



World Heritage in the Madrid Region



Comunidad
de Madrid



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The World Heritage list is somewhat like the contemporary version of the “wonders of the world”. Only certain exceptional places with great heritage wealth due to their cultural or natural legacy can win this recognition. Spain has the honour of being the third country with the most World Heritage sites, only surpassed by Italy and China. In the Madrid Region we have the good fortune to have five of these enclaves:

- The Monastery and Royal Site of San Lorenzo de El Escorial
- University and Historic Centre of Alcalá de Henares
- The Cultural Landscape of Aranjuez
- The Paseo del Prado and Buen Retiro. Landscape of Arts and Sciences.
- The Montejo Beech Forest

A Shared Heritage

One hour more or less is what it takes to reach each one of the World Heritage enclaves from the centre of the capital. There are few regions around the world with so much cultural wealth gathered together in such a small space and so accessible in such a short time.

The Madrid Region hosts these sites which UNESCO has included in its World Heritage list according to its definition: “Cultural heritage refers to monuments, groups of buildings and sites with historical, aesthetic, archaeological, scientific, ethnological or anthropological value. Natural heritage refers to outstanding physical, biological and geological formations, habitats of

threatened species of animals and plants and areas of scientific, conservation or aesthetic value.” (UNESCO, World Heritage Information Kit, 2008).

This guide helps us to explore these emblematic places and invites us to enjoy them in the fullest sense.

To award the World Heritage label, UNESCO receives the candidatures proposed by the different countries and verifies that they meet one or more of the ten criteria that give entry to this select list compiled since 1972. The criteria are laid down in the “Operational Guidelines”, the Committee’s main document, and are regularly reviewed as they evolve in parallel with the development experienced by the actual ‘World Heritage’ concept. The goal, in all cases, is to ensure that future generations can inherit the treasures of the past.

Below we enumerate the criteria followed by the Committee for including these assets in the World Heritage List:

Cultural

- I. Represent a masterpiece of human creative genius.
- II. Exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town planning or landscape design.

- III. Bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared.
- IV. Be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history.
- V. Be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land use or sea use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change.
- VI. Be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.

Natural

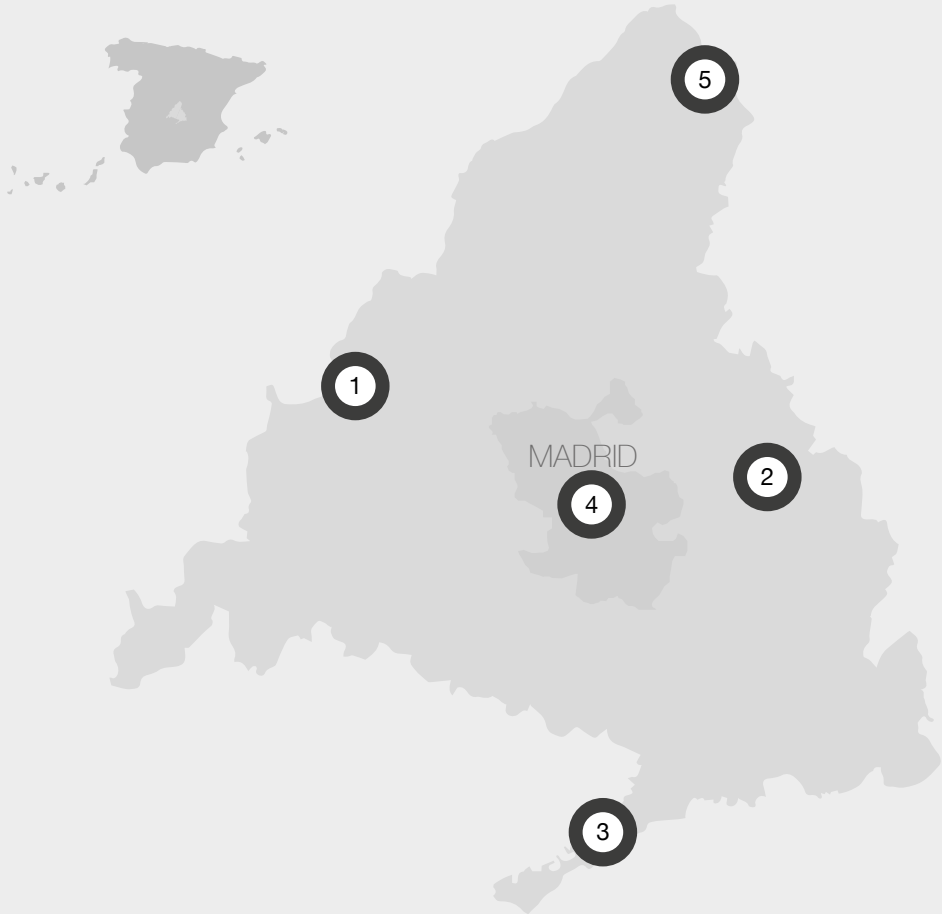
- VII. Contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance.
- VIII. Be outstanding examples representing major stages of the earth's history, including the record of life, significant ongoing geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features.
- IX. Be outstanding examples representing ongoing ecological and biological processes in the evolution of ecosystems.

X. Contain the most important and significant natural habitats for the conservation of biodiversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

About this Guide

In the pages that follow we present you with the World Heritage enclaves in the Madrid Region. Each one of the chapters we devote to them is divided into two sections: the first part corresponds to the details of the UNESCO Declaration, with its definition, date of designation and the criteria followed by the Committee for including these assets in the World Heritage List, together with explanatory texts and curious facts that allude to them. In the second part we expand the information on the enclaves and include other details of interest on the localities, their history, traditions and setting. The Guide ends with a proposal of cycling routes for enjoying these sites in an original, environmentally friendly manner.

We are convinced that every traveller who comes to these destinations will find reasons for enjoying them and reasons for returning. In the Madrid Region we feel privileged, which is why we would like to invite you to enjoy this legacy with us. We are proud to share it with those who visit us.



1. San Lorenzo de El Escorial y El Escorial
2. Alcalá de Henares
3. Aranjuez
4. Landscape of Light, Madrid
5. Hayedo de Montejo beech forest



World Heritage in San Lorenzo de El Escorial



*Monastery of San
Lorenzo de El Escorial*



Full Designation: The Monastery and Royal Site of San Lorenzo de El Escorial

Date of Designation: 1984

Criteria of the World Heritage List: I, II and VI.

Reference: 318

Purpose: "Built at the end of the 16th century on a plan in the form of a grill, the instrument of the martyrdom of St Lawrence, the Monastery of El Escorial stands in an exceptionally beautiful site in Castile. Its austere architecture, a break with previous styles, had a considerable influence on Spanish architecture for more than half a century. It was the retreat of a mystic king and became, in the last years of Philip II's reign, the centre of the greatest political power of the time."

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Criteria Applied by the Committee for Including these Assets in the World Heritage List

Criterion (I): *"The Monastery and Site of El Escorial, Madrid, represents a masterpiece of human creative genius, where the great collective work of important artists was subject to the will and orders of the historic figure of King Philip II."**

This criterion is shared by a quarter of the sites with World Heritage designation by UNESCO. The works on the Monastery of

San Lorenzo de El Escorial were initiated according to the plans drawn up by Juan Bautista de Toledo. The task was immediately continued by Juan de Herrera who, in opposition to the more traditional Plateresque line, defined a restrained style that was completely new in Spain. Juan de Herrera developed a singular interpretation of classic Renaissance architecture, using innovative architectural solutions.

Criterion (II): *“The Monastery and Site of El Escorial expresses an important interchange of human values and symbolises the ideological and artistic expression that influenced developments in architecture, monumental arts and landscape design during the Spanish Golden Age. The architectural ensemble is an example of the palace convents and their urban and landscape design built by the European Christian monarchies. Its final 18th-century layout makes it one of the most representative examples of the Real Sitio – the courtiers’ residential town – developed by the monarchy as a seat and reflection of power.”**

Virtually four in every ten sites selected by UNESCO meet the requirements established by this criterion. The construction of the Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial is inspired in the descriptions found in the Bible of the Temple of Solomon and represented a revolution in Renaissance architecture. Its author, Juan de Herrera, developed his own *Herrerian* style, which was to be repeated not only in buildings in which Herrera directly took part, such as Valladolid Cathedral or Segovia’s Casa de la Moneda, but also inspired other 16th- and 17th-century religious buildings such as the church of San Bernabé, in the neighbouring town of El Escorial, built by Francisco de Mora, one of Juan de Herrera’s collaborators. This way of building would also extend to America, its principal example being Cuzco Cathedral in Peru. Its influence was not limited to the 17th century, since it was recovered in the 20th by architects on both sides of the

political and cultural divide of post-Civil War Spain (1936/39): republicans such as Secundino Zuazo (in Madrid’s Nuevos Ministerios), or Francoists such as Luis Moya (in Gijón’s Universidad Laboral) or Luis Gutiérrez Soto (in the Air Force Headquarters, in Madrid).

The Monastery is not just the cradle of the *Herrerian* style. Since its creation in the 16th century, when it began to be known as “the Eighth Wonder of the World” (anticipating its inclusion in the World Heritage lists), it became a cultural centre of the first order. Its library contained a veritable “cabinet of wonders”, a collection that encompassed all of the world’s knowledge and contained art treasures commissioned and collected by the greatest patron of the era, king Philip II, together with riches and curiosities issued from the Hispanic provinces of the New World as well as other products from nature. It was all gathered together in one of the best libraries of the time, a compendium of the era’s technological and humanistic knowledge. Little of the cabinet has been preserved due to successive destructions, but the library still contains Greek, Arabic or Hebrew manuscripts as well as geographical, astronomic and navigational instruments such as world globes, astrolabes or armillary spheres. The art collection conserved in this palace/monastery also includes excellent examples of painting and sculpture, with works by Hieronymus Bosch, Roger van der Weyden, Luca Giordano, Pompeo and Leone Leoni or Benvenuto Cellini, among others.

Criterion (VI): *“The Monastery and Site of El Escorial is directly associated with very important historic personalities in European and world history such as the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and all his descendants from the House of Austria and the House of Bourbon who occupied the Spanish throne, in particular Philip II. It embodied, in an exemplary way, the ideology of the society and the austere pomp and ceremony with which its divine and worldly majesty was represented.”**

Approximately a fifth of World Heritage sites fulfil this criterion, which alludes, as well as to artistic production, to the intangible heritage that forms part of a community’s collective memory. In San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Christmas plays a

central role, captured in the representation of a vast living nativity in one of the town’s squares.

Gastronomy is another tradition very much alive in all of Madrid’s enclaves included in the World Heritage list. The well-known *tapas* are commonplace everywhere in the Madrid Region. In fact, the birth of this gastronomic sub-genre is popularly attributed to the visits made by Philip II to the Site of El Escorial, when the king ordered the tumblers of wine to be covered with a slice of bread so that dust could not fall into them.

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San Lorenzo de El Escorial y El Escorial

***Monastery, royal palace, basilica, pantheon,
library, college and courtiers' residences in
a spectacular natural enclave***

Of the four UNESCO World Heritage sites of the Madrid Region, the Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial was the first one to be listed, in 1984. The ensemble represents the vast collective work of important artists at the service of the Crown. As in other cases (“The Alhambra and the Generalife”, “The architectural works of Gaudí”, “Burgos Cathedral” or the “Mosque of Cordoba”), it was obvious that monumentality had to be combined with their setting. Specifically, the UNESCO declaration on the Monastery was clear right from the start, since it held that this site could not be understood without taking the setting that surrounds it very much into account, an opinion absolutely shared by all the inhabitants of San Lorenzo who have the privilege of walking in areas such as La Herrería, sheltered by the Monastery.



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*Main staircase
of the Monastery*

The Works

Two motivations could have led Philip II to commission the monument. The first one, to commemorate a victory. Thus, a letter written to the Order of St Jerome makes it clear that he wished to build this monastery to celebrate the victory at the battle of Saint Quentin in 1557, which took place on St Laurence day. The second reason was his wish to erect on the site a mausoleum to the memory of his parents and the entire royal family. Today this mausoleum, the work of Juan Gómez de Mora following the plans of Juan Bautista Crescenzi, contains the sepulchres of most of the monarchs of the Habsburg and Bourbon dynasties, from his predecessor Charles I of Spain to our days.

The works on the Monastery started in 1563, directed by Juan Bautista de Toledo. But since he died practically at their outset, Juan de Herrera took charge of the project. Herrera's influence is such that he even gave his name to an architectural style: *Herrerian*. The last stone was laid on 13 September 1584. The director of the works was Friar Antonio de Villacastín, although Philip II himself supervised the plans and would often come to check on the progress of the ensemble.



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The Royal Sites

The Monastery and Site of San Lorenzo de El Escorial symbolizes the ideological and artistic expression that influenced the evolution of the architecture, monumental arts and landscape design of the Spanish Golden Age. Its late 18th-century layout makes this one of the most representative examples of a “*Real Sitio*” (a “Royal Site”, the residential town of the court) developed by the monarchy to reflect its power.

The royal sites became a phenomenon across Europe, becoming spaces which the monarchy used as places for recreation or rest and among which were the summer or winter residences. They reached their peak in the 18th century, associated with the romantic idea of nature and the recovery of the humanistic spirit of the Renaissance.

In Spain, Patrimonio Nacional (National Heritage) superintends and manages these assets which the

Crown, retaining its right of use, assigns to the State for the enjoyment of all Spanish citizens. Our royal sites (Royal Palace of Madrid, Royal Palace of El Pardo, La Granja de San Ildefonso in Segovia or the Monastery of San Jerónimo de Yuste, among others) make up some of the most outstanding cultural ensembles in Europe.



[+info](#)
[Patrimonio](#)
[Nacional](#)

On the Site

The Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial is an architectural marvel. This is stated in UNESCO's Designation as a World Heritage Site. The main, west-facing façade is 207 metres in length and has two lateral doors corresponding to the entrance to the College of Alfonso XII and the Augustinian convent. In the centre, between six Doric columns, is the building's main entrance. Above is a body of Ionic columns in which stand out Philip II's family crest and a great statue of St Laurence, carved in granite by Juan Bautista Monegro.

Inside the building, you have to visit the Monarchs' Courtyards, the Basilica, the Library, the Monarchs' Pantheon, the Pantheon of the Infantes, the Palaces and the Chapter Halls. The guided tours, which last approximately one hour, are an excellent way of enjoying the site. Explanations are given on the rooms' functions, highlighting the artistic aspects of the building itself, the furniture and other pieces contained in these palaces as well as other curiosities of the history of the Spanish monarchy. Devotees of genealogy will enjoy the overview



Library of the Monastery

of the dynasties and their relatives, whose remains lie in the Royal Pantheon.



+info
Constructional
fabric and order

The Monastery's Jewels

The artworks are one of the most remarkable aspects of this site. Its paintings, sculptures, choir books, scrolls, liturgical ornaments and other sumptuary, sacred and court objects also turn it into a museum. Its complex iconography and iconology have merited the most widely



*Charles III Royal
Coliseum Theatre*

varying interpretations by historians, admirers and critics. The entire Monastery of El Escorial crystallises the ideas and the will of its driving force, king Philip II, a prince of the Renaissance.

Prominent among the paintings is a complete collection of works from the Flemish, German, Italian and Spanish schools of the 15th to 17th centuries. We will admire some breathtaking works such as the Martyrdom of St Maurice by El Greco that presides over this nine-room art gallery, which also contains canvases by painters such as Titian,

Ribera, Tintoretto, Veronese, Velázquez, Bosch or Zurbarán.

The monastery's other great jewel is the Library, a long vaulted room with frescoes by Peregrino Tibaldi on themes taken from arts and letters and flanked by beautiful shelves filled with interesting works which, together with the collection of Madrid's National Library, are certainly the two spaces that best conserve the humanistic wealth of what was once the Spanish Empire. The library holds around 5,000 manuscripts, of which 400 feature miniatures (Arabic codices of Muley Zidan and 10th-century Christian ones, the *Cantigas* of Alfonso X the Wise, with 213 miniatures recreating aspects of 13th-century life, or the Persian poems of Mohamed Hafiz, which date from the 16th century and transport us to the Orient, among others).

The Culture Today

For three centuries the monastery was home to the Order of St Jerome, initially led by Father Sigüenza, who supported Philip II during the building works. This order was undoubtedly close to the monarchs, but due to the vicissitudes of history the monastery is today run by a different one, the Order of St Augustine. More than 40 monks continue the choir project whose tradition dates back to the origins of the architectural ensemble and where students from the ages of eight to eighteen are trained in the musical arts as boarders or day pupils.

These "boy singers" participate in the most important church services held in the Basilica of El Escorial

throughout the year (Christmas, Easter, masses of the main festivities), in local services (Festivity of the Sacred Form of El Escorial, Saint Laurence and Saint Augustine) and in those associated with the Spanish Royal Household. Listening to them is without a doubt a golden opportunity to delight in the wonderful acoustics of the site, admire the voices and enjoy an almost mystical moment. Music and other scenic arts can also be enjoyed in spaces such as the Royal Coliseum of Charles III (which opened in 1771) or the new auditorium theatre of the Madrid Region. Sometimes we can even revel in the culture in the open air, in the monastery square where they have made use of the large esplanades to stage pop-rock concerts.



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Royal Coliseum
of Charles III



+info
Auditorium
Theatre



+info
Choir School
of El Escorial

The Town

As we head into the municipality we leave behind the building's most austere façades. One of the houses of trades attached to the monastery square – known as the First one – houses the House of Culture, the Manuel Andújar municipal library, an exhibition room and the Tourist Office and Interpretation Centre, where we can learn about the town's history.

From here it is a more than pleasant stroll around the urban centre and its main streets such as Floridablanca and other nearby ones such as the calle del Rey, small squares such as Jacinto Benavente and Constitución, offering the finest Castilian food in bars and restaurants. Particularly outstanding are the fried potatoes with beef, lamb and pork meat, homemade croquettes, fried fish, scrambled eggs with mushrooms or grilled vegetables... without overlooking other more typical Madrid and mountain dishes such as snails, the potato omelette called *tortilla* and cured sausages served as an appetizer. The *cocido* stew (chick peas, meat and vegetables), tripe and garlic soups are also commonly found dishes and deserve to be highlighted. As a main dish we recommend veal from the Sierra de Guadarrama, which is cooked on burning embers, and lamb and suckling pig, which are oven-roasted. Sea bream and salt cod are commonplace, and for dessert aniseed doughnuts, puff pastry cylinders filled with custard or *mantecados*, almond cakes.

From among the local sweets we also recommend the *bizcotelas* of San Lorenzo, delicious sponge cakes made from egg yolk and covered in chocolate that give us the necessary energy to continue the tour and which can be found in the local pastry shops. The recipe already appeared as '*Vizcocho de Palacio Real*' in the book "Arte de Repostería" (Art of Pastry Making) by Juan de la Mata, a confectioner at the Court in 1747.

In summer, almost all of the little squares are dotted with pleasant terraces in which to sit and sip on a glass of beer or eat a tasty ice cream or chocolate with

churros. We suggest you take some warm clothing because the cooler mountain air can surprise us at nightfall.

Strolling around the lanes in search of an attractive bar or restaurant you may discover that the past life of the monastery is also transferred to the town itself. Plans and guides contain multiple references to constructions that were the home of people associated with the court either because they were nobles or artists at its service. Among them is the house of Jacometrezo, one of the oldest in the town together with the Monastery itself, so called because it is believed to have belonged to the court sculptor who made the tabernacle of the Basilica of El Escorial. We also highlight the House of Doctors and Professors, a project by Juan de Herrera dating from 1583 to house the Art and Theology professors of the College located outside the monastery premises, since these lay persons could not reside inside the convent. Its construction was the origin of what would become the first street in the town, calle Floridablanca.

In summer it is customary to be visited by professors and academics from different disciplines and specialities as well as prominent political personalities and even the odd Nobel laureate. We may attend the conferences they impart or participate in their symposia, since they are present at the renowned courses offered by one of the oldest and most prestigious Spanish-speaking universities, the Universidad Complutense of Madrid. What used to be known as the House of the Families of the Infantes Carlos María Isidro and Francisco de Paula,

attributed to Juan de Villanueva, houses one of the educational centres of this university.



[+info](#)
Summer
university

The Market

In the late 18th century the Government of San Lorenzo de El Escorial promoted its last great work, consisting of a *“Large house for storing wine, groceries, fish, pork and other trades and rooms”*, in other words, a *“market”*. Juan de Villanueva was commissioned to undertake the project and the works took from 1797 to 1806. Although modified by later works and uses, today it still houses a retail space and it is worth visiting to view the local products and see how the granite from the mountain is here present in the two floors of this public building.



[+info](#)
The Market

The King's Carriage Sheds

It is interesting to view the Museo Cocheras del Rey, the Museum of the King's carriage sheds, a construction dating from the 18th century that has also undergone different uses and which currently includes a restaurant and a bookshop. In the display rooms you can view carriages and coaches, paintings, engravings, costumes, etc., all of it relating to the only means of transport from the time of Charles III up to the second half of the 19th century: riding and draught animals.



[+info](#)
The King's
Carriage Sheds

Gardens

If there is one thing of which the Monastery of San Lorenzo can boast it is the beautiful gardens, which are free to enter (which is unusual in Europe and greatly appreciated by visitors). The main and north façades, the first ones the visitor sees, are surrounded by esplanades known as *lonjas*, although the Monastery's most beautiful façade is the south-facing one with its 161 metres in length and a two-storey arcaded gallery of 77 arches. The gardens (the King's Private Garden, the Friars' Garden and the Garden of the Convalescents) resulted from the monarch's interest in hiring the best national and foreign professionals. They contained numerous varieties of plants brought here from the New World, many of them medicinal plants. The inside of the Monastery Cloister or the Evangelists' Courtyard contained a collection of different flower varieties which, thanks to the optimal orientation of this space, could be enjoyed even in the cold winter. Both the gardening and the botany reveal the painstaking, specialized work of those long-gone gardeners whose toil is carried on today with the same care and resolve by the Monastery staff. There are multiple spaces in which to walk and behold the views of the kitchen gardens and the countryside of La Herrería.

Master Architects

Following in the footsteps of Juan Bautista de Toledo and Juan de Herrera, other architects completed the main grid of constructions until well into the 18th century. Of the many names of great artists we could mention, we highlight two for the way they succeeded in connecting the complex with the small town.



Interior of Monastery

The first one is Francisco de Mora, who helped to urbanize the area to the west of the Monastery and joined it up with the town, designing the boulevard of Los Álamos leading to the old road to Madrid, along which the Court would arrive. This boulevard today runs almost parallel to the road into the town of San Lorenzo and is surrounded by recently built houses.

The second one is Juan de Villanueva, whose influence physically marks an entire historical stage in the town. Under the Bourbon dynasty, and after a few prior royal decrees ordering the development of the enclave, Villanueva gave the town the configuration we enjoy today. He is also the author of some palatial houses and rooms.

Other Royal Residences

To understand the Monastery and the landscape that made it famous worldwide we have to visit its surroundings, where we encounter different royal residences known as “*casitas*”, little houses. The architect Juan de Villanueva built them for the royal progeny and they were devised for recreation right from the start. Separate from the stiff rigour of the court, these “little houses” were built for playing and enjoying the arts and other interests as well as for more “guilty” pleasures... This type of architecture is often found in European royal sites.

The Casita del Infante, or Casita de Arriba (Upper Little House), was built for the Infante Gabriel de Borbón, the son of Charles III, and took inspiration from Italian villas. It was conceived for enjoying music, among other uses. The construction is freestanding, surrounded by terraced gardens from which some wonderful vistas of the Monastery can be enjoyed.

The Casita del Príncipe, or Casita de Abajo (Lower Little House) was erected as a pleasure pavilion for the use of Charles IV, at the time still Prince of Asturias. It is accessed along a beautiful poplar-lined boulevard. The little house is surrounded by gardens with benches for sitting down and admiring the ensemble. Its main façade is considered to be a precursor of the Prado Museum façade and it is not unusual to find painters taking sketches or making engravings. Although it has been repeatedly reformed, the interior still contains frescoes by Lucas Jordán, royal furniture from the era and a collection of paintings, including a couple of Goyas and

works by other renowned authors such as Brambillia, Neefs, Panini, Teniers or Van Ostade.



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Patrimonio
Nacional



+info
Casita
del Príncipe

The Train of Philip II

San Lorenzo can easily be reached by public or private transport. One of the most interesting conveyances is the Train of Philip II, a tourist train covering the Madrid - El Escorial route. It departs from Madrid's Príncipe Pío station and, after entering the Sierra de Guadarrama, arrives in El Escorial, the gateway to a different sort of day in which to enjoy the huge heritage, cultural, artistic and gastronomic offer available in both the Royal Site of San Lorenzo del Escorial (known as the "upper" village") and in the Loyal Village of El Escorial (the "lower" village).

The train is made up of a locomotive and 20th-century coaches. Thanks to having been carefully restored, when you climb aboard any of the 4 coaches and compartments for up to 8 people, with their lovely finishings, you will enjoy an exciting trip to another era.



+info
The Train
Of Philip II



Dome of Monastery

Popular Festivities

San Lorenzo has some fantastic popular festivities. The best-known is undoubtedly the Pilgrimage of the Virgin of Gracia, listed as being of National Tourist Interest. The pilgrimage starts on the Friday preceding the second Sunday in September, so as well as enjoying the festivity, the start of autumn can also be the perfect time for visiting this World Heritage site and the surroundings of the monastery.

The festivities start with a floral offering to the Virgin in her sanctuary of calle Floridablanca and culminates on the Sunday when, after several dawn events, at 10 in the

morning the Pilgrimage procession comprised of the governing boards of the Fellowships of the Ladies and Pilgrims of the Virgin of Gracia, authorities, clubs, groups of pilgrims and private individuals sets out from the Square of the Royal Monastery – dressed in traditional costumes, with their carts and vehicles embellished with mountain, popular or religious motifs – heading towards the estate of La Herrería to enjoy the day there and eat the food prepared for the purpose, singing mountain ditties and dancing the *Rondón*. Prizes are presented to the best-embellished carts at the end of the festivity, which ends with the throwing of petals at the Virgin on the return journey to the sanctuary after a day of fun, tradition and culture.



[+info](#)
[Hermandad](#)
[de romeros](#)

Sierra de La Herrería

The mountain range of La Herrería, located to the south of the Monastery of San Lorenzo del Escorial, is one of the best-preserved settings in the Madrid region. Different wooded areas covered in Pyrenean oak alternate with meadowlands dotted with ash and oak. The best place for viewing La Herrería is from the garden of the Friars in the Monastery itself – or from the vantage point of Philip II's Chair. According to legend, the king watched the progress of the Monastery works from the steps of this chair carved out of a huge rock, from where we have a wonderful view of the Monastery, with Monte Abantos in the background. Abantos is one of the favourite destinations of mountain sports devotees and

has an environmental education centre, the Luis Ceballos Arboretum, which offers the possibility of learning about the area's ecosystems in a guided 2.2-km tour.



+info
Arboreto
Luis Ceballos

La Granjilla

What was once the historical park of La Fresneda, today known as La Granjilla, is located at a distance of three kilometres from El Escorial along the M-505 road. This spot boasts an important natural, historical and artistic heritage. Here we find a palace in the Herrerian style built by order of Philip II in the 16th century for his personal use and comprising small houses, ponds and gardens in a Renaissance style that display one of the monarch's least-known facets, his great love of nature and hydraulic devices. These passions are evident on any of the routes around the estate.

In addition the property has an adjacent convent (the House of the Friars and the Avendaño Tower) and the church of San Juan Bautista, the parish church of La Fresneda. One part of these spaces is currently for private use and used for events (weddings, business meetings, etc.).



+info
La Granjilla

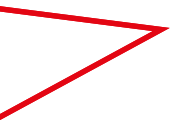
Crossing of the Summits

Hiking devotees have a date on 15 August, the day of a festivity devoted to the local saint. The Travesía de las Cumbres, the Crossing of the Summits, is an activity to which around a thousand five hundred people sign up every year. The route covers more than 22 kilometres around the peaks of Madrid's Sierra surrounding the municipality of San Lorenzo de El Escorial. We are certain that, in his quest to reconnoitre the territory, Philip II and his councillors must have covered more than one section of this route, which offers spectacular vistas of the mountain range and gives glimpses of the famous construction that transformed the landscape of El Escorial forever.



[+info](#)
[Travesía de](#)
[las Cumbres](#)





World Heritage in Alcalá de Henares

*Renaissance facade
of the Archiepiscopal
Palace of Alcalá de
Henares*



Full designation: University and Historic Precinct of Alcalá de Henares

Date of Designation: 1998

Criteria of the World Heritage List: II, IV and VI

Reference: 876

Purpose: “Founded by Cardinal Jiménez de Cisneros in the early 16th century, Alcalá de Henares was the world’s first planned university city. It was the original model for the Civitas Dei (City of God), the ideal urban community which Spanish missionaries brought to the Americas. It also served as a model for universities in Europe and elsewhere.”

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Criteria Applied by the Committee for Including these Assets in the World Heritage List

Criterion (II): *“Alcalá de Henares was the first city to be designed and built solely as the seat of a university, and was to serve as the model for other centres of learning in Europe and the Americas.”**

The University of Alcalá de Henares was built in the mid-16th century and is an outstanding work of the Spanish Renaissance. The oldest building in the complex is the Halls of Residence of San Ildefonso, the current seat of the University of Alcalá de Henares. It was ordered to be built at the initiative of Cardinal Cisneros, a

veritable political, religious and cultural driving force in the time of the Catholic Monarchs. It was the first university campus to be built for that purpose and became a model exported to different universities. The architect of the new university was the Madrid native Rodrigo Gil de Hontañón. The continuer of a family tradition of builders, Gil de Hontañón designed other pinnacle Renaissance works such as Segovia and Salamanca cathedrals and the church tower of Colmenar Viejo in Madrid. The imposing façade of the San Ildefonso residence is

today one of the most representative images of Alcalá de Henares, but we should not forget that behind it there is a spectacular monumental ensemble opening on to various cloisters where Alcalá's centuries-old university tradition remains alive.

Academic centres have been spectacular sites since their origins. This is reflected in the World Heritage list. In Spain, together with Alcalá de Henares, we have the University of Salamanca, the oldest in our country, listed as a World Heritage Site in 1988. The Medina of Fez, deemed to be the world's oldest university, was designated a World Heritage Site in 1981. Some universities are recently gaining prominence for symbolizing social and cultural values, such as the central campus of the University City of Mexico's National Autonomous University (UNAM), one of the most important symbols of modernity in Latin America.

Criterion (IV): *"The concept of the ideal city, the City of God (Civitas Dei), was first given material expression in Alcalá de Henares, from where it was widely diffused throughout the world."**

Alcalá de Henares, a city of Roman origin (the ruins of Complutum can be visited, barely a kilometre from the centre of Alcalá) has always been a place of intense cultural exchange, especially since the creation of the current urban nucleus in the Middle Ages, then known as El Burgo de Santiuste. Three cultures were coexisting at the time in the city and although, as occurs today, that coexistence was not

always a peaceful one, especially in the second half of the 15th century, they have all left their mark on Alcalá's urban design. The City Hall has recently signaled three areas in the old quarter, making it easier for visitors to identify them, walk around them and recognize their identifying traits.

Alcalá's Jewish quarter spread out on both sides of calle Mayor, between calle Santiago and calle Escritorios, and ended in what today is Plaza de Cervantes, the very heart of the city. Although transformed, some of its principal buildings are still standing, such as the Synagogue, which was on calle Santiago and was later occupied by a Capuchin convent, or one of the butcher's shops whose location coincides with that of Cervantes' birth house. Prominent among the illustrious Jews born in Alcalá is Alfonso de Zamora, one of the theologians charged with transcribing the Complutensian Polyglot Bible which for the first time gathered together in a single volume the biblical texts in Hebrew, Aramaic, Latin and Greek.

The Moorish quarter took up the streets immediately adjacent to Plaza de las Bernardas. The great mosque was also on calle Santiago and would later, in the late 15th century, be transformed by Cardinal Cisneros into the church of Santiago.

Finally, the Christian quarter grew next to the cathedral and was enlarged with the construction of the Archbishop's Palace and the walls that enclose the historic district. The Holy and Distinguished Magisterial Cathedral of St Justus and St

Pastor of Alcalá de Henares, a Gothic late-15th-century work, is, together with Leuven Cathedral in Belgium, one of only two cathedrals in the world known as magisterial, meaning that all of their canons have to be doctors of theology.

This role as a cultural crossroads would grow in the late 15th century with the creation of the University of Alcalá by Cardinal Cisneros. It educated illustrious personalities of the Spanish Golden Age and the University attracted intellectuals from the whole of Europe. The University of Alcalá oversaw the production of part of the works of the humanists Benito Arias Montano and Andrea Navaghero, the Portuguese erudite Gaspar Barreiros, the theologian Domingo de Soto, the historian Ambrosio de Morales, the grammarian Antonio de Nebrija, the politician Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, the writers Quevedo and Calderón de la Barca or the poets and theologians Fray Luis de León and San Juan de la Cruz, among others. Also under the aegis of the University, 1502 saw the founding of one of Spain's oldest printing presses which became, together with the University, another driving force for cultural exchange. And it was in the cultural crucible that was Alcalá in the early 16th century where the Complutensian Polyglot Bible was published.

The old University of Alcalá de Henares, denominated since the late 15th century Universidad Complutense in memory of the old Roman city that was at the origins of Alcalá, moved to Madrid in 1836 and the city next to the Henares river lost its

status as a university city. To prevent the buildings that had housed the university from falling into disrepair, and aware of their great artistic value, the neighbours of Alcalá succeeded in becoming the owners of this vast heritage by creating the so-called "Society of Co-Owners". In 1977, when the new University Alcalá de Henares was created, dynamism returned to the city and the heirs of those first co-owners leased out to the new university the buildings in which the city's most splendid era had been birthed. Today the University of Alcalá, with almost 30,000 students, remains a research centre of vital importance.

At this time the exchange of human values has in Alcalá de Henares another key exponent: the headquarters of the Cervantes Institute, which is in charge of promoting and disseminating the Spanish language around the world. Every year, on 23 April, the University's Assembly Hall is the venue for the presentation of the Cervantes Prize, deemed by many to be the Spanish-language equivalent of the Nobel Prize for Literature and which has recognized, among others, Jorge Luis Borges, Rafael Alberti, Mario Vargas Llosa or Camilo José Cela, the two last ones also the recipients of the Nobel Prize awarded by the Swedish Academy.

Criterion (VI): *"The contribution of Alcalá de Henares to the intellectual development of humankind finds expression in its materialization of the Civitas Dei, in the advances in linguistics that took place there, not least in the definition of the Spanish language, and through the work of*

its great son, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra and his masterpiece Don Quixote."*

Alcalá de Henares opens the list of this criterion in its relationship with *Don Quixote*, considered to be the first modern novel, which has exerted constant influence on the universal narrative and especially through its creator, Miguel de Cervantes. A museum has been installed in his birth house which not only focuses on the figure of the author of *Don Quixote* but also recreates a 17th-century house at the time when the novel was written. Cervantes' presence in the city is not reduced to the Birthplace Museum, since next to it is the Hospital de Antezana where the writer's father worked and, a short distance away, the La Imagen Carmelite convent of which Cervantes' sister was prioress.

The La Imagen Convent also witnessed the stay in Alcalá de Henares of Saint Teresa of Ávila, a reformer of the religious orders in the 16th century, and of the theologian San Juan de la Cruz, a reformer of the Carmelite order, of whose stay in the city the memory also remains as the founder of one of Alcalá's convents.

Alcalá de Henares is also the setting for some outstanding picaresque novels, a genre inherent to Spanish 17th-century literature, which narrate the adventures of a rascal, a hungry antihero such as Guzmán de Alfarache by Mateo Alemán and, especially, *El Buscón* by Quevedo, an author who spent four years at the University of Alcalá. To finish, the city is a place which every year stages a universal play, *Don Juan Tenorio* by José Zorrilla, adopted as their own by Alcalá's denizens and transformed into a new symbol of the city.

In addition to the above, an unusual celebration is staged in Alcalá de Henares at the start of every university year. In September the University's professors, dressed in the garb that represents each one of the Schools and Faculties, process along the section that separates the Magisterial Cathedral from the University's Assembly Hall in the College of San Ildefonso. Each year this procession recalls the importance for the city of Alcalá de Henares of its University, which has been present there for more than five hundred years.

* Source: UNESCO/ERI / Description licence: CC - BY - SA IGO 3.0

Alcalá de Henares

University, sacred architecture, crossroads of cultures, Golden Age and a lot of Cervantes

“The city of Alcalá de Henares, which witnessed the birth of Miguel de Cervantes in 1547, was designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO on 2 December 1998. This recognition refers not only to the historical and artistic heritage contained in the old Roman city of Complutum but also to Alcalá’s transcendental contribution to universal culture, especially in the 16th and 17th centuries.”
(Narciso Casas, Cultural World Heritage of Humanity in Spain, Bubok, 2015)

A Model

When commenting on its designation as a World Heritage Site, Unesco states: “Founded by Cardinal Jiménez de Cisneros in the early 16th century, Alcalá de Henares was the world’s first planned university city. It was the original model for the *Civitas Dei* (City of God), the ideal urban community which Spanish missionaries brought to the Americas. It also served as a model for universities in Europe and elsewhere.”



*Alley and Chapel of
Las Santas Formas*

Academic centres have become a quintessential place for strengthening and exchanging human values, something which the population of Alcalá continues to be very much aware of in its daily life, even in words such as “*empollón*” (a nerd, a swot), which appears to refer to the poor students who would sit for hours without moving from their place, like a chicken (*pollo*), keeping a seat for a rich student who paid him for this.



+info
Alcalá
Heritage



Assembly Hall of
Cisneros University

History

In its history, the university has passed through different phases. Between 1293 and 1499 it was a *Studium Generale* (or General Study, which was the denomination for university studies). These studies were the seed for the Complutensis Universitas (created by Cardinal Cisneros with a bull issued by Pope Alexander VI authorizing the foundation of Alcalá University in 1499). Some time earlier, Cisneros had already started to buy up land on which to build the future *Civitas Dei*, or City of God, which became the first purposely built university campus in the world and whose model would be

exported to different universities. 1501 saw the start of the building works and by 1509 the faculties of Arts and Philosophy, Theology, Canon Law, Letters and Medicine were already up and running. Over the years its classrooms hosted figures such as Antonio de Nebrija, Ignatius of Loyola, Lope de Vega, Francisco de Quevedo or Pedro Calderón de la Barca.

In 1836, in the reign of Isabel II, the university moved to Madrid and took the name of Universidad Central. In 1845, the buildings which had hitherto hosted the university of Cardinal Cisneros were auctioned off and passed into private hands. To prevent the disappearance of the university's properties, in 1851 a group of neighbours created a shares-based society to conserve the historical heritage. Today, their heirs remain the owners of a great many of the buildings that made up the university, the so-called *Manzana Universitaria*, the University City Block.

Many of the seats of today's University of Alcalá are still located in the historic centre. This is the case of the Faculty of Law, which is situated in the *Collegium Maximum* of the Jesuits, whose origins date back to the 15th century. The Faculty of Philosophy and Literature, one of the oldest, uses as its headquarters the Málaga College, the College of the Trinitarians and the College of San José de Caracciolos (from the 17th century, though reformed in the 1990s). Many of the spaces can be freely accessed when visiting the university. As well as touring the most recognizable streets in the town, visitors can view the courtyards and halls where, provided the

university community's rules are respected, they will experience the student atmosphere and contemporary academic life.



+info
University
of Alcalá

The Religious Facet

The city's religious facet is reflected not only in the university buildings and in its founder's status as a cardinal but also in the buildings of the different orders that had set up here since the mid-12th century. In fact, people continue to retain ancestral customs such as that of donating eggs to the nuns of the Poor Clares so that it will not rain on their wedding day.

Most of the orders, attracted by the founding of the university, remain exactly as they were conceived in the 16th and 17th centuries, the time of the city's religious zenith. Some of them have changed their functions and many of them the interior of their buildings, as is the case with the university headquarters mentioned above and the City Hall, which is today located in the old convent of San Carlos Borromeo, of "the dying". Others ended up as luxury hotels, like the College of Saint Thomas Aquinas, or as cultural centres, such as today's Regional Archaeological Museum located in the Convent of the Cistercian Nuns. Also worth a mention are the multiple institutions and churches to be found in the town, such as the College of Santa María de Regla and that of Saint Justus and Saint Pastor, the Magisterial Cathedral, the Convent College of the Discalced Carmelites of Saint Cyril, the Trilingual College or Málaga College and the



Magistral Cathedral

Royal College of Saint Augustine, among others. Alcalá's inhabitants like to make nocturnal visits to some of these spaces, such as the courtyard of the Philosophers or that of Saint Thomas... another reason for making an overnight stay in Alcalá de Henares, drink a few beers in the bars on calle Mayor or calle Libreros, which are near the university colleges, and enjoy a stroll around the city's most emblematic spaces to view them from a different perspective.



+info
Alcalá Cathedral



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Regional Archaeological
Museum

Cisneros

The tie that unites university, power and religion is personified in the figure of Cardinal Cisneros. He was successively archbishop of Toledo, adviser to queen Isabella the Catholic and regent adviser. A major patron of the Spanish Renaissance, and having received a university education, first in Salamanca and later in Rome, he founded the University and, aware of the significance of this foundation, he spared no effort to endow his College with the appropriate urban framework, proper funding and the best educators of the time, all of which benefited the town of Alcalá de Henares enormously. The first stone of the building that would house it was laid by Cisneros on 14 March 1501; in 1508 lessons started and in 1510 he endowed his foundation with a set of Constitutions. Cisneros gifted a magnificent library to the new University of Alcalá, where a high percentage of books dealt with natural sciences. The University of Alcalá was the first Renaissance, humanist and universal university.

The Centre

The choice of Alcalá de Henares as an academic centre is to some extent due to its status as a flourishing burg during the Middle Ages, with a long record as a cultural crossroads. Like many other towns on the peninsula, its medieval origin meant that it contained vestiges of three cultures: Muslim, Christian and Jewish. Their traditions remain present in the districts in which we walk today, as numerous guides attest. A mandatory visit is to the Interpretation Centre of Burgo de Santiuste, the name by which the town was known in the 12th century



*Detail of the Chapel of
Cardinal Cisneros*

immediately after the Muslim era, during which its name had been Qal'at Abd al-Salam. This centre gives an overview of the town's history, with an interesting use of maps, infographics and old photographs that allow us to locate and recognize the different spaces during our visit.

Burgo de Santiuste, Alcalá de Santiuste, Alcalá de San Justo or Alcalá de Fenares (its name in the 14th century) was an emerging trading centre and a regional market town. Nor should we forget the walls, erected mainly in the 14th century by Pedro Tenorio, which are still present

next to the Archbishop's Palace and of which 16 towers are still standing. It is possible to visit parts of it, entering via Tower 14 in the walled enclosure of the old citadel.



+info
Interpretation
Centre

An Overview of the Three Cultures

The past has left its mark on many streets. Below we enumerate a short summary so that you can enjoy searching for those signs. We invite you to walk the streets in which the three cultures shared moments:

The Moorish Quarter: Plaza de las Bernardas, calle Santiago (Mosque), calle de San Bernardo (Almanxara, the oil press), calle Diego de Torres together with calle Santiago (the old flea market), calle Diego de Torres opposite calle Madre de Dios (wicket into the Moorish Quarter).

The Jewish Quarter: calle Mayor, Yard of the (Major) Synagogue, Minor Synagogue on calle de Santiago, The Jews' butcher's shop on calle Cervantes. Calle Mayor de la Judería (as it was called during the Late Middle Ages) was the main artery of Alcalá's *aljama*, the Moorish and Jewish communities living under Christian rule, which connected the urban centre with the primitive Guadalajara gate. On this street, on the ground floors of homes, Jewish traders and artisans had their workshops and market stalls.

Christian Quarter: Plaza de los Santos Niños and Iglesia, calle de la Tercia (The Council and Chapel of Santa

Lucia), calle Travesía de Seises (The General Studies), calle Damas (La Mancebía or Brothel), calle Vicario (the Archbishop's Gaol), calle de Santa María la Rica (Medieval Hospital of Santa María La Rica), Plaza de la Picota, Archbishop's Fortress-Palace, La Fuente Tower, Plaza de Palacio, City Walls, Calle Sandoval y Rojas.

The Gates

Of the five gates leading into the urban centre, only two are still standing. Of these, the more monumental one is the Madrid Gate (demolished in 1788 and replaced by the current one in a neoclassic style) built during the reign of Charles III. The Burgos Gate is older and is situated opposite O'Donnell Park. It dates from the 14th century, with an arch added in the 16th century. This gateway into the historic centre gives us access to one of the most emblematic examples of the baroque style typical of Madrid, built by the great architect Juan Gómez de Mora, to whom we referred when speaking of the Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial.

Within the walled sector there are several dividing streets. Prominent among the main lines is calle Mayor, which formerly formed part of the Jewish Quarter and today is a shopping street, with many clothes shops, cafeterias and pastry shops. However, when we walk along it we can recognize the arcades, tiny windows and spyholes used centuries earlier by the traders to see who was knocking on their door.

Unique Buildings

Alcalá de Henares contains some unique buildings. Among them we highlight Antezana hospital, built in the 15th century and active ever since. It is one of the oldest healthcare centres in Europe and has been in constant use for more than 500 years. Donated by the house of Antezana, a rich family whose name was given to the hospital, it was initially built to house not only the sick but also pilgrims and the poor. Today it is an old people's home. Once we cross its doors, leaving behind the austere neo-Gothic façade, we encounter one of the town's most charming popular courtyards.



+info
Unique
buildings

Cervantes and the Prize that Carries his Name

The contribution of Alcalá de Henares to the intellectual development of humankind finds expression in its materialization of the Civitas Dei, in the advances in the linguistics of the Spanish language and in *Don Quixote of La Mancha*, the masterpiece of its most illustrious son, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra.

Cervantes never quite lost his ties to his home town. After his captivity in Algiers in 1585, Miguel de Cervantes visited Alcalá on several occasions and it is there where the first edition of his pastoral novel “La Galatea” was published. It came out of the printing press of Juan Gracián, funded by the bookseller Blas de Robles.

The last visit Miguel de Cervantes made to Alcalá of which a record remains took place three years before his

Cervantes
Birthplace Museum



death, on 2 July 1613, when Miguel took the habit of the Venerable Third Order of Saint Francis.

Miguel de Cervantes mentions Alcalá in several of his works (“The Illustrious Kitchen Maid”, “The Dialogue of the Dogs”) but above all in “La Galatea” – which is set in the environs of the river Henares – and in chapter 29 of the first part of Don Quixote, where he recalls a little-known Alcalá legend: *“And I will even pretend that I am riding on the horse Pegaso, or on the zebra or horse on which rode the famous moor Muzaraque, who even now lies bewitched on the great Zulema incline not far from the great Compluto.”*

While Cervantes wrote the bulk of his work away from Alcalá de Henares, this is the quintessential place for learning about his history and background. We can start at Cervantes' Birthplace Museum on calle Mayor, where the life of a wealthy family during the 16th and 17th centuries is recreated, and then head to the interpretation centre of "Cervantes' Universes" in the Chapel of the Oidor, where we find a copy of his birth certificate and the baptismal font where he was allegedly christened. But the figure of Cervantes has transcended far beyond here and has given his name to the most important Spanish-language literary award: the Cervantes Prizes. Annually since 1976, the Cervantes Award is presented in the University's Assembly Hall in the month of April. On a local scale we have dozens of activities associated with literature, such as "Cervantes Week", one of the neighbours' favourites and staged in October. This Week devoted to Cervantes is an excellent excuse for visiting the city, as it is crammed with all kinds of cultural events. The streets of the historic centre turn into a vast Golden Age market, with an antique book fair, public readings of Don Quixote or the Cervantes Gastronomic Workshops, among other activities.



+info
Birthplace Museum



+info
Oidor Chapel

A Named Square

Among the many elements to which Alcalá's illustrious son has lent his name is a public space where we will end our stay: a bench on Plaza Cervantes. Let's sit down and watch families walk by, students and professors share notes or visitors take a break to find their location on a map. Perhaps in that stall they are selling books or crafts, we will enjoy live music, dramatizations and someone doing mime for passers-by... This square was, and remains, a quintessential public space for understanding Alcalá de Henares. Many memories shape our historical memory, from the tunnels underneath our feet to the tower bombed during the Civil War. Witnesses of earlier times inhabiting the same place we share today.

The visit offers numerous opportunities, such as for example buying a typical *costrada* cake from Alcalá de Henares, a delicious pastry that, together with caramel-coated almonds and Alcalá doughnuts, comprise the most emblematic trio of aces of Alcalá's sweet gastronomy. While we savour it we can enjoy this cheerful public space while reading one of its multiple writers, both contemporary and past ones.

Universal Classics

For lovers of the theatre, Alcalá de Henares possesses many attractions. Prominent among them is the staging since 1984 of *Don Juan Tenorio* by Zorrilla, which takes place on the weekend that is closest to 1 November each year. This is a major open-air production, with free admission and massively attended by the public. Of vast dimensions, it is structured into 6 huge stages in the walled enclosure of the Archbishop's Palace. *Don Juan in*



Plaza de Cervantes

Alcalá is an event listed by the Madrid Region as a Festivity of National Tourist Interest.

Literature has always gone hand in hand with Alcalá de Henares: Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, Calderón de la Barca, Quevedo, Mateo Alemán... many Spanish poets and theologians have passed through its classrooms. The city's Tourist Office organizes literary routes to acquaint visitors with the city as a haven for wordsmiths. One of its symbolic texts, which gave the university its international fame, was the Polyglot Bible commissioned by Cardinal Cisneros from Alcalá's then-young printing press. Printed in the early 16th century, this work in Latin, Greek and Aramaic was produced by the best linguists of

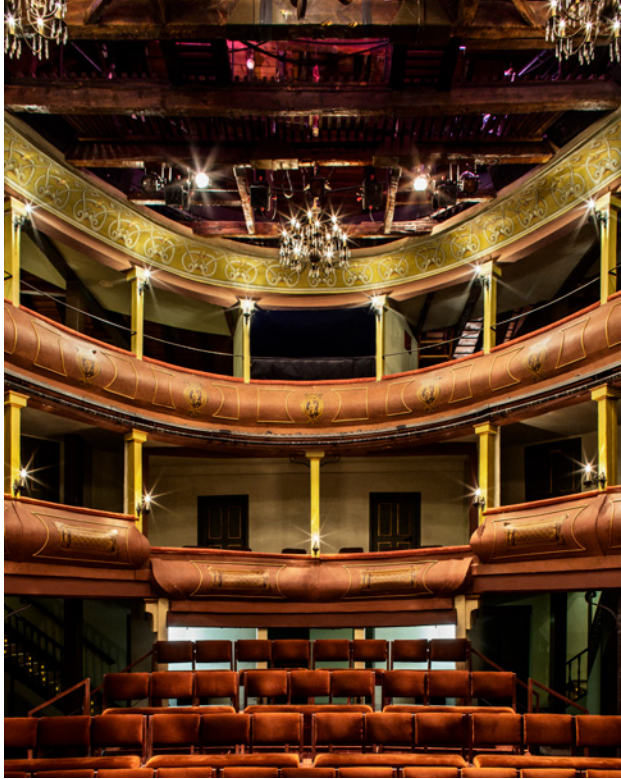
the time (Demetrio Ducas, Hernán Núñez, Juan de Vergara, Alonso Zamora or Antonio de Nebrija, among others). There are barely a hundred copies of this Bible left in the world, one of which is conserved in the City Hall's Assembly Room.

Courtyard Theatre

Its history began in October 1601 when Francisco Sánchez, a carpenter and neighbour of the town, presented to the Municipal Council a proposal to build “a courtyard theatre in the Market Square”, today Plaza de Cervantes, which was Alcalá's economic and social centre as well as a meeting point for locals and foreigners alike.

After its opening, and for more than a century and a half, the *Corral de Comedias* was Alcalá's leisure centre and its stage resounded with the voices of comedians and the verses of the playwrights of the time. Cervantes, Quevedo or Villamediana must have made an appearance in the *Corral* during their stays in the town, and very likely Lope de Vega, Calderón de la Barca, Ruiz de Alarcón and many other authors saw their works staged in Alcalá on more than one occasion.

Alcalá's *Corral de Comedias* is one of the oldest courtyard theatres still standing in Europe. The building has been put to various uses over time: it was a courtyard theatre in the 17th century, a coliseum from 1769 onwards, a romantic theatre in the 19th century and a cinema in the first quarter of the 20th. This variety of



*Corral de Comedias
Theatre*

functions has led to important transformations in its architectural structure.

This space is today a living theatre-museum which, run by the Madrid Region and Alcalá de Henares City Hall, looks to the future with the anticipation of adding new experiences to its four centuries of history.



[+info](#)
Corral
de Comedias

Countryside Routes

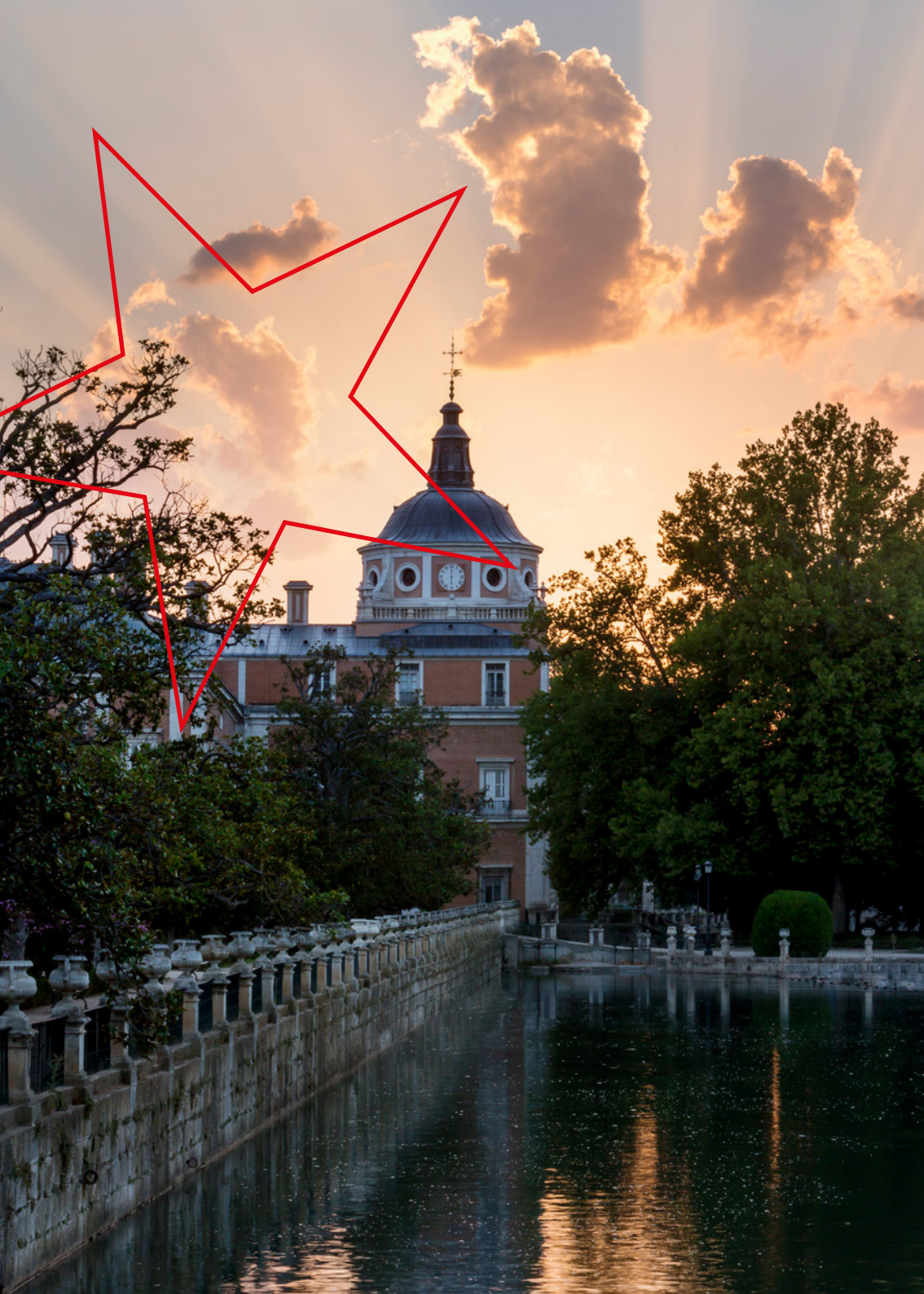
The relationship of Alcalá de Henares with nature is another of its major attractions. Alcalá's historic urban landscape offers us some breathtaking countryside routes along the bank of the river Henares and the adjacent hills, which we can cover on foot or on a bicycle, a more leisurely way of enjoying the countryside and the river. Some of these hills have been inhabited since prehistory and not far from here are the remains of the old Arabic city.

Film Sites

Alcalá de Henares was the venue for a famous international shoot, *Spartacus*, as well as around fifty Spanish films, from “*Nadie hablará de nosotras cuando hayamos muerto*” to “*Los fantasmas de Goya*”, “*Abre los ojos*”, “*La conjura de El Escorial*”, “*El Lute*”, “*Amantes*”, etc., all of them set in different locations around the city.



+info
Shootings
Office



World Heritage in Aranjuez

*Sunset in Island
Garden. Aranjuez*



Full Designation: Aranjuez Cultural Landscape

Date of Designation: 2001

Criteria of the World Heritage List: II and IV

Reference: 1044

Purpose: “The Aranjuez cultural landscape is an entity of complex relationships: between nature and human activity, between sinuous watercourses and geometric landscape design, between the rural and the urban, between forest landscape and the delicately modulated architecture of its palatial buildings. Three hundred years of royal attention to the development and care of this landscape have seen it express an evolution of concepts from humanism and political centralization to characteristics such as those found in its 18th-century French-style Baroque garden, to the urban lifestyle which developed alongside the sciences of plant acclimatization and stock-breeding during the Age of Enlightenment.”

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Criteria Applied by the Committee for Including these Assets in the World Heritage List

Criterion (II): *To exhibit an important interchange of human values over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town planning or landscape design.*

The Cultural Landscape of Aranjuez meets this criterion as an example of a type of

landscape that illustrates several stages in history: the Renaissance and the Enlightenment.

The first rulers to take notice of this plain by the river Tagus were the Catholic Monarchs in the late 15th century, but it was Philip II who decided to develop the entire setting of what today are the

Aranjuez vegetable gardens, with a series of long streets setting out from circular plazas, sketching out a topography that arranges a large territory.

Philip II also created the *Island's Garden* as a compendium of all the gardening trends that were in vogue in Europe at the time of the Renaissance and which the king knew about first-hand thanks to his interest in gardens. His love of nature and landscaping was so great that he even sent his gardener, Gaspar de Vega, on a tour of Europe to keep abreast of the latest novelties in this field. Philip II's interest in gardening led him to establish in Aranjuez the first botanic garden in Spain.

Aranjuez's urban planning occurred some time later, in the 18th century under the reign of the Bourbons, when in the era of Ferdinand VI and Charles III a city was built with rectangular blocks around great avenues and a large square, Plaza de San Antonio. At that time the *Prince's Garden* was designed next to the river Tagus, a large extension containing kitchen gardens, gardens landscaped in the English style, geometric gardens in the French style and a series of recreational constructions. The gardens of Aranjuez pioneered in Europe the introduction of plant species from America and the Philippines, which found their space in the *Prince's Garden*, especially in the areas known as the Asian and American islands.

The complex designed cultural landscape of Aranjuez, derived from a variety of sources, marks a seminal stage in the development of landscape design.

Criterion (IV): *To be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history.*

Aranjuez was thus transformed into a desirable city, although its use was limited to the Crown. For the people, in a separate area, large farming zones were established, the Real Cortijo de San Isidro which, as with Aranjuez, still retains the character of a city created by the Enlightenment, together with a vast 18th-century wine cellar.

Aranjuez is the reflection of a historic moment in the Spanish Enlightenment in which the Crown promoted the development of the arts, crafts, architecture and technology. The Royal Palace boasts extensive gardens and contains some outstanding painting and sculpture collections as well as remarkable examples of products made in the Royal Factories founded in the 18th century to create a courtly environment to the greater glory of the Crown, imitating the royal manufactures established by Louis XIV in France. The people settled in the arable and livestock farms of the Cortijo de San Isidro, Sotomayor, El Deleite or Casa de Vacas, under the protection of the enlightened monarchs.

Aranjuez

**Palace, river, gardens, fountains, avenues,
vegetable gardens, arts and crafts**

“The Tagus and Jarama rivers are the two main arteries of the Aranjuez Cultural Landscape, an extensive area in the south of the Autonomous Community of Madrid. The property comprises different zones: historic vegetable gardens, tree-lined avenues and groves (Legamarejo, Picotajo, El Rebollo), the Palace and gardens (the Prince’s, the Island’s, the Parterre, the King’s and Isabella II’s gardens) and the town itself (the historic centre) (...) The conceptual combination of these zones creates a series of landscapes that comprise the Aranjuez Cultural Landscape. These include the water landscape (rivers, ponds, dams and ditches), the arable and livestock farming landscape, the gardens, the ordered landscape (the inspiring geometry) and the constructed landscape (the palace, the planned town and the rustic town).”



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A Regal Palace

This palace stands on the left bank of the river Tagus, chosen by the Bourbons for establishing their spring



*Main staircase
of the Palace*

residence and temporarily transforming it into the administrative framework of the Royal Sites.

On the palace's current location there was formerly a palace house belonging to the Order of Saint James whose construction was commissioned from Juan Bautista de Toledo in 1561 by Philip II. When he died the works were continued by Juan de Herrera. Unfortunately, twenty years later two fires broke out in the building and caused major damage, since a large part of it was made from wood.



*Arabic inspired
smoking room*

The palace we see today dates from the Bourbon period. Philip V ordered its layout in 1717 from the architect Pedro Caro Idrogo. The main façade was built by Giacomo Bonavia in the time of Ferdinand VI, while the two wings and the public chapel were the work of Sabatini during the reign of Charles III. The palace front is embellished with the statues of the three kings who took part in its construction: Philip II, Ferdinand VI and Charles III.

The building's ornamentation is in exposed red brick, in contrast with the white stone quarried in Colmenar de

Oreja used on the plinths, angles, cornices, balconies and door and window frames.

Prominent in the interior is the Rococo-style balustraded staircase, the Hall of Mirrors and the Porcelain Room, considered to be a work of art of the Buen Retiro Porcelain Factory. The palace also contains, among other elements, paintings by Lucas Jordán and Vicente López y Esquivel, furniture in various styles and a collection of clocks, lamps and sculptures that show what everyday life was like for the royal families. But the undoubted jewel of the palace is found outdoors: its gardens.



+info
Palacio
Real

Summarizing the Landscape

The complex design of the Aranjuez Cultural Landscape is the result of materializing and combining landscape, architecture and art works representative of key periods in the history of humanity, in which the relations between humankind and nature come together. This process transcends the sphere of the western world and displays the universal aspects of aesthetics, science, technique, architecture and art.

The combination of urban and natural elements allows us to enjoy incredible walks and hiking routes, on foot or on a bicycle... or experience activities as exotic as viewing the city from the sky, in a hot-air balloon, just like the royals of the 18th century.



Fountain of Ceres

Interchange and Convergence

Aranjuez witnessed the interchange and convergence of different cultural values and currents whose intellectual assimilation propitiated a cultural landscape which would in turn constitute a touchstone for subsequent expressions.

To understand a place such as Aranjuez we have to remember how royalty operated from the end of the middle ages to the modern era. These were three intense centuries in which the different monarchies looked after this privileged space capable of integrating a baroque French-style garden and an urban way of life while not

foregoing the scientific practice of botany or livestock breeding. Its exceptional universal value won it recognition as a World Heritage Site in 2001.

The magic of Aranjuez involves combining, and appreciating, the urban and the “naturally artificial”. Even today the local inhabitants emphasize the prevailing peace and quiet. This is why Aranjuez has been chosen as a place of residence by many people escaping from the stressful city, finding in this environment a perfect home for enjoying a stroll among the tree groves and by the river Tagus.

A Brief History

Although the part we visit belongs mainly to the modern era, it is interesting to recall the origin of the Aranjuez palace area. Think, for example of the *Island's Garden*, a visit not to be missed by any traveller worth their salt, built in the late 14th and early 15th centuries and given this name because it was encircled by the Tagus river. When Ferdinand the Catholic became Grand Master of the Order, queen Isabella the Catholic acquired a taste for the *Island*. Later, both Charles I and his son Philip II decided to transform the area into an exceptional natural environment, starting the main works on the palace we know today with the participation of the famous court architects Juan Bautista de Toledo, Gerónimo Gil and Juan de Herrera, who was ultimately the main executor of many of the buildings.

Be that as it may, in 1560, with Juan Bautista de Toledo the first botanic species for this garden started to arrive

from Flanders, France, Valencia and Andalusia. Shortly after they brought from Italy the carved marbles for the fountains, which multiplied in the reign of Philip III and Philip IV. The outline of the *Island's Garden* is based on a central axis surrounded by rectangular compartments, in turn divided into squares, and the plazas with fountains were located in the main crossroads. This central street was covered in the 16th and 17th centuries by tunnels of mulberries and wooden lattices called galleries, which disappeared in the 18th century due to the French influence. In 1729 Philip V decided to create a vantage point over the river Tagus by building strong retaining walls on the riverbed to protect the garden from any possible river flooding. This part of the garden was called *La Isleta*, the Little Island, and was built by Leandro Bachelieu according to a project by Esteban Marchand. Santiago Bonavía built the bridges over the lough and the Tagus. The great stone benches that surround the plazas of the fountains were made by Sabatini in the time of Charles III.

Urban Geometry

While the traditional tour revolves around the fountains and gardens surrounding the palace, it is also imperative to take good note of the urban geometry that allows us to move around the town. Opposite the palace's east façade, from the so-called Hercules fountain (so majestic that it is unmistakable), run the three main streets known as *the trident*: the Prince's avenue in the centre, the street of the Infantas to the right and the Queen's Avenue to the left, leading to the Prince's Garden. The

neighbours recommend nocturnal strolls around this part of the city, which still retains the forms that have seen numberless couples of lovers passing by.

Around the area, typically Castilian open-air bars and restaurants abound. They serve meals and tapas, and in this regard calle Postas and calle Foso Abajo are a good place to start. There are also offers for nocturnal guided tours available that include boat rides on the Tagus and provide abundant information on the modern history of Aranjuez and Spain. Aranjuez, so close to the capital, played a key role in national politics, as reflected in the *Aranjuez Mutiny* that is nowadays performed in the local festivities.

The Mutiny of Aranjuez

The Mutiny of Aranjuez was an uprising which took place on 17, 18 and 19 March 1808, led by the people and supported by the then Prince of Asturias, the future king Ferdinand VII. It was triggered as a protest against the policies of Manuel Godoy, secretary of state of Charles IV. After the defeat of Trafalgar, the country was experiencing serious economic problems and the growing presence of French troops appeared to threaten the country's stability. In fact, this threat forced the Spanish royal family to withdraw to Aranjuez so that, if they needed to, they could travel south to Seville and embark for America. The mutineers found Godoy in his hiding place and took him to the barracks of the Royal Corps. After this incident, Charles IV abdicated the throne and named his son Ferdinand VII as his successor.

Today this mutiny, coinciding with the local festivities, is remembered in the first week of September. The reenactment evokes the storming of Godoy's old palace, where more than 170 neighbours dressed in period costumes dramatize the popular uprising. The event has been listed as a Festivity of National and International Tourist Interest.



+info
Mutiny
of Aranjuez

Finding a Balance

Seeking to maintain a balance with the surrounding landscape, there are barely any tall buildings in this town. An excellent starting point for a stroll is the Church of San Antonio square, which flows into Avenida de la Reina. This avenue was built in the 18th century to join up the palace area with the new developed zones. The church was used by the popular classes as a place of contemplation and its construction was not completed until well into the 19th century. The chapel is on Plaza de San Antonio, also known as Plazuela de la Mariblanca due to the sculptural ensemble known as the *Fountain of La Mariblanca* (its real name is Fountain of Venus) which decorates the northern end of the square. The church staircase is the venue for the Spring Concerts performed by the band of the “Joaquín Rodrigo” Municipal Music School, accompanied by other music groups. As in yesteryear, spring brings many cultural activities to the town, prominent among them the Early Music Festival whose concerts enhance the palace gardens and interiors.

Palace dwellings are also commonplace in the town. There are some from the 18th century, such as Godoy's house on calle de la Reina, and 19th-century mansions. However, one of the town's greatest attractions is its market, a forged iron structure that has been active since the 19th century. Here you find typical products from the area: strawberries, asparagus or artichokes from the Aranjuez vegetable gardens. Between the market and the Plaza de La Constitución there are multiple bars and shops to wander around in. The town transmits peace and calm, so we recommend that you stay overnight so you can discover what its evenings have to offer and to enjoy a concert or a scenic arts performance.

A Tribute to Music

The entire world knows Aranjuez from the concert for guitar and orchestra that Joaquín Rodrigo composed in 1939 and which is undoubtedly his most famous creation and the most often-performed piece of Spanish music worldwide. Its popular adagio has been played by well-known figures such as Paco de Lucía, Plácido Domingo, Carlos Santana or Miles Davis, who once said: *"This melody is so strong that the softer you play it, the stronger it gets, and the stronger you play it, the weaker it gets."*

Music has always been a key element of Aranjuez, where today they continue to stage an Early Music Festival. In addition, from May to June you can enjoy musical strolls around the gardens in a guided tour that unites botany, history and music in a single experience.

Also worth mentioning are the concerts in the Royal Palace, in the Palace's magnificent chapel, which has a dome painted by Francisco Bayeu and contains paintings by Lucas Jordán and Mariano Salvador Maella. The most intimate concerts are staged in the Theatre hall decorated with unfinished frescoes by Mengs. The Horses' Courtyard is a large-capacity open-air venue.

A record label was created in 2004 to celebrate the music played in these festivals so that we can enjoy it wherever we are.



+info
Early Music
in Aranjuez

Charles III Royal Theatre

The theatre building was erected in 1768 by king Charles III, its architect being Jaime Marquet. Its façade bore this inscription: «*Rudos deliciis urbana adjecta. Voluptas Jussu CAROLI TERTII. Anno MDCCLXVIII*», which informs us that Aranjuez unites the delights of the countryside and the pleasures of the town. Little remains of the original building and the one standing today, the work of Mariano Bayón, reopened its doors on 5 June 2014 with an attractive programme of international interest.



+info
Royal Theatre

Strawberry Train

If you are looking for a romantic way to travel to Aranjuez, we recommend the Strawberry Train, a Madrid tourist classic.

The railway line from Madrid to Aranjuez, which opened on 9 February 1851, was the primitive line linking up Madrid and Aranjuez and the second railway line built on the Iberian peninsula. The station, which was restored at the start of the 20th century, is in a Neo-Mudejar style and its main foyer displays a gorgeous coffered ceiling.

The Strawberry Train was its name since it was launched, since it carried the fruit grown in the kitchen gardens of the Tagus and Jarama rivers. Today, only during the season, they run an exact replica of that old train, recreating the atmosphere of its 19th-century predecessor. The hostesses wear traditional 19th-century court dresses and travellers are invited to taste the Aranjuez strawberries.



+info
Strawberry Train

Barges and Boat Rides

While not suitable for bathing, fishing is possible in some parts of the river Tagus, as is the practice of canoeing, which has become an everyday activity. It is also possible to visit old bathing spots, such as for example La Pavera opposite the Prince's Garden of Casa de Marinos, the Sailors' House, or the Molino de los Franceses, the Frenchmen's Mill.

Strawberry Train



For now, a boat ride is our simplest option. We can buy the tickets beforehand on the internet. River rides are so commonplace that there is a museum housing a fabulous collection of 18th- and 19th-century royal barges, the Royal Gondola of Philip V and multiple engravings of the Tagus Fleet. You can buy tickets at the ticket offices of the Royal Palace or on their website.



+info
Barge Museum



+info
Tourist Boat

The Gardens

The gardens of Aranjuez comprise a series of forests and landscaped parks decorated with numerous fountains and statues. They are currently under the care of National Heritage, as they form part of the Cultural Landscape of Aranjuez. There are four gardens: the Parterre, the Island's, the Prince's and Isabel II's gardens.

Parterre Garden: next to the east façade of the Royal Palace. Philip V ordered the French gardener Esteban Boutelou to build it in 1727 and it was planted in 1746. On the north side it gives on to the river Tagus, while the eastern and southern side is flanked by a masonry pit and an iron railing with flower vases on pedestals, created in 1762 by order of Charles III. Besides the numerous flowers and trees of every kind the garden contains, there are three exceptional fountains: the Hercules and Antaeus fountain, the Ceres fountain and the fountain of the Nereids. In the western end of the Parterre Garden is the Garden of the Statues, so called for the fourteen marble busts of Roman emperors, Spanish monarchs and figures from antiquity, placed in as many niches in the wall. It is also called the *King's Garden*, for Philip II, the king who ordered it to be built. This garden (second half of the 16th century) is a closed garden in line with the Italian Renaissance model of a secret and private garden that can be viewed from the palace balconies.

Island's Garden: Its origins go back to the Order of St James, which between 1387 and 1409 built a magisterial palace, the predecessor of the current palace. In those

years a canal or lough was built out from a meander in the river Tagus, with various water mills occupying its banks. History tells us that when in 1487 Ferdinand the Catholic became Grand Master of the Order, queen Isabella the Catholic acquired a taste for the Island, which is why it became known as the Queen's Garden. Later Charles I and Philip II decided to transform the area into an exceptional natural setting and bring it to its highest splendour. As well as numerous flowers and verdant trees, this garden also boasts numerous fountains and statues.

Prince's Garden: This garden, situated between the river Tagus and calle de la Reina, is the most extensive of all of Aranjuez's gardens. Its perimeter is 7 km long and it covers 150 hectares, of which only about half can be visited. The garden possesses a fortified jetty which Charles IV ordered to be built and which was often used during the monarchs' stay in Aranjuez, when rides on the Tagus were organized on board luxurious barges. Among its architects and gardeners were Juan de Villanueva and Esteban de Boutelou. It is a landscape garden in the late 18th-century English style. Inside we encounter various fountains as well as the gazebos of the Chinese Pond and the Casa del Labrador as well as numerous tree species listed as unique specimens.

Isabel II's Garden: This was the last garden to be built in Aranjuez in the 19th century when Isabel II was still a girl. The first trees were planted in 1830 and four years later a marble pedestal with a bronze statue of the Girl Queen was installed in the centre of the garden.

The gardens are a very special part of a visit to Aranjuez. Access to them is free and some sections can even be traversed at night. Bicycles are not allowed in any of them.



[+info](#)
Gardens
of Aranjuez

Casa del Labrador

Art devotees should not miss the Casa del Labrador, a place for the intimate recreation of the royals and one of the most beautiful examples of Spanish neoclassicism. Tours are guided and the interior features rooms created from materials such as silk, stucco, bronze, marble, glass, platinum or hardwoods. The author of the ornamentation was the interior designer Jean-Démosthène Dugourc, the author of many of the works contained in the building. Some of the rooms are spectacular, such as the King's Hall, also known as the Billiards Room. The Casa del Labrador holds an outstanding pictorial collection of 93 pieces featuring views of Madrid and the Royal Sites. It personifies the spirit of a palace in which nature and culture come together in perfect harmony.



[+info](#)
Casa
del Labrador

The Fountains have Stories to Tell

Something that truly stands out in Aranjuez are its fountains and statues, although we often enjoy these spaces and admire the beauty of the sculptures and water jets without delving into the stories behind them.

In the Parterre Garden we find:

Fountain of Hercules and Antaeus. The most spectacular of them all. Ferdinand VII commissioned it in 1827 from the architect Isidro González Velázquez and the sculptor Juan Adán. On the central pillar, Hercules grips Antaeus and lifts him up. Antaeus was a powerful giant from Libyan lands. Hercules struggles to defeat him but every time the giant touches the ground he revives because his mother, Gaia, gives him strength. The statue represents the triumph of Hercules over the giant by raising him off the ground, which is how he succeeds in vanquishing him.

Ceres Fountain. It was rebuilt in 1828 after the original, which dated from 1804, was destroyed. The pond in which it stands is oval in shape and features three groups of sculptures. We highlight the central one, with the goddess next to two playing children, one of them holding some wheat spikes and the other one embracing a horn of plenty, while the goddess grasps the torch of creation and holds some poppies in her hands.

In the Island's Garden we find the following statues:

Fountain of Hercules and the Hydra. Depicts Hercules slaying the Hydra on a pedestal.

Clock Fountain, also known as the Fountain of the Hours or of the Ring. When in operation, just like a clock,

the shadow of the water jet marks the hours on the edges of the fountain.

Fountain of Boy with Thorn, or Spinario or Harpies Fountain. A central pedestal supports a boy who is removing a thorn from his left foot.

These are not the only ones. There are fountains dedicated to Venus, Bacchus, Neptune... we invite you to discover all their stories.



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Vegetable Gardens, Wines and Engineering

We have spoken of the quality of the local fruit and vegetables, but not of the wines. The Wine Cellar of the Real Cortijo was ordered to be built by Charles III in 1782 to keep the Royal Household supplied with wine and oil. Charles III acquired an estate in 1766 with the aim of transforming Aranjuez into a modern rural site and into the larder of his palaces, according to the concept of enlightened despotism. The “Real Cortijo de San Isidro”, 5 km distant from Aranjuez, turned this Royal Site into the germ of modern agriculture according to the chroniclers of the time. It was listed as a Historic-Artistic Monument in 1983.



[+info](#)
[Real Cortijo](#)

Tree-Lined Avenues

The layout of this element –with the characteristic tree-lined avenues configured around the Twelve Streets— has kept virtually the same design for more than five centuries. A total of twelve avenues issue from one square, flanked by rows of plane trees that make this area unique. This configuration of urban planning and nature created by the hand of man, besides boasting unparalleled beauty, is characterized by connecting the Historic Vegetable Gardens of Picotajo, Legamarejo and El Rebollo.

Aranjuez Asparagus and Strawberries

Aranjuez's asparagus and strawberries are famous; however, other very valuable produce is grown, such as Brussels sprouts, tomatoes, artichokes or potatoes. This area, in the time of the monarchs –specifically the Habsburgs and Philip II— was used as a place for agricultural research, experimenting on the viability of crops from the so-called New World.

The cuisine of the best restaurants in Aranjuez is based on the use of the produce from these kitchen gardens which today continue to be farmed and are a national benchmark for quality.

The Historical Groves and Walks

The Historical Groves and Walks constitute Aranjuez's most complex and valuable ecosystems for being the home of different varieties of flora and wildlife species. In the mid-16th century they started to build walks with geometric shapes in the environs of the river whose functions ranged from separating farmlands to providing access, producing timber and providing pleasant cooling shade for the outings of the court. Many of them have

*Royal Winery
Cortijo de San Isidro*



survived until the present day and are recreational spaces for the population.

Washington, the Other Aranjuez

The Spaniard Manuel Salvador Carmona, the engraver of the design of the Aranjuez municipality with the data provided by the topographer Domingo de Aguirre, shared part of his life with the artist Pierre L'Enfant, the father of the architect who designed the city of Washington, Pierre Charles L'Enfant. They spent 12 years together at the Paris Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture. Thanks



Interior of Royal Palace

to his friendship with the artist and engraver, the architect and town planner Pierre L'Enfant gained exact knowledge of the plans for Aranjuez, which measured 3.40 metres in width by 3.20 metres in length and were his inspiration for urbanizing Washington, the capital of the United States.

The Aranjuez plans were known in all the European embassies because Charles III sent two copies of the engravings, in 1775, to highlight the importance of this Madrid town. The researcher Carlos de San Antonio Gómez and Cristina Velilla, professors at Madrid's

Polytechnic University, and tenured professor Francisco Manzano Agugliaro of Almería University claim that the plans held in France's National Library, in the British Library and in the Library of the United States Congress are in many respects very similar to those of the Spanish city.

The two cities shared the same layout of the main buildings – the Capitol and the White House in one case and the Royal Palace and the church of San Antonio in the other – plus the layout of the 12 radial avenues and the street system, as described in the mapping work undertaken by the scholars.

Both L'Enfant and his father were able to see the Aranjuez plans in Paris, since both spent time with Manuel S. Carmona, the creator of the Aranjuez engraving, at the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture. Thomas Jefferson may also have seen it during his stint as ambassador to Paris, when the creation of a capital in the United States was proposed and he was the candidate to plan it owing to his relationship with president George Washington. As well as a politician, Thomas Jefferson was an architect who made a sketch of the American capital based on the Aranjuez plans handed to him by the French architect Pierre L'Enfant.



Madrid. Landscape of Light



*Crystal Palace
in Retiro Park*



Full declaration: Paseo del Prado and Buen Retiro, Landscape of Arts and Sciences

Date of the Declaration: 2021

Criteria of the World Heritage List: II, IV, V

Reference: 1618

Object: "Paseo del Prado and Buen Retiro, a landscape of Arts and Sciences is located in the urban heart of Madrid. It was the prototype of a Hispanic boulevard of the 16th century, a public space based on the presence of nature within the city for the enjoyment of citizens. It was also an example of a new idea of urban space and a model for green urban planning of the enlightened absolutist era of the 18th century. This model quickly spread and became a model that had a social influence in Latin America, illustrating the ambition for a utopian society in Spanish overseas territory in the 16th century. Alongside the Gardens of the Buen Retiro Park and blending culture and nature, it is a cultural landscape in an urban environment that has gradually evolved over the centuries. It was a new concept and a complex project with a clear social component that included the creation of an innovative series of buildings and facilities devoted to science and public education, that would also beautify the city. Buildings devoted to arts and sciences joined others devoted to industry, health and research in a cultural landscape encompassing 200 hectares. Its special link to arts and sciences grew over the centuries, resulting in an extraordinary space that is still devoted to nature for the leisure of citizens along with museums, cultural institutions and research and science centres."

Source: Decision: 44 COM 8B.21 of UNESCO



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Criteria Applied by the Committee for Including these Assets in the World Heritage List

Criterion II: “The Paseo del Prado was the first green space designed within a European capital in the modern era; it is a tree-lined avenue, dating back to the 16th century, although substantially modified in the 18th century, which had a strong influence in Latin America as a model for urban planning. It was the first and important example of a boulevard or promenade.”

Criterion IV: “The Paseo del Prado and the Retiro Park is also a model of green urban planning in the era of enlightened absolutism, the prototype of a new idea to improve urban space with strong social content guided by rational criteria in order to enhance decoration, hygiene and functionality. It is a unique expression of enlightened ideals applied to urban planning projects with the unique incorporation of sciences as an essential component, all with a view to democratising knowledge and making it available to all citizens. Its different parts

are geographically and ideologically united by the idea of creating a large urban green space (formed by a tree-lined avenue, a park and a botanic garden) in different periods of history from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment.”

Criterion V: “The proposed property represents a utopian society linked to the Arts and Sciences, paradigm of Culture, within a natural framework inside the city. It also represents the idea of democratizing knowledge, introducing the chance to learn sciences and enjoy the arts, in a leisure space for citizens. It was an idea to improve society that went beyond the borders of Spain and spread to America. The arts, sciences, health, industry and research, all as part of an exchange of human and scientific values that promote the dissemination of knowledge and whose public and social role has been preserved with remarkable vitality.”

The Proposal of Madrid

“Authenticity. The main attributes of the property have shown their authenticity and the sources of information are credible. There are a large number of original documents, maps, etc. in municipal archives such as the Town Archive, and others such as the Archive of the Royal Botanic Garden. There is also a large amount of literary and graphic information. The green spaces, the Paseo del Prado, the Gardens of the Buen Retiro Park and the Royal Botanic Garden still have their use and function. Many of the buildings of the Cerros de las Ciencias are still used for their original purpose, and other buildings such as the Prado Museum and Atocha train station maintain their original use.”

Decision: 44 COM 8B.21 of UNESCO

The last place declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO in the Madrid Region protects the unique natural urban environment of Europe. This declaration is the result of an initiative proposed by the Council of Madrid, the Community of Madrid and the Ministry of Culture and Sport, which sought to showcase a unique space where art, nature and science go hand-in-hand.

In the 16th century, Madrid introduced a novel urban design that would later be adapted by the 18th-century



*Palace of Communications,
which houses the Council
of Madrid*

enlightenment in other European capitals. The space was a tree-lined promenade that organically included elements related to culture, science and nature. This exceptional model, devised during Philip II's era, moreover, helped citizens gain access to scientific knowledge in a remarkably beautiful setting.

With this addition there are now five sites in the Community of Madrid that UNESCO has declared World Heritage Sites, making this Community a benchmark destination for visiting places worthy of that consideration. The Landscape of Light joins San Lorenzo de El Escorial (the Monastery and Royal Site), Alcalá de Henares (University and historic precinct) and Aranjuez (Cultural Landscape) to which it is necessary to add the Hayedo de Montejo beech forest, declared a Natural Heritage site.

Within Madrid, the geographical boundary encompassing the site declared World Heritage has the Paseo del Prado as the focal point stretching from Plaza de Cibeles to Plaza del Emperador Carlos V, which runs along the Buen Retiro Park on one of its sides and the neighbourhood of Los Jerónimos on the other. A journey marked out by a constellation of places, buildings and environments of unique value from very different origins.

Among them we find spaces of great environmental importance such as the Garden of the Buen Retiro and the Royal Botanic Garden. A real lung in the centre of Madrid, as well as a first-rate historical document, and the other, the oldest museum institution in Spain, a little paradise in the heart of the city where science has been thriving since the 18th century.

The space that the Landscape of Light encompasses is probably one of the most artistically dense places in the world. The Prado Museum, the Reina Sofía National Art Centre, the National Anthropology Museum, the Casa de América, the National Museum of Decorative Arts, the Naval Museum, the Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum and CaixaForum Madrid are some of the examples of the enormous range of museums it houses.

The list of names of universal significance hanging from the walls of its museums is endless; in Madrid alone it is possible to view works by Velázquez, Goya, Hopper, Titian, Hieronymus Bosch, Caravaggio, Picasso, Rubens, Monet, Degas, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Miró, Mondrian, Van Dyck and El Greco within the few square kilometres declared a World Heritage site.

Values

“Integrity. All the important attributes identified are preserved within the boundaries of the property; they are maintained correctly and are in good condition, no significant neglect was identified. It maintains its integrity as a planned urban development. Contemporary interventions on historic buildings need to be considered for the future and it is necessary to pay special attention to the intensity of use and overexploitation in the short-term, the adaptation to climate change specifically in relation to the trees on the Paseo del Prado, Buen Retiro Park and Royal Botanic Garden, traffic and air pollution.”

Decision: 44 COM 8B.21 of UNESCO

The incorporation of boulevards into the urban landscape -tree-lined avenues, not necessarily with poplars- was a genuinely Spanish contribution that had its prototype on the Paseo del Prado. Its adoption brought with it a new conceptualisation of urban space: a leisure and recreation space in close contact with nature that also served -and continues to serve- as a connecting link between sites with aesthetic, scientific or artistic values. It is also an attempt at improving hygiene and social reform, that exudes enlightened ideas. This model was exported by the Bourbons to the Ibero-American colonies and adapted by several European cities in the 19th century. Since its implementation the presence of vegetation within cities has continued to increase,



Puerta de Alcalá

considerably improving the lives of their inhabitants. The boulevard acts as a powerful catalyst for human relations, through the endless cultural acts it has witnessed: theatre, music and street art encourage an environment that is conducive to being sociable and create a unique and virtuous network.

Nature

The presence of a natural space like the Buen Retiro Park as a crucial part of the urban planning design formed by the Landscape of Light adds the green dimension to the ensemble. Undoubtedly, this oxygen creator within the city is a resource that contributes greatly to its sustainability, as it is a source of air purification, it cushions the effect of temperatures and helps to contain pollution. It is one of the favourite places of the people of Madrid for going to breathe fresh air away from the bustle of the city and it is home to authentic botanic, historic and architectural wonders. Ultimately, it is a first-rate environmental asset.

A special mention is deserved for the Glass Palace and the Velázquez Palace, both representatives of the architecture of the 19th century. These are two buildings housed within the park that have become benchmarks in their own right for visitors and they currently hold temporary exhibitions by the Reina Sofía National Art Centre.

The Royal Botanic Garden, with a fully scientific vocation, completes the green patch of the Landscape of Light. It was created with the mission of promoting the knowledge, conservation and enjoyment of plants and their natural environment and it is one of the first institutions of this type in Europe, the result of enlightened despotism, although it was not until 1774 that it was moved to its current site on the orders of Charles III.



Pond in Retiro Park

Buen Retiro Park

This green space located in the heart of Madrid offers 125 hectares of nature, monuments and recreation. More than 15,000 trees, including the oldest in Madrid, a Montezuma cypress, which has been calculated to be 400 years old. The park is full of gardens in different styles: Those of Cecilio Rodríguez, in a classical and Andalusian style, that of Vivaces, the rose garden and the French Parterre.

The perimeter of the park is dotted with buildings and architectural elements. One of the most celebrated is the



Big Pond, where it is possible to rent a rowing boat and which is home to the Municipal School of Canoeing for children and young people. Other examples are the reserve of Ferdinand VII, which includes several “caprices”, such as the Fisherman’s House, and the Smuggler’s House, which now houses the Florida Retiro recreational centre, previously Florida Park.

The walk around the park is marked by statues and fountains, some very notable such as the monument to Alfonso XII and the monument of the Fallen Angel, one of



*Monument of the Fallen
Angel in Retiro Park*

the few sculptures in the world that depicts the devil, the Galapagos Fountain, which commemorates the birth of Isabella II, and the Forest of Remembrance which remembers the attacks of 11 March 2004.

In addition to walking, the Park offers many activities: runners and skaters find it an ideal place for doing sport, there is even a sports centre inside it. The offer is completed by a library and a cultural centre as well as several play areas for children and even a puppet theatre that has a show every weekend.



+info
Parque de El Retiro
Plaza de la Independencia, 7

The Crystal Palace and the Velázquez Palace

We should not forget two architectural benchmarks in the Retiro Park. The Crystal Palace is one of the best examples of the so-called cast-iron architecture of the 19th century in Madrid. It was built as a greenhouse for tropical plants as part of the 1887 Exhibition of Flora from the Philippines.

It is a work by the architect Ricardo Velázquez Bosco, who was inspired by the Crystal Palace of Hyde Park in London, built in 1851. In addition to the large glass windows that give it the transparent quality, the ceramic décor of its friezes, a work by Daniel Zuloaga, stands out. In the lake at the foot of the Crystal Palace there are several specimens of bald cypresses planted which are partially submerged that, alongside the large horse chestnut trees that frame it, recreate the Romantic atmosphere of the early 19th century.

We also owe the Velázquez Palace to Velázquez Bosco, and it is named after him. It was built between the years 1881 and 1883 on the occasion of the National Exhibition of Mining. It is a building that fits into Neo-Renaissance historicism, characterised by large iron and glass vaults that enable natural light to enter its rooms. Its characteristic facade of two-tone brickwork is countered by the frieze of tile work created by the Royal Factory of La Moncloa.

Both buildings are now venues of the Reina Sofía National Art Centre, used for temporary exhibitions.

*Velázquez Palace
in Retiro Park*

Royal Botanic Garden



The Royal Botanic Garden

Influenced by enlightened despotism, Charles III devised a complex devoted to Natural Sciences. As part of the plan, he moved the botanic garden created by his brother Ferdinand VI in the Orchard of Migas Calientes (close to what is now Puerta de Hierro) to within the renovation project of the Paseo del Prado and close to what was then the Natural History Museum and is now the Prado Museum. The neoclassical style architectural is the work of the architect Francisco Sabatini.

The Botanic Garden sponsored great expeditions to Ibero-America and to the Pacific, renowned illustrators were commissioned to produce botanical drawings and new species were described for science.



It is an institution that is overseen by the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) and it houses more than 5000 living species of plants, as well as an herbarium with more than one million specimens, an archive and a library. An entire complex devoted to botany that, without losing the historic character that gave it status, has been able to adapt its role to modern times, disseminating the natural heritage that it safeguards through temporary exhibitions, guided visits and workshops for children.



+info
The Royal Botanic Garden
Plaza de Murillo, 2

Art

Although the jewel in the crown of the cultural offer of the Landscape of Light is the Prado National Museum, uniquely rich in paintings by Spanish masters and several schools of painting from the rest of Europe between the 15th and 18th centuries, and the Spanish ones of the 19th century, including globally renowned works such as *Las Meninas* by Diego de Velázquez, *Charles IV of Spain and His Family* by Francisco de Goya and *the Garden of Earthly Delights* by Hieronymus Bosch, the other Museums located on the so-called Golden Mile of Madrid do not lag behind: The Reina Sofía National Art Centre is the flagship of contemporary art in Spain and it houses, among others, *Guernica* by Picasso, as well as extremely important collections of works by Salvador Dalí and Joan Miró. Its attachment to contemporaneity makes it a benchmark for new artistic trends through its temporary exhibitions. Without abandoning plastic arts, or the perimeter of the Landscape of Light, the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum offers foreign creators, such as the Americans Hopper and Pollock, and the impressionists and post-impressionists Monet, Gauguin and Van Gogh. The offer is completed by other National Museums such as that of Decorative Arts, private institutions such as the CaixaForum and other collections such as those hidden in the Congress of Deputies and the Bank of Spain.



Prado Museum

We need to consider the contribution of the architectural riches to the Landscape of Light, both of emblematic buildings, such as those that house the aforementioned museums, as well as the urban ecosystem of the neighbourhood encompassed in the declaration. Many of them have been inherited from the enlightenment architecture of the 19th and 20th centuries that give Madrid a unique character and beauty.

Prado Museum

The Prado Museum is one of the most important galleries in the world. Its collections provide a journey through the history of Spanish painting from medieval works, such as the Mozarabic paintings of San Baudelio de Berlanga, to 19th century works. Hispano-Flemish and Renaissance



painting can be seen in the panels and canvases of Bartolomé Bermejo, Berruguete and El Greco. It is the main witness of the Spanish Golden Age with paintings by Ribera, Murillo and Velázquez, some of whose most important works hang from its walls, such as *Las Meninas* and *Apollo in the Forge of Vulcan*. Another great genius of Spanish painting, Francisco de Goya, is extensively represented in the Prado Museum. From his boards for the tapestry factory to emblematic works such as the *Majas*, the *Third of May 1808* and the *Black Paintings* of the last stage of his life.

The Historicism of the Spanish 19th century is present in works by Fortuny, to which it is necessary to add works by Sorolla and the Madrazo family. The birth of Picasso closes the temporal scope of its collections and from this



*Reina Sofía
National Art Centre*

*Casón del Buen Retiro.
Venue of the Prado Museum*

point on, the Reina Sofía is responsible for exhibiting plastic arts, from the avant-garde movements to the present day.

The Prado houses impressive collections of international painting. From the early Italian Renaissance, the Annunciation by Fra Angelico stands out, along with names such as Botticelli and Mantegna. The Cinquecento appears in the virgins of Rafael and it has some of the main names of the Venetian school, such as Tintoretto, Veronese and Titian. Into the baroque era, the galleries of the museum are illuminated by Caravaggio, Guido Reni and Carracci.

The historic interests of the Spanish crown in Flanders have resulted in extensive representation of Flemish

painting, with first-rate works such as the Descent from the Cross by Van der Weyden and the Garden of Earthly Delights by Hieronymus Bosch. The baroque splendour is displayed in works by Rubens, Brueghel, Jordaens and Teniers. Other countries such as France, Holland and Germany are represented by painters such Dürer, Rembrandt and Watteau. There is also room for other forms of artistic expression such as sculpture -the Roman statuary and the works by the Leoni family are significant- and jewellery, as in the case of the Dauphin's Treasure.

The building that the Museum currently sits in was originally designed by Juan de Villanueva as a Cabinet of Natural History. It was during the reign of Ferdinand VII, and sponsored by his wife María Isabel de Braganza that it began housing the royal collections. In addition to the Villanueva building, it has other venues such as the Casón del Buen Retiro and the recent extension by the architect Rafael Moneo.



+info
Prado Museum
Calle Ruiz de Alarcón, 23

Science

The Enlightenment was a reaction against obscurantism and superstition, a pursuit of light in knowledge that provided an enormous boost for critical thinking. This spirit imbues every aspect of human endeavour and is reflected in the urban planning development of the Landscape of Light, dotted with buildings devoted to science. The seed of this movement can be found in the fact that the Prado Museum was initially conceived as the Cabinet of Natural History, along with the Royal Botanic Garden, in the 18th century during the reign of Charles III. However, perhaps its best representative is the Royal Observatory of Madrid, housed within the Retiro Park itself. An entire conceptual development encompassing science and nature inserted into a space devised for walking that is attractive and accessible. A space open to citizens that is a gateway to knowledge and that definitively established itself during the so-called Silver Age of Spanish culture during the 19th century, when the Naval Museum, Faculty of Medicine and the laboratory of Santiago Ramón y Cajal were built. We should not forget the presence of the Royal Spanish Academy, a connecting link between all Spanish speakers that delves into the universalizing nature of heritage, tangible and intangible, contained in its surroundings.



*National Astronomical
Observatory of Madrid,
southern slope of the Retiro*

The Royal Observatory of Madrid

In his pursuit of enlightenment, once again it was Charles III who drove the establishment of the Royal Observatory of Madrid and Villanueva was also the architect responsible for successfully creating the building which was located on a hill inside the Retiro Park in 1790. Inside, a 60 cm diameter reflecting telescope was installed by the astronomer W. Herschel. It is currently possible to view a replica of the original, which was destroyed during the Napoleonic occupation of 1808.

Its facilities include a library which, in addition to several old publications, houses a collection of instruments and

precision timepieces. A Foucault pendulum can be seen in the central rotunda showing the rotation of the earth. The Halls of Earth and Universe Sciences exhibit some of the historical instrument pieces, such as the mirror polished by Herschel and the Repsold meridian circle dating to 1854.

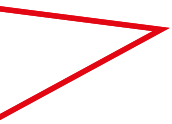
It is the headquarters of the National Astronomical Observatory and the Central Geophysical Observatory, carrying out work on subjects such as seismology, volcanology, astrophysics, cartography and meteorology.



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The Royal Observatory of Madrid
Alfonso XII, 3





World Heritage of the Montejo Beech Forest

*Hayedo de Montejo
beech forest*



Full designation: Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe

Date of Designation: 2017 for the Montejo Beech Forest (initially 2007 with extensions in 2011 and 2017)

Criteria of the World Heritage List: IX

Reference: 1133ter-065

Purpose: “Conserving the diversity of life on Earth is crucial for global human wellbeing. With the support of the World Heritage Convention, the most important natural sites are given international recognition as well as technical and financial assistance in dealing with threats such as agricultural encroachment, exotic species and poaching.”

Source: UNESCO/ERI / Description licence: CC-BY-SA IGO 3.0



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Criteria Applied by the Committee for Including these Assets in the World Heritage List

Criterion (IX): To be outstanding examples representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals.

Situated in the municipality of Montejo de la Sierra within the Biosphere Reserve of the Sierra del Rincón, the Montejo Beech Forest is a unique expanse of just 250 hectares but of incalculable ecological value. The indisputable queen of the

landscape is *Fagus Sylvatica*, the most widespread beech species in all of Europe yet not so much in the Iberian Peninsula, with the exception of the northern area, since it requires some degree of humidity to grow and survive. This makes the Montejo Beech Forest even more extraordinary and unique.

Its existence on this territory goes back to the last ice age. It was in that cold and damp period when large beech forests were formed in Spain that then gradually

disappeared when the climate started to change. The Montejo Beech Forest managed to survive thanks to the deep fresh soils that were permanently enriched by litterfall, to its northeast exposure that minimizes the effects of evapotranspiration and to its use as meadowlands –probably a decisive and crucial factor in its

conservation, aside from the climate and ambient conditions. Today it is the only beech forest in the Madrid Region and one of the southernmost in Europe.

Source: <https://sierranorte.com/reportajes/ficha.php?rut=17>

Hayedo de Montejo

The primeval beech forests of the Carpathians and other regions in Europe constitute a transnational Natural World Heritage comprising more than fifty forests, mainly beech, distributed around a dozen European countries.

Originally the designation focused only on a specific area of the Carpathians and was the result of cooperation between the administrations of Ukraine and Slovakia, which presented a joint proposal comprising almost 30,000 hectares of forest that initially included 10 locations along a 185-km axis. The proposal was designated a World Heritage Site in 2007.

In 2011, UNESCO accepted extending the site with five beech forests in Germany, which added 4,391 hectares of German forests to the 29,278 hectares of Ukrainian and Slovakian beech forests.

As a result of this, numerous European countries that also had primeval beech forests asked for theirs to be added to the designation. In 2017, UNESCO extended the asset to numerous forests situated in 12 countries around Europe to reach its current status.

In 2018, Serbia, Montenegro and Switzerland included more forests in the tentative list and so it is possible that this site will be extended even further in the coming years.

The forests protected by the designation comprise an outstanding example of complex, peaceful temperate forests. They contain a genetic reserve of beeches and many associated species that depend on these forest habitats.

Location

The Montejo Beech Forest covers 250 hectares on the foothills of the Sierra de Ayllón belonging to the municipality of Montejo de la Sierra, in the Madrid Region, to the north of Madrid province and on the border of Guadalajara province and the river Jarama.

The Montejo Beech Forest is one of the southernmost beech forests in Europe. The area's microclimate, due to capturing humidity from the air masses that do not collide with the mountain range, and the fact that the hillside remains in shadow, have enabled its conservation.

It is popularly stated that this beech forest is the southernmost in the whole of Europe, but this is not true; it is not even the one furthest south in Spain. The Montejo Beech Forest interpretation centre has a map indicating its position and that of other beech forests, and even the forest guides explain this common error to visitors. In Spain, the southernmost beech forest is “La

fageda del Retaule” (“the Altarpiece beech forest”) in the provinces of Tarragona and Castellón, and the southernmost beech forest in Europe (and the world) is in Sicily, on Etna’s southern slope.

Characteristics

It grows on a steep and shady slope that starts on the right bank of the river Jarama, near its source, and comprises the mountainous areas of El Chaparral and La Solana. In this terrain, beeches mix with oaks, Pyrenean oaks and holly trees, because finding a pure beech forest is only possible on less than half of its area. As regards its wildlife, there is an abundance of roe deer and wild boar in the undergrowth, plus numerous micro-mammals, insects and invertebrates, and the damp atmosphere favours the proliferation of amphibians and reptiles.

Visits

The Montejo Beech Forest is a hugely fragile expanse, and so visiting it is regulated and controlled. The tour starts at the Sierra del Rincón Biosphere Reserve Resources and Information Centre, where free passes are provided. In addition, the centre manages everything relating to this natural space and provides tourist information on the area, the paths that can be taken, the five municipalities that comprise the Sierra del Rincón Biosphere Reserve and the area’s accommodation and restaurant availability. It is open all year from 9.30 am to 5.30 pm except for the 1st and 6th of January and 25th of December.

The three itineraries for touring the Montejo Beech Forest are: the Senda del Río or the River Trail, a linear route running parallel to the river Jarama, an easy route requiring approximately 75 minutes to complete. Here you can observe most of the woodland settings and it is partially accessible to wheelchair users. The second one is the Senda de la Ladera or the Slope Trail, of medium difficulty and taking 90 minutes to complete. It climbs in the vicinity of the river and then along a slope. The last one is the Senda del Mirador, the Lookout Trail, which crosses several of the types of vegetation patches that configure the Montejo Beech Forest. It can be done in 90 minutes and the difficulty is high.

The passes can be booked online, by telephone and in person on the day you visit at the Sierra del Rincón Biosphere Reserve Resources and Information Centre.

The best time of the year for a visit is autumn, when the forest is dominated by reddish, ochre, yellow and gold hues and is transformed into a magical place.



+info
Sierra del Rincón
Resources Centre



+info
Sierra Norte





World Heritage on a Bicycle

Cycling is an original way of enjoying these World Heritage sites. The Madrid Region places the CiclaMadrid routes at your disposal, 420 kilometres connecting tourist destinations and resources, among them the World Heritage sites and Guadarrama National Park.

A simple, eco-friendly, accessible and healthy way of discovering the charm of our region and its natural environment.

Ciclamadrid Conecta

The Madrid Region has set up a website and an app to make the most of CiclaMadrid. The app is called Conecta! Here you will find maps and useful information for scheduling and enjoying tours around San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Alcalá de Henares, Aranjuez, Sierra Norte and many other municipalities in our region.

The app is available in both the Apple Store and in Google Play. It is an unbeatable tool for enjoying heritage and nature on an eco-friendly, active and fun vehicle, a bicycle.

In addition, the signage of all 770 km has recently been completed. Now you will feel accompanied throughout the route, making you want to know more and inviting you to explore the entire circuit.



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CiclaMadrid
Conecta!

San Lorenzo de El Escorial

Circular route around the historic centre and the natural environment

Duration: 3 h 10 min (14 km)

Difficulty: Medium

Daytime: Our starting point is the Commuter Station and we climb towards the urban nucleus, crossing the gardens of the Casita del Príncipe. Once crossed, we can choose to pedal along Calleja Larga, skirting the fences of the Monastery and the gardens towards La Herrería, or crossing the Lonja after skirting the Monastery to then also take the path towards La Herrería. We cross the forest towards the Chapel of the Virgin of Gracia to continue towards Philip II's Chair and from there take a trail that will lead us around some of the most significant spots such as the Cueva del Oso (Bear Cave) or the Castañar Estate. Afterwards we will have to cross and pedal along a short section of road to link up with the path of La Horizontal, which we will follow in its entirety. Lastly, we will descend along the streets to the town, where we can enjoy its cuisine, its architecture, its streets and its people.

Night-time. Circular night-time route around the main streets of the historic centre

Duration: 30 min (2.5 km)

We can start at any of its points: this route is well-lit and covers the main architectural landmarks. We can also end at any of its spaces, enjoying a varied cultural offering. We also suggest the option of heading for Terreros Park to enjoy the views of Madrid from there.

Alcalá de Henares

Route around the archaeological sites and the historic centre

Duration: 1 h 15 min (6 km)

Difficulty: Easy

Daytime: We depart from the La Garena Commuter Station and head towards the House of Hippolyttus, our first stop. From here we will continue along Avenida de Madrid until we cross Avenida de Nuestra Señora de Belén, which we will take as far as the Forum of Complutum. We return to the Madrid Gate and from here enter the centre to tour its most prominent sites. We can decide beforehand whether we want to view the city walls, head for the Archbishop's Palace or for the Magisterial Cathedral. We will then pedal along calle Escritorios and calle Santa Úrsula as far as plaza Rodríguez Marín and plaza Cervantes. On the way we will pass some of the university campus buildings. We will again have to decide whether we want to cross Plaza de Cervantes or go past the Parador on the way to the main seat of the University and the San Ildefonso Halls of Residence. We will finally emerge on to calle Libreros and will pedal along calle Mayor, where we can view its arcades and stop at Cervantes' Birth House.

Evening - Night-time. Route around the historic centre of Alcalá de Henares

Duration: 35 min (3 km)

Departing from the Madrid Gate, we will start by touring the city walls, admiring the way they have been lit up. Once in Plaza Santos Niños, we can take calle Escritores and calle Santa Úrsula to start the circular route along the streets of the historic centre, where we will observe

the nocturnal landscape created by its illuminated spaces and buildings. On the way back we can mingle in the bustle of calle Mayor or attend one of the performances at the Cervantes Theatre or the Corral de Comedias courtyard theatre.

Aranjuez

Route around the vegetable gardens and groves.

Duration: 40 min (10 km)

Difficulty: Easy

Cycling: From the Commuter Station we head to the Royal Palace of Aranjuez: we can reach the entrance of the Parterre Garden next to the Palace by crossing Plaza de Parejas and then Plaza San Antonio, passing the church of the same name. From the gate of the Garden, which we recommend you visit together with the Island's Garden, even though the latter does not allow bicycles, we head along calle de la Reina to the end of the Prince's Gardens. From here, along tree-lined avenues, we cross the Soto de Rebollo, view the Aranjuez vegetable gardens and some of its *Gangos* (picnic spots) such as El Rebollo or El Paraíso and then return to the gate of the Parterre Garden. At this point we recommend you park the bike and explore the Prince's Gardens on foot.

Route on foot. Route around the gardens and the town

Duration: 2 h (10 km)

From the commuter train station we head to the Royal Palace of Aranjuez. Once there we can choose between first visiting the urban centre to discover some of its

most outstanding buildings and spaces or start with the tour of the Parterre Garden and the Island's Garden. If we decide to start with the town of Aranjuez, we will cross the Plaza de Parejas and Plaza San Antonio and head towards the Isabel de Farnesio Culture Centre (on the way we will pass the food market, Plaza de la Constitución, the Town Hall, the Governor's House and some of the *corralas*, Aranjuez's communal courtyards). We will then follow calle del Capitán to the bullring. From here we will climb along calle del Almíbar towards the Prince's Gardens, which we will tour and exit via de gate of the Casa del Labrador, returning along Calle de la Reina to the Palace surroundings. Lastly, if we did not do so at the start, we will visit the Parterre and Island's Gardens.

Sierra del Rincón along the Jarama Valley

Pedalling through the Sierra del Rincón Biosphere Reserve

Duration: 4 - 5 h. (32 km). Elevation gain: 905 m ↑ and ↓

Difficulty: HIGH

Spectacular and varied route for MTB

We depart from Horcajuelo de la Sierra, taking as the starting point the direction sign of the Carpetania Network of Paths (SN87), which is located on calle Comunidad de Madrid. We follow the direction pointing towards Las Pinillas and leave the town along a white gravel path that passes by the heliport. The path divides in two and we take to the left-hand fork (pay attention to the yellow-painted markings of the Network of Paths). This section climbs far more steeply and enters the

valley of the Las Cabrillas stream. The path gains altitude until it reaches the upper line of the mountain range where the SN88 signpost is located and where we take the path towards Las Minas, in the direction of Robregordo. Before long we arrive at a crossroads and at SN7 we head along the Sierra Escalba Horizontal Path towards the Mosquito mountain pass. We set out on a long and sustained ascent while enjoying the excellent vistas of Sierra del Rincón, Sierra de Guadarrama and La Cabrera. The ascent peaks at the Mosquito mountain pass, where we change mountainsides and enter the head of the Jarama valley. The views are breathtaking. The peaks of Tres Provincias, El Pico del Lobo or El Cerrón accompany the birth of the river Jarama which, edged with pine groves, oaks, rowans and riverbank woodland, skips merrily through this unknown spot.

During the long descent we enjoy some truly stunning vistas. One of them, perhaps the most remarkable one, gives us a view of the Montejo Beech Forest from above and at certain times of the year displays some awe-inspiring colours. Shortly after we reach the Cardoso mountain pass and on SN38 we take the so-called Rianza path towards Montejo de la Sierra. The descent continues along the Sierra Escalba slope, leading us into the Montejo meadowlands, a gorgeous Pyrenean oak expanse containing the Montejo irrigation ponds. The calle del Agua, hemmed in by traditional vegetable gardens, takes us to the village of Montejo de la Sierra and its Plaza de la Fuente. From here we follow the signs to the path of Las Huertas (SN75). Under the shade of

the trees and flanked by the dry-stone walls that enclose the kitchen gardens in which the farmers grow the famously fat Montejo beans, we arrive back in Horcajuelo.



Tourism of the Community of Madrid

www.turismomadrid.es

San Lorenzo de El Escorial

<http://sanlorenzoturismo.es/>

Alcalá de Henares

<http://www.turismoalcala.es/>

Aranjuez

<http://www.aranjuez.com/>

Paisaje de la Luz

<https://paisajedelaluz.es/>

World Heritage Journeys

<https://visitworldheritage.com/en/eu>

Cicloturismo

www.ciclamadrid.es

Madrid Enoturismo

<http://madridenoturismo.org>

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World Heritage



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