MAD RURAL

Exploring the forms of water



Financiado por la Unión Europea
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Gobierno de España
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Plan de Recuperación, Transformación y Resiliencia

Comunidad de Madrid

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Water, nature and adventure in landscapes with soul

The Madrid Region boasts a surprising diversity of landscapes, and in all of them water leaves its mark in very different ways. Waterfalls and torrents in the mountains, rivers winding through historic river valleys, reservoirs surrounded by nature and river beaches that invite you to relax paint a picture of a region full of contrasts and nuances.

Exploring Madrid through its waterways means discovering a region where nature, adventure, heritage and outdoor leisure intertwine in a unique way. Each destination offers a different experience: from the thrill of water sports and hiking trails to the tranquillity of a swim surrounded by nature or the charm of gardens and landscapes shaped by time.

These suggestions invite you to see Madrid from a different perspective: that of a vibrant, diverse and surprising land, criss-crossed by waterways, reflections and riverbanks that shape some of its most special spots. In all these places, you can discover the diversity of Madrid, a land shaped by 'the forms of water'.



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TAGUS RIVER BEACHES AND ROYAL GARDENS

Family-friendly | Nature | Water activities

As it flows through the region, the Tagus is still taking shape to become the river that eventually fills the Lisbon estuary. Here it is still in its youth, with charming spots and riverside vegetation where you can go for a swim.



FUENTIDUEÑA DE TAJO – CANOEING

Water activities | Family-friendly

The El Tajo Canoeing Club is a leading name in the sport. Offering activities for adults and children alike, its unsinkable canoes provide safety for those new to water sports. Learn to paddle effectively, enjoy the riverside vegetation, listen to all kinds of birds... Between the Eiffel Bridge and Peña Soriana, willows, elms and poplars accompany travellers on an experience that's sure to captivate.







SIERRA OESTE DE MADRID

Sierra Oeste de Madrid unfolds into small mountain valleys that are as serene as they are captivating. Its streams and rivers, born in the peaks, shape a unique landscape where the Cofio and Aceña rivers trace routes that blend nature, heritage and gastronomy. A perfect destination for a family weekend break.

SANTA MARÍA DE LA ALAMEDA – CASCADA DEL HORNILLO

Hiking | Family-friendly

Distance: 4.8 km (circular)
Difficulty: moderate
Signposted route

The El Hornillo trail winds its way through riverside vegetation. Well-signposted and shaded, it offers a family-friendly way to enjoy well-preserved ecosystems, take in sweeping panoramic views of the Aceña valley and admire one of the finest waterfalls in the entire mountain range. Pine forests and rocky outcrops define the character of this exceptional natural landscape.





VALDEMAQUEDA – COFIO RIVER TRAIL

Hiking | Family-friendly

Distance: 8 km (circular)
Signposted route

Valdemaqueda is situated in an area of pine forests that rise towards the mountain passes linking up with the Ávila mountain range. One kilometre to the south lies the Mocha Bridge, an imposing medieval structure that bears witness to the town's historical importance. Surrounding it is a river beach, ideal for cooling off after the walk through the Cofio River valley.

Microexperience

Why not cool off and spend some quality family time on the waters of these rivers? The slow pace of summer afternoons sets the rhythm of life in the villages of the Sierra Oeste – a rhythm we've forgotten amidst the hustle and bustle of modern life.





ALDEA DEL FRESNO

Alberche Beach

Accessible | Family-friendly

As you descend through the valley, the rivers widen and the rock gives way to sand. As it flows through Aldea del Fresno, the Alberche is joined by the waters of the Perales and the Berciana, creating a wide, accessible river beach designed for leisure in a safe environment for children, as the water is shallow. Dogs are even allowed, provided they are kept on a lead and wear a muzzle.

ZEPA N.º 56

SPA 56, known as the *Holm Oak Woodlands of the Alberche and Cofio Rivers*, is one of the most valuable natural areas in the Madrid Region. This vast protected area, part of the Natura 2000 network, stretches across municipalities in south-western Madrid such as San Martín de Valdeiglesias, Robledo de Chavela, Navas del Rey, Fresnedillas de la Oliva and Pelayos de la Presa, amongst others. Its extensive holm oak groves, pine forests and pasturelands form a Mediterranean landscape of great ecological richness.

Regarded as a true ornithological gem, the SPA is home to significant populations of the Iberian imperial eagle, black vulture and black stork, as well as numerous species of birds of prey and woodland birds. Its landscapes, criss-crossed by the rivers Alberche and Cofio, make this area an ideal spot for hiking, birdwatching and nature tourism, just a short distance from Madrid.

SAN MARTÍN DE VALDEIGLESIAS – PLAYA VIRGEN DE LA NUEVA

Family-friendly | Accessible

Virgen de la Nueva beach has been awarded the 'Blue Flag', an international distinction recognising the quality of its waters.

The San Juan reservoir boasts almost 50 km of inland shoreline, formed by the waters of the Alberche and Cofio rivers. There are up to 14 beaches here, offering access to swimming and water sports, including both sailing and motorboating. Among them, Virgen de la Nueva stands out, situated in the central part of the reservoir.

In addition, there is a range of water sports organised by specialist companies.



Microexperience

After exploring the experience inspired by the shapes of the water at the San Juan reservoir, the surrounding wineries will entice you with their wines and wine tourism offerings. In the area, you'll find a wide variety of wineries, from the most traditional to the most innovative, all united by the quality of their wines.

CASTLES ON THE WATER: MANZANARES EL REAL – SANTILLANA RESERVOIR

Nature | Family-friendly

The Santillana Reservoir —also known as the Manzanares el Real Reservoir— is the largest in the Sierra de Guadarrama. Situated at the foot of La Pedriza, it regulates the flow of the River Manzanares. Its waters stretch between Manzanares el Real and Soto del Real, creating an open landscape dominated by the silhouette of the mountain range.

Its origins date back to the early 20th century: in 1907, King Alfonso XIII laid the final stone of the original dam, inaugurating a remarkable structure of great scenic value. Among its most distinctive features was its iconic neo-Gothic tower, which rises above the water and appears to float when the reservoir level is high. The current dam, built in 1971, flooded the 1908 dam, although the upper part of the original tower was preserved to maintain visual harmony with the town's castle.

In addition to its role within Madrid's water supply system, the reservoir is a prime spot for observing waterbirds. Almost a century after its construction, it has established itself as one of the main sites for the conservation, protection, migration and nesting of birds in the Madrid Region. As early as the 1960s, Félix Rodríguez de la Fuente visited the area to study its birdlife and promoted the construction of two observatories on its banks to facilitate research and conservation.

The variety of birds that inhabit or rest in this area is extraordinary. It is no surprise, then, that the reservoir forms part of the

The reservoir forms part of the Upper Manzanares Basin Regional Park, designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1992, benefits from various forms of environmental protection, including its inclusion in the Regional Catalogue of Reservoirs and Wetlands of the Madrid Region and its designation as an Important Bird Area (IBA).

Today, the Santillana Reservoir is a little paradise for ornithologists, birdwatchers and nature lovers, as well as one of the most iconic landscapes in Madrid's mountainous surroundings.

Microexperience

The Manzanares el Real Reservoir is particularly noteworthy for its outstanding ornithological interest. Here you can observe a wide variety of birds in their natural habitat, including mallards, northern shovelers, coots and cormorants. Don't forget your binoculars!



NAVACERRADA – MOUNTAIN RESERVOIR

Nature | Family-friendly

Surrounded by pine forests and granite peaks, the Navacerrada reservoir is one of the most iconic landscapes of the Madrid mountains. Built in 1969 on the River Samburiel, it is an ideal destination for enjoying panoramic views of some of the area's most iconic peaks, such as La Maliciosa and La Bola del Mundo.

Trails and natural viewpoints lead off from its shores, offering sweeping views of the nearby mountains and forests. The setting is perfect for leisurely walks, landscape photography and wildlife spotting, all within a natural setting of great beauty.

The visit can also be rounded off with a tour of the village of Navacerrada, one of the best-known and most popular villages in the Sierra de Guadarrama, which adds cultural, gastronomic and tourist interest to the experience.

GUADARRAMA – CANOEING ON THE LAS ENCINILLAS RESERVOIR

Water activities | Family-friendly

The Las Encinillas reservoir, in the municipality of Guadarrama, is one of the most peaceful spots in the mountains for canoeing. Its clean, calm waters, fed by mountain streams, allow you to explore the reservoir by kayak or canoe within a particularly well-preserved natural environment.

It is an ideal activity to enjoy with family or friends, always wearing a life jacket and adhering to the reservoir's safety regulations



GUADALIX DE LA SIERRA – WATER SPORTS IN PEDREZUELA

Adventure | Sailing and windsurfing

The Pedrezuela reservoir, also known as the Guadalix reservoir, is one of the main venues for water sports in the Sierra de Guadarrama. On its waters, you can go kayaking, stand-up paddleboarding, dinghy sailing or windsurfing, thanks to the water sports schools and centres located on its shores.

Its vast expanse of water and proximity to Madrid make it the perfect place to get started in water sports.

Link: https://sierraguadarrama.info/embalse-de-guadalix/



GUADARRAMA – LA JAROSA RESERVOIR

Hiking | Nature | Family-friendly

A peaceful footpath circles La Jarosa Reservoir. Ideal for family outings, this 3.4 km circular route takes about an hour and a half and winds its way between the reservoir's banks and the pine forests. Along the way, there are six information panels explaining the construction of the reservoir and the riverside landscape of its streams, as we climb to a higher vantage point offering panoramic views of the mountains.

When the water level drops, the ruins of the hamlet of La Herrería del Berrueco, submerged by the reservoir, can be seen. However, the tower of the San Macario chapel remains visible even when the reservoir is full.

The alternative 'Discovering the Silver Forest of La Jarosa' route offers new perspectives along a longer trail.

Link: https://sierraguadarrama.info/los-embalses-la-sierra-guadarrama-reservas-vida/



MORALZARZAL – WATER TRAIL

Hiking | Nature | Heritage | Family-friendly

The Moralzarzal Water Trail winds through a landscape where the sound of water sets the rhythm and shapes the memory of the place. Along the way, ancient springs appear, such as the '4 Caños', which for centuries have remained a meeting point and landmark.

The route passes through areas linked to the earliest settlements, which sprang up around springs that not only provided water but also fuelled local beliefs. The 'Manantial de la Fe Perseverante' (Spring of Persevering Faith), for example, came to be associated with the healing of tuberculosis sufferers, attracting people from Madrid in search of relief for many years.

Amidst paths and hillsides, granite—the very essence of the architecture of the Sierra de Guadarrama—shapes the ancient waterworks of the 19th century. One can still make out the conduits and channels that channelled water from the local streams surrounding area to the old washhouse, in a system partly inherited from the Islamic tradition.

It is a route to be walked at a leisurely pace, listening to the water and reading in the stone the layers of history that have shaped Moralzarzal.



BECERRIL DE LA SIERRA – MAJALESPINO RESERVOIR

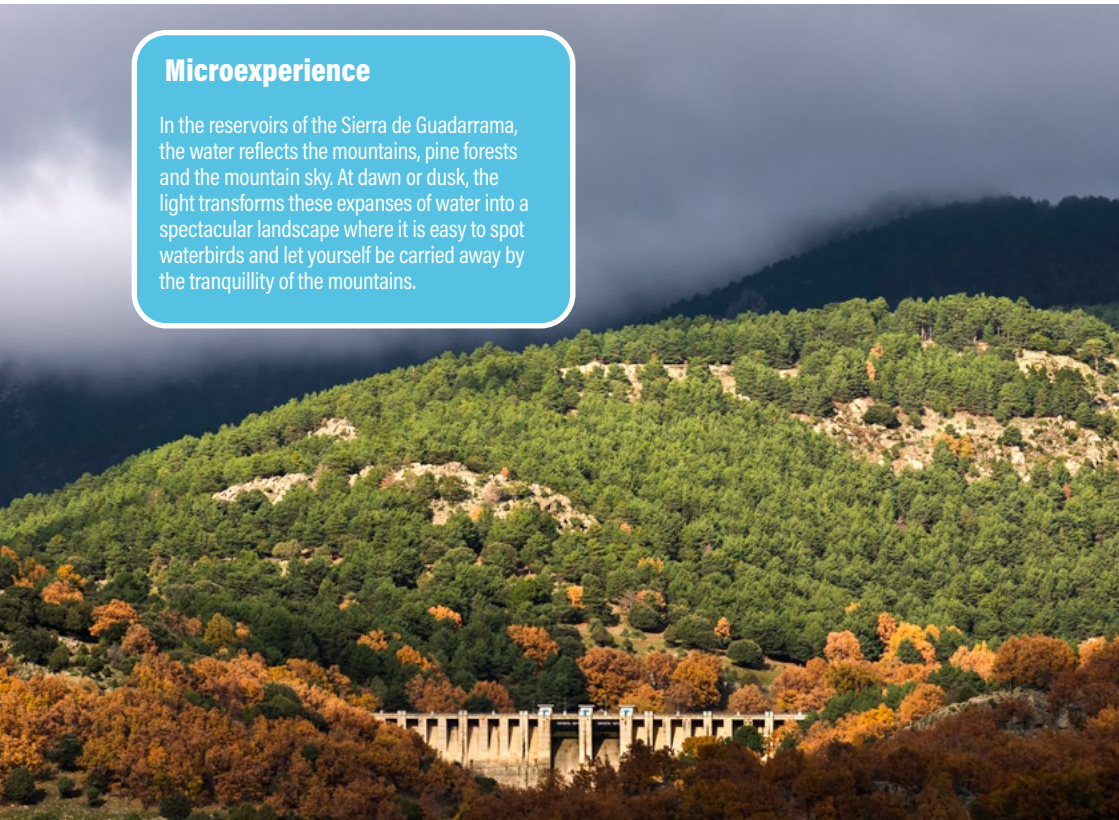
Hiking | Nature | Landscape

The Majalespino Reservoir, also known as the La Maliciosa Reservoir, is one of the most unique scenic spots in Becerril de la Sierra and a landmark on the traditional route taken by mountaineers to one of the most iconic peaks of Sierra de Guadarrama: the Maliciosa, as it is also known. Its surroundings, dominated by large granite formations and sweeping panoramic views, make it an excellent natural vantage point over the mountain landscape. Created by damming the waters of the Peña Jardera stream, this small reservoir supplies drinking water to the municipality and offers valuable insight into the local terrain. From its immediate surroundings, the different ecosystems of the mountain range can be clearly seen, while the winding, rocky paths evoke ancient routes used by shepherds and travellers.

CERCEDILLA – NAVALMEDIO RESERVOIR AND ÁRBOL DE LA CADENA

Hiking | Nature | Family-friendly

A spot of great natural beauty, surrounded by pine forests and hiking trails that invite you to explore a serene landscape that is highly representative of Sierra de Guadarrama. The surrounding area offers walks through pine forests, past small streams and out to panoramic clearings, in a setting particularly prized by those seeking nature and tranquillity. Among the best-known excursions in the area is the climb to the Árbol de la Cadena, a large Scots pine that has become one of the most unique specimens in the mountain range. At its base, a chain and an information panel have been preserved, recalling the story that made it special, adding a legendary and emotional element to the route that enriches the experience of the walk.



Microexperience

In the reservoirs of the Sierra de Guadarrama, the water reflects the mountains, pine forests and the mountain sky. At dawn or dusk, the light transforms these expanses of water into a spectacular landscape where it is easy to spot waterbirds and let yourself be carried away by the tranquillity of the mountains.

SIERRA NORTE DE MADRID

The river Lozoya is one of Madrid's major water sources. A large part of the capital's water supply comes from here, drawing on the water from torrents, waterfalls, pools and reservoirs that flow down from the mountains. The Upper Lozoya Valley route and the various sporting activities in Rascafría trace these waterways, always close to the river's course.

RASCAFRÍA – PURGATORIO WATERFALL

Hiking | Family-friendly

Distance: 11.8 km (cicular)
Difficulty: moderate

The Aguilón stream flows through a narrow gorge between rocky walls that form the Purgatorio waterfall. The route starts at the Perdón bridge and is suitable for families. Furthermore, nearby lies the monastery of El Paular, one of the most interesting historic sites in the area.

Microexperience

Giner de los Ríos founded the Institución Libre de Enseñanza in 1876. One of his ideals was to raise awareness of nature and its educational value. In memory of that legacy, the Giner de los Ríos Arboretum invites us to explore botany from around the world just a few metres from El Paular. A true 'open-air classroom.'



RASCAFRÍA – LAS PRESILLAS

Family-friendly

Equipped for swimming and featuring car parks, catering facilities and toilets, the Las Presillas area offers wide open meadows where you can spend the day with your family.

PINILLA DEL VALLE – KAYAKING ON THE PINILLA RESERVOIR

Water activities | Family-friendly

The Pinilla reservoir is situated on the upper reaches of the Lozoya River and forms part of the Canal de Isabel II network.. Its surroundings, at the foot of the mountains, are of great environmental value and provide the backdrop for the sporting activities on offer here.



Microexperience

Learn to paddle a canoe at the reservoir's multi-adventure centres. No watercourse will be too much for you!



SAN MAMÉS – CHORRERA DE SAN MAMÉS

Hiking | Family-friendly

Distance: 12 km (circular)
Difficulty: low

The rugged terrain and rock formations of the Sierra Norte give rise to spectacular waterfalls such as the Chorrera de San Mamés. An ideal destination for discovering the area's diverse natural heritage, on the way to the peaks and very close to the Peña del Águila viewpoint.

SOMOSIERRA – CANYONING

Adventure | Medium-high level

If you're looking for thrills, the Somosierra Gorge — or Duratón Gorge — is the perfect adventure. With a nine-metre 'slide', numerous walls for abseiling and a descent through cold mountain waters, this spot is perfect for the most experienced adventurers. The canyoning schools in the area provide the equipment, safety measures and expertise needed to enjoy the descent down the river.



CERVERA DE BUITRAGO – WATER SPORTS ON THE ATAZAR

Adventure | Sailing and windsurfing

The El Atazar reservoir offers a vast expanse of wind-swept water, ideal for sailing, windsurfing or canoeing, all of which can be enjoyed here safely and conveniently thanks to the area's long-established sports schools.

Microexperience

Learn the basics of sailing in one of Spain's finest inland settings.





RIOSEQUILLO RECREATIONAL AREA IN BUITRAGO DEL LOZOYA

Nature | Family-friendly

Situated next to the Riosequillo reservoir and surrounded by the landscape of the Sierra Norte de Madrid, this recreational area is one of the region's leading outdoor leisure destinations. It features extensive green spaces, picnic areas, rest areas and a large summer swimming pool, considered one of the largest in Spain. Its natural setting and comprehensive facilities make it an ideal place to enjoy a family day out, take part in outdoor activities or relax whilst taking in the views of the reservoir and the mountains surrounding Buitrago del Lozoya.

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https://www.madrural.com/en/experiencias-en/exploring-the-forms-of-water/

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