

AHASoc: Placement guides

Madrid (Spain)



This brief guide is intended to help students establish themselves in the Spanish capital and is by no means exhaustive. I spent my year here as a British Council English Language Assistant, so I'm writing from a 'working' rather than a 'studying' perspective. However, most information is applicable to both categories.

Travel

The public transport system in Madrid is excellent and comprises three main modes: *Cercanías* trains, buses and the Metro. Buses and Metro are a great way for getting around the city centre (and nearby suburbs); trains being best for trips outside of the city.

If you are going to be using public transport frequently, it makes financial sense to buy *Abono Transportes*. This is the Madrid travel card that requires a passport photograph, photocopy of your passport, as well as your *DNI* (passport ID number). It will entitle you to unlimited public transport (*Cercanías* trains, buses or Metro) within your specific zone for the month of purchase.

The card can be bought from any *Estanco* (shop that carries the brown 'T' sign) for about 1€. Once you have this card, you can then buy a month's travel *cupón*. These vary in price according to the zone that you require. For example: Madrid city centre is zone 'A' and costs around 46€ for unlimited travel that calendar month. If you are under 21, you can get a young person's version (which roughly has a 50% discount).

For more information, visit:

http://www.ctm-madrid.es/servlet/RedTransServlet?xh_ACCION=1&xh_TIPO=7

Planes to/from Barajas Airport:

(http://www.aena.es/csee/Satellite?pagename=subHome&Language=EN_GB&c=Page&SiteName=Madrid&cid=1049727006353)

There is only one airport in Madrid and it's called *Barajas*. It is served by a good number of the low-cost airlines, including easyJet and Ryanair from many UK locations. It also has its own Metro stop (on Line 8) that drops you off at T2 and a bus service that runs frequently from outside T1 (see below).

Cercanías Trains (http://www.renfe.es/cercanias/madrid/index_horarios.html)

There are *Cercanías* stations all around Madrid, each with different line correspondences. *Atocha* is the main station (which all lines run through) and can be reached on Metro, Line 1. These trains are probably the best way to reach surrounding towns and sites, outside of the city. Full timetables, prices and other information can be found at the *renfe* website above.

Buses

(<http://www.emtmadrid.es>)

Buses run at almost every hour of the day - very handy late at night when the Metro isn't running. There are interchanges at *Avenida de América* and *Méndez Álvaro* (amongst others). There is also an airport service that leaves from outside Barajas T1 Arrivals (line 200): it costs 1€ and runs every 10-15 minutes. The terminus is the *Avenida de América* Interchange. A similar service also exists for T4 (line 204).

Metro

(<http://www.metromadrid.es>)

The Metro has an extensive network in Madrid. It consists of 12 lines with a station almost always just around the corner. It's clean, frequent (from 6 am until 1.30 am) and cheap (1€ per trip). You can also buy 10 trips at a discounted rate of 7,40€. Just be careful to watch for pickpockets on the more crowded lines.

Bank accounts

If you're planning to work while you're out there (either as an English Language Assistant or otherwise), you'll probably need a Spanish bank account. The choice is broad, but some accounts are better than others. Look for accounts that provide you with a *Maestro* card (or equivalent), have low commission on international currency transfers (so you can transfer money from your UK bank account without having to pay high rates of commission) and don't charge (or charge less) to withdraw money from cash machines.

It's worth asking whether your UK bank has a partner in Spain, as this could save legwork when you arrive and it will be one less thing to think about. However, make sure that you read the small print, as partner recommendations may not be getting you the best deal.

Travel and health insurance

It is one of the university's recommendations that you take out travel insurance. There are many different policies available. It may be worth asking your parents if you're covered by an annual policy that they may have taken out. Failing that, insurance can be brought through the University's Travel Office (Go Bananas Insurance) or from any other high street insurer. Again, it's worth shopping around as premiums can vary greatly.

You are entitled to apply for a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). This entitles you to reduced-cost, sometimes free, medical treatment that becomes necessary while you're in a European Economic Area (EEA) country or Switzerland. With an EHIC you'll be treated the same as an 'insured' person living in the country you're visiting. Please remember, however, that this might not cover all of the things you'd expect to get free of charge from the NHS in the UK.

You can apply for an EHIC online: <https://www.ehic.org.uk/Internet/home.do>

University and student finance

If you plan on spending an entire academic year abroad, you will not be expected to pay Tuition Fees to St Andrews (correct in 2008/2009). Whether studying or working, you are also entitled to apply to the university for an Erasmus Grant from the British Council.

For further information see the University's Erasmus portal: <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/studyabroad/outgoingstudents/Erasmus/>

You will also be entitled to a Student Loan (from the Student Loans Co.), as you would be for any other academic year. However, if you plan to work in Spain, this amount will be less than for a study placement.

For further information see the Student Loans Co. website: <http://www.slc.co.uk/>

Accommodation

The cost of renting in Madrid varies greatly. A flat on recommendation is highly desirable. The current price in Madrid seems to range from 300€ to 450€ per month, excluding bills. Obviously your rent will depend upon how many people you share with, the specifications of the flat and its location. Try searching for places online, but always go and see it in person, before you hand over any money to the landlord.

Employment

Try to find out as much about your position before you arrive, by contacting your employer. The more you find out, the less you'll need to ask when you get there.

British Council English Language Assistants

If you are working as an English Language Assistant in Madrid (through the British Council), you have the possibility of being employed by two different organisations. The *Ministerio de Educación* and the *Comunidad*.

Assistants that work for the *Ministerio de Educación* in Madrid tend to work 12 hours per week in secondary schools. They receive a monthly *beca* (grant), instead of a wage, of 700€ (2008-2009) per month, for the eight months (October-May) that they are employed. The grant is paid directly into a Spanish bank account. They will also need to solicit a N.I.E. (*Número de Identidad de Extranjero*), as both their bank details and N.I.E. will need to be entered on the Spanish Ministry's online database (*PROFEX*) before they can get paid. Further details about this process will be provided by the relevant parties.

Assistants that work for the *Comunidad* are usually employed in bilingual primary schools. These assistants work 16 hours per week and receive a wage (rather than a grant) of around 900€ per month. They also work one month more than the other assistants: from the end of September until the end of June. Their wage is paid either via a cheque or bank transfer to them directly, by the *Comunidad*.

Tip! Make sure that you have enough money to last for at least for your first couple of months out there (<1500€). The first wage payment can be in mid-November. Also bear in mind that the first couple of months are often the most expensive too: you'll need money for a flat deposit and rent, transport and other set-up costs.

Private English Conversation Classes

There is considerable demand in Madrid for private weekly English conversation classes. If you are working in schools, you will more than likely receive considerable interest. If your first couple of

classes go well, you'll often be approached by more people. Make sure that you don't tie yourself in to too many; you're out there to enjoy it too! Ask your pupils what they want to get out of their classes (conversation, grammar, topics etc.), so you can prepare adequately for each class. You can expect to receive between 10€ and 20€ per hour of classes given.

Sightseeing

There are lots of places of interest to see within Madrid itself. However, there are also places outside the city. As stated above, the best way to get to see them is via *Cercanías* trains (or other *renfe* trains). Places worthy of visiting include *Segovia*, *Toledo*, *Salamanca*, *Ávila* and *Alcalá de Henares*.