

## TIP SHEET AROUND SOL

**Plaza Puerta de Sol (Sol for most locals)** is one of central Madrid's most important squares. This tip sheet has some infrastructure notes and some nearby shops that you might need during your stay.

**Geography (streets):** The **big red and white building with a clock tower is on the south side** of the square. It's a good landmark for finding your way around the area. The two streets leaving **Sol to the south** (Carretas and Correo) are not very important (but people who like to sew should follow Correo and peek in store on your right on first corner, famous for all sewing notions and especially buttons, fabulous low-tech display system!). Three streets leave **Sol to the north** (Preciados, Carmen and Montera), all pedestrian and all shopping streets, mostly for clothes though Preciados and Carmen join at Plaza de Callao, where you can find electronics and books at FNAC and El Corte Inglés. Two streets leave **Sol to the east**: some traffic flows west on Alcalá, exiting immediately on Carrera de San Jerónimo without entering the square; walking these two streets can take you to the Retiro park, Prado museum and other places. Two streets leave **Sol to the west**: traffic flows into Sol on calle Mayor (McDonalds), exiting on Carrera de San Jerónimo. Calle Mayor goes towards Plaza Mayor, the Cathedral and some eateries. The other westerly street is pedestrian Arenal which goes directly to Plaza Isabel II (metro Opera) and the Royal Palace behind the Opera house.

**Tourism office:** Closest is the Plaza Mayor, under arcades on north side, more or less even with left foreleg of horse statue (on your right as you enter square from pedestrian calle Postas, which you get by the McDonalds at start of calle Mayor). This is the place for city maps.

**Public transportation:** Subway lines 1, 2 and 3 run through Sol. Several accesses around the square, all are marked by red diamonds and word Metro. Commuter trains also stop in Sol, access marked by red circle with backwards C: best access for train is humpback glass structure at east end of square. Since the square is mostly pedestrian there aren't many buses: the most useful is the 51 bus which starts on the east side of the square at the start of calle Alcalá (near the bear statue). That bus goes by the main gate of Retiro park.

**ATM machines:** Some right in the square and calles Alcala, Carrera de San Jeronimo, Mayor and Arenal all have ATM machines relatively near Sol. Remember that ATM's usually have better exchange rate than exchange offices, though you might be charged a per transaction fee. Watch out for pickpockets when taking money out of ATM machines: some banks have machines inside which are safer, as you won't have anyone behind you when doing your thing, and can stash your cash before hitting the street.

**Pharmacy:** Closest to Sol is at start of calle Arenal near a Burger King. You need pharmacies for aspirin and other basics, none of that sold in general services stores.

**Post office / stamps:** The easiest way is to get your stamps at any "Tabacos" kiosk (lots in Madrid and elsewhere) and use mailboxes in the street (yellow columns). If you need a post office in Madrid the closest is the basement of old post office (now city hall): address is Paseo del Prado 1, open 8.30AM – 9.30PM.

**International press / books:** Several of the press kiosks in Sol have international papers and magazines. So does the Corte Ingles department store and FNAC electronics-music store in Callao; both these places also have books in English.

**Sports equipment:** Theoretically you've got your gear, but if you forgot something important: Lots of Colors-Decathlon (calle Arenal 18) has good basic sportswear and a few accessories, nothing fancy but good quality at a good price. El Corte Inglés main store (Calle Preciados, second block from Sol on the left) has a larger sports section on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor. Their "sports store" on north side of Sol is mostly urban sport.

**Electronics** (like charger, batteries, local cell phone for extended stay). Take Carmen out of Sol and after several blocks of shops and a church (on your right) you will find two large stores for electronics: Corte Inglés - Electronics (on your right) and FNAC (on your left). FNAC also has books, music and a few other products. Apple has its own huge store on east side of Sol, between Alcalá and San Jerónimo.

**Get just about anything:** El Corte Inglés is Spain's biggest department store, with the main, general store at start of calle Preciados (very near Sol) and specialized stores for electronics, books, semi-sports all near or right on Sol. Other El Corte Inglés stores in Madrid and other cities: if you have time or knowledge to go elsewhere please do (small shops appreciate your business more) but if you are in a hurry or don't know your way around this is a good option. Open 10AM to 10PM

**Buying food: American style grocery stores** in the basements of El Corte Inglés stores in Callao and on calle Preciados (almost in Sol); a bit more expensive than other grocery stores but a good selection. Small corner store for basics just east of the Plaza Mayor (corner San Cristobal and Zaragoza), also has a fabulous selection of cookies from all over Spain and some candied fruit. **Cheese, lunch meat** and a few other things at Ferpal on calle Arenal (corner Bordadores): most things are sold by weight, 100 or 150 grams of cheese will make at least two bocadillo-sandwiches. Excellent selection and a good choice, but do check your bill, one guy in there is either really stupid or really smart. **Candies, nuts and raisins (etc)** in El Rincon on Carrera San Jerónimo, you scoop and bag the amount you want and pay by weight. Excellent **pastries** at La Mallorquina on west side of Sol.

**Peanut butter and health food/special needs, a special note:** El Corte Inglés grocery store (basement of department stores just off sol and in Callao square) usually has peanut butter, Skippy and similar brand Capitan Maní; it's usually near the honey and the Nutella/Nocilla chocolate spread. The store just off Sol has a separate health food section with gluten-free products and general selection of health food/vegetarian items. Two health food stores relatively near Sol with much larger selection: La Biotika at calle Amor de Dios 3, near Santa Ana square, more or less between Sol and the Prado Museum (has vegetarian restaurant next door). KIKI Market La Latina at Cava Alta 21, a little south of the Plaza Mayor. Both these places have a good selection of products, including all-natural nut butters, cheese, gluten-free, veges, tofu, etc.

**Eating out, general:** Spain has two **fixed-price deals:** the **menú del día** (or just menú) lets you choose a first course, second course and dessert from the daily options. First is usually soup, veges, salad or some kind of pasta, rice or legume dish and second protein. You can usually order two firsts (soup and salad, pasta and salad) which is often enough. The menú deal usually includes bread and beverages (water, wine, beer but not soft drinks) and IVA tax (VAT or value added), if something is not included it should say that clearly on the menu. In Madrid this deal is usually 9-18 euros and more frequently available for lunch during the week, at night, on weekends or holidays the deal might not be offered or be a little more expensive.

The other fixed price deal is the more basic, pared down **plato combinado**, a one-plate meal that has some protein, some carbs, and a small dose of greens; usually this 5-9 euro deal does not include bread (which they might bring anyway, you can usually send back) nor beverage, so in the end price might be similar to a menu del día, depending on the place. **Sandwiches** have different names depending on style: a bocadillo is on baguette-style bread and can be hot or cold, a pulga (flea) is on smaller, fluffier bread, a montado is usually open-face (no top) and sandwich is American style on loaf bread and can be hot or cold.

A special note for **tortilla española**, a hearty potato omelette that can be in a bocadillo, as a pincho (slice) or the whole thing for sharing. This is Spain's fast food, and when good, it's a fabulous, fast way to fill your tummy.

**Eating near Sol:** It's tempting to sit outside in the **Plaza Mayor** but it's expensive and not very good; they get more tourists than locals so they're not going for return business. Don't order without seeing prices first and check your bill. See ideas below for places nearby but better value.

**Breakfast or afternoon snack: Chocolateria San Ginés** for thick hot chocolate and churros. This is one of the should-do's but so you know: the hot chocolate is more like hot chocolate pudding than drinking chocolate, it's good for dipping the churros (sort of a fritter) or porras (bigger version of churros) or eating with a spoon but not actually for drinking. If you have never had this it might be good to get one chocolate to share, unless you are a total chocolate freak. This kind of breakfast / afternoon snack can be found elsewhere, but San Ginés is famous and near Sol: take calle Arenal west from Sol and turn left on the alleyway just before San Ginés church. **La Mallorquina** (west side of Sol) has good coffee and all kinds of pastries. Downstairs is stand-up bar area, but there's a seating area upstairs.

**Lunch or dinner:** Many of the side streets between calle Arenal and calle Mayor have good places, a special note for Fresco salad bar on calle Fuentes (almost in Opera, also has some hot food in their all you can eat deal) and for calle Coloreros (along one side of San Ginés chocolate place), a small pedestrian street with several small restaurants AND a cute, yummy and not expensive sandwich place called 100 Montaditos on corner of calle Mayor: their (aprox) 4-inch mini bocadillos are quite good, check what you want on the list, pay at the cash register and they call you when it's ready. **Paella:** not generically Spanish (really from the eastern seaboard) and the real stuff is chicken or rabbit and veges. There are a number of places in the city, I like the Pato Mudo (Costanilla de los Angeles 8, street south from Arenal near Plaza Isabel II). They have several kinds of paella (minimum two people!) and the menu is translated into ok English. Good grilled vege dish, salads and desserts good too. **Mercado San Miguel:** (just west of the Plaza Mayor) an old market turned food venue. This is fun, sort of an inside tapa-hop but can be pricey. The market is pulling up the area and now there are some places just outside the market itself that are interesting and less expensive: Emma on street just south of the market is good, and there are several places outside the market to the west and a bit south, including places in the darling, almost linked squares Conde de Barajas and Conde de Miranda. **Jacometrezo street:** westish from Callao square mentioned above for electronics, this pedestrian street has lots of eateries.