the square on the northeast corner and stroll down Calle Postas to reach Madrid’s epicenter, the lively Puerta del Sol.
Beyond Old Madrid

**Plaza Monumental de las Ventas del Espíritu Santo**

The bullfighting season in Madrid runs from late March to mid-October, with the highlights being the *San Isidro Fair* (May 9–June 8) and the *Feria de Otoño*, the October Fair. Bullfights are held each Sunday during the season at the Plaza de toros de las Ventas, which is Spain’s largest bullring, holding 23,000 spectators. Tickets go on sale at the bullring a few days prior to the scheduled corrida (bullfight). If you’re interested in seeing a bullfight, purchase a *sombra* (shade) ticket rather than the cheaper *sol* (sun) or *sol y sombra* (sun and shade) tickets for a comfortable late afternoon, as you can only sit comfortably in the sun in early May and mid-October. Be sure to rent a *almohadilla*, a leather cushion, to sit on, as the seats are concrete. Your seat will be marked by a number on the concrete, and will be a very tight space at that! The priciest seats are the *barrera*, *contrabarrera* and *delantera*, the first four rows of seating, followed by the *tendido bajo* seats. Avoid the *andanada*, the nosebleed section. Bullfight tickets can be purchased online when they become available.

To reach the Las Ventas bullring by public transportation, take the metro, line 2, and get off at the Ventas stop. The bullring’s *museum* is located next to the *patio de caballos* in the back, and admission is free, and it’s pen from 9:30 am to 2:00 pm.
Standard self-guided tours are available from 10:00 am to 6:30 pm daily, except December 25 and January 1. Purchase your tickets, which include the audio guide, at the gift shop at the Cuadrillas gate. Open on Sundays, March through mid-October from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm, 4 hours before the bullfights begin. Tour tickets are 14€ for adults, 8€ for children under twelve, and free to children under 5.

**Santiago Bernabéu soccer stadium**
This is great fun for fútbol fans young and old alike. Tours are conducted daily except on December 25, January 1 and game days when tours must end five hours before the match begins. Tours are available Monday-Saturday, 10:00am to 7:00 pm and Sunday and holidays from 10:30 am to 6:30 pm on non-match days. On match days, tours are given until 5 hours before the match. Tickets can be purchased at the stadium ticket window, taquilla number 10, next to Gate (Puerta) 7 and entrance is located at Tower B on Avenida Concha Espina. Or purchase tickets [online](mailto:info@iberiantraveler.com).

The self-guided tour allows access to the Super Box (Palco de Honor), the locker rooms, the trophy and museum rooms, opportunity for a drink at the bar, access to the field via the players’ tunnel and finishes up, of course, in the official Real Madrid store. Tickets are 19€ for adults and 13€ for children up to age 14. Visitors can reach the stadium by taking the metro line 10 to the Santiago Bernabéu station, or for a very scenic tour of modern Madrid, take bus 27 from the stop at the Plaza de Cibeles, where you’ll find the Palacio de Cibeles and get off at Plaza Cuzco, where you will see the stadium on your right (beware of pickpockets on both the bus and metro).

**For a lunch break after touring the stadium**
The [Real Café Bernabeu](mailto:info@iberiantraveler.com) offers a sushi bar downstairs and serves a low cost weekday menú cuchara expres for 9,90€ or the menú madristra for 18€, if you and your family need quick and easy sustenance after the tour. The elegant Cibeles bar of the [Puerta 57 Restaurant](mailto:info@iberiantraveler.com), within the stadium (entrance through door 57), is a great place for very traditional tapas from the Asturias region. Prices are a bit inflated but it makes for great people watching. And it does serve an outstanding tortilla española and ensaladilla rusa. Inside the stadium there is an Asian restaurant, [Zen Market](mailto:info@iberiantraveler.com), entry through gate 20, open daily for lunch from 1:30 pm to 4:30. [Asador de la Esquina](mailto:info@iberiantraveler.com), entry through gate 46, has a terrace for summer dining. Open for lunch daily from 1:00 pm to 4:00.
Madrid’s Golden Art Triangle

The Golden Art Triangle, the *Paseo del Arte*, the Art Walk, consists of the three “must see” museums, the Prado, the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía and the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, plus the Caixa Forum Cultural Center.

One can buy a pass for admission to the big three, called the Abono Paseo del Arte, for 25,60€, a savings of 3,40€. I have bought mine at the Reina Sofía where the lines move more quickly. You can also purchase it at the Goya ticket booths at the Prado, but to enter the Prado one needs to show the Paseo de Arte pass at the Goya ticket center to exchange it for a Prado specific entrance ticket. The pass is valid for a one-time visit to each museum and valid for one year. But it is not valid for special exhibits at the Thyssen and Prado that require a separate ticket. Also, the Prado and Reina Sofía now have hours when entrance is free. So it may not be worth it to you if you plan to attend these special shows or go to those two museums during their admission-free periods.

For the smaller, state-run museums, not including the Prado, Thyssen or Reina Sofía, two passes exist, the first for visiting four museums within 10 days, that costs 8€, and the second, which allows visits to eight museums within 15 days, for 16€. The Museo del Romanticismo, Museo Nacional de Antropología (MAN), Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas, Museo del
Traje, Museo Cerralbo, Museo de América, Museo Arqueológico Nacional and Museo Sorolla participate in this program and the passes can be purchased at their ticket windows.

**Museo del Prado**

The Prado Museum first opened to the public on 19 November 1819 as a *Royal Museum of Painting and Sculpture*, the museum houses the great masters of Spanish painting (the Baroque giants, Velázquez, Ribera, Murillo and Zurbarán, along with El Greco and Goya). A vast and tiring space, it’s best to concentrate on the Spanish masterpieces rather than try to see it all there is in one visit. The Prado is open Monday-Saturday from 10:00 am to 8:00 pm and on Sundays and holidays from 10:00 am to 7:00 pm. Open from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm on December 24 and 31 and January 6. Closed January 1, May 1 and December 25.

The principal entrances for individuals to the Prado are through the center Velázquez door facing the Paseo del Prado, Goya door, facing the Hotel Ritz and the Jerónimos wing entrance. The Jerónimos wing currently houses an information desk, the cloakroom (backpacks must be checked here), museum store, an auditorium, the cafetería, Café Prado, and the special exhibition halls. Just beyond the Velázquez entrance facing the Paseo del Prado you’ll find the information desks. The museum has a café in the new Rafael Moneo-designed Jerónimos wing and a gift shop. The first floor galleries are always crowded with groups.

General admission is 15€, reduced tickets are 7,50€, and include access to the permanent and temporary exhibits. The *Paseo del Arte* Card is 30,40€. Those who purchase tickets in advance can avoid the long lines. Note: If you hold a ticket for a special show housed in the Jerónimos wing, it’s quicker and less confusing to enter through the Jerónimos door in the annex at the northern end of the museum, behind the Goya Sales Point. The southern entrance, the Murillo door in the Villanueva original building, is for groups only.

If you don’t opt for the Prado audio guide, you might want to purchase the mini guide “Masterpieces of the Prado” in the gift shop before making your assault. In each major room you’ll also find small explanatory brochures available in several languages (however, sometimes they run out of the English pamphlets).

Audio guides are available in several languages for 4€ for the permanent collection, 3,50€ for the temporary exhibits, or 6€ for a combo. And remember that visitors can book online for both temporary exhibits and general admission. The *Official Prado Guide*, 480 pages, is now available in nine languages and was updated in 2019 for the Bicentenary. The cost of the digital guide is 18,53€.

The Velázquez rooms are 16, 16B, and 27-29. El Greco is in rooms 9A-10A. Ribera and Murillo are in rooms 25-26. Goya can be found in rooms 32, and 34-38, his macabre black
paintings are on the ground floor in rooms 64-67 and 75, while his light and airy tapestry designs are found on the top floor in rooms 85, and 90-94.

Once inside the main Villanueva building, rent your audio guide for permanent collection/temporary exhibit or combo, pick up your map, and head straight up to the second floor to the Grand Hall, where you’ll find the huge canvases of the Spanish masters, the magnificent Spanish Baroque - Ribera, Zurbarán, Velázquez and Murillo. Caravaggio is also found off the Grand Hall in room 5, Rembrandt in room 7, Rubens in 8-9, El Grecos in 9A, 10A, Zurbarán in 18 A, Ribera in 25, Murillo in 26.

Keep going and hit the other Velázquez rooms first (16, 16B and 27-29), as they become very crowded very quickly. Then move on to the end of this floor (rooms 32, 34-38) to view Goya’s court portraits at far end of Grand Hall. Then move to the light-filled renovated rooms upstairs on the 3rd floor (85, 90-94) where you’ll find the “happy” Goya rooms. His “cartones”, the designs for tapestries, are hung there along with his Majas.

On the ground floor you’ll find Goya’s lugubrious Black Paintings (such as Saturn Devouring his Son) in rooms 64, 65 and 67 along with Italian masterpieces of Mantegna, Raphael, Bellini, Tiepolo, Tintoretto, Veronese, plus the Dutch masters, Van der Weyden, Dürer and Hieronymus Bosch’s masterpiece, “The Garden of Earthly Delights” Bosch has his own room, 56A. In Spanish, he’s known as “El Bosco”.

Note: From time to time the museum redistributes paintings to different rooms, so the current distribution may be different from the rooms mentioned above. But if you have a limited time for the Prado and want to see the very best of its Spanish collection, I would concentrate on the El Greco, Velázquez, Ribera, Murillo and Goya rooms.

For a coffee or lunch break, after a visit to the Prado

The Café Prado in the museum is open from 10:00 am to 30 minutes before the museum closes), and serves a daily set menu. In the summer months, an outdoor café is set up at the Jerónimos door, which is open from 11:00 am to 8:30 pm.

If you find the Café Prado just too busy after your visit, you can cross the avenue, Paseo del Prado, to a nice and reasonably priced wine bar, Bar Museo La Platería, in the Plaza de Platerías, where Calle Moratín and Calle Huertas converge, for a late breakfast, gourmet tapas, a plato del día, and wines by the glass, for reasonable prices, and with very reasonably priced cocktails and digestifs served at night. Open weekdays from 7:30 am until 1:30 am, Saturdays and Sundays from 9:00 am until 1:00 am. English menu is available.

Also on the square is La Tapería del Prado, a friendly, “coffee shop” style place where you can have tapas, a small plates meal, or drinks. Open Monday-Friday from 8:00 am until midnight, Saturdays and Sundays from 10:00 am until 12:30 am.
Or walk up a few steps up Calle Huertas to Bodeguilla Los Rotos at No. 74. This bargain spot is a replica of the popular Bodeguilla Los Rotos in the Riojan capital of Logroño. A roto here is a creamy mixture of broken eggs fried up in a skillet along with your choice of other ingredients such as chistorra, ratatouille, mushrooms, or gulas, served in hollowed out bread. These cost very little and make for a very filling breakfast or snack. It also serves as a handy spot for those staying in the Spain-Select apartments on Lope de Vega. The tavern opens for breakfast at 9:00 am with an offering of continental breakfast for under 5€.

If you’re looking to lunch in a more sophisticated setting, the Cask restaurant of the Hotel Radisson Blu Prado, which is also in the plaza, open daily from 12:30 pm to 4:00 pm. Can be reserved online at: eltenedor.es. Tel: (+34) 915 242 626 The hotel will be closed for renovations from January 1 until May 31, 2020.

Bar Museo la Platería, La Tapería and Cast all have outdoor terraces on the square.

Behind the Prado, at Ruiz de Alarcón, 27, Carolina Herrera’s favorite hang out (whose owners are also Venezuelan), you’ll find the Murillo Café, open for breakfast, weekend brunch, lunch, tapas, dinner, drinks, daily from noon to 10:00 pm and until midnight in August. Reserve online.

San Jerónimo el Real
While in the Prado neighborhood, walk east to visit Madrid’s most elegant church, dating from the 16th-century. It’s located just east of the Prado’s new Jerónimos wing on Calle de Moreto. The cloister, suffering over the years from neglect, was renovated and incorporated into Navarran architect Rafael Moneo’s extension of the Prado. The church is Madrid’s only example of neo-Gothic style and is where former King Juan Carlos was crowned in 1975 upon the death of Franco and end of the dictatorship. Open September to June, Monday-Saturday from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm and 5:00 to 8:00 pm - from 6:00 to 8:30 pm in July and August. On Sundays it’s open from 9:30 am to 2:30 pm and 5:30 to 8:00 pm - from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm and 6:00 to 8:30 pm in July and August.

Museum Thyssen-Bornemisza
This museum on the Paseo del Prado is often called a one-stop survey, a quick lesson in the history of Western Art from the 13th to the 20th centuries, beginning with the early Siena school and ending with Mondrian, Hopper, Pollock, Lichtenstein and Warhol. Or call it a collection of “great masterpieces of lesser-known painters” or “lesser known paintings of great masters”, including the “Portrait of a Young Man” by Raphael, a self-portrait by Rembrandt, Monet’s “Charing Cross Bridge” and Constable’s “The Lock”. Some painters you will never have heard of and some paintings of the great masters you will have never known.
A stunning 16-room annex was opened in the summer ’04 to house 200 works of the Baroness Thyssen, Carmen Cervera’s personal private collection ranging from 17th to the 20th century, which I find even more impressive than her late husband’s collection. This wing added 800 square meters of floor space to the museum. One can easily spend two hours getting to know these rooms. You’ll be most impressed by this amazing and equally vast collection. Before the Spanish government purchased the collection for $350 million, it was the largest private collection in the world, belonging to the industrialist Baron Heinrich Thyssen - another small collection from the late Baron’s vast art holdings is housed in the National Museum of Catalan Art in Barcelona (MNAC).

To see the original Thyssen collection in chronological order, which will take at least two hours, start at the second floor and work your way down. The special exhibits are in a separate wing to the right of the entrance. These temporary exhibits require a special timed ticket (15-minute intervals beginning at 10:00 am, ending at 6:00 pm), which can be purchased online (and picked up at the first ticket window to your left), or purchased at the ticket windows. The line generally moves quickly. Before entering the exhibit at your appointed time, you can rent an exhibit audio guide at the dedicated booth in the hallway. A visit to special exhibits usually takes about an hour. This is a museum that is comfortable, up-to-date and really works well. ATM downstairs. Great gift shop and handy café, both open to the public without a ticket. Plus a restaurant, El Mirador, which is located on the top floor of the annex offering multi-level outdoor dining. It’s open only in summer and is quite fashionable.

Opening hours are Tuesday-Sunday from 10:00 am to 7:00 pm. Special exhibits are open Sunday-Friday from 10:00 am to 7:00 pm, and until 9:00 pm on Saturdays. Admission to the permanent collection and temporary exhibits is now 12€. Reduced price tickets are 8€. And thanks to the sponsorship by Master Card, the permanent collections are now open on Mondays with free admission from 12:00 noon to 4:00 pm. Free to those over 65.

Audio guides cost 5€ for permanent collection, 4€ for the temporary exhibitions, and the combined audio guide is 7€. The Paseo del Arte ticket (25,60€) is only good for the permanent collection. Note: Because of the size and scope of both the Prado and the Thyssen, we recommend that visitors not try to take in both museums on the same day, although their special exhibits are easy and fairly quick sees.

For a coffee or lunch break, after a visit to the Thyssen
While the Thyssen has a cafeteria, and in summer opens its wonderful covered terrace, where you can sit back, relax and enjoy the breeze, if you’d like a tapas meal afterwards, we recommend the downstairs pintxos bar-Txoko in the Basque Cultural Center, Euskal Etxea, run by the Sagardi Cocineros Vascos group, at Calle Jovellanos, 3. It’s just across the street
from the Teatro de la Zarzuela, a 3-minute walk from the Thyssen, and open daily from 11:00 am until midnight.

If you’d like something more than a sandwich and can spare the time for a fantastic sit-down meal, we loved Askuabarra. It’s tucked away on narrow Calle Arlabán, No. 7, a 5-minute walk up Calle Zorrilla from the museum. It’s open for lunch from 1:30 to 3:00 pm and dinner from 8:30 to 10:00 pm, closed Sunday evenings. Reserve online or call (+34) 915 937 507.

**Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía**

Located directly across from Atocha rail station on Santa Isabel, 52, this is a vast space consisting of the Sabatini building, a former hospital, and the avant-garde and enormous 110,000,000€ extension designed by Jean Nouvel, which has made the Reina Sofia one of the world’ largest contemporary art museums. To take in its most noteworthy works, take the elevator to the second floor where the permanent collection is housed and head straight for room 206 where you’ll find the huge masterwork of this museum, Picasso’s *Guernica*. Then continue on to the next rooms to see works by Dalí in room 205, Miró in 206-207, Juan Gris in room 208 and backtrack to more Miró in room 202 and works of the young Picasso in 201. Noteworthy paintings here are Picasso’s “*Woman in Blue*”, Dalí’s “*Great Masturbator*”, Gris’s “*Guitar in Front of the Sea*” and Solana’s “*Gathering at the Café de Pombo*”. The 4th floor rooms have a less compelling collection of 20th to 21st century Spanish art, so you need not waste time on them unless you’re a very avid contemporary art enthusiast. Again, the masterpieces are all located together on the 2nd floor (for now, but plans to reconfigure the entire space are in the works…).

Open Mondays and Wednesday-Saturday, from 10:00 am to 9:00 pm, Sunday from 10:00 am to 2:15 pm for the entire collection and 2:15 pm to 7:00 pm for the temporary exhibit. From April-September the museum remains open until 10:00 pm. Closed on Tuesdays and January 1 and 6, May 1 and 15, November 9, December 24, 25 and 31.

Tickets for the permanent collection, plus temporary exhibits, are 8€. Temporary exhibits only are 4€. The Royal Palace-Museo Reina Sofia combined ticket is 14€. Entry is free on Monday and Wednesday-Saturday from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm, Sunday from 1:30 pm to 7:00 pm. Also free April 18, May 18, October 12 and December 6.

**For a coffee or lunch break, after a visit to the Reina Sofía**

If your hunger calls after your heavy dose of Dalí, Picasso and Miró, and you’d like something more than a sandwich, more creative fare, you can have just a coffee or a continental breakfast after a visit or beer/wine/ tapas or small plates at the new branch of the well-regarded gastro bar Arzábal, connected to the museum itself (with separate entrance on the left side, below the steps).
Make a lunch of creamy croquettes, *ensaladilla rusa*, shrimp in garlic sauce, a mini burger, skillet eggs with truffles or their famous oven baked potatoes, *patatas a la importancia*. It’s open for breakfast at 9:00 am and stays open until 2:00 am for after dinner drinks. The Arzábal boys, Iván Morales and Alvaro Castellanos, have spent a great deal of money and planning on this, their fourth and largest Madrid dining space, and we find its secluded, interior garden terrace quite appealing for a late night cocktail or glass of champagne during the steaming Madrid summers. Open daily.

If you have picky tweens/teens in tow who only eat pizza or pasta (teens seem to love the Reina Sofía masterpieces, especially Dalí), you need only to head across the square to a branch of the popular and inexpensive Montecarlo based *Pinocchio Trattoria* chain at Sánchez Bustillo, 5.

Or if you’d like to partake of tapas in a typical Madrid tavern atmosphere, head up Calle Santa Isabel to *La Musa de Espronceda* at No. 17, which is between the Reina Sofía and the Filmoteca Nacional. Have tapas at the bar or a sit down meal of croquettes, monkfish brochette, fried eggplant, pork tenderloin. It opens for lunch from 12:30 to 4:00 and in the evening from 7:00 until midnight. Closed Sunday evening, all day Monday and during August.
Noteworthy Exhibition Spaces
On the Art Walk, Paseo del Arte

Caixa Forum - Madrid

This much photographed, much talked about social and cultural center at Paseo del Prado, 36 was inaugurated in February ‘08. Designed by the Swiss architects/ Pritzker Prizewinners Herzog & de Meuron, authors of the Tate Modern, it represents yet another architecturally exciting addition to Madrid’s Museum Mile, and is a brilliant restoration and expansion of an 1899 brick and cast iron power station, Central Eléctrica del Mediodía, one of the last surviving pieces of Industrial Age architecture in the city. The most talked about and photographed part of the complex is its 24-meter high “vertical garden”, designed in collaboration with the botanist Patrick Blanc.

In addition to its permanent collection and temporary exhibits, the center offers concerts, films and poetry recitals. Please check the web page before your arrival for any temporary exhibit that may run during your stay. Open daily, including holidays, from 10:00 am to 8:00 pm, but closes at 6:00 pm on Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve. Closed on December 25, January 1 and 6. Admission is 4€ to non-bank customers. Free on May 15 (San Isidro feast day) and November 9.
On the top floor, the museum operates a bar-café, which is open throughout the day. To the right is a dining area where a bargain menú del día is served on weekdays and offers a special menu on weekends - to the right of that you have a la carte dining. Across the street at Calle Almadén, 26, is the handy El Patio Vertical.

**Royal Botanical Gardens**

The Royal Gardens, located next to the Prado, contain the most diverse collection of plants in all of Spain and is open November through February from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm, March and October until 7:00 pm, April and September until 8:00 pm and until 9:00 pm from May through August. You can download the official app, RJB, museo vivo, to use while visiting the garden. Admission is 3€, 1,50€ for students with accreditation. Free to seniors 65+ and children under 10.

**Fundación Mapfre Sala Recoletos**

One of two temporary exhibit spaces of the Fundación Mapfre is housed in a 19th-century palace at Paseo de Recoletos, 23, just north of the Museo Thyssen between the Plaza Cibeles and Plaza Colón. Its temporary exhibits feature painting from the years between 1880 and WWII. We have seen some highly compelling exhibits here since it opened in ’08, such as “Impressionism: a Renaissance”, “Picasso and the Workshop”, “Sorolla and the United States”, “The Splendor of Romanesque” a Pierre Bonnard retrospective, Boldini and “The spirit of an Age” plus the recent Rodin-Giacometti special exhibit (ends May 5). There is also an excellent permanent collection of 65 works by Miró. Open Mondays from 2:00 pm to 8:00, Tuesdays-Saturdays from 10:00 am to 8:00 pm, Sundays and holidays from 11:00 am to 7:00 pm. Open 10:00 am to 3:00 pm on December 24 and 31, closed December 25, January 1 and 6. Admission is always free (so expect long lines on weekends). Audio guides rent for 3€.
Worthwhile Small Museums

One can now purchase two special passes for the smaller, state-run museums. The first is to visit four museums within 10 days and costs 8€; the second includes eight museums within 15 days and costs 16€. These passes can be purchased at each museum’s ticket window.

Museums included in the special passes are: Museo del Romanticismo, MAN (Museo Nacional de Antropología), Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas, Museo del Traje, Museo Cerralbo, Museo de América, Museo Arqueológico Nacional and Museo Sorolla.

Museo Sorolla

At General Martínez Campos, 37, this wonderful small museum is the lovely, perfectly preserved studio/home of the Valencian born, 19th-century Spanish Neo-Impressionist, Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida (1863-1923), whose murals can be seen at the Hispanic Society in N.Y.. Sorolla spent the last 13 years of his life here and was the exponent of “Luminism”, the celebration of light in painting. Upon the painter’s death his widow sold the building to the Spanish State and it was transformed into a museum in 1932. This is a delightfully quiet, serene, turn-of-the-century mansion/atelier, which you can often have virtually to yourself. The artist himself designed the gardens, and he planted myrtles brought from the Alhambra. It’s a hidden treasure that also serves as a decorative arts museum with its fine original
furnishings, lamps, and a stupendous collection of ceramics from Manises, Valencia. Audio guides are available. A short video of the painter’s life (in Spanish) is shown downstairs where you’ll find an exquisite Andalusian patio, along with the painter’s extensive ceramic collection. It’s Iberian Traveler’s favorite Madrid museum, and a national treasure. Open Tuesday-Saturday from 9:30 am to 8:00 pm and on Sundays from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm, when it’s free. Closed Mondays and on January 1, May 1, December 24, 25 & 31 and local holidays. Admission is 3€, free to those under 18 and EU citizens over 65. It is also free on May 18, October 12, and December 6.

You can reach the museum by taking bus 27 from Paseo del Prado that runs up to Castellana Boulevard (Paseo de la Castellana), and get off at the Glorieta de Emilio Castelar roundabout, just south of the Intercontinental Hotel and north of the American Embassy, then walk 1-½ blocks west on Paseo de Martínez Campos.

For a lunch break, after a visit to the Sorolla Museum

If you are in need of lunch after your visit, we recommend a short walk down and west to the very popular Las Tortillas de Gabino, where the specialty is the delicious potato and egg omelet served up in many guises. It’s a 3-minute walk from the museum at Calle Rafael Calvo, 20. Reservations recommended. Or head west on Paseo Martínez Campos to Calle del Castillo, 16, a tiny street behind Calle Santa Engracia, for a fantastic value at Bacira, one of the neighborhood’s most sought after tables, offering very well-executed Mediterranean-Asian fusion fare in a pleasant bistro atmosphere with attentive service and a truly unparalleled weekday lunch menu. Open daily from 1:00 to 4:00 pm for lunch and 8:30 pm to midnight for dinner. It’s a short 10-minute walk from the museum. If you’re a sushi lover, then walk up and over (about 6 minutes) to Calle Viriato, 58, to the elegant Soy de Pedro Espinosa for some of the cities best sushi and sashimi by chef Pedro Espina, named the Primer Itamae (sushi chef) in Spain.

Museo de la Real Academia de Bellas Artes

The Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando, Calle de Alcalá, 13, on the premises of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, housed in an 18th-century palace designed by Churriega, has as an impressive collection of artwork surpassed only by the Prado and the Thyssen - 1,400 paintings, 600 sculptures and an outstanding collection of decorative arts. The museum is strong on Spanish, Flemish, and Italian Baroque masters. Works of Velázquez, Murillo, Rubens, Ribera, Zurbarán, also a special room with 13 works by Goya, plus works by El Greco, Sorolla, even Juan Gris. Open Tuesday-Sunday from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm, including holidays. Closed January 1 and 6, May 1 and 30, December 24, 25 and 31, and all of August. General admission is 8€, reduced admission is 4€ for seniors over 65. Free for those under 18, and free for all on non-holiday Wednesdays, May 18, October 12 and December 6.
For a lunch break after a visit to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts

If you are in need of lunch after your visit, we recommend you take a short walk to La Huerta de Tudela at Calle del Prado, 15, open daily for lunch at 1:30 pm. There are two special vegetarian-vegan menus for 38,50€, or a more traditional menu for only 28,50€ prepared by chef Ricardo Gil, el maestro de las verduras. Or a few minutes closer is one of our favorites, Restaurante AskuaBarra, at Calle de Arlaban, 7, by the Gadea brothers, Nacho and Jorge. Open in the summer Tuesday-Saturday for lunch from 1:30 to 4:00 pm and dinner from 8:30 to midnight. Open daily the rest of the year for lunch from 1:30 to 3:00 pm and for dinner Monday-Saturday from 8:30 to 10:00 pm. Reservations highly recommended.

Museo Lázaro Galdiano Foundation

I highly encourage you to visit this gem housed in a four-story Italianate mansion, which displays the most impressive private collection of the 19th century financier, journalist, publisher and arts patron, José Lázaro Galdiano. Located in the Barrio de Salamanca neighborhood, at the northern end of Calle Serrano, 122, near María de Molina, the Museum Lázaro houses one of Spain’s preeminent private art collections, and reopened after a two-year long renovation and expansion project. He bequeathed this enormous treasure of 15,000 objects, considered the largest and most important art collection in Spain at that time, to the state upon his death in 1947. Only 750 of these treasures are displayed at a time.

The collection includes paintings, sculpture, clocks and watches, furniture, ivory, Limoges enamels, Persian silks, porcelain and various archaeological treasures from the 4th to 20th centuries. Paintings include works by Goya, Velázquez, El Greco, Zurbarán, Murillo, Hieronymus Bosch, Constable, Gainsborough and Reynolds. It’s often compared to NYC’s Frick. Open Tuesday-Saturday from 10:00 am to 4:30 pm and on Sunday until 3:00 pm. Closed October 12, November 9, December 24, 25 and 31, plus January 1 and 6. Admission is 6€, 3€ for those over 60. Free the first Friday of every month from 5:00 to 9:00 pm and on Sunday from 2:00 to 3:00 pm. Free to children under 12 and all teachers. Metro: Núñez de Balboa.

For a snack or lunch break after visiting the Lázaro Galdiano Museum

If you’d like a quick snack or inexpensive lunch, there is a branch of La Mucca nearby at Calle Serrano, 91, serving international fare: pizzas, burgers, Pad Thai, curries, steak tartare and risottos. Opens daily at 11:00 am.

Museo Arqueológico Nacional (MAN)

Spain’s National Archaeological Museum, at Calle Serrano, 13, just south of Plaza Colón, reopened in 2014 after going through a massive six-year renovation project, making the 19th-century building one of the most advanced archaeological museums in all of Europe, and accessible to all. Explanations are in Spanish, English and Braille, and the HD video
screens have subtitles in English. It houses items from pre-historic times to the 19th-century; including a reconstruction of the prehistoric cave paintings of Altamira. Plan on at least two hours or even more to do it justice. My favorite piece here is the bust of the Lady of Elche, from the 5th-Century B.C., discovered in 1897 on the grounds of a private estate in Alicante province. Open Tuesday-Saturday from 9:30 am to 8:00 pm, on Sundays and holidays from 9:30 am to 3:00 pm. Admission is 3€, free on Saturdays after 2:00 pm, Sunday mornings, May 18, October 12, November 16 and December 6.

For a lunch break after a visit to the MAN

If you’re in need of lunch, walk east from the MAN on Calle Jorge Juan, the district’s “restaurant row” to the corner of Lagasca and Jorge Juan to Ultramarinos Quintín, at Jorge Juan, 17, a very stylish bistro, and a member of the El Paraguas group. It’s very popular with denizens of the neighborhood and Americans who work at the Embassy. Reservations recommended. Directly across the street you’ll find the delightful Bistro Huerta Carabaña, at Calle Jorge Juan 18. Restaurante Huerta Carabaña is located a few steps away, around the corner at Calle Lagasca, 32. Both are open daily.

Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas

The Decorative Arts Museum can be found on Calle Montalbán, 12, between Plaza Neptuno and Plaza Cibeles, just east of the Palacio de Comunicaciones, the Madrid City Hall. It houses 60,000 objets d’art-textiles, furnishings, ceramics, glass, jewelry and metalwork, displayed in chronological order from medieval and Renaissance to Bourbon Dynasty to 19th-century. On the 1st floor you’ll find the medieval and Renaissance pieces, including Flemish tapestries. On the 2nd floor, there are reproduction rooms of an 18th-century noble home along with Talavera ceramics. On the 3rd floor the pieces come from the Bourbon Dynasty, including porcelains, and 19th-century decorative works are found on the 4th floor, along with a replica of a ceramic tiled Valencian palace kitchen. Open Tuesday-Saturday from 9:30 am to 3:00 pm, plus Thursday from 5:00 to 8:00 pm, and Sundays/holidays from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. Closed Mondays. Admission is 3€, free on Sundays, April 18, May 18, October 12, and December 6.

Museo Naval (Naval Museum)

One block south of Plaza de Cibeles, at Paseo del Prado, 5, this outstanding Naval museum is housed on the first floor of the Spanish Navy Headquarters. If you’re a history or naval buff, you might want to visit, but bring your passport to pass through security. The museum displays the bounty accumulated during Spain’s maritime expansion, the most important historical pieces owned and procured by the Navy from the period of Ferdinand and Isabella to the present day. This vast collection includes an array of navigational tools, charts, primitive weapons, muskets, guns, coins, paintings of battles and models of ships from the country’s earliest days of maritime exploration to the 20th-century. The “boardroom” is a
reproduction of a wardroom of a 16th-century frigate and the director’s cabin is a reproduction of the cabin room of a ship commander dating from the 19th-century. One of the museum’s treasures is the first known map of the Americas, the *Mapa Mundi*, drawn by cartographer Juan de la Cosa, made for King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella in 1500. Open Tuesday-Sunday from 10:00 am to 7:00 pm (closes in August at 3:00 pm). Guided tours are available on Saturdays and Sundays in Spanish (free) at 11:30 am. Closed Mondays, Good Friday, May 15, July 16, October 12, November 9, December 24, 25, 31 and January 1. Admission is a 3€ donation to help with the upkeep of the museum.

**For a lunch break after visiting the Decorative Arts or Naval Museum**

For lunch in this area you’re blessed with three alluring alternatives. The first, directly across the street from the Decorative Arts Museum, is the highly praised *Restaurante Alabáster*, featuring fine seafood from Galicia. Open Monday-Saturday for lunch and dinner, while just down the street, at No. 3, on the way to the Naval Museum, is *Vinoteca García de la Navarra*, or its next door sibling, *Taberna de Pedro* run by brothers Pedro and Luis García de la Navarra.

**Museo Cerralbo**

Located at Ventura Rodríguez, 17, in the Argüelles district northwest of the Plaza de España, this museum is housed in a 19th-century noble mansion once belonging to the Marquis de Cerralbo, an obsessive collector of art and objects d’art. He bequeathed this private collection to the Spanish state - paintings, clocks, treasures from the Orient, suits of armor, musical instruments, porcelains, etc. The house for years has been in need of major renovation and the paintings crying out for major restoration so as to make the Cerralbo a really fine museum, but the Marquis insisted that the collection be displayed “exactly as he had left it”. At first glance it doesn’t seem quite worthy of one’s time when compared to the Lázaro Galiano collection until one reaches the top floor. The gala Dining Room and Ballroom are incredibly lavish - an ode to 19th century opulence. Photography is not permitted. General admission is 3€. Open Tuesday-Saturday from 9:30 am to 3:00 pm, plus Thursdays from 5:00 to 8:00 pm, Sundays and holidays from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. Entrance 3€, but is free on Thursdays from 5:00 to 8:00 pm, Saturdays after 2:00 pm and all day Sunday. Close January 1 and 6, May 1, December 24, 25 and 31, and November 9.

**Real Monasterio de la Encarnación**

Located north of the Plaza de Oriente on the Plaza de la Encarnación, King Philip III and Empress María de Austria founded this Royal Convent in 1611 as another nunnery for titled women, following the example of the Descalzas Reales, and to this date it remains a working Augustinian convent. It contains important paintings and sculptures from the 17th-18th centuries, including a St. John the Baptist by José Ribera and a polychromed wood statue of Christ by Gregorio Fernández. The final stop on the guided tour, and the most famous, the
subterranean El Relicario chamber, is filled with 1,500 relics of saints—their hair, bones, vials of blood, nails, skulls, all displayed in ornate glass containers and cases. The most famous relic of the ensemble, a tiny flask said to contain the solidified blood of San Pantaleón, a 14th century physician, supposedly miraculously liquefies each year at midnight on the day of his martyrdom, July 27. Open Tuesday-Saturday for guided tours only from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm and from 4:00 to 6:30 pm, and on Sundays and holidays from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. Closed on Mondays and January 1 and 6, Easter Thursday to Sunday, May 1 and 15, November 1 and 9, December 24, 25 and 31. Admission is 6€.

Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales
At Plaza de las Descalzas, near Puerta del Sol, you’ll find this monastery housed in a palace, the former residence of Emperor Charles V and his wife Isabel of Portugal and where their daughter, Juana, was born in 1535 and is buried in the chapel. When she was left a widow in 1557, Juana founded a convent of Franciscan “blue blooded” nuns. The splendid Grand Staircase, Flemish tapestries and works by Titian, Bruegel and Zurbarán are more than enough reasons to endure the wait and take the obligatory guided tour. It, along with the Convent of the Encarnación, can be Madrid’s most frustrating museum to visit due to the long lines and waits for tours to begin. I suggest that you visit first thing in the morning so as to get in with the first group. Expect a long wait. Open daily except Monday but with limited hours because it is still a “working” Franciscan convent. Guided tours are given Tuesday-Saturday from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm and again from 4:00 to 6:00 pm, and on Sundays and holidays from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. Closed on January 1 and 6, Easter Thursday to Sunday, May 1 and 15, November 1 and 9 and December 24, 25 and 31. Admission is 6€, free to children under 5. There is currently no access for disabled persons.

For a lunch break after visiting Cerralbo, Encarnación or Descalzas Reales
A wonderful spot nearby to have lunch is Dantxari, at Calle Ventura Rodríguez, 8, serving Basque cuisine in a traditional Navarran-Basque setting. They offer a special 35€ menu during the week. Open Monday-Saturday for lunch and dinner and Sundays for lunch. Or walk over to the Plaza de Oriente, across from the Royal Palace, for a snack at the classic Café de Oriente Palacio Real, the bistro-gastrobar belonging to the Lezama Group. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

La Ermita de San Antonio de la Florida
The best way to reach this small neo-classical temple at Glorieta San Antonio de la Florida, 5, is to take line 10, or the circular line 6 of the metro to the end, to the Príncipe Pío/Norte stop. You’ll go through the Estación del Norte (station no longer used) and up the escalators, over the tracks to the exit Paseo de la Florida. It will be down this Paseo, 500 meters. San Antonio de la Florida, also known as the Museo y Panteón de Goya, is a chapel/hermitage built in the late 1700’s, during the reign of Charles IV, and made famous by the brightly
colored frescoes painted by 53-year old (and by then deaf) Francisco de Goya on the hermitage cupola in just four months. The major scene depicts a miracle performed by Saint Anthony of Padua, the saint who is depicted resurrecting a murdered man from the dead so that he can name his murderer and thus absolve St. Anthony’s innocent father who had been accused of the crime. It is also Goya’s burial site—the artist is interred (headless) above the altar—and this hermitage is considered the “church of the people”. The frescoes, widely considered one of Goya’s finest works, have been beautifully restored. Open Tuesday-Sunday and holidays from 10:00 am to 8:00 pm, closed Monday (including holidays) January 1, 6, Mary 1, and December 24, 25, 31. Admission is free.

On June 13, St. Anthony of Padua’s feast day, young madrilènes, along with widows and divorcees, come here with a handful of pins in hand to pray for the saint to send them a suitor. This is a tradition originated by seamstresses. The ladies drop thirteen pins inside the font, they dip their hands into the font, and the number of pins that stick to their hands indicates the number of boyfriends the girls will have that year!

**For a lunch break near the temple**

For very inexpensive and amusing dining nearby, if you’re a rotisserie chicken and cider lover, you might enjoy Casa Mingo. Located at Paseo de la Florida, 2, (metro: Norte). Casa Mingo is a bustling, noisy (think German beer hall) and very rustic 1888 Asturian cider house (the oldest in Madrid), built into a stonewall, which is a legend among Madrileños. Serves only spit roasted whole chicken, chorizo braised in cider, tuna empanadas, Cabrales (blue) cheese, pre-packaged house salad and bottles of cider along with typical Asturian desserts, such as rice pudding, cider cake, milk curd and lemon cream. Extremely popular on Sundays among the working class families who live in the area, those who want a quick, inexpensive Sunday al fresco dinner and cash poor university students. To find a seat, the unwritten etiquette is to approach a table of patrons about ready to leave and ask if you can have their table when they’ve finished, then keep hovering until they do. Don’t expect a maitre d’ to seat you. It’s first come, first served, survival of the fittest. Good for those with kids (who like roast chicken), or those on a tight budget. Open daily.

**Museo de las Américas**

At Avenida de los Reyes Católicos, 6, this museum, which celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2016, is often overlooked, but is a must see for anyone interested in Spain’s conquest and colonization of the Americas. It’s comprised of two floors with over 20,000 items recovered from the Americas including textiles, ceramics, tools, paintings and sculptures. The star of the show is the Quimbayas treasure, a stunning collection of gold objects from the Quimbaya culture, presented to the museum by the Colombian government. The museum is organized thematically: how America was perceived in Europe from the Age of Discovery until the 18th-century, the reality, the evolution of native societies, religion, and communication between
the nations. There is an excellent gift shop and a café in the museum’s basement. Open Tuesday-Saturday from 9:30 am to 3:00 pm, Thursdays until 7:00 pm, and Sundays and holidays from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. Closed Mondays and January 1, May 1, December 24, 25 and 31, plus local holidays. Admission is 3€. Free to those under 18 and over 65. Free for everyone on Sundays, April 18, May 19, October 12 and December 6. Metro: Moncloa

**Museo del Traje**

An exciting costume museum is in the former home of the Contemporary Art Museum on the Universidad Complutense campus at Avenida Juan de Herrera, 2 (metro: Ciudad Universitaria or Moncloa). It displays a collection of 500 frocks, including regional folk costumes, bullfighting suits and haute couture of Balenciaga, Pertegaz, Paco Rabanne as well as contemporary designers. Free one-hour audio guides are available in English. Open Tuesday-Saturday, 9:30 am to 7:00 pm and on Sundays and holidays from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. Admission is 3€, free on Saturday after 2:30 pm and Sundays. Free for those under 18 and over 65. Also free for everyone on April 18, May 18, October 12 and December 6. The museum also features an elegant gourmet, glass-enclosed restaurant, run by the Lezama group, the Café del Oriente Musel del Traje, with views of the gardens, delightful outdoor dining in summer and a very accomplished chef, Delia Bautista, who offers two tasting menus, at 48€ and 52€, not including beverages. Restaurant is open on Friday for dinner and Saturday for lunch and dinner. The bar/cafeteria section of the restaurant serves a great value menú de trabajo at lunch and is open from 9:00 am to 7:00 pm and 10:00 am to 3:00 pm on Sundays.

**Museo del Ferrocarril de Madrid**

Housed in the no-longer-used rail station, Estación de las Delicias, inaugurated in 1880 by King Alfonso XII and decorated with ironwork by Gustave Eiffel, this is one of the largest railroad collections in Europe. Trains once ran from Delicias to as far as Portugal, but all services were halted in 1968. Here you will see steam locomotives, a sleeping car from the 1920s, station clocks, model trains and tracks. There is even a little café in an elegant vintage 1930 restaurant coach. Open June-September, Tuesday-Sunday from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm and from October-May it’s open Monday-Thursday from 9:30 am to 3:00, and on Saturday, Sunday and public holidays it opens at 10:00 am. General admission is 6€ (2,50€ on Sundays), 4€ for seniors 65 and over, children from 4 to 12, and all students, 1€ for persons with disability. Free to children less than 4 years of age, Madrid Card holders and children under 12 on Saturdays.

The Museum, among other activities, offers you the opportunity to travel between Madrid and Aranjuez (42 km) on an authentic vintage train, “Tren de la Fresa”, or the Strawberry Train, on Saturdays and Sundays in the spring and fall. On a weekend you may even be lucky enough to discover both outside and inside the museum the new “Mercado de
Motores”, a vintage market with stalls selling antiques, used clothing, toys, graphic arts, any number of vintage “treasures” along with live music and a gastronomic space.

**Real Fábrica de Tapices**

The Royal Tapestry Workshop, at Fuenterrabia, 2, in the heart of Madrid (metro: Menéndez Pelayo), just south of Parque Retiro and the Royal Gardens, close to Atocha station, the Prado and the Reina Sofía, was originally founded in 1721 by King Felipe V, and like its Parisian counterpart, Gobelins, served to decorate the Royal Court’s palaces with tapestries. Francisco de Goya began his career here creating designs (cartoons) to furnish the palaces of El Pardo and El Escorial and these designs are now displayed at the Prado Museum.

Private visits to the workshop are available Monday-Friday from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm (guided tours only). Spanish language tours depart every half hour, with the last tour departing at 1:30 pm. Call ahead to see if an English or French-speaking guide is available: (+34) 914 340 550. Closed from December 24 to January 2.

**Palacio de Cibeles**

Take a look at the stunningly renovated Cibeles Palace, the former post office and now a free exhibition space, at Plaza Cibeles. Open from 10:00 am to 8:00 pm, admission is free. The entrance to this space is through the doors that face Cibeles fountain, where you’ll see one Spanish flag above, flanked by two crowns. Security is also tight here, so you must put your belongings through the magnetometer. In the downstairs space, on the ground floor to the left of the entrance and down the steps, the palace has opened an exhibition space that displays excellent temporary art exhibits from private collections. Hours of these exhibits: Tuesday-Saturday from 10:00 am to 8:00 pm. Admission is 6€, 4€ for seniors and students with accreditation. Exhibits are free to all the first Wednesday of the month. Closed Mondays, January 1, 6, May 1, December 24, 25 and 31.

The Mirador Madrid is open Tuesday-Saturday from 10:30 am to 2:00 pm and again from 4:00 to 7:00 pm. Admission is 2€ for adults, 0.50€ for children.

**For a lunch break around Plaza Cibeles**

The Adolfo Collection of Toledo has opened a stylish cocktail bar, Terraza Cibeles, on the top floor. To access the terrace, take the elevator to the left of the entrance. It’s open daily from 1:00 pm until 2:00 am, 2:30 am on Fridays and Saturdays, and advertises “the best views in the city”. If you’d like to have a drink here in the summer, it’s best to reserve a table. Downstairs (2nd floor) in the Centro-Centro, Adolfo has opened a casual bar/café popular with office workers, Café Colección Cibeles, open daily from 10:00 am to midnight that serves a market menu at lunch. The restaurant Palacio de Cibeles, also located on the top floor, is open daily for lunch from 1:00 to 4:00 pm, and for dinner from 8:00 to midnight. Reservations required.
Urban Green Spaces
Madrid’s has one of Europe’s highest ratios of urban green spaces to city inhabitants, with nearly 35 percent of the city dedicated to green spaces and parks.

**El Retiro Park**
Madrid’s largest and most famous park, Parque del Buen Retiro, the "Park of the Pleasant Retreat", covering 125 hectares and home to over 15,000 trees, is a vast urban oasis with formal gardens, fountains, a lake (*estanque*), play areas, outdoor cafés, puppet theatre and the [Crystal Palace](#), an iron and glass edifice built in 1887 to house exotic plants and now used for special (free) art exhibits sponsored by the [Centro de Arte Reina Sofía](#).

Head straight to the park on a Sunday morning or afternoon and join the promenade and the almost carnival-like atmosphere. There will be joggers, cyclists, roller blade enthusiasts and families out in paddleboats on the [Estanque](#), the man-made lake near the monument to Alfonso XII. There are also band concerts and puppet shows for the children at 1:00 pm on Saturday and at 1:00, 6:00 and 7:00 pm on Sunday. It’s open until 10:00 pm during the summer. And despite what one may read on Trip Advisor, the park is safe for walkers and joggers and is open in the summer from 6:00 am until midnight, 10:00 pm in the winter.
Real Jardín Botánico
Next door to the park you’ll find the Royal Botanical Gardens, which opened in 1781 after botanists and explorers gathered plants from all around the world. It remains a place for scientific study. Open in the summer from 10:00 am until 9:00 pm. General admission is 4€, 0,50€ for seniors, free to children under 10.

Jardín del Príncipe Anglona
In medieval Madrid you’ll find this hidden corner of the city, an Andalucian-style rose garden (500 m2), one of the few examples of the noble gardens from the 18th-century, behind high stone walls on the downhill end of the Plaza de la Paja, the original medieval market square in the Barrio de Latina. Restored in 2002 by Tuscan landscape architect Lucía Serredi, it is open daily from 10:00 am to 10:00 pm during the summer, 6:30 pm during the winter, entry is free.

Campo del Moro
Sitting below the west side of the Royal Palace is an expansive park, the English-style Moorish Garden, a broad open green space, that was built on the ruins of a 10th-century Muslim fortress that once looked out over the forest and river valley. Open every day.

Parque Templo Debed
This small park to the north of the Royal Palace area, to the west of Paseo de Pintor Rosales, boasts an authentic 4th-century B.C. Egyptian temple which was donated to Spain as a thank you for its help with the building of the Aswan Dam. The site is open Tuesday-Friday from 9:45 am to 1:45 pm and again from 4:15 to 6:00 pm. A nice place to view the sunset. Open Saturdays and Sundays from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm, closed Mondays and holidays. Free.

Monte de El Pardo
At the north end of the city you’ll find a native Mediterranean forest which covers 16,000 hectares, among Europe’s best-preserved forests where you’ll find wild boar and deer. Here is where the Manzanares River passes through on its journey from the Sierra de Guadarrama south. Hiking trails will soon be open in the El Prado Woodlands. Here you’ll find the Royal Palace of El Pardo. The Palace and gardens are open every day at 10:00 am and can be reached on the Intercity bus 601.
Covered Markets

**Mercado de la Paz**

My preferred market in my favorite neighborhood is found in aristocratic Salamanca district is at the corner of Calles Ayala and Lagasca. It’s widely considered Madrid’s most exclusive indoor market and attracts few tourists. It originates from 1879 and is one of the oldest, and most distinguished, in the city.

Here is where I shop for artisan breads and beautiful pastries, Spain’s best canned goods, *conservas*: sardines, anchovies, mussels, cockles at La Alacena del Gourmet, cheeses from all regions of Spain and for the finest Iberian ham, *pata negra*, at La Boulette, with several stands inside. La Boulette’s Gran Reserva from Embutidos Blázquez is aged for 36 months - to be labeled Gran Reserva, hams must be aged for a minimum of 30 months. For more Iberian ham there’s also José Alvarez, outside, at the entrance to the market, who will hand slice and cryovac your order. For fresh pulses, I pick up a half kilo of *alubias* from Tolosa, *judiones* from La Granja, *verdinas* and *fabes* from Asturias at Frutas Mari Carmen. And if your shoes are in need of repair, head to the Reparación de Calzados counter.

If you’re feeling hunger pangs, inside the market you’ll find several small counters. One, a bustling, loud and rather hectic lunch counter, Casa Dani, serves traditional Spanish fare to
an egalitarian crowd of area workers and wealthy Salamanca denizens, and is a favorite of the King’s aunt and a scattering of celebrities. It offers a killer *tortilla española* (a portion can easily be shared), rice with lobster, shrimp from Huelva, baby lamp chops and *guisos del día*, the stew of the day, at bargain prices.

The market is open Monday-Saturday from 9:00 am to 2:30 pm and 5:00 to 8:00 pm. The best time to arrive is around noon. It will be filled with the well-heeled locals who only buy the very best.

**Mercado de Chamartín**

Located near the Chamartín rail station in the northern business district, at Calle Bolivia, 9, and Calle Potosí, this market has some of the city’s top purveyors, including another branch of Mamá Framboise, if you find yourself in this northern business district. The market is open Monday-Saturday from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm and Monday-Friday evenings from 5:00 to 8:00 pm.

**Mercado de San Antón**

Visitors can also food shop and sample at this renovated and lively market in the hip Chueca district at Augusto Figueroa, 24, corner of Libertad. It tempts with three floors and 22 vendors devoted to the best food and wine available in the city, including the Iberian ham purveyor, *Charcutería de Octavio*, a stylish Basque bar, La Alacena de Victor Montes, at which you can sample pintxos (Basque tapas), a branch of *Vienna La Baguette* and a handy rooftop terrace restaurant, *El Cielo de San Antón*.

Much like the Mercado de San Miguel, this space is more devoted to food sampling rather than real day to day market shopping. Open daily from 10:00 am until midnight, 3:00 pm on Sundays.

The *Cocina de San Antón* restaurant on the market’s top floor, with outdoor terrace, is run by the *Cinco Jotas Osborne Group*, and serves contemporary fare for reasonable prices, including a Monday-Friday lunch menú del día for under 15€. Open continuously from 10:00 am until midnight and until 1:30 am on Friday and Saturday. It’s very popular for the well-priced food and the views.

**Mercado de San Miguel**

This lovely 1916 Beaux-Arts building of delicate ironwork and glass remained closed for several years until finally fully renovated, restored to its former glory and reopened in ’09 to become one of the city’s major gourmet food destinations and a “place to see and be seen”. It boasts over 30 high-end shopping stalls that surround its central café area. Rather than a conventional market, this new concept is more of a leisure center for gourmands, and more
Covent Garden than Boquería. One can purchase gourmet food from the stalls and wines from the several bars and enjoy them at the high tables in the open, central space.

If you love oysters and champagne, head to Daniel Sorlut; for some of the country’s best wines by the glass, make your way to Pinkleton and Wine; for pastries or a plate of churros head to El Horno de San Onofre. For one of the finest labels of Iberian ham stop at Carrasco Guijuelo.

The market is open daily and keeps wide ranging hours, 10:00 am until midnight during the week, and until 2:00 am on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

While the market certainly merits a visit, do know that prices are high due to the high quality of the purveyors and its prime tourist-central location on Plaza San Miguel next to the Plaza Mayor. Also note that on Sunday afternoons, from 1:00 to 3:00 pm, it becomes extremely congested as locals gather here after the Rastro flea market ends to have a wine and tapa before heading home for lunch.

**Mercado de Antón Martín**

Opened in 1941, the market is located at the Antón Martín metro stop where barrio Latina meets Lavapiés, a somewhat bohemian and very multi-ethnic quarter of the city, with entrance on Calle Santa Isabel and has been recently renovated. This is one of the city’s most traditional markets. Although it has several lunch counters within, Yokaloka for sushi, La Saletta for Italian and a vermouth bar, Latazo, it does not scream thankfully, “food court for tourists”, as the Mercado San Miguel has become. Neighborhood residents shop here on a daily basis and prices are lower than those of the Mercado La Paz, as this is a decidedly multicultural district rather than a posh area. The Orbayu Sabores del Cantábrico stand will tempt cheese lovers with its wonderful selection of Asturian artisan cheeses. Open 9:00 am to 9:00 pm, 3:00 pm on Saturdays.

The Buns and Bones casual eatery outside the market, entrance on Santa Isabel, to the left, as one walks east towards the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, has become quite popular for its Asian street food. It serves up Asian bao buns, which are steamed bread rolls with many different fillings (including some vegan options), along with grilled meats (the “bones” half), plus vegetable tempura, desserts and cocktails. It opens Tuesday-Sundays from 12:30 pm to 5:00 pm and from 8:00 until 1:00 am. Closed Mondays.

**Mercado de Barceló**

Calle Barceló, 6, near the Triball area, reopened last year after a complete remodel and now has around 100 stands on three floors selling deli products, Argentinian croissants, Italian pasta, canned goods, regional treats, cheese, fish/meat, fruits, vegetables, etc. It’s open from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm and 5:30 to 8:30 pm. Monday-Friday, closed Saturday afternoons at 3:00 pm and all day Sunday.
Mercado de San Ildefonso
Like those found in London and New York, the new street market is located at the corner of hipster Fuencarral street, number 57, in the Malasaña neighborhood. Composed of three floors covering 500 square meters, with 20 food stalls, 3 bars and two terraces, it’s housed in the former site of Madrid’s first covered market (1835), which was demolished in 1970 as part of the urban renewal project. The concept here is to purchase your prepared foods (ceviches, tacos, hamburgers, steaks, Iberian ham, omelets, fried fish, sushi, etc.) and enjoy in situ with a beer or wine, or have a cocktail in the bar on the top floor. The market is open 365 days of the year from noon to midnight, 1:00 am Thursday-Saturday.

El Huerto de Lucas
Calle San Lucas, 13, in Chueca, was designed with the same street market concept, to enjoy one’s purchases in situ or to take away, but all products are 100% organic. Here shoppers will find a bakery, a charcuterie, fruit and vegetable stand and butcher, plus a cosmetic shop and organic canteen, La Cantina Orgánica. Open daily from 10:00 to 10:00, restaurant is open until midnight. Closed Sundays,

Gourmet Experience Gran Vía
On the 9th floor of the El Corte Inglés department store at Plaza de Callao, 2, facing the Gran Vía, one can food shop, dine and admire spectacular city views all in one spot, and it’s open continuously until midnight. Dining options include both traditional Spanish food at La Máquina, San Sebastian style pintxos at Asador Imanol, bakery products at Harina, dim sum at Tse Yang, Mexican grub at Central Mexicana, burgers at Hamburguesa Nostra, oysters at Juanillo Club, hot dogs at Perro Bar and pizza at Al Cuadrado.

Gourmet Experience Serrano
Ditto to the smaller and more exclusive Gourmet Experience in El Corte Inglés store at Serrano, 52, corner of Ayala—the men’s apparel store, in the swank Salamanca district, where you’ll find 3-Michelin starred chef David Muñoz’s Asian street food counter, StreetXO, with larger, bright red U-shaped counter with open kitchen along with a cocktail bar. Much larger than its original counter space at the El Corte Inglés Gran Vía, now at 220 square meters, it offers expanded seating for 70-80 diners and its own private enclosed glass terrace. Five classic dishes from the former StreetXO continue here, including Chili Crab, while other avant-garde dishes are added on a rotating basis. Beware: rock music absolutely blasts from the speakers!

StreetXO is accompanied on the 7th floor by Robert Ruiz’s Mexican counter, Salón Cascabel, and the 3-Michelin starred Roca Brothers’ gourmet ice cream counter, Rocambolesc. On the 6th floor you’ll find the same epicurean market as the original one in Plaza de Callao, selling Spain’s finest gourmet products.
Flea Markets
Madrid has a long tradition of street markets and flea markets offering a wide variety of items.

Mercado del Rastro
Europe’s largest flea market takes place in the Embajadores district of Old Madrid every Sunday from 9:00 am until 3:00 pm. The old slaughterhouses of this quarter are the origins of today’s flea market, which spreads over this neighborhood, in and around the Ribera de Curtidores. The name “Rastro” comes from “arrastre”, the dragging of dead animal corpses out of the slaughterhouses, and the “Rastro” was the blood trail left behind. Street vendors fill this quarter with various types of bric-a-brac, cheap underwear, t-shirts, bootleg CDs, vinyl, mostly junk, bargains are rare, haggling is expected and pickpockets abound. Not my cup of tea, but if you go, please watch your wallet.

Mercado de los Motores
Both outside and inside the Railway Museum, Mercado del Ferrocarril, at Paseo de las Delicias, 61, this is a pop up vintage market with dozens of stalls set up around the carriages and locomotives, selling antiques, used clothing, toys, graphic arts, any number of vintage “treasures” along with live music, a ride for children on a mini choo-choo and a gastronomic space. This market takes place on the second weekend of each month; on Saturdays from 11:00 am to 10:00 pm and on Sundays from until 9:00 pm, depending on the weather.

Mercado de las Ranas (Frogs Market)
Not actually a flea market but instead an event in the Las Letras quarter-on the first Saturday of each month some 200 shops in this district participate and offer concerts, workshops, story telling for the kids, discounts, complimentary vermouth and tapas, and other enticements to promote shopping in this charming section of Old Madrid.

Cuesta de Moyano
One of the busier street markets since 1925, at Calle de Claudio Moyano next to Retiro Park, is open daily from 10:00 am to 2:30 pm and in the afternoon from 5:00 to 7:30 pm. Good for serious book collectors.
Guided Tours

Hop on Hop off Bus
You might like to take the Madrid City Tour red double-decker bus around its Historic Madrid circuit as a short orientation to the city on day one, but don’t depend on the English commentary as your definitive city guide. You can catch it at Gran Vía, 32, Plaza de España, Puerta del Sol, in front of the Wax Museum on Calle Recoletos, Hard Rock Café on the Plaza Colón, in front of the Botanical Gardens, above the Prado near the Hotel Ritz, and at the Royal Palace. Headphones are available with commentary in 14 languages. Hop on and off as you please.

The bus runs two main routes: Route 1 (blue), Historic Madrid - 80 minutes, and Route 2 (green), Modern Madrid - 65 minutes. There is also a Night Route during the summer, Route 1, but without stops. Buses pass by every 8 to 15 minutes depending on the season. Tickets are available for one day or two consecutive days. See the web for current schedule and pricing. Madrid City Tour offers a discount for kids 7-16 and seniors over 65. Free for children under 7.

There are no restrooms and soft drinks are not sold on the bus. You can download the free mobile app through iTunes or Google Play.

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**Madrid-Museum-Tours**

For escorted art tours, this well-regarded company offers high quality, personalized, private tours of Madrid’s museums and monuments with officially licensed guides. Madrid-Museum-Tours specializes in Art History and includes in its offerings a full Prado Museum Tour along with a special two-hour “**Jewish Heritage of the Prado**” tour with Nacho Benjumea, author of *Mystery of Las Meninas*, in addition to an 8-hour tour of the big three art museums + Royal Palace. They also offer a private visit to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, one of Madrid’s lesser-known jewels, a tour of Madrid’s most fascinating Monasteries, the Descalzas Reales and Encarnación, where the regular guided tours are usually only given in Spanish.

Full-day chauffeured excursions lasting up to nine hours, are available to El Escorial/Valley of the Fallen, Toledo and Segovia/Avila. And for those who wish to combine wine and art, M-M-T offers a full-day tour by car to the countryside. Participants will first visit the beautiful Bourbon dynasty Royal Palace of Aranjuez, followed by a stroll through its lavish gardens, then move on to the rural village of Colmenar de Oreja where they will visit a highly regarded family-run winery for a tour and tasting, then on to lunch in the charming, atmospheric town of Chinchón with its balconied, oval square where bullfights are still held and *anís* (anisette) still produced. The final stop on this excursion is to the UNESCO World Heritage City of Alcalá de Henares, birthplace of Cervantes and the “stork capital” of Spain.

M-M-T also offers private tapas and wine tours in Rural Madrid.

While prices do run steep for any privately escorted tours with a licensed guide, they are a small luxury that can make Madrid’s artistic treasures come alive for the visitor and provide lasting memories.

Mr. Hernan Amaya Satt and his colleagues are an especially kind, thoughtful and talented bunch. Our clients have been in very good hands with M-M-T. Rick Steves recommends them as well, and you can read testimonials from clients on his Graffiti Wall.

**Madrid Cool and Cultural**

A Madrid native, Gemma García, passionate about her city, offers very well regarded tours, focusing on both food and culture, in and around the city, museum tours, Sephardic tours, exclusive gastro tours (she knows the very best places), cooking classes in a small professional kitchen preceded by a market tour, wine tastings, private flamenco classes, luxury art experiences, etc. Gemma also arranges to Toledo and Segovia with a team of licensed, professional guides.
Gourmet Food & Wine Tours

Gourmet Madrid
Get off the beaten tourist trail with a gourmet tapas experience, run by natives, in the Retiro district, which is blessed with the very best creative tapas bars/small plates restaurants in the city. This tour is called the “Creative Tapas Tour” and it runs on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. The lunch tapas tour in the Retiro starts at 1:00 pm and will last around 2-1/2 hours. Meeting point is at the Ibiza metro station exit (Line 9), on Calle Ibiza, and costs 90€/person.

Note: the gourmet gastrobars in the Retiro are jam packed with savvy locals at night, making it very difficult to conduct a tour there in the evening.

The evening tapas tour takes place in Old Madrid, Sunday-Thursday, from 7:30 to 10:30 pm, with the meeting point at the Plaza Santa Ana in front of the bronze statue of Lorca, which is in front of the theater, Teatro Español. Cost is 70€/person. This company also offers wine tours to wineries in the Madrid province and an all day wine touring program to the Ribera del Duero, as well as bilingual cooking classes conducted by a chef, beginning with a tour of the prestigious La Paz Market, Madrid’s most exclusive, in the tony Salamanca district.
Madrid Tours and Tastings
Owner Nygil Murrell, who has conducted tours for travel guru Rick Steves, leads Gastronomic Tapas Tours, stopping at 3-4 different tapas bars in central Madrid. His most popular tour is the 3-½ hour, Neighborhood of Letters Tour, through the Barrio de las Letras, and costs 95€/person, including guide services, food and drink. A maximum of 6 participants insures a personalized experience. This tour is offered for both lunch and dinner. Meeting point is Plaza Santa Ana. He also offers a Vegetarian Tapas Tour through the veggie/vegan friendly district of Malasaña. As Nygil is a certified sommelier, he also offers an all day wine excursion to the prestigious Ribera del Duero appellation with a maximum of six participants. Can also be arranged as a private tour.

Adventurous Appetites
Yet another expat company offering a guided evening tapas tour of Old Madrid daily (except Sunday), lasting about 4 hours. Tour begins at 8:00 pm from the famous Oso y Madroño statue, the bear leaning on a strawberry tree, in the Puerta del Sol. Groups are limited to 8 participants except during periods of heavy demand. Cost is 50€, which includes the first drink and tapa, and it’s “pay-as-you-go” after the first aperitivo. Available every day except Sunday.

Madrid Tapas Trip
The owner of this small Jamon shop at Calle Mayor, 8o, between Mercado de San Miguel and Catedral de la Almudena offers food and wine tours as well as hands-on Paella and Tortilla cooking classes.

Walks of Madrid Tapas Tour
Andrés Jarabo has been a fixture in Madrid for a number of years and offers small, private food and wine tours in the evenings in El Madrid de los Austrias, old Madrid, Tuesday-Sunday for 65€/person, which includes the cost of the tapas and wine.
Cooking Classes

Although Madrid is the epicenter of gastronomy in Spain, nonprofessional cooking classes are primarily limited to tapas and paella.

Cooking Point
In the Barrio de las Letras (Huertas) at Calle Moratín, 11, close to the Antón Martín market, receives solid reviews from participants. Owner and teacher Eduardo offers hands-on, 4-hour tapas cooking classes, paella-making and wine tasting classes in English from Monday through Saturday for up to 24 people. The tapas classes run from 5:30 pm to 9:30 pm while the paella classes take place from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm and include a visit to the atmospheric Antón Martín covered market nearby.

Soy Chef (I’m a Chef)
Located in the Mercado de Torrijos, Calle General Diaz Porlier, 8, in the Salamanca district, offers an excellent 3-hour Spanish Tapas Cooking Class. This is also where chef Alex Marugán’s Tres Por Cuarto can be found.

A Punto Cooking and Tasting School
This hands-on school is located in a bookshop that specializes in cookbooks, as well as a culinary school offering 10 tapas classes and wine tasting. Includes a tour of nearby San Antón market.
Day Spas, Pools and Hairdressers

Day Spas and Health Clubs

The **Hammam Al Ándalus Madrid** (Baños árabes) is at Calle Atocha, 14, in Old Madrid. It’s a member of the **Grupo Ándalus**, with Hammams in Córdoba, Granada and Málaga, and offers bath, massages and aromatherapy by advanced reservation only. Spa times are every two hours beginning at 10:00 in the morning, with the last one reservation available at 10:00 pm. The **Chi Spa Madrid** is at Conde de Aranda, 14, in the Salamanca district, and is one of the city’s most exclusive luxury day spas (has a sister spa in Barcelona). It offers hair treatments, facials, body massages, waxing, manicures and pedicures. Open Monday-Friday from 10:00 am to 9:00 pm, close on Saturdays and Sundays at 6:00 pm. You’ll find **Le Max Wellness Club** inside the 5-star Hotel Wellington at Velázquez, 8, in the Salamanca quarter. It offers both fitness and a spa, while **The Spa by Natura Bissé**, the newest hotel spa in town, is found inside the 5-star **Hotel Urso** at Calle de Mejía Lequerica, 8, in the trendy Tribunal neighborhood. **Fusión** is an Asian spa at Calle Alcalá, 44, across the avenue from Palacio de Cibeles, specializing in Thai, Balinese and Hawaiian massages. Also offers an exotic array of beauty treatments, such as a coffee scrub or pineapple body wrap. Towels, slippers, bath tunics, cotton pajamas provided.

Public Pools

The city hall opens the Olympic-sized public municipal outdoor pool, **Piscinas Canal Isabel II**, usually on May 30 and closes it the first week of September. It’s located at Avenida Filipinas, 54. Metro: Canal. Opening daily 8:00 am to 10:00 pm. It is part of the Centro Deportivo Municipal de Isabel II that also includes tennis courts.

Hotel Pools - Open to Non-Guests

The rooftop pool of the **Hotel Emperador**, Gran Via, 53, is open to non-hotel customers and can be accessed Monday-Friday for 35€/person, and weekends and holidays for 48€. Not only can one enjoy the pool, but also the lounge chairs, chill out cocktail bar and use the free Wi-Fi. Open May-September from 11:00 am to 8:00 pm.

Hairdressers

**Alberto Cerdán**, Calle Ortega y Gasset, 21, is a catalán stylist who has styled the hair of tennis star Arantza Sánchez Vicario plus designed the wedding coif for the (ex) daughter-in-law of the Duchess of Alba. **Oliver Martínez**, Calle de Castelló, 33 is the hairdresser to model Ariadne Artilles. **Lorena Morote**, Calle Velázquez, 69, is the hairdresser to Spanish actresses, **Salón Cheska** is at Calle Velázquez, 61, and **Ines Estebanez** is at #100. **Moncho Moreno**, Calle Lagasca, 3, has counted Queen Noor of Jordan as one of his clients. **Angela Navarro**, Calle Ayala, 26. **Rizos** has a salon at Calle Ortega y Gasset, 45.
Madrid Nightlife

Madrid has one of the most active nightlife scenes in Europe. Possibilities are almost endless. On Saturday nights the traffic is as intense at 3:00 am as it is at 3:00 pm. Check Timeout.com/Madrid to get you started. Their entertainment sections are great resources for what’s going on at night in Madrid. If you read Spanish, then check out Guia de Locio, it’s a kind of “Pariscope” and will keep you up to date on what’s going on in Madrid.

Flamenco

There are several venues for flamenco in Madrid. The rule of thumb with flamenco is the later the hour, the fierier, more spirited the flamenco will become and the more “duende” (soul) it will have. When fellow flamenco artists drop by the tablaos late at night, the performances heat up. Performances for the tourist audience only may often seem uninspired, the dancers just going through the motions, but if you’re not a real aficionado you may not notice. See deflamenco.com for their recommendations.

We feel that the most authentic and intimate is Casa Patas in Old Madrid at Calle Cañizares, 10, where there are nightly performances at 8:00 and 10:30 pm. Tickets are 40€, drink included. This flamenco club also has a handy bar-restaurant that starts serving dinner at

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7:30 pm. Prices are reasonable. Another older and more famous venue, a true flamenco nightclub or tablao, is the Corral de la Morería, in Old Madrid at Calle de Morería, 17, close to the Royal Palace. Inaugurated in 1956, it attracts Spain’s premier talent and offers nightly performances as well as dinner.

Equally famous, with a sumptuous décor, is the Café de Chinitas at Calle Torrija 7, occupying the ground floor of a 17th-century palace, where one can dine and watch the flamenco performance. There are two nightly performances, beginning at 7:30 and 9:30 pm, closed Sundays. Opened in 1970, this is one of the pricier venues in town with a gourmet dinner plus show priced at 72€. Just the show and drink is 43€.

Las Carboneras, in the Plaza del Conde de Miranda, is located in the basement of the old palace of the Count of Miranda. Show and a drink is 28€. The show and dinner starts at 7:30 and 10:30 pm. Menus start at 74€. Open daily.

Handily located in the Barrio de las Letras at Calle Echegaray, 15, a few steps up the street from Calle de Prado, is Cardamomo Tablao Flamenco. Attracts a younger crowd. Offers three shows daily starting at 6:00 pm (25€ for the show and a glass of sangria). The 10:00 pm show is 39€, one drink included.

If you’re a hard-core flamenco fan looking for a unique experience at a real, authentic flamenco tablao, then venture to where flamenco artists hang out: Candela Tablao, at Calle Olmo, 2, in the Lavapiés district, a two-minute walk from Casa Patas. The list of artists who have performed here include: Camarón, Paco de Lucía, Enrique Morente, Pepe Habichuela, Gerardo Núñez, Ray Heredia, Antonio Canales, Javier Limón, Ketama and Sara Baras. Performances on Fridays and Saturdays at 11:00 pm, with entrance and a drink for 15€. The door opens at 10:30 pm. “Amazing and passionate flamenco in an intimate, vintage venue” Reservations required.

Veranos de la Villa is the July-August outdoor performing arts festival with performances held at the Conde del Duque and Puente del Rey venues. The Suma Flamenca Festival is held during the entire month of June with performances at all the major tablaos such as Casa Patas, Las Tablas, Las Carboneras, Villa Rosa, Cardamomo and Café de Chinitas, plus the Teatros del Canal.

Jazz

The city’s “best” jazz venue that is handiest for visitors is Café Central on the Plaza del Angel, number 10, just west of the NH Palacio de Tepa hotel and Plaza Santa Ana. Open until 2:30 am Sunday-Thursday and until 3:30 am on Friday and Saturday. Another jazz venue in the Letras neighborhood is Café Popular, at Huertas, 22, with a low cover charge, 3€ Sunday-Thursday and 10€ Fridays, Saturdays and evenings. It features jazz, blues, swing, Afro-
American and salsa nightly, with shows from 10:00 pm until midnight. El Junco, Plaza Santa Bárbara, 10, is known as the city’s best for late night jazz. Jam sessions on Sundays (blues) and on Tuesdays (jazz). Open Tuesday-Thursday at 10:30 pm and on weekends from 11:00 pm to 6:00 am. For old school jazz try Café Berlin, Calle Costanilla de los Ángeles, 20.

**Classical Music, Symphony**

Auditorio Nacional de Música, Príncipe de Vergara, 146. See the schedule for upcoming concerts of the Orquesta Sinfónica de Madrid. Spanish Radio and Television Symphony Orchestra (RTVE) performs its concerts at the Teatro Monumental at Calle Atocha, 65, in Old Madrid. Check the schedule for upcoming performances. Fundación March, Castelló, 77, in the Salamanca quarter holds free chamber concerts on Wednesdays at 7:30 pm, Mondays/Saturdays/Sundays at noon, and also lectures, poetry readings important art exhibits. Seating is not assigned—first come, first served so arrive early.

**Opera-Ballet-Modern Dance**

Teatro Real, on the Plaza del Oriente, with performances throughout the summer. The two major Spanish dance companies below perform both here and at the Teatro de la Zarzuela. Ballet Nacional de España is wonderful and mixes classical ballet with flamenco. Not to be missed! They often perform at the Teatro de la Zarzuela, and tickets sell out extremely quickly. Compañía Nacional de Danza of Nacho Duato performs modern works, usually at the Teatro de la Zarzuela. Zarzuela, Spain’s version of operetta is performed at the Teatro de la Zarzuela on Calle Jovellanos behind Parliament. Teatros del Canal, at Cea Bermúdez, 1 is a new and vast multipurpose performing arts complex, occupying 35, 500 square meters of space, a creation of Santander architect Juan Navarro Baldeweg. It’s currently a venue for modern dance, ballet, flamenco (during the Summa Flamenco festival), rock and classical music concerts, even Portuguese fado.

**Rock**

Major international soloists, groups perform in the Las Ventas bullring or the Barclay Card Center (formerly the Palacio de Deportes), or the covered bullring, Palacio de Vista Alegre. You can buy tickets downstairs at FNAC on Calle Preciados or in the music department of El Corte Inglés in the Puerta del Sol, or the other El Corte Inglés branches. Check Madrid’s Official Tourism website: www.esmadrid.com, for upcoming concerts before you leave and purchase your tickets at Ticketmaster Spain.

**Dance Clubs**

Because the clubs in vogue constitute a constantly changing scene, please see the recommendations in the most recent Time Out Madrid online.
Safety Concerns

- Watch your handbag/wallet with extreme caution when riding the metro and bus! The very best recourse is to wear a money belt/neck pouch so as not to worry. The most popular metro station for pickpockets are SOL and OPERA, and be aware of pickpockets on the crowded bus line 27, which travels the north-south Castellana Boulevard axis.

- When sightseeing anywhere in Old Madrid, please leave all valuables (tickets, passport, large sums of cash) in your hotel safe. For receiving a VAT refund at a shop, the clerks will request your passport number for the paperwork. A copy of the passport will do, or photo on your Smartphone will suffice.

- In public places always guard your personal belongings and luggage well, and never allow a “volunteer” on the metro to help you with your luggage.

- Be wary of suspiciously helpful gestures, such as the above, and unsolicited warnings regarding stains on your clothing or damage to your car. Also beware of distractions such as someone dropping his cell phone in front of you to get your attention while his accomplice behind you picks your pocket.

- You may wish to read the “What are some Safety Tips” article under “Top Questions about Spain” to the right of the Trip Advisor Spain Forum: www.tripadvisor.com/ShowForum-g187427-i42-Spain.

- Pickpockets abound in the Gran Via-Calle Preciados-Puerta Del Sol area and at the Sunday morning flea market, El Rastro.

- Ignore any gypsy woman who approaches you with twigs of rosemary as a “gift”, or any young person with a clipboard pretending to take a survey. Simply walk away.

What is SATE?

Servicios de Atención al Turista Extranjero (SATE de Madrid) is the Foreign Tourist Assistance Services, a centrally located police department whose role is to offer foreign tourists visiting Madrid specialized help after falling victim to a crime. Assistance includes help with canceling credit cards, contacting embassies and consulates, contacting family members, assistance with reporting lost objects.

This office is located next to the Plaza de España at Calle Leganitos, 19, and is open daily from 9:00 am to midnight. Or call the 24-hour hotline: +34 915 488 537 / 915 488 008, English spoken once a person comes on the line.
Embassy & Tourist Information
For obtaining a new passport, if yours lost or stolen...

The American Citizen Services office (ACS) is located at Serrano, 75, in the Salamanca district. Plan on spending an entire morning here to secure a replacement passport, and try to be in line by 8:30 am. There is a machine inside the consular waiting room to obtain a passport size photo. Bring plenty of change with you. If you are one of the very first in line and already have your photo, the entire process can, on a good day, take just over two hours. Tel: (+34) 915 872 200

The Canadian Embassy is located at Torre Espacio, Paseo de la Castellana 259D, in the north Madrid Business District (Begoña Metro stop). Tel: (+34) 913 828 400

Tourist Information Center
Drop by the Tourist Information Center at Plaza Mayor, 27, to pick up maps, brochures or to check your email at the computers as you enter to your right, or visit the official tourism website and check out “Discover Madrid”.

The information center is open daily from 9:30 am to 8:30 pm. You’ll find other information centers at the Plaza Colón, Plaza Cibeles and at the Adolfo Suárez Madrid-Barajas Airport, Terminals 2 and 4.

Other Madrid Tourist Offices
• Tourism center on Plaza Colón, on the Castellana Boulevard
• Information kiosk at Plaza Cibeles
• Information kiosk at Plaza Callao
• Terminal T4 and T1 at Barajas airport
Travel Planning Services

Exclusive Travel Planning Services by Iberian Traveler & Maribel's Guides. Contact Maribel to arrange a custom itinerary for your trip to Spain, Portugal, Paris or France.

Travel planning services are fee based, depending on the length of your stay. The fee includes the preparation of a customized, day-to-day itinerary based on the client’s specific interests/travel style/budget, customized sightseeing, dining and shopping guides for each destination, booking of all accommodations, making restaurant reservations, securing of performing arts tickets (theater/opera/ballet/flamenco), setting up winery visits, cooking classes, personal guide services or special day tours, car rentals and consultation by email or phone.

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