

Best Natural Swimming Pools in Madrid (my top three)

Sometimes in life, you find yourself taking sides on what really matters: dogs or cats? living in the city or in a town? Here comes a difficult one: pizza or burger? From now on, you won't have to struggle on the next question in Madrid: **day trip to the ocean or hiking in the mountains?** Cause the answer is **piscina natural!!**

Las piscinas naturales, or **natural swimming pools/ponds**, are a pleasant alternative to the more common ones in the city (take a look at our previous post, [my top 4 city swimming pools in Madrid](#)). As far as I know, this kind of pool is **chemical free** and uses the water that flows from a river to fill the **pool**. Here in Madrid, we are lucky enough to live relatively close to a few of them. Since **summer** has now come and it's going to stick around for a while, go give yourself a break and enjoy life in the *"Sierra de Madrid"*.

Here are my top three!

(note—they're all open now but I highly recommend calling beforehand to confirm their hours, sometimes they change without warning)

1. Piscinas naturales de Cercedilla (Las Dehesas)



Cercedilla by Marcelo Concina



Cercedilla by ABC

What you need to know:

Cercedilla's pool is my favorite because it's the closest to the city and the easiest one to get to. Before going, you should know that there is a "small" 30-60min walk from **Cercedilla's train station** to the pool. Although you can get a bus that makes it shorter, I'd recommend walking and enjoying the **landscape**. Also, that way you'll really feel you deserve the swim.

Telephone: 91 852 57 40 / 91 852 22 00 (Tourism office)

Schedule: 10am to 8pm (Season 2014: They are open since June 13th!!)

How to get there:

- Quick link to [how to get to Cercedilla](#)
- [Bus from Cercanias train station to the pools](#)

How much is it?

- **Working days:** 5,50€
- **Weekends:** 6,50€
- **Others:** Children and elderly 3,50€ / They also have group prices.

**Note: If it's the first time you go there, ask somebody to tell you in which direction you have to walk.*

2. Piscinas naturales Buitrago de Lozoya

(Riosequillo)



Buitrago de Lozoya by Kripsol



Buítrago de Lozoya by Canalgestión

What you need to know:

My perfect day trip would be visiting **Buítrago de Lozoya** town in the morning, follow by spending the afternoon at the pool while enjoying the view. Buítrago's pool is a bit farther than the one in Cercedilla, and the public transportation is not as convenient. However, the town and the pool deserve a try.

Telephone: 91 293 20 47 (Info) / 91 868 00 56 (City hall) / 91 545 10 00 (Canal de Isabel II)

Schedule: 10am to 8pm (Season 2014: They are open since June 21st!!)

- **Working days(From Tuesday to Friday):** 11.30 am to 8.30pm
- **Weekends and holidays:** 11am to 9pm

- **Note: Mondays are closed. Better to go on a weekday.*

How to get there:

- Quick link to [how to get to Buitrago](#)
- **Note. Ask the bus driver where to get off, it's not the last stop and you don't want to get lost!*

How much is it?

- **Working days:** 2,50€
 - **Weekends:** 3€
 - **Others:** Children and elderly 1,50€
-

3. Piscinas naturales Rascafría (Las Presillas)



Rascafría by rascafría.eu



rascafria by javidemadrid.tumblr.com

What you need to know:

Last but not least, *Las Presillas* pool in Rascafria is the farthest pond from Madrid and the less convenient to go by public transportation. Although the entrance is free and looks like the most natural and authentic. Plus, the bar area is great!

Telephone: 91 869 18 04 (Las Presillas) / 91 869 11 71 (Rascafria City hall)

Schedule: 9am to 9pm

How to get there:

- Quick link [to how to get to Rascafría](#)

How much is it?

- The entrance is free!!
- Parking is 5€ a day.

Buitrago de Lozoya



Buitrago_del_Lozoya by wikipedia



Buitrago de Lozoya by Lugaresconhistoria

What to see:

After living in **Madrid** for a while, you learn how to survive the summer heat ([pools help a lot](#)) and **Buitrago de Lozoya** has become an integral part of my method to avoiding the high temperatures. An hour and a half away from the city, you will find this beautiful city surrounded by a **wall** that was built during the **IX and XI centuries**. Here, enjoy the breeze from the **Lozoya River** and the views of the **Somosierra** mountains. Find your spot in the plaza while drinking a beer and looking up at **Buitrago de Lozoya's Castle**.

A little secret of the town will be revealed soon... so keep an eye on the blog!

How to get there:

- By Car ([How to get there by Car](#))

Duration: 1 hour (80km)

- By bus

Depart from: Plaza Castilla

Schedule:

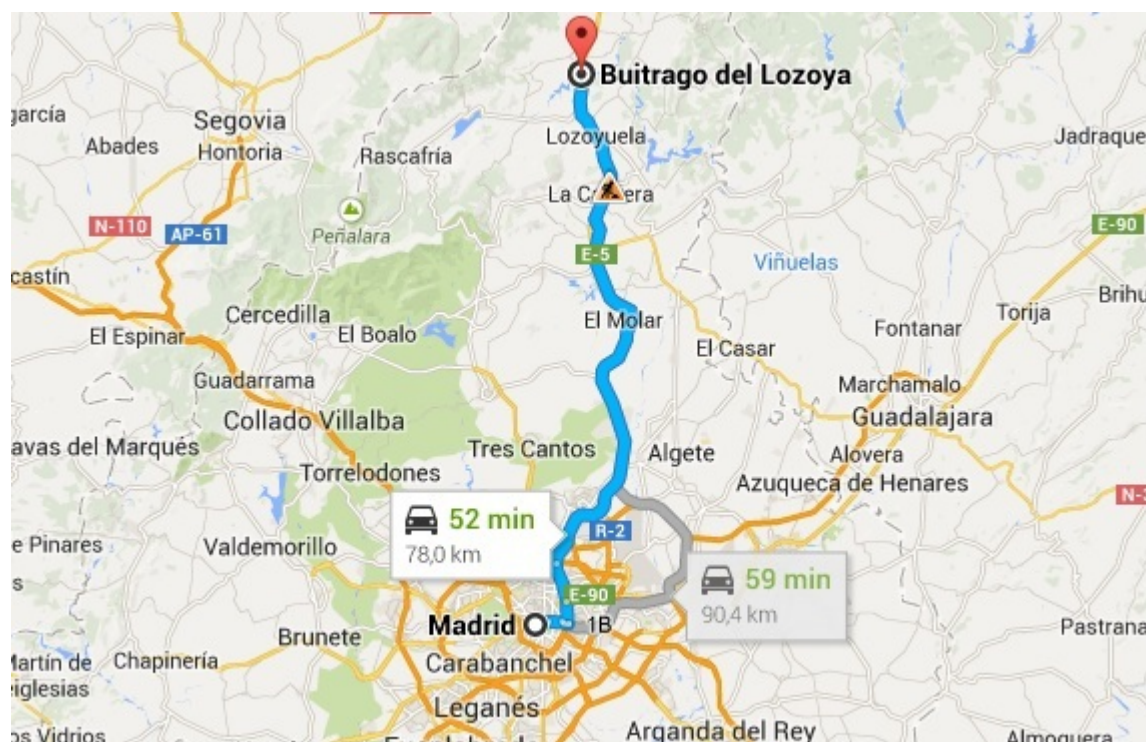
Departure ([Madrid – Buitrago de lozoya \(Bus\)](#))

Return ([Buitrago de lozoya – Madrid \(Bus\)](#))

Duration: approx. 1 hour 40 min

Price: 5,10€ (round trip 10,20€)

Where to find it on a map:



Aranjuez



What to see:

In the south of Madrid, you'll feel royal as you walk through Aranjuez's lush gardens and visit its impressive Royal Palace. Built as the royal family's summer house, Aranjuez is best to visit in the spring or summertime so you can take in all the colors of its gardens in full bloom.

Unlike most towns in Spain, there are no tiny streets here. Aranjuez stands out for its large and spacious boulevards. Once you've built up an appetite, there are plenty of good Spanish restaurants right along the Tajo river where you can enjoy typical Spanish food and *carne de caza* (game food).

How to get there:

• By train (Cercanías)

Depart from: Atocha train station

Schedule:

Departure ([Madrid – Aranjuez \(RENFE\)](#))

Return ([Aranjuez – Madrid \(RENFE\)](#))

Duration: approx. 50 min

Price: 3,30€ (round trip approx. 6,60€).

• By bus

Depart from: Méndez Álvaro: Bus 423

Schedule:

Departure ([Madrid – Aranjuez \(INTERURBANO\)](#))

Return ([Aranjuez – Madrid \(INTERURBANO\)](#))

Duration: approx. 1 hour

Price: 4,20€ (round trip 8,40€)

Where to find it on a map:



Images from turismoenaranjuez.com and wikipedia

Ávila



What to see:

There are plenty of reasons to go to Ávila. For example, the city is stunning (especially when it snows in winter), the cathedral transports you to ancient times and the old wall that still stands enclosing the city is simply amazing.

It also claims to be the Spanish city with the most amount of Romanesque and Gothic churches per capita. Plus it's the birthplace of Spain's national saint, Santa Teresa de Ávila.

But to be honest, I would go here for the following: **judías del barco** (beans from Avila), **chuletón de ternera** (large beef steak) and **yemas de Santa Teresa** (traditional sweets made with egg yolks).

How to get there:

- **By train (Renfe)**

Depart from: Chamartín train station

Schedule:

Departure ([Madrid – Ávila \(RENFE\)](#))

Return ([Ávila – Madrid \(RENFE\)](#))

Duration: approx. 1 hour 20 min

Price: 12€ (round trip approx. 24€).

• By bus

Depart from: Estación Sur. Méndez Álvaro

Schedule:

Departure ([Madrid – Avila \(Larrea\)](#))

Return ([Avila – Madrid \(Larrea\)](#))

Duration: approx. 1 hour 20 min

Price: 8,90€ (fares + round trip ticket approx. 20€)

Where to find it on a map:

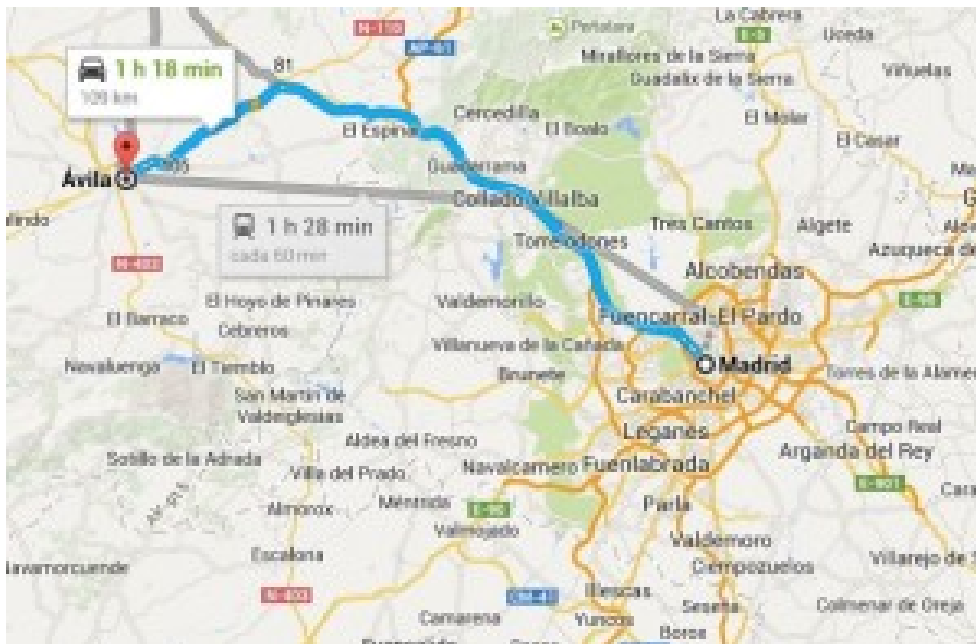


Image from Hostal Alcantara and abc.es

Madrid doesn't have the sea, but it's not that far away! So let's go sailing!

A fresh breeze hits my face while the waves make us swing smoothly. Juan is steering the **sailboat**. He grasps the rudder and tells Vanessa and Daphne to get ready to swerve. Antonio, our **patrón** (skipper or captain), adjusts the rope that controls **the boom** (a spar on which the foot of a triangular sail is bent). In perfect harmony, we change course, picking up **2 more knots** of speed and a big smile on our faces. Let's do it again!



Although this could have been a perfect dream, this actually

became real for me for a few days. The journey started in **Cádiz** (a city in Andalucía, the southern region of **Spain**) when I decided to join in on an adventure with some friends on a Wednesday night. After having lots of **Biodramina** (sea sickness pills), I climbed into my cabin and quickly settled into the tiny space and the light rocking movement of the boat. Then I slept like a baby, pondering what sailing was all about.

On Thursday morning, I woke up fidgety and full of enthusiasm. After the right maneuvers, Juan got us out from the port and went along the edge looking for some wind. We ended up getting hit by what we thought was smoke from a boat in flames, but was actually **a cloud of mosquitoes from Africa**. I had my body covered with insects and thus my first impression of sailing wasn't very good. But then Antonio dropped the anchor at the same altitude as **Rota** (Spanish municipality located in the Province of Cádiz) and prepared the most delicious **tuna** I had ever tasted in my life. The tuna saved the day.





After lunch, the wind gained more strength. We took the anchor up, set the sails and went in the direction of the open sea. As if we were in a **regatta**, Antonio marked our target: **"A por ellos!"** (go after them!) and gave us instructions: **"Déjate caer Juan!"** (back starboard or catch the wind on the forward side of the sail), **"Hay que largar el Génova Vanessa!"** (I'm still wondering what that means...), **"James, get your butt in the Cockpit if you don't want to jump off the boat!"** (oops!)



A few swerves later, we headed for **Guadalquivir** estuary in **Sanlúcar de Barrameda**, (a small town in Huelva province), in front of which, you can find **Doñana** (a Spanish National Park), a beautiful paradise where Antonio decided to call it a day and prepare another amazing meal.



Doñana National Park

The next day, we woke up and had breakfast while the **National Park** was illuminated by the morning sun. After that, when I

thought it was going to be a calm day of sailing up the river towards **Seville**, Antonio proved me wrong once again. "**I won't waste this wind,**" said the captain. We raised up the sails and set out to the **capital of Andalusia**.







A few days after our trip started, we were finally pedestrians again. We spent Saturday walking around the city of Seville, just as it was getting ready for its world-famous week of partying, known as **La F ria de Sevilla**. We were lucky enough to sail with our friend, Vanessa, from [Las mesas de Vanessa](#) (a food blog from Madrid). She knew exactly where to take us for lunch—[Espacio Eslava](#)—a fantastic spanish restaurant which won the **Best Tapa of the Year in 2013**. This restaurant is a must if you find yourself in Seville. We ordered **salmorejo** (a typical Andalucian tomato soup made with bread, garlic, olive oil and tomato) and, my favourite, **costillas** (ribs), among many other unbelievable dishes.



It was hard to come back to reality. Life at sea can be pretty addictive. Yet now I know that even though Madrid doesn't have sea, it's not that far from here!

Sailing School Info: [Oversailing](#)

[Facebook](#)

Restaurant in Seville: [Espacio Eslava](#)

[Facebook](#)

Address C/ Eslava, 3 & 5
41002 Seville, Spain

Monasterio de Piedra, an idyllic place to escape to

As you may already know, I like getting out of the city from time to time. Last week I wrote a post about the orange-colored cliffs at [El Barranco de la Hoz](#), and today I'd like to introduce you to another place that may be unknown to you. Built in the 12th century, [Monasterio de Piedra](#) (*Stone Monastery*) is situated in a natural park in **Zaragoza** (a province northeast of Madrid), which is inundated by misty **waterfalls, rivers** and **streams** that give you goosebumps.



Our visit to [Monasterio de Piedra](#) started a few weeks ago, when my friends and I were preparing a two-day trip outside

the city. When one of my friends suggested we go here, I stared at him with a puzzled look on my face. If we're going to pay 15€, it better be good. Actually, it better be incredible, I thought. Let's see what happens...

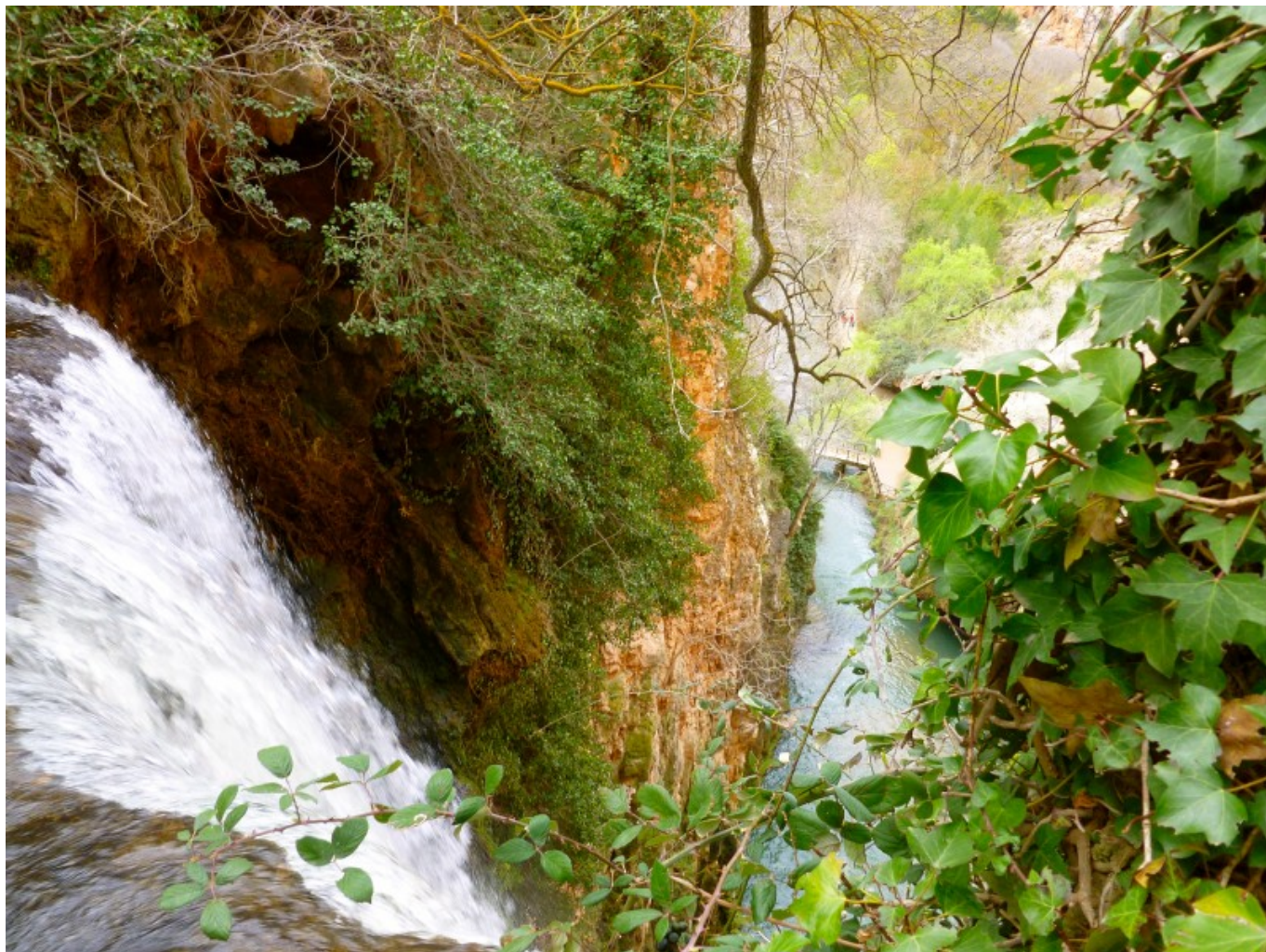


As soon as we entered the park, we walked down a bunch of steps and came across the first wow in our path. The **Wilful Waterfall** (in Spanish, "La cascada Caprichosa") stood in front of us. As you look up at the cascading giant, you see many different types of green and hear the sound of the water crashing into the river and continuing on its way. Although there were several other groups of visitors at the site, it never felt crowded.

The "**Río Piedra**" (Stone river) is guilty of having formed this spectacular landscape of waterfalls and cozy natural spots.

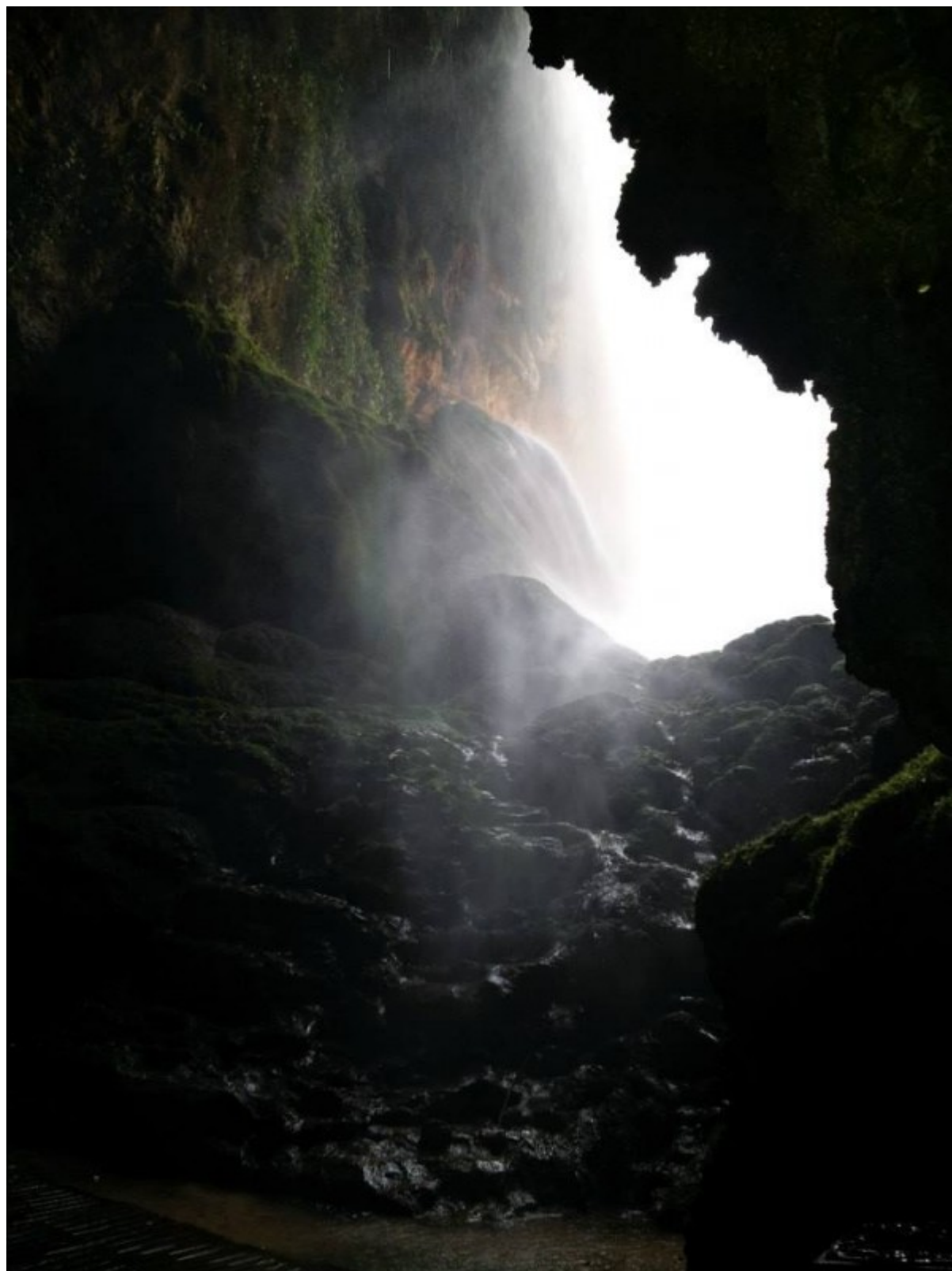


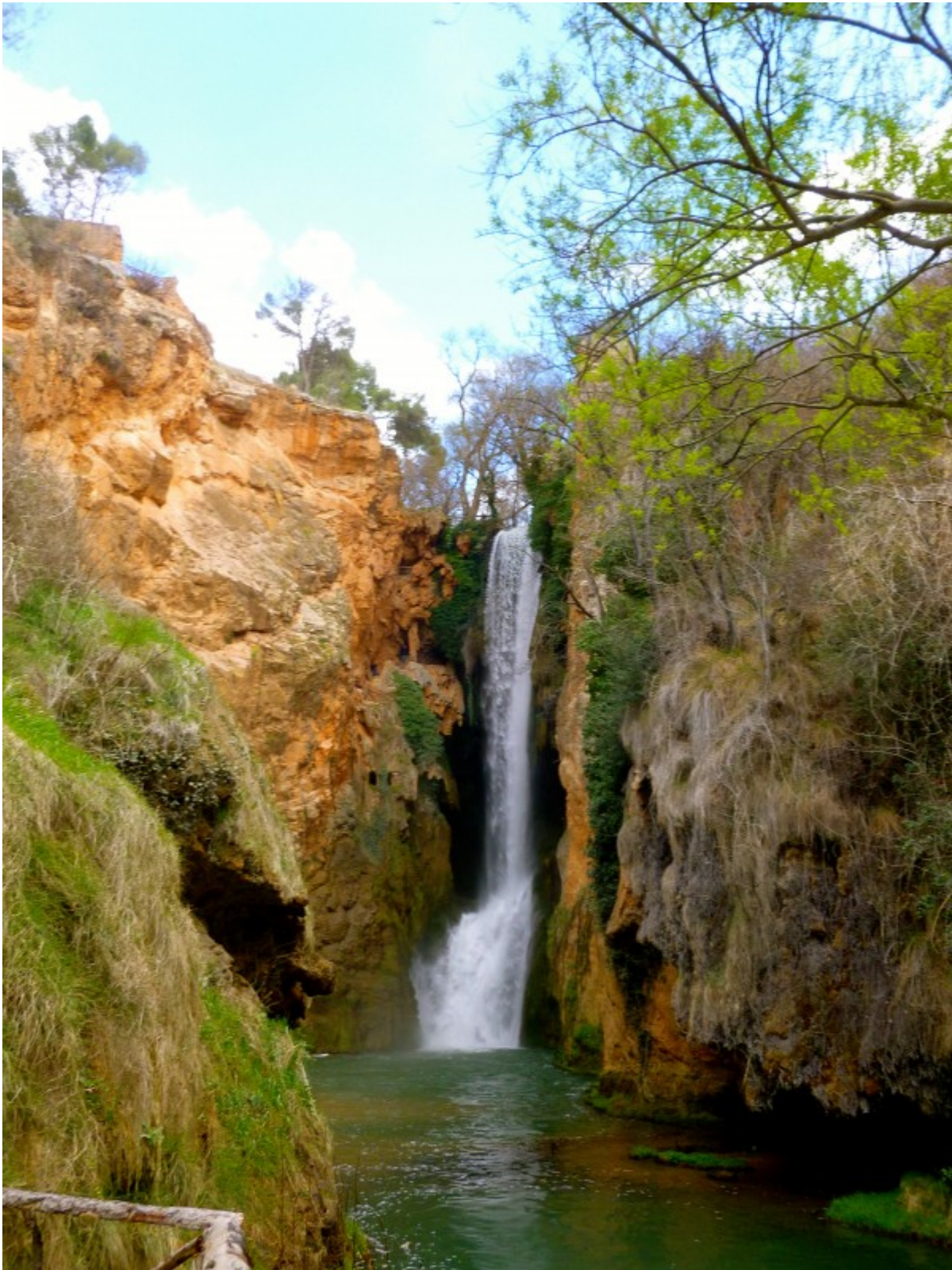
As we moved along the **río piedra** and stumbled upon a few more wows, we eventually got close up to the tallest waterfall in Spain: "**La cola del caballo**" (or, in English, *the horse tail waterfall*). It's an incredible 50m fall which makes you feel fear, awe and calmness, in that order.



We saw the “Cascada” from every angle. The most impressive moment was being behind it, inside the cave, feeling the strength of the water falling in your face.







Although we only walked through the park, **Monasterio de Piedra** also has a magnificent hotel that boasts a spa and two restaurants, fit for weddings and banquets of all kinds. Not to mention, the Monastery itself is open to the public.

Where:

Nuévalos (Zaragoza)

229 kilometres from Madrid

Website:

www.monasteriopiedra.com

[How to get there from Madrid](#)

Toledo



What to see:

The breathtakingly beautiful city of Toledo lies to the south of Madrid and was Spain's former capital. Although there are plenty of things to do here, nothing beats getting lost amidst Toledo's tiny and windy streets.

If you're looking for a gift (check out [Best Gifts from Madrid list](#)), Toledo is well known for its **mazapán** (marzipan) and **navajas** (Swiss army and pocket knives), which can be found throughout the city.

How to get there:

• **By high speed train (AVE)**

Depart from: Atocha AVE station (take metro line 1 to Atocha Renfe)

Schedule:

Departure ([Madrid-Toledo horarios y precios \(RENFE\)](#))

Return ([Toledo-Madrid horarios y precios \(RENFE\)](#))

Duration: approx. 35 min

Price: 12,70€ (round trip 25,40€).

**Note. You will have to walk 15 min or take another bus to get to the center.*

• By bus

Depart from: Plaza Elíptica bus station

Schedule:

Departure ([Madrid-Toledo horarios y precios \(ALSA\)](#))

Return ([Toledo-Madrid horarios y precios \(ALSA\)](#))

Duration: approx. 1 hour

Price: 5,63€ (round-trip 11,26€). Buy tickets on the bus.

Where to find it on a map:



San Lorenzo del Escorial



What to see:

El Escorial is famous for its beautiful *Monasterio* which was built between 1563 and 1584. We recommend going inside the monastery, even though the entrance fee costs €10.

Once you've visited the monument, it's absolutely necessary to take a walk around the charming little town. Grab a seat at a *terrazza* and enjoy the pure air of the city's mountains, known as *la sierra de Madrid*.

How to get there:

▪ **By cercanías train ([map](#))**

Depart from: Sol, take Cercanías Line C3

Schedule:

Departure ([Horario Sol-El Escorial](#))

Return ([Horario El Escorial-Sol](#))

Duration: approx. 1 hour

Price: 5,40€ (round trip 10,80€). Buy tickets from machines inside Sol's train station.

**Note: you will have to walk 15 min or take another bus to get to the center.*

▪ **By bus**

Depart from: Moncloa, take bus line 661

Schedule:

Bus line [661](#) (every 10-15 min)

Bus line [664](#) (every 10-15 min)

Duration: approx. 1 hour

Price: 4,20€ (round trip 8,40€). Buy tickets on the bus.

Where to find it on a map:



Segovia

What to see:

In this thousand-year-old city, you'll find one of the most famous Roman aqueducts in the world, **el acueducto de Segovia**, as well as the magnificent castle, **Alcazar**, which really resembles a castle from Disney World.

More importantly, while you're in Segovia you must try their star dish – **cochinillo asado** – roasted suckling pig which is cooked so tender that it's tradition for the waiters to slice it in front of you with the side of a plate.

Although I haven't succeeded in finding Segovia's best *cochinillo*, I highly recommend going to the restaurant [Candido](#) which is easy to find as it's situated in the Aqueduct's plaza and its ambiance is very special.

How to get there:

▪ By high speed train (AVE)

Depart from: Chamartín train station

Schedule:

Departure ([Madrid-Segovia horarios y precios \(RENFE\)](#))

Return ([Segovia-Madrid horarios y precios \(RENFE\)](#))

Duration: approx. 30 min

Price: 12,70€ (round trip approx. 25€).

**Note. Sometimes you can find special offers on the website.*

▪ By bus

Depart from: Príncipe Pío bus station

Schedule:

Departure ([Madrid-Segovia horarios y precios \(La Sepulveda\)](#))

Return ([Segovia-Madrid horarios y precios \(La Sepulveda\)](#))

Duration: approx. 1 hour 15 min

Price: 8,09€ (round trip 16€)

Where to find it on a map:

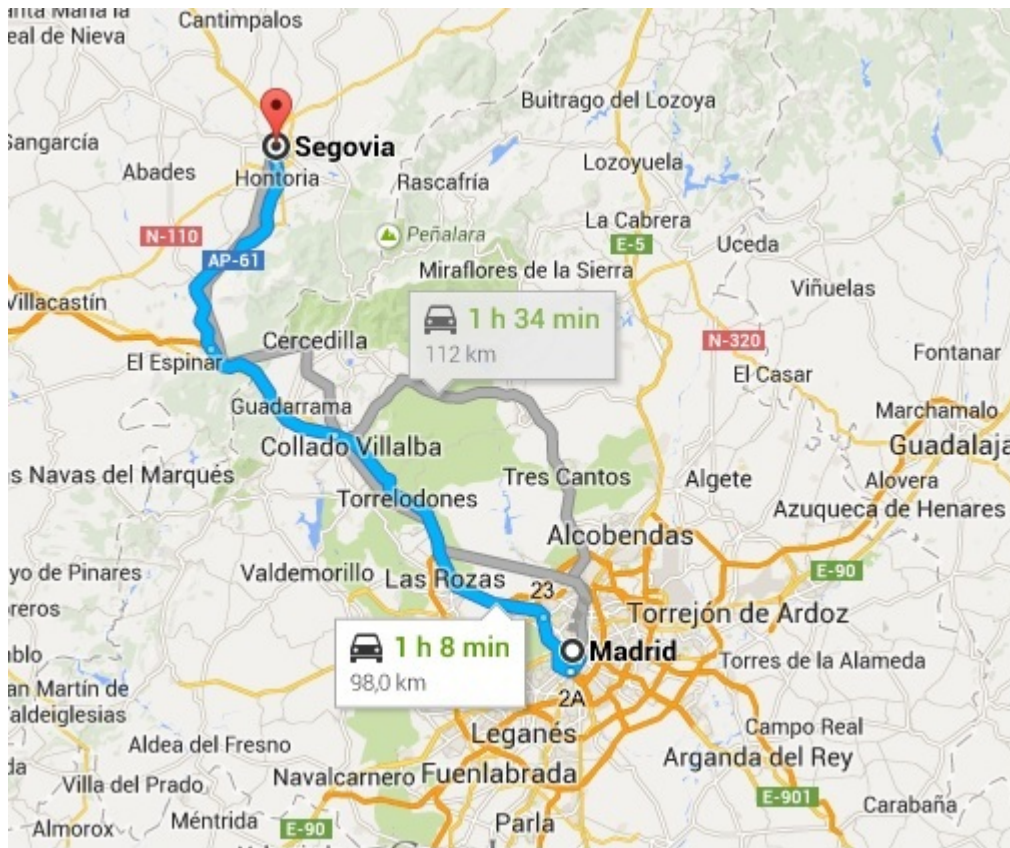


Image from

wikipedia

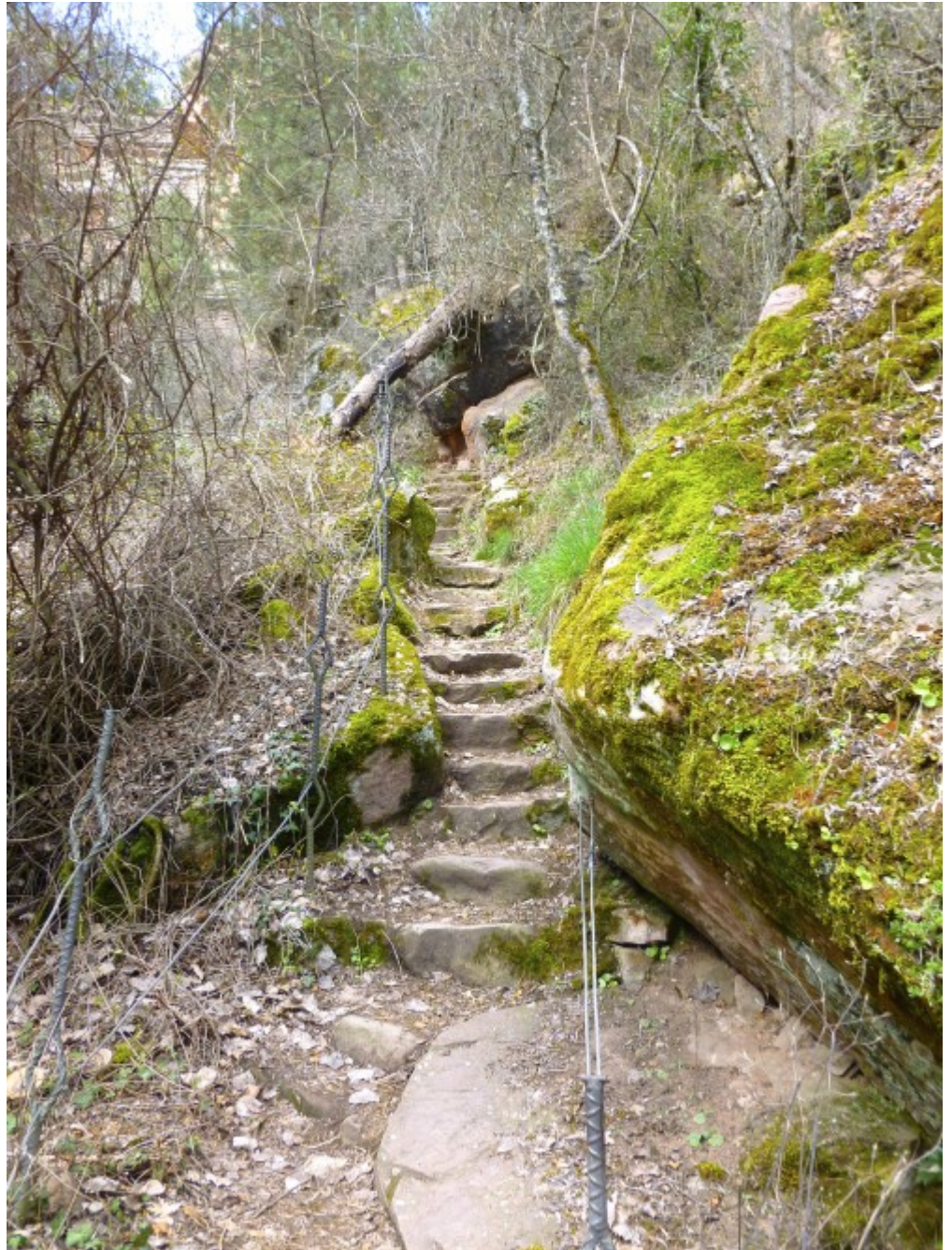
Barranco Virgen de la Hoz (Parque Natural del Alto Tajo) in Guadalajara

No plans for the weekend? Here's a great alternative to barhopping it up in Madrid. Last Sunday, my friends and I decided to discover other **natural beauties of Spain**; get out of the city and smell some fresh air. So we drove to the province of **Guadalajara** to visit what our friend, Carlos, describes as "**the mini Grand Canyon of Spain**".



Just a few hours drive east of Madrid lies one of the country's most beautiful natural parks, the **Alto Tajo**. Inside

this park, you'll witness nature's grandeur, the orange and red cliffs of **Barranco Virgen de la Hoz**. Views from the top of **these cliffs** make you feel as though you've been transported



to Arizona.

With **270 handmade stone steps** ahead of us, our non-athletic friends got worried. But as we walked up, we arrived at a series of “miradores” (lookout points) where we could rest, and take in the views; totally worth it. As we looked down, we could see the side streams of the **Río Gallo** (river) winding below the majestic **Barranco Virgen de la Hoz's** burnt-orange-colored cliffs.



What I liked most about **Barranco Virgen de la Hoz** is that you don't have to be a professional alpinist to make it all the way up. So there are no excuses to enjoy a really nice journey to the top.





Along

the path, the views get better and better.



Finally, after about an hour's climb, we reached our

destination.





Smile!

Oh well,
time to go back to reality. Good bye **Barranco Virgen de la Hoz**, hope to see you again soon...



Before we headed back to Madrid, we went to the breathtaking **Monasterio de Piedra**, where we saw hundreds of waterfalls. We could call it Spain's "**mini Niagara Falls**". More about that later...