Let’s visit the wine region, Ribera del Duero, from Madrid!

We all know that we owe a lot to the Romans- the feats of engineering, the inventions, the creation of basic law, the art. But in the case of Ribera del Duero, we owe them the discovery of the perfect place to grow the tempranillo grape, and the beginnings of the Ribera del Duero wine region.

Do you like full-bodied red wines, exploring ancient ruins and travelling through stunning landscapes? Then Ribera del Duero could be your next destination. To give you a head start, here are some useful tips from inside the wine industry, including where the region is, why it is famous, my favourite winery and how to get there from Madrid.

The scoop

Ribera del Duero is talked about as being one of the most prestigious wine regions in Spain. It is renowned for its **full-bodied, elegant and complex red wines**, which are of an **extremely high quality** (the region’s regulatory body only allows a certain amount of grapes to be produced per harvest- meaning that quality is in, and quantity is out).

In fact, in 2012 Ribera won a Wine Star award for being the **best wine region in the entire world** (which in the wine world is the equivalent to winning the Oscars).

Roman Gods and Medieval fortresses

Ribera del Duero became an official D.O. (Designation of Origin) region in 1982, but wine has been produced here for **over 2,000 years**. We know for sure that the Roman people of Ribera del Duero made wine, because they left behind mosaics

of the Roman God of wine, Bacchus.

Bacchus was, amongst other things, the youthful, beautiful and (somewhat) androgynous God of harvest, wine and general all-round debauchery (he was actually the half mortal son of Zeus, so who can blame him). You can still see a 66 metre mosaic tile floor dedicated to him and his frivolous escapades at the *Baños de Valdearados,* a small pueblo right in the centre of Ribera del Duero.

The Ancient Romans believed that wine was a ´daily necessity´ and produced wine in Ribera del Duero for everyone in society- men, women, slaves, aristocrats and peasants

In fact, Ribera del Duero gets its entire name from the Romans and their love of wine; they were also so thankful for the blessing of the river on their vineyards, that they personified the river as Durius, a River God (who, we can only

assume, was working in cahoots with Bacchus).

Ribera del Duero continued to make wine long after the Romans left- all throughout the Visigoth, Muslim, Christian and medieval eras, right up until today. This means that Ribera del Duero not only has beautiful vineyard landscapes shaped by thousands of years of wine making, but also a winemaking tradition as old as the Coliseum.

If you are interested in medieval history or have a penchant for fairy-tale architecture, Ribera del Duero also has an incredible collection of Middle Age castles. On my last trip, I visited the official ´National Monument´ of the castle of Peñafiel, which is located where all good castles are- on top of a hill.

The castle of Peñafiel

Geography

Ribera del Duero is a long and narrow wine region shaped to follow the path of the Duero river. Ribera del Duero is effectively an extended area of vineyard river bank, which is why the word ´Ribera´ (river bank) is used in its name.

The Ribera del Duero the wine region includes parts of **four regional territories**– covering the south of Burgos, extending west into Valladolid and encompassing sections of Segovia in the south and Soria to the east.

There are 4 main municipalities: Peñafiel, Roa, Aranda del Duero and San Esteban de Gormaz. These are surrounded by rural areas of vineyards and wineries, churches, castles and beautiful valleys.

My favourite winery

There are almost 300 wineries spread over the river banks of Ribera del Duero, a combination of hundred-year-old traditional family wineries and modern corporate giants, but for me, the winery **Pago de Carraovejas** is a real diamond- a shining example of how to keep Ribera del Duero´s wine

traditions alive, but not be afraid of modern innovation.

Back in the 1970´s, a curious young sommelier José María Ruíz had a dream that he would one day own his own restaurant, where he would serve Segovia´s most traditional dish, ´cochinillo´ (roast baby piglet), which would be paired with his own Ribera wine.

Years later, and just 3km outside Peñafiel, Ruíz´s impressive winery is in the perfect location in a sunny valley, protected by the hills from the North Wind and close enough to the river.

The vineyards of Pago de Carraovejas in its special valley this summer 2014, with views of Peñafiel castle in the distance

On my last trip to Ribera, I took part in the unveiling of Pago de Carraovejas´ new wine tasting technique: the peeling and tasting of the skin, pulp and seeds of the grape before

tasting the wines. This is a prime example of Carraovejas´ innovative approach to wine and ability to think outside of the box, as is their research with Universities to create their own natural yeasts and bacteria specific to the land.

Pago de Carraovejas in winter, photograph taken by my colleague and wine expert Raul Buendía. As the seasons change, so do the landscapes- with so many vineyards, each season brings unique stunning views

If you tour their winery, not only will you taste their fantastic red wines throughout the tour in different winemaking rooms (a refreshing take on the traditional end-of-tour wine tasting), but you will also get to enjoy 3 delicious tapas dishes (including ´cochinillo´) that have been carefully elaborated in Ruiz´s dream restaurant to pair with the wines.

One of the delicious tapas served in the barrel room on my last visit- a tuna, sautéed pepper and vegetable stack, with edible flower

If you have a food allergy, Pago de Carraovejas are up to the job. They can adapt their tasting menu to gluten free and lactose free diets if you let them know in advance- and they will even serve gluten free bread. You might also want to let them know if you don´t want to eat ´cochinillo´ (baby piglet fed only milk and slaughtered at 15-20 days old), if you are a vegetarian, vegan or have certain meat eating beliefs.

Which wineries?

To see a list of all of the wineries registered in the region, go to the official Ribera del Duero D.O. website.

If this seems too overwhelming and you aren´t sure which winery to pick, or how to organise numerous visits that fit

together, you could organise a wine tour of Ribera del Duero from Madrid. You could even visit a winery that produces one of your favourite wines!

How to get there

Ribera del Duero has so many places to visit that you could leave Madrid in a number of different directions, depending on where you are headed. Here are two routes to the wine towns Peñafiel and Aranda de Duero.

By car:

I would recommend travelling to Ribera del Duero by car so that you can see Ribera´s landscapes as you travel up from Madrid. This is all part of seeing Ribera- the land, the vineyards, castles and landscapes have all been shaped by wine making. You will also have the freedom to move about the region once you are there- you could stay in a wine town and drive to rural wineries and castles during the day, returning to eat delicious local food in the town at night.

You can see which companies rent cars in Madrid by going to our previous Travelling by car in Madrid: renting cars, car sharing or carpooling article.

Route: Madrid- Peñafiel
Duration: 2 hours approx.
Tip: Combine this route with a stop at the beautiful UNESCO city of Segovia on the way

Route: Madrid- Aranda de Duero
Duration: 1 hour 45 approx.
Tip: You can find recommended Aranda de Duero scenic driving routes for once you have arrived in the area, on the official Aranda y Ribera guide website. Useful for a weekend trip.

By bus:

It is possible to travel to a few of the wine towns by coach

from Madrid. This would be a good option if you would just like to visit the main wine towns.

Route: Madrid- Peñafiel
Depart from: Moncloa
Duration: 3 hours approx.
Price: 17,00 approx. single
Company: The official Peñafiel website cites travelling with La Sepulvedana

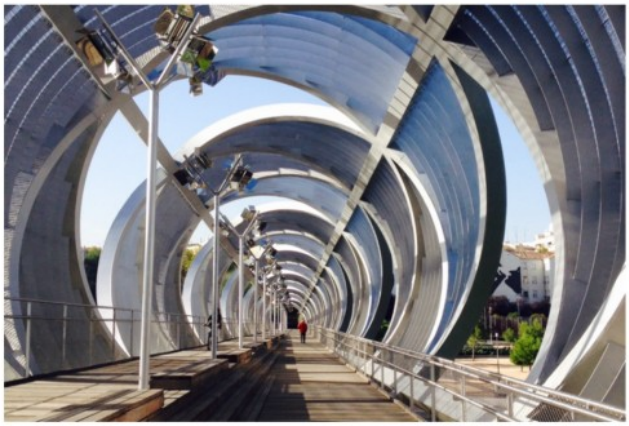
Route: Madrid- Aranda de Duero
Depart from: Avenida de America
Duration: 2 hours
Price: 12,00€ approx. single (24,00€ approx. return)
Company: Alsa

Wine word for your trip

El sarmiento– the little young, green vine shoot

Running in Madrid: November 2014

If the word ‘running’ ‘exercise’ or the idea of general movement makes you want to crawl under a rock, it’s probably best you look away now. But before you do… I want to make it clear that I am no running expert, I was always picked last for sport’s teams (sob), so why not hear me out..



Beautiful photography taken by Lauren Haynes on her run along Madrid Rio.

I have recently discovered the world of running (scorn all you like) but I can honestly say, without shame, that I am hooked. I always used to convince myself that I wasn't a runner, and that I did my daily exercise running up and down the metro every day, barging and weaving my way past the incessantly slow Spaniards who did a great job of ignoring my tomato face.

One day, however, my perspective changed. I was walking past *Lots of Colours* (a great shop by the way on Calle Fuencarral

that is actually affordable) and I saw some running shoes on offer in the window for 29 euros (this explains why they absolutely destroyed my feet, but that’s another story). They were taunting me, testing me. I had to buy them to make them shut up!

So anyway, I bought the shoes. Next step: use them. It’s harder than it seems, trust me. On a whim one day, I went out for my first clumsy run, feeling silly and self-conscious, but after at least 15 minutes I found myself running alongside Templo de Debod, near Plaza de España (for those of you who have yet to visit it, at night time it is lit up in a particularly majestic way), and suddenly I almost forgot that I was doing exercise and was simply enjoying the view. Madrid is a great place to run, once you have managed to escape the main streets, and there is the added benefit that you are unlikely to bump into anyone you know.

If I still have your attention so far, you might want to consider some of the great running opportunities there are in Madrid, because believe it or not there are races almost every weekend! The atmosphere is always alive and buzzing, even at 9.30 on a Sunday morning, and if you sign up you get a free t shirt and some food at the end the race (there I knew I could convince you).

Getting ready to start, check out the lycra ;)

Taken at X Carrera Popular Distrito de Retiro, 26th October.

So here is what November in Madrid has in store for you:

1. **4a Carrera Popular, Corre por el Niño:**

   Distance: 4 and 10 kilometres (A little bizarre, but a great one to get started!)

   When: Sunday 9th November, 9:30 am

   Where: Retiro Park

   Cost: 10€ (which goes to El Hospital Infantil Universitario Niño Jesús)

   Website

2. **XXXI Medio Maratón de Villaverde:**

   Distance: 21.097 kilometres (a half marathon)

   When: Sunday 16th November, 9:30 am

   Where: Metro Ciudad de Los Ángeles, line 3.

   Exit: C/Unanimidad (Auditorio El Espinillo)

   Cost: 12.60€

   Website

3. **Derbi de Las Africiones:**

   Distance: 10 kilometres

   When: Sunday 16th November, 9:00 am

   Where: Santiago Bernabéu Stadium, line 10

   Cost: 12€

   Website

4. IV Carrera de los Emprendedores:

Distance: 5 & 10 kilometres

When: Sunday 23rd November, 9:00 am

Where: Retiro Park

Cost: 8€ (possibility of discount if you sign up before 26th October)

Website

5. XXXV Trofeo Jose Cano:

Distance: It varies from 2-10 kilometres

When: Sunday 23rd November, 9:00 am

Where: The nearest metro stops are: Las Musas, San Blas or Alsacia

Cost: free for the first 300 who sign up otherwise 16€

Website

So I wanted to give a little summary of how I got into running, just to prove to readers that I am no athlete, and it can be a great way to keep fit (and for free!) If you know of any more running activities please feel free to share them!

After the X Carrera Popular Distrito de Retiro, 10 kilometre – happy running!

If you are really into running and you want to stay up-to-date with the latest running events in Madrid and beyond, please check out my blog: www.goguiri.com where you can also read my running diary.

Madrid's action-packed English-language comedy scene, interview with Josh and Rusty

Thanks to a whirlwind of stand-up comedy shows, improv groups and international festivals, you can enjoy live comedy in English in Madrid every week! This year alone, the city hosted an international comedy competition and received a visit from the world-famous stand-up comedian, Eddie Izzard, himself.

So, how do I find out about shows and get up on stage?

You can check out our **calendar** for upcoming events, but first, get to know the city's three main English-language comedy groups:

1. Ace Comedy Factory was founded by Joshua Saxon (from London) and Rusty Birdwell (from Tennessee) last March with monthly open mic comedy showdowns at Triskel Tavern in

Malasaña. They've also launched an event called "Comedy Super Team, Go!" which Josh calls the "*best of*", as they perform their most polished sets and feature comedians such as Archie Bezos and Kirk Bonacci.

Rusty on stage at Comedy Super Team, Go! at Ancora

2. Freshly Comedy prides itself on being Madrid's first English-language comedy group. It has two different shows: "*Freshly Squeezed*" (45 min stand-up/45 min improv) and "*Freshly Baked*" (90 min pure improv). At all of these events, expect lots of drinks, jokes and games, plus audience participation…

Freshly Comedy – doing what could only be improv – at Beer Station

3. MAD Improv is an English improv group that meets every Saturday afternoon. The first three weekends of the month are free, while the last is a 4-hour masterclass given by Benjamin Nathan-Serio, costing €25. Anyone can join; you don't have to be a native speaker or have any previous experience. In fact, one Spanish woman joined because she had to do public speaking in English at work. (check out their **meetup group**)

improv workshops in English near Puerta de Toledo on Saturdays from 4:30-7:30pm

Inside scoop on Madrid's English-language comedy scene

To give you a roadmap, I sat down with Josh and Rusty, the guys who founded **Ace Comedy Factory** and collaborate with **Freshly Comedy**. Rusty is one of the leaders of **MAD improv** and Josh organized this year's **Festival Internacional de la Comedia (FIC)**, which featured an outstanding line-up including Reginald D. Hunter, one of the UK's best known comedians whose 200-seat show sold out. The festival also included the **Funniest FICer competition**, Spain's premiere English-language comedy competition held in Madrid and Barcelona, plus a free inaugural event in Retiro – **The Big Comedy Picnic** – in which eighty people set up picnics on the grass.

seen at The Big Comedy Picnic in Retiro

First impressions

When I first met Rusty, I asked him how he got his name. His answer: “Well, my parents just couldn’t decide. My father wanted to call me Chainsaw and my mother, Butterfly!” It turned out this was an “elevated truth”, a tactic both Rusty and Josh use in their sets.

doing improv I assume…

Oh, and Josh likes to be called Batman if possible. He likes bats.

the batman of comedy indeed

Sitting down with Rusty and Batman for coffee at **La Ciudad Invisible** felt like a behind-the-scenes glimpse into their free-style warm-up; the shenanigans that go on when they hang out together often lead them to come up with their best lines.

What's the crowd like?

They get a lot of regulars and people from all over the world. One of the regular comedy-goers, Amy Flippant, from the UK, said: "I remember thinking it was cool to see so many nationalities and accents [on stage] in one event. There were Brits, Americanas, Canadians, and Spaniards, so it's very welcoming." She also witnessed all sorts of comedy, from loud and slapstick to very *very* surreal (especially at the picnic), and lots of first-time performers, too.

Why do you think Madrid has such a widely popular comedy scene in English?

Both Josh and Rusty agreed that the amount of stuff going on is quite unexpected. It shows the city's welcoming nature as well as the power of Madrid's expat community to start new things. Unlike cities like New York and London, there's little competition for English comedy in Madrid; it's a niche market here. What started out with a few English-language comedy nights a month has since turned into an action-packed micro-culture of stand-up and improv groups that are at it all year long. Not to mention the many English-language theater groups. That's a whole other story…

How did you get into comedy?

Both are pretty new to comedy. For Josh, who has a background in Journalism, it was always on his bucket list. On a whim, he participated in the **FICer Competition** last year and has been hooked ever since. Rusty calls Josh "super multi-talented," as he's not only a comedian and host, but also handles the web, organization and PR for many events. Rusty grew up doing theater and improv, and some film acting, although he stopped when he went into writing. While living in Madrid, he got the urge to get back into it and began organizing **Ace Comedy Factory** with Josh last February.

Do you get nervous?

"Yeah, of course," said Josh. He's had a few tense moments on stage, but it's part of the game. "I compare it to getting punched in the face. Once it's happened, you can stand up for yourself." Rusty followed with a quote he had recently heard: "The master has failed more times than the beginner has ever tried."

Their advice for anyone who wants to start something new in Madrid

"Go for it!"

*Images from **Ace Comedy Factory**, **MAD Improv**, **Freshly Comedy** and **Madrid International Comedy Festival***

The 3 Best Wine Shops in Madrid

All throughout Spanish history, farmers, monks and locals have produced wine and drunk it at their family tables, blissfully unaware that their daily vino was the nectar of the rich and privileged in faraway countries. **Wine has always been available here, and it has always been good.**

If you are not from Madrid, it can be hard to buy wine like a Spaniard. We tend to look for an imported bottle and an expensive label – but not anymore.

Forget your old assumptions about quality and price, because in Madrid, fantastic wine is produced just around the corner. On the edges of the city border, incredible **Madrid wineries** with vast vineyards are producing fantastic wines that have been enjoyed here locally for centuries. You have great wines at good prices right at your fingertips, and are in the perfect place to start a Spanish wine journey.

Working at a wine company, I have learnt a few things about where the Spanish buy their wine in Madrid. Drop your post-work trip to the supermarket and try these **3 best places to buy wine in Madrid**– whether you are looking to pick up a bottle for a friend´s dinner, or spend as long as you like on a Saturday afternoon browsing and tasting the wines that they have on offer.

Lavinia

Lavinia is a chic and modern wonderland of wine situated in the barrio of Salamanca. On the same street as Chanel, Dolce Gabbana and Louis Vuitton, its location only adds to its impeccable service, friendly staff and welcoming atmosphere. There is a sense that things are happening here, and they are: with a top restaurant and regular tasting events and courses (this month, special cheese and wine pairing), Lavinia is a hub of specialised wine activity. They even have little decanting machines to taste wine in the shop on your own- the perfect way to test your palate style if you not sure what you like yet.

Restaurant on top floor, with decanting machines for wine tasting below

Wines organised by wine region (Denominación de Origen-D.O.)

Lavinia´s exclusive wines and restaurant in the background on the top floor

If you are looking for your new favourite bottle, or a gift, and feel a bit lost, Lavinia is the best place to go. Just take in the label of your current favourite wine, e.g. an oaked smoky red, along with a price range, and they will show something new to try. If you are looking for a gift, you could even take in the label of a friend´s favourite wine and wrap up something that they have never tried before. Without a doubt, the staff of Lavinia know their stuff- just check out their website to see how many years each sommelier has totalled working in the wine industry.

Special themes and promotions encouraging you try something new

Beautiful wine store designs

The D.O. of Rioja has launched a gastronomic competition this autumn in which the best gastro bars across Spain compete for the best tapa. Lavinia´s entry: Lasaña de morcilla

Address: Calle Jose Ortega y Gasset, 16

Bodega Santa Cecilia

Santa Cecilia is, in so many words, a wine supermarket. It has a mini supermarket check-out counter, push entry barriers, aisles of beautiful shining bottles, wine gifts and books. However, Santa Cecilia also has a somewhat hidden secret weapon: a selection of traditional Spanish foods. Originally founded in 1922 as a traditional Madrileño food shop, Santa Cecilia has stayed true to its roots and today still offers a selection of delicious gourmet cheeses, hams, aperitivo snacks and store cupboard patés to add to the wine in your shopping basket.

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Following the theme of food, Santa Cecilia also has a mini cafetería style bar with high stools that serves tapas to try with the wine while you browse. This makes a visit to this shop with a friend a potential afternoon of food and wine tasting. They also have a serve yourself ´zona de catas´ wine tasting bar, with bottles open and ready to try if you need some inspiration, or are just figuring out what you like.

Wine tasting area with the tapas bar in the background

Santa Cecilia also offers a wide selection of liquors, juices, spirits and mixers, as well as tasting workshops and courses- this month Scottish whisky tasting and cocktail making.

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LICORES SIN
BOLS
BOLS
BOLS
BOLS

Address: Blasco de Garay 74, Madrid

Enoteca Barolo

Walking down the glass walled stairs into Enoteca Barolo´s underground wine selection is like submerging into your own private collection. The wines have been lovingly organised amongst modern box-like compartments and illuminated by simple lighting, as if the room were an exhibition of a life´s work. In fact, having lived for several years abroad in Italy, its owners returned to Spain with a passion for providing the city with an extensive selection of both Spanish and worldwide wines. This makes Barolo probably the best selection of wines in Madrid: a special selection put together by the owners´ personal recommendations.

Each wine bottle has its own little lovingly added paper price tag

If you already know a little about wine, the staff of Enoteca Barolo can help you out with suggestions for new wines to try, and you can learn more from their regular wine tasting courses. This month alone they have over 8 tasting courses, ranging from almost extinct grape wine and cheese pairing, to a progressive Italian wine tasting course.

You don´t have to be looking for an expensive bottle to visit to Enoteca Barolo either- their cheapest wine sells for 2,30 € (which, non-incidentally, is produced… in Madrid).

Address: Principe de Vergara 211, Madrid

Extra information:

If you would like to find out more about the wine region of Madrid and its local wines, just go to the official

Designation of Origin (DO) Madrid page, at: www.vinosdemadrid.es/en

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Bodegas Rosell, one of Madrid's best tabernas

Madrid is a fascinating city. We see so many new restaurants and bars opening up every week and yet, the city's good-old *tabernas* and more traditional bars are also thriving. When I crave the latter (which is quite often), one of my go-to spots is Bodegas Rosell.

Bodegas Rosell, one of my favorite old taverns in Madrid

Bodegas Rosell is one of those havens that I like to go to when I want to get away from the city's newer spots. Located close to Atocha, everything about **Bodegas Rosell** screams Madrid; you can breathe in tradition as soon as you walk in.

This wonderful place was founded in 1920 by the Rosell family, who converted a former wine shop into a neighborhood *taberna*. Today, **Bodegas Rosell** preserves the spirit of the old, traditional taverns that were so popular in another time. Its decor, food, portions, staff and service will take you a step back in time.

The Decor

When you arrive and stand in front of its facade, you realize you're in a special place. The facade's tiles are a genuine work of art, painted by Alfonso Romero, who also painted altar pieces in the **Plaza de Toros de las Ventas** (Madrid's iconic bullfighting ring).

While the exterior oozes with tradition, the interior doesn’t leave you unimpressed either. It’s not a particularly large place, which makes it even more charming. The walls are decorated with guitars, photographs of the Rosell Family, bottles of wine, and of course, we can’t forget about

the great map of the Community of Madrid. Can it be more traditional?

Bodegas Rosell is just perfect for a quick snack on a stool at any of the *barrel tables*; or for a quieter lunch or dinner at any of their *4-legged tables*. They also have private salons, so it won't be a problem if you are a large group.

The Food

Bodegas Rosell offers a traditional menu with generous portions. Specializing in meat dishes, one of their star dishes is *solomillo* (**pork tenderloin**). Another favourite is *bacalao* (**cod**) prepared *al horno* (oven-baked) or *rebozado* (fried in an egg and flour batter). And of course, you can also find excellent **canned seafood**, such as *mejillones (***mussels**), *berberechos* (**cockles)** and *anchoas* (**anchovies).**

I’m not very fond of fish, but this *bacalao* was superb.

The *entrecot* was so big that we had to ask the waiter to split it in two. This pic only shows half.

The *albóndigas* (meatballs) were amazing!

My favorite thing to order here is the plate of *embutidos ibéricos (***Iberian cured meats**) and the **cheeses**. You can have various types of cheese such as **Manchego, olive oil, Idiazabal, goat, sheep,** so I recommend ordering **the cheese board** for those undecided or who like all of them. The Iberian cured meats are wonderful, such as *jamón serrano*, *chorizo, lomo* and *salchichón*. I also recommend ordering the *tabla de ibéricos* ***(cured meat platter with all of them).***

Of course we also have the typical salads and vegetable dishes for those who aren't so keen on meat or cheese.

Mixed salad

Special mention; the fantastic *tostas* and tapas; perfect to accompany a refreshing *caña* (small draft beer). My favorite tapa is the *boquerones en vinagre* (**white anchovies in**

vinegar).

The house specialties are also fantastic: My favorites are the homemade, absolutely delicious **croquettes**, not to mention the typical *callos a la madrileña* (**Madrid-style tripe**) and the Spanish *tortilla* ***(egg and potato omelet).***

The house croquettes are wonderful, probably one of the best I've ever had in Madrid.

Despite all of these scrumptious dishes, Bodega Rosell's main attraction remains the **Cocido Madrileño** (a very typical and hearty stew prepared with garbanzo beans and all types of sausage) that they prepare by order.

Although the food menu is wide and varied, the dessert menu is smaller yet equally delicious; *leche frita (***fried milk**) or *natillas (***custard**) are some of the delights that Bodegas Rosell offers to end a delicious meal.

Cheesecake

Flan

All that’s left to say is that if you’re looking for an **authentic Spanish tavern**, then you’ve found it!

Price & Contact Info

The price range is varied and quite affordable. You can have a *tosta* or tapa for **€2.90** or a great steak for **€13.50**.

- **Websit** & **Facebook**
- **Address:** c/ General Lacy, 14
- **Phone:** 914 67 84 58

Here are some of our other favorite Madrid taverns & Spanish restaurants:

- **Taberna Lamiak (Basque-style pincho bar)**
- **Bar Lambuzo (Family-run Andalusian restaurant)**
- **Casa Mingo (Asturian cider house!)**

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3 Best Hotel & Restaurants in Madrid: Barrio de las Letras (Huertas)

Somewhere in the U.S., in a place whose name I do not care to remember, I found myself sleeping in a motel surrounded by gangs, in a room where the sheets hadn't been washed in a while and you could imagine picking up any sort of illness from the bathroom. A few years later, the story happened again, but this time back in Europe. Since then, every time I travel, I like to check out the best hotels on Trip Advisor and read the comments thoroughly before booking a room.

Here in Madrid, you've got plenty of fantastic and affordable hotels to choose from, which is why we're breaking this list down by **neighborhood**. So, what do we look for in the perfect hotel? One, its location. Two, extra fun; those that boast **rooftop bars**, great restaurants or free walking tours. And three, if we'd personally want to stay here and recommend it to our friends and family.

3 Best Places to Stay in Madrid's Barrio de las Letras (Huertas)

We're starting this series in **Barrio de las Letras**, a central neighborhood named after the many famous Spanish writers who once lived here. This vibrant neighborhood offers tons of fun bars and restaurants, and is located close to the city's main attractions such as Puerta del Sol, Plaza Mayor and Paseo del Prado, along which you'll find the **city's finest museums**. It's also very accessible by metro, near the city's main train station, Atocha, and the **airport shuttle bus**.

Learn more about the neighborhood in our quick guide: Madrid barrio overview

**All rates are approximate, please check their webs to confirm*

1. Room007 & Restaurant Saporem

Room007 is a wonderful hostel with a hidden restaurant in a perfect location; a two-minute walk separates this whimsical and inexpensive hostel from *Plaza Santa Ana* or *Sol,* both must-see sites in Madrid. On top of that, it won't take you longer than 10 minutes to walk to the **airport bus**.

Whether you're traveling with your backpack or with a family member, at **Room007**, you will find a good range of rooms from double rooms to a single bed in a 8-bed shared room. Moreover, the different kinds of people passing through will catch your attention.

As an added bonus, you'll get the chance to hang out on the **rooftop**! You will never want to leave. Also, let Adrian, the hostess, know that you want to enjoy some of the great activities that the place has to offer: **Free walking tours, bike tours, parties** (3 bars + 1 club), **drinking games, tapas experiences, affordable flamenco tablaos** and much more!

Hostel rates:

- Bed in shared room from 18€
- Double from 50€

**See special deals on their website.*

Contact info:

- **Address:** Ventura de la Vega, 5 & Hortaleza, 74
- **Metro**: Sol or Sevilla (Ventura) Chueca (Chueca)
- **Facebook**
- **Web site**
- **Email:** reservas@room007.com

1. Saporem Restaurant

If that wasn’t enough, **Room007** also has an **outstanding restaurant** downstairs, which you will have discounts on during your stay. Here you can find all kinds of food including burgers, vegetable platters and homemade pizza and pasta dishes. The average price is **around 20€/each** without the discount.

Libre

Menu

- Pasta & Pizza ……**9€-11€**
- Fish & meat……**8€-12€**
- Bottle of wine ……..**13€**

2. Hostal Persal & Ginger Restaurant

Hostal Persal is another really good option located just a stone's throw away from **Puerta del Sol.** This hostel is also close to **La Latina** neighborhood, one of the most famous areas in Madrid, well known for its charming streets and gorgeous **pintxo bars** like **Lamiak**.

Hostel rates:

- Single room from 40€
- Double from 50€

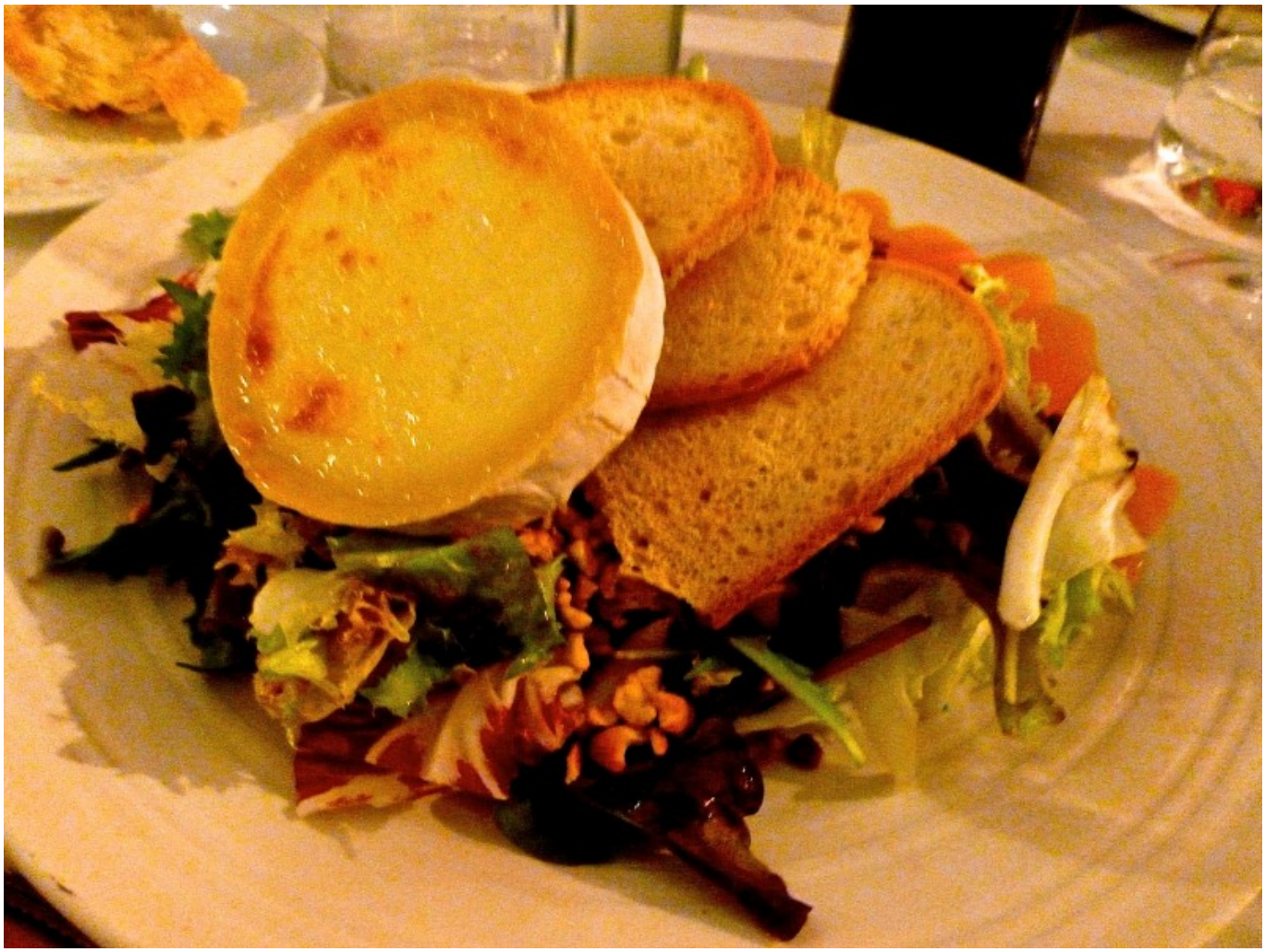
*Best price guaranteed on their website.

Hostal Persal Contact info:

- **Address:** Plaza del Ángel, 12
- **Metro:** Sol or Sevilla
- **Facebook**
- **Web site**
- **Email:** info@hostalpersal.com

2. Ginger Restaurant

Although it may look like an expensive place, Ginger offers great quality food at an affordable price. Ginger is owned by a restaurant group founded in Barcelona that now has **6 restaurants** in Madrid, all of which deserve a try. These restaurants run a chef apprenticeship program and share the same concept: nice ambiance, top quality and inexpensive food. On top of that, the group's foundation, **Andilana**, is a large NGO that invests money into helping people reintegrate into society.



Ginger Restaurant Contact info:

- **Address:** Plaza del Ángel, 12
- **Metro:** Sol or Sevilla
- Facebook
- Website
- **Email:** ginger@grupandilana.com
- **Tel. +34 91 369 10 59**

3. One Shot 23 & Ateneo Restaurant

One Shot 23 is a modern hotel which boasts a healthy mix of luxury, convenience and affordability. The hotel has another location in **Barrio de Salamanca** and is set to open more in Spanish cities such as Valencia, Seville and Barcelona. One of the advantages of staying at **One Shot 23** is its location – it is very close to the Prado and Thyssen Museum. Although Madrid is a very noisy city, the hotel is situated in a quiet area.

Hotel Rates:

- Single room from 68€
- Double from 72€

Contact Info

- **Address:** Calle Prado, 23 | One Shot 04 (Barrio Salamanca)
- **Metro:** Banco de España & Sevilla
- **Facebook**

- **Website**
- **Email:** prado23@oneshothotels.com

3. Ateneo Restaurant

Ateneo is much more than a restaurant. Since its founding, this institution has been a private cultural center. Today it is situated on Calle Prado, where you will be transported a century back in time. If Ateneo’s walls could talk, they’d surely tell fascinating stories of the history of Spain.

Enjoy your stay!

Los Chuchis Bar, Downright Good Food in Lavapiés

Los Chuchis is a sweet little bistro bar that sits on calle Amparo, one of those typically narrow and sloping streets in Lavapiés. The bar lures you in with its white-and-blue-striped

awning and funky decorations. Although it seats no more than fifty people – you may have to squeeze in at the bar or pounce on one of the few tables – what it lacks in size, it truly makes up for in quality. If you are a foodie, then dining at **Los Chuchis** is a must.

Los Chuchis was opened by Scott, an Englishman who has called Madrid home for about three years. Scott not only owns and runs the restaurant, but the kitchen, too. **Los Chuchis**' cuisine is British at heart; many dishes are inspired by Jamie Oliver, although touches of Spain can be noticed in its ingredients, drink selection and ambience.

The first time I heard of **Los Chuchis** was when Spain's newspaper, **El País**, came out with an article on **10 Madrid Expats' Favorite Bars**. A photo of **Los Chuchis and Scott** was featured at the top of the article. That photo stuck with me.

Since **Los Chuchis** had been lingering on my list for weeks,

James and I went for a ***menú del día*** (€11.50), which, I can assure you, is the best time to go. When I saw the menu, I was blown away by the number of succulent ingredients in each and every dish. Everything was so fresh and the presentation was delightful. I was smitten.

After much deliberation, here's what we ordered for lunch:

For starters, I had a salad with fresh greens, watermelon and fetta cheese. James went for the cold avocado soup.

For the main course, I ordered **hake fish with pesto and clams** and James got the **breaded veal with a lovely side salad of mango, tomato, avocado and onion**.

While we could have written this post right then and there, we decided that it was only fair that we try out **Los Chuchis** for dinner too. We just wanted to make sure it was as good as we thought it was. So we went back for dinner the other night and guess what? It was.

Dinner at Los Chuchis means *raciones* with friends

At night, **Los Cuchis** serves ***raciones*** (large dishes which you can either share or eat on your own). As we entered the bar on a Tuesday night, James and I were hit with all types of wonderful smells and instantly started gazing over at the patrons beside us, admiring the dishes they were devouring. The star dish that kept on coming out of the kitchen was the **potato skins with sour cream and hot sauce** (€8.50)**.**

The menu also featured tantalizing concoctions such as **Stinking Bishop cheese with grapes** (€13,50), **Isle of Mull**

cheddar with chilli peppers (€13.50)**, oven-baked Camembert cheese with roasted garlic and rosemary** (€12.50)**.** Then there were the more classic dishes such as **roasted chicken with lemon and rosemary (€10.50)** as well as **arugula salad with roasted tomato, red onion and Stilton cheese** (€11.50).

James and I decided to share the **lamb chops with yogurt and mint sauce** (€14.50). James liked the sauce so much that he took it home with him in a coffee cup.

Los Chuchis should be on the top of your list if you're into food, want to satisfy your tastebuds and appetite, and like discovering unique little restaurants that truly surprise you.

I recommend making a reservation for lunch and dinner. You can eat at the bar too.

Price range & hours:

- Lunch: *menú del día* – weekdays €11.50 & weekends €14.50. From 2pm-4pm.
- Dinner: *raciones* – 20-25€/person. Kitchen opens at 8:30pm.

Facebook

Address: c/ Amparo, 82

Metro: Lavapiés

Phone: 911 27 66 06

Travelling by car in Madrid: renting cars, carsharing or carpooling

Renting Cars

You can find all the major car rental companies in Madrid, such as Avis and Hertz. Unless you're picking up the car right from the airport, my advice is to go to Atocha train station because all the companies have offices there, so you can go in, ask for the best deals and pick up the car right then and there. Of course you can also book online at all these places.

Here are the top 5 car rental companies in Madrid (based on popularity) and links to their Madrid webs:

1. **Hertz**
2. **Europcar**

3. Sixt
4. Pepecar.com
5. Avis

Carsharing, Carpooling or Car Clubs (whichever way you call it)

In the last few years, a new way of travelling has appeared: **carpooling is the 21st Century version of hitch-hiking.** Online car-sharing platforms allow drivers and carless travellers to get in touch, travel together, share expenses and keep each other company during the ride. Drivers post where and when they are going and how much money you'll need to pay. If it suits your travel plans, you just contact them! Easy as pie. So if you want to go to Alicante or even Lisbon, you're bound to find someone who's already heading that way and is offering an extra seat in their car. Many websites offer this service, but **Bla Bla Car** is the most common in Spain and it's very easy to use. Also, if you're a woman travelling alone, there's the option to seek other women drivers.

Here is a quick guide on how to use it:

Step 1# go to blablacar.es (or any other if you wish!)

Step 2# Get a user.

- You only need your facebook account or email address and a cell phone number.
- They will send you an email and cellphone text message which you will use (both of them) to confirm your account

Step 3# Select your departure city and

destination.

Step 4# Select your driver. A women's section is available, if you aren't comfortable enough.

Step 5# Pay for your trip through the website. The carpooling company will send a code which you'll have to give the driver once you get to your destination.

If you can't make it, they offer a **cancellation policy:**

- More than 24 hours cancellation, you get your money back
- Less than 24 hours cancellation, you get 50% of your money back
- You don't show up, you get nothing!

Here are some links to **different websites** that work in Spain

- **Carpooling**
- **Amovens**

Check out more posts on getting around Madrid here:

1. Getting around Madrid by train: inner-city commuter train (Cercanías) & high-speed train (AVE)
2. Madrid's easy metro system
3. How to get your abono (monthly travel pass)
4. How to get to Madrid's beautiful surrounding towns

Travelling by train in Madrid: commuter train (Cercanías) & high-speed train (AVE)

The most convenient way to travel in Spain is by train. The country has been investing in train infrastructure for many years now and as a result, we have one of the largest train and high-speed train systems in the world. Spain's high-speed train, called the **AVE**, travels long distances across the country, while Madrid's suburban train, called the **Cercanías**, covers medium distances.

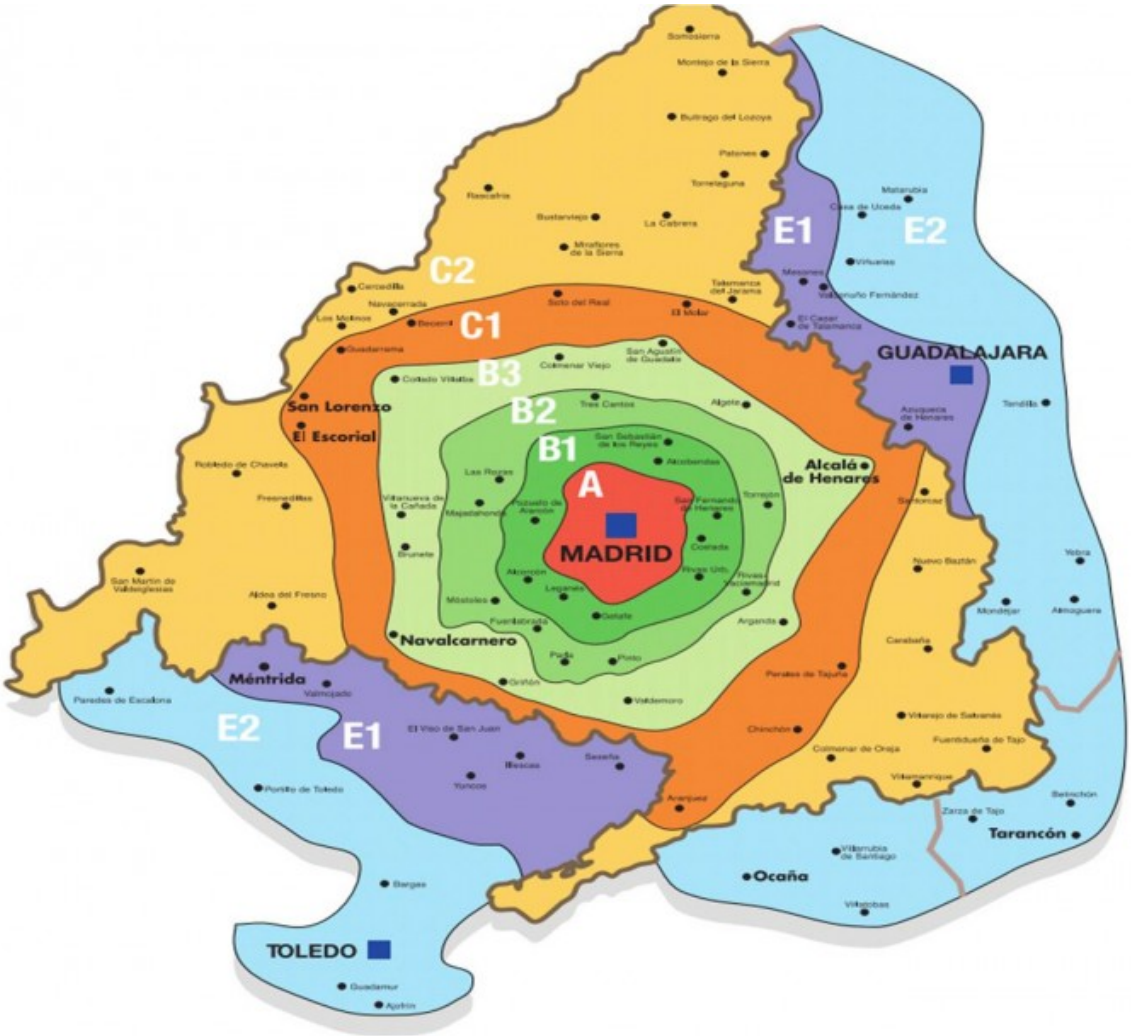
Thanks to the **AVE,** you can get to cities like Barcelona, Valencia or Alicante in just a couple of hours. Unlike flying into the country's airports, the **AVE** picks you up and drops you off in train stations located right in the city center. And thanks to the **Cercanías,** you can cross the city in a matter of minutes and visit **Madrid's surrounding towns** in no time. Plus the **Cercanías** is connected to **Madrid's underground metro system**.

Here's all the info on Madrid's train services:

1. Suburban train services or Cercanias

The suburban train system – ***Cercanías*** – goes across the city connecting the main stations of Madrid with other cities near the capital. The service runs from 5am or 6am (depending on the line) until 12am. ***Cercanias*** has 10 different lines and some of them are connected to the normal metro system, which is really good because you can combine them to make your trip even faster. Before I start talking about the price, let me

remind you that Madrid's pubic transportation is divided into zones (A, B1, B2, B3, C1, C2, E1 and E2). Zone A includes Madrid's city-center while E2 takes you all the way to cities like Guadalajara or Toledo.



There are three different types of tickets that you can use on the suburban train system.

1. A single trip costs 1,65€ (one/two zones) – 5,40€ (Seven zones).
2. You can also buy a 10-journey train ticket and its price can also vary depending on how many zones you'll buy it for (9,85€ for 1/2 zones to 37,75€ 7 zones).
3. Finally, you can also use your monthly travel card (abono).

- **Full map**

Mapa de Cercanias by Renfe

- **Full fares (official English website)**
- **Schedules (Link to Cercanias website)**

2. High speed train or AVE

AVE Atocha by Guias-viajar.com

AVE is the Spanish high-speed-train system. These trains get you to some of the biggest cities in Spain in just few hours or less. Although prices aren't cheap, there are some ways to get them cheaper: the most advisable is to take 4 seats (a table). That way you'll save 40-50%. Also, it's good to remember that train stations are in the city center, so you won't spend money and time getting to and from the airport.

Renfe, Spain's train company, has an App for IPhone and Android called Renfe Ticket

- Check prices and buy your tickets (AVE website in English)
- Renfe Official Website

Red española alta velocidad by Wikipedia

Feature photo by guias-viajar.com

For more info on travelling around Madrid, check out these posts:

- *Getting around Madrid by Metro*
- *How to get to Madrid's beautiful surrounding towns*
- *How to get your Abono (Madrid's monthly metro pass)*
- *Travelling by car in Madrid: renting cars, carpooling & carsharing*
- *An overview of Madrid's central neighborhoods*

Getting around Madrid by metro

A few years ago, I was running late to work as usual and I got into my *boca de metro* (metro entrance) only to realize the metro had closed for no reason. I kept walking to the next metro stop, and it was closed too! “Yes! I have an excuse for being late to tell my boss,” thought the Spaniard in me. Then, I realized that something big was going on – the city’s public transport workers had gone on strike.

For three days, the city looked like a scene from a Hitchcock movie. People were either waiting in lines to take the bus or walking long distances to work. To sum up, chaos reigned over the city. Finally, the transport union and City Hall came to an agreement and the citizens got back the most valued form of public transport in Madrid – the metro!!

Madrid’s first metro line was opened by the former King Alfonso XIII on October 17th, 1917. Today, under Felipe VI’s reign, ***El Metro de Madrid*** covers more than 300km and 12 lines (plus line “R” and the “light rail”) and it is the most used form of transport in Spain.

Here’s all you need to know about tickets, prices and zones!

metro by metromadrid.es

If you're in Madrid for a few days, there are three types of metro tickets to choose from:

1. **Tourist travel pass for 8,40€, one day:** unlimited rides for metro, bus and **regional train system (Cercanías)**. Before you buy one, remember that the city center is not that big and you can walk almost everywhere.

2. **Metrobús, 10-trip ticket for 12,20€:** access to all metro lines and buses.

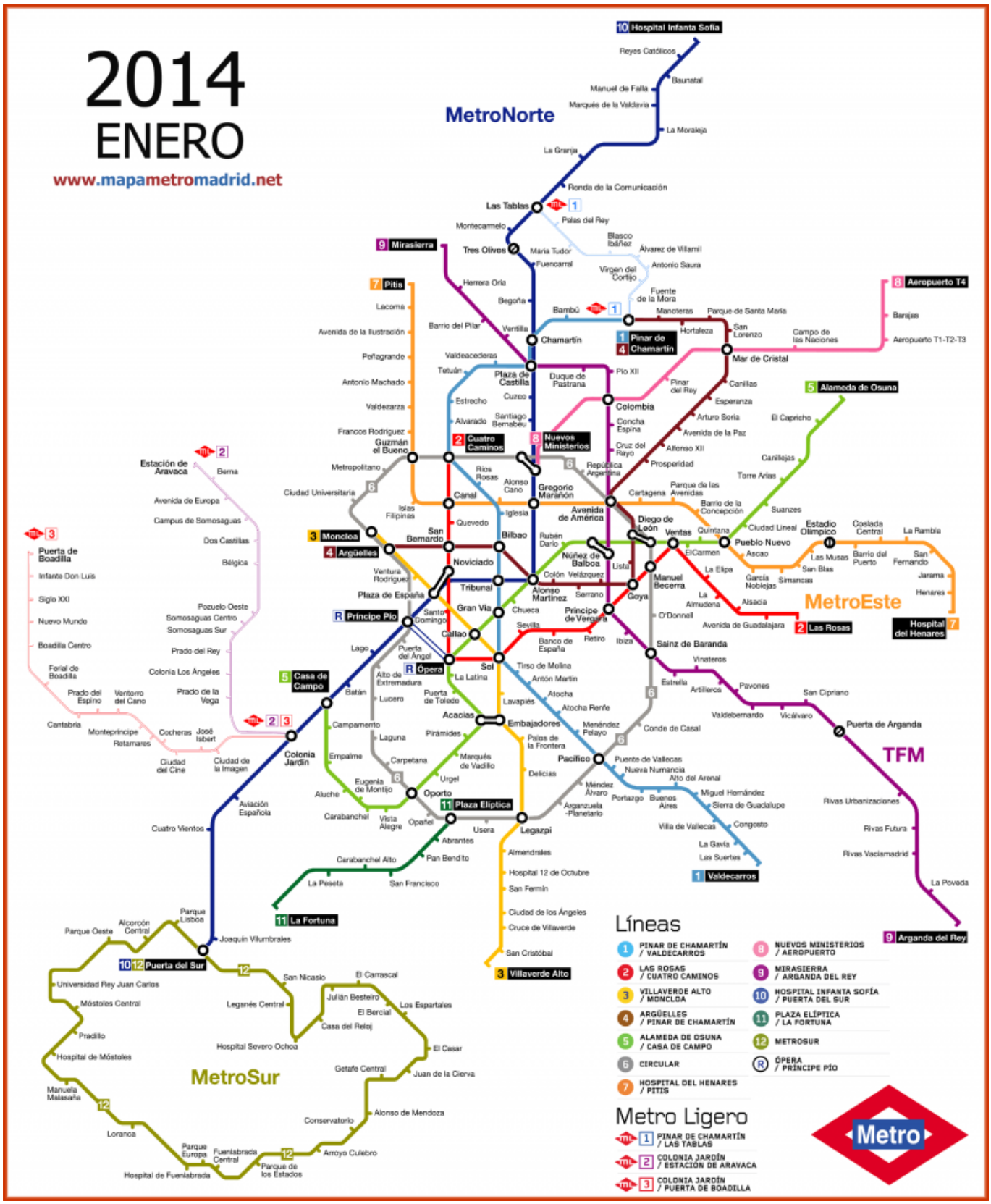
3. **Single trip ticket for 1,50€** (first 5 stops + 0,10€ every next stop, max 2€).

Our advice: if you're only here for a few days, you should buy this last option.

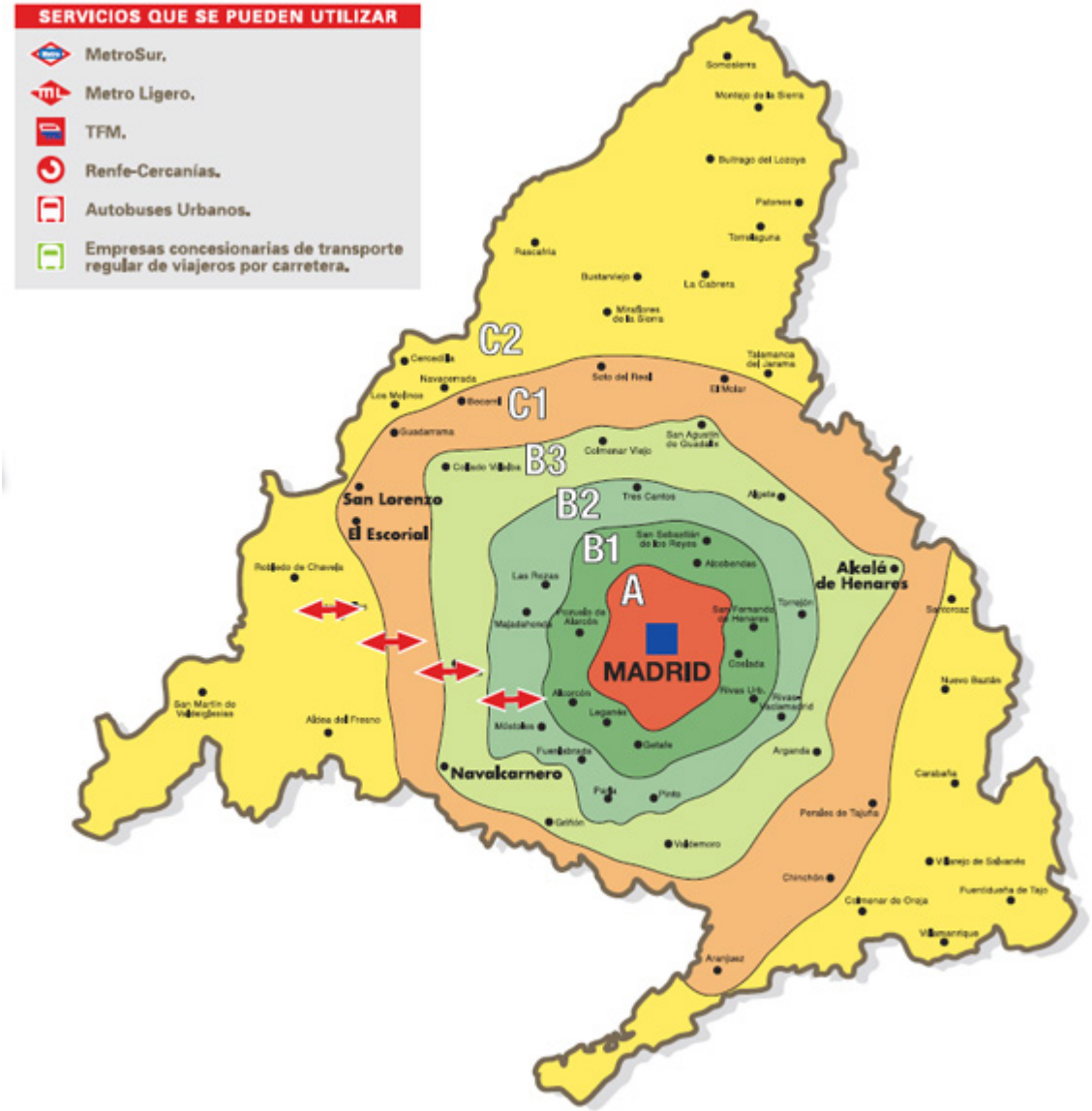
If you are planning on staying a bit longer, you might

consider getting a **monthly travel card**, called an *abono,* in which case you'll pay **54,60€ per month** for unlimited access to metro, bus and **cercanías**. For further information about this ticket, check out this article: **How to get your abono**.

- **Schedule:** the metro opens everyday of the year from 6am to 1:30am
- **Metro Map**



- Metro fares. Notice that Madrid is divided into different areas (A, B1, B2, etc). Regardless of price per ticket, getting your tickets and monthly pass require the same process explained above.



[Official Madrid transport website (All fares)]

1. Abono turístico.

TOURIST TRAVEL PASS

Zones	1 day	2 day	3 day	5 day	7 day
A	8.40 €	14.20 €	18.40 €	26.80 €	35.40 €
T	17.00 €	28.40 €	35.40 €	50.80 €	70.80 €

[*by Tarifas red de transportes]

2. Abono residentes.

TRAVEL CARD

Travel Card/Zone	A	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	B1-B2 B2-B3 B3-C1 C1-C2	E1	E2
Monthly travel card coupon	54.60€	63.70€	72.00€	82.00€	89.50€	99.30€	47.90€	110.60€	131.80€
Youth travel card coupon	35.00€	39.60€	45.00€	51.60€	56.20€	61.80€	30.30€	78.30€	97.40€
Monthly senior citizen travel card coupon	12.30€							–	–
Anual travel card coupon	546,00€	637,00€	720,00€	820,00€	895,00€	993,00€	479,00€	1106,00€	1138,00€
Anual youth travel card coupon	350,00€	396,00€	450,00€	516,00€	562,00€	618,00€	303,00€	783,00€	974,00€
Anual senior citizen travel card coupon	123,00€							–	–

*by Tarifas red de transportes

3. Metrobus and singles trip tickets.

FARES	
SINGLE TRIP	**Euros**
EMT ticket	1.50-2

10 TRIP TICKET	Euros	
Metro Zone A, EMT and ML1 ticket (Metrobús)	12.20	
TICKETS FROM/TO THE AIRPORT	**Euros**	
Single Ticket Metro+Extra charche (*)	4.50	5.00
Combined Metro Ticket+Extra charche	6.00	
Airport Surcharge Ticket	3.00	
Airport Express Bus Ticket	5.00	

(*) Routes up to 5 stations or less: 1.50 €.

Routes of 6 to 9 stations: 0.10€ extra per station.
Routes of 10 stations or more: 2.00€.
In the vending machines inside all metro stations, you pick a destination on the touch screen and it will automatically calculate the number of stations and price for the shortest route possible.

(**) Valid for the Metro Network of Madrid Region, TFM and Light Rail.

(***) Valid for 10 journeys with a SINGLE transfer EMT + EMT in a maximum of 60 minutes starting from the first validation.

***by Tarifas red de transportes**

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