

Escape the Madrid Heat in the Mountains of Cercedilla

As someone who considers themselves a 50/50 city girl and mountain lover, I was slightly curious when moving to Madrid about where the hiking enthusiast side of me would find a place in such a massive city. I find that when most people think of Spain, their minds tend to veer more towards flamenco, sangria, paella, medieval villages, and enchanting cities.

To my surprise, the community of Madrid is also home to a vast range of world-class hiking trails. I was excited the other week to be escaping the city for a day in the mountains of Cercedilla, but was pleasantly surprised when I saw the immense beauty that La Sierra de Guadarrama beholds.

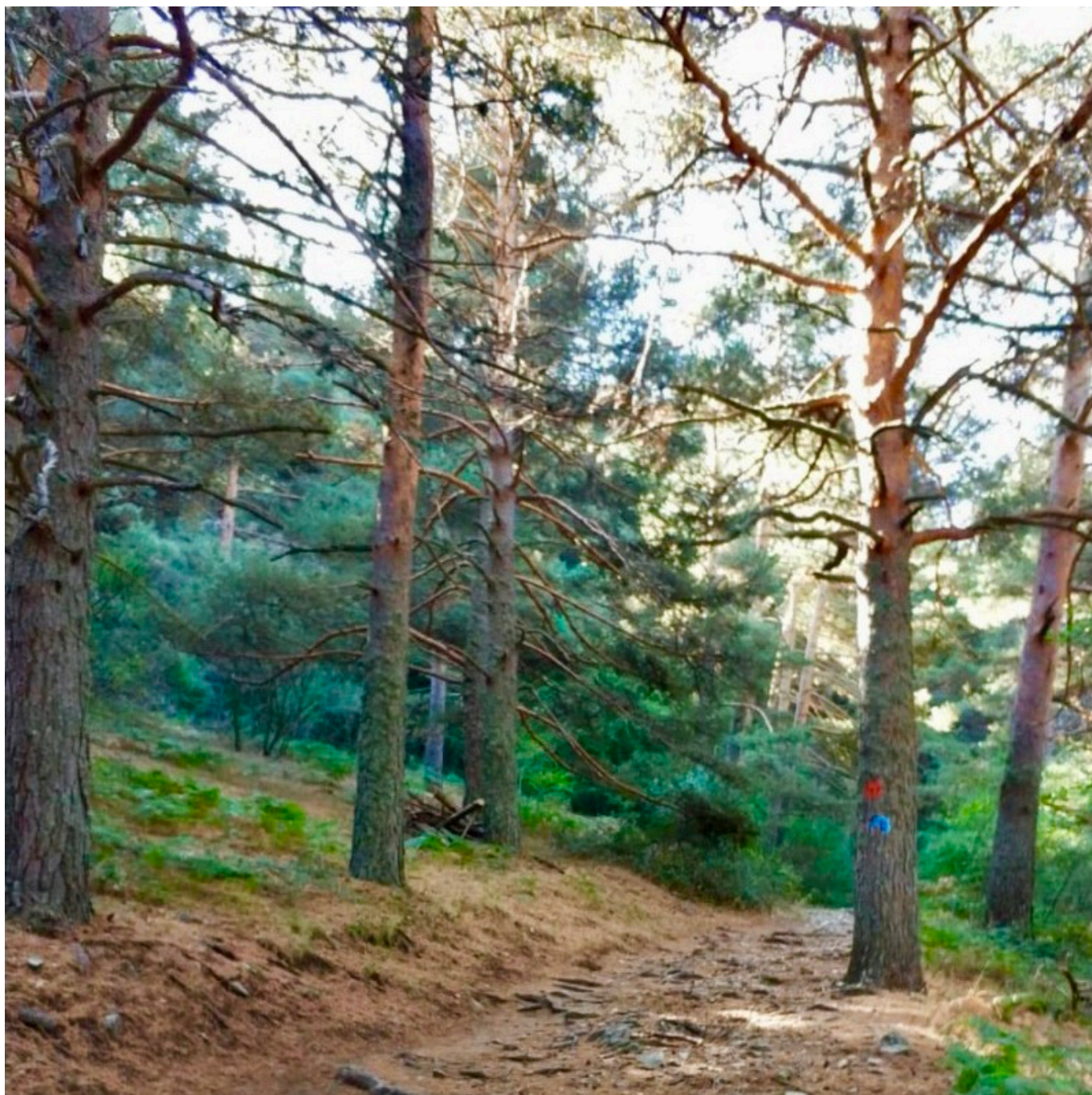


Getting to Cercedilla

Luckily, Cercedilla is only about a one-hour drive away from

Madrid and can be easily reached by [train](#), which will drop you off right in the center of the quaint mountain town. I took a car to Cercedilla and after driving through this charming destination for a bit, found my way to the environmental office.

Stepping out of the car and getting a whiff of the crisp mountain air and pine trees was the perfect welcome into the gorgeous La Sierra de Guadarrama that surrounds Madrid. If you go up to the window at the environmental office, you will meet a guide who will provide you with plenty of information and maps on the hikes that the area boasts.



Choosing Your Hike

The guide at the environmental office explained the map that contains many different color-coded trails, informing us of how long each would take, what the difficulty level was, etc. We decided to do the orange trail and then break off to go to Puerto de la Fuenfria, one of the area's peaks.

Once you leave the environmental office, if you simply drive about five minutes up the road, you will find a lovely restaurant with outdoor seating – perfect for a delicious and

well-deserved bite after your hike! It was from this restaurant that we parked and found the trailhead for the orange trail.

The first part of this hike is definitely the most challenging, which the guide prepared us for at the environmental office. It is most definitely on the steeper side but travels through the thick forest, so although you will feel the burn, you will remain in the cool shade of the trees. The views are absolutely stunning all the way up, overlooking the towering mountain peaks. The trails are also marked very well, with the color of each trail on the trees helping you to stay on track.

After about an hour and a half of hiking through lush pines and enjoying picturesque moments, we made it to our first lookout point, Mirador Vicente Alexandre. This is a fabulous spot to admire the panoramic views, while having a snack or taking a water break. We found many boulders with Spanish quotes and poems carved on them, which added to the incredible atmosphere.



Puerto de la Fuenfria

After spending about 20 minutes at Mirador Vicente Alexandre, we continued on our hike. The rest of the trail that we took to reach the Puerto de la Fuenfria was a gorgeous dirt road, rather than a typical forest trail that was the first half of the hike. "Dirt road" may not sound like something "gorgeous," but there were barely any people there and horses roaming free with breathtaking views constantly in the background.

After hiking this road and enjoying the mountain views for about another hour and a half, we arrived at the peak. The views were wonderful, just as they were through the entire hike and there is an old fountain that we sat by to eat lunch.

There is an old Roman-built cobblestone road that you will hike down when you leave, which was a different but just as beautiful way than hiking up.

We arrived back at the restaurant, where our car was parked. Here, you can enjoy a nice meal to refuel after the 10-mile hike before driving back to the city.

Explore Madrid's Many Mountains!

After experiencing my first Madrid hike, I can confidently say that living in this vibrant city does not come at the expense of a world-class hike whenever your heart desires. La Sierra de Guadarrama is just one of many fantastic mountain destinations for you to enjoy an escape from the city. Explore the many other natural wonders that surround Madrid, such as Cotos Forest, Abedular Canencia, La Pedriza, and so much more.

By Haley Grant

Also read:

- [How to get to Cercedilla](#)
 - [Madrid's 10 most beautiful surrounding towns \(and how to get there\)](#)
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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:

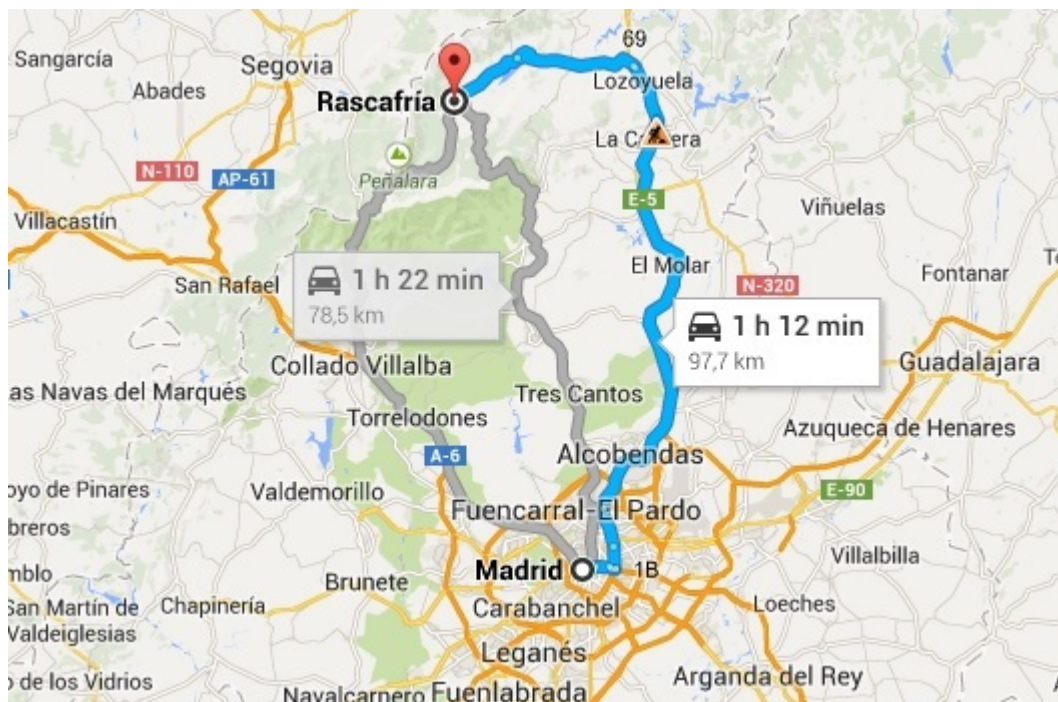
Departure ([Madrid – Rascafria \(Bus\)](#))

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

Duration: approx. 2 hour

Price: 5,10€ (round trip 10,20€)

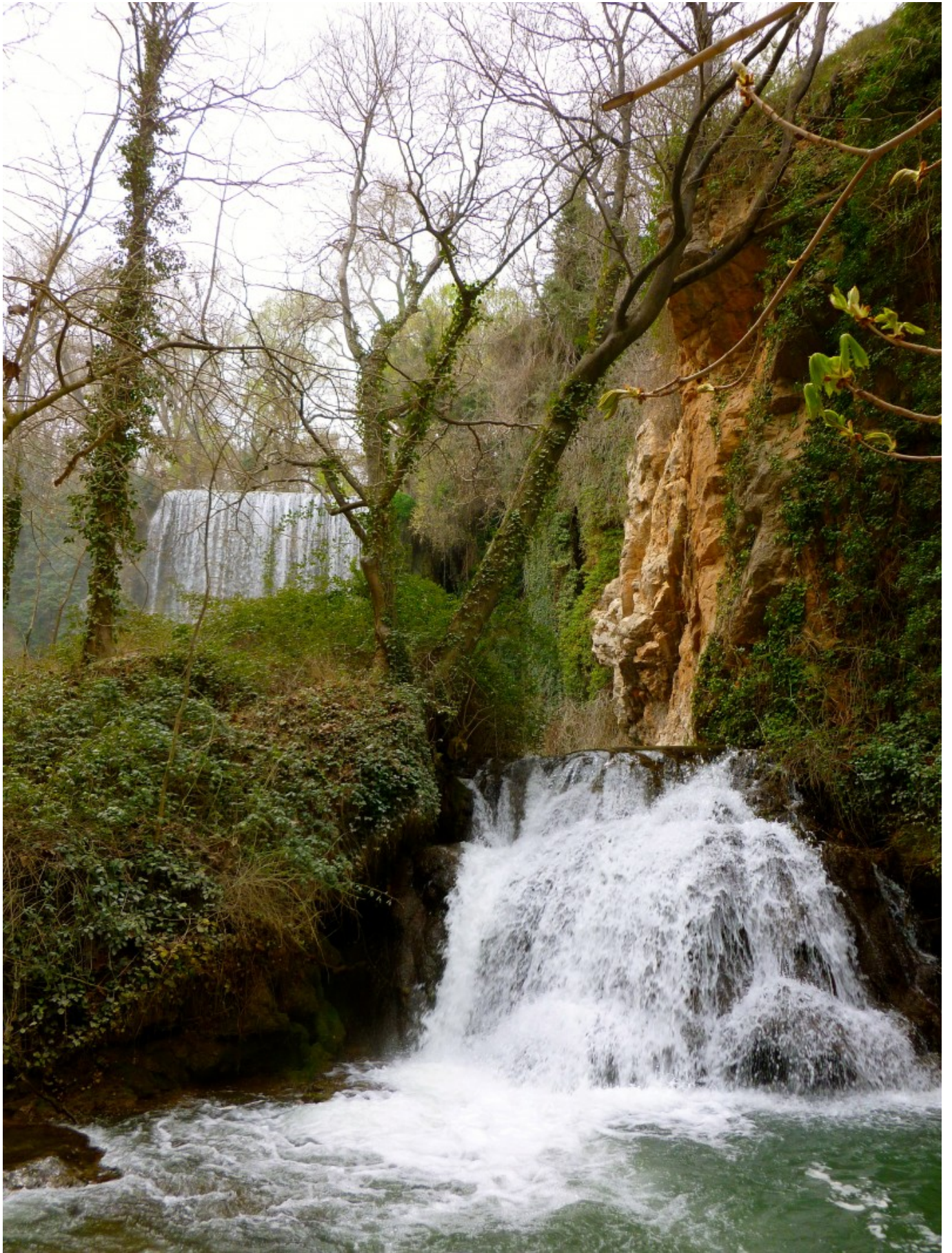
Where to find it on a map:



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 Waterfall** (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 "**Río Piedra**" (Stone river) is guilty of having formed this spectacular landscape of waterfalls and cozy natural spots.



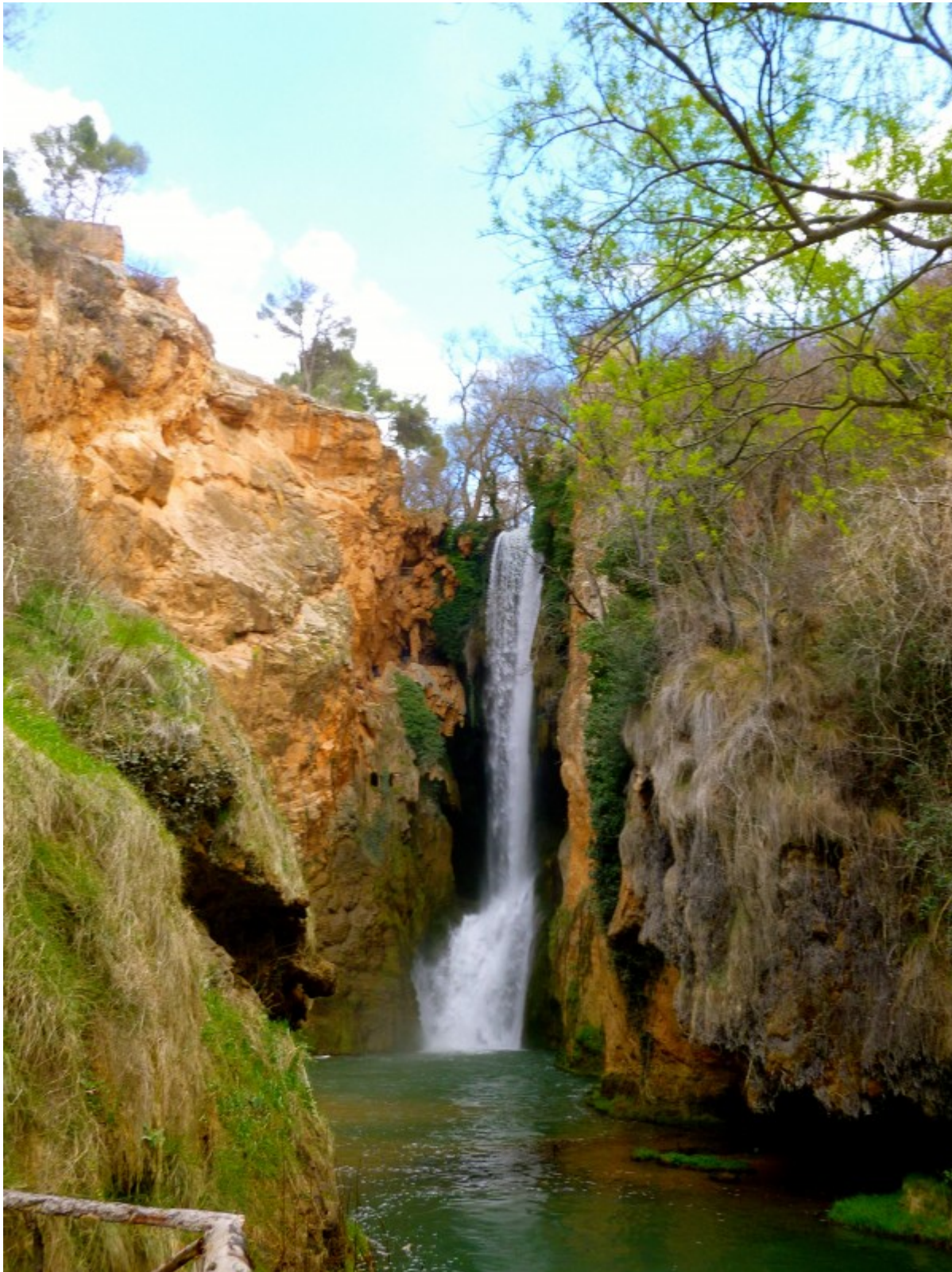
As we moved along the **río piedra** and stumbled upon a few more wows, we eventually got close up to the tallest waterfall in Spain: "**La cola del caballo**" (or, in English, *the horse tail waterfall*). It's an incredible 50m fall which makes you feel fear, awe and calmness, in that order.



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](#)

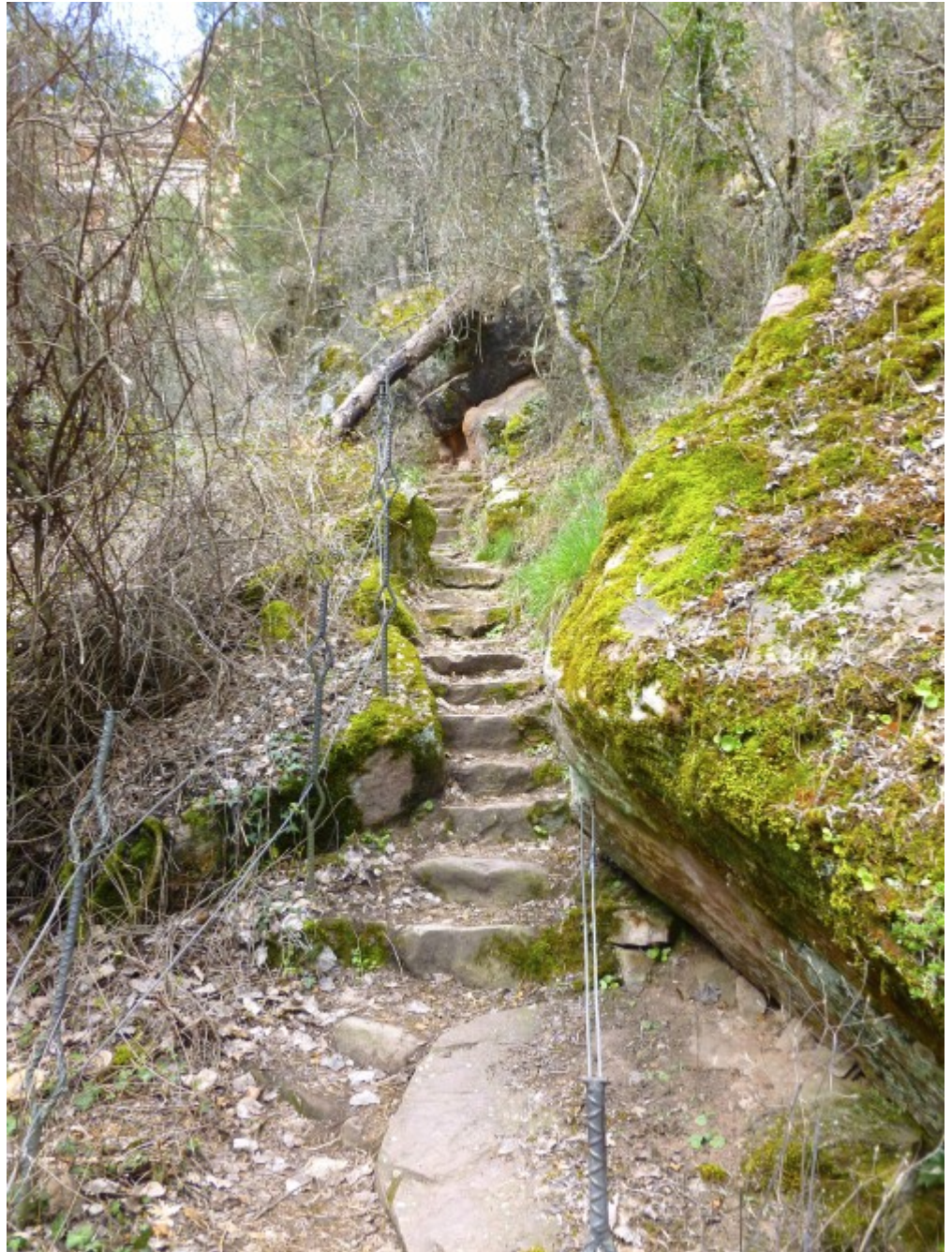
Barranco Virgen de la Hoz (Parque Natural del Alto Tajo) in Guadalajara

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...