MAD RURAL

Intangible Heritage of 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

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INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

The intangible heritage of the Community of Madrid is a living expression of the identity of its towns and villages, a legacy that is not preserved behind glass, but rather passed down from generation to generation through shared memory, celebration and collective experience. Pilgrimages, folk performances, patron saint festivals, oral traditions and rituals linked to the agricultural calendar form a legacy that continues to give meaning to local life and makes each region a territory deeply rooted in its history.

In the rural world, these expressions take on a particularly revealing significance, as they demonstrate the intimate relationship between community, landscape and custom. They are not merely dates marked on the calendar: they are occasions for coming together that strengthen neighbourly bonds, preserve symbols, music, trades and stories, and keep alive a way of living in the land where tradition is not merely remembered, but practised



MADRID DESTINO RURAL

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To engage with this heritage is to discover an essential dimension of the region – one that is recognised in the shared excitement of a village festival, in the power of a historical re-enactment, or in the continuity of rituals that have endured without losing their meaning. This selection offers a tour of some of the celebrations that best express the cultural diversity of rural Madrid and which, in keeping with the spirit of MadRural, invite you to discover the region through its memory, its identity and its living culture.

LIVE NATIVITY SCENE — ANCHUELO, COLMENAR DE OREJA, PEZUELA DE LAS TORRES, VALDILECHA

DECEMBER (DATES VARY DURING THE CHRISTMAS PERIOD)

Experiencing Christmas in the villages of Las Vegas & Alcarria Madrileña is an experience brimming with charm and tradition. In winter, the streets smell of burning wood, creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere that invites you to share this festive season with the community. Here, the beautiful tradition of the 'Living Nativity Scenes' has been revived, in which the villagers themselves transform the village into the stable at Bethlehem, portraying the Holy Family, the shepherds and traditional trades. Added to this are Christmas carols, Christmas markets and more intimate and heart-warming Three Kings parades, which keep the magic of Christmas alive.





LAVENDER FESTIVAL — PEZUELA DE LAS TORRES

JUNE

Every summer, the Lavender Festival transforms Pezuela de las Torres into an almost surreal landscape. As evening falls, visitors stroll along the paths between rows of purple flowers whilst the sweet scent of the blooms fills the air. Dressed in white, as tradition dictates, many pause to watch the sun slowly sink over the fields. The golden light of dusk intensifies the mauve hues and creates the perfect backdrop for photographs, live music and leisurely strolls. It is a simple, fragrant celebration, deeply rooted in the landscape and the rural tranquillity of Madrid's Alcarria region.

OTHER NOTABLE FESTIVALS AND TRADITIONS

- The Burning of Judas in Tielmes
- Los Mayos in Ambite, Carabaña, Estremera, Pezuela de las Torres, Valdilecha and Villarejo de Salvanés
- San Isidro Pilgrimages in Anchuelo, Campo Real, Colmenar de Oreja, Estremera, Los Santos de la Humosa, Perales de Tajuña, Villar del Olmo, Villarejo de Salvanés



LIVE NATIVITY SCENE — COLMENAR DE OREJA

FESTIVAL OF REGIONAL TOURIST INTEREST

THE SATURDAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS EVE

A Christmas nativity play set in the town's historic centre, where the Plaza Mayor and its surrounding monuments become a vast open-air stage. Its origins date back to 1976 and its enduring popularity, sustained by local volunteers and a meticulously staged production, has made it one of the most eagerly awaited events of the Christmas season in Madrid.



LAND OF PASSIONS

This route invites you to discover the most authentic Holy Week celebrations in the Community of Madrid through towns such as Valdilecha, Orusco de Tajuña, Villarejo de Salvanés, Belmonte de Tajo, Chinchón and Morata de Tajuña, where tradition, heritage and emotion form part of a unique cultural experience.

Historic processions, living re-enactments of the Passion of Christ and popular celebrations transform streets, squares and churches into stages for living culture, thanks to the involvement of local residents and religious brotherhoods who have kept these traditions alive generation after generation.

Of particular note is the Passion of Chinchón, the oldest in the region and designated a Festival of National Tourist Interest, alongside other celebrations that reflect the historical and devotional richness of the Las Vegas and Madrid's Alcarria regions.

Land of Passions is an invitation to explore charming villages, discover their architectural heritage and enjoy an experience where history, tradition and cultural tourism come together in the heart of south-eastern Madrid.





PROCESSION OF THE VIRGIN OF ALARILLA — FUENTIDUEÑA DE TAJO

SECOND WEEKEND IN SEPTEMBER

A unique river procession, in which the statue is carried down the Tagus in a rope-hauled boat, accompanied by torches, swimmers and hundreds of devotees. Documented since 1866, this celebration combines popular fervour, ritual theatrics and a close connection with the river, making it one of the most distinctive traditions in Madrid's festive heritage.



SIERRA DE GUADARRAMA

The traditional festivals of Sierra de Guadarrama form an essential part of the cultural identity of its villages. Throughout the year, the festival calendar combines religious celebrations, folk customs and outdoor gatherings that keep traditions alive, passed down from generation to generation. Although summer is when the main festivals of many towns take place, there are notable celebrations in every season, from winter rituals to spring pilgrimages and patron saint festivities at the end of summer.

In winter, ancient festivities are still observed, such as the San Sebastián festivities, where a bonfire is lit, or popular celebrations such as those for Santa Águeda and San Blas. With the arrival of spring, just as the migratory birds return, so too do the pilgrimages and festivals linked to nature and the countryside, such as the Cruz de Mayo, La Maya or San Isidro, many of which are held in iconic locations in the mountains. In summer, the liveliest festivals take place, usually coinciding with each village's main festival, where modern bands perform alongside traditional elements such as the dulzaina, the tamboril and folk dances. The festive season continues until September with celebrations such as the Fiestas del Cristo, which bring the calendar to a close with processions, music and neighbourhood gatherings.

FESTIVAL OF SAN SEBASTIÁN AND THE HEIFER — LOS MOLINOS

FESTIVAL OF REGIONAL TOURIST INTEREST

JANUARY

Celebrated since the 16th century, the Vaquilla is one of the most iconic traditions of the mountains. During the festival, the young men of the village, dressed as traditional cattle herders, lead the heifer — represented by another villager wearing a decorated wooden frame — to the rhythm of dulzainas. It is a vibrant experience that transports visitors to a setting steeped in medieval atmosphere.





SAN BLAS FESTIVITIES — LOS PERREROS - MIRAFLORES DE LA SIERRA

FESTIVAL OF REGIONAL TOURIST INTEREST

FEBRUARY

This unique celebration begins when the so called 'perreros' descend from the mountain ringing their cowbells, re-enacting an ancient legend according to which the villagers managed to scare off Napoleon's troops during the French occupation by imitating the stampede of a herd of cows. The following day, dressed in their traditional costumes — top hats, white clothing adorned with ribbons and cowbells on their backs — the perreros lead a pilgrimage to the Humilladero de San Blas. There, games are held, along with a mass and a communal meal of potatoes with cod. The day concludes back in the village with music from the dulzaina and tamboril, a re-enactment of the heifer's death, and hot chocolate with churros shared between locals and visitors.



AURRULAQUE — CERCEDILLA

JULY

A symbolic twinning event with the Sierra de Guadarrama and a tribute to its natural and cultural heritage. Established in 1984 as a protest march calling for the utmost protection of the mountain range, it maintains the tradition of the ascent, the reading of the manifesto and the commemoration of those who have defended this landscape as a place of remembrance and conservation.

Did you know...?

The culture of the dulzaina in the Sierra de Guadarrama is one of the region's most vibrant musical traditions, historically linked to transhumance and the popular festivities that bring together the slopes of Madrid and Segovia.

Cercedilla, Guadarrama, Alpedrete and Los Molinos all feature the dulzaina and the tamboril as an essential soundtrack to their processions and patron saint festivals.

CALDERETA DAY FESTIVAL — HOYO DE MANZANARES

FESTIVAL OF REGIONAL TOURIST INTEREST

SEPTEMBER

The Caldereta Festival in Hoyo de Manzanares is held as part of the patron saint festivities in honour of the Virgin of La Encina. Every year, this centuries-old tradition brings together thousands of locals and visitors in the Plaza Mayor to sample the popular caldereta, a bull meat stew cooked slowly in large pots, reviving the tradition of the local shepherds. Organised by the La Caldereta Association since 1958, the celebration keeps alive an ancient community spirit that makes this popular meal one of the most iconic moments of the festivities.



OTHER TRADITIONAL CELEBRATIONS

- Live nativity scenes in Mataelpino, Manzanares El Real and Guadalix de la Sierra
- Candlelit Night in Becerril de la Sierra, Mataelpino, Moralzarzal and Navacerrada.
- Craft Beer Festival in Los Molinos or Cerceda

SIERRA OESTE DE MADRID

GRAPE HARVEST FESTIVAL — CENICIENTOS

SEPTEMBER

A celebration rooted in wine culture in a region with a long-standing winemaking tradition, now also closely linked to rural wine tourism. Through local festivities, wine tastings and references to work in the vineyards, the festival celebrates an identity forged over centuries around the landscape, the harvest and the winemaking process.



LOS TOMILLOS FESTIVAL — COLMENAR DEL ARROYO

JANUARY

The Los Tomillos festival in Colmenar del Arroyo is one of the most deeply-rooted traditions in this Madrid municipality, held in honour of Saint Vincent the Martyr. It begins on 21 January, when locals and visitors head up into the hills to gather thyme and broom. At dusk, everyone gathers outside their homes to light bonfires of thyme, whose aroma and smoke symbolise the purification and protection of the village – a centuries-old custom that was once believed to ward off illness. After the bonfires have burned out, people gather round the embers to share food, music and each other's company. The following day, a mass and procession are held in honour of the patron saint.



TRADITIONAL BULL RUNS — VILLA DEL PRADO

SEPTEMBER

Bull runs and bullfighting festivities linked to a long tradition of agriculture and livestock farming, experienced as a distinctive expression of local folk culture. The atmosphere in the social clubs, streets and town square reinforces its role as one of the most notable events on the municipality's festive calendar.

FIESTA DE LA VAQUILLA — FRESNEDILLAS DE LA OLIVA

JANUARY

The town's Fiesta de la Vaquilla (designated a Site of Cultural Interest) is one of the best- preserved masquerades in the Community of Madrid. Dating back to pre-Roman times, these winter festivities involve rituals centred on an animal, in this case a heifer. The tradition features seven distinct characters and a strict protocol, which has enabled it to survive despite the dictatorship and rural exodus. Coinciding with the feast day of Saint Sebastian, the celebration combines ritual, symbolism and cultural syncretism.



OTHER NOTABLE FESTIVALS

- San Blas Festival — Pelayos de la Presa
- Pilgrimage of the Virgin of La Nueva — San Martín de Valdeiglesias (September)
- Folklore Groups Competition in Cenicientos (August)
- Santa Águeda in Rozas de Puerto Real

SIERRA NORTE DE MADRID

LIVE NATIVITY SCENE — BUITRAGO DEL LOZOYA

FESTIVAL OF REGIONAL TOURIST INTEREST
DECEMBER, VARIABLE DATES IN THE RUN-UP TO CHRISTMAS

The Living Nativity Scene in Buitrago del Lozoya is one of the most iconic Christmas events in the Community of Madrid. Every December, the walled historic centre is transformed into a vast open-air stage where more than two hundred local residents bring biblical scenes, traditional trades and period scenes to life. The route, covering around 1.2 kilometres, offers an immersive experience where architectural heritage, community participation and collective excitement intertwine. Its deep-rooted connection to the local community and the unique setting make this celebration one of the highlights of the winter in the mountains.

BROOM FESTIVAL — NAVARREDONDA

JUNE

The Retama Festival, revived in 2013 through a neighbourhood initiative, revives an ancient custom linked to St Peter's Day, when young men would place bouquets of retama in the windows of young women who were coming of age. That gesture, a prelude to festive courting and social gatherings, has now become a celebration of local heritage. The day features traditional music, parades, craft workshops and activities centred on rural skills. Among its most significant moments is the building of a charcoal kiln, in which older and younger generations share knowledge of a trade that for generations formed part of the mountain economy. The festival thus transforms memory into a living tradition.



SHEARING

Every first weekend in June, the Los Apisquillos Agroforestry Cooperative organises one of the most unique celebrations in the Sierra Norte in Puebla de la Sierra. The Shearing Festival offers a close-up look at the traditional tasks associated with sheep farming, featuring shearing demonstrations, sheepdog trials, workshops on carding and spinning wool, and displays of local crafts. The day's events are rounded off with traditional cuisine, music and folk dances, making it a unique opportunity to discover the region's pastoral heritage and rural culture.



LIVE NATIVITY SCENE AND CHRISTMAS MARKET — EL BERRUECO

DECEMBER

Every December, El Berrueco celebrates its Living Nativity Scene, a community-led performance in which local residents re-enact biblical scenes and traditional trades such as stonemasonry, blacksmithing and the pig slaughter. Launched in 1999 as a modest initiative, this tradition has established itself as one of the most endearing events on the local calendar. This is complemented by the Christmas Market, which brings together craftspeople and producers offering a range of handmade items, local food products and goods from local businesses. Both celebrations reinforce the town's welcoming character and make Christmas a time for coming together, remembrance and participation.



THE SHEPHERDS' WALK

Las Navas de Buitrago pays tribute to the pastoral tradition that shaped life in the region for centuries. The event features a 9-kilometre guided walk to the Prados Relaños, where the ruins of an ancient livestock settlement linked to the historic cattle fairs of Buitrago de Lozoya still stand. Along the route, participants discover the remains of squares, barns, enclosures, dwellings and cattle tracks, whilst on the return journey they enjoy 'migas del pastor' (shepherd's breadcrumbs), traditional music, exhibitions and demonstrations of spinning with spinning wheels. An experience that offers an insight into transhumance and the trades linked to the pastoral world that shaped the Sierra Norte.



THE TRAIL AND THE VILLAGE

Villavieja del Lozoya hosts an event that invites visitors to discover the essence of rural life in the Sierra Norte through nature, culture and anthropology. Organised by the Villavieja del Lozoya Town Council and the Villavieja Cultural and Recreational Association, the event offers the chance to explore some of the municipality's most iconic trails, such as the Senda del Lino, the Senda de Matambre, the Senda al Puerto Linera and the Senda de la Vuelta de la Reguera. Furthermore, visitors can take part in a guided walk along the historic trail, accompanied by local experts and environmental educators, discovering the history, landscapes and traditions that have shaped this corner of the Lozoya Valley. An experience designed to bring visitors closer to the natural and human heritage of Madrid's Sierra Norte.





PERO HARVEST FESTIVAL — LA HIRUELA

LATE OCTOBER

The Pero Harvest Festival pays tribute to La Hiruela's fruit-growing tradition and, in particular, to the cultivation of the 'pero', a variety of apple prized for its aroma and flavour. For centuries, this fruit played a significant role in the local economy and was even sold in Madrid's markets. The festival features a craft market, tastings, demonstrations of traditional grafting techniques, apple variety tastings, tours of the orchards and visits to the town's ethnological heritage sites, such as the mill, the charcoal kiln and the apiary. More than just an agricultural festival, it is a celebration of the conservation of native varieties, the cultivated landscape and the rural wisdom that has shaped the identity of La Hiruela.



THE HEIFERS OF THE NORTHERN MOUNTAINS

The 'vaquilla' festivals form part of the traditional winter rituals in several villages of the Sierra Norte. With their own distinctive features in each locality, these celebrations hark back to ancient masquerades linked to the carnival cycle, fertility, the renewal of nature and the close relationship between mountain life and livestock farming. The Vaquilla de Braojos, held in February, parades through the streets represented by a wooden frame adorned with sheets and scarves, accompanied by masked figures who lend the festival a distinctly ritualistic character. The town also preserves a dual manifestation of this tradition: the children's 'vaquilla', linked to Saint Sebastian, and the Carnival 'vaquilla.' And in El Berrueco, La Vaquilla also echoes the ancient winter celebrations with pagan roots. Interpreted as a carnival festival associated with the changing of the seasons, renewal and the symbolic power of nature, this tradition allows visitors to experience an ancestral form of celebration that still retains its ability to bring the community together.



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