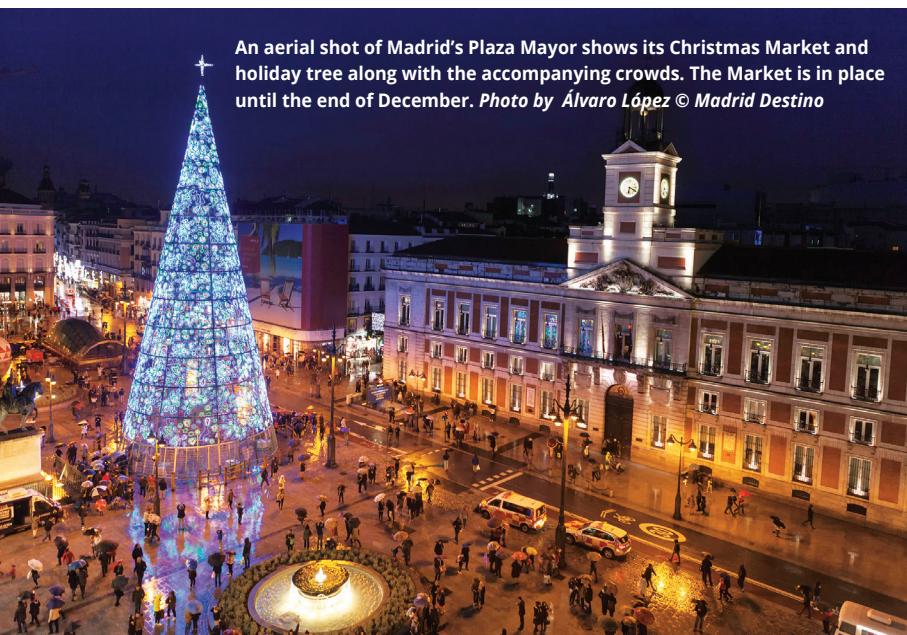


Traveling On: Marvelous Madrid



The Plaza Mayor is great for grabbing a bite to eat or people-watching -- often enjoyed at the same time. Photo by Álvaro López © Madrid Destino



An aerial shot of Madrid's Plaza Mayor shows its Christmas Market and holiday tree along with the accompanying crowds. The Market is in place until the end of December. Photo by Álvaro López © Madrid Destino

Story and Photos By Nicole Pensiero

Madrid, Spain— with its mild temperatures, many attractions and low prices— seemed a natural fit for our early November five day getaway. With great dining, fantastic shopping, and an endless array of cultural attractions, this is a European destination that has it all.

With minimal knowledge of Spanish, I immediately felt at ease in Madrid. Each day, we would set off on foot to explore, only rarely taking a taxi. We even had time to enjoy a full day in nearby **Toledo**, a magnificent medieval city that had once been the country's capital.

We loved our modern and centrally located hotel, the **Porcel Ganivet**. The price for our twin room was incredible— less than \$775 for five nights, with an included (and



At Chocolateria San Gines, visitors and locals enjoy Churros with Chocolate, available round-the-clock Wednesday through Sunday. Photo by Álvaro López © Madrid Destino

delicious) buffet breakfast. Located in the trendy La Latina neighborhood, we were more than happy with our stay.

Here are some suggestions for a visit to this magnificent European capital:

Exploring By Foot

With many visually stunning buildings from the early 1900s, we fully experienced the city's step-back-in-time vibe on day one, as we strolled to the **Plaza Mayor**. This enormous esplanade from the 17th century is used today for everything from rock concerts to outdoor markets; there was a Christmas market being set up during our visit. A 10-minute stroll from there leads to another Madrid landmark, the **Puerta del Sol**, which is considered the symbolic center of the entire country. If it is shopping you want, check out the array of high-end stores along the beautiful **Gran Via**.

Food, Glorious Food

Madrid is known for its countless outdoor cafes and restaurants. Ham (in any variation) is hugely popular in Spain, as is the famed rice dish, *paella*. Any first-time visitor needs to sample the any-time-of-day treat known as **Churros con Chocolate**—fried dough you dip in a warm cup of pudding-like chocolate. You can enjoy this delicacy round-the-clock, Thursday to Sunday, at **La Chocolateria San Gines**, in business since 1894. A serving for two people is less than \$6.

Get Cultured

The “Golden Triangle” of art comprises three world-class museums within walking distance of each other: **The Prado**, the **Thyssen-Bornemisza** and the **Reina Sofia** museum. The city's most famous work lives at the Reina Sofia: Pablo Picasso's **Guernica**, painted during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) and considered by many to be the world's most powerful anti-war painting.



The beautiful, medieval city of Toledo makes for a great side trip from Madrid. Photo by Nicole Pensiero

Explore Retiro Park

Nature abounds at Park Retiro, a gorgeous stretch of land and water once reserved for Spanish aristocracy. “El Retiro” is adorned with ornate fountains and open-air cafes. There's also a garden that has more than 4,000 roses in full bloom in May and June. You can rent a rowboat at the park too!

Experience Flamenco

You can watch Flamenco in big, touristy rooms, or smaller venues like **Flamenco Torres Bermejas**, where we went. Opened in 1960, this club was beautifully decorated and lit.

Enjoy a Side Trip

We booked a full-day excursion to nearby **Toledo** (about an hour's drive from Madrid) via www.getyourguide.com. For only \$25 per person, we were transported to and from this ancient city, enjoyed a brief walking tour, then had four hours on our own. Its historic medieval quarter is a UNESCO World Heritage site.

We couldn't see and do it all during our five-day adventure, but we got a great taste of all that Madrid offers, and one day we'll be back to explore more.

For more information about Madrid, visit: <https://www.esmadrid.com/en>.

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