Let’s hit the slopes! Ski and snowboard in Madrid

Yep, that’s right. Just when you thought Madrid couldn’t get any better, that it was a city purely of terrazas, tapas, cañas and sunshine, winter rolls around and you discover it has yet more to offer. What’s not to love about a place where you can soak up the sun by the pool in the summer, then ski the hell out of some mountains in the winter? After an unseasonably warm start to the season, it looks like we’re finally in for some snow, so get your gear on and let’s go!

Where?

There are three ski areas near the capital:

Puerto de Navacerrada



Image from Puerto de Navacerrada’s Facebook

Puerto de Navacerrada is the closest ski area to Madrid, around 65km away, but it’s also the smallest. You can download the piste map here.

Valdesquí



Image from Valdesquí's Facebook

Valdesquí is around 75km from Madrid, in the next valley over from Puerto de Navacerrada. Although it's a little further away, it's worth the extra mileage as it's a lot bigger than its neighbour (see the piste map here). However, its proximity to the capital means it can get very busy.

La Pinilla



Image from La Pinilla's Facebook

La Pinilla is located just over the border in Castilla y León and is the furthest ski area from the capital, around 120km away. It also covers a fairly large area (piste map here) but there are usually fewer people, due to its more remote location. Most of the people I know who ski or snowboard in Madrid say this is the best area to go to.

How do I get there?

I'm not going to lie, the easiest way to get to all three areas is by car, particularly if you're taking ski or snowboard equipment with you. If you haven't got a car, you could rent one, persuade a nice friend with a car to take you or use a service like BlaBlaCar. Or steal one if you have to. Seriously though, it is possible to get there on public

transport but it takes a while and the buses and trains aren't at the most convenient times, especially at weekends. You can get the Cercanías Line C8b to Cercedilla then jump on line C9, getting off at the Puerto de Navacerrada stop or the Cotos stop for Valdesquí, but you still have to take a taxi or a shuttle bus to get to the actual ski areas. Bus 691 from Moncloa is also an option but takes about 90 minutes and only goes once an hour at weekends. La Pinilla is even harder to get to on public transport, with just a few Alsa buses going to Riaza, a nearby village. However, there is a company which runs a shuttle bus at weekends from Atocha and Plaza de Castilla. More info here.

When can I go?

All the ski areas are now open and will be every day until March or whenever the snow disappears, maybe April if we're lucky. However, they're sometimes forced to close due to strong winds or other adverse weather conditions, so make sure you check the website or ring beforehand. Whether you're going by car or by public transport, and I can't stress this enough, get there AS EARLY AS YOU CAN. Although the ski areas don't open until 9am, I wouldn't recommend leaving Madrid any later than 7am. Once the car parks are full, they stop letting people in and you'll be going home disappointed. Some of my friends like to head up even earlier and enjoy a leisurely breakfast there, thereby avoiding queues and stress.

What facilities do the ski areas have?

All the ski areas have all the normal facilities you'd expect: ski and snowboard rental, restaurants, bars, hotels, etc. You

might want to consider renting equipment in Madrid before you go, as the official rental places in the ski areas can have pretty long queues and some of the other non-official places, although quicker, often don’t have such good equipment. Another option would be to go up the day before, sort out equipment rental and ski passes in the afternoon and stay the night in a hotel, meaning you’re all ready to catch that first chairlift in the morning!

How much does it cost?

The price of ski passes, or *forfaits*, varies depending on the ski area and how many days you want to go for, but the usual cost is around 30-40 euros per day. Food and drink are typically expensive at the ski areas, so take your own if you want to save money.

Other options

Madrid SnowZone at Xanadú



Image from Madrid SnowZone's Facebook

Of course, you don't have to limit yourself to skiing in the winter. At Madrid SnowZone in the Xanadú shopping centre you can ski and snowboard all year round if you want. It's not quite the same as being in the great outdoors surrounded by snow-capped mountains, but it's great for learning to ski or just practising your technique. You can get there on buses 528, 534 and 539 from Príncipe Pío. Check out their website for offers, classes and more.

Club Amistad

Madrid's oldest and largest ski club organises buses to the ski areas, classes and equipment rental, amongst other things. They also organise trips to ski areas in other parts of Spain and abroad. Check out their website for details.

Further afield

While the ski areas in Madrid aren't bad for a day trip, they can get extremely busy and the snow isn't always the best. There are ski areas all over Spain, so if you have a weekend or a few days to spare, I'd recommend going to one of the following:

Sierra Nevada (Andalucía)



Image from Sierra Nevada's Facebook

The big daddy of southern Spain, Sierra Nevada is a massive ski area just outside Granada (see piste map here). It often has sunny weather and is very popular with Spaniards, with a fantastic après-ski scene. They get a lot of snow but because of the temperature cycles it can quickly get icy. Not the best place if you're looking for powder.

Formigal (Aragón)



Formigal is the biggest ski area in Spain and generally has more reliable and better-quality snow than the south. Your *forfait* also includes the neighbouring resort of Panticosa, so when everything is open that's 176km of skiable terrain (see piste map here). The nearby village of Formigal is pretty small so it can get booked up quickly. The same company also owns another great resort called Cerler, which more difficult to get to but generally has better snow and fewer people.

Astún (Aragón)



Powder day in Astún!

Smaller than Formigal and less crowded, if you get Astún on the right day the snow can be incredible (see piste map here). You can stay in the town of Jaca and get a bus, so it's perhaps slightly easier for a last-minute trip than Formigal. There's another resort right next to Astún called Candanchú which is also excellent, although the terrain is considerably more challenging.

Even further afield…

Of course, you don’t have to stop there! There are plenty of resorts in Catalonia (Baqueira/Beret is the most famous one) and Andorra has some fantastic areas such as Grand Valira.

See you on the slopes!