

MADRID

Madrid is the capital and largest city of Spain. The city is located on the river Manzanares in the centre of both the country and the Community of Madrid (which comprises the city of Madrid, its conurbation and extended suburbs and villages); this community 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 center of Spain.

Due to its economic output, standard of living, and market size, Madrid is considered the major financial center of the **Iberian Peninsula**. It hosts the head offices of the vast majority of the major Spanish companies, as well as the headquarters of three of the world's 100 largest companies.

While Madrid possesses a modern infrastructure, it has preserved the look and feel of many of its historic neighborhoods and streets.



Royal Palace of Madrid : is the official residence of the King of Spain. King Juan Carlos and the royal family do not reside in this palace, instead choosing the smaller Palacio de la Zarzuela, on the outskirts of Madrid. However, the Palacio Real de Madrid is still used for state occasions.

The palace is located on Bailén street, in the western part of downtown Madrid, east of the Manzanares River, and is accessible from the Ópera metro station.

The Museo del Prado : is a museum and art gallery. It features one of the world's finest collections of European art, from the 12th century to the early 19th century, based on the former **Spanish Royal Collection**. Founded as a museum of paintings and sculpture, it also contains important collections of more than 5,000 drawings, 2,000 prints, 1,000 coins and medals, and almost 2,000 decorative objects and works of art. Sculpture is represented by more than 700 works and by a smaller number of sculptural fragments. It is one of the most visited sites in Madrid.

The Prado has easily the world's finest collection of Spanish painting, with large numbers of the finest works of **Diego Velázquez** and **Francisco Goya**, as well **El Greco**, Bartolomé Estéban Murillo, Jusepe de Ribera, Francisco de Zurbarán, and most other leading Spanish old masters. There are also large groups of important works by the Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch (a personal favorite of King Philip II of Spain), Titian, Peter Paul Rubens, Raphael, and Joachim Patinier.

The Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía : (MNCARS) is the official name of Spain's national museum of 20th century art. The museum was officially inaugurated on September 10, 1992 and is named for **Queen Sofia of Spain**. It is located near the Atocha train and metro stations, at the southern end of the so-called Golden Triangle of Art.

The museum is mainly dedicated to Spanish art. Highlights of the museum include excellent collections of Spain's two greatest 20th century masters, Pablo Picasso and **Salvador Dalí**. Certainly the most famous masterpiece in the museum is **Picasso's** great painting **Guernica**. The Reina Sofía also has fine collections of the works of Juan Gris, Joan Miró, Julio González, Eduardo Chillida, Antoni Tàpies, Pablo Gargallo, Lucio Muñoz, Luis Gordillo, Jorge Oteiza, José Gutiérrez Solana and many other significant artists.

Foreign artists are few, but there are works by Robert Delaunay, **Yves Tanguy**, **Man Ray**, Jacques Lipchitz, Lucio Fontana, **Yves Klein**, cubist still-lives by Georges Braque and a large work by Francis Bacon.

It also hosts a free-access library specializing in art, with a collection of over 100,000 books, over 3,500 sound recordings and almost 1,000 videos.



Santa María La Real de La Almudena Cathedral : Plans for the construction of a new cathedral for Madrid dedicated to the Virgin of Almudena began in the 16th century, but the slow construction did not begin until 1879. **Francisco de Cubas**, the Marquis of Cubas, was the architect who designed and directed the construction in a Gothic revival style. Construction ceased completely during the **Spanish Civil War**. The project was abandoned until 1950, when **Fernando Chueca Goitia** adapted the plans of de Cubas to a neoclassical style exterior to match the grey and white façade of the Palacio Real, which stands directly opposite and was not completed until 1993, when the cathedral was consecrated by **Pope John Paul II**.

The Neo-Gothic interior is uniquely modern, with chapels and statues of contemporary artists, in heterogeneous styles, from historical revivals to "pop-art" decor. The Neo-Romanesque crypt houses a 16th century image of the Virgen de la Almudena. Further along, the Calle Mayor is the site of excavations which have unearthed remains of Moorish and medieval city walls.

Puerta del Sol : This plaza is the "heart" of Madrid and one of the busiest places in the city. On the north side of the plaza there is a famous statue of an oso (bear) climbing the **madroño tree**, which is the symbol of **Madrid**. Also in Sol, just in front of the Capital building of the community of Madrid, is Kilometer Zero, a plaque showing the point where the measuring of national highways begins. Both the bear statue, and Km. Zero are common meeting spots for friends. The giant neon Tío Pepe sign above the plaza is also a famous fixture of this area.



Plaza Mayor: The plaza built during the **Habsburg** period is a central plaza in the city, located only a few blocks away from another famous plaza, the Puerta del Sol. The Plaza Mayor is rectangular in shape, measuring 129 by 94 meters, and is surrounded by three-story residential buildings having 237 balconies facing the Plaza. It has a total of nine entrance ways. The **Casa de la Panadería**, serving municipal and cultural functions, dominates the Plaza Mayor.

Palacio de Comunicaciones : is the headquarters of the municipality of Madrid. Located on the Plaza de Cibeles, it was designed by Antonio Palacios and Joaquin Otamendi. It houses the headquarters of the Sociedad de Correos de España y Telegrafos. The building, a very personal style due to its two architects, is particularly inspired by the Gothic Revival and particularly the work of Viollet-le-Duc. There is also the influence of Gustave Eiffel and Otto Wagner.

It is said that when Leon Trotsky visited Madrid in 1930 at the beginning of his exile, was so impressed with the monumentality of the building that he named Nuestra Señora de Las Comunicaciones.

El Retiro park : is a large and popular 1.4 km² (350 acres) park at the edge of the city center, very close to the Puerta de Alcalá and not far from the Museo del Prado. A magnificent park, filled with beautiful sculptures and monuments, galleries, a peaceful lake and host to a variety of events, it is one of Madrid's premier attractions. The park is entirely surrounded by the present-day city. El Retiro gradually became the green heart of the city. At the beginning of the 20th century, the monument to Alfonso XII was erected next to the pond. Countless statues, fountains and commemorative monuments have filled the park and converted it into an open-air sculpture museum.

USEFUL INFORMATION

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