

Title:

Spain's capital Madrid

Word Count:

940

Summary:

Madrid is the capital of Spain and of Madrid province. It lies in central Spain on the Manzanares River and is almost in the exact geographic centre of the country. It is the focus of its own autonomous region.

Keywords:

spain, madrid, prado, Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, toledo, avila, guadalajara, segovia

Article Body:

Madrid is relatively young when compared to the other great Spanish cities such as Seville and Valencia and so it lacks the traditions of the ancient Andalusian and Castilian towns. It lies on a vast open plateau and is subject to extremes of temperature, the daily variation is sometimes 22°C. The locals sum up their climate as nine months of winter and another 3 months of hell.

It is the nation's chief transportation and administrative centre. Its commercial and industrial life developed very rapidly after the 1890s and today it is nation's chief transportation and administrative centre, rivalled only by Barcelona. Besides it's many manufacturing industries, Madrid are foremost as a banking, education, printing, publishing, tourism, and film production centre.

The general aspect of Madrid is modern, with boulevards and fashionable shopping areas, but the old quarters have picturesque streets. In the heart of the city is the Plaza Mayor, a 17th century square, built in the style of Juan de Herrera. Madrid's loveliest gardens can found the Buen Retiro Park which opened in 1631. At the weekends street performers including musicians, tarot readers and puppet shows for children play in the park but this does bring in the crowds. Other landmarks include, El Pacicio Real, the huge and very opulent royal palace. A restored 1850 opera house and the imposing 19th-century building containing the national library, the national archives, and an archaeological museum. Also noteworthy is the modern University City, which transferred from the town of Alcalá de Henares in 1836.

The best area in Madrid for bars and clubs is Malasana. If you arrive before 1

am you'll find the night yet to get underway. Cool Ballroom is probably numero uno in the city. And don't forget to end the night with the traditional Chocolate con Churrus. Madrid, as you would expect has numerous eating-place but try Casa Mingo in the Rio Manzanares. The house speciality is a whole roast chicken served with a salad and a bottle of cider. On Sunday you should head for, along with most of the population of the city, the Embajadores for the flea market on El Rastro. Most of what is on sale is junk but there are a few stalls with genuine antiques. If you're a football fan try to obtain tickets for one of Real Madrid's home games at the spectacular Santiago Bernabeu Stadium. Here you will see the famous "galacticos" perform, or as is more usual under perform.

Madrid places host to three superb art museums, the Prado, which houses one of the finest art collections in the world including works by Veleazquez, Domenikos Theotokopoulos, Goya, Murillo, Ribera, Hieronymus Bosch, Rubens, Botticelli, Mantegna, Titian, Rembrandt, Mengs, Poussin and Gainsborough. The Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum is housed in the renovated Villahermosa Palace and is home to one of the most wide ranging private collections of European art. The Queen Sofia Museum of modern art includes turn of the 20th century Catalan Modernism, Juan Gris' cubism, the bronze sculptures of Pablo Gargallo, some 20 canvases by Salvador Dali and Picasso's work condemning the German bombing the town of Guernica in the Basque country during the Spanish civil war. Also worth a visit is the Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales which holds an interesting collection of treasures.

Madrid was first mentioned in the 10th century as a fortress of the Moors. Alfonso VI of Castile drove them out in 1083. The Cortes of Castile met in Madrid several times, and Ferdinand and Isabella as well as Emperor Charles V often resided there, but Madrid became the capital of Spain only in 1561, in the reign of Philip II. The city developed slowly at first, but it expanded rapidly in the 18th century under the Bourbon kings. The royal palace and the Prado date from that period. A popular uprising against the French took place at Madrid on May 2, 1808 at the beginning of the Peninsular War. A fierce battle was fought in the city's central square, the Puerta del Sol. In reprisal, hundreds of citizens were shot at night along the Prado promenade. Goya immortalized the events of that day with two of his most celebrated paintings, both can be seen in the Prado gallery. Madrid again played a heroic role in the Spanish civil war, when, under the command of General José Miaja, it resisted 29 months of siege by the Franco's Nationalist forces, suffering several bombardments and air attacks. It finally surrendered in late March 1939 effectively bringing the conflict to an end.

Alcalá de Henares lies some 30 km to the east of Madrid, on the Henares River. Once surrounded by wheat fields, the building of a major road has drawn it into

the suburban orbit of Madrid. Chemicals, plastics, electrical appliances, leather, and china are produced in the town. Among the landmarks are a Gothic collegiate church and the former archiepiscopal palace. The new University of Alcalá de Henares was founded in 1977.

The town was called Complutum in Roman times. It is famous as the former seat of a great university founded in 1508 which subsequently transferred to Madrid in 1836. Also as the birthplace of Cervantes, Ferdinand I and Katherine of Aragon. And lastly as the scene of the Cortes in which Alfonso XI promulgated the Ordenamiento de Alcalá. The Spanish civil war saw the town severely damaged.

Other towns within the autonomous region of Madrid include Toledo, which preceded Madrid as the Spanish capital. Avila, whose old walls remain largely intact and a walk along them provides superb views of the town within and the harsh Castilian landscape outside. Segovia and it's ancient aqueduct which is an example of Roman engineering at it's very best and Guadalajara.