

## **Madrid Information**

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*Madrid is the capital of Spain, with a population of almost 3.2 million. It is the third-largest city in the European Union, after London and Berlin. The city is located on the Manzanares in the centre of both the country and is bordered by the autonomous communities of Castile and León and Castile-La Mancha. As the capital city of Spain, seat of government, and residence of the Spanish monarch, Madrid is also the political, economic and cultural centre of Spain. While Madrid possesses a modern infrastructure, it has preserved the look and feel of many of its historic neighbourhoods and streets. Its landmarks include the Royal Palace of Madrid; the Royal Theatre with its restored 1850 Opera House; the Buen Retiro Park, founded in 1631; the 19th-century National Library building (founded in 1712) containing some of Spain's historical archives; a large number of national museums, and the Golden Triangle of Art, located along the Paseo del Prado and comprising three art museums: Prado Museum, the Reina Sofía Museum (a museum of modern art), and the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum. The Cibeles Palace and Fountain have become one of the monument symbols of the city.*

*Most of the tourist attractions of Madrid are in the old town and the Ensanche, corresponding with the districts of Centro, Salamanca, Chamberí, Retiro and Arganzuela. The nerve centre of the city is the Puerta del Sol, starting point for the numbering of all city streets and all the country's highways.*

*The Calle de Alcalá or Alcalá Street leads from the Puerta del Sol from the NE of the city. From the street you get from Plaza de Cibeles. Subsequently, the street reaches the "Plaza de la Independencia", which includes the Puerta de Alcalá and an entrance to the Buen Retiro Park.*

*The Calle Mayor leads to Plaza Mayor continuing for the so-called Madrid de los Austrias, in reference to the Dynasty of Habsburg – finally reaching Calle de Bailén, near the Cathedral of the Almudena and the church of San Francisco el Grande.*

*The Calle del Arenal comes to Royal Theatre in Plaza de la Ópera, continuing through Plaza de Oriente, where the Royal Palace is it. From there the Calle Bailen leads to Plaza de España and the Temple of Debod, an Egyptian temple moved stone by stone to Spain in gratitude for their help in the construction of the Aswan Dam. Also in this square is the start of Gran Vía street.*

### **Places to see:**

#### *Retiro Park:*

*When you're a royal, life's a grind – you're always in competition for the biggest back yard. Once owned by the Spanish Royal Family, Retiro Park's sprawling gardens are filled with opulent fountains, statues and the spectacular architecture of centuries past. Its marvels, including the iconic Crystal Palace and equestrian statue of King Alfonso XII, are open to public viewing year-round. The glorious gardens of El Retiro are as beautiful as any you'll find in a European city. Littered with marble monuments, landscaped lawns, the occasional elegant building (the Palacio de Cristal is especially worth seeking out) and abundant greenery, it's quiet and contemplative during the week but comes to life on weekends. Put simply, this is one of our favourite places in Madrid. Laid out in the 17th century by Felipe IV as the preserve of kings, queens and*

their intimates, the park was opened to the public in 1868 and ever since, whenever the weather's fine and on weekends in particular, madrileños (people from Madrid) from all across the city gather here to stroll, read the Sunday papers in the shade, take a boat ride or nurse a cool drink at the numerous outdoor terrazas (open-air cafes). The focal point for so much of El Retiro's life is the artificial lake (estanque), which is watched over by the massive ornamental structure of the Monument to Alfonso XII on the east side, complete with marble lions; as sunset approaches on a Sunday afternoon in summer, the crowd grows, bongos sound out across the park and people start to dance. Row boats can be rented from the lake's northern shore – an iconic Madrid experience. On the southern end of the lake, the odd structure decorated with sphinxes is the Fuente Egipcia: legend has it that an enormous fortune buried in the park by Felipe IV in the mid-18th century rests here. Hidden among the trees south of the lake is the Palacio de Cristal, a magnificent metal-and-glass structure that is arguably El Retiro's most beautiful architectural monument. It was built in 1887 as a winter garden for exotic flowers and is now used for temporary exhibitions organised by the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía. Just north of here, the 1883 Palacio de Velázquez is also used for temporary exhibitions. At the southern end of the park, near La Rosaleda (Rose Garden) with its more than 4000 roses, is a statue of El Ángel Caído. Strangely, it sits 666m above sea level... In the same vein, the Puerta de Dante, in the extreme southeastern corner of the park, is watched over by a carved mural of Dante's Inferno. Occupying much of the southwestern corner of the park is the Jardín de los Planteles, one of the least visited sections of El Retiro, where quiet pathways lead beneath an overarching canopy of trees. West of here is the moving Bosque del Recuerdo, an understated memorial to the 191 victims of the 11 March 2004 train bombings. For each victim stands an olive or cypress tree. To the north, just inside the Puerta de Felipe IV, stands what is thought to be Madrid's oldest tree, a Mexican conifer (ahuehuete) planted in 1633. In the northeastern corner of the park is the Ermita de San Isidro, a small country chapel noteworthy as one of the few, albeit modest, examples of Romanesque architecture in Madrid. When it was built, Madrid was a small village more than 2km away.

#### *Plaza de Santa Ana:*

This is a delightful confluence of elegant architecture and irresistible energy. It presides over the upper reaches of the Barrio de las Letras and this literary personality makes its presence felt with the statues of the 17th-century writer Calderón de la Barca and Federico García Lorca, and in the Teatro Español (formerly the Teatro del Príncipe) at the plaza's eastern end. Apart from anything else, the plaza is the starting point for many a long Huertas night. Situated in the heart of Huertas, the plaza was laid out in 1810 during the controversial reign of Joseph Bonaparte, giving breathing space to what had hitherto been one of Madrid's most claustrophobic barrios. The plaza quickly became a focal point for intellectual life, and the cafes surrounding the plaza thronged with writers, poets and artists engaging in endless tertulias (literary and philosophical discussions).

#### *Puerta de Alcalá*

Back in 1778, Carlos III realised that Madrid wasn't complete without an elaborate gate. This monument to Madrid's ferocity was created in the 18th century, all but destroyed in the early 20th and rebuilt to its former glory. It's even the eponymous subject of a kitschy song by Spanish singers Ana Belén and Victor Manuel, popular throughout the Spanish-speaking world.

#### *Royal Palace of Madrid:*

Once you see this grand, slightly over-the-top palace, you'll be dying to take a peek inside. Renaissance paintings, enormous chandeliers and beautiful frescoes adorn the rooms, which also contain the world's only complete Stradivarius string quintet. Take a tour – although it's the official residence of the royal family, they no longer live there and it's now used mainly for ceremonial purposes. Or simply admire it from the adjacent Sabatini Gardens. Spain's lavish Palacio Real is a jewel box of a palace, although it's used only occasionally for royal ceremonies; the royal family moved to the modest Palacio de la Zarzuela years ago. When the alcázar burned down on Christmas Day 1734, Felipe V, the first of the Bourbon kings, decided to build a palace that would dwarf all its European counterparts. Felipe died before the palace was finished, which is perhaps why the Italianate baroque colossus has a mere 2800 rooms, just one-quarter of the original plan. The official tour (self-guided tours are also possible and follow the same route) leads through 50 of the palace rooms, which hold a good selection of Goyas, 215 absurdly ornate clocks, and five Stradivarius violins still used for concerts and balls. The main stairway is a grand statement of imperial power, leading to the Halberdiers' rooms and to the sumptuous Salón del Trono (Throne Room), with its crimson-velvet wall coverings and Tiepolo ceiling. Shortly after, you reach the Salón de Gasparini, with its exquisite stucco ceiling and walls resplendent with embroidered silks. Outside the main palace, visit the Farmacia Real (Royal Pharmacy) at the southern end of the patio known as the Plaza de la Armería (or Plaza de Armas). Westwards across the plaza is the Armería Real (Royal Armoury), a shiny collection of weapons and armour, mostly dating from the 16th and 17th centuries.

### *Plaza Mayor:*

The Spanish Inquisition left Plaza Mayor with a bloody history. Once a centre for executions and bullfights, today it's chic and cosmopolitan. The 400-year-old equestrian statue of King Philip III watches over the restaurants, artisan shops and street artists that occupy the square. Explore the side streets and you'll find speciality calamari sandwich shops. Madrid's grand central square, a rare but expansive opening in the tightly packed streets of central Madrid, is one of the prettiest open spaces in Spain, a winning combination of imposing architecture, picaresque historical tales and vibrant street life coursing across its cobblestones. At once beautiful in its own right and a reference point for so many Madrid days, it also hosts the city's main tourist office, a Christmas market in December and arches leading to laneways leading out into the labyrinth. Ah, the history the plaza has seen! Designed in 1619 by Juan Gómez de Mora and built in typical Herrerian style, of which the slate spires are the most obvious expression, its first public ceremony was suitably auspicious – the beatification of San Isidro Labrador (St Isidro the Farm Labourer), Madrid's patron saint. Thereafter it was as if all that was controversial about Spain took place in this square. Bullfights, often in celebration of royal weddings or births, with royalty watching on from the balconies and up to 50,000 people crammed into the plaza, were a recurring theme until 1878. Far more notorious were the autos-da-fé (the ritual condemnations of heretics during the Spanish Inquisition), followed by executions – burnings at the stake and deaths by garrotte on the north side of the square, hangings to the south. These continued until 1790 when a fire largely destroyed the square, which was subsequently reproduced under the supervision of Juan de Villanueva, who lent his name to the building that now houses the Museo del Prado. These days, the plaza is an epicentre of Madrid life. The grandeur of the plaza is due in large part to the warm colours of the uniformly ochre apartments, with 237 wrought-iron balconies offset by the exquisite frescoes of the 17th-century Real Casa de la Panadería (Royal Bakery). The present frescoes date to just 1992 and are the work of artist Carlos Franco, who chose images from the signs of the zodiac and gods (eg Cybele) to provide a stunning backdrop for the plaza. The frescoes were inaugurated to coincide with Madrid's 1992 spell as European Capital of Culture.

### *Gran Vía:*

Don't let the lack of can-can girls and singing matadors stop you visiting Gran Vía. Known as the 'Broadway' of Madrid, this long avenue is lined with high-end shops, theatres and cinemas – all built in a variety of styles that reads like an architectural guide to art history. The Goddess of Victory watches over the street from the top of the iconic Metropolis Building.

### *Puerta del Sol Madrid:*

Once upon a time, a bear stood next to a strawberry tree – and an icon was born. The statue, 'El Oso y El Madroño' stands in this large square and is Madrid's official symbol. The area is renowned for its clock tower attached to the royal post office, as well as assorted shops, hotels and restaurants. New Year's celebrations are also held here – according to tradition, the locals eat one grape each time the bell tolls.

### *Golden Triangle of Art:*

When endless squares have got you feeling ... square, head to this triangle of art galleries and museums. El Prado exhibits paintings (including Fra Angelico's sublime 'Annunciation') plus sculptures, prints and drawings from Europe's masters. Wander along the two-kilometre 'art walk', where Reina Sofía and Thyssen-Bornemisza galleries, the National Library and Archaeological Museum are all within close proximity.

### *Plaza de Cibeles:*

Sometimes, a lion-drawn chariot is the only way to see a city. Just ask Cybele, Madrid's mythological protector whose statue sits on top of Cibeles Fountain. The fountain attracts locals for libation and merriment, especially when Madrid FC wins a game. It's bordered by four iconic buildings – The Bank of Spain, Buenavista and Linares Palace's and City Hall.

### *Buen Retiro Park (Parque del Buen Retiro, or simply Parque del Retiro):*

Formerly the grounds of the palace built for Philip IV of Spain, is Madrid's most popular park and the largest park in central Madrid. Its area is more than 1.4 km<sup>2</sup> (0.5 sq mi) (350 acres) and it is located very close to the Puerta de Alcalá and not far from the Prado Museum. The park is entirely surrounded by the present-day city. Its lake in the middle once staged mini naval sham battles to amuse royalty; these days the more tranquil pastime of pleasure boating is popular. Inspired by London's Crystal Palace, the Palacio de Cristal can be found at the south-eastern end of the park.

### *Atocha Railway Station (Estación de Atocha):*

This is the city's first and most central station, and is also home to a 4,000-square-metre (43,056-square-foot) indoor garden, with more than 500 species of plant life and ponds with turtles and goldfish.

#### *Casa de Campo:*

This is an enormous urban parkland to the west of the city, the largest in Spain and Madrid's main green lung. Its area is more than 1,700 hectares (6.6 sq mi). It is home to a fairground, the Madrid Zoo, an amusement park, the Parque de Atracciones de Madrid, and an outdoor municipal pool, to enjoy a bird's eye view of the park and city take a cable car trip above the tree tops. Casa de Campo's vegetation is one of its most important features. There are, in fact, three different ecosystems: oak, pine and river groves. The oak is the dominant tree species in the area and, although many of them are over 100 years old and reach a great height, they are also present in the form of chaparral and bushes. The pine-forest ecosystem boasts a large number of trees that have adapted perfectly to the light, dry conditions in the park. In addition, mushrooms often emerge after the first rains of autumn. Finally, the river groves, or riparian forests, are made up of various, mainly deciduous, species that grow in wetter areas. Examples include poplars, willows and alder trees. As regards fauna, this green space is home to approximately 133 vertebrate species.

#### *The Royal Palace (Palacio Real):*

This is surrounded by three green areas. In front of the palace, are the gardens of the Plaza de Oriente; to the north, the gardens of Sabatini and to the west up to the Manzanares River, the famous Campo del Moro. Campo del Moro gardens has a surface area of 20 hectares and is a scenic garden with an unusual layout filled with foliage and an air of English romanticism. The Sabatini Gardens have a formal Neoclassic style, consisting of well-trimmed hedges, in symmetric geometrical patterns, adorned with a pool, statues and fountains, with trees also planted in a symmetrical geometric shape. Plaza de Oriente can distinguish three main plots: the Central Gardens, the Cabo Noval Gardens and the Lepanto Gardens. The Central Gardens are arranged around the central monument to Philip IV, in a grid, following the baroque model garden. They consist of seven flowerbeds, each packed with box hedges, forms of cypress, yew and magnolia of small size, and flower plantations, temporary. These are bounded on either side by rows of statues paths, popularly known as the Gothic kings, and mark the dividing line between the main body of the plaza and the Cabo Noval Gardens at north, and the Lepanto Gardens at south.

#### *St. Jerome Church:*

This is a gothic church next to El Prado Museum. The Catholic Monarchs ordered its construction in the 15th century, as part of a vanished monastery. The monastery's cloister is preserved.

#### *St. Isidore Church:*

This was built between 1620 and 1664 by order of Empress Maria of Austria, daughter of Charles V of Germany and I of Spain, to become part of a school run by the Jesuits which still exists today. Its dome is the first example of a dome drawing on a wooden frame covered with plaster, which, given its lightness makes it easy to support the walls. It was the cathedral of Madrid between 1885 and 1993, which is the time it took to build the Almudena. The artwork inside were mostly burned during the Spanish Civil War, but it retained the tomb that holds the incorrupt body of Saint Isidore Laborer and the urn containing the ashes of his wife Maria Torribia.

#### *Royal Chapel of St. Anthony of La Florida:*

This is sometimes named the "Goya's Sistine Chapel". The chapel was built on orders of King Charles IV of Spain, who also commissioned the frescoes by Goya. These were completed over a six-month period in 1798. The frescoes portray miracles by Saint Anthony of Padua, including one which occurred in Lisbon, but which the painter has relocated to Madrid. On every 13 June, the chapel becomes the site of a lively pilgrimage in which young unwed women come to pray to St. Anthony and to ask for a partner.

#### *San Francisco el Grande Basilica:*

This was built in neoclassical style in the second half of the 18th century by Francesco Sabatini. It has the fifth largest diameter dome to Christianity. (33 metres (108 feet) in diameter: it's smaller than the dome of the Rome's Pantheon (43.4 metres or 142.4 feet), St. Peter's Basilica (42.4 metres or 139.1 feet), the Florence Cathedral (42 metres or 138 feet) and the Rotunda of Mosta (37.2 metres or 122.0 feet) in Malta, but it's larger than St. Paul's Cathedral (30.8 metres or 101 feet) in London and Hagia Sophia (31.8 metres or 104 feet) in Istanbul). The church is dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi, who according to legend was established in Madrid during his pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. Its sumptuous interior features many artworks, including paintings by Goya and Zurbarán.

#### *The Cathedral of Santa María la Real de la Almudena:*

This is the episcopal seat of the Archdiocese of Madrid. It is a temple 102 metres (335 feet) long and 73 metres (240 feet) high, built during the 19th and 20th centuries in a mixture of different styles: neoclassical exterior, neo-Gothic interior and neo-Romanesque crypt and neo-Byzantine apse's paints. The cathedral was

built in the same place which was built the Moorish citadel (Al-Mudayna) in Madrid. It was consecrated by Pope John Paul II on his fourth trip to Spain on 15 June 1993, thus being the only Spanish cathedral dedicated by a pope.

#### *Basilica de San Francisco El Grande:*

Lording it over the southwestern corner of La Latina, this imposing and recently restored baroque basilica is one of Madrid's grandest old churches. Its extravagantly frescoed dome is, by some estimates, the largest in Spain and the fourth largest in the world, with a height of 56m and diameter of 33m. Legend has it that St Francis of Assisi built a chapel on this site in 1217. The current version was designed by Francesco Sabatini, who also designed the Puerta de Alcalá and finished off the Palacio Real. He designed the church with an unusual floor plan: the nave is circular and surrounded by chapels guarded by imposing marble statues of the 12 apostles; 12 prophets, rendered in wood, sit above them at the base of the dome. Each of the chapels is adorned with frescoes and decorated according to a different historical style, but most people rush to the neo-plateresque Capilla de San Bernardino, where the central fresco was painted by Goya in the early stages of his career. Unusually, Goya has painted himself into the scene (he's the one in the yellow shirt on the right). A series of corridors behind the high altar (accessible only as part of the guided visit) is lined with works of art from the 17th to 19th centuries; highlights include a painting by Francisco Zurbarán, and another by Francisco Pacheco, the father-in-law and teacher of Velázquez. In the sacristy, watch out for the fine Renaissance *sillería* (the sculpted walnut seats where the church's superiors would meet). A word about the opening hours: although entry is free during morning Mass times, there is no access to the museum and the lights in the Capilla de San Bernardino won't be on to illuminate the Goya. At all other times, visit is by Spanish-language guided tour (included in the admission price). Just to confuse matters, you may face a similar problem if you're here on a Friday afternoon or any time Saturday if there's a wedding taking place.

#### *Museo del Prado:*

Welcome to one of the world's premier art galleries. The more than 7000 paintings held in the Museo del Prado's collection (although only around 1500 are currently on display) are like a window onto the historical vagaries of the Spanish soul, at once grand and imperious in the royal paintings of Velázquez, darkly tumultuous in *Las pinturas negras* (The Black Paintings) of Goya, and outward looking with sophisticated works of art from all across Europe. Spend as long as you can at the Prado or, better still, plan to make a couple of visits because it can be a little overwhelming if you try to absorb it all at once.

Entrance to the Prado is via the eastern Puerta de los Jerónimos, with tickets on sale beneath the northern Puerta de Goya. Once inside, pick up the free plan from the ticket office or information desk just inside the entrance – it lists the locations of 50 of the Prado's most famous works and gives room numbers for all major artists. The western wing of the Prado (Edificio Villanueva) was completed in 1785, as the neoclassical Palacio de Villanueva. Originally conceived as a house of science, it later served, somewhat ignominiously, as a cavalry barracks for Napoleon's troops during their occupation of Madrid between 1808 and 1813. In 1814 King Fernando VII decided to use the palace as a museum, although his purpose was more about finding a way of storing the hundreds of royal paintings gathering dust than any high-minded civic ideals – this was an era where art was a royal preserve. Five years later the Museo del Prado opened with 311 Spanish paintings on display. Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes (Goya) is found on all three floors of the Prado, but we recommend starting at the southern end of the ground or lower level. In Room 65, Goya's *El dos de mayo* and *El tres de mayo* rank among Madrid's most emblematic paintings; they bring to life the 1808 anti-French revolt and subsequent execution of insurgents in Madrid. Alongside, in Rooms 67 and 68, are some of his darkest and most disturbing works, *Las pinturas negras*; they are so called in part because of the dark browns and black that dominate, but more for the distorted animalesque appearance of their characters. There are more Goyas on the 1st floor in Rooms 34 to 37. Among them are two more of Goya's best-known and most intriguing oils: *La maja vestida* and *La maja desnuda*. These portraits, in Room 37, of an unknown woman, commonly believed to be the Duquesa de Alba (who may have been Goya's lover), are identical save for the lack of clothing in the latter. There are further Goyas on the top floor.