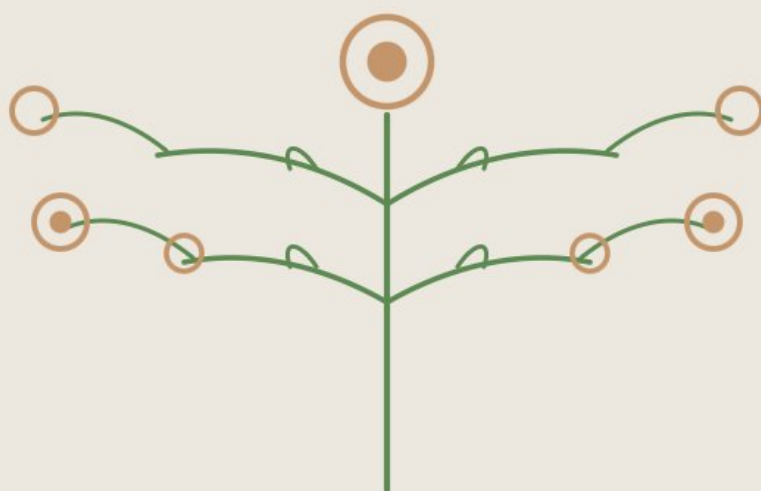




48 HOURS IN

Madrid

BLOOM WHERE YOU WANDER

48 Hours in Madrid

Madrid doesn't ease you in. It pulls you into the middle of things — a wide boulevard lined with 19th-century architecture, a tapas bar so deep into a side street you'd never find it twice, a late lunch that becomes early dinner because nobody here eats on anyone else's schedule. This is a city built for people who move on their own terms.

Over the next 48 hours, you'll cover the Prado, the Retiro, Malasaña, La Latina, Lavapiés, and the food circuit that ties it all together. The pace is purposeful but not punishing — this guide is written for solo travelers who want the city at full depth, not the greatest hits reel.

QUICK FACTS

Language:	Spanish — English widely spoken in tourist areas
Currency:	Euro (€) — ATMs everywhere; card accepted almost universally
Time Zone:	CET (UTC+1) / CEST (UTC+2) in summer
Metro:	12 lines, 302 stations — easiest way to move
Best Season:	Spring (Mar-May) and autumn (Sept-Nov)
Emergency:	112 — universal EU emergency number

DAY ONE

The Museum Triangle

Prado · Thyssen · Reina Sofía · Retiro

8:30 AM

Café Gijón or Café Comercial

Start the way Madrileños start — at a café table with café con leche and a tostada. Café Gijón on Paseo de Recoletos opened in 1888 and still feels like a conversation waiting to be had. Café Comercial in Malasaña is slightly younger but equally serious about mornings. Either is perfect.

INSIDER

Order tostada con tomate: toasted bread rubbed with fresh tomato, olive oil, and salt. This is how Madrid eats breakfast and it will ruin hotel buffets for you forever.

10:00 AM

Museo Nacional del Prado

Madrid's Prado is one of the great art museums of the world and one of the few you can actually see properly in two to three hours. The collection is anchored by Velázquez's Las Meninas, Goya's Black Paintings, and El Greco's long-figured saints. Don't try to do everything — pick a wing and go deep. Book tickets online the day before to skip the queue.

INSIDER

The Prado closes Mondays. On Tuesday–Saturday, the last two hours before closing (6–8pm) are free. Worth knowing if you want a second visit.

1:00 PM

Lunch: Mercado de San Miguel or Taberna La Bola

The Mercado de San Miguel near Plaza Mayor is a beautiful iron market with tapas vendors and good pintxos. For a more local sit-down, Taberna La Bola (c/Bola 5) has been serving cocido madrileño — Madrid's slow-cooked chickpea stew — since 1870. They do a single daily lunch service; arrive at 1:30pm.

INSIDER

Cocido madrileño is served in two courses: first the broth, then the meat and vegetables. Don't ask for them together — that's not how it works.

Retiro to La Latina

The park, the palace district, and the evening tapas run

3:00 PM

Parque del Retiro

Madrid's great park is 350 acres of gardens, fountains, and shaded paths. The Retiro is at its best on a weekday afternoon when the weekend crowds are gone — you'll find it occupied by older Madrileños reading on benches and the occasional rowing boat on the lake. The Crystal Palace (Palacio de Cristal), tucked at the south end, hosts contemporary art exhibitions and is free to enter.

INSIDER

The boating lake (Estanque Grande) rents rowboats by the hour. It's quieter than it looks, and the palace skyline makes for a good solo hour.

5:30 PM

Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum

If the Prado is the main course, the Thyssen is the discovery — a private collection that covers seven centuries of European painting with an intimacy that larger museums can't match. Highlights span Dürer's Christ Among the Doctors, Caravaggio's Saint Catherine, and an excellent Impressionist wing. It's across the road from the Prado and far less crowded. Worth 90 minutes.

INSIDER

Tuesday evenings are free after 12 noon. Check [thyssen.org](https://www.thyssen.org) for current pricing — combined Prado/Thyssen tickets offer modest savings.

8:00 PM

La Latina: Calle de la Cava Baja

Madrid's most famous tapas street is at its best on a weekday evening before 9pm, when the bars are full but not impenetrable. Taberna Tempranillo for wine and cheese, Casa Lucio nearby for the tortilla española that won't let you go back to the version at home, and El Viajero on Plaza de la Cebada for a rooftop beer before dinner.

INSIDER

Madrid eats late. 9pm is early here; 10pm is normal dinner time. If you're hungry at 7, the tapas bars are your friend and the restaurants are still empty.

DAY TWO

Malasaña & the Living City

Barrio culture · Reina Sofía · Gran Vía

9:00 AM

Malasaña: Morning in the Barrio

Malasaña is Madrid's most characterful neighbourhood — a grid of 19th-century streets that became the epicentre of Spain's post-Franco cultural explosion (la movida madrileña) and has never really calmed down. Start at Plaza del Dos de Mayo, have breakfast at Toma Café or Federal Café, and walk the streets before the boutiques open. The neighbourhood is completely safe and enormously rewarding to wander without a plan.

INSIDER

Calle del Pez and Calle Espíritu Santo are the best streets for independent shops, bookstores, and the kind of bar that doesn't have a sign out front.

11:30 AM

Museo Reina Sofía

The Reina Sofía houses Spain's 20th-century art, anchored by Picasso's Guernica — a work you need to see in person to understand its scale and weight. The building itself is a converted hospital, and the collection extends to Dalí, Miró, and an extensive Surrealist wing. Allow two hours minimum.

INSIDER

Guernica is on the second floor (Sala 206). The room is designed to be experienced slowly — the painting is 11 feet tall and 25 feet wide. Don't rush it.

2:00 PM

Lunch: Mercado de Antón Martín or Restaurante El Lacón

Mercado de Antón Martín is the locals' covered market — fresh produce stalls on the ground floor, a handful of excellent lunch bars upstairs. Less touristed than San Miguel, with better prices. El Lacón on Calle Manuel Fernández y González is a proper Galician pulpería — octopus, empanada, and Albariño wine.

INSIDER

Most Madrid restaurants offer a menú del día (two courses, bread, and a drink) at lunch for €12–15. It's the best-value meal in the city and is almost never advertised in English — just ask.

Gran Vía to Lavapiés

Architecture, the Rastro, and a final evening

4:00 PM

Gran Vía & Círculo de Bellas Artes Rooftop

Gran Vía is Madrid's main commercial boulevard — broad, grand, and relentlessly alive. Walk the length of it from Calle Alcalá to Plaza de España, then take the lift to the roof terrace of the Círculo de Bellas Artes (small entry fee). The 360-degree view of the city at late afternoon is one of the best in Europe.

INSIDER

The Círculo rooftop faces west — late afternoon light on the rooftops of the city is exceptional. Plan to spend at least 30 minutes up there.

6:00 PM

Lavapiés: Madrid's Most Alive Neighbourhood

Lavapiés is the most multicultural corner of Madrid — a neighbourhood of immigrant communities, independent theatres, artisan studios, and bars that feel nothing like the tourist-facing city. Walk Calle de Lavapiés and Calle del Olivar, stop at Bar Melo's for a zapatilla (a doorstep-sized bocadillo), and let yourself get pleasantly lost.

INSIDER

The Tabacalera, a former tobacco factory turned cultural centre on Calle de Embajadores, hosts free exhibitions and events — check their programme for the week.

9:00 PM

Final Dinner: Bodega de los Secretos or Casa Alberto

Bodega de los Secretos is an underground restaurant built into 17th-century wine cellars below the city streets — a genuinely extraordinary setting for a solo dinner at the bar. Casa Alberto on Calle de las Huertas has been open since 1827 and hasn't changed its programme much: vermouth at the bar, then a proper Castilian dinner. Either is a worthy final night in Madrid.

INSIDER

In Madrid, eating alone at the bar (la barra) is completely normal and often preferred — you get the chef's eye, faster service, and the best view of the kitchen.

WHERE TO EAT

Madrid's Restaurants & Bars

All within the tourist radius · solo-friendly · no booking required unless noted

Sobrino de Botín

La Latina · Cochinillo asado / Castilian · €€€

In the Guinness Book of Records as the world's oldest restaurant (est. 1725). The suckling pig (cochinillo) is roasted in wood-fired ovens. Book ahead — but worth it for the experience. Solo travellers can usually get a bar seat without a reservation.

Taberna La Bola

Ópera / Centro · Cocido madrileño · €€

This is where you eat cocido madrileño — Madrid's great slow-cooked chickpea and meat stew. Lunch service only. Family-run since 1870. Possibly the most honest restaurant in the city.

Restaurante El Lacón

Huertas · Galician / Pulpería · €€

Best pulpo a la gallega (Galician-style octopus) in the city centre. Also: empanada gallega, padron peppers, and Albariño wine. Come at lunch or book ahead for dinner.

Taberna Tempranillo

La Latina · Wine bar / tapas · €€

Exceptional wine list focused on Spanish regions most visitors have never heard of. The cheese and charcuterie selection is excellent. Bar seating only — perfect for solo travellers.

Federal Café

Malasaña · Australian-style café / brunch · €

Madrid's best brunch spot and one of its best cafés. Long communal tables, excellent flat whites, and an avocado toast that forgives the cliché by being genuinely good. Opens 9am.

WHERE TO EAT • CONTINUED

Bars, Markets & Late Nights

Casa Alberto

Huertas • Traditional taberna • €€

Open since 1827, Casa Alberto is one of Madrid's great old-school tabernas. The house vermouth on tap is non-negotiable as an aperitivo. After that: huevos rotos, callos, and whatever looks right on the chalkboard. Book ahead for weekends.

Bodega de los Secretos

Huertas / Lavapiés border • Spanish contemporary • €€€

The setting — 17th-century wine cellars carved into the bedrock — is extraordinary. The food matches it: contemporary Spanish cooking in a space that's been there for 400 years. Good solo option: book the bar counter.

Bar Melo's

Lavapiés • Bocadillos / Working bar • €

Famous for the zapatilla — a doorstep-thick bocadillo filled with lacon (cured pork shoulder) and cheese, griddled until perfect. Stand at the bar, order one, eat over the counter. This is exactly what it should be.

El Viajero

La Latina • Bar / Rooftop terrace • €€

Three floors: a ground-floor bar, a restaurant in the middle, and a rooftop terrace above the rooftops of La Latina. The food is secondary to the view and the setting. Go at sunset before dinner.

Cervecería Cervantes

Huertas • Beer / tapas • €

Small, unpretentious cervecería near the Thyssen. The tapas come free with each drink — this is still how some Madrid bars operate and it is an excellent thing. Shrimp, croquetas, and a caña (small beer) — a near-perfect afternoon stop.

SOLO DINING IN MADRID

The bar (la barra) is the most natural place to eat alone in Madrid. Order with confidence, make eye contact with the barman, and don't rush. Nobody is watching you — they're eating too.

GETTING AROUND

Madrid Metro & Transport

KEY METRO LINES

L1	Light blue · Pinar de Chamartín ↔ Valdecarros — central spine of the city
L2	Red · Las Rosas ↔ Cuatro Caminos — connects Malasaña/Centro to east
L3	Yellow · Villaverde Alto ↔ Moncloa — serves Lavapiés, Callao, Moncloa
L5	Green · Alameda de Osuna ↔ Casa de Campo — Chueca, Ópera, Callao
L10	Dark green · Hospital Infanta Sofía ↔ Tres Olivos — Nuevos Ministerios
C1	Cercanías (commuter rail) · Airport ↔ Atocha ↔ Sol — airport express

TICKETS & FARES

Single ticket

€1.50–2.00 depending on zones. Tap Visa/Mastercard contactless directly at the gate.

Tourist card

Tarjeta Turística — €8.40/day unlimited metro and bus within Zone A. Available at airport.

Cercanías

Commuter rail from Chamartín, Sol, and Atocha. Cheap and fast for day trips.

Airport Metro

Line 8 (pink) runs from Barajas T1–T4 to Nuevos Ministerios. €3 airport supplement applies.

Taxis

Metered, honest, and clearly white. Supplement for airport and late night. Apps: MyTaxi, Cabify.

Walking

The city centre is completely walkable. Prado to Retiro is 8 min. Gran Vía to Malasaña is 12 min.

BACKUP PLAN

If It Rains in Madrid

Madrid gets fewer rainy days than almost anywhere in Western Europe — but when it does...

The Prado, extended

A wet morning is the best excuse to go back to the Prado without a schedule. Pick one painter — Velázquez, Goya, Rubens — and follow their whole arc through the gallery. The building is warm, the café is good, and the crowds thin out by 11am on a grey day.

Reina Sofía Deep Dive

The second and third floors hold an enormous photography archive and permanent collection beyond Guernica that few visitors explore. A rainy afternoon here is genuinely one of Madrid's best art experiences.

El Corte Inglés, Callao

Madrid's great department store on Callao is seven floors of Spain's best retail and a supermarket floor that doubles as one of the city's best food halls. The rooftop restaurant looks directly at the Gran Vía. Not ironic — it's actually good.

Flamenco at Corral de la Morería

The best flamenco venue in Madrid runs afternoon and evening shows. A rainy afternoon show is more intimate than a weekend evening. Book in advance at the website.

Museo Thyssen Second Visit

Tuesday afternoons the Thyssen is free from noon — an excellent backup if you've already done the Prado. The Impressionist floor is consistently underappreciated.

Real Madrid Museum & Tour

Santiago Bernabéu's museum is absorbing even for non-football fans. The stadium tour covers the pitch, dressing rooms, and the trophy gallery. Book ahead online.

NEIGHBOURHOODS

Madrid District by District

La Latina

Traditional Madrid · Oldest streets in the city

Home to the medieval city, the best tapas bars, and the Sunday Rastro flea market. Calle de la Cava Baja is the spine. Come for the crawl, stay for the vermouth.

Malasaña

Bohemian · La Movida legacy · Best barrio for wandering

Post-Franco cultural explosion neighbourhood that hasn't gentrified its soul away. Good independent coffee, vintage shops, and bars with no name on the door.

Lavapiés

Multicultural · Theatre district · Most authentic neighbourhood

The most ethnically diverse corner of the city — Senegalese restaurants next to traditional tabernas, the Tabacalera arts centre, and stairs that go nowhere useful.

Chueca

LGBTQ-friendly · Design scene · Excellent restaurant concentration

Madrid's most design-forward neighbourhood, centred on Plaza de Chueca. The shopping and restaurant density is exceptional. Very welcoming for solo travelers.

Salamanca

Upscale · Designer shopping · Quiet streets

Madrid's most expensive neighbourhood: the Serrano designer strip, excellent traditional restaurants, and a Sunday-morning quiet that makes it perfect for a slow walk.

Huertas / Barrio de las Letras

Literary Madrid · Wine bars · After-dinner circuit

Named for the writers who lived here in the 17th century. Calles de Huertas and Moratín are the best late-night streets. The Cervantes House is worth a look.

CONNECTIONS & DAY TRIPS

Beyond Madrid — AVE & Cercana Day Trips

Toledo

30 minutes by AVE from Atocha

The medieval capital of Castile — walled city, El Greco Museum, cathedral, and swordmakers. Take the 8:45am AVE (€12-15), spend the morning walking the city walls, and be back in Madrid for late lunch. The best solo day trip from the city.

Segovia

30 minutes by AVE or 90 minutes by bus

The Roman aqueduct, the Alcázar fortress on its promontory, and cochinitillo at Mesón de Cándido below the arches. Take the first AVE (Chamartin-Segovia, €14 each way). A half-day is enough; a full day is better.

El Escorial

50 minutes by Cercanías C-3 from Atocha

Philip II's vast royal monastery-palace in the Sierra de Guadarrama foothills. Austere, massive, and quietly extraordinary. The basilica and royal tombs are the highlights. Cheap day trip and almost no tourists mid-week.

Ávila

90 minutes by AVE + bus

The best-preserved medieval walls in Europe ring this small Castilian city. Walk the full circuit from the top (open daily, €5) and visit the Cathedral of Ávila, built into the city wall itself. The yemas de Ávila (egg-yolk candies from the convents) are obligatory.

Barcelona

2h 30min by AVE from Atocha

Renfe's Ave Alvia connects Madrid Atocha to Barcelona Sants in 2h30m. If your trip allows for an extension, the journey itself is a pleasure — Castilian plateau giving way to the Mediterranean coast. Book in advance on [renfe.com](https://www.renfe.com) for best prices.

Madrid Without the Myths

The schedule is real — adapt to it

Madrid runs on a different clock. Lunch is 2–4pm, dinner starts at 9pm, and the streets don't fill until 11pm. Fighting the schedule is futile. Embracing it means you'll have restaurants to yourself at 8pm and the whole night still in front of you.

Tap water is excellent

Madrid's tap water (agua del grifo) is among the best in Europe — clean, cold, and free from any treatment taste. Asking for tap water in a restaurant is completely normal and expected. Don't buy bottled unless you want to.

The Prado requires a strategy

Without a plan, the Prado is overwhelming. The Collections Guide (free at the entrance, also downloadable) maps the highlights by room. Pick three or four artists and follow their rooms. You can always come back — the Prado allows same-day re-entry.

El Rastro is the right size for solo

Every Sunday morning, the Rastro flea market fills the streets of La Latina — hundreds of stalls, real antiques mixed with tourist junk, food vendors, and the city at its most unguarded. Solo it's completely manageable. Go between 9:30 and 11:30 before it's too crowded.

Heat is serious in July and August

Madrid's summer heat can reach 40°C/104°F. Museums become sanctuaries. Midday (1–5pm) is for interiors. The city's parks have misters installed during heat waves. The shoulder seasons (March–May, September–November) are when Madrid is at its best.

The city is completely solo-friendly

Solo travel is not unusual in Madrid. The bar culture, the café culture, the whole rhythm of public life is built around individuals present in spaces — not couples or groups. You will never feel conspicuous eating, drinking, or exploring alone here.

BEFORE YOU GO — MADRID CHECKLIST

- ☐ Prado & Reina Sofía tickets booked online
- ☐ Sobrino de Botín reservation confirmed (weekends especially)
- ☐ Corral de la Morería flamenco night booked
- ☐ Metro app downloaded (Metro de Madrid)
- ☐ Cercanías rail card loaded (if doing day trips)
- ☐ Tarjeta Turística purchased at airport if doing multiple days
- ☐ AVE tickets booked for Toledo or Segovia (renfe.com)
- ☐ European Health Insurance Card checked / travel insurance active
- ☐ offline Maps.me Madrid map downloaded
- ☐ Someone has your itinerary and hotel details

Your interactive Madrid map is one scan away.

All locations from this guide · color-coded by day · works offline



goingsolo.life/maps/madrid