

Mad for it in Madrid!

03/05/2024

Spanish News



Spain's capital city Madrid is an intoxicating mix of classic culture, innovative cuisine and energetic nightlife. What is even better is that the high-speed train can whisk you from Malaga to Madrid city centre in less than three hours, making it the perfect destination for a weekend or mid-week break!

Madrid really is Spain's capital of culture and high on the list of "must do's" is the superb Prado Museum, regarded by many to have the finest art in the world. It houses works belonging to the Spanish Royal collection, including paintings by Rogier van der Weyden, Hieronymus Bosch, Rubens, Fra Angelico, El Greco and Titian, among other artists. The Prado's "big hitters" however are the masterpieces of two of the greatest Spanish painters: Velázquez and Goya. If you are tight for time, the best option is to book a guided tour that will also mean you will not have to queue.

The Reina Sofía Museum tells the story of Spanish and European art from the historical avant-garde movements to the present. With a focus on contemporary and modern 20th century art, the undisputed highlight of the Reina Sofía is Picasso's masterpiece "Guernica". Do NOT try to take a selfie by this painting – the security staff are swift and severe!

Nearby is the Serrería Belga Cultural Space, which showcases Madrid's creative dynamism in the fields of art, music, design, literature, image and gastroculture. Madrid is also home to the tNational Drama Centre, the state-of-the-art Naves del Español en Matadero and the MAD (Madrid Artes Digitales) Immersive Experiences Centre.

Madrid is also a great city for walking and there is no better place to start a wander than the Kilometre 0 marker in the Puerta del Sol, from which the national roads starting in Madrid fan out.

Puerta del Sol is the bustling centre of Madrid, flanked by large department stores, retail shops and fast food restaurants on every side. Its location has made it a popular meeting point for hundreds of years, now with modern markers like the neon "Tío Pepe" sign and Madrid's most emblematic statue, "El Oso y el Madroño" (the Bear & the Strawberry Tree). On New Year's Eve, Puerta del Sol is the equivalent of New York's Times Square. Calle de Preciados, the second busiest street in the world according to the Guinness Book of Records, starts from this large square.

Just north of Puerta del Sol is Gran Vía, the major shopping street full of shops, nightclubs, cafés, cinemas and theatres, with a recently refurbished metro station. Wandering along the Gran Vía, you will come across the WOW Concept mega store, conceived as a multi-brand and multi-product shopping centre; and you can find the Galería Canalejas, an exclusive shopping gallery, which has become the new icon of luxury in Madrid.

If the Puerta del Sol is too busy, take a break and unwind in El Retiro park. The green lung in central Madrid doubles as an interesting cultural complex, with its famous steel and glass hall that was built to host exhibitions. El Retiro is always lively, filled with Madrileños out for jogging, bicycling, rollerblading, rowing, visiting an exhibition or having a drink in an outdoor café, all in a bohemian and family-friendly atmosphere.

The most traditional open-air flea market in Madrid, El Rastro takes you along Ribera de Curtidores and the adjoining streets every Sunday. They say what you can't find in El Rastro you can't find anywhere else. From clothes to records or books to natural rubber, keys, frying pans, knives, hats, antiques and all kinds of things you won't even know what they're for. After a stroll through this bustling street market, you could have a drink in the La Latina district. The shops in the area, offering antiques, second-hand goods and furniture, are open on weekdays too.

When the sun goes down, the city wakes up. There is no better place in Madrid for a great cocktail than Museo Chicote, named after Perico Chicote, the barman who opened this establishment on Gran Vía more than 80 years ago. Classic and creative cocktails here are the perfect mix of wonderful colours, smells and flavours. If a tapas tour is more your thing, then the bars of Barrio de las Letras are a great place to start.

A good place to start your tapas tour – which consists in hopping from bar to bar eating bite-size food and drinking a glass of wine or beer – is Plaza de Santa Ana, in Barrio de las Letras (Literary Quarter), just a stone's throw from Puerta del Sol.

For live flamenco, a visit to The Corral de la Morería is a must. Opened in 1956 by Manuel del Rey, it soon became the most famous flamenco tablao in the world. The greatest artists performing cante jondo (a vocal style in flamenco) have passed through the stages of this establishment, which also includes a Michelin star restaurant led by David García.

And if you really want to throw yourself into the nightlife, the – Malasaña and Chueca districts have housed the bars, pubs, music venues and clubs that turned the Madrid party into one of the coolest the world over since the "Movida" of the 80s.

With so much to do and so much going on, you are sure to sleep well on the high speed train journey back!