

## SHORT STAY IN MADRID – SOME IDEAS

### Plaza Puerta del Sol:

True trivia about Sol: not too long ago all the streets around the square had car traffic – the square was more traffic roundabout than pedestrian area. Sol's last remodeling closed the second to last through street Alcalá - Arenal (flowing west), leaving only calle Mayor - Carrera San Jerónimo (flowing east). Now Sol is almost pedestrian and Arenal is much friendlier, lined with shops and cafés, though beware! Some perpendicular traffic still crosses Arenal, and delivery vans have access in the mornings (and do not watch for people!).

- **Red and white building** with clock on top (south side of square, landmark for navigating the area), now Madrid Province government offices), was built as post office in the 18<sup>th</sup> c; during dictator Francisco Franco's time it was police headquarters and site of many unpleasant goings-on. Clock on the top is official clock for New Year's Eve, and "Kilometer 0" in the sidewalk in front of the building (next to the street) marks starting point for Spain's six radial highways

- **Statue of big-nosed man on a horse** on north side of the square: Carlos III (Spanish Bourbon dynasty, ruled 1759-1788), one of Spain's best kings. Goya painted him, his son and grandson, see paintings in the Prado.

- **Statue of bear and tree** on east side of square, start of calle Alcalá: Madrid's coat of arms shows a bear and tree. Two stories tell us why but neither is technically true.

- **Strange humpback glass structure** on east side of square: access to commuter trains. Some of the Metro accesses work too, but not all. This one is easier to remember.

- **Statue of woman on a pillar** on west side of square, start of calle Arenal. The Mariblanca, replica of a 1625 statue that was on a fountain on east side of the square.

- **McDonalds on west side of square.** Yes really. This is your landmark for the diagonal pedestrian street called Postas that leads to the Plaza Mayor.

**Plaza Mayor** Now considered the heart of Old Madrid, this square was outside the first walled city. It began as a market square, later evolving to what we see today. The basic layout of the square is from the 17<sup>th</sup> c. under Felipe III (1598-1621, on a horse in the middle of the square), though what we see today is from late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> c., after a 1790 fire destroyed part of the square. The square has been used for bullfights, Inquisition trials, executions (though not burnings), theater, parades and concerts; still today it has concerts and theater in the summer, Christmas market in season, stamp and coin fair on Sundays and other events throughout the year.

### Three big art museums

**Paseo del Arte ticket:** If you plan to visit all three art museums this is a good choice, with 20% reduction over the sum of buying the three tickets separately. Price is 28 euros, and you can visit each of the three museums one time in one year, counting from your visit to the first museum. Get Paseo del Arte ticket at the ticket window of your first museum visit. If not planning to visit all three museums you can see websites to see times when museums are free, or if you qualify for reduced price tickets.

**Museo del Prado:** World-class art museum, all the Spanish painters (Velazquez, Goya, El Greco, Murillo and more) but also famous internationals like Italians Titian and Fra Angelico, Dutch Bosch (Garden of Earthly Delights) and Bruegel, Flemish Van der Weyden and a copy of the Mona Lisa, done in Leonardo's study at the same time as the original. People fascinated or repelled by Spanish painter Francisco de Goya's Black Paintings can balance that opinion by seeing the lighthearted paintings created to make tapestries, some of his first work. Where: Paseo del Prado no number, on southeast side of Neptuno square. Tickets: 15 euros. More info: <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/>

**Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia:** National museum of contemporary art, usually goes by Reina Sofia. The building is an 18<sup>th</sup> c hospital built (mostly) under Carlos III. Excellent collection of 20<sup>th</sup> c. art in different media: painting, prints, sculpture, some film and movies, some exhibits or sections show influence between different kinds of media. Most people visit this museum to see Picasso's painting Guernica; if you go to see this painting, be sure to see the photos of Picasso working on the painting and the photos of the Spanish Civil War in a nearby room. Where: Atocha area, entrance for original building from square at end of Santa Isabel street (exterior glass elevators are fun), entrance to new addition from Ronda de Atocha. Tickets: 8 euros general entrance, 4 euros for special temporary exhibits. More info: <http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en>

**Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Museum (usually called the Thyssen):** Two eclectic private collections on permanent loan to the Spanish people. Organized chronologically from the top floor down, from early religious painting through first portraits to 19<sup>th</sup> c. landscapes to 20<sup>th</sup> c. pop-art. Excellent temporary exhibits, check website to see what (if anything) is showing. Added perks: very good gift shop (you don't have to pay entrance fee to visit this part) and very good café in the courtyard. Where: Paseo del Prado no number, on northwest side of Neptuno square, diagonal from the Prado. Tickets: 12 euros general entrance for permanent collection, 5 euros for audio guide. Temporary exhibits have different prices and schedules. More info: <http://www.museothyssen.org/>

### Other sights

**Sorolla museum:** Valencian painter Joaquín Sorolla (1863 – 1923) is best known for his marvelous use of light and for his portrayal of Spanish regional customs and costumes. The Madrid museum is in his studio-residence and has a good collection of his painting. The website has a virtual visit that lets you see the museum (whether to evaluate a possible visit or lament not having time): open visita virtual and click on "plano" (alas, I see no English). Tip: afternoon is usually less crowded. Where: Calle General Martínez Campos 37, (Metro Iglesia, line 1, direct from Sol). Tickets: 3 euros. More info <http://museosorolla.mcu.es/>

**National Archaeology museum (MAN):** Fabulous museum, covering the Iberian peninsula from pre-history up to modern Spain (19th century), plus other ancient cultures. That's a lot to take in at once so don't even try - go to their website and pick a period or pick a floor, and stay on if you want to see more. Be prepared to wow over the pre-Roman cultures, they have some silver and gold jewelry to knock your socks off. When you get to the museum, get their map, it will help you follow the chronology and gives you ten "don't miss" pieces. Where: Serrano 13, next to Plaza Colon (nearest metro is Serrano but it's close to Retiro stop and several bus lines). Tickets: only 3 euros! (one of the best museum deals in the city!) Multi-media guide 2 euros. More info, including explanation of collection and museum layout: <http://www.man.es/man/home>

**National Decorative Arts Museum:** For something different, check out this museum on interior design throughout the ages, lots of traditional Spanish including a wonderful tiled kitchen (sneak peek <http://mnartesdecorativas.mcu.es/VisitaVirtual/cocina.html> ). Where: calle Montalban 12, near the Prado museum and Retiro park. Tickets: 3 euros. More info: <http://mnartesdecorativas.mcu.es/>

**Royal Palace** Almost on the site of the 9th c. Islamic fortress, origin of Madrid; that building was enlarged and remodeled several times before Carlos I did a total re-construction in the 16th c, tearing down most of the original structure in the process. The 16th c. palace was almost destroyed by fire on Christmas Eve 1734; luckily the royal family was at a different palace on the outskirts of Madrid. Thus the current palace is 18th c., mostly neo-Classic design, and is considered one of the should-do's in a Madrid visit, however short. The porcelain room is one of the most memorable, as is the state dining room. No, the King doesn't live here anymore (Alfonso XII left in a hurry in 1931 when the Second Republic was declared), rather in the Zarzuela palace on the northwest side of the city, on the El Pardo estate. The Royal Palace is used for many state occasions, thus the "may be closed for official events". That includes when ambassadors present credentials to the King: horse-drawn carriages and honor guard from the State Department on southeast corner of the Plaza Mayor, very fun to watch if you're lucky enough to see this, though disappointing if you wanted to see the Palace. Tips: The Palace tour was completely re-organized in 2014, so if your guidebook is older, some things may have changed. There are various add-ons to the visit (check at entrance to see if all visible or not, some have been closed in recent past for rehab or reorganization. On Wednesdays you can see the Changing of the Guard at the Plaza del Oriente door, several turns between 11 am and 2pm. First Wednesday of the month, special Changing of the Guard in the Plaza de la Armeria (in front of the Cathedral) at 12 noon. Neither ceremony takes place in July, August or September, if weather is really bad or if there is something official happening. Where: The Royal Palace faces east, looking onto the Plaza del Oriente, big landscaped square not far from Opera metro stop, entrance is to the left on side that faces the Cathedral. Ticket: 10 euros, sometimes a small additional fee to cover special exhibits. More info: <https://entradas.patrimonionacional.es/es-ES/informacion-recinto/6/palacio-real-de-madrid>

**Almudena Cathedral.** (built 1885 – 1993) Just south of the Royal Palace. Most people want to see this, but it's not the best cathedral in Spain nor even the most interesting church in the city, so if you're short on time this could go on "maybe" list. More info: <http://www.catedraldealmudena.es/> The strange building immediately to the west of the Cathedral is the future museum of Royal Collections, still under construction after a 17-year, mega-million project; it is completely finished but tangled in bureaucracy and probably will not open until end of 2018.

**CentroCentro / Palacio de Cibeles.** Madrid's old post office, designed by Antonio Palacios, inaugurated 1919, now City Hall and cultural center. Mirador observation deck on 8th floor, get tickets to the right of main door. Visits are timed due to limited space, ticket shows your time. First elevator only goes partway up to waiting area, taking a smaller elevator or the stairs a few more floors to the lookout deck. Deck wraps around the main tower with panels explaining the view, all the way out to the mountains on a clear day. People with ok knees: walk all the way down the stairs to admire this fabulous building. Restaurant-café and cocktail bar on 6th floor. Where: Plaza de Cibeles, southeast side of square, white building that looks like a wedding cake. More info on observation deck and ticket fees: [www.centrocentro.org/centro/espacios](http://www.centrocentro.org/centro/espacios) scroll down to Mirador – but check out other things in this cool building.

**Círculo Bellas Artes.** Private cultural center, offers lots of things to general public. Also designed by Antonio Palacios, inaugurated 1926. The CBA Azotea (rooftop) observation deck and bar has one of the best views in the city center. Where: calle Alcalá 42, entrance from side street Marqués de Casa Riera. Metro Banco de España. More info for observation deck and ticket fees: <http://www.circulobellasartes.com/azotea/>

**Retiro Park:** just east of the Prado Museum, this is a great place to get some green and a sit-down after touring or the nearby art museums. Originally the gardens of a 17<sup>th</sup> c. royal palace that no longer exists, the gardens included all the area between the west edge of the park and the Paseo del Prado, and from calle Alcalá to the extension of calle Atocha. There's an artificial lake for rowing (big monument on one side is to late 19<sup>th</sup> c king Alfonso XII), a rose garden, the fabulous "Crystal Palace" next to a smaller lake (created as a greenhouse for 19<sup>th</sup> c exhibit, now hosts special exhibits from the Reina Sofia art museum), the Fallen Angel statue to the devil (southwest of Crystal Palace, at altitude 666 meters), lots of wildish space and quite a few outdoor cafés, around the lake and near main entrance. When created as a garden there was an artificial canal for the Royals and friends to navigate by gondola (connected to the rowing lake, the canal followed the paved roads east and south of the lake, ending at the Fallen Angel statue).

Greenhouse in old Atocha train station: across the street from Reina Sofia art museum, another great place for some green and a sit-down. This old part of Atocha station is from 1892, first under the train company M Z A (Madrid-Zaragoza-Alicante, look for metal frieze around mini-towers on west side of the station), then under Renfe when all Spanish trains came under that umbrella company in the 1940's. The old station operated as such until the late 1980's, when the two new stations to the east were inaugurated: one station for Cercanias (short run / commuter trains) and another station for long distance, included the bullet (AVE) trains to a variety of destinations. The old station was converted into a greenhouse (inaugurated 1992), with thousands of plants in a wide variety. There are several small cafés and some benches for resting; the lobby connecting the greenhouse to the other two stations has some shops. For a great view of the greenhouse from above and to appreciate the architecture of this classic building, take the moving ramps (east side of greenhouse, where it connects to rest of station) to the upper floor balcony, arrival point for taxis.

**Madrid has two panoramic bus lines.** Neither is fabulous, but ok for a fast overview. Some lines connect the main sights so can be used for hop-on, hop-off transportation if you don't want to walk. Madrid Visión <http://www.busvision.net/es/> Madrid City Tour: <http://www.esmadrid.com/madrid-city-tour/>

**Flamenco:** Villa Rosa is a corner of Santa Ana square near Sol, has decent flamenco, a nice venue and reasonable starting times for their shows. More info: <http://www.tablaoflamecovillarosa.com/es/> For the real thing (including 10.30pm start for their "early" show) : Casa Patas <http://www.casapatas.com/> Excellent flamenco in an authentic setting, worth it if you have someone who really likes music and knows something about flamenco or wants to learn.

#### **Ideas for souvenirs:**

Lots of tourist shops around Plaza Mayor and on calle Mayor, lots of typical touristy things but also some fun things like tiles with street names, flamenco or bullfighter aprons, refrigerator magnets in Spanish themes. Personal favorite: look for small clay figurines of typical Spanish people (flamenco, bullfighters, regional dress in shops on west side of Plaza Mayor.

Craft shop in southwest corner of Plaza Mayor, next to stone staircase down to bar area

Museum gift shops, especially the Reina Sofia

Fans: Casa Diego on north side of Plaza Mayor has nice fans

Espadrilles (rope-soled shoes): Casa Hernanz, just south of Plaza Mayor on calle Toledo, shortly after end of the arcades. This is one of most traditional places in Madrid for espadrilles, often has a line in the summer.

Espadrille tips: they do stretch, so don't get them too loose. Since they're handmade, another pair in same size might fit better. They can be washed (carefully) as long as you don't get rope bottoms wet.

Olive oil and olive oil products: La Chinata (calle Mayor 44, near northwest corner Plaza Mayor). Great little shop for everything olive oil – their soaps and small cans of olive oil are good presents for yourself or for people back home.