

Plaza Mayor & Royal Madrid

Neighbourhood Top Five

1 Immersing yourself in the street life that courses across the cobblestones or taking up residence at an outdoor table surrounding the **Plaza Mayor** (p52).

2 Soaking up the grandeur at the **Palacio Real** (p53), Madrid's seat of royal power.

3 Spending time in **Plaza de la Villa** (p59), one of Madrid's most architecturally rich corners.

4 Stopping by for Madrid's best *chocolate con churros* (chocolate with deep-fried doughnuts) at the **Chocolatería de San Ginés** (p63).

5 Learning why locals are obsessed about food at **Mercado de San Miguel** (p61).



For more detail of this area see Map p232 →

Explore: Plaza Mayor & Royal Madrid

The Plaza Mayor is the hub of Madrid's most medieval quarter, an area known as Madrid de los Austrias, in reference to the Habsburg dynasty, which ruled Spain from 1517 to 1700. The plaza is a place both to admire and to get your bearings, the place where so many explorations of the neighbourhood (and wider city) begin. That's because it is at once the hub of neighbourhood life and the topographical high point of the *barrio* (district).

Build your day exploring this neighbourhood around this and other squares, which are lovely and quiet in the morning, and lively and pretty in the soft light of late afternoon. Running close to its northern edge, Calle Mayor connects Plaza Mayor with the rest of the neighbourhood, running down the hill past the wonderful Mercado de San Miguel to Plaza de la Villa with tangled lanes of medieval origin twisting away on either side. Away to the north is the Plaza de Oriente, royal palace and cathedral.

Although it's no hard-and-fast rule, the shops, restaurants, bars and nightclubs tend to be concentrated at the eastern end of the neighbourhood, close to the Plaza Mayor, while the architectural highlights are more evenly spread.

Local Life

- ➔ **Hang out** The broad appeal of the neighbourhood is summed up by two of its favourite meeting places: the stunningly converted Mercado de San Miguel (p61) and the timeless Chocolatería de San Ginés (p63).
- ➔ **Meeting points** The equestrian statue of Felipe III in the centre of Plaza Mayor was moved here in 1848 and has ever since been a favoured meeting point for locals who arrange to meet 'under the balls of the horse'.
- ➔ **Shopping** Ignore the tacky souvenir shops that overflow from shopfronts across the centre: small artisan shops abound across the neighbourhood and are well worth tracking down.
- ➔ **Nightclubs** Watch out for themed nights that might make Monday a better night to dance than the weekend.

Getting There & Away

- ➔ **Metro** A short step from Plaza Mayor, Sol metro station is one of the most useful in Madrid, with lines 1, 2 and 3 all passing through.
- ➔ **Metro Ópera** (lines 2 and 5) is another useful neighbourhood station – line 2 can carry you to the Paseo del Prado (leaving a short walk to the galleries), Parque del Buen Retiro or Salamanca in no time.

Lonely Planet's Top Tip

Treat Plaza Mayor as a place to soak up the atmosphere, and order a coffee or wine to justify your presence at one of the outdoor tables. Come in the morning when the pressure to order something more substantial is minimal. For a meal you're better off heading to the Mercado de San Miguel.

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Mercado de San Miguel (p61)
- ➔ Restaurante Sobrino de Botín (p63)
- ➔ Taberna La Bola (p61)
- ➔ Casa Revuelta (p60)
- ➔ Casa Paco (p62)

For reviews, see p60 ➔

Best Places to Drink

- ➔ Chocolatería de San Ginés (p63)
- ➔ The Sherry Corner (p63)
- ➔ Teatro Joy Eslava (p63)
- ➔ Café del Real (p63)
- ➔ Café de Oriente (p64)

For reviews, see p63 ➔

Best Shopping

- ➔ Antigua Casa Talavera (p65)
- ➔ El Arco Artesanía (p65)
- ➔ Maty (p65)
- ➔ Convento del Corpus Cristi (p66)
- ➔ Casa Hernanz (p66)

For reviews, see p65 ➔