MAD RURAL

Sustainable tourism under the stars in the Madrid Region



Financiado por la Unión Europea
NextGenerationEU

GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA
MINISTERIO DE INDUSTRIA Y TURISMO

Plan de Recuperación, Transformación y Resiliencia

Comunidad de Madrid

MAD RURAL

ASTROTOURISM

The Madrid Region still has places where the night regains its true rhythm and the sky once again takes centre stage. When the lights of day fade and silence settles over the mountains, plains and reservoirs, the sky opens up over the landscape with surprising clarity. Far from the city's glare, the stars reappear one by one until they paint a deep sky, where the Milky Way can be glimpsed on the darkest nights.

At various points across the Madrid region, the quality of the night sky reaches levels of darkness equivalent to classes 3–4 on the Bortle scale, allowing for remarkable astronomical observation with the naked eye. The altitude of the mountains, the rugged terrain and the low population density help to maintain a cleaner, clearer atmosphere, creating ideal conditions for rediscovering constellations, tracking the movement of the planets or watching meteor showers.

But the true charm of these skies also lies in their proximity. In just one or two hours from the capital, you can find yourself beneath a starry sky, surrounded by natural landscapes, historic trails, viewpoints and villages where the night is enjoyed in peace. These settings allow you to combine hiking, cultural heritage and stargazing in a single experience.



MADRID DESTINO RURAL

Financiado por la Unión Europea NextGenerationEU
GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA MINISTERIO DE INDUSTRIA Y TURISMO
Plan de Recuperación, Transformación y Resiliencia
Comunidad de Madrid
MAD RURAL


Arturo
VIRGO
Spica
22:51

SIERRA NORTE DE MADRID

At the northernmost tip of the Madrid Region, the Sierra Norte boasts some of the darkest night skies in the region. The altitude of its mountains, the sweeping horizons and the low population density allow the night to unfold with a clarity rarely seen so close to the capital. When the sky clears, the stars appear by the hundreds and the Milky Way traces its luminous band across the mountainous landscape during the spring and summer nights.

Here, the experience of gazing at the sky blends with a landscape of tranquil reservoirs, oak forests and small villages where life moves at a leisurely pace. Natural vantage points, country lanes and open spaces offer ideal spots to pause, switch off the lights and let the night sky fill the entire horizon.

Suitable for all audiences

Highlights:

- El Atazar and El Berrueco — natural vantage points overlooking the great reservoir in the mountains. On calm nights, the water reflects the stars, creating a particularly attractive setting for astrophotography and stargazing at dusk.

- Paredes de Buitrago — a spot surrounded by open countryside where minimal light pollution allows you to enjoy vast night-time horizons.

- La Hiruela and Montejo de la Sierra — small mountain villages situated in the Sierra del Rincón Biosphere Reserve, where nature, tradition and the starry sky come together to create a single, unforgettable experience.



Recommended experiences

- Guided stargazing around the El Atazar reservoir.
- Introductory workshops on the constellations and night-time navigation.
- Guided trails combining astronomy, landscape and rural traditions.



Did you know...?

The Sierra del Rincón was designated a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO. This status recognises areas where nature conservation coexists with traditional human activity. Low levels of urban development and environmental protection also help to preserve high-quality night skies, ideal for stargazing.



SIERRA OESTE DE MADRID

The Sierra Oeste boasts a Mediterranean landscape where pine forests, pastures and open reservoirs create particularly tranquil settings in which to enjoy the night sky. Far from the most densely populated urban areas, this part of the region offers wide horizons and serene nights in which the night sky is reflected on the water and frames the dark silhouette of the forests.

On summer nights, the sky is filled with stars and the so-called Summer Triangle appears, formed by the bright stars Vega, Deneb and Altair, easily recognisable even to those observing the sky for the first time. Towards the south, the constellations of Scorpio and Sagittarius point to the heart of the Milky Way, where the luminous band of our galaxy becomes most intense on the darkest nights.

The presence of reservoirs and vast woodlands also lends a very special atmosphere to night-time stargazing: the silence of the pine forest, the reflection of the stars on the water and the sense of vastness make these evenings under the sky a peaceful and contemplative experience.

Suitable for all ages

Highlights

- Picadas and San Juan reservoirs — open spaces by the water offering unobstructed horizons and particularly attractive settings for stargazing or capturing the shimmering reflections on the reservoir's surface (it is advisable to move away from the illuminated recreational areas).

- The pine forests of Pelayos de la Presa and San Martín de Valdeiglesias — extensive Mediterranean woodlands where a few clearings and little-used paths allow you to enjoy tranquil skies and the profound depths of the night.

- Fresnedillas de la Oliva — a small mountain town with a unique connection to the history of space exploration.



Recommended experiences

- Observing the night-time landscape of Sierra Oeste de Madrid from the stargazing platforms set up in the area.
- Astrophotography amidst Mediterranean pine forests and summer skies.
- A cultural visit to the Space Tracking Centre (Lunar Museum) in Fresnedillas de la Oliva.

Did you know...?

The Apollo 11 communications from Fresnedillas

Fresnedillas de la Oliva played a key role in the space race by hosting one of NASA's tracking stations during the Apollo programme. From this site in Madrid, key communications were received and transmitted from Apollo 11, the mission that took the first human to the Moon in 1969.

The station formed part of the international network that enabled constant contact to be maintained with the spacecraft as the Earth rotated, making Fresnedillas one of the strategic hubs for space communications of the time.

Very close by, in the municipality of Robledo de Chavela, lies the Madrid Deep Space Communications Complex (MDSCC), whose large antennas remain today one of the most recognisable symbols of NASA in the Sierra Oeste de Madrid.



SIERRA DE GUADARRAMA

The peaks and valleys of the Sierra de Guadarrama offer one of the most iconic backdrops in the Madrid Region for combining mountains and starry skies. On clear nights, when the high-altitude air becomes cleaner and more transparent, the night sky unfolds above the granite ridges and open hills of the mountain range.

From these mountain landscapes, it is easy to recognise some of the best-known constellations of the northern sky. Ursa Major rotates slowly above the northern horizon throughout the year, whilst in summer the Milky Way stretches across the sky like a faint luminous band. In winter, the brilliant Orion dominates the sky with its three aligned stars, visible even to those observing the sky for the first time.

The experience is particularly intense in these mountain landscapes: the silence of the mountains, the dark silhouettes of the peaks and the sense of vastness transform stargazing into a unique way of discovering the mountains as night falls.

Suitable for all ages.

Key locations

- The mountain passes of Navacerrada, Guadarrama (Alto del León) and La Morcuera (Miraflores de la Sierra) — high-altitude spots from which to enjoy clear skies and sweeping panoramic views of the mountains, especially when moving away from the most heavily lit and busiest areas.

- La Pedriza (Manzanares El Real) — a unique granite landscape where the rock formations create spectacular scenes for landscape astrophotography (check regulations and opening hours).

- Viewpoints in the Sierra de Guadarrama — places such as the San Antonio Hermitage Viewpoint (Navacerrada), the Virgen del Rosario (Soto del Real), the Monte de El Chaparral Viewpoint (Manzanares El Real), the Guadarrama Viewpoint, the Pelona Viewpoint (Cercedilla) and the Alto del Hilo Viewpoint (Becerril de la Sierra) offer accessible spots and sweeping panoramic views for observing the night sky.



- Recreational areas and reservoirs — due to their easy access, the Navacerrada Reservoir Viewpoint, the La Jarosa Reservoir (Guadarrama) and the Pedrezuela Reservoir (Guadalix de la Sierra) are also recommended, as are various recreational areas in the mountainous surroundings that are ideal for leisurely stargazing.

Recommended experiences

- Landscape astrophotography combining the starry sky and granite formations.
- Guided night-time walks along historic roads and traditional paths.
- Constellation spotting from hilltops and viewpoints with unobstructed panoramic views.

Did you know...?

Altitude improves the clarity of the atmosphere. At higher altitudes, there are usually fewer airborne particles and lower humidity, which allows the stars to be seen with greater clarity and brightness. This is why mountainous areas are particularly popular for astronomical observation.



LAS VEGAS & ALCARRIA MADRILEÑA

The region of Las Vegas & Alcarria Madrileña feature a landscape of open countryside, gentle moorland and river valleys where the horizon stretches out with hardly any obstacles. Although these areas are relatively close to urban centres, they still retain vast rural expanses where the night is peaceful and the sky regains much of its depth.

The vastness of the landscape allows you to gaze upon almost the entire sky. On clear nights, it is easy to follow the movement of the constellations as the hours pass: the Big Dipper rotates slowly around the north, whilst in summer the Summer Triangle rises high above the fields. During winter, the brilliant figure of Orion dominates the south-eastern sky, visible from practically any vantage point with an unobstructed horizon.



These rural landscapes also offer a particularly accessible setting for those new to stargazing: farm tracks, greenways and gentle hills allow you to enjoy the sky without the need for long journeys or tackling challenging terrain. It is the perfect setting for discovering the stars for the first time, with family or in small groups.

Suitable for all ages



Did you know...?

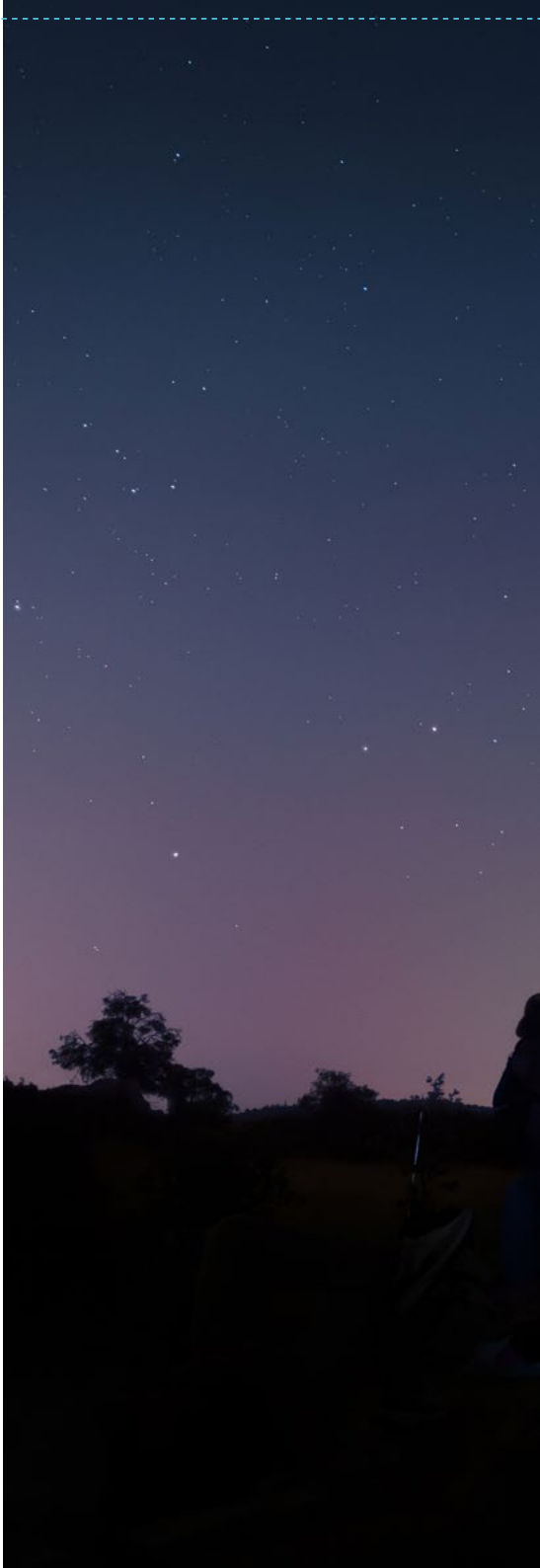
Open countryside landscapes allow you to observe entire constellations thanks to their unobstructed horizons in almost every direction. This panoramic view of the sky makes it easy to see how the stars move slowly throughout the night, following the apparent movement of the celestial sphere.

Highlights

- Tajuña Greenway (Carabaña) — peaceful and accessible rural stretches, ideal for gentle evening walks under the starry sky.
- Pezuela de las Torres and Brea de Tajo — open moorlands with sweeping panoramic views of the sky and few visual obstructions.
- Chinchón (outer hillside areas) — natural vantage points situated outside the historic centre from which to gaze at the sky away from the most heavily lit areas.

Recommended experiences

- Astronomy observation suitable for families and school groups.
- Guided night-time walks along greenways and farm tracks.
- Simple astrophotography in landscapes with wide horizons and clear skies.





THEMED NIGHTTIME ROUTES

Astrotourism combines hiking, heritage and nature through itineraries reinterpreted from an astronomical perspective.

The region's historic trails offer particularly evocative settings for night-time observation, such as the Camino Mendocino, the area around the Ermita de la Peña Sacra chapel, and the Camino de Puricelli, where heritage and landscape come together beneath the starry sky. Similarly, routes linked to nature and water — such as the Senda del Genaro, particularly the sections near the El Atazar reservoir, or the Molinos on the River Perales—allow you to combine hiking and stargazing in areas of great environmental value. In all cases, it is essential to check local regulations, opening hours and specific rules, particularly when visiting protected areas.

ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY

The Madrid landscape offers unique settings for capturing the night sky: granite formations, reservoirs, medieval walls, open moorland and pastures provide foreground elements of great aesthetic value for longexposure photography and capturing the Milky Way.

The centre of our galaxy is visible in the Madrid Region from approximately April to September, with June, July and August being the most spectacular months for observing and photographing it when facing south.

Some of the standout locations for this type of tourism include:

- La Pedriza
- El Atazar Reservoir
- The walls of Buitrago del Lozoya
- The moors of La Alcarria
- The Dehesas of the Sierra Oeste





RECOMMENDED ASTRONOMICAL CALENDAR

Planning is key to getting the most out of astrotourism. Throughout the year, the skies over Madrid offer various phenomena of interest:

- **Perseids (August) — one of the most popular meteor showers.**
- **Geminids (December) — high meteor rate on cold, clear nights.**
- **Quadrantids (January) — a brief but intense meteor shower.**
- **Eclipses and planetary conjunctions, as per the annual calendar.**

The centre of the Milky Way is visible from approximately April to September, particularly during the summer months. For the best experience, it is recommended to plan your observation during the new moon or late waning quarter phases, when the moon's brightness is at its lowest.

The dark sky is a natural resource that forms part of the region's environmental heritage, and its conservation also depends on responsible use. To preserve it, it is recommended to use red light rather than bright white torches, to avoid noise and respect nocturnal wildlife, not to leave litter, and to park only in designated areas. These small gestures allow you to enjoy the experience without disturbing the environment.

Various local councils and specialist organisations in the region offer activities that enhance the experience of observing the night sky: telescope sessions, family workshops introducing astronomy, guided walks under the stars and educational activities linked to science and space exploration. Experiences that combine learning, leisure and contact with nature and adapted to different types of visitors.

MAD RURAL

Sustainable tourism under the stars in the Madrid Region

https://www.madrural.com/en/home-en/

Financiado por la Unión Europea NextGenerationEU

GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA MINISTERIO DE INDUSTRIA Y TURISMO

Plan de Recuperación, Transformación y Resiliencia

Comunidad de Madrid

MAD RURAL