

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!

Cuenca

What to see:

Less than two hours driving from Madrid, you'll find the city of **Cuenca**, which is a "must-see" kind of place if you're travelling around Spain. **Cuenca** was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999 and its *Hanging Houses* well deserve such honor.

These iconic houses from Cuenca were built in the 15th century and the best way to see them is from the bridge of San Pablo. Another city monument is the Cathedral of Cuenca, whose construction started in the 12th century.

Once you walk around the city and check out other important sites, you should also enjoy the city's gastronomy. As in most parts of Spain, Cuenca has a passion for meat and a tender roast lamb is its specialty. I can't tell you which is the best "Asador" or rotisserie in the city, but here's a link

to [Trip Advisor](#). Hope you have fun finding the right place (please let us know if you do)!

How to get there:

▪ By Train (AVE-Medium Distance)

Depart from: Atocha train station

Schedule:

Departure ([Madrid-Cuenca](#))

Return ([Cuenca-Madrid](#))

Duration: approx. 50min (AVE) 2h 50min (Medium distance)

Price AVE (High speed): 24€ (round trip approx. 48€).

Price (medium distance): 14€ (round trip approx. 28€).

▪ By bus

Depart from: Méndez Álvarez

Schedule: [Check Avanza web site \(English\)](#)

Duration: approx. 2 hour 10 min

Price: 14€ (round trip 28€)

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 (Cercanias)

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:

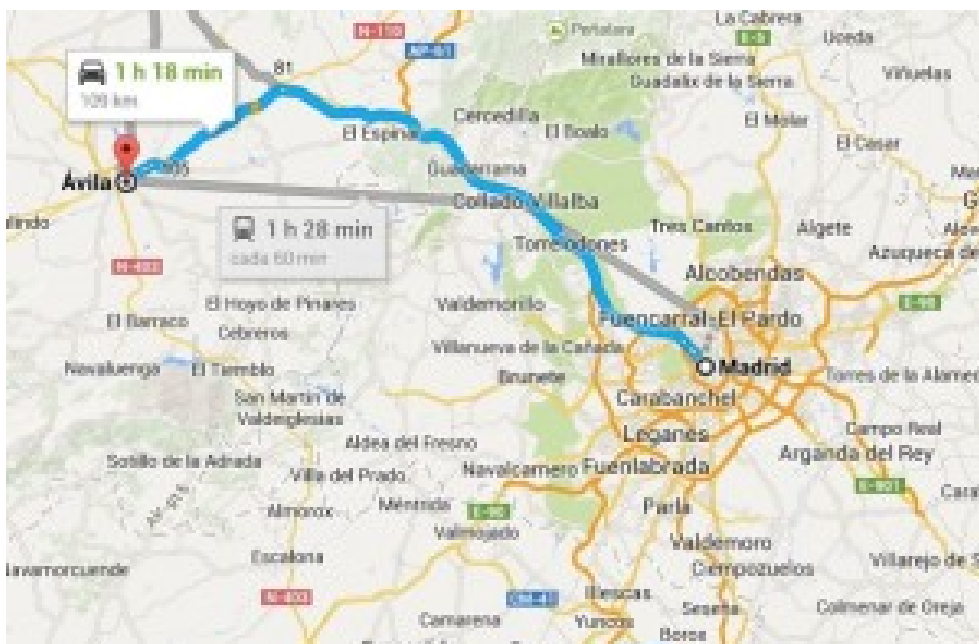


Image from Hostal Alcantara and abc.es

San Lorenzo del Escorial



What to see:

El Escorial is famous for its beautiful *Monasterio* which was built between 1563 and 1584. We recommend going inside the monastery, even though the entrance fee costs €10.

Once you've visited the monument, it's absolutely necessary to take a walk around the charming little town. Grab a seat at a *terrazza* and enjoy the pure air of the city's mountains, known as *la sierra de Madrid*.

How to get there:

• **By cercanías train ([map](#))**

Depart from: Sol, take Cercanías Line C3

Schedule:

Departure ([Horario Sol-El Escorial](#))

Return ([Horario El Escorial-Sol](#))

Duration: approx. 1 hour

Price: 5,40€ (round trip 10,80€). Buy tickets from machines inside Sol's train station.

**Note: you will have to walk 15 min or take another bus to get to the center.*

• By bus

Depart from: Moncloa, take bus line 661

Schedule:

Bus line [661](#) (every 10-15 min)

Bus line [664](#) (every 10-15 min)

Duration: approx. 1 hour

Price: 4,20€ (round trip 8,40€). Buy tickets on the bus.

Where to find it on a map:



Segovia

What to see:

In this thousand-year-old city, you'll find one of the most famous Roman aqueducts in the world, **el acueducto de Segovia**, as well as the magnificent castle, **Alcazar**, which really resembles a castle from Disney World.

More importantly, while you're in Segovia you must try their star dish – **cochinillo asado** – roasted suckling pig which is cooked so tender that it's tradition for the waiters to slice it in front of you with the side of a plate.

Although I haven't succeeded in finding Segovia's best *cochinillo*, I highly recommend going to the restaurant [Candido](#) which is easy to find as it's situated in the Aqueduct's plaza and its ambiance is very special.

How to get there:

• **By high speed train (AVE)**

Depart from: Chamartín train station

Schedule:

Departure ([Madrid-Segovia horarios y precios \(RENFE\)](#))

Return ([Segovia-Madrid horarios y precios \(RENFE\)](#))

Duration: approx. 30 min

Price: 12,70€ (round trip approx. 25€).

**Note. Sometimes you can find special offers on the website.*

• **By bus**

Depart from: Príncipe Pío bus station

Schedule:

Departure ([Madrid-Segovia horarios y precios \(La Sepulvedana\)](#))

Return ([Segovia-Madrid horarios y precios \(La Sepulvedana\)](#))

Duration: approx. 1 hour 15 min

Price: 8,09€ (round trip 16€)

Where to find it on a map:

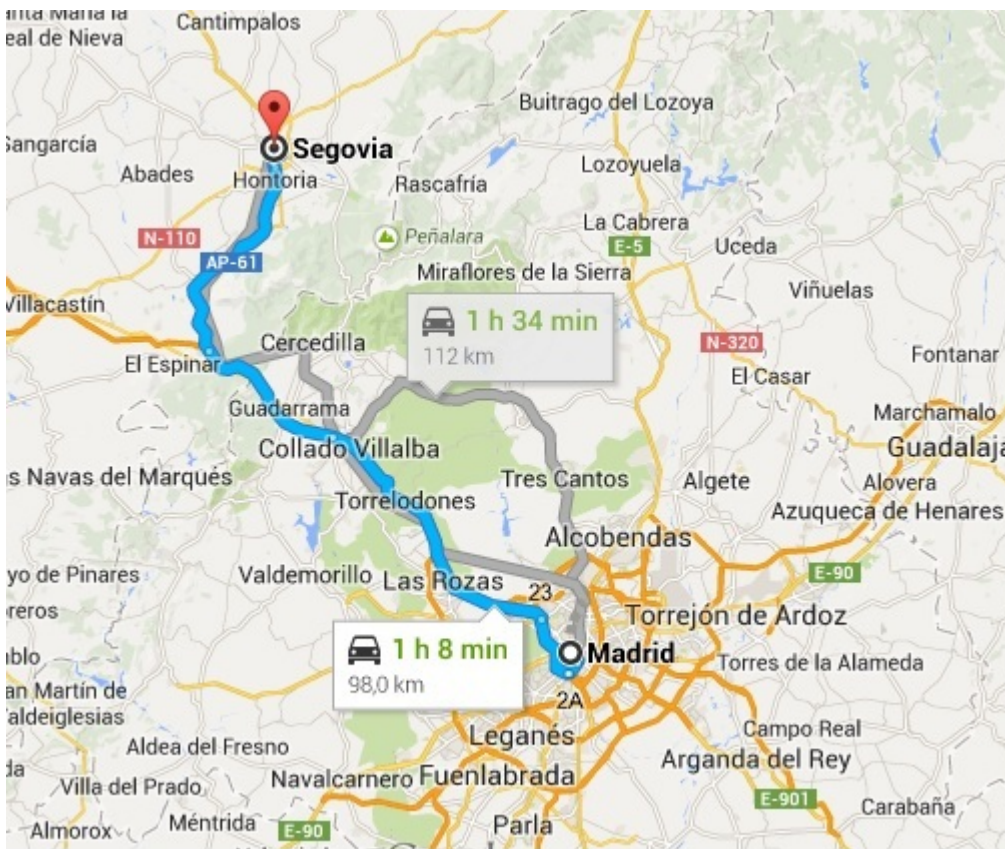


Image from wikipedia