

meats, several salads, and varied *raciones* (daily, Calle Prior 4, tel. 923-260-092).

PICNIC FOOD

The covered *mercado* (market) on Plaza Mercado has fresh fruits and veggies (Mon 8:00-14:30 & 16:00-19:00, Tue-Sat 8:00-14:30 but may be open later on Tue in summer, closed Sun, on east side of Plaza Mayor).

Supermarkets: A small **El Arbol** grocery, two blocks west of Plaza Mayor at Iscar Peyra 13, has just the basics (Mon-Sat 9:30-21:30, closed Sun). For variety, the big **Carrefour Market** supermarket is your best bet, but it's a six-block walk north of Plaza Mayor on Calle del Toro (Mon-Sat 10:00-22:00, closed Sun, across from Plaza San Juan de Sahagún and its church—see map on page 372).

Sandwiches: The **Pans & Company** fast-food sandwich chain is always easy, with a branch on Calle Prior across from Burger King (daily 10:30-24:00).

OFF THE BEATEN PATH

Locals and students head just a bit outside the old town to hit the *tapa/pincho* scene along a main artery called **Calle Van Dyck**. It's about a 20-minute walk or a short taxi ride from the edge of the old town, but it's worth the effort as there are several cheap and tasty options. You'll spend, on average, €2.50 for a *caña* (small beer), which comes with a small *tapa*. To get there on foot, go to the end of Calle del Toro, cross the main drag (Avenida de Mirat), and go up Calle Maria Auxiliadora; after crossing the wide Avenida de Portugal, take the third left onto Calle Van Dyck (see map on page 372).

Start at the neighborhood classic, which has been around for more than 40 years—**Cafe Bar Chinitas** at #18—where Victorio, Manoli, and their son Javi serve up a delicious selection of 45 *tapas* (closed Mon, also closed Sun June-July and all of Aug, tel. 923-229-471). Or try the Galician seafood eatery **Casa Chicho**, farther down the street at #34 (or enter around corner at Alfonso de Castro 15). You can either dine in their *pincho* bar or sit down in the restaurant for grilled fish and seafood *raciones* galore (closed for Wed lunch, Sun dinner, and all day Mon-Tue, tel. 923-123-775). There are many other options on the streets around Van Dyck.

Salamanca Connections

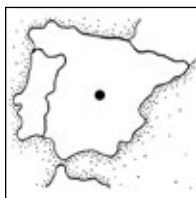
From Salamanca by Train to: Madrid (7/day, 3 hours, Chamartín Station), **Ávila** (8/day, 1-1.5 hour), **Barcelona** (8/day, 6-7.5 hours, change in Madrid from Chamartín Station to Atocha Station via

Metro or *cercanías* train; also possible 1/day with change in Valladolid, 8.5 hours), **Santiago** (1/day except none Saturday, 6.5 hours, transfer in Medina del Campo), **Burgos** (4/day, 4.5-5.5 hours), **Lisbon**, Portugal (1/day, 7.5 hours, departs Salamanca Station at about 1:00 in the morning, no kidding; catch a taxi to the train station, ask your hotel to arrange taxi in advance). Train info: Toll tel. 902-320-320, www.renfe.com.

By Bus to: Madrid (hourly express, 2.5-3 hours, arrives at Madrid's Estación Sur, Avanza bus), **Segovia** (2/day, 3 hours, Auto-Res bus), **Ávila** (4/day, 1.5 hours, Auto-Res bus), **Santiago** (1-2/day plus 1 night bus, 6-7.5 hours, Alsa bus), **Barcelona** (2/day with transfer in Burgos, 11 hours, Alsa bus), **Burgos** (3/day, 3.5 hours, Alsa bus), **Coimbra**, Portugal (1/day, departs at 11:45, 5 hours; same bus continues to **Lisbon** in about 10 hours total, Alsa bus). Bus info: Alsa (tel. 902-422-242, www.alsa.es), Avanza and Auto-Res (tel. 902-020-052, www.avanzabus.com), El Pilar (tel. 923-222-608, www.elpilar-arribesbus.com); also try www.movelia.es for multiple company listings.



MADRID



Today's Madrid is upbeat and vibrant. You'll feel it. Even the living-statue street performers have a twinkle in their eyes.

Madrid is the hub of Spain. This modern capital—Europe's second-highest, at more than 2,000 feet—has a population of 3.3 million, with about 6 million living in greater Madrid.

Like its people, the city is relatively young. In medieval times, it was just another village, wedged between the powerful kingdoms of Castile and Aragon. When newlyweds Ferdinand and Isabel united those kingdoms (in 1469), Madrid—sitting at the center of Spain—became the focal point of a budding nation. By 1561, Spain ruled the world's most powerful empire, and King Philip II moved his capital from tiny Toledo to spacious Madrid. Successive kings transformed the city into a European capital. By 1900, Madrid had 500,000 people, concentrated within a small area. In the mid-20th century, the city exploded with migrants from the countryside, creating today's modern sprawl. Fortunately for tourists, there's still an intact, easy-to-navigate historic core.

Madrid is working hard to make itself more livable. Massive urban-improvement projects such as pedestrianized streets, parks, commuter lines, and Metro stations are popping up everywhere. The investment is making once-shady neighborhoods safe and turning ramshackle zones into trendy ones. These days the broken concrete and traffic chaos of the not-so-distant past are gone. Even with austerity measures related to Spain's ongoing economic crisis, funding for the upkeep of this great city center has been maintained. Madrid feels orderly and welcoming.

Tourists are the real winners. Dive headlong into the grandeur and intimate charm of Madrid. Feel the vibe in Puerta del Sol,

the pulsing heart of modern Madrid and of Spain itself. The lavish Royal Palace, with its gilded rooms and frescoed ceilings, rivals Versailles. The Prado has Europe's top collection of paintings, and nearby hangs Picasso's chilling masterpiece, *Guernica*. Retiro Park invites you to take a shady siesta and hopscotch through a mosaic of lovers, families, skateboarders, pets walking their masters, and expert bench-sitters. Save time for Madrid's elegant shops and people-friendly pedestrian zones. On Sundays, cheer for the bull at a bullfight or bargain like mad at a megasize flea market. Swelter through the hot, hot summers or bundle up for the cold, dry winters. Save some energy for after dark, when Madrileños pack the streets for an evening paseo that can continue past midnight. Lively Madrid has enough street-singing, bar-hopping, and people-watching vitality to give any visitor a boost of youth.

PLANNING YOUR TIME

Madrid is worth two days and three nights on even the fastest trip. Divide your time among the city's top three attractions: the Royal Palace (worth a half-day), the Prado Museum (also worth a half-day), and the contemporary bar-hopping scene.

While the Prado and palace are open daily, the Reina Sofía (with Picasso's *Guernica*) is closed on Tuesday, and other sights are closed on Monday, including the Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, outside of Madrid (see next chapter). If you're here on a Sunday, consider going to the flea market (year-round) and/or a bullfight (some Sun in March-mid-Oct; generally daily during San Isidro festival in May-early June).

For good day-trip possibilities from Madrid, see the next two chapters (Northwest of Madrid and Toledo).

Day 1

Morning: Take a brisk 20-minute good-morning-Madrid walk from Puerta del Sol to the Prado (taking the pedestrianized Calle de las Huertas). Spend the rest of the morning at the Prado.

Afternoon: Enjoy an afternoon siesta in Retiro Park. Then tackle modern art at the Reina Sofía. Ride bus #27 from this area out through Madrid's modern section to Puerta de Europa for a dose of the nontouristy, no-nonsense big city.

Evening: End your day with a progressive tapas dinner at a series of characteristic bars.

Day 2

Morning: Follow my self-guided walk, which loops to and from Puerta del Sol, with a tour through the Royal Palace in the middle.

Afternoon: Your afternoon is free for other sights, shopping, or a side-trip to the palace at El Escorial. Be out at the magic hour—before sunset—when beautifully lit people fill Madrid.

Evening: Take in a flamenco or zarzuela performance.

Orientation to Madrid

Puerta del Sol marks the center of Madrid. No major sight is more than a 20-minute walk or a €7 taxi ride from this central square. Get out your map and frame off Madrid's historic core: To the west of Puerta del Sol is the Royal Palace. To the east, you'll find the Prado Museum, along with the Reina Sofía museum. North of Puerta del Sol is Gran Vía, a broad east-west boulevard bubbling with shops and cinemas. Between Gran Vía and Puerta del Sol is a lively pedestrian shopping zone. And southwest of Puerta del Sol is Plaza Mayor, the center of a 17th-century, slow-down-and-smell-the-cobbles district.

This entire historic core around Puerta del Sol—Gran Vía, Plaza Mayor, the Prado, and the Royal Palace—is easily covered on foot. A wonderful chain of pedestrian streets crosses the city east to west, from the Prado to Plaza Mayor (along Calle de las Huertas) and from Puerta del Sol to the Royal Palace (on Calle del Arenal). Stretching north from Gran Vía, Calle de Fuencarral is a trendy shopping and strolling pedestrian street.

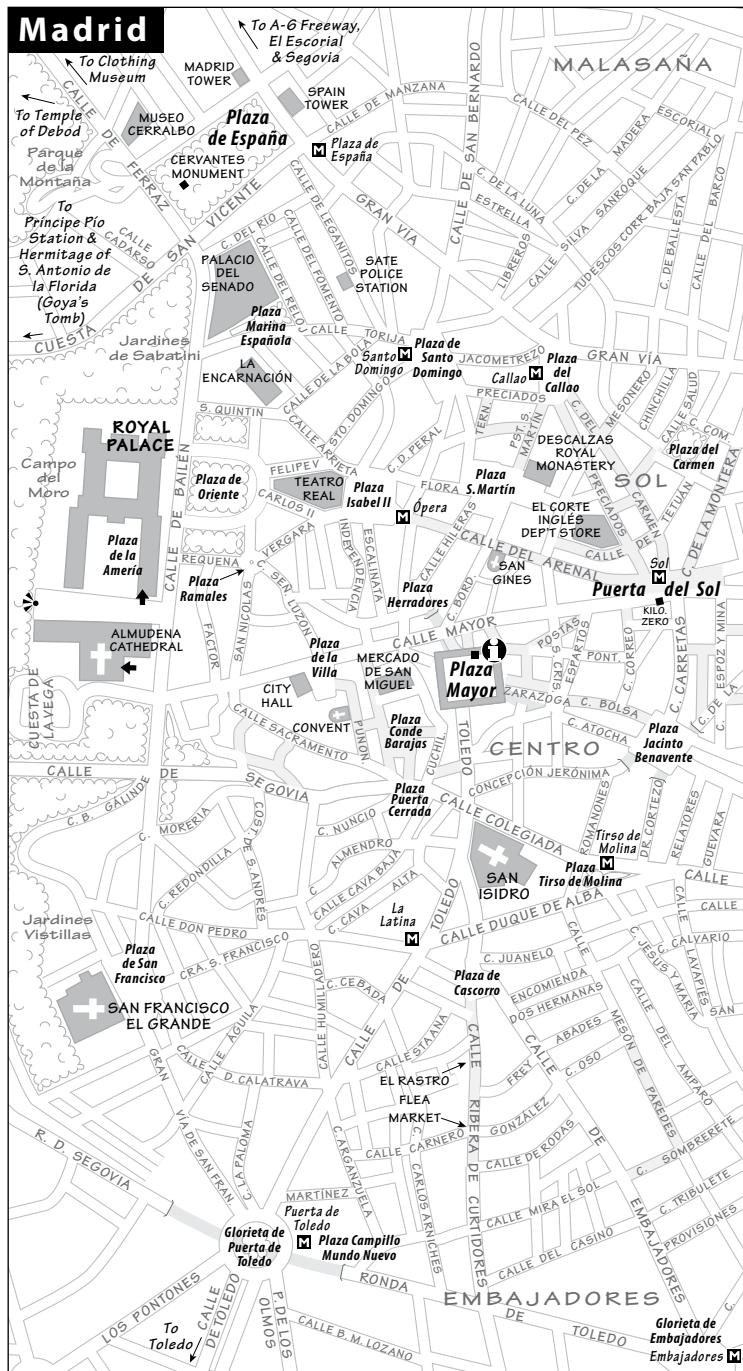
TOURIST INFORMATION

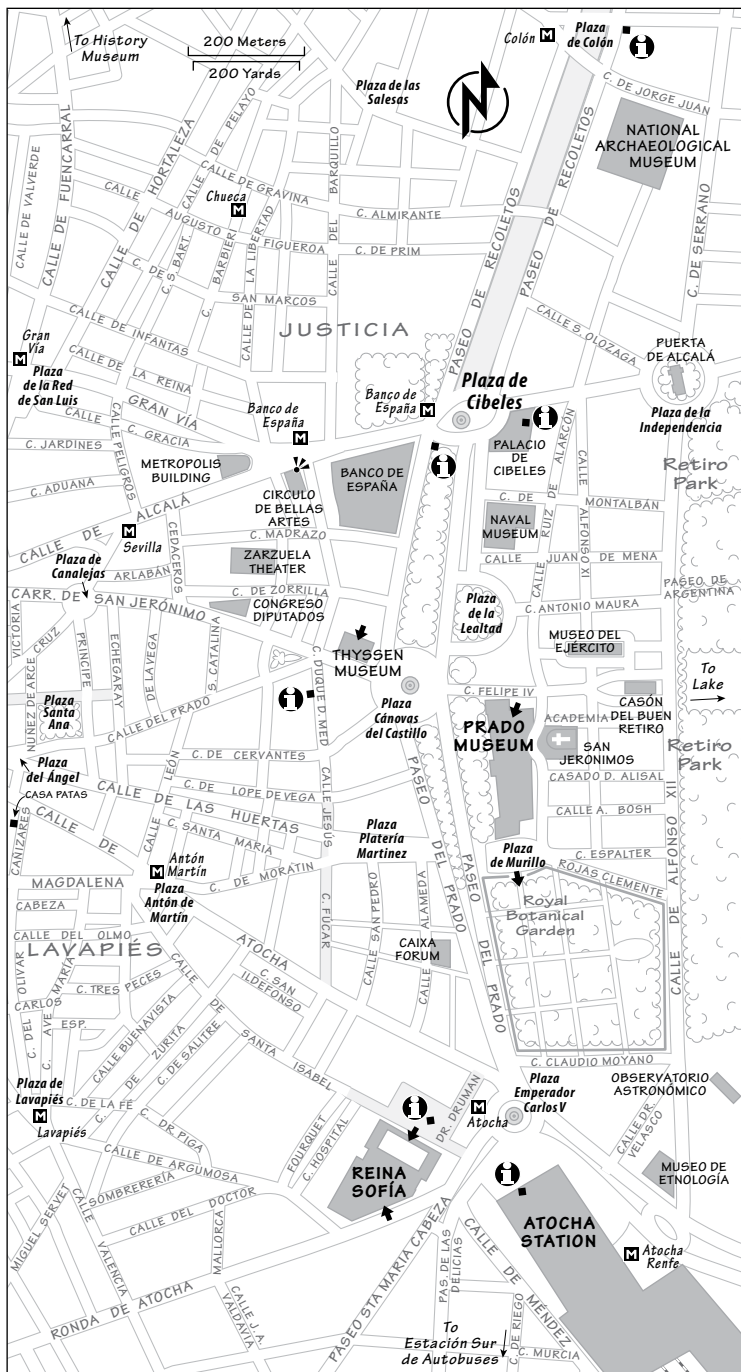
Madrid is home to two types of tourist information offices: city TIs run by the Madrid City Council, and regional TIs run by the privately owned Turismo Madrid. Both are helpful, but you'll get more biased information from Turismo Madrid.

City-run TIs share a website (www.esmadrid.com), a central phone number (tel. 914-544-410), and hours (daily 9:30-20:30); exceptions are noted in the listings below. The best and most central city TI is on **Plaza Mayor**. They offer several guided walks in English each day (described later, under "Tours in Madrid"). They can also help direct travelers to the nearby foreign tourist assistance office (SATE; see "Helpful Hints" for details).

Madrid's other city-run TIs are at **Plaza de Colón** (in the underground passage accessed from Paseo de la Castellana and Calle de Goya), **Palacio de Cibeles** (inside, up the stairs and to the right, Tue-Sun 10:00-20:00, closed Mon), **Plaza de Cibeles** (at Paseo del Prado), and **Paseo del Arte** (on Plaza Sánchez Bustillo, near the Reina Sofía museum). During the busy summer months, the city council deploys high-tech mobile TIs to major sites around town. Travelers will find city TIs at the **airport** (Terminals 2 and 4, daily 9:00-20:00).

Madrid





Regional Turismo Madrid TIs share a website (www.turismomadrid.es) and are located near the **Prado Museum** (Duque de Medinaceli, across from Palace Hotel, Mon-Sat 8:00-15:00, Sun 9:00-14:00), **Chamartín train station** (near track 20, Mon-Sat 8:00-20:00, Sun 9:00-14:00), and **Atocha train station** (AVE arrivals side, Mon-Sat 8:00-20:00, Sun 9:00-20:00). There are also regional TIs at the **airport** (Terminals 1 and 4, Mon-Sat 9:00-20:00, Sun 9:00-14:00).

At most TIs, you can get the *Es Madrid* English-language monthly, which lists events around town. TIs occasionally distribute the *Guía del Ocio* (described later) for free; just ask. Pick up and use the free, well-designed *Public Transport* map, which includes detailed transportation routes throughout the city center.

Sightseeing Pass: Very energetic travelers can save a little money and some valuable sightseeing time by buying the **Madrid Card**. It covers more than 50 sights (including the Royal Palace, Prado, Thyssen-Bornemisza, and Reina Sofía) and lets you skip lines—a definite plus in high season, especially at the palace and the Prado. Additionally, the pass covers the Bernabéu Stadium tour, all the Essential Madrid tours, and it's good for a 10 percent discount at El Corte Inglés. The three-day card is the best bargain (€67; other options include €47/24 hours and €60/48 hours, online discounts available, www.madridcard.com). You can pay extra to add the hop-on, hop-off bus tour (saves a maximum of €2) or public transport (only worthwhile if you ride multiple times a day).

Entertainment Guides: For arts and culture listings, the TI's printed material is not very good. Pick up the Spanish-language weekly entertainment guide *Guía del Ocio* (€1, sold at newsstands, sometimes free at TI or hotels) or visit www.guiadelocio.com. It lists daily live music (*"Conciertos"*), museums (under *"Arte"*—with the latest times, prices, and special exhibits), restaurants (an exhaustive listing), TV schedules, and movies (*"V.O."* means original version, *"V.O. en inglés sub"* means a movie is played in English with Spanish subtitles rather than dubbed).

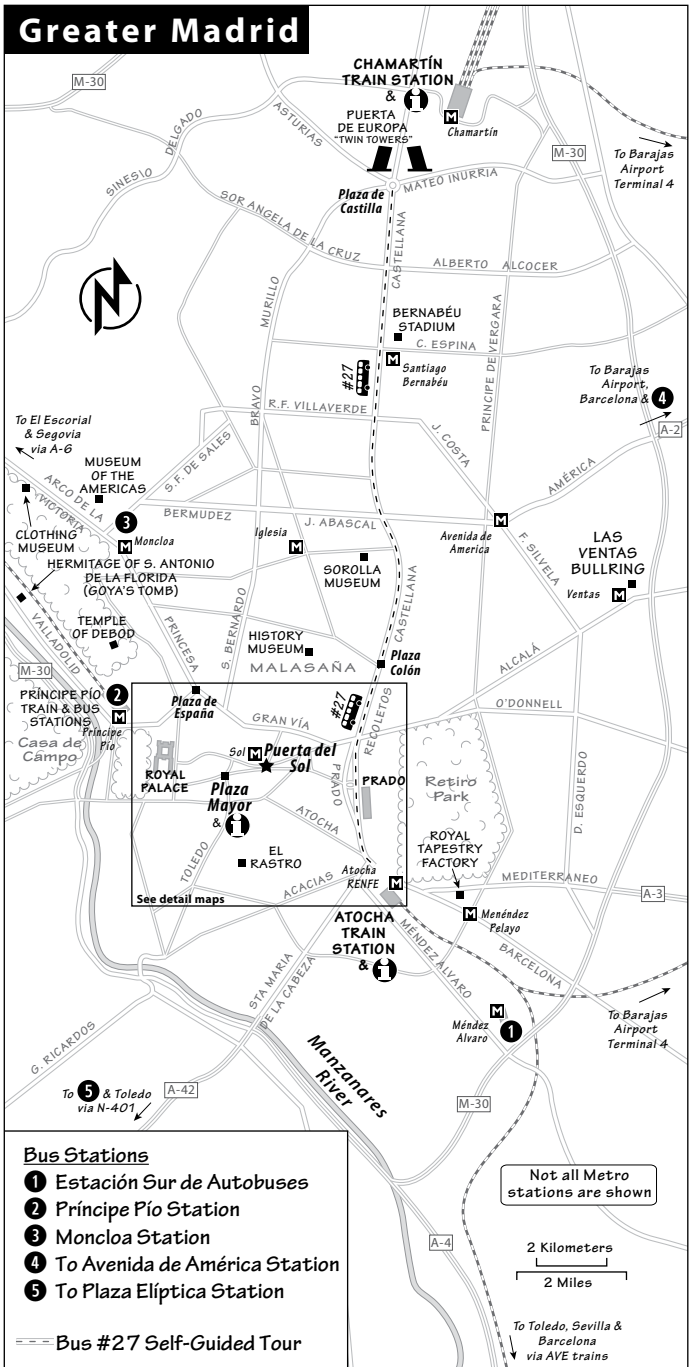
Helpful Website: While not officially part of the TI, www.madridman.com is run with passion by American Scott Martin and offers tips on sightseeing, hotels, restaurants, and more.

ARRIVAL IN MADRID

For more information on arriving at or departing from Madrid's airport, train stations, and bus stations, see "Madrid Connections," at the end of this chapter.

By Train: Madrid's two train stations, Chamartín and Atocha, are both on Metro lines with easy access to downtown Madrid.

Greater Madrid



Chamartín handles most international trains and the AVE (AH-vay) train to and from Segovia. Atocha generally covers southern Spain, as well as the AVE trains to and from Barcelona, Córdoba, Sevilla, and Toledo. For details on both stations, see page 484.

Traveling Between Chamartín and Atocha Stations: You can take the Metro (line 1, 30–40 minutes, €1.50; see “Getting Around Madrid” on page 399), but the *cercanías* trains are faster (6/hour, 13 minutes, Atocha-Sol-Chamartín lines C3 and C4 are the most convenient, €1.65, free with rail pass or any regular train ticket to Madrid—show it at ticket window in the middle of the turnstiles, depart from Atocha’s track 6 and generally Chamartín’s track 1, 3, 8, or 9—but check the *Salidas Inmediatas* board to be sure).

By Bus: Madrid has several bus stations, each one handy to a Metro station: Príncipe Pío (for Segovia, Metro: Príncipe Pío); Estación Sur de Autobuses (for Ávila, Salamanca, and Granada; Metro: Méndez Álvaro); Plaza Elíptica (for Toledo, Metro: Plaza Elíptica); Moncloa (for El Escorial, Metro: Moncloa); and Avenida de América (for Pamplona and Burgos, Metro: Avenida de América). If you take a taxi from the station to your hotel, you’ll pay a €3 supplement. For more on bus connections, see page 487.

By Plane: Both international and domestic flights arrive at Madrid’s Barajas Airport. Options for getting into town include public bus, *cercanías* train, Metro, taxi, and minibus shuttle. For details, see page 488.

HELPFUL HINTS

Theft Alert: Be wary of pickpockets—anywhere, anytime. Areas of particular risk are Puerta del Sol (the central square), El Rastro (the flea market), Gran Vía (the paseo zone: Plaza del Callao to Plaza de España), the Ópera Metro station (or anywhere on the Metro), bus #27, the airport, and any crowded street. Be alert to the people around you: Someone wearing a heavy jacket in the summer is likely a pickpocket. Teenagers may dress like Americans and work the areas around the three big art museums; being under 18, they can’t be charged in any meaningful way by the police. Assume any fight or commotion is a scam to distract people about to become victims of a pickpocket. Wear your money belt. For help if you get ripped off, see the next listing.

Tourist Emergency Aid: SATE is an assistance service for tourists who might need, for any reason, to visit a police station or lodge a complaint. Help ranges from canceling stolen credit cards to assistance in reporting a crime (central police station, daily 9:00–24:00, near Plaza de Santo Domingo at Calle Leganitos 19). They can help you get to the police station and will even act as an interpreter if you have trouble communicating

Daily Reminder

Sunday: The National Archaeological Museum, Sorolla Museum, Descalzas Royal Monastery, and Clothing Museum close earlier than usual today (15:00), as does the Bullfighting Museum (13:00). The Prado Museum and Centro de Arte Reina Sofía also close a bit earlier than normal, at 19:00. The flea market at El Rastro runs until 15:00. Midday, Retiro Park erupts into a carnival-like atmosphere. Bullfights take place on some Sundays (March through mid-Oct). The Royal Tapestry Factory and some flamenco places are closed today.

Monday: These sights are closed today: Naval Museum, Palacio de Cibeles, Descalzas Royal Monastery, Museum of the Americas, National Archaeological Museum, Madrid History Museum, Clothing Museum, Hermitage of San Antonio de la Florida, Temple of Debod, and Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial (next chapter). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum has shorter hours today (12:00-16:00).

Tuesday: The Reina Sofía is closed today.

Wednesday: All major sights are open.

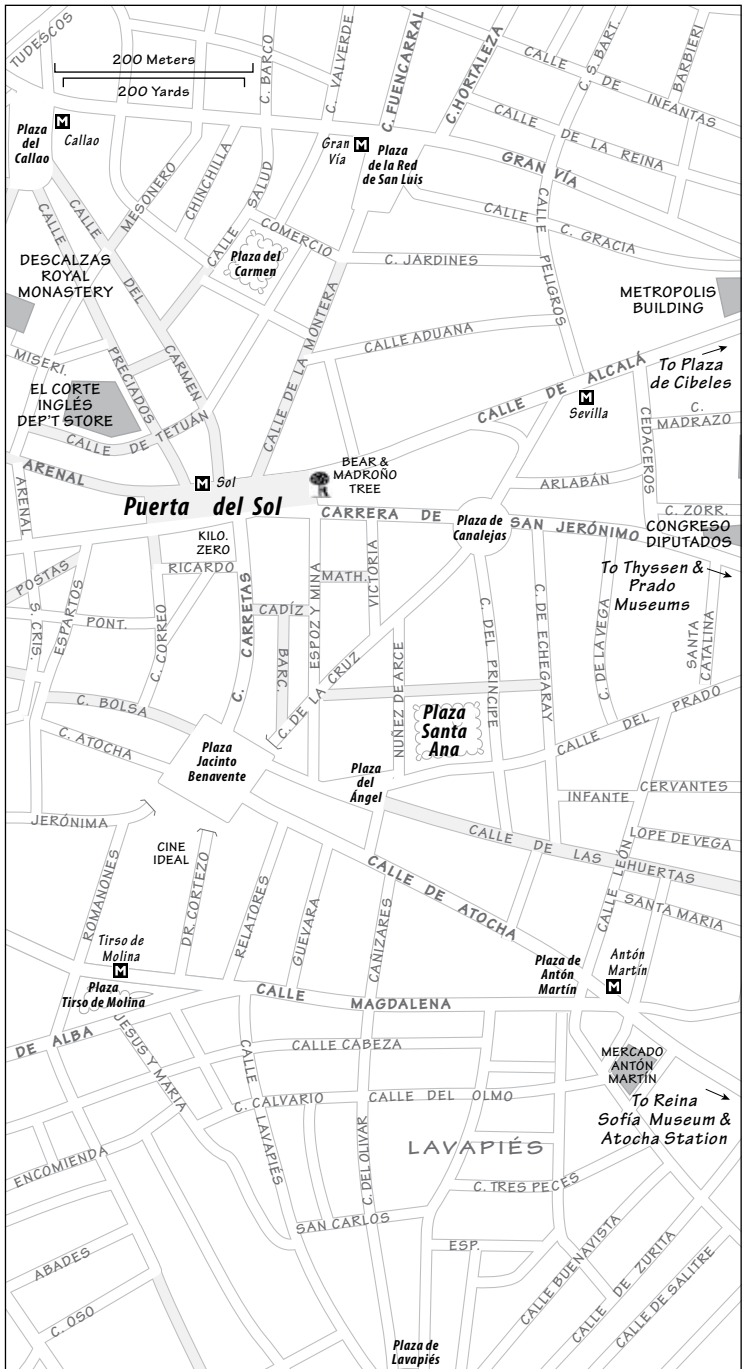
Thursday: All major sights are open. The Museum of the Americas is open later than usual today (until 19:00).

Friday: All major sights are open.

Saturday: The Royal Tapestry Factory and Bullfighting Museum are closed today. Midday, enjoy the scene at Retiro Park.

Late-Hours Sightseeing: Sights with evening hours (20:30 or later) include the Reina Sofía (Mon and Wed-Sat until 21:00), the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum (exhibits only, Sat until 21:00 in summer), and the Clothing Museum (Thu until 22:30 in July-Aug).

Free Sightseeing: The Prado is free every evening from 18:00 (17:00 on Sun), the Reina Sofía has free evening hours Mon and Wed-Sat from 19:00 (15:00 on Sun), and the Thyssen-Bornemisza is free on Mondays. The Museum of the Americas is free on Sundays, and the following are free all day Sunday and on Saturday afternoons: National Archaeological Museum and the Sorolla Museum (Sat from 14:00), as well as the Clothing Museum (from 14:30). These sights are always free: Palacio de Cibeles, Hermitage of San Antonio de la Florida, Bullfighting Museum, Madrid History Museum, and Temple of Debod.



with the police. Or you can call in your report to the SATE line (24-hour tel. 902-102-112, English spoken once you get connected to a person), then go to the police station (where they'll likely speak only Spanish) to sign your statement.

You may see a police station in the Sol Metro station; this office handles only Metro theft.

Prostitution: Diverse by European standards, Madrid is spilling over with immigrants from South America, North Africa, and Eastern Europe. Many young women come here, fall on hard times, and end up on the streets. While it's illegal to make money from someone else selling sex (i.e., pimping), prostitutes over 18 can solicit legally (€30, FYI). Calle de la Montera (leading from Puerta del Sol to Plaza Red de San Luis) is lined with what looks like a bunch of high-school girls skipping out of school for a cigarette break. Again, don't stray north of Gran Vía around Calle de la Luna and Plaza Santa María Soledad—while the streets may look inviting, this area is a meat-eating flower.

One-Stop Shopping: The dominant department store is **El Corte Inglés**, which takes up several huge buildings in the commercial pedestrian zone just off Puerta del Sol (Mon-Sat 10:00-22:00, Sun 11:00-21:00, navigate with the help of the info desk near the door of the main building—the tallest building with the biggest sign, a block off Puerta del Sol, Preciados 3, tel. 913-798-000). They give out good, free Madrid maps. In the main building, you'll find two handy travel agencies (see listing later), a post office, souvenirs, a modern cafeteria (seventh floor), and a supermarket with a fancy “Club del Gourmet” section (with edible souvenirs) in the basement. Across the street is its Librería branch—a huge bookstore with English-language guidebooks. The second building fronting Puerta del Sol contains six floors of music, computers, home electronics, and SIM cards for mobile phones (passport required, second floor), with a box office on the top floor selling tickets to whatever's on in town. Locals figure you'll find anything you need at El Corte Inglés. Salespeople wear flag pins indicating which languages they can speak. If doing any serious shopping here, look into their discounts (10 percent for tourists) and VAT refund policy (21 percent but with a minimum purchase requirement; see page 922 for details).

Internet Access: Plaza Mayor has free Wi-Fi, and more public spaces may offer it soon. You can get online on all Madrid buses and trains—look for *Wi-Fi gratis* signs. Most hotels offer Wi-Fi and a guest computer in the lobby. Any *locutorio* call center should have a few computers and is generally the cheapest Internet option in the neighborhood. Near the Puer-

ta del Sol, **Workcenter** has plenty of terminals and is a productive place to kill time if you're waiting for the tapas-crawl action to heat up (Mon-Fri 8:00-21:00, Sat-Sun 10:00-14:30 & 17:00-20:30, Calle Sevilla 4, tel. 913-601-395).

Bookstores: For books in English, try **FNAC Callao** (Calle Preciados 28, tel. 902-100-632), **Casa del Libro** (English on ground floor, Gran Vía 29, tel. 902-026-402), and **El Corte Inglés** (guidebooks and some fiction, in its Librería branch kitty-corner from main store, fronting Puerta del Sol—see “One-Stop Shopping,” earlier).

Laundry: Ask your hotelier if they have laundry service. Or do it yourself at **Colada Express** (€5/load to wash, €3/load to dry, free Wi-Fi, daily 9:00-22:00, Calle Campomanes 8, tel. 657-876-464). **Higiensec** offers self-service laundry (€7/load to wash, a few euros more to dry) as well as drop-off laundry service and dry cleaning (Mon-Sat 9:00-21:00, closed Sun, between Calle del Arenal and Calle Mayor at Plaza Herradores 8, tel. 915-428-492). For launderette locations, see the map on page 466.

Travel Agencies: The grand department store **El Corte Inglés** has two travel agencies (air and rail tickets, but not reservations for rail-pass holders, €2 fee, on first and seventh floors, for hours and contact info see “One-Stop Shopping,” earlier). They also have a travel agency in the Atocha train station. These are fast and easy places to buy AVE and other train tickets.

Updates to This Book: For updates to this book, check www.ricksteves.com/update.

GETTING AROUND MADRID

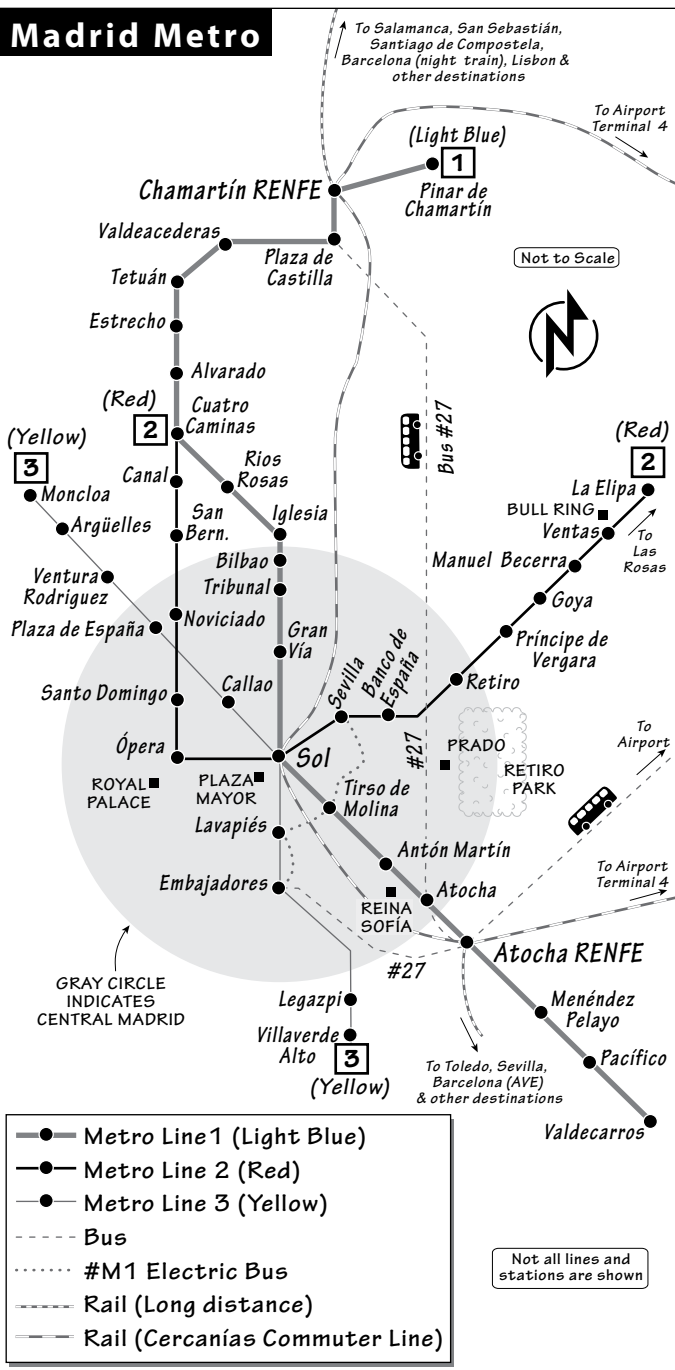
If you want to use Madrid's excellent public transit, pick up the fine *Public Transport* map/flier (free, available at TIs or at Metro info booths in most stations—near the entrance turnstiles). The metropolitan Madrid transit website (www.ctm-madrid.es) covers all public transportation options (Metro, bus, and suburban rail).



By Metro: The city's broad streets can be hot and exhausting. A subway trip of even a stop or two saves time and energy. Madrid's Metro is simple, speedy, and cheap.

It costs €1.50 for a ride within zone A, which covers most of the city, but not trains out to the airport. The 10-ride, €12.20 Metro-bus ticket can be shared by several travelers and works on both the Metro and buses. Buy tickets in the Metro (from easy-to-use machines or ticket booths), at newspaper stands, or at Estanco tobacco

Madrid Metro



shops. Insert your ticket in the turnstile, then retrieve it and pass through. The Metro runs 6:00-1:30 in the morning. At all times, be alert to thieves, who thrive in crowded stations.

Study your Metro map—the simplified map on the opposite page can get you started. The lines are color-coded and numbered; use end-of-the-line station names to choose your direction of travel. Once in the Metro station, signs direct you to the train line and direction (e.g., Linea 1, *Valdecarros*). To transfer, follow signs in the station leading to connecting lines. Once you reach your final stop, look for the green *salida* signs pointing to the exits. Use the helpful neighborhood maps to choose the right *salida* and save yourself lots of walking. Metro info: www.metromadrid.es.

By Bus: City buses, though not as easy as the Metro, can be useful (€1.50 tickets sold on bus, €12.20 for a 10-ride Metrobus ticket, bus maps at TI or info booth on Puerta del Sol, poster-size maps usually posted at bus stops, buses run 6:00-24:00, much less frequent *Bubo* buses run all night). Bus info: www.emtmadrid.es.

By Taxi: Madrid's 15,000 taxis are reasonably priced and easy to hail. A green light on the roof indicates that a taxi is available. Foursomes travel as cheaply by taxi as by Metro. For example, a ride from the Royal Palace to the Prado costs about €6. After the drop charge (about €3, higher on weekends and late at night), the per-kilometer rate depends on the time: *Tarifa 1* (€1.05/kilometer) is charged Mon-Fri 6:00-21:00; *Tarifa 2* (€1.20/kilometer) is valid after 21:00 and on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays. If your cabbie uses anything other than *Tarifa 1* on weekdays (shown as an isolated "1" on the meter), you're being cheated. Rates can be higher if you go outside Madrid. There is a flat rate of €30 between the city center and any *one* of the airport terminals. Other legitimate charges include the €3 supplement for leaving any train or bus station, €20 per hour for waiting, and a few extra euros if you call to have the taxi come to you. Make sure the meter is turned on as soon as you get into the cab so the driver can't tack anything onto the official rate. If the driver starts adding up "extras," look for the sticker detailing all legitimate surcharges (which should be on the passenger window).

Tours in Madrid

ON FOOT

Food and Walking Tours

Essential Madrid's interesting tours in English depart from the Plaza Mayor TI (€17, 20 percent discount for booking three different tours, 2 hours). Check their booklet or website for specifics and departure times, which change frequently (www.esmadrid.com). Groups can be very small, so you almost feel like you have a private

Madrid at a Glance

▲▲▲**Royal Palace** Spain's sumptuous, lavishly furnished national palace. **Hours:** Daily April-Sept 10:00-20:00, Oct-March 10:00-18:00. See page 420.

▲▲▲**Prado Museum** One of the world's great museums, loaded with masterpieces by Diego Velázquez, Francisco de Goya, El Greco, Hieronymus Bosch, Albrecht Dürer, and more. **Hours:** Mon-Sat 10:00-20:00, Sun 10:00-19:00. See page 431.

▲▲▲**Centro de Arte Reina Sofía** Modern-art museum featuring Picasso's epic masterpiece *Guernica*. **Hours:** Mon and Wed-Sat 10:00-21:00, Sun 10:00-19:00, closed Tue. See page 446.

▲▲▲**Paseo** Evening stroll among the Madrileños. **Hours:** Sun-down until the wee hours. See page 462.

▲▲**Puerta del Sol** Madrid's lively central square. **Hours:** Always bustling. See page 405.

▲▲**Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum** A great complement to the Prado, with lesser-known yet still impressive works and an especially good Impressionist collection. **Hours:** Mon 12:00-16:00, Tue-Sun 10:00-19:00, Sat until 21:00 in summer (exhibits only). See page 445.

▲▲**National Archaeological Museum** Traces the history of Iberia through artifacts. **Hours:** Tue-Sat 9:30-20:00, Sun 9:30-15:00, closed Mon. See page 454.

▲▲**Bullfight** Spain's controversial pastime. **Hours:** Scattered Sundays and holidays March-mid-Oct, plus almost daily in May-early June. See page 459.

▲▲**Flamenco** Captivating music and dance performances, at various venues throughout the city. **Hours:** Shows every night, some places closed on Sun. See page 463.

guide. Buy your ticket at the TI, by phone at 902-221-424, or online at www.entradas.com (search for "Essential Madrid"). Tours can fill up in high season, so booking at least a few hours in advance is a good idea. (Bike tours are also available, but you are responsible for renting your own bike. Ask the TI for details.)

Letango Tours offers private tours, packages, and stays all over Spain with a focus on families and groups. It's run by Carlos Galvin, a Spaniard who led tours for my groups for more than a decade, and his wife Jennifer, who's from Seattle. Their kid-friendly

▲**Plaza Mayor** Historic cobbled square. **Hours:** Always open. See page 409.

▲**Retiro Park** Festive green escape from the city, with rental rowboats and great people-watching. **Hours:** Closes at dusk. See page 452.

▲**Royal Botanical Garden** A relaxing museum of plants, with specimens from around the world. **Hours:** Daily 10:00-21:00, shorter hours off-season. See page 452.

▲**Naval Museum** Seafaring history of a country famous for its Armada. **Hours:** Tue-Sun 10:00-19:00, until 15:00 in Aug, closed Mon. See page 453.

▲**Museum of the Americas** Pre-Columbian and colonial artifacts from the New World. **Hours:** Tue-Sat 9:30-15:00, Thu until 19:00, Sun 10:00-15:00, closed Mon. See page 454.

▲**Clothing Museum** A clothes look at the 18th to 21st century. **Hours:** Tue-Sat 9:30-19:00, Thu until 22:30 in July-Aug, Sun 10:00-15:00, closed Mon. See page 455.

▲**Hermitage of San Antonio de la Florida** Church with Goya's tomb, plus frescoes by the artist. **Hours:** Tue-Sun 9:30-20:00, closed Mon. See page 455.

▲**El Rastro** Europe's biggest flea market, filled with bargains and pickpockets. **Hours:** Sun 9:00-15:00, best before 11:00. See page 460.

▲**Zarzuela** Madrid's delightful light opera. **Hours:** Evenings. See page 462.

“Madrid Discoveries” tour, mixing a market walk and history with a culinary-and-tapas introduction, gets you close to the Madrileños and their culture (€250/group, up to 5 people, kids go free, 3-plus hours). Carlos and Jennifer also lead walking and driving tours, including to Barcelona, whitewashed villages, wine country, Jewish sights, and more (mobile 655-818-740 and 661-752-458, www.letango.com, tours@letango.com).

At **Madrid Tours & Tastings**, Nygil Murrell's passions for Spanish history, food, and wine are superbly brought together in

his old-town walking tours (€15/person), tapas tours, including a vegetarian option (from €75/person), and wine tastings (from €65/person). Tapas and wine tours are limited to six people; private tours are also available. Nygil's blog is loaded with insightful and beautifully photographed stories of Madrid life from an American expat's perspective (mobile 620-883-900, www.madridtandt.com, nmurrell@madridtandt.com).

Hernán Amaya Satt and his expert team at **Madrid Museum Tours** organize more than 40 itineraries, including nine different Prado tours, a gossip-filled "secrets of Madrid" walk, and activities around the city and beyond (€165/3 hours, mobile 680-450-231, www.madridmuseumtours.com, info@madridmuseumtours.com). Rick Steves readers get a 20 percent discount; transportation and admission costs not included.

Local Guides

Frederico, Cristina, and their team are licensed guides who lead city walks through Madrid. They specialize in family tours of Madrid and excel at engaging kids and teens in museums (prices per group: €155/2 hours, €195/4 hours, €235/6 hours) and to nearby towns (with public or private transit, tel. 913-102-974, mobile 649-936-222, www.spainfred.com, info@spainfred.com).

Stephen Drake-Jones, a British expat, leads walks of historic old Madrid almost daily (11:00 and 20:00, or private tour by appointment). A historian with a passion for the Duke of Wellington (the general who stopped Napoleon), Stephen founded Madrid's Wellington Society and has been its chairman for over 30 years. For €65, you become a member and get a 3.5-hour tour with three stops for drinks and tapas (€10 more for fine wines). On his themed tours, eccentric Stephen sorts out Madrid's Habsburg and Bourbon history, plus the Spanish Civil War and Hemingway's Madrid. He likes wine, a lot—if that's a problem, skip the tour (for details on his other tours, see www.wellsoc.org; mobile 609-143-203, chairman@wellsoc.org).

Other good licensed local guides include: **Inés Muñiz Martín** (guiding since 1997 and a third-generation Madrileña, €120-180/2-5 hours, 25 percent more on weekends and holidays, mobile 629-147-370, www.immguidedtours.com, info@imguidedtours.com), and **Susana Jarabo** (with a master's in art history, €200/4 hours; extra rental charge to tour by bike, scooter, or Segway; mobile 667-027-722, susanjarabo@yahoo.es).

ON WHEELS

Hop-On, Hop-Off Bus

Madrid City Tour makes two different hop-on, hop-off circuits through the city: historic and modern. Buy a ticket from the driver

(€21/1 day, €25/2 days), and you can hop from sight to sight and route to route as you like, listening to a recorded English commentary along the way. Each route has about 15 stops and takes about 1.5 hours, with buses departing every 10 or 20 minutes. The two routes intersect at the south side of Puerta del Sol and in front of Starbucks across from the Prado (daily March-Oct 9:30-22:00, Nov-Feb 10:00-18:00, tel. 917-791-888, www.madridcitytour.es).

Big-Bus City Sightseeing Tours

Julià Travel leads bus tours departing from Plaza de España 7 (office open Mon-Fri 8:00-19:00, Sat-Sun 8:00-15:00, tel. 915-599-605). Their city offerings include a 2.5-hour Madrid tour with a live guide in two or three languages (€27, one stop for a drink at Hard Rock Café, one shopping stop, no museum visits, daily at 9:00 and 15:00, no reservation required—just show up 15 minutes before departure). See their website for other tours and services (www.juliatravel.com).

Self-Guided Tours by Bus or Minibus

A ride on public **bus #27** from the museum neighborhood up Paseo del Prado and Paseo de la Castellana to the Puerta de Europa and back gives visitors a glimpse of the modern side of Madrid (see page 456), while a ride on electric **minibus #M1** takes you through the characteristic, gritty old center (see page 457).

Madrid Walks

Two self-guided walks provide a look at two different sides of Madrid. For a taste of old Madrid, start with my “Puerta del Sol to Royal Palace Loop,” which winds through the historic center. My “Gran Vía Walk” lets you glimpse a more modern side of Spain’s capital.

PUERTA DEL SOL TO ROYAL PALACE LOOP

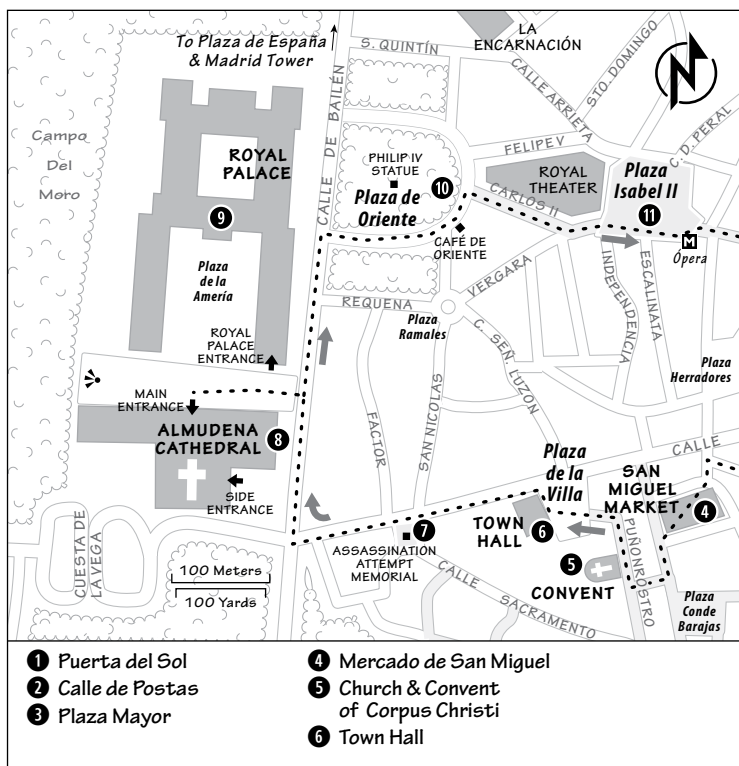
Madrid’s historic center is pedestrian-friendly and filled with spacious squares, a trendy market, bulls’ heads in a bar, and a cookie-dispensing convent. Allow about two hours for this self-guided, mile-long triangular walk. You’ll start and finish on Madrid’s central square, Puerta del Sol (Metro: Sol).

• *Head to the middle of the square, by the equestrian statue of King Charles III, and survey the scene.*

1 Puerta del Sol

The bustling Puerta del Sol, rated ▲▲, is Madrid’s—and Spain’s—center. It’s a hub for





the Metro, *cercanías* (local) trains, revelers, protesters, and pick-pockets. In recent years it has undergone a facelift to become a mostly pedestrianized, wide-open space...without a bench or spot of shade in sight. Nearly traffic-free, it's a popular site for political demonstrations. Don't be surprised if you come across a large, peaceful protest here.

The equestrian statue in the middle of the square honors **King Charles III** (1716-1788) whose enlightened urban policies earned him the affectionate nickname "the best mayor of Madrid." He decorated the city squares with beautiful fountains, got those meddlesome Jesuits out of city government, established the public school system, mandated underground sewers, opened his private Retiro Park to the general public, built the Prado, made the Royal Palace the wonder of Europe, and generally cleaned up Madrid. (For more on Charles, see page 425.)

Head to the slightly uphill end of the square and find the **statue of a bear** pawing a tree—a symbol of Madrid since medieval times. Bears used to live in the royal hunting grounds outside the city. And the *madroño* trees produce a berry that makes the tradi-



tional *madroño* liqueur. Near the statue, locate the Metro entrance and the glass-fish entrance to the *cercanías* trains.

Charles III faces a red-and-white building with a bell tower. This was Madrid’s first post office, founded by Charles III in the 1760s. Today it’s the **county governor’s office** (Residencia de la Comunidad de Madrid), home to the president who governs greater Madrid. The building is notorious for having once been dictator Francisco Franco’s police headquarters. An amazing number of those detained and interrogated by the Franco police tried to “escape” by jumping out its windows to their deaths. Notice the hats of the civil guardsmen at the entry. It’s said the hats have square backs, cleverly designed so that the men can lean against the wall while enjoying a cigarette. On the opposite side of the square look up to see the famous Tío Pepe sign. A neon advertisement for this sherry wine was on display in Puerta del Sol from the 1950s until 2011, when it disappeared, much to the dismay of locals. It returned in 2014 to light the rooftops again.

Appreciate the **harmonious architecture** of the buildings that circle the square—yellow-cream, four stories, balconies of iron,

shuttered windows, and balustrades along the rooflines (with TV antennas on top).

Crowds fill the square on New Year's Eve as the rest of Spain watches the Times Square-style action on TV. The bell atop the governor's office chimes 12 times, while Madrileños eat one grape for each ring to bring good luck through each of the next 12 months.

- *Cross the square, walking to the governor's office.*

Look at the curb directly in front of the entrance to the governor's office. The marker is "**kilometer zero**," the symbolic center of Spain (with its six main highways indicated). Standing on the zero marker with your back to the governor's office, get oriented visually: At twelve o'clock (straight ahead), notice how the pedestrian commercial zone (with the huge El Corte Inglés department store) is thriving. At two o'clock starts the seedier Calle de la Montera, a street with shady characters and prostitutes that leads to the trendy, pedestrianized Calle de Fuencarral. At three o'clock is the biggest Apple store in Europe; the Prado is about a mile farther to your right. At ten o'clock, you'll see the pedestrianized Calle del Arenal Street (which leads to the Royal Palace) dumping into this square... just where you will end this walk.

On either side of the entrance to the governor's office are **two plaques** tied to important dates, expressing thanks from the regional government to its citizens for assisting in times of dire need. To the left of the entry, a plaque on the wall honors those who helped during the terrorist bombings of March 11, 2004 (we have our 9/11—Spain commemorates its 3/11). A similar plaque on the right marks the spot where the war against Napoleon started in 1808. When Napoleon invaded Spain and tried to appoint his brother (rather than the Spanish heir) as king of Spain, an angry crowd gathered outside this building. The French soldiers attacked and simply massacred the mob. Painter Francisco de Goya, who worked just up the street, observed the event and captured the tragedy in his paintings *Second of May, 1808* and *Third of May, 1808*, now in the Prado.

On the corner of Puerta del Sol and Calle Mayor (downhill end of Puerta del Sol, across from McDonald's) is the busy *confitería* **La Mallorquina**, "*fundada en 1.894*" (daily 9:00–21:00, closed mid-July–Aug). Go inside for a tempting peek at racks with goodies hot out of the oven. Enjoy observing the churning energy at the bar lined with Madrileños popping in for a fast coffee and a sweet treat. The shop is famous for its cream-filled *Napolitana* pastry (€1.20). Or sample Madrid's answer to doughnuts, *rosquillas* (*tontas* means "silly"—plain, and *listas* means "all dressed up and ready to go"—with icing, about €1 each). The room upstairs is more genteel, with nice views of the square. Buy a pastry. (Or buy two, one to give to a beggar outside.)

From inside the shop, look back toward the entrance and notice the tile above the door with the 18th-century view of Puerta del Sol. Compare this with today's view out the door. This was before the square was widened, when a church stood at its top end.

Puerta del Sol (“Gate of the Sun”) is named for a long-gone gate with the rising sun carved onto it, which once stood at the eastern edge of the old city. From here, we begin our walk through the historic town that dates back to medieval times.

• *Head west on busy Calle Mayor, just past McDonald's, and veer left up the pedestrian alley called...*

② Calle de Postas

The street sign shows the post coach heading for that famous first post office. Medieval street signs posted on the lower corners of buildings included pictures so the illiterate (and monolingual tourists) could “read” them. Fifty yards up the street on the left, at Calle San Cristóbal, is Pans & Company, a popular Catalan sandwich chain offering lots of healthy choices. While Spaniards consider American fast food unhealthy—both culturally and physically—they love it. McDonald's and Burger King are thriving in Spain.

• *Continue up Calle de Postas, and take a slight right on Calle de la Sal through the arcade, where you emerge into...*

③ Plaza Mayor

This square, worth ▲, is a vast, cobbled, traffic-free chunk of 17th-century Spain. In medieval times, this was the city's main square. The equestrian statue (wearing a ruffled collar) honors Philip III, who (in 1619) transformed the medieval marketplace into a Baroque plaza. The square is 140 yards long and 102 yards wide, enclosed by three-story buildings with symmetrical windows, balconies, slate roofs, and steeped towers. Each side of the square is uniform, as if a grand palace were turned inside-out. This distinct “look,” pioneered by architect Juan de Herrera (who finished El Escorial), is found all over Madrid.



This site served as the city's 17th-century open-air theater. Upon this stage, much Spanish history has been played out: bullfights, fires, royal pageantry, and events of the gruesome Inquisition. Worn-down reliefs on the seatbacks under the lampposts tell the story. During the Inquisition, many were tried here—suspected heretics, Protestants, Jews, tour guides without a local license, and Muslims whose “conversion” to Christianity was dubious. The

guilty were paraded around the square before their executions, wearing billboards listing their many sins (bleachers were built for bigger audiences, while the wealthy rented balconies). The heretics were burned, and later, criminals were slowly strangled as they held a crucifix, hearing the reassuring words of a priest as the life was squeezed out of them with a garrote.

The square's buildings are mainly private apartments. Want one? Costs run from €400,000 for a tiny attic studio to €2 million and up for a 2,500-square-foot flat. The square is painted a democratic shade of burgundy—the result of a citywide vote. Since the end of decades of dictatorship in 1975, there's been a passion for voting here. Three different colors were painted as samples on the walls of this square, and the city voted for its favorite.



A stamp-and-coin market bustles at Plaza Mayor on Sundays (10:00-14:00). The Casa Yustas shop at #30 (in the northeast corner) has been making hats here since 1894.

The building to Philip's left, on the north side beneath the twin towers, was once home to the baker's guild and now houses the TI. It's wonderfully air-conditioned and offers daily walking tours. Consider reserving a spot now (for details, see "Tours in Madrid," earlier).

Day or night, Plaza Mayor is a colorful place to enjoy an affordable cup of coffee or overpriced food. Throughout Spain, lesser *plazas mayores* provide peaceful pools in the whitewater river of Spanish life.

For some interesting, if gruesome, bullfighting lore, drop by **La Torre del Oro Bar Andalú**. This bar is a good place to finish off your Plaza Mayor visit (north side of the square at #26, a few doors to the left of the TI). The bar has *Andalú* (Andalusian) ambience and an entertaining staff. Warning: They may push expensive tapas on tourists. The price list posted outside the door makes your costs perfectly clear: "*barra*" indicates the price at the bar; "*terrazza*" is the price at an outdoor table. Step inside, stand at the bar, and order a drink—a *caña* (small draft beer) shouldn't cost more than €2. At the outdoor tables, only larger size *cañas dobles* are available (for €4.50).

The interior is a temple to bullfighting, festooned with gory decor. Notice the breathtaking action captured in the many photographs. Look under the stuffed head of Barbero the bull. At eye level you'll see a *puntilla*, the knife used to put poor Barbero out

of his misery at the arena. The plaque explains: weight, birth date, owner, date of death, which matador killed him, and the location. Just to the left of Barbero, there's a photo of longtime dictator Franco with the famous bullfighter Manuel Benítez Pérez—better known as El Cordobés, the Elvis of bullfighters and a working-class hero. At the top of the stairs to the WC, find the photo of El Cordobés and Robert Kennedy—looking like brothers. To the left of them (and elsewhere in the bar) is a shot of Che Guevara enjoying a bullfight.

At the end of the bar, in a glass case, is the “suit of lights” the great El Cordobés wore in an ill-fated 1967 fight, in which the bull gored him. El Cordobés survived; the bull didn't. Find the photo of Franco with El Cordobés at the far end, to the left of Segador the bull. Near the Kennedy photo is a shot of El Cordobés' illegitimate son being gored. Disowned by El Cordobés senior, yet still using his dad's famous name after a court battle, the junior El Cordobés is one of this generation's top fighters.

Back in the case with the “suit of lights,” notice the photo of a matador (not El Cordobés) horrifyingly hooked by a bull's horn. For a series of photos showing this episode (and the same matador healed afterward), look to the left of Barbero back by the door.

Consider taking a break at one of Torre del Oro's sidewalk tables (or at any café/bar terrace facing Madrid's grandest square). Cafetería Margerit (nearby) occupies the sunniest corner of the square and is a good place to enjoy a coffee with the view. The scene is easily worth the extra euro you'll pay for the drink.

• *Leave Plaza Mayor on Calle de Ciudad Rodrigo (at the northwest corner of the square), passing a series of solid turn-of-the-20th-century storefronts and sandwich joints, such as Casa Rúa, famous for their cheap bocadillos de calamares—fried squid rings on a roll. Emerging from the arcade, turn left and head downhill toward the covered market hall.*

④ Mercado de San Miguel

To wash down those *calamares* in a more refined setting, pop into the Mercado de San Miguel (daily 10:00–24:00). This historic iron-and-glass structure from 1916 stands on the site of an even earlier marketplace. Renovated in the 21st century, it now hosts some 30 high-end vendors of fresh produce, gourmet foods, wines by the glass, tapas, and full meals. Locals and tourists alike pause here for its food, natural-light ambience, and social scene.

Alongside the market, look down the street called Cava de San Miguel. If you like singing and sangria, come back after 22:00 and visit one of the *mesones* that line the street. These cave-like bars, stretching far back from the street, get packed with Madrileños out on dates who—emboldened by sangria and the setting—are prone to suddenly breaking out in song. It's a lowbrow, electric-keyboard,

karaoke-type ambience, best on Friday and Saturday nights. The odd shape of these bars isn't a contrivance for the sake of atmosphere—Plaza Mayor was built on a slope, and these underground vaults are part of a structural system that braces the leveled plaza.

• *After you walk through the market and exit, continue west a few steps, then turn left, heading downhill on Calle del Conde de Miranda. At the first corner, turn right and cross the small plaza to the brick church in the far corner.*

5 Church and Convent of Corpus Christi

The proud coats of arms over the main entry announce the rich family that built this Hieronymite church and convent in 1607. In 17th-century Spain, the most prestigious thing a noble family could do was build and maintain a convent. To harvest all the goodwill created in your community, you'd want your family's insignia right there for all to see. (You can see the donating couple, like a 17th-century Bill and Melinda, kneeling before the communion wafer in the central panel over the entrance.) Inside is a quiet oasis with a Last Supper altarpiece.

Now for a unique shopping experience. A half-block to the right from the church entrance is its associated convent—it's the big brown door on the left, at Calle del Codo 3 (Mon-Sat 9:30-13:00 & 16:00-18:30, closed Sun). The sign reads: *Venta de Dulces* (Sweets for Sale). To buy goodies from the cloistered nuns, buzz the *monjas* button, then wait patiently for the sister to respond over the intercom. Say "*dulces*" (DOOL-thays), and she'll let you in. When the lock buzzes, push open the door and follow the sign to the *torno*, the lazy Susan that lets the sisters sell their baked goods without being seen. Scan the menu, announce your choice to the sequestered sister (she may tell you she has only one or two of the options available), place your money on the *torno*, and your goodies (and change) will appear. *Galletas* (shortbread cookies) are the least expensive item (a *medio*-kilo costs about €9). Or try the *pastas de almendra* (almond cookies).

• *Continue uphill on Calle del Codo (where those in need of bits of armor shopped—see the street sign) and turn left, heading toward the Plaza de la Villa (pictured here). Before entering the square, notice an **old door** to the left of the **Real Sociedad Económica** sign, made of wood lined with metal. This is considered the oldest door in town on Madrid's oldest building—inhabited since 1480. It's set in a Moorish keyhole*



arch. Look up at what was a prison tower. Now continue into the square called Plaza de la Villa, dominated by Madrid's...

6 Town Hall

The impressive structure features Madrid's distinctive architectural style—symmetrical square towers, topped with steeples and a slate roof. The building still functions as Madrid's ceremonial Town Hall, though the city council and hands-on duties have moved elsewhere. Over the doorway, the three coats of arms sport many symbols of Madrid's rulers: Habsburg crowns, castles of Castile, and (the shield on the left) the city symbol—the berry-eating bear. This square was the ruling center of medieval Madrid, a tiny remnant of the 14th-century town. Even before then, when Madrid was an Arab-Moorish community, this was the only square in town.

Imagine how Philip II took this city by surprise in 1651 when he decided to move the capital of Europe's largest empire (even bigger than ancient Rome at the time) from Toledo to humble Madrid. To better administer their empire, the Habsburgs went on a building spree. But because their empire was drained of its riches by prolonged religious wars, they built Madrid with cheap brick instead of elegant granite.

The statue in the garden is of Philip II's admiral, Don Alvaro de Bazán—mastermind of the Christian victory over the Turkish Ottomans at the naval battle of Lepanto in 1571. This pivotal battle, fought off the coast of Greece, slowed the Ottoman threat to Christian Europe. However, mere months after Bazán's death in 1588, his “invincible” Spanish Armada was destroyed by England...and Spain's empire began its slow fade.

• *From here, walk along busy Calle Mayor, which leads downhill toward the Royal Palace. A few blocks down Calle Mayor, on a tiny square, you'll find the...*

7 Assassination Attempt Memorial

This statue memorializes a 1906 assassination attempt. The target was Spain's King Alfonso XIII and his bride, Victoria Eugenie, as they paraded by on their wedding day. While the crowd was throwing flowers, an anarchist (what terrorists used to be called) threw a bouquet lashed to a bomb from a balcony at #84 (across the street). He missed the royal newlyweds, but killed 23 people. Gory photos of the event hang inside the recommended Casa Ciriaco restaurant, which now occupies #84 (photos to the right of the entrance). The king and queen went on to live to a ripe old age, producing many great-grandchildren, including the current king, Felipe VI.

• *Continue down Calle Mayor one more block to a busy street, Calle de Bailén. Take in the big, domed...*

8 Almudena Cathedral (Catedral de Nuestra Señora de la Almudena)

Madrid's massive, gray-and-white cathedral (110 yards long and 80 yards high) opened in 1993, 100 years after workers started building it. This is the side entrance for tourists (€1 donation requested). The main entrance (selling €6 museum-and-cupola tickets) is a block north, facing the Royal Palace. If you go inside, you'll see a refreshingly modern and colorful ceiling, a glittering 5,000-pipe organ, and a grand 15th-century painted altarpiece—striking in the otherwise Neo-Gothic interior. The highlight is the 12th-century coffin (empty, painted leather on wood, in a chapel behind the altar) of Madrid's patron saint, Isidro. A humble farmer, the exceptionally devout Isidro was said to have been helped by angels who did the plowing for him while he prayed. Forty years after he died, this coffin was opened, and his body was found to have been miraculously preserved. This convinced the pope to canonize Isidro as the patron saint of Madrid and of farmers, with May 15 as his feast day.

Turn right on Calle de Bailén to reach the main entrance. The doors feature reliefs of the cathedral's 1993 consecration, including one with Pope John Paul II and former king and queen Juan Carlos I and his wife Sofía.

• *From the cathedral's front steps, face the imposing...*

9 Royal Palace

Since the ninth century, this spot has been Madrid's center of power: from Moorish castle to Christian fortress to Renaissance palace to the current structure, built in the 18th century. With its expansive courtyard surrounded by imposing Baroque architecture, it represents the wealth of Spain before its decline. Its 2,800 rooms, totaling nearly 1.5 million square feet, make it Europe's largest palace.

• *You could visit the palace now, using my self-guided tour (see page 420). Or, to follow the rest of this walk back to Puerta del Sol, continue one long block north up Calle de Bailén (walking alongside the palace) to where the street opens up into...*

10 Plaza de Oriente

As its name suggests, this square faces east. The grand yet people-friendly plaza is typical of today's Europe, where energetic governments are converting car-congested wastelands into public spaces like this. A recent mayor of Madrid earned the nickname "The Mole" for all the digging he did. Where's the traffic? Under your feet.

Notice the quiet. You're surrounded by more than three million people, yet you can hear the birds, bells, and fountain. The

park is decorated with statues of Visigothic kings who ruled from the third to seventh century. Romans allowed them to administer their province of Hispania on the condition that they'd provide food and weapons to the empire. The Visigoths inherited real power after Rome fell, but lost it to invading Moors in 711. The fine bronze equestrian statue of Philip IV (honoring the king who built the Royal Palace) was a striking technical feat in its day, as the horse stood up on its hind legs (possible only with the help of Galileo's clever calculations and by using the tail for more support). The king faces Madrid's opera house, the 1,700-seat **Royal Theater** (Teatro Real), rebuilt in 1997. To your left, in the distance, the once-impressive **Madrid Tower** skyscraper (460 feet tall, built of concrete in 1957) marks Plaza de España (and the end of my "Gran Vía Walk"—see page 419).

• *Walk along the Royal Theater, on the right side, to the...*

11 Plaza de Isabel II

This square is marked by a statue of Isabel II, who ruled Spain in the 19th century. Although she's immortalized here, Isabel had a rocky reign, marked by uprisings and political intrigue. A revolution in 1868 forced her to abdicate, and she lived out her life in exile.

Evidence of Moorish walls turn up in this neighborhood and elsewhere in Madrid. Check out the tactile model in this square: The position of the old Moorish fortress and walls is outlined, with the modern city faintly depicted underneath. Feel it. Notice also the grooved sidewalk you're standing on—designed for the white canes of people who can't see.

• *From here, follow Calle del Arenal, walking gradually uphill. You're heading straight to Puerta del Sol.*

12 Calle del Arenal

As depicted on the tiled street signs, this was the "street of sand"—where sand was stockpiled during construction. Each cross street is named for a medieval craft that, historically, was plied along that lane (for example, "Calle de Bordadores" means "Street of the Embroiderers"). Wander slowly uphill. As you stroll, imagine this street as a traffic inferno—which it was until the city pedestrianized it a decade ago. Notice also how orderly the side streets are. Where a mess of cars once lodged chaotically on the sidewalks, smart bollards (*bolardos*) now keep vehicles off the walkways. The fancier facades (such as the former International Hotel at #19) are in the "eclectic" style (Spanish for Historicism—meaning a new interest in old styles) of the late 19th century.

The brick **St. Ginés Church** (on the right) means temptation to most locals. It marks the turn to the best *chocolatería* in town.

Spain's Royal Families: From Habsburg to Bourbon

Spain as we know it was born when four long-established medieval kingdoms were joined by the 1469 marriage of Isabel, ruler of Castile and León, and Ferdinand, ruler of Aragon and Navarre. The so-called “Catholic Monarchs” (Reyes Católicos) wasted no time in driving the Islamic Moors out of Spain (the Reconquista). By 1492, Isabel and Ferdinand conquered a fifth kingdom, Granada, establishing more or less the same borders that Spain has today.

This was an age when “foreign policy” was conducted, in part, by marrying royal children into other royal families. Among the dynastic marriages of their children, Isabel and Ferdinand arranged for their third child, Juana “the Mad,” to marry the crown prince of Austria, Philip “the Fair.” This was a huge coup for the Spanish royal family. A member of the Habsburg dynasty, Philip was heir to the Holy Roman Empire, which then encompassed much of today’s Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Transylvania, the Low Countries, southern Italy, and more. And when Juana’s brothers died, making her ruler of the kingdoms of Spain, it paved the way for her son, Charles, to inherit the kingdoms of his four grandparents—creating a vast realm and famously making him the most powerful man in Europe. He ruled as Charles I (king of Spain, from 1516) and Charles V (Holy Roman emperor, from 1519).

He was followed by Philip II, Philip III, Philip IV, and finally Charles II. Over this period, Spain rested on its Golden Age laurels, eventually squandering much of its wealth and losing some of its holdings. Arguably the most inbred of an already very inbred dynasty (his parents were uncle and niece), Charles II was weak, sickly, and unable to have children, ending the 200-year Habsburg dynasty in Spain with his death in 1700.

Charles II willed the Spanish crown to the Bourbons of France, and his grandnephew Philip of Anjou, whose granddaddy was the “Sun King” Louis XIV of France, took the throne. But the rest of Europe feared allowing the already powerful Louis XIV

From the uphill corner of the church, look to the end of the lane where—like a high-calorie red-light zone—a neon sign spells out *Chocolatería San Ginés*...every local’s favorite place for hot chocolate and *churros* (always open). Also notice the charming bookshop clinging like a barnacle to the wall of the church. It’s been selling books on this spot since 1650.

Next door is the **Joy Eslava disco**, a former theater famous for operettas in the Gilbert-and-Sullivan days and now a popular club. In Spain, when you’re 18 you can do it all (buy tobacco, drink, drive, serve in the military). This place is an alcohol-free disco for the younger kids until midnight, when it becomes a thriving adult

to add Spain (and its vast New World holdings) to his empire. Austria, the Germanic States, Holland, and England backed a different choice (Archduke Charles of Austria). So began the War of Spanish Succession (1700-1714), involving all of Europe. The French eventually prevailed, but with the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), Philip had to give up any claim to the throne of France. This let him keep the Spanish crown but ensured that his heirs—the future Spanish Bourbon dynasty—couldn't become too powerful by merging with the French Bourbons.

In 1714, the French-speaking Philip became the first king of the Bourbon dynasty in Spain (with the name Philip V). He breathed much-needed new life into the monarchy, which had grown ineffectual and corrupt under the inbred Habsburgs. When the old wooden Habsburg royal palace burned on Christmas Eve of 1734, Philip (who was born at Versailles) built a new and spectacular late-Baroque-style palace as a bold symbol of his new dynasty. This is the palace that wows visitors to Madrid today. Construction was finished in 1764, and Philip V's son Charles III was the palace's first occupant. Charles III's decorations are what you'll see if you visit the palace's interior.

The Bourbon palace remained the home of Spain's kings from 1764 until 1931, when democratic elections led to the Second Spanish Republic and forced King Alfonso XIII into exile. After Francisco Franco took power in 1939, he sidelined the royals by making himself ruler-for-life. But later he handpicked as his successor Alfonso XIII's grandson, the Bourbon Prince Juan Carlos, whom Franco believed would continue his hardline policies. When Franco died in 1975, Juan Carlos surprised everyone by voluntarily turning the real power back over to Spain's parliament. Today Spain is a constitutional monarchy with a figurehead Bourbon king, Felipe VI, son of Juan Carlos I, who abdicated the throne in 2014.

space, with the theater floor and balconies all teeming with clubbers. Their slogan: "Go big or go home."

Next, at #11, **Soccer Shop** carries team regalia, postcards of today's stars, official mouth guards, and so on for soccer fans. Many Europeans come to Madrid primarily to see its 80,000-seat Bernabéu soccer stadium. The Starbucks on the next corner (opposite) is popular with young locals for its inviting ambience and American-style muffins, even though the coffee is too tame for many Spaniards.

Kitty-corner from there (at #7) is **Ferpal**, an old-school deli with an inviting bar and easy takeout options. Wallpapered with ham hocks, it's famous for selling the finest Spanish cheeses, hams, and other tasty treats. Spanish saffron is half what you'd pay for



GRAN VÍA WALK

For a walk down Spain's version of Fifth Avenue, stroll the Gran Vía. Built primarily between 1900 and the 1950s, this boulevard, worth ▲, affords a fun view of early-20th-century architecture and a chance to be on the street with workaday Madrileños. I've broken this self-guided walk into five sections, each of which was the ultimate in its day.

- Start at the skyscraper at Calle de Alcalá #42 (Metro: Banco de España).

1 Circulo de Bellas Artes: This 1920s skyscraper has a venerable café on its ground floor (free entry) and the best rooftop view around. Ride the elevator to the seventh-floor roof terrace (€4, daily 11:00-14:00 & 17:00-21:00), and stand under a black, Art Deco statue of Minerva, perhaps put here to associate Madrid with this mythological protectress of culture and high thinking. Walk the perimeter of the rooftop from the far left for a clockwise tour.

Looking to the left, you'll see the gold-fringed dome of the landmark Metropolis building (inspired by Hotel Negresco in Nice), once the headquarters of an insurance company. It stands at the start of the Gran Vía and its cancan of proud facades celebrating the good times in pre-civil war Spain. On the horizon, the Guadarrama Mountains hide Segovia. Farther to the right, in the distance, skyscrapers mark the city's north gate, Puerta de Europa (with its

striking slanted twin towers). The big traffic circle and fountain below are part of Plaza de Cibeles, with its ornate and bombastic cultural center and observation deck (Palacio de Cibeles—see page 453). Behind that is the vast Retiro Park. Farther to the right, the big low-slung building surrounded by green is the Prado Museum. And, finally, at the far right (and hard to see), is the old town.

• *Descend the elevator and cross the busy boulevard immediately in front of Circulo de Belles Artes to reach the start of Gran Vía.*

❷ **1910s Gran Vía:** This first stretch, from the Banco de España Metro stop to the Gran Vía Metro stop, was built in the 1910s. While the people-watching and window-shopping can be enthralling, be sure to look up and enjoy the beautiful facades, too.

❸ **1920s Gran Vía:** The second stretch, from the Gran Vía Metro stop to the Callao Metro stop, starts where two recently pedestrianized streets meet up. To the right, Calle de Fuencarral is the trendiest pedestrian zone in town, with famous brand-name shops and a young vibe (the 14-story 1920s Telefónica skyscraper at the corner was one of the city's first). To the left, Calle de la Montera is notorious for its prostitutes. The action pulses from the McDonald's down a block or so. Some find it an eye-opening little detour.

❹ **1930s Gran Vía:** The final stretch, from the Callao Metro stop to Plaza de España, is considered the “American Gran Vía,” built in the 1930s to emulate the buildings of Chicago and New York City. You'll even see the Nebraska Cafeteria restaurant—a reminder that American food was trendy long before the advent of fast-food chains. This section is the Spanish version of Broadway, with all the big theaters and plays.

❺ **Plaza de España:** End your walk at Plaza de España (with a Metro station of the same name). Once the Rockefeller Plaza of Madrid, these days it's pretty tired. While statues of the epic Spanish characters Don Quixote and Sancho Panza (part of a Cervantes monument) are ignored in the park, two Franco-era buildings do their best to scrape the sky above. Franco wanted to show he could keep up with America, so he had the Spain Tower (shorter) and Madrid Tower (taller) built in the 1950s. But they succeed in reminding people more of Moscow than the USA.

Sights in Madrid

▲▲▲ROYAL PALACE (PALACIO REAL)

This is Europe's third-greatest palace, after Versailles and Vienna's Schönbrunn. It has arguably the most sumptuous original interior, packed with tourists and royal antiques.

The palace is the product of many kings over several centuries. Philip II (1527-1598) made a wooden fortress on this site his



governing center when he established Madrid as Spain's capital. When that palace burned down, the current structure was built by King Philip V (1683-1746). Philip V wanted to make it his own private Versailles, to match his French upbringing: He was born in Versailles—the grandson of Louis XIV—and ordered his tapas

in French. His son, Charles III (whose statue graces Puerta del Sol), added interior decor in the Italian style, since he'd spent his formative years in Italy. These civilized Bourbon kings were trying to raise Spain to the cultural level of the rest of Europe. They hired foreign artists to oversee construction and established local Spanish porcelain and tapestry factories to copy works done in Paris or Brussels. Over the years, the palace was expanded and enriched, as each Spanish king tried to outdo his predecessor.

Today's palace is ridiculously supersized—with 2,800 rooms, tons of luxurious tapestries, a king's ransom of chandeliers, frescoes by Tiepolo, priceless porcelain, and bronze decor covered in gold leaf. While these days the royal family lives in a mansion a few miles away, this place still functions as the ceremonial palace, used for formal state receptions, royal weddings, and tourists' daydreams.

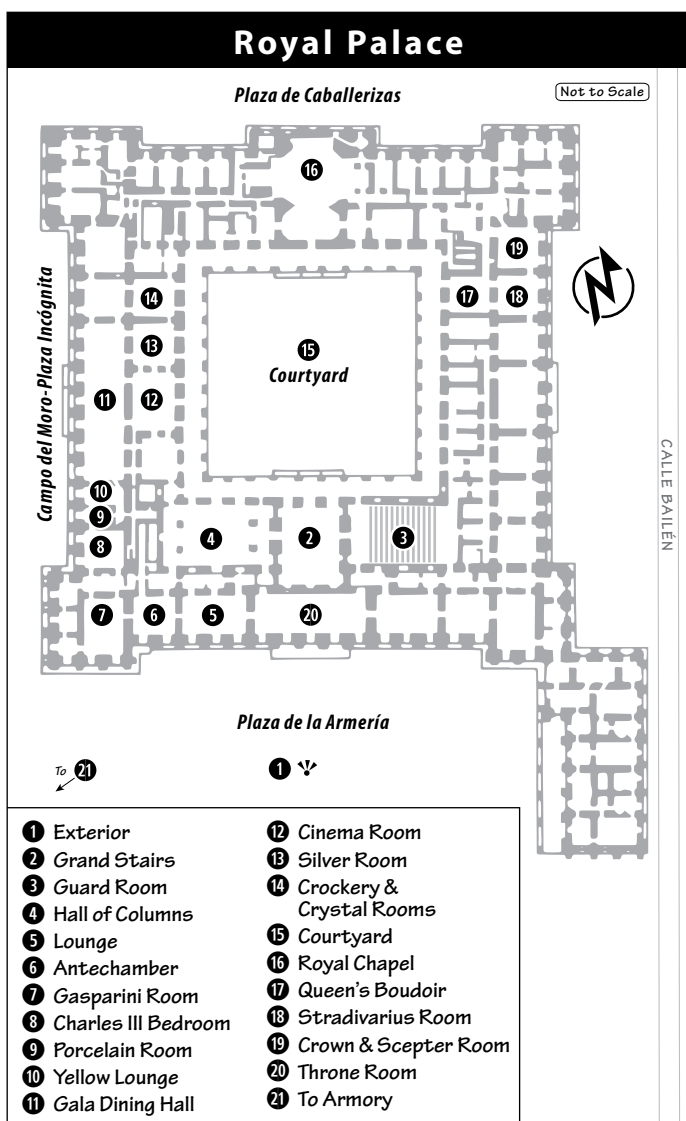
Cost and Hours: €11; open daily April-Sept 10:00-20:00, Oct-March 10:00-18:00, last entry one hour before closing; from Puerta del Sol, walk 15 minutes down pedestrianized Calle del Arenal (Metro: Ópera); palace can close for royal functions—confirm in advance.

Crowd-Beating Tips: The palace is most crowded on Wednesdays and Thursdays, when it's free for locals. On any day, arrive early or go late to avoid lines and crowds. Madrid Card holders get to skip the line: Enter around the right side at the group entry point, a block down, along Calle de Bailén.

Information: Short English descriptions posted in each room complement what I describe in my tour. The museum guidebook demonstrates a passion for meaningless data. Tel. 914-548-800, www.patrimonionacional.es.

Tours: You can wander on your own or join a €4 **guided tour**. Check the time of the next English-language tour and decide as you buy your ticket; the tours are dry, depart sporadically, and aren't worth a long wait. The excellent €4 **audioguide** is much more interesting.

Services: Free lockers and a WC are just past the ticket booth. Upstairs you'll find a more serious bookstore with good books on Spanish history.



Photography: Not allowed.

Eating: Though the palace has a refreshing air-conditioned cafeteria upstairs (with salad bar), I prefer to walk a few minutes and find a place near the Royal Theater or on Calle del Arenal. Another great option is **Café de Oriente**, boasting fin-de-siècle elegance immediately across the park from the Royal Palace. While its lunch special is good and reasonable—three courses for €15

(served Mon–Fri 13:00–16:00)—the restaurant and terrace menus are pricey (Plaza de Oriente 2—for location see map on page 474, tel. 915-413-974, www.cafedeoriente.es).

👉 Self-Guided Tour

You'll follow a simple one-way circuit on a single floor covering more than 20 rooms.

• *Buy your ticket, pass through the bookstore, stand in the middle of the vast open-air courtyard, and face the palace entrance.*

❶ **Palace Exterior:** The palace sports the French-Italian Baroque architecture so popular in the 18th century—heavy columns, classical-looking statues, a balustrade roofline, and false-front entrance. The entire building is made of gray-and-white local stone (very little wood) to prevent the kind of fire that leveled the previous castle. Imagine the place in its heyday, with a courtyard full of soldiers on parade, or a lantern-lit scene of horse carriages arriving for a ball.

• *Enter the palace and show your ticket.*

Palace Lobby: In the old days, horse-drawn carriages would drop you off here. Today, stretch limos do the same thing for gala events. (If you're taking a guided palace tour, this is where you wait to begin.) The modern black bust in the corner is of Juan Carlos I, a “people's king,” who is credited with bringing democracy to Spain after 36 years under dictator Franco. (Juan Carlos passed the throne to his son in 2014.)

❷ **Grand Stairs:** Gazing up the imposing staircase, you can see that Spain's kings wanted to make a big first impression. Whenever high-end dignitaries arrive, fancy carpets are rolled down the stairs (notice the little metal bar-holding hooks). Begin your ascent, up steps that are intentionally shallow, making your climb slow and regal. Overhead, the white-and-blue ceiling fresco gradually opens up to your view. It shows the Spanish king, sitting on clouds, surrounded by female Virtues.

At the first landing, the burgundy coat of arms represents Felipe VI, the son of Spain's previous king, Juan Carlos. J. C. knew Spain was ripe for democracy after Francisco Franco's dictatorial regime. Rather than become “Juan the Brief” (as some were nicknaming him), he returned real power to the parliament. You'll see his (figure) head on the back of the Spanish €1 and €2 coins.

Continue up to the top of the stairs. Before entering the first



room, look to the right of the door to find a white marble bust of J. C.'s great-great-g-g-g-great-grandfather Philip V, who began the Bourbon dynasty in Spain in 1700 and had this palace built.

3 Guard Room: The palace guards used to hang out in this relatively simple room. Notice the two fake doors, added to give the room symmetry. The old clocks—still in working order—are part of a collection of hundreds amassed as a hobby by Spain's royal family. Throughout the palace, the themes chosen for the ceiling frescoes relate to the function of the room they decorate. In this room, the ceiling fresco is the first we'll see in a series by the great Venetian painter Giambattista Tiepolo (see sidebar). It depicts the legendary hero Aeneas (in red, with the narrow face of Charles III) standing in the clouds of heaven, gazing up at his mother Venus (with the face of Charles' own mother).

Notice the carpets in this room. Although much of what you see in the palace dates from the 18th century, the carpet on the left (folded over to show the stitching) is new, from 1991. It was produced by Madrid's royal tapestry factory, the same works that made the older original carpet (displayed next to the modern one). Though recently produced, the new carpet was woven the traditional way—by hand. The fine inlaid stone table in this room is important to Spaniards because it was here, in 1985, that the king signed the treaty finalizing Spain's entry into the European Union.

4 Hall of Columns: Originally a ballroom and dining room, today this space is used for formal ceremonies and intimate concerts. This is where Spain formally joined the European Union in 1985 (the fancy table used to be in here) and honored its national soccer team after their 2010 World Cup victory. The tapestries (like most you'll see in the palace) are 17th-century Belgian, from designs by Raphael.

The central theme in the ceiling fresco (by Jaquinto, following Tiepolo's style) is Apollo driving the chariot of the sun, while Bacchus enjoys wine, women, and song with a convivial gang. This is a reminder that the mark of a good king is to drive the chariot of state as smartly as Apollo, while providing an environment where the people can enjoy life to the fullest.

• *The next several rooms were the living quarters of King Charles III (r. 1759–1788). First comes his* **5 lounge** (with red walls), where the king would enjoy the company of a similarly great ruler—the Roman emperor Trajan—depicted “triumphing” on the ceiling. *The heroics of Trajan, one of two Roman emperors born in Spain, naturally made the king feel good. Next, you enter the blue-walled...*

6 Antechamber: This was Charles III's dining room. The four paintings—all originals by Francisco de Goya—are of Charles III's son and successor, King Charles IV (looking a bit like a dim-witted George Washington), and his wife, María Luisa (who wore the

Charles III (1716-1788)



Of the many monarchs who've enlarged or redecored the Royal Palace, it was Charles III who set the tone for its Baroque-Rococo interior. Charles' mother was Italian, and he spent his formative years in Italy. When he became Spain's king, he brought along sophisticated Italian artists to decorate his new home—the painter Tiepolo, the architect Sabatini, and the decorator Gasparini. They created some of the most elaborate, jaw-dropping rooms tourists see in the palace today.

Charles was an enlightened ruler who tried to reform Spain along democratic principles. He failed. After his death, Spain dwindled into repressive irrelevance. But over the centuries, each of his successors labored to top Charles in ostentatious decoration, making Madrid's Royal Palace his greatest legacy.

pants in the palace). María Luisa was famously hands-on, tough, and businesslike, while Charles IV was pretty wimpy as far as kings go. To meet the demand for his work, Goya made replicas of these portraits, which you'll see in the Prado.

The 12-foot-tall clock—showing Cronus, god of time, in porcelain, bronze, and mahogany—sits on a music box. Reminding us of how time flies, Cronus is shown both as a child and as an old man. The palace's clocks are wound—and reset—once a week (they grow progressively less accurate as the week goes on). The gilded decor you see throughout the palace is bronze with gold leaf. Velázquez's famous painting, *Las Meninas* (which you'll marvel at in the Prado), originally hung in this room.



⑦ **Gasparini Room:** (Gasp!) The entire room is designed, top to bottom, as a single gold-green-pink ensemble: from the frescoed ceiling, to the painted stucco figures, silk-embroidered walls, chandelier, furniture, and multicolored marble floor. Each marble was quarried in, and therefore represents, a different region of Spain. Birds overhead spread their wings, vines sprout, and fruit bulges from the surface. With curlicues everywhere (including their reflection in the mirrors), the room dazzles the eye and mind. It's a

Tiepolo's Frescoes

In 1762, King Charles III invited Europe's most celebrated palace painter, Giambattista Tiepolo (1696-1770), to decorate three rooms in the newly built palace. Sixty-six-year-old Tiepolo made the trip from Italy with his two well-known sons as assistants. They spent four years atop scaffolding decorating in the fresco technique, troweling plaster on the ceiling and quickly painting it before it dried.

Tiepolo's translucent ceilings seem to open up to a cloud-filled heaven, where Spanish royals cavort with Greek gods and pudgy cherubs. Tiepolo used every trick to "fool the eye" (*trompe l'oeil*), creating dizzying skyscapes of figures tumbling at every angle. He mixes 2-D painting with 3-D stucco figures that spill over the picture frame. His colorful, curvaceous ceilings blend seamlessly with the flamboyant furniture of the room below. Tiepolo's Royal Palace frescoes are often cited as the final flowering of Baroque and Rococo art.



triumph of the Rococo style, with exotic motifs such as the Chinese people sculpted into the corners of the ceiling. (These figures, like many in the palace, were formed from stucco, or wet plaster.) The fabric gracing the walls was recently restored. Sixty people spent three years replacing the rotten silk fabric and then embroidering back on the silver, silk, and gold threads.

Note the micro-mosaic table—a typical royal or aristocratic souvenir from any visit to Rome in the mid-1800s. The chandelier, the biggest in the palace, is mesmerizing, especially with its glittering canopy of crystal reflecting in the wall mirrors.

The room was the king's dressing room. For a divine monarch, dressing was a public affair. The court bigwigs would assemble here as the king, standing on a platform—notice the height of the mirrors—would pull on his leotards and toy with his wig.

• *In the next room, the silk wallpaper is from modern times—the intertwined "J. C. S." indicates the former monarchs Juan Carlos I and Sofia. Pass through the silk room to reach...*

⑧ **Charles III Bedroom:** Charles III died here in his bed in 1788. His grandson, Ferdinand VII, redid the room to honor the great man. The room's blue color scheme recalls the blue-clad monks of Charles' religious order. A portrait of Charles (in blue) hangs on the wall. The ceiling fresco shows Charles establishing

his order, with its various (female) Virtues. At the base of the ceiling (near the harp player) find the baby in his mother's arms—that would be Ferdy himself, the long-sought male heir, preparing to continue Charles' dynasty.

The chandelier is in the shape of the fleur-de-lis (the symbol of the Bourbon family) capped with a Spanish crown. As you exit the room, notice the thick walls between rooms. These hid service corridors for servants, who scurried about mostly unseen.

⑨ **Porcelain Room:** This tiny but lavish room is paneled with green-white-gold porcelain garlands, vines, babies, and mythological figures. The entire ensemble was disassembled for safety during the civil war. (Find the little screws in the greenery that hides the seams between panels.) Notice the clock in the center with Atlas supporting the world on his shoulders.

⑩ **Yellow Lounge:** This was a study for Charles III. The properly cut crystal of the chandelier shows all the colors of the rainbow. Stand under it, look up, and sway slowly to see the colors glitter. This is not a particularly precious room. But its decor pops because the lights are generally left on. Imagine the entire palace as brilliant as this when fully lit. As you leave the room, look back at the chandelier to notice its design of a temple with a fountain inside.

• *Next comes the...*

⑪ **Gala Dining Hall:** Up to 12 times a year, the king entertains as many as 144 guests at this bowling lane-size table, which can be extended to the length of the room. The parquet floor was the preferred dancing surface when balls were held in this fabulous room. Note the vases from China, the tapestries, and the ceiling fresco depicting Christopher Columbus kneeling before Ferdinand and Isabel, presenting exotic souvenirs and his new, red-skinned friends. Imagine this hall in action when a foreign dignitary dines here. The king and queen preside from the center of the room. Find their chairs (slightly higher than the rest). The tables are set with fine crystal and cutlery (which we'll see a couple of rooms later). And the whole place glitters as the 15 chandeliers (and their 900 bulbs) are fired up. (The royal kitchens, where the gala dinners were prepared, may be open for viewing; ask the staff where to enter.)

• *Pass through the next room of coins and medals, known as the* ⑫ **Cinema Room** *because the royal family once enjoyed Sunday afternoons at the movies here. The royal string ensemble played here to entertain during formal dinners. From here, move into the...*

⑬ **Silver Room:** Some of this 19th-century silver tableware—knives and forks, bowls, salt and pepper shakers, and the big tureen—is used in the Gala Dining Hall on special occasions. If you look carefully, you can see quirky royal necessities, including a baby's silver rattle and fancy candle snuffers.

• *Head straight ahead to the...*

14 Crockery and Crystal Rooms: Philip V's collection of china is the oldest and rarest of the various pieces on display; it came from China before that country was opened to the West. Since Chinese crockery was in such demand, any self-respecting European royal family had to have its own porcelain works (such as France's Sèvres or Germany's Meissen) to produce high-quality knockoffs (and cutesy Hummel-like figurines). The porcelain technique itself was kept a royal secret. As you leave, check out Isabel II's excellent 19th-century crystal ware.

- *Exit to the hallway and notice the interior courtyard you've been circling one room at a time.*

15 Courtyard: You can see how the royal family lived in the spacious middle floor while staff was upstairs. The kitchens, garage, and storerooms were on the ground level. The new king, Felipe VI, married a commoner (for love) and celebrated their wedding party in this courtyard, which was decorated as if another palace room. Spain's royals take their roles and responsibilities seriously—making a point to be approachable and empathizing with their subjects—and are very popular.

- *Between statues of two of the giants of Spanish royal history (Isabel and Ferdinand), you'll enter the...*

16 Royal Chapel: This chapel is used for private concerts and funerals. The royal coffin sits here before making the sad trip to El Escorial to join the rest of Spain's past royalty (see next chapter). The glass case contains the entire body of St. Felix, given to the Spanish king by the pope in the 19th century. Note the "crying room" in the back for royal babies. While the royals rarely worship here (they prefer the cathedral adjacent to the palace), the thrones are here just in case.

- *Pass through the 17 Queen's Boudoir—where royal ladies hung out—and into the...*

18 Stradivarius Room: Of all the instruments made by Antonio Stradivarius (1644-1737), only 300 survive. This is the world's best collection and the only matching quartet set: two violins, a viola, and a cello. Charles III, a cultured man, fiddled around with these. Today, a single Stradivarius instrument might sell for \$15 million.

- *Continue into the room at the far left.*

19 Crown and Scepter Room: The stunning crown and scepter of the last Habsburg king, Carlos II, are displayed in a glass case in the middle. Look for the 2014 proclamations of Juan Carlos' abdication of the crown and Felipe VI's acceptance as king of Spain. Notice which writing implement each man chose to sign with: Juan Carlos' traditional classic pen and Felipe VI's modern one.

- *Walk back through the Stradivarius Room and into the courtyard hallway. Continue your visit through the Antechamber, where ambassadors*

would wait to present themselves, and the Small Official Chambers, where officials are received by royalty and have their photos taken. Walk through two rooms, decorated in blue and red with tapestries and paintings, to the grand finale, the...

20 Throne Room: This room, where the Spanish monarchs preside, is one of the palace's most glorious. And it holds many of the oldest and most precious things in the palace: silver-and-crystal chandeliers (from Venice's Murano Island), elaborate lions, and black bronze statues from the fortress that stood here before the 1734 fire. The 12 mirrors, impressively large in their day, each represent a different month.

The throne stands under a gilded canopy, on a raised platform, guarded by four lions (symbols of power found throughout the palace). The coat of arms above the throne shows the complexity of the Bourbon empire across Europe—which, in the 18th century, included Tirol, Sicily, Burgundy, the Netherlands, and more. Though the room was decorated under Charles III (late 18th century), the throne itself dates only from 1977. In Spain, a new throne is built for each king or queen, complete with a gilded portrait on the back. The room's chairs also indicate the previous monarchs—"JC I" and "Sofia." With Juan Carlos' abdication, the chairs may not have changed names yet.

Today, this room is where the king's guests salute him before they move on to dinner. He receives them relatively informally... standing at floor level, rather than seated up on the throne.

The ceiling fresco (1764) is the last great work by Tiepolo (see sidebar on page 426), who died in Madrid in 1770. His vast painting (88 × 32 feet) celebrates the vast Spanish empire—upon which the sun also never set. The Greek gods look down from the clouds, overseeing Spain's empire, whose territories are represented by the people ringing the edges of the ceiling. Find the Native American (hint: follow the rainbow to the macho red-caped conquistador who motions to someone he has conquered). From the near end of the room (where tourists stand), look up to admire Tiepolo's skill at making a pillar seem to shoot straight up into the sky. The pillar's pedestal has an inscription celebrating Tiepolo's boss, Charles III ("Carole Magna"). Notice how the painting spills over the gilded wood frame, where 3-D statues recline alongside 2-D painted figures. All of the throne room's decorations—the fresco, gold garlands, mythological statues, wall medallions—unite in a multimedia extravaganza.

• *Exit the palace down the same grand stairway you climbed at the start. Cross the big courtyard, heading to the far-right corner to the...*

21 Armory: Here you'll find weapons and armor belonging to many great Spanish historical figures. While some of it was actually for fighting, remember that the great royal pastimes included

hunting and tournaments, and armor was largely for sport or ceremony. Much of this armor dates from Habsburg times, before this palace was built (it came here from the earlier fortress or from El Escorial). Circle the big room clockwise.

In the three glass cases on the left, you'll see the oldest pieces in the collection. In the central case (case III), the shield, sword, belt, and dagger belonged to Boabdil, the last Moorish king, who surrendered Granada in 1492. In case IV, the armor and swords belonged to Ferdinand, the husband of Isabel, and Boabdil's contemporary.

The center of the room is filled with knights in armor on horseback—mostly suited up for tournament play. Many of the pieces belonged to the two great kings who ruled Spain at its 16th-century peak, Charles I and his son Philip II.

The long wall on the left displays the personal armor wardrobe of Charles I (a.k.a. the Holy Roman emperor Charles V). At the far end, you'll meet Charles on horseback. The mannequin of the king wears the same armor and assumes the same pose as in Titian's famous painting of him (in the Prado).

The opposite wall showcases the armor and weapons of Philip II, the king who watched Spain start its long slide downward. Philip, who impoverished Spain with his wars against the Protestants, anticipated that debt collectors would ransack his estate after his death and specifically protected his impressive collection of armor by founding this armory.

The tapestry above the armor once warmed the walls of the otherwise stark palace that predated this one. Tapestries traveled ahead of royals to decorate their living space. They made many palaces "fit for a king" back when the only way to effectively govern was to be on the road a lot.

Downstairs is more armor, a mixed collection mostly from the 17th century. You'll find early guns and Asian armor. The pint-size armor you may see wasn't for children to fight in. It's training armor for noble youngsters, who as adults would be expected to ride, fight, and play gracefully in these clunky getups. Before you leave, notice the life-saving breastplates dimpled with bullet dents (to right of exit door).

- *Climb the steps from the armory exit to the viewpoint.*

View of the Gardens: Looking down from this high bluff, it's clear why rulers have built on this strategically located spot (great for protecting the historic capital, Toledo) since the ninth century. The vast palace backyard, once the king's hunting ground, is now a city park, dotted with fountains.

- *Walk to the center of the huge square and face the palace. Notice how the palace of the king faces the palace of the bishop (the cathedral). Whew. After all those rooms, frescoes, chandeliers, knickknacks, kings,*

and history, consider a final stop in the palace's upstairs café for a well-deserved rest.

BETWEEN THE ROYAL PALACE AND PUERTA DEL SOL

Descalzas Royal Monastery (Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales)

Madrid's most visit-worthy monastery was founded in the 16th century by Philip II's sister, Joan of Habsburg (known to Spaniards as Juana and to Austrians as Joanna). She's buried here. The monastery's chapels are decorated with fine art, Rubens-designed tapestries, and the heirlooms of the wealthy women who joined the order (the nuns were required to give a dowry). Because this is still a working Franciscan monastery, tourists can enter only when the nuns vacate the cloister, and the number of daily visitors is limited. The scheduled tours often sell out—come in the morning to buy your ticket, even if you want an afternoon tour (plans are under way to sell advance tickets online; check www.patrimonionacional.es).

Cost and Hours: €7, visits guided in Spanish or English depending on demand, Tue-Sat 10:00-14:00 & 16:00-18:30, Sun 10:00-15:00, closed Mon, last entry one hour before closing, Plaza de las Descalzas Reales 1, near the Ópera Metro stop and just a short walk from Puerta del Sol, tel. 914-548-800.

MADRID'S MUSEUM NEIGHBORHOOD

Three great museums, all within a 10-minute walk of one another, cluster in east Madrid. The Prado is Europe's top collection of paintings. The Thyssen-Bornemisza sweeps through European art from old masters to moderns. And the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía has a choice selection of modern art, starring Picasso's famous *Guernica*.

Combo-Ticket: If visiting all three museums, you can save a few euros by buying the **Paseo del Arte** combo-ticket (€25.60, sold at all three museums, good for a year). Note that the Prado is free to enter every evening, the Reina Sofía has free hours every night but Tuesday (when it's closed), and the Thyssen-Bornemisza is free on Monday afternoons (see specifics in following listings).

▲▲▲Prado Museum (Museo Nacional del Prado)

With more than 3,000 canvases, including entire rooms of masterpieces by superstar painters, the Prado (PRAH-doh) is my vote for the greatest collection anywhere of paintings by the European masters. The Prado is *the* place to enjoy the great Spanish painter Francisco de Goya, and it's also the home of Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, considered by many to be the world's finest painting, period. In addition to Spanish works, you'll find paintings by Italian

and Flemish masters, including Hieronymus Bosch's fantastical *Garden of Earthly Delights* altarpiece.

Cost: €14, additional (obligatory) fee for occasional temporary exhibits, free Mon-Sat 18:00-20:00 and Sun 17:00-19:00, under age 18 always free.

Hours: Mon-Sat 10:00-20:00, Sun 10:00-19:00, last entry 30 minutes before closing.

Crowd-Beating Tips: It's generally less crowded at lunchtime (13:00-16:00), when there are fewer groups, and on weekdays. It can be busy on free evenings and weekends. Ticket-buying lines can be long. Here are your time-saving options:

1. Use the ticket machines at the Goya entrance (credit cards only).
2. Book an entry time in advance online or by phone (www.museodelprado.es, print out ticket; or tel. 902-107-077, get a reference number). Same-day advance purchase is possible if space is available.
3. Buy a Paseo del Arte combo-ticket (described earlier) at the less-crowded Thyssen-Bornemisza or Reina Sofía museums.
4. Get a Madrid Card beforehand (see page 392).

Getting There: It's at the Paseo del Prado. The nearest Metro stops are Banco de España (line 2) and Atocha (line 1), each a five-minute walk from the museum. It's a 15-minute walk from Puerta del Sol.

Getting In: While there are several entrances, you must buy tickets at the Goya (north) entrance. (Even at free-entry times, you need to pick up a gratis ticket at the Goya ticket window.) Once you have your ticket, you can enter at the Goya, Jerónimos, or Velázquez entrance. Those who book in advance or have a Madrid Card can pick up their tickets at the adjacent Jerónimos entrance, skipping the main line. The Murillo entrance is generally reserved for student groups. Your bags will be scanned as you enter.

Information: Tel. 913-302-800, www.museodelprado.es.

Tours: The €3.50 audioguide is a helpful supplement to my self-guided tour. Given the ever-changing locations of paintings (making my tour tough to follow), the audioguide is a good investment, allowing you to wander and dial up commentary on 250 masterpieces.

Services: The Jerónimos entrance has an information desk, bag check, audioguides, bookshop, WCs, and café. Larger bags must be checked. No drinks, food, backpacks, or large umbrellas are allowed inside.

Photography: Not allowed.

