

Catedral de Justo, a self-built cathedral in Mejorada del Campo, Madrid

Conceived and brought to life by a present-day Don Quijote and situated in La Mancha, stands a cathedral like no other. Over half a century ago, former monk and visionary, Justo Gallego Martínez, also called Don Justo, made it his life-long quest to build a cathedral in his hometown of Mejorada del Campo, just 20km from Madrid. Today, at nearly 90 years old, he is still pursuing his dream.

I'd been meaning to visit the **Catedral del Justo** for a long time, although it wasn't until last weekend that I finally made it out there with my husband, James. It's a [great day-trip destination from Madrid](#) if you have a car, as you can combine it with a visit to [Alcalá de Henares](#) afterwards.

To be honest, visiting this cathedral is a visceral experience, making it difficult to describe the feeling of seeing it first-hand. As I approached it, I was first impressed by how big it is. With outer dimensions of 20×50 square meters, it takes up a whole block and has a somewhat whimsical appearance.



As I entered, I noticed a huge dome hovering over me, 40 meters high and 12 meters in diameter. The columns, walls, floors and stairwells are made out of materials that were either found, recycled or donated from local tile and brick factories. Even though parts of the building reminded me of an old scrapyard, it did resemble a cathedral—just from another planet!

The next thing that caught my eye was Don Justo himself, sitting contentedly on a chair, reading a book as if everything surrounding him was completely normal. His little dog was running around and an old TV was playing the same trance-like song, over and over again.



When I got home I started reading up on the history of the cathedral. It turns out that Don Justo never got a legal building permit, nor is his cathedral recognized by the Catholic Church. But for me, there was no question I was entering a spiritual place.





What strikes me the most is the story behind his decision to dedicate his life to building this cathedral by himself. Born in 1925, Don Justo had a religious upbringing and aspired to be a monk. However, his dream was crushed when he was diagnosed with tuberculosis; he promised himself that if he ever recovered, he would build a cathedral from scratch and make a shrine to "Our Lady of the Pillar". In 1961, he started building on an olive grove that belonged to his family in his hometown of Mejorada del Campo, and he hasn't stopped since.





He never studied architecture nor formalized any sort of building plan; instead he envisioned it in his mind and drew inspiration primarily from the Vatican, St. Peter's Basilica and other churches around Spain. On certain occasions, he received help from professional architects and volunteers, but overall, this cathedral is the realization of one individual's dream. He has financed his work through renting inherited land and donations.





Although it will take at least another 15-20 years to complete the cathedral, Don Justo expects to be there every day,

despite his nearly 90 years. Walking through the cathedral's crypt, courtyard, mini cloisters and chapels; gazing up at the dome and examining the different recycled materials used to make the columns, staircases, and floors—it feels slightly Gaudí-esque. In fact, the town of Mejorada del Campo, which notoriously has not fully embraced Don Justo's cathedral, eventually changed the name of the street on which it lies to "Calle Antonio Gaudí."





Not surprisingly, I've read that many people have called Don Justo crazy. Watching this present-day Don Quijote sitting on his chair, reading quietly in the cathedral he has been building with his own hands for more than half a century... while it all feels like a dream, the cathedral is real, and so is Don Justo. I highly recommend paying them a visit and enjoying the experience of witnessing such a unique vision come to life.

How to get there:

Catedral de Justo is located in **Mejorada del Campo**, a small town just 20km from Madrid. To get there, there are two **public buses** from the center: *Avenida de América* (line 282) and *Conde Casal* (line 341). However, going by car is a better option, so you can continue your day-trip to [Alcalá de Henares](#),

Cervantes' hometown, which is about a half hour away or less.

Address: *Calle de Antonio Gaudí*

Bus Line 341 from Conde Casal ([link](#))

Bus Line 282 from Avenida de América ([link](#))

Also check out our post on 10 best day-trips from Madrid!

Barcelona

What to see:

La ciudad condal (as it's also called in Spanish) has everything you'd like to see in a city: crazy **Gaudi architecture**, great food and of course, the Mediterranean. One of the most visited cities in the world, Barcelona has been written about a lot and it's not our mission at **Naked Madrid** to show you what the city has to offer. We jus want to tell you how to get there!

From Madrid, there are many ways to get there, although I highly recommend the **high speed train (AVE)**. It takes barely 3 hours and most importantly, it picks you up and drops you off right in the center city (a true godsend). You'll also skip the waiting time at the airport and the annoying 6-hour drive from Madrid. Plus, it's not too expensive if you get the ticket in advance and choose the right date (be aware of the [public holidays](#)).

To get your trip started, you should read [Barcelona yellow post](#). Here, you'll find the 10 must-see sites in Barcelona such as **Sagrada Familia**, **Montjuic** or **Barrio Gótico**. Another good one is Devour Barcelona's [blog](#). But I find my favourite tips in [El boquerón viajero](#).



One place to eat at that we recommend is: Colmado

Our friends Bianca and Gaby took us to Colmado, a traditional Spanish restaurant and bar with a terrific atmosphere. You must order their **patatas bravas** (Potatoes with alioli sauce) and **pan tumaca** (bread with tomato and olive oil). It was really remarkable. You should call to book a table (a barrel with stools around it) ahead, as the place gets really busy.

Colmados's main info:

- [Website](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- Address C/ Provença, 236
- Tel 935 46 20 06





How to get there:

- By Train (High Speed Train – AVE)

Depart from: Atocha train station

Schedule:

Departure [Madrid-Barcelona \(AVE\)](#)

Return [Barcelona – Madrid \(AVE\)](#)

Duration: approx. 2.45 hour

Price: 50€ (round trip approx. 100€).

*[Link to Renfe's Web Site to get the tickets](#)

▪ By bus (Alsa)

Depart from: Avenida de America or Barajas airport

Duration: approx. 7 hour 30 min

Price: 32,46€ (round trip 64,92€)

*[Link to Alsa's web site to get your tickets](#)

Where to find it on a map:

Madrid's 10 Most Beautiful Surrounding Towns

One of the best things about living in Madrid is that you can easily escape the city center and take a day-trip or weekend getaway to one of the beautiful nearby towns.

These towns have some of the world's oldest universities, cathedrals, monasteries and historic monuments. You'll also find [natural swimming pools](#), mountains, hiking trails and other [adventure activities](#). And make sure to try special dishes like Segovia's *cochinillo*, suckling pig, or Ávila's sugary egg yolks, known as *yemas*.

Here's a list of the most popular nearby towns, plus a few things you should know about each one. Click on each town name below or our category link "[How to get to](#)" for a more in-depth post on each one, and all the different ways to get there.

Madrid's surrounding towns

1. [Alcalá de Henares](#): free tapas and [Cervantes' home](#)
2. [Aranjuez](#): royal gardens and palace
3. [Avila](#): old surrounding wall from medieval times, cathedral of Avila
4. [Buitrago de Lozoya](#): castle and large reservoir
5. [Cercedilla](#): mountains that are great for hiking, biking, swimming (natural pool) and other adventure activities
6. [Cuenca](#): cathedral of Cuenca, hanging houses and lamb
7. [El Escorial](#): monastery, Valle de los Caídos (20th-century war memorial)
8. [Rascafría](#): nature, restaurant El Poular, monastery of El Poular, hiking trails, natural pool, and a waterfall
9. [Segovia](#): Roman aqueduct, cochinillo (suckling pig), The Jewish Quarter, Alcázar of Segovia (castle) and a nearby town called La Granja
10. [Toledo](#): beautiful old streets and architecture, museums, and the synagogue of El Transito. Where three cultures lived in harmony for centuries (Jewish, Christian and Muslim).



Cercedilla





What to see:

When I think of *Cercedilla*, the first thing that pops into my head is nature. An hour from Madrid, this mountainous town is an incredible place for hiking, adventure activities and typical, no-frills kind of food.

In the summer, there's also an amazing natural swimming pool, meaning a manmade pool filled with natural running water from the mountain's streams and rivers, so you can take a refreshing dip while enjoying the beautiful surroundings.

If you'd like to go to Cercedilla but the idea of hiking scares you, there's a train that travels around the Guadarrama mountains. The train is called "*Tren de la naturaleza*" and runs every Thursday and Friday from the beginning of July to the end of September.

How to get there:

- By Train (Cercanías)

Depart from: Chamartín train station

Schedule:

Departure ([Madrid – Cercedilla \(Cercanías\)](#))

Return ([Cercedilla – Madrid \(Cercanías\)](#))

Duration: approx. 1 hour

Price: 4€ (round trip approx. 8€).

- By bus

Depart from: Moncloa. 684 bus

Schedule:

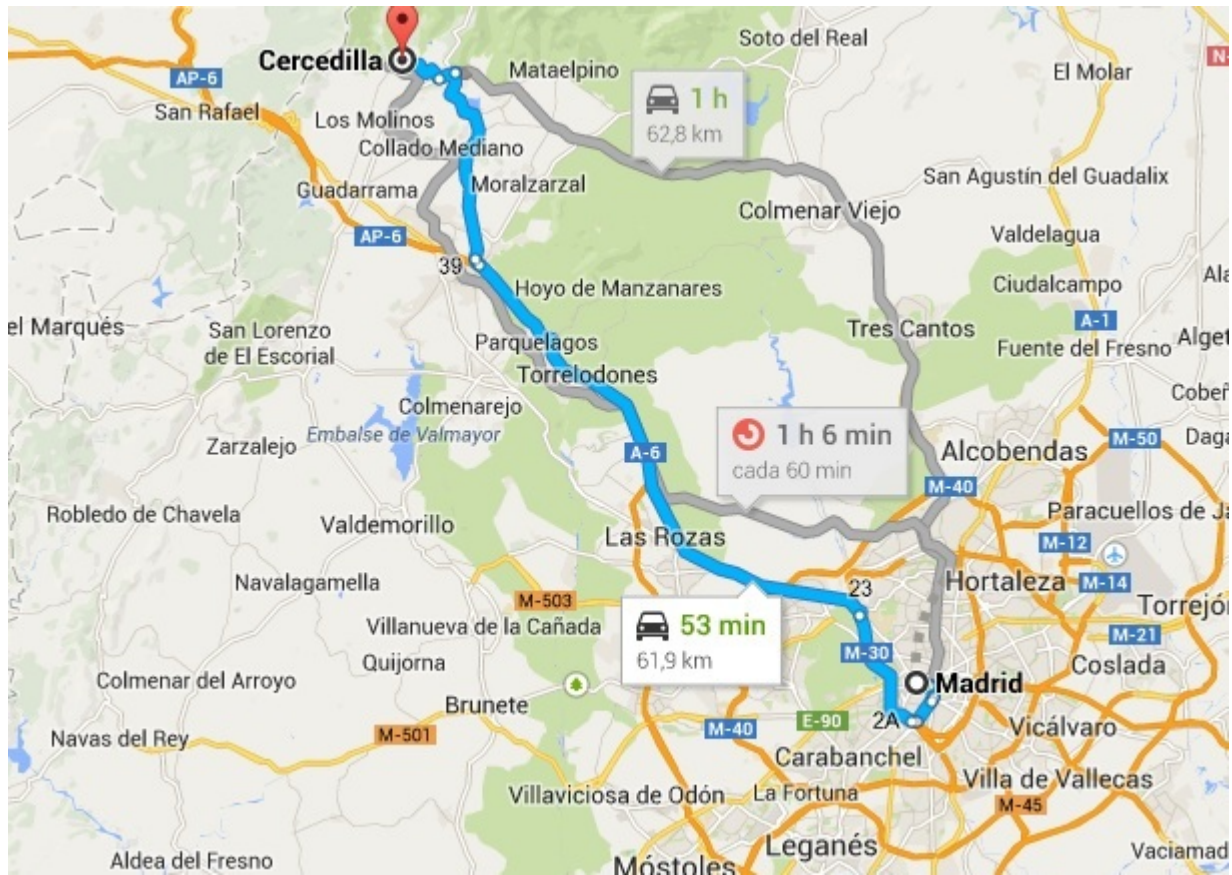
Departure ([Madrid – Cercedilla \(Bus\)](#))

Return ([Cercedilla – Madrid \(Bus\)](#))

Duration: approx. 1 hour 10 min

Price: 5,10€ (round trip 10,20€)

Where to find it on a map:



Rascafría



What to see:

There is a proverb in Spanish that goes: “*quien algo quiere, algo le cuesta.*” It’s the Spanish way of saying: “no pain, no gain.” I say this because, if you don’t have a car, Rascafría is far from the city and inconvenient. However, if you have wheels, don’t miss the opportunity to drive along the **northern mountains of Madrid and get away from the city**. Once you get there, you won’t regret it.

In this northern town, there are plenty of adventure activities to do. Although hiking and biking are the most popular, you can also jump into one of Madrid’s natural ponds. After that, enjoy the rest of the day at one of the pool-side *terrazas* or at a café in the quaint town.

How to get there:

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

Depart from: Plaza Castilla. 194 bus
Schedule:

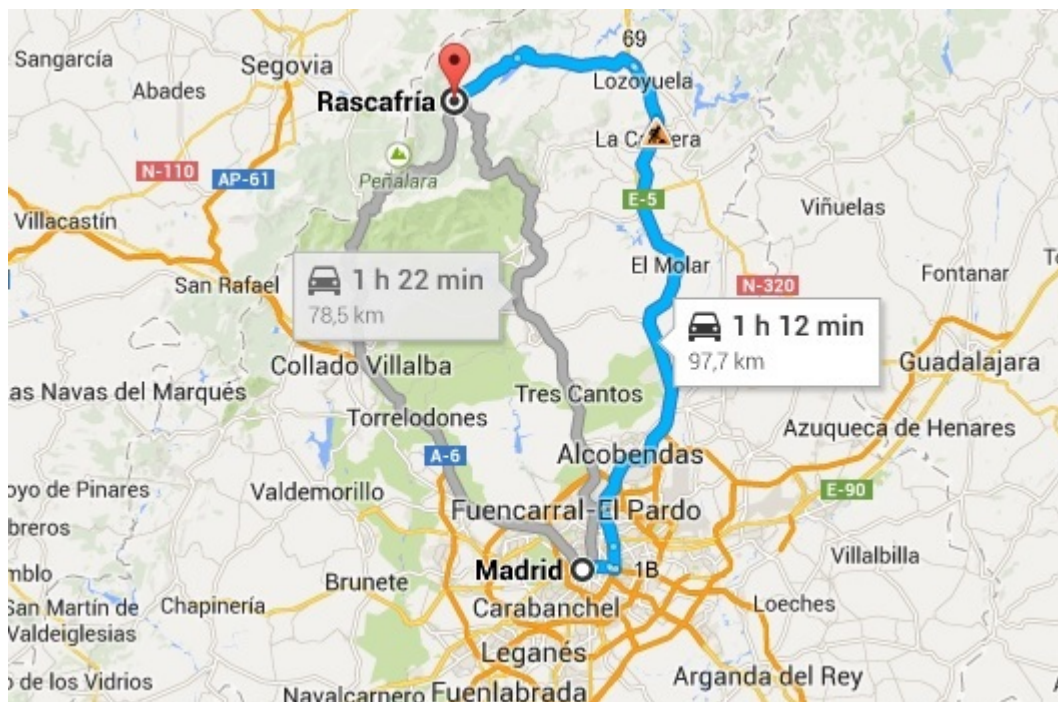
Departure ([Madrid – Rascafria \(Bus\)](#))

Return ([Rascafria – Madrid \(Bus\)](#))

Duration: approx. 2 hour

Price: 5,10€ (round trip 10,20€)

Where to find it on a map:



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:

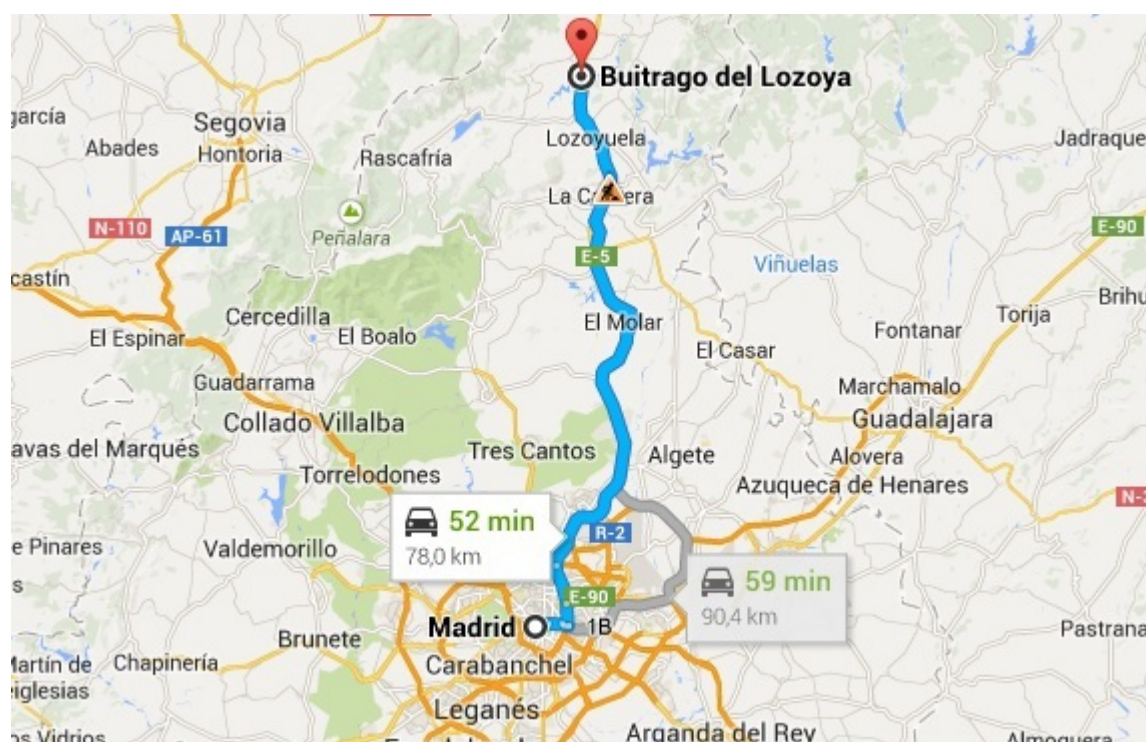
Departure ([Madrid – Buitrago de lozoya \(Bus\)](#))

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:

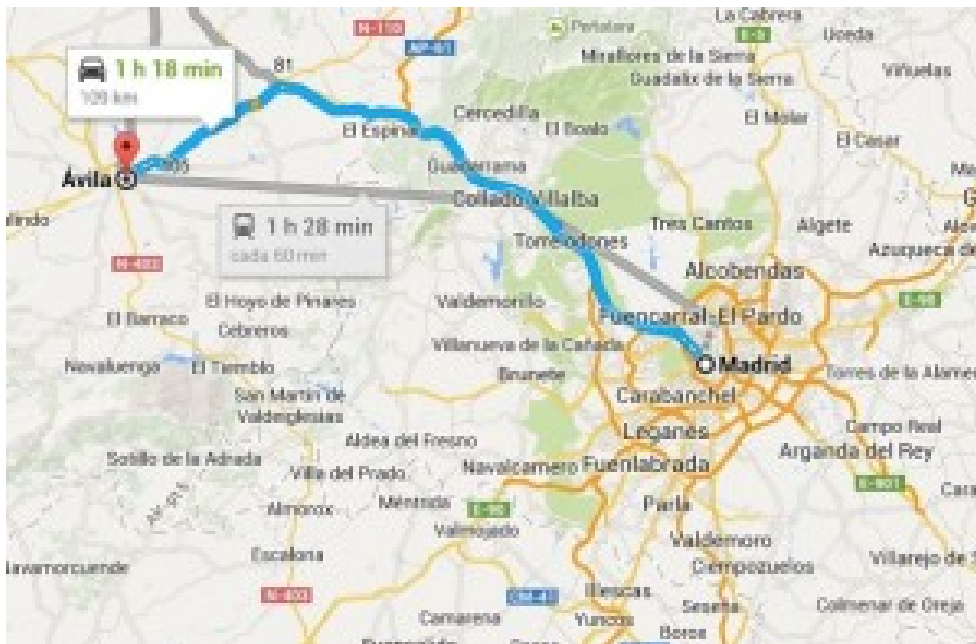


Image from Hostal Alcantara and abc.es

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 (Cercanías)

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:

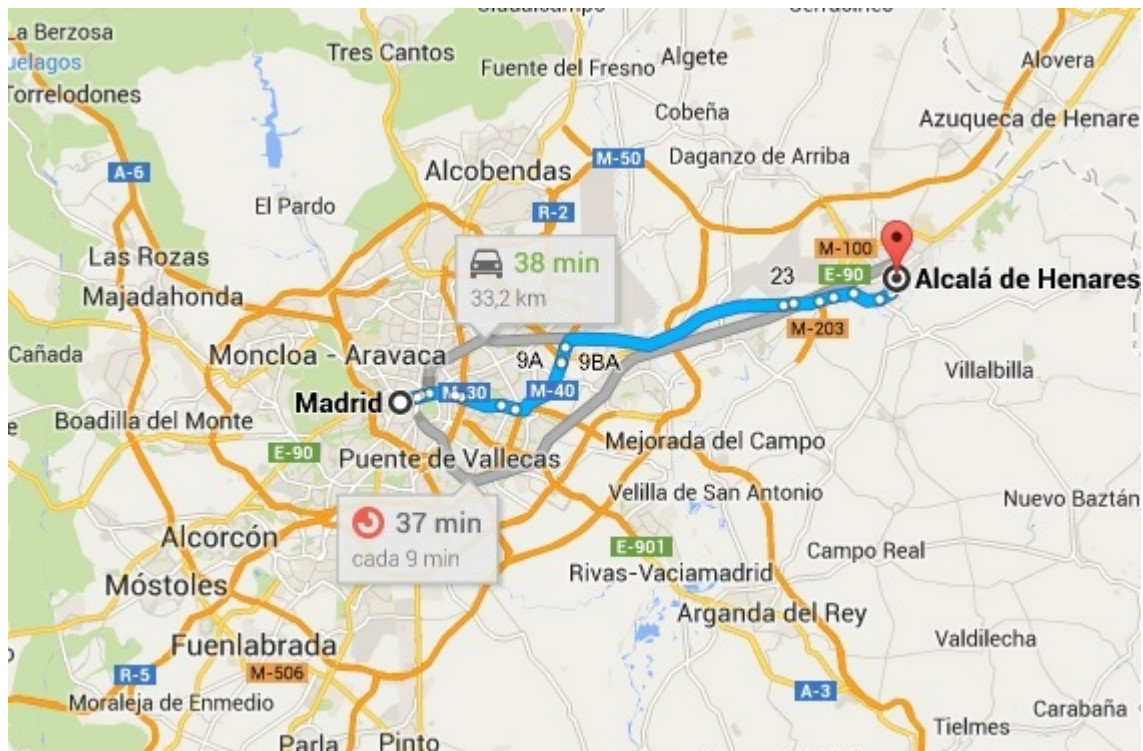
Departure ([Madrid-Alcala de Henares horarios y precios \(ALSA\)](#))

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:



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:

