



TRAVEL

Madrid: The Crown Jewel of Spain



By Richard Levy

I was twenty-two years old the first time I visited Madrid and just out of college. The only thing I knew about the city was what I read in *The Sun Also Rises*, *Death in the Afternoon* and *By-Line Ernest Hemingway*. He had painted such an adventurous, vivid and passionate picture for me, I felt as if I had already been there.



Cibeles

Eager to trace Hemingway's footsteps, I somehow managed to stay at the luxurious Palace Hotel, now the Westin Palace, even though I couldn't afford it. The first time Hemingway stayed there, he was a free-lance reporter covering the Spanish Civil War for the American Newspaper Alliance, and he couldn't afford it either. One night General Franco's bombs badly damaged the Palace and the guests fled, so Hemingway, who had always wanted to stay there, seized the moment and checked in. The management gratefully gave him one of their best rooms for a handful of pesos.

For most of the Civil War, Hemingway lived where most of the expats stayed: at the Hotel Florida, demolished in 1964.



Olive Trees



Casa de Cisneros

Madrid seemed alive with boundless energy as I wandered around on my first day there. Eventually I made my way over to one of Hemingway's favorite cafes: *Cervecería Alemana*, located at end of the Plaza Santa Ana. A cross between a German beer hall and a Spanish tapas bar, it is still as loud and boisterous as it was when he hung out there and they have kept his favorite table near the window empty, as a tribute to him. Of course, I ordered what he would: a plate of grilled sardines along with the house beer: "the best beer in Madrid," according to Hemmingway.

La Venecia, an old sherry bar also near Plaza Santa Ana was another of Hemingway's haunts. It's hard to find, so look for a pair of old wooden shutter-like doors that mark the entrance. Republican soldiers used to hang out



Don Quijote Statue in El Toboso

here during the Spanish Civil War and Hemingway, a war correspondent, would sit at the bar hoping for news from the front. *La Venecia* serves only sherry: five delicious varieties poured from old barrels, perfectly complemented by an inexpensive tapas menu.

Afterwards I went back to my hotel, took a siesta, awoke at 9PM and headed over to the Plaza Mayor. Hemingway



Museo del Prado, Madrid

spent most of his evenings stopping at his favorite tapas bars, drinking lots of wine and schmoozing. At most tapas bars, you'll get free tapas each time you order another glass of wine.

Casa Botin, featured in *The Sun Also Rises*, was Hemingway's favorite restaurant and his favorite meal was the suckling pig washed down with Rioja Alta wine. The restaurant has recently been renamed and is now called *El Sobrino de Botin*. (Make reservations before you leave NY.)



Fountain Madrid Glorieta Carlos V

A few days later, I was sitting in the Plaza de Torres, Madrid's legendary bullfighting ring. As the fanfare and parade of Matadors began, trumpets blared, crowds cheered and it got very quiet when the majestic bull trotted into the ring snorting and kicking. The Matador stood very erect in the middle of the ring awaiting his bull and the elaborate "fight" commenced. By the end I was totally disillusioned and unexpectedly sick to my stomach. This was not the beautiful "art form" Hemingway had raved about in his books, but a well-orchestrated slaughter of the bull: a true blood sport. I quickly exited the arena and headed for the nearest bar. Don't allow my feelings to sway you; decide

for yourself. Though many people love the bullfights, just as Hemingway did, the numbers of those who wish to ban Bull Fighting and the slaughter of these proud animals is on the rise. If you go, buy aisle seats so you can make a hasty exit, if needed.



Museo Reina Sofia

Most local folks, or Madrileños as they're called, don't go to dinner until 10PM and often don't get home until dawn. So how do they stay up so late and then get up for work the next day? Their secret is the siesta: the beloved two-hour nap they've taken every afternoon for centuries. Most shops also close for a few hours to take their siesta, leaving visiting tourists with little else to do. So if you'd like to enjoy Madrid's nightlife like a local, everyday at two o'clock, head back to your hotel for a two-hour nap. (And you don't have to sleep; after all you're on vacation!)

On Sunday mornings visit *El Rastro*: Madrid's huge flea market. Who knows, maybe you'll find an old unsigned early El Greco! For a memorable Madrid lunch, stop by a local market to pick up some Serrano ham (Jambon), *baulettes*, manchego cheese and bottle of wine for a romantic picnic at "Parque del la Retiro" (Magnificent park overlooking the lake.

Plan to take a one-day tour of the historic city of Toledo: home to La Mancha castle and the statue of Don Quixote. On another day, visit Segovia, the town where time stands still and the 2,000 year-old Roman Aqueduct is



Gran Via Night

side by side with modern buildings. The Alcázar commands the high ground on a promontory above two rivers. Originally the site of a Roman fort, the Alcázar is currently a museum, and also houses military archives.

A visit to Madrid is not complete without spending a day at the Museum. Three museums are clustered along Paseo del Prado, east of the old city: the Museo del Prado, considered one of the finest art museums in the world; the Thyssen-Bornemisza, a baron's collection of classical art; and the Reina Sofia, Madrid's modern art museum.

You will love the Prado Museum even if you're not an art lover. Hemingway, who hated Museums, loved the Prado because he admired the Spanish masters. A neo-classical work of art, the Prado houses masterpieces by Goya, Valasquez, El Greco and my favorite artist, Hieronymus Bosch, I love "The Garden of Delights," painted in

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1649: a bizarre depiction of mankind's sins, virtues and demonic punishments. This painting will astound you.

After your Prado experience, go to the Reina Sofia Museum and spend as much time as possible admiring Picasso's Guernica, the famous anti-war painting: a black and white abstraction of the horrors of the Spanish Civil war in which 420,000 Spaniards are estimated to have died. * Most museums are closed on Mondays and many stores are closed on Sundays.

One of my favorite Madrid neighborhoods for strolling, is the Gran Vía,

see non-touristy Flamenco, or the Casa Patas, where they will guarantee you great seats near the stage if you have dinner at there. Flamenco is considered a cultural art form, in Madrid, not just a floorshow.

Madrid's traditional cuisine includes: *Gallinejas*—Pieces of lamb fried in its fat; *Callos a la Madrileña* - A hot pot of spicy beef tripe; *Cocido Madrileño* - chickpea stew with meat; *Oreja de Cerdo* - pigs ears fried in garlic and *Sopa de Ajo* -garlic soup. My favorite restaurants are, Tasca la Farmacia: a Basque restaurant with "pintxos" (Basque tapas.) The house specialty is Cod, prepared



Palace Hotel, Madrid

Some of my other favorite cafes are: Cafe Circulo de Bellas Artes, a soaring hall on the ground floor of Madrid's art center with lots of atmosphere and food at reasonable prices. This is a great place for lunch as it is close to the best shopping and museums.

One of my favorite bars is Areia,



Taberna Los gatos - Tapas Madrid

decorated in an artsy Moroccan style. Dark, but very inviting, the floor is covered in sand giving it a beach-like vibe. There are big cushions on the floor, and if you're lucky, a four-poster bed to hang out on. Drop by La Corolla bar where their specialty is toasts: small pieces of toast served with a variety of delicious toppings. (You won't be able to stop.) Then there's Museo Chicote, an old Hemingway haunt; famous for having served their unusual drinks to many famous celebrities over the years, including: Ava Gardner, Frank Sinatra, Lana Turner and Orson Wells. I also loved Café Central, with its art deco decor, mirrored pillars and marble-topped tables. Café Central features blues and jazz on weekdays and Flamenco during the weekend.

If you'd like to go dancing, head for Palacio Gaviria. This stunning club plays

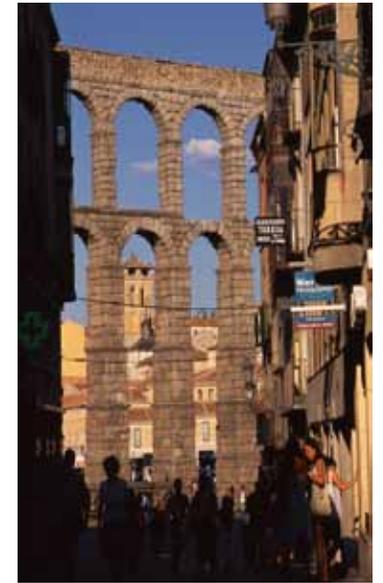
Spanish pop and is decorated like a lavish 16th century palace with a marble staircase, and two dance floors.

Where to stay in Madrid? The classic five-star Ritz Hotel is the "grand old lady of Madrid" and an exquisite example of Spanish architecture, close to the Prado and "Parque del buen Retiro." Or stay at AC Hotel Palacio de Retiro. The Hotel NH Palacio de Tera is only a five-minute walk from the Plaza Mayor.

Now for a little bit of Madrid's history: In 1561 King Philip II made Madrid the capital city of his vast empire. The historic center was the spectacular Plaza Mayor square—in-inaugurated in 1620 and one of the most popular sites in Spain—a living example of the splendor of the city during the 16th and 17th centuries. Near the Plaza Mayor is the Royal Palace, "the jewel in the crown." An imposing building dating from the 17th century, the palace features a mixture of Baroque and classicist styles. Just east of the Palace Real is Plaza de Oriente square: semi-circular landscaped gardens where one of the walkways is lined by 44 statues of medieval Spanish kings.

Madrid's historic Plaza de España is nearby and you will find there a towering monument to Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra overlooking bronze sculptures of Don Quixote and Pancho. Nearby are the Teatro Real opera house and the modern cathedral of La Almudena consecrated by Pope John Paul II, in 1993.

The national New Year's Eve celebration is broadcast from the Puerta del Sol, a bustling center of shops and



Segovia Aqueduct

businesses where Spain's network of roads come together. You will find here, the statue of the Bear and the Strawberry Tree, heraldic symbols of Madrid, representing the resilience and industry of the residents.

The best way too get around Madrid is on their very easy to navigate and affordable Metro: a 10 ride ticket is 7 Euros. (Or splurge and take a taxi.) Bring home some Serrano smoked ham and prints from museum gift shops, castanets, to practice Flamenco and a small statue of Don Quixote. Attention Chefs: saffron is 50% less here!

How to get to Madrid? Iberia, the airline of Spain offers the most flights. (Check Google.com/travel for best fares for dates you're considering.) Don't go to Madrid in August: it's stifling hot and many restaurants are closed. The best months are May, June, September and October. And before you go, read Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, or take it with you, after all, you're going to Madrid, his beloved city. Buen viaje!!!

We are grateful to the Tourist Office of Spain for the photos (© Tourist Office of Spain) used to illustrate this story; 666 5th Ave., #3502 NY, NY 10103. T.212.265.8822. For further information on traveling to Spain, visit: spain.info/en, SpanishTourism.com or WelcomeToSpain.com and pick up one of the Spain guide books to take with you.

** The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain. By Paul Preston. HarperPress; American publication by W.W. Norton*



Toledo



Retiro, Madrid

Literally "Great Way", referred to as "Broadway," one of the busiest avenues in Madrid, running from Plaza de España to Plaza de Cibeles. You'll stroll through the cinema district, shopping malls, historic Plaza de Cibeles and the massive intersection of Calle de Alcalá and Paseo del Prado where you'll be awed by the beautiful Fountain of Cibeles, portraying the Roman goddess of fertility sitting upon a chariot pulled by two lions. Keep walking and you'll come to one of the world's most beautiful city halls, the Palacio de Cibeles, an impressive structure with a spectacular classic facade.

If you've never seen Flamenco, visit Las Tablas one night: the best place to

as croquettes, incorporated into stews or fried. Go to Zalacaín, winner of a Michelin star, for fine Spanish cuisine, where their classic dish is mushroom and foie gras lasagna. Also consider La Terraza del Casino, with two Michelin stars, one of Madrid's most innovative restaurants; order their tasting menu of 20 small dishes. (Expensive, but the best meal you'll eat in Madrid.)

The most popular tapas bar in Madrid and my favorite is El Tigre. This is a lively place, and with every glass of wine or beer you order, you will also be served get free plates of tapas. (One night stuff yourself with tapas and forget about dinner.)



Royal Palace, Madrid