

## A furious finale to fab Madrid: Exploring the Spanish capital's ancient corners and fiery flamenco

- The Daily Mail's Caroline Hendrie explored the cultural delights of Madrid
- She stayed at the newly-opened and centrally-located Only You Hotel Atocha
- Visits included the Reina Sofia museum and Corral de la Moreria flamenco club

By CAROLINE HENDRIE FOR THE MAIL ON SUNDAY  
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With his curly waxed moustache, he looked like an Edwardian villain, but Steven could not have been a more courteous chauffeur.

In his tiny, vintage Seat 600 we bowled along avenues, tootled round monuments and nipped through narrow alleys on a whistlestop tour.

For this first-timer in Madrid, it was the perfect introduction to the city as he pointed out the Prado museum, Retiro Park, the Aloala Gate, Cibeles fountains, Cervantes's house in Barrio de Las Letras, the old literary quarter, the hefty Royal Palace and Cathedral.



Caroline toured Madrid with the help of a guide on her first day, making stops at sights including the Cibeles fountain at Plaza de Cibeles (pictured)

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There were pitstops at Plaza Mayor and Casa de Campo, once a royal hunting ground, now beloved of joggers, cyclists and dog-walkers.

By the time we arrived back at my hotel, I had my bearings and was ready to strike out on my own.

A five-minute walk from the doors of the new Only You Hotel Atocha brought me to the Reina Sofia national art museum, where a glass lift took me up to see Picasso's vast anti-war painting, Guernica, strikingly set in its own gallery after nearly 45 years touring the world, and so fragile now, never to be moved again.

My return route to the hotel, which could not have been more centrally placed for sightseeing, was through Atocha railway station, with an elegant wrought-iron, roof (Gustave Eiffel had a hand in the design) big enough to contain a tropical rainforest thick with palms and benches for resting travellers.

The industrial-look lobby of the hotel turned out to offer the perfect opportunity to mingle with Madrilenos, with office workers sharing dishes from the fusion-menu in Trotamundos (a collaboration with trendy Spoonik restaurant in Barcelona) at lunchtime on one side, and Mama Framboise bakery on the other serving cakes and coffee all day long.

Commuters, meanwhile, sat on the central sofas, drinking American gin before catching their trains; and a New York barber wielded his clippers in a cubicle in the window.



Caroline's hotel, the Only You Hotel Atocha (pictured), was perfectly placed for sight-seeing - and had a remarkable interior

And come evening, Madrid's night-life came to us. The hotel's covered courtyard is the place for Thursday night jazz, with cocktails and tapas included in the price.

Upstairs, my airy, loft-look, corner junior suite, with three balconies, was quiet and comfortable, with a giant walk-in shower and zebra-stripe bathrobe.

Breakfast on the seventh floor came with views of the city waking up (late) from the terrace.

Exploring the little shops and bars of old Barrio de Las Letras with my poor Spanish would have been very hit and miss without a guiding angel.

Jo Wivell, a Yorkshire woman who has lived in Madrid for 17 years, gives Insider's Madrid walking tours. With Jo leading the way, beaming barmen, chefs, shopkeepers and craftspeople welcomed us in.

*"I could see the sweat and tears as they bared their souls and stamped their feet"*

I saw Ernest Hemingway's favourite table in Botin, which has been serving suckling pigs from a wood-fired oven for nearly 300 years, and tried on a cape in Sesena, cape-maker to kings, opera-singers and Michael Jackson.

And in Jose Ramirez, guitar-makers for five generations, I met a man who knew the man who made the classical guitar George Harrison played And I Love Her on in the 1964 Beatles film A Hard Day's Night. A similar one will cost you £7,500.

That evening I sat so close to the performers in Corral de la Moreria flamenco club that I could see the sweat and tears as they bared their souls and stamped their feet.

It was a fiery and sometimes furious finale to a fabulous first taste of Madrid.

