What is World Heritage?

The canals of Venice, the Palace and Gardens of Versailles, the Alhambra and the Generalife, the historic city of Cartagena de Indias, the Iguazú waterfalls… These are some examples of assets listed as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO as places of exceptional value for humanity.

In case you don’t know, the World Heritage Site list is something like the contemporary version of the “wonders of the world”. Only exceptional places with great heritage wealth due to their cultural or natural legacy can obtain this recognition.

Spain has the honour of being the third country with the most World Heritage Sites, only surpassed by Italy and China. In the Madrid Region we have the good fortune of having four listed enclaves:

• The Monastery and Royal Site of San Lorenzo de El Escorial
• The University and historic centre of Alcalá de Henares
• The Cultural Landscape of Aranjuez
• The Montejo Beech Forest

And all of them less than 100 kilometres from the centre of Madrid. They are a must-see!

By bike and train

An original way of seeing three of these places, learning about their past and driving through settings in the historic Madrid-El Escorial-Priego line. The Tren de la Fresa, the Strawberry Train to Aranjuez, and the Tren de Felipe II, the Philip II Train to San Lorenzo de El Escorial, both from Príncipe Pío station, and the Cervantes Train to Alcalá de Henares from Atocha station. A trip back in time that will turn this visit into a unique experience.

By bike and train, an original way of touring three of these places, learning about their past and delving into their setting is on the historical trains that connect them to Madrid: the Tren de la Fresa, the Strawberry Train to Aranjuez, and the Tren de Felipe II, the Philip II Train to San Lorenzo de El Escorial, both from Príncipe Pío station, and the Cervantes Train to Alcalá de Henares from Atocha station. A trip back in time that will turn this visit into a unique experience.

If what you like is cycling, you cannot miss the CiclaMadrid tours, 420 kilometres connecting destinations and tourist resources, among them these four World Heritage enclaves and the Guadarrama National Park. A simple, eco-friendly, accessible and healthy way of discovering the charm of our region and its natural environment.
The UNESCO World Heritage List includes sites of exceptional importance to the cultural and spiritual identities of peoples around the world. These sites are selected by the World Heritage Committee based on certain criteria. The inclusion of a site on the UNESCO World Heritage List signifies its importance for world heritage and the need to protect it.

Architectural and scientific development

The Palace and University of Complutum, which is a model for the rest of the European Renaissance architecture, were added to the UNESCO World Heritage List as examples of the development of architectural and scientific thought in the 16th and 17th centuries. The University of Complutum, founded in 1502, was one of the first universities in Europe and was a center for the translation and study of classical texts. The palace, which was built for Emperor Charles V, is renowned for its magnificent ceremonial rooms and is an emblem of the Spanish empire's wealth and power.

Long traditions

The Three Encore Pieces are masterworks, reflecting the exchange of knowledge and art between Europe and the Islamic world during the Middle Ages. These pieces, which include the Cathedral of Seville, the Alhambra in Granada, and the Great Mosque of Cordoba, are examples of the development of Islamic architecture and art in the Iberian Peninsula. The Cathedral of Seville, built in the 16th century, is a masterpiece of Gothic architecture and is considered one of the finest examples of this style in Europe. The Alhambra, a palace and fortress complex built in the 14th and 15th centuries, is a magnificent example of Moorish architecture and is one of the most visited tourist sites in Spain. The Great Mosque of Cordoba, built in the 8th century, is a spectacular example of Islamic architecture and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The University of Alcalá was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1998 as a result of its architectural and cultural significance. The university was founded in 1499 by the Bishop of Baeza and is considered one of the most important universities in Europe. The university's main building is a magnificent example of Renaissance architecture and is a symbol of the intellectual and cultural achievements of the Spanish Golden Age.
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The UNESCO criteria

Architectural and scientific developments.

The Palace and Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial provided an ideal context for the exchange of cultural values. From the 16th century onwards, we can see a prime example of the influence of Mudejar architecture in the Monastery of El Escorial.

The complex design of the Aranjuez complex contributed to the development of a new style of architecture, which was to become known as the "Aranjuez Style." This style was characterized by the use of simple elements such as columns and pilasters, combined with the use of classical motifs such as the orders of architecture.

Living traditions.

The three enclaves mentioned above can gain some idea of the technical, scientific instruments, maps, spheres, drawings and engravings that were produced in the Madrid Region in the 18th century.