Alcalá de Henares



What to see:

In Miguel de Cervantes' hometown, you'll find one of the oldest university campuses in Spain – Universidad de Alcalá – which was founded in the 15th century. The city still boasts some of the magnificent buildings from that time.

History aside, I'd say that Alcalá de Henares is most known for its generous and free tapas. So after you visit the University and walk through the town to see its monuments and *plazas*, you should rest at one of the bars close to Plaza Miguel de Cervantes and enjoy a cold beer that is sure to come with a nicely-sized tapa. The most famous tapas bar in Alcalá is El Índalo, but there are many others. This cute town is

perfect for a relaxing day trip!

Here's a great post: **7 reasons Alcalá is worth more than a day trip from Madrid**

How to get there:

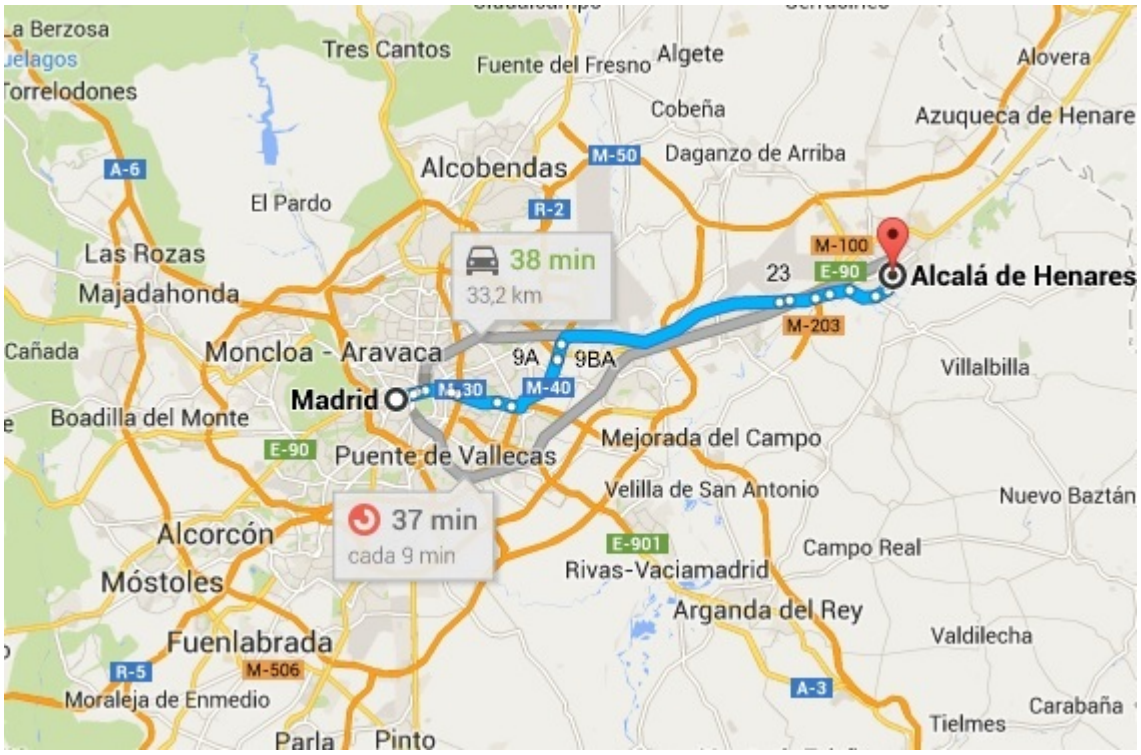
- **By Train (Cercanias)**

  Depart from: Atocha train station
  Schedule:
  Departure (Madrid-Alcala de Henares horarios y precios (RENFE))
  Return (Alcala de Henares – Madrid horarios y precios (RENFE))
  Duration: approx. 35 min
  Price: 2,50€ (round trip approx. 5€).

- **By bus**

  Depart from: Avenida de america: Buses 223, 225, 227
  Schedule:
  Departure (Madrid-Alcala de Henares horarios y precios (ALSA))
  Return (Alcala de Henares – Madrid horarios y precios (ALSA))
  Duration: approx. 40 min
  Price: 3,60€ (round trip 7,20€)

Where to find it on a map:



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 Andalucia.**







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 Féria 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: [Oversailling]

Facebook

Restaurant in Seville: Espacio Eslava

Facebook
Adress C/ Eslava, 3 & 5
41002 Seville, Spain

La Buena Cerveza, all things beer in Madrid

My first encounter with beer was many years ago (well, not too many). When I was a child in **Madrid,** I used to go to the **bar** with my dad to watch football and spend the afternoon together. My father, an Englishman with a Spanish family, always said that I should get used to **beer** as soon as possible so I'd appreciate it better. To help me along, he would always pass me his glass and look away so that I could take a few sips, feeling like I was doing something wrong.


Tienda especializada
en cervezas artesanales e importación
Beer shop
La Buena Cerveza
www.labuenacerveza.com Telf. 910060524
TALLERES
—CATA
—ELABORACION CERVEZA

A few weeks ago, I was running late to meet up with friends at **Mercado de San Anton**, when a little sign caught my attention: ***"talleres de elaboración de cerveza"*** (or in English, **homemade beer workshop**). Once again, as if I were a little boy, the feeling of doing something wrong popped into my head. My friends will have to wait, cause I'm going in!



Once I got through **La Buena Cerveza's** door, I found Nacho across the shop, a **Madrileño** from **Vallecas** (a south-east neighbourhood of Madrid). As we started talking, he kindly offered me a cold *La Cibeles stout*—a **Spanish craft beer** from Madrid. As we drank, he told me he had always dreamt of opening a **beer shop** in the center of **Madrid.** In his dream shop, a customer could find not only 1,000 different kinds of beer , but also a place to taste and experience the deeply

cherished beverage.


SALITOS
El Original
BLUE MOON

At **La Buena Cerveza**, feel free to ask the owners to open up a beer for you from the fridge. Though it's not a bar, you're welcome to buy a beer and drink it there (for tasting purposes, obviously!)



Nacho and Manuel (brothers and co-founders of **La Buena Cerveza**) organize **beer tastings** every two weeks. They cost **15€** and include at least 5 different beers. Here you'll also find the reason why I first came in. For a reasonable price of **85€,** you can see yourself making your own beer in a seven-hour workshop. And if that's not enough, you can even make beer at your own home, and have them store it for you in the right conditions until it's good enough to drink!



If you’re interested in going to the tasting but aren’t comfortable with your Spanish just yet, get in touch with us and we can help out!

Address: c/ Pelayo 5
Metro: Chueca or Gran Vía
Facebook

Tlf 910060524


942
DouGall's
DouGall's
DouGall's
942
IPA
DouGall's
PALE
PILSNER


BEER/BIERE
THE PRE-PROHIBITION BEER
BROOKLYN
BRAND
LAGER
5.2% alc./vol.
℮ 355 ml/35,5 cl
APPROX. 1.5 STANDARD DRINKS
STRONG BEER/BIERE FORTE
BREWED IN NEW YORK
BROOKLYN
BRAND
BROWN ALE
℮ 355 ml/35,5 cl
APPROX. 1.6 STANDARD DRINKS
STRONG BEER/BIERE FORTE
BROOKLYN BRAND
EAST INDIA
BRAND
PALE ALE
6.9% alc./vol.
℮ 355 ml/35,5 cl


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NAPA
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Aió: Sardinia, pizza, and bike haven in Malasaña

Aió in Sardinian means “let’s go” (or “venga vamos” in Spanish). Most likely, Andrea and Marcelo were thinking of this very expression when they decided to open a restaurant in Madrid three years ago. These two friends have brought their hometown of **Sardinia** with them to **Malasaña**, where they’ve created a magnificent combination of **Italian food** and **true *madrileño* ambiance**. It is basically an extraordinary place.



It was love at first sight when I came here with my friend, Nina, from Austria. We had a ***menú del dia*** for **9,50€** (11.50€ on weekends and holidays) that includes two dishes, a drink and dessert. They also have a **pizza menu** that comes with a salad, large pizza, drink and coffee for **10,50€**; and a Sardinian menu with different regional dishes for **14€**. On the weekends, it's better to make a reservation.

We ordered fresh pasta with fresh tomato and basil; a salad and a burger with caramelized onions and homemade fries. Only if the pictures could tell you how good they tasted.



When I travel outside Spain, I always like to look for local spots, and the best indication of that is always by seeing locals themselves. Similarly, when I’m in Madrid and I go to an Italian restaurant, I like to see Italian patrons—to me that’s a sign of authenticity. At **Aió** , you’ll find people from all over the world, yet the clientele’s dominant nationality is Italian, by far.



You'll also find a large **biking community** here. Users and lovers can find bikes hanging on the walls. Although they're nice decoration, the real reason they're on display is because they're **for sale.** However, if you're already happy with the bike you own, you can also park it here, as **Aío's downstairs area** is a **free bike drop-off point.**



Malasaña is my favorite neighbourhood to get a drink at after work. Thanks to Aío, the neighbourhood has just gotten even better. On Thursdays at 9pm (officially at 8:30pm), they offer **an all-you-can-eat Italian buffet**, called **Aperaió.** It only costs **4.50€**, including the drink of your choice. Last night, I went with my wife, Daphne, to check out the buffet. The first thing we noticed was that almost everyone was drinking the **Aperol Spritz,** the popular Italian aperitif that combines seltzer, champagne, Aperol, a slice of orange and plenty of ice. The drink is strong and stringent, but a feel-good hit for **summer.**

For this modest price, I thought the food wasn't going to blow my socks off. But I couldn't have been more wrong. We were lucky enough to grab a seat right by the counter. As the waiters brought out dish after dish of mouth-watering Italian

goodness, the patrons swarmed around the food and served themselves heaps of rice, pasta, salad and pizza. Although it was all good, the **pasta** was the star dish; it was creamy mushroom mini-shell pasta that the crowd just couldn’t get enough of.



The salad was far from your average *ensalada mixta,* as it came with all types of greens, onions, green bell peppers,

cucumbers, apples, raisins and topped with a deliciously sweet vinaigrette dressing. This is officially the best deal you can find in Madrid on food and drinks.



We barely missed the pizza because it flew off the counter in a matter of seconds (that’s why there’s no picture, so you’ll have to go see for yourself!).



Facebook

Address: Calle Corredera Baja de San Pablo 25
Tlfn: 910 09 64 69
Hours: M-F 9.00-1.30 /S-S 10.00-2.00
Breakfast: M-F 9.00-13.00 /S-S 10.00-13.00
Lunch: M-F 13.00-16.00
Aperaió (buffet): Thursdays at 20:30

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 Waterfal**l (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 "R**ío Piedra**" (Stone river) is guilty of having formed this spectacular landscape of waterfalls and cozy natural spots.

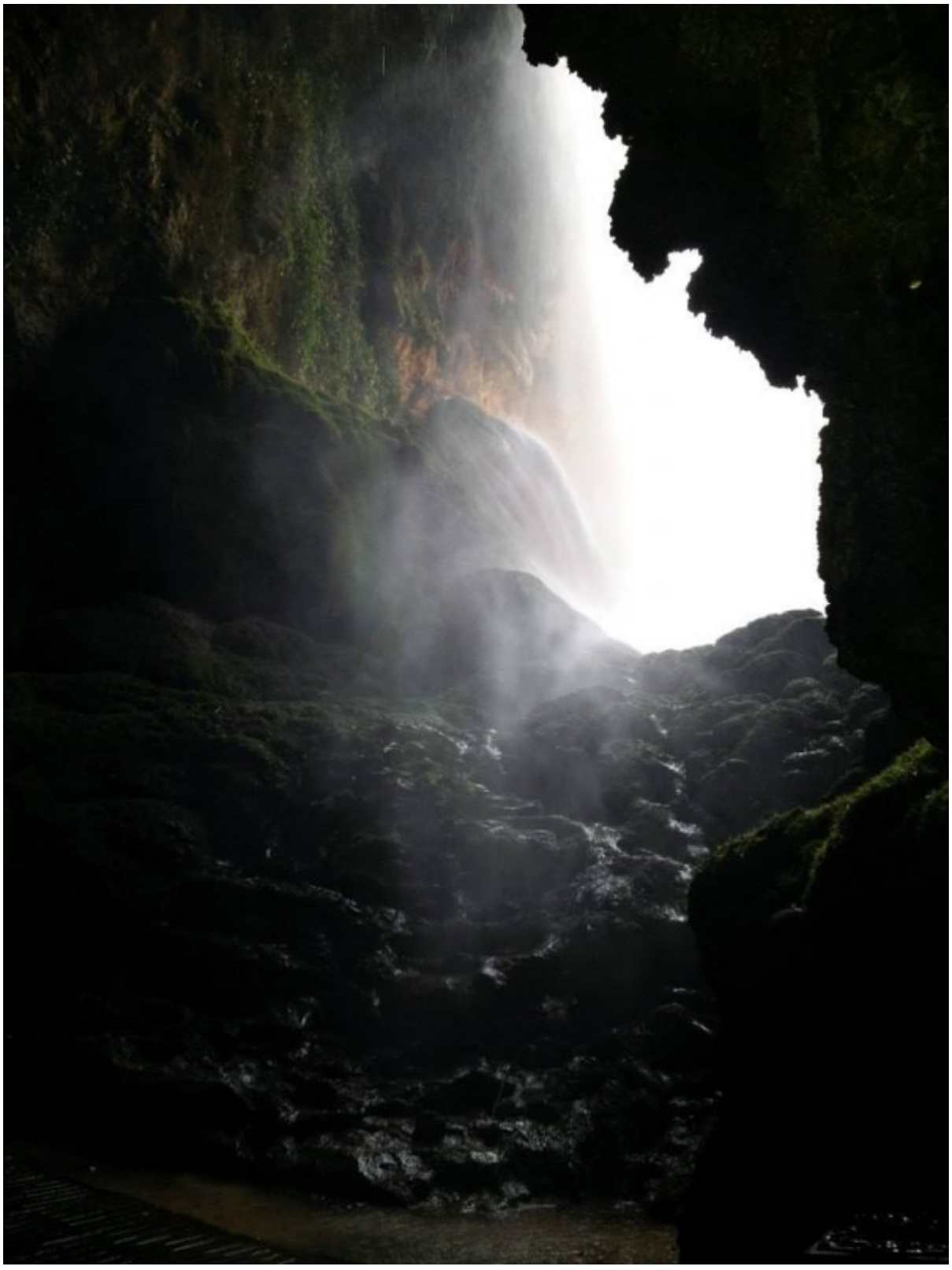


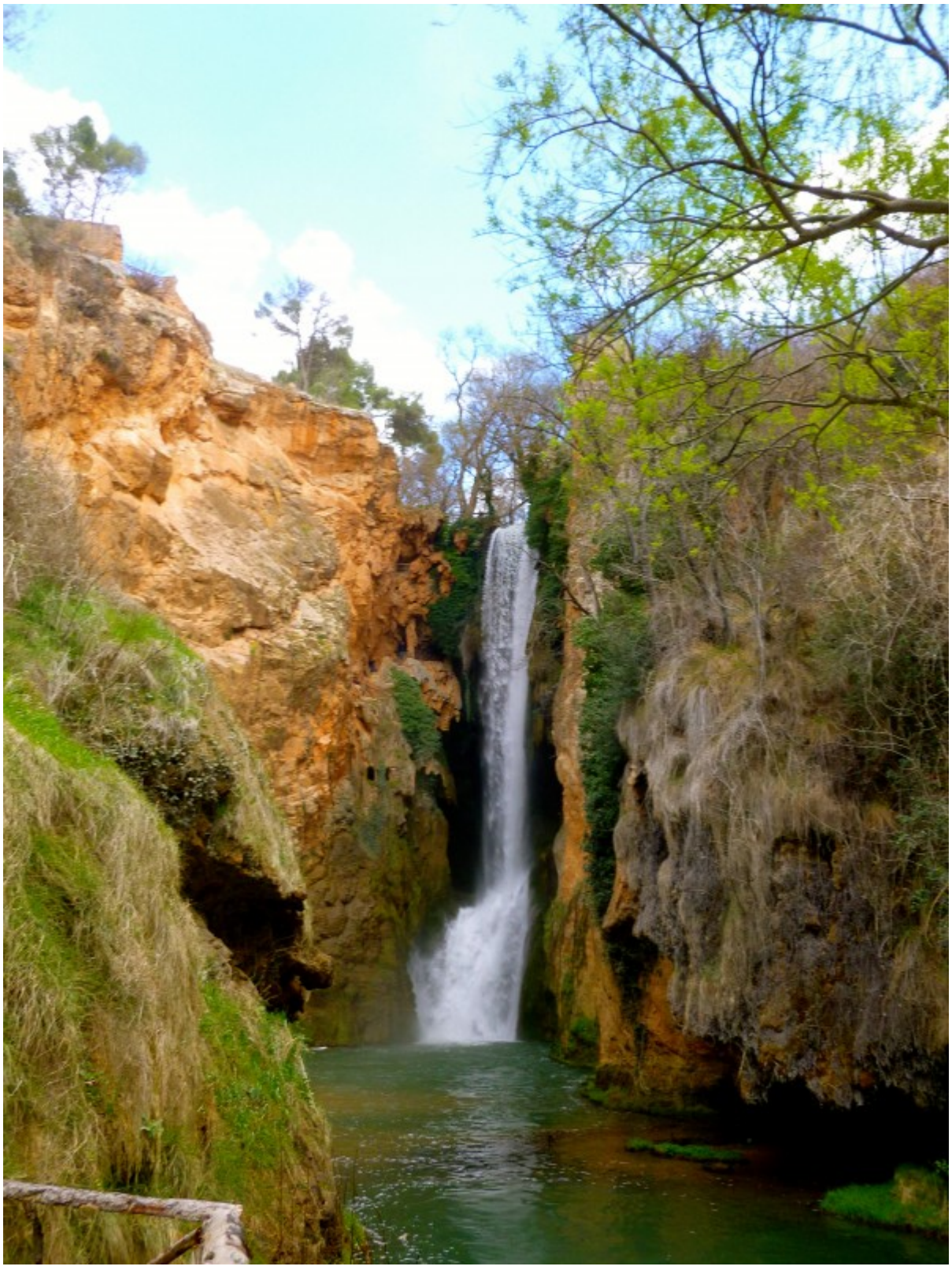
As we moved along the **río piedra** and stumbled upon a few more *wows*, we eventually got close up to the tallest waterfall in Spain: “**La cola del caballo**” (or, in English, *the horse tail waterfall*). It’s an incredible 50m fall which makes you feel fear, awe and calmness, in that order.



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 *terraza* 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 Sepulvedana))
Return (Segovia-Madrid horarios y precios (La Sepulvedana))
Duration: approx. 1 hour 15 min
Price: 8,09€ (round trip 16€)

Where to find it on a map:

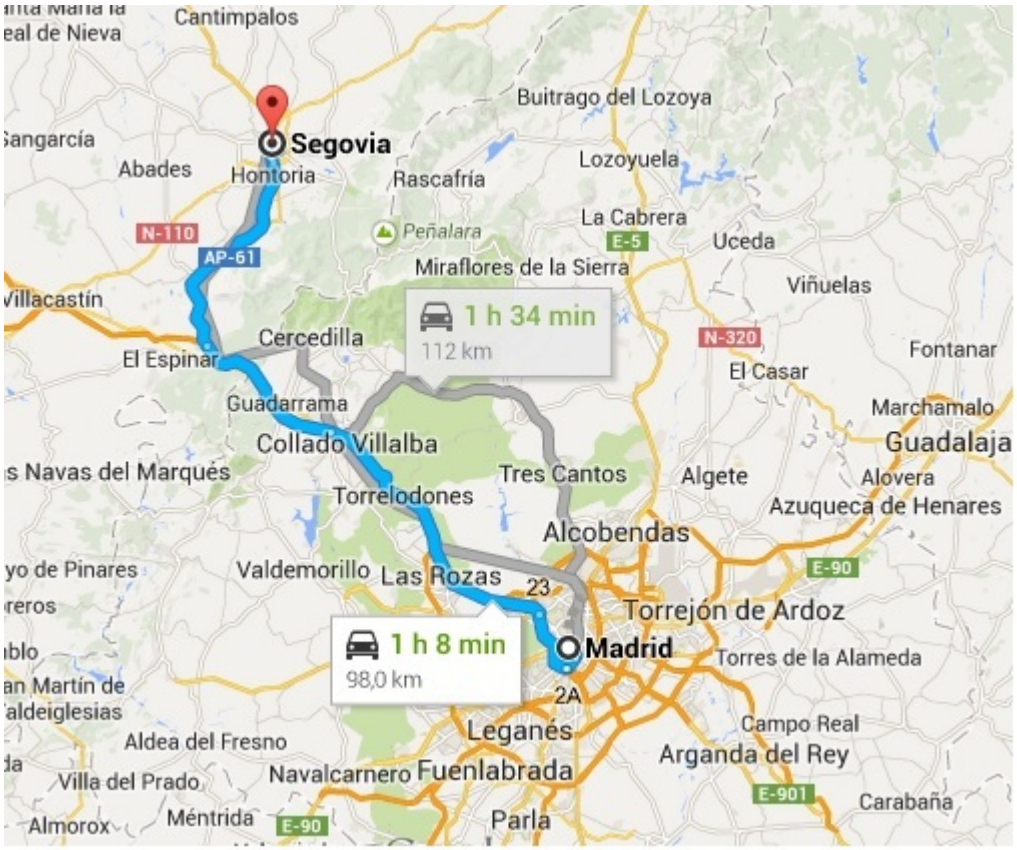


Image from wikipedia

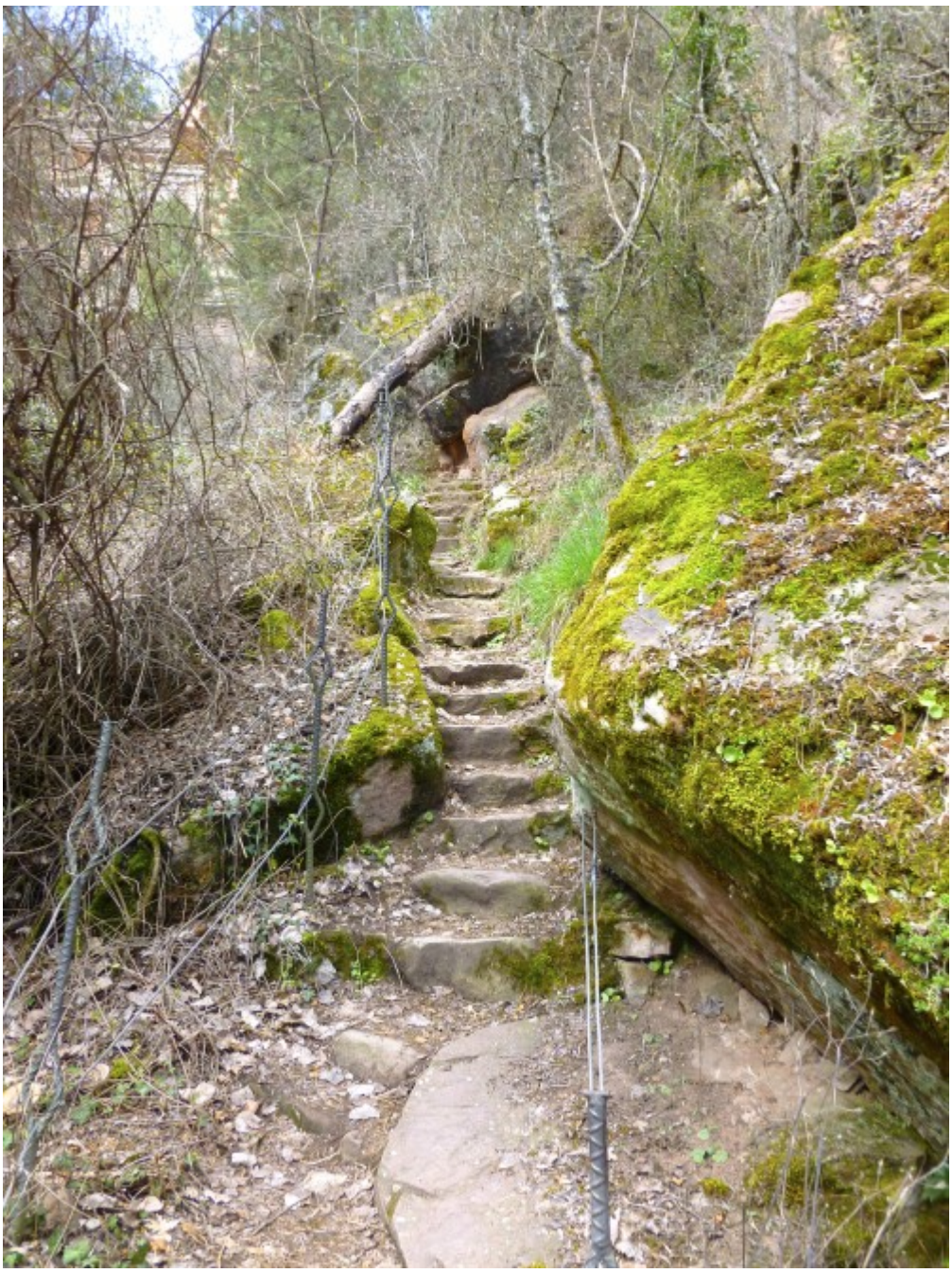
Barranco Virgen de la Hoz (Parque Natural del Alto Tajo) in Guadalajara

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…

La Paca, the perfect Malasaña café and bar with art exhibits, movie nights and

Chema…

As you walk through **La Paca**'s door, you feel like you're in the right place. This **funky café in Malasaña** is always a good choice when you're in the mood for a coffee, a beer, or something stronger.



La Paca's facade on calle Valverde in Malasaña (image from Facebook)

La Paca is divided into two areas: the ground bears a worn-out floor from a different time period, when the place used to be a family's house. **Vintage furniture** from every single corner of Spain fills the room: old sofas, lamps, Galician mirrors, and bird-cages. **La Paca**'s owner is an antique collector who travels across Spain in pursuit of treasure troves. You can find his finest pieces either sold at his **vintage store La Republicana**, or displayed at La Paca.



funky furniture at La Paca

One step up and you'll find **Chema**, the star bartender and the man who runs the show. As I say in Spanish, he's "***un terremoto de felicidad***" (an earthquake of happiness). Working alongside Chema is his sister, **Vero,** who's also the perfect host. Feel free to ask them both about the place and their drinks.

La Paca's menu has different types of tea and coffee served with cakes (carrot, cheese or *couland* which is an oozy chocolate muffin-type cake), and *bizcocho* (pound or sponge cake). If you're looking for a drink, they also have a wide collection of **craft beers** (made from Madrid breweries) on tap, **wines** and **cocktails**.

In this quintessential **Malasaña café**, you've also got to try their **tortilla de patatas** (homemade Spanish omelet), it is my favourite!



my favorite tapa at La Paca

Another feature that makes **La Paca** so special is its **events**. On Wednesdays at 9pm, they have **free movie night downstairs.** They prepare the room in a way that reminds me of a **movie night** at a friend's house; sofas and people scattered about with no order whatsoever (plus the popcorn is also free!). I went last Wednesday and saw **Kill Bill I**, and the week before they had shown **Taxi Driver** (in Spanish with no subtitles).



free movie nights on Wednesdays at La Paca in Malasaña (image from Facebook)

On Thursdays, **La Paca** holds **acoustic music performances,** making room for **up and coming Spanish artists**. Although Wednesday movie nights and Thursday concerts are held regularly, La Paca showcases several other events such as theater performances, **independent markets**, English classes, clown shows, and **art exhibitions**. In fact, when it comes to **art exhibits**, they're booked until 2016!



Theater performance at La Paca (image from Facebook)

What I like most about **La Paca**'s events is the way they're set up. Last time I was there, I ended up sharing a few beers with **Chema** and **Vero,** and I asked them how they make money from their events. Their answer was as simple as it was nice: **they just want to help people from the neighborhood.** If you have a **creative project** and you need a place to start, you shouldn't think twice about getting in touch with them.

Shhh…….. today is Wednesday night and **the movie** is about to start!

La Paca

Facebook
Address: *c/ Valverde 36*
Metro: *Gran Vía or Tribunal*