Lifestylemetro

Your France and Spain (Paris, Barcelona, Madrid) itinerary

Prepared for James and Ada · 10 days from 15 April 2027 · Couple, mid-range

Your trip at a glance

Hello James. This is a ten-day, rail-first trip for two: three nights in Paris, three in Barcelona and three in Madrid, linked by two scenic high-speed train journeys. You arrive by Eurostar and fly home from Madrid. The days lean towards art and food, with plenty of walking between sights, and each city gets one gentler day so the pace stays balanced.

Your two must-sees are timed. The Louvre is on Day 2 and the Sagrada Família on Day 5. Both sell timed-entry tickets that go quickly in spring, so book them as soon as your dates are fixed. You can follow the days to departure with our holiday countdown.

Day	Date	Where you are	Theme
1	Thu 15 April	London to Paris	Eurostar arrival, the Marais and an evening by the Seine
2	Fri 16 April	Paris	The Louvre, Palais-Royal, Île de la Cité and the Latin Quarter
3	Sat 17 April	Paris	Montmartre in the morning, Musée d'Orsay and Saint-Germain
4	Sun 18 April	Paris to Barcelona	Direct high-speed train south, then an evening in the Gothic Quarter
5	Mon 19 April	Barcelona	Sagrada Família and Gaudí's Eixample
6	Tue 20 April	Barcelona	Markets, the Picasso Museum, El Born and a Barceloneta sunset
7	Wed 21 April	Barcelona to Madrid	A slow morning in Gràcia, the AVE to Madrid, then tapas in La Latina
8	Thu 22 April	Madrid	The Prado and Retiro Park
9	Fri 23 April	Madrid	Reina Sofía, the Royal Palace and a last big dinner
10	Sat 24 April	Madrid	An easy morning, a market lunch and the flight home

The two long transfers:

- **Paris to Barcelona:** direct high-speed trains leave from Gare de Lyon and take about 6½ to 7 hours. There are only a few departures a day, so book early: Book trains (Trip.com).
- **Barcelona to Madrid:** fast trains run from Barcelona Sants to Madrid (usually Atocha) and take about 2½ to 3 hours. Several companies run this route, so it is worth comparing fares: Book trains (Trip.com).

France and Spain both use the two-pin European plug, so you will need adapters for UK devices. Our plug adapter checker confirms what to pack.

Visas and entry

Both cities are in the Schengen area, so this is one Schengen trip. Paris to Barcelona to Madrid stays inside Schengen, so you won't need a transit visa as long as you fly direct from the UK. The two passports have very different rules. The British passport holder can travel visa-free. The Nigerian passport holder needs a Schengen short-stay visa, even with UK settled status.

France

British passport: No visa is needed. British citizens can visit for up to 90 days in any 180-day period for tourism, family visits or business. Days spent anywhere in Schengen count towards the same 90. Your passport must be issued under 10 years before arrival and valid 3+ months after you leave Schengen. At the border you may be asked for proof of your travel insurance, that you have enough money for your stay, proof of your accommodation, a return or onward ticket. See GOV.UK France entry requirements.

Nigerian passport: You need a Schengen short-stay (Type C) visa. UK settled status does not give visa-free entry to Schengen. You apply to the country where you'll spend the most time. If the length of the stay in each country is identical, the application must be filed with the consulate of the first Schengen country that will be entered. In your case that would be France. If you'll spend more nights in Spain, see the Spain section. If France is the right country, apply on France-Visas, then attend an appointment at a UK visa centre. You must apply at least two weeks prior to your planned visit; however, it can not be submitted more than 6 months prior. The visa fee is about €90 for short-stay visas, plus a visa centre service fee. Your passport must be valid for at least 3 months after you leave Schengen. Check France-Visas for any rules about blank pages.

Border systems on these dates: As of 10 April 2026 the European Entry-Exit System (EES) is fully operational at all external border crossing points. Both of you will have facial images, fingerprints and personal data from the travel document recorded at your first crossing. ETIAS would only apply to the British passport holder. As of mid-November 2026, the official website says ETIAS is not in operation and gives no start date. Check the official ETIAS site before you travel and

ignore any other site that offers ETIAS applications. You're not travelling with children, so no extra child documents are needed.

Spain

British passport: The rules are the same as for France. The 10-day trip easily fits in the 90/180-day limit. GOV.UK states that a British passport should be less than 10 years old on the day of entry into Spain and valid for at least 3 months after your planned departure date from the Schengen area. Border staff may ask for proof of insurance and enough money for your stay - the amount varies depending on your accommodation. See GOV.UK Spain entry requirements.

Nigerian passport: If you'll spend more nights in Spain (Barcelona plus Madrid), Spain is probably your main destination, so apply through Spain. Being married to a British citizen doesn't change this. Spain's London consulate says that third-country nationals living in the UK who are married/dependent of a UK citizen should apply for a Schengen visa at BLS International London (consulate FAQ). For the London centre, applications must be submitted at the Visa Application Centre BLS International. An appointment is necessary. The visa fee for applicants aged 12 and over is about 90 EUROS, plus a BLS service fee.

BLS London's tourist visa checklist (in Spanish) says:

- Your passport must be valid for at least 90 days after you leave Schengen and have at least 2 blank pages (al menos 2 páginas en blanco).
- Your UK residence permit must also be valid for at least 90 days after you leave Schengen (al menos, 90 días más).
- You need hotel bookings for every night in Schengen.
- Processing takes a minimum of about 15 calendar days (el plazo mínimo de tramitación es de 15 días naturales).

I couldn't confirm how BLS checks a UK eVisa as proof of residence. Before your appointment, confirm with BLS which proof of your settled status they accept. You can apply now: the 6-month window for a 15 April 2027 trip is already open. Aim to apply by January 2027.

Border systems: EES and ETIAS work the same way in Spain as in France (see above). See the Spanish Consulate London Schengen visa page.

Visa rules change and depend on your full circumstances. Check the official source or embassy before you book. This is general information, not legal advice.

Where to stay

As a rough guide, a mid-range double room in mid-April costs about €150–250 a night in Paris, about €120–200 in Barcelona and about €100–180 in Madrid. All three cities add a small tourist tax per person per night, which is normally paid at the hotel.

Paris (nights 1 to 3)

- **Le Marais (3rd and 4th arrondissements):** this area suits food lovers and walkers. It has medieval lanes, galleries, falafel on rue des Rosiers and the Marché des Enfants Rouges. You can walk to the Louvre and Notre-Dame, and Gare du Nord is about 15 minutes away by Metro.
  - Watch for: rooms are small and often up several floors, and the area is lively until late at weekends.
  - Book here: Find hotels (Trip.com)
- **Saint-Germain-des-Prés and the Latin Quarter (5th and 6th arrondissements):** this is classic Left Bank Paris, with cafés, bookshops and the Luxembourg Gardens. It is close to the Musée d'Orsay and an easy walk to the Louvre.
  - Watch for: it costs more per square metre than anywhere else on this list, and the restaurant strips around rue de la Huchette are aimed at tourists.
- **Canal Saint-Martin and the 11th arrondissement:** this is the best-value option, with a younger, local feel and an excellent neighbourhood food scene. It is handy for both Gare du Nord on arrival and Gare de Lyon for your train south.
  - Watch for: you will take the Metro to most big sights, and a few streets right by the stations feel scruffy at night.

Barcelona (nights 4 to 6)

- **Dreta de l'Eixample:** wide, safe streets lined with Modernista buildings. You can walk to Casa Batlló and La Pedrera, and the Sagrada Família is about 20 minutes on foot. There are good Metro links to Sants station.
  - Watch for: Passeig de Gràcia itself is pricey, so look one or two blocks off it.
  - Book here: Find hotels (Trip.com)
- **Gràcia:** a village feel with small squares, vermouth bars and lower prices. It is a pleasant base for a couple who like to wander.
  - Watch for: it is a short Metro ride from the old town and the beach, and the squares can be noisy on warm nights.

- **El Born:** atmospheric lanes, close to the Picasso Museum, the Santa Caterina market and the seafront.
  - Watch for: rooms can be dark and noisy. Pickpockets work this area and the Gothic Quarter, especially on and around Las Ramblas, so keep phones off café tables.

Madrid (nights 7 to 9)

- **Barrio de las Letras (Huertas):** this is the ideal base for an art lover. You can walk to the Prado, the Reina Sofía and Retiro Park, Atocha station is about 10 minutes away for your arrival, and the area is full of tapas bars.
  - Watch for: Plaza de Santa Ana gets busy and loud at night, so ask for a room at the back.
  - Book here: Find hotels (Trip.com)
- **La Latina and Madrid de los Austrias:** old Madrid. It is close to the Royal Palace and has the best tapas crawl in the city along Cava Baja.
  - Watch for: the streets are hilly, and weekend nights are lively.
- **Malasaña:** an independent, creative area with good brunch spots, vintage shops and a slightly lower price point.
  - Watch for: it is about 25 minutes on foot from the Prado, and the bars stay noisy until very late.

Day 1: Eurostar arrival, the Marais and the Seine

Morning

The Eurostar from London St Pancras to Paris Gare du Nord takes about 2 hours 20 minutes. Remember that Paris is one hour ahead of the UK. Arrive at St Pancras in good time, because check-in and security close before departure.

When you reach Gare du Nord, go straight to your hotel to drop your bags. Check-in is usually mid-afternoon, but most hotels will store luggage. If your train arrives later in the day, skip ahead to the afternoon plan.

Afternoon

Ease in with a walk through the Marais:

- Start at the Marché des Enfants Rouges, the oldest covered market in Paris, for a late lunch.
- Wander south along rue Vieille du Temple and rue des Rosiers.

- Finish at the Place des Vosges, a beautiful 17th-century square where you can rest on the grass under the arcades.

If you still want some art, the Musée Picasso is in the heart of the Marais. Allow 1½ to 2 hours. Otherwise, save your energy, because the next two days are museum-heavy.

Evening

Walk about 10 minutes down to the river and cross to the Île Saint-Louis. Its quiet quays are lovely at dusk, with views of the back of Notre-Dame. Then wander back towards the Marais or the Hôtel de Ville area for dinner.

Book an early night. Tomorrow starts at the Louvre.

Food nearby

- **Marché des Enfants Rouges:** stalls serving Moroccan, Japanese, Lebanese and French food.
- **Rue des Rosiers:** famous for falafel in pitta, about €8–12.
- **Dinner:** the Marais has plenty of bistros where a classic set dinner costs about €30–50 per person before wine. On the Île Saint-Louis, an ice cream is the traditional pudding.

Getting around

- From Gare du Nord, Metro line 4 runs south through the city towards the Marais and Saint-Germain. There is also a taxi rank outside the station.
- Singles on the Metro cost about €2–3. A rechargeable Navigo Easy card, or the RATP app on your phone, saves queuing at machines.
- Today is mostly on foot, with only a gentle 3–4 km of walking.

Day 2: The Louvre, Palais-Royal and the islands

Morning

Arrive at the Louvre for the first timed entry of the day. The early slots are the calmest, and you must book a timed ticket in advance: Book tickets (Trip.com). Tickets cost about €20–35 per person, and visitors from outside the EU may pay a higher rate. The Louvre closes one day a week, usually Tuesday, so check before you go, although your Friday visit should not be affected.

Use the less crowded entrances where your ticket allows, rather than queueing at the glass pyramid. Pick a route rather than trying to see everything; 3 hours is plenty for one visit. For example:

- **Denon wing:** the Mona Lisa, the Winged Victory of Samothrace and the great French paintings such as Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*.
- **Richelieu wing:** the Napoleon III Apartments and the Dutch and Flemish masters, which are usually quieter.

Afternoon

Walk 5 minutes north to the gardens of the Palais-Royal, with Daniel Buren's striped columns in the courtyard. Then continue through the Galerie Vivienne, one of the city's 19th-century covered passages, which has mosaic floors and small shops.

After lunch, walk back down to the river and along the Seine to the Île de la Cité, about 20 minutes:

- **Sainte-Chapelle:** its 13th-century stained glass is a highlight for art lovers on a sunny afternoon. Visits use timed entry, and there are airport-style security checks.
- **Notre-Dame:** the cathedral has reopened after restoration. Entry is free, but expect a queue. Free reservation slots are sometimes offered online, which shortens the wait.

Evening

Cross to the Left Bank and drop into Shakespeare and Company, the bookshop facing Notre-Dame. Then climb into the Latin Quarter around the Place de la Contrescarpe and rue Mouffetard for dinner.

If you have energy left, a sunset stroll back along the quays is free and better than most river cruises.

Food nearby

- **Rue Sainte-Anne:** a few minutes from the Palais-Royal, this is the city's Japanese and Korean street. It is excellent for a quick ramen or udon lunch at about €15–20 per person.
- **Rue Mouffetard and side streets:** wine bars and crêperies for dinner at about €25–45 per person.
- **Restaurants to avoid:** skip the menu-board places on rue de la Huchette.

Getting around

- Almost everything today is within walking distance, about 7–9 km in total, so wear comfortable shoes.
- Metro line 1 or 7 serves the Louvre if you are coming from further away.
- Metro lines 7 and 10 bring you back from the Latin Quarter.

Day 3: Montmartre, the Musée d'Orsay and Saint-Germain

Morning

Go up to Montmartre early, before the Saturday crowds. Take the Metro to Abbesses, which has one of the original Art Nouveau entrances. Then:

1. Climb the lanes to the Sacré-Cœur for the view over Paris.
2. Duck behind the basilica into the quieter streets around rue de l'Abreuvoir, the pink Maison Rose and the vineyard.
3. Look in at the Place du Tertre, where artists paint at their easels, but do not linger. It is a good place to watch your bag.
4. Walk back down rue Lepic, past the Moulin de la Galette, to the food shops around rue des Abbesses.

If you prefer a guided version, a Montmartre food walk combines this area with tastings: Book tours (Klook).

Afternoon

Metro line 12 runs from Abbesses to Solférino, beside the Musée d'Orsay, in about 20 minutes with no change. The Orsay is housed in a former railway station, which feels fitting for a train lover. Book a timed ticket and allow 2½ to 3 hours. Highlights include:

- the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist galleries on the top floor, with Monet, Renoir, Degas and Van Gogh
- the view through the giant station clock
- the Art Nouveau furniture rooms

Afterwards, walk about 20 minutes through Saint-Germain-des-Prés to the Luxembourg Gardens. Find a green metal chair by the Medici Fountain and rest your legs.

Evening

Spend your last Paris evening in Saint-Germain:

- Have an apéritif on a café terrace around the Carrefour de l'Odéon.
- Have dinner in the side streets towards rue de Buci, which is good for a proper French meal with steak frites, duck or seasonal fish.
- Walk back along the river to see the Eiffel Tower sparkle. It sparkles on the hour after dark, and the Pont des Arts or the Pont Alexandre III give good views.

Pack tonight and check your departure time from Gare de Lyon. The direct train to Barcelona is a long day, so buy a picnic tomorrow before you board.

Food nearby

- **Rue des Abbesses and rue des Martyrs:** boulangeries, cheese shops and pastry shops, ideal for a picnic lunch of about €10–15 per person.
- **Bouillon Pigalle:** at the foot of the hill, this canteen serves hearty, affordable French classics at about €15–25 per person. Expect to queue at peak times.
- **Saint-Germain:** a bistro dinner costs about €35–60 per person before wine. Booking ahead for a Saturday night is wise.

Getting around

- Montmartre is steep. If your knees need a break, the funicular up to the Sacré-Cœur takes a standard Metro ticket.
- Line 12 links Montmartre and the Orsay directly, which keeps today from criss-crossing the city.
- Expect about 8–10 km on foot in total.
- For tomorrow, Gare de Lyon is on Metro line 1, RER A and RER D. Allow at least 45 minutes from a central hotel to your platform.

Day 4: Paris to Barcelona by high-speed train, then the Gothic Quarter

Morning

Today is mostly about the journey, and it is a good one. Check out early and head to **Gare de Lyon** . From the Marais it takes about 15 minutes by Metro (line 1 runs straight there). From Canal Saint-Martin or the 11th it is a similar time, or a pleasant 25 to 30 minute walk if your bags are light. Aim to reach the station at least 30 minutes before departure, because the platforms for long-distance trains can be a fair walk from the Metro exits.

If you have time before boarding, walk ten minutes to the **Marché d'Aligre** area. It is a lively, local market neighbourhood that is usually at its busiest on a Sunday morning. Pick up cheese, charcuterie, fruit and a baguette for the train. If you would rather sit down, the grand belle-époque dining room of **Le Train Bleu** inside Gare de Lyon is a memorable splurge for coffee or breakfast. It is popular, so do not count on getting a table without a reservation.

Your train will most likely leave in the morning. Seats should already be booked: Book trains (Trip.com).

Afternoon

Settle in for about 6½ to 7 hours of rolling scenery. The line runs south through Burgundy and down the **Rhône valley**, past Lyon and Valence. It then swings west along the Mediterranean via Nîmes and Montpellier, where you get glimpses of lagoons and flamingo country near the coast. After Perpignan, look out for the foothills of the **Pyrenees** as you cross into Catalonia, followed by stops at Figueres and Girona. There is a café car on board, but your market picnic will be far better. Bring a book, offline maps and downloaded shows, because mobile signal drops in places.

You arrive at **Barcelona Sants** in the late afternoon or early evening. If you stay in the Eixample, take Metro line 5 or line 3 a few stops, or a taxi of about 15 to 20 minutes (roughly €12–18 depending on traffic). Taxis are easy to find at the rank outside the station.

Evening

Drop your bags and walk down to the **Barri Gòtic** (Gothic Quarter). From the Eixample it takes about 15 to 20 minutes on foot via Plaça de Catalunya. Wander slowly. See the floodlit façade of the **Cathedral**, the arched bridge over **Carrer del Bisbe**, the medieval **Plaça del Rei** and the quiet, shrapnel-scarred **Plaça de Sant Felip Neri**. It is one of the most moving small squares in the city. The Roman columns of the Temple of Augustus are tucked into a courtyard nearby.

Spaniards eat late, so a 9pm dinner is perfectly normal. Have a glass of cava or vermouth first.

Food nearby:

- Skip the restaurants on Las Ramblas itself. Duck into the lanes around **Plaça Reial**, **Carrer de la Mercè** and Carrer Ample for old-school bars serving pimientos de Padrón, grilled squid, patatas bravas and pa amb tomàquet (bread rubbed with tomato and olive oil).
- Expect about €35–60 for two at a casual tapas bar with drinks. Some family-run places close on Sunday evenings, so have a back-up in mind.

Getting around: buy a *T-casual* ten-journey card from any Metro machine. It covers the Metro and city buses, one person per card, and will cover most of your Barcelona trips. Keep phones and wallets zipped away in the Gothic Quarter and around Las Ramblas.

Day 5: Sagrada Família and Gaudí's Eixample

Morning

This is the big one. Choose a morning entry slot for the **Sagrada Família** if you can get one. Morning light pours through the stained glass on the eastern side in cool blues and greens. Late-afternoon visits get the warm reds and oranges instead, so both are beautiful. Allow about 1½ to 2 hours with the audio guide. If you want to climb one of the towers, that ticket needs to be booked in

advance as part of your entry: Book tickets (Trip.com).

From the Dreta de l'Eixample it is about a 20-minute walk, or two or three stops on Metro line 2 or 5 to Sagrada Família station. Before or after your slot, cross into **Plaça de Gaudí**, the small park opposite the Nativity façade, for the classic reflection photo over the pond.

Afterwards, walk the pedestrianised **Avinguda de Gaudí** for about 10 minutes to the **Recinte Modernista de Sant Pau**, a former hospital by Lluís Domènech i Montaner with tiled pavilions and gardens. Even from the outside it rivals Gaudí. If you have the energy, it is well worth going inside.

Afternoon

For lunch, look for a **menú del día** in the streets between Sant Pau and the Sagrada Família, or back towards Carrer de València. This weekday set lunch of three courses, usually with bread and a drink, typically costs about €15–22 a head. It is the best-value meal in Spain.

Then head to **Passeig de Gràcia** (Metro line 5 to Diagonal, or a 25 to 30 minute walk). This is the showpiece boulevard of Modernisme:

- **Casa Batlló**: Gaudí's bone-and-scale fantasy house. The interior visit is immersive and theatrical. Book a timed slot: Book tickets (Trip.com).
- **The "Block of Discord"**, right next door: Casa Amatller and Casa Lleó Morera show how three rival architects competed on a single stretch of street.
- **Casa Milà (La Pedrera)**: a few minutes north, with a rolling stone façade and a rooftop of warrior-like chimneys.

For a balanced day, go inside **one** of Casa Batlló or La Pedrera and admire the other from the street. Two Gaudí interiors on top of the Sagrada Família is a lot in one day. Batlló is the more dramatic interior, and La Pedrera's rooftop is the more memorable view.

Afterwards, go back to the hotel for a rest. You have a late dinner ahead.

Evening

Stay in the Eixample tonight. The grid of streets either side of Passeig de Gràcia, especially **Carrer d'Enric Granados**, partly pedestrianised and lined with terraces, and **Carrer de Mallorca**, is full of good-quality modern Catalan restaurants and buzzy tapas bars. This is the place for a slightly smarter dinner. Try dishes such as fideuà (a noodle cousin of paella), esqueixada (salt-cod salad), croquetes and botifarra sausage with white beans.

Food nearby:

- A good mid-range dinner for two with a bottle of Catalan wine (look for Priorat, Montsant or Penedès) is about €70–110.
- Note that some restaurants close on Mondays. Check before you set out, or reserve.

- For a nightcap, try a glass of cava at a bar on Rambla de Catalunya. It is quieter and more local than its famous neighbour.

Getting around: the Eixample is a near-perfect grid, and most of today is walkable. Corners are cut at an angle (the *xamfrans*), which makes the blocks feel open and airy. Expect about 10 to 12 km on foot today, so wear comfortable shoes.

Day 6: Markets, the Picasso Museum, El Born and a Barceloneta sunset

Morning

Start early at **La Boqueria**, the famous market just off Las Ramblas. Arrive before about 9:30am, when locals are still shopping and the tour groups have not yet arrived. Head past the photogenic juice stands at the front to the counter bars deeper inside. A breakfast of tortilla, grilled prawns or chickpeas with blood sausage at the bar is a Barcelona rite. Allow about €25–40 for two.

Then walk about 15 minutes east through the Gothic Quarter and across Via Laietana into **El Born**. Stop at the **Mercat de Santa Caterina**, which has a wave-like, multicoloured tiled roof. It is calmer and more local than the Boqueria, and a good place to buy olive oil, saffron or turrón to take home.

Next comes the **Picasso Museum** on Carrer de Montcada, set in a row of linked medieval palaces. Its strength is the young Picasso: his astonishing teenage academic work, the Blue Period and his Las Meninas series, which makes a lovely link to the Velázquez original you will see in the Prado on Day 8. Allow about 1½ to 2 hours, and book a timed slot: Book tickets (Trip.com).

Afternoon

Spend the afternoon slowly in El Born:

- **Santa Maria del Mar**: a soaring, almost bare Catalan Gothic church that many prefer to the Cathedral. Step inside to feel the space.
- **El Born Centre de Cultura i Memòria**: a former market hall built over excavated streets from 1714, which you can see from the walkways.
- Small design shops, galleries and chocolate shops along **Carrer del Rec** and the lanes around Passeig del Born.

For lunch, keep it light with a few pintxos or a sandwich at a café terrace. Then walk off the morning in the **Parc de la Ciutadella**, about 5 minutes away. See the extravagant Cascada fountain, which a young Gaudí helped work on, and rent a rowing boat on the little lake if the weather is fine. Allow time for a siesta back at your hotel if you need one.

If you would like someone else to guide the food side of today, an El Born or Gothic Quarter tapas walk is a good option for food-loving couples: Book tours (Klook).

Evening

Walk about 15 to 20 minutes from El Born, past the yacht marina of Port Vell, into **Barceloneta**, the old fishermen's quarter of narrow, washing-hung streets. Continue onto the beach promenade and stroll north towards the sail-shaped W Hotel in one direction, or towards the Olympic Port in the other. In mid-April the sun sets at roughly 8:30pm. It will be too cold to swim, but a seafront drink at sunset is a perfect last Barcelona evening.

Barceloneta claims to have invented the **bomba**, a fried potato ball stuffed with spiced meat and served with aioli and a hot sauce. Order one in a back-street bar inside the neighbourhood grid rather than on the promenade.

Food nearby:

- Locals eat paella and arròs negre (black rice with squid ink) at lunchtime rather than dinner, and good places cook them fresh to order. If you want one, the inner streets of Barceloneta are the place. Avoid anywhere with photo menus and touts outside, because that rice has usually been sitting there.
- For a seafood dinner for two with wine, expect about €60–100. Casual tapas in a neighbourhood bar costs about €35–55.

Getting around: today is almost entirely on foot, at about 8 to 10 km. To get back, take Metro line 4 from Barceloneta station. Change at Passeig de Gràcia for most Eixample hotels, which takes about 15 to 20 minutes in all. A taxi is about €10–15. Pickpockets target the beach and Las Ramblas, so keep valuables out of sight and never leave bags unattended on the sand.

Before bed, check your train time from **Barcelona Sants** to Madrid tomorrow and pack the night before. That leaves the morning free for a slow wander in Gràcia.

Day 7: Barcelona to Madrid, a slow morning in Gràcia and tapas in La Latina

Morning

Check out after breakfast. Most hotels will hold your bags if you ask, but it is simpler to take them with you to Sants and use the station's left-luggage lockers if you have time to spare. Then spend an unhurried couple of hours in **Gràcia**, Barcelona's former village. It is about 10 minutes by Metro from the Eixample, or a 20 to 25 minute walk up Passeig de Gràcia.

- Start on **Carrer Gran de Gràcia** and look at the Modernista façades above the shopfronts.
- Wander east through the small squares: **Plaça de la Vila de Gràcia** with its clock tower, **Plaça del Sol** and the church-fronted **Plaça de la Virreina**. On a weekday morning they are quiet and local.
- If you have twenty minutes, walk a few blocks west to see the outside of **Casa Vicens** on Carrer de les Carolines. It was Gaudí's first house, and the tiled exterior makes a good bookend to your Gaudí day.
- Browse the independent shops on **Carrer de Verdi** and **Carrer de Astúries**: ceramics, design and small bookshops.

Afternoon

Take the train to Madrid. A departure somewhere between late morning and early afternoon suits this plan. The fast trains take about 2½ to 3 hours, so you will reach Madrid by mid to late afternoon. Fares for a mid-range seat bought in advance are about €30–90 each, depending on the company and how early you book. You should already have this booked through the link in your overview.

- Allow plenty of time at **Barcelona Sants**. Bags are security-scanned before boarding, and the platforms open fairly close to departure.
- Most trains arrive at **Madrid Puerta de Atocha**, but a few services use **Chamartín** in the north of the city. Check your ticket. From Chamartín, the local Cercanías trains run to Atocha in about 15 minutes.
- From Atocha, Barrio de las Letras is a 10 to 15 minute walk uphill. With heavy cases, a taxi is cheap and quick.

Once you have checked in, take an easy first stroll around your new neighbourhood. Look down on **Calle de las Huertas**, where quotations from Spanish writers are set into the pavement in brass letters. Then have a coffee or a small beer in **Plaza de Santa Ana** while the light softens.

Evening

Madrid eats late. Locals rarely sit down to dinner before 9pm, and the tapas bars fill up from about 8.30pm. Walk to **La Latina**, about 15 to 20 minutes west through Plaza Mayor or along Calle de Atocha, for the city's classic tapas crawl.

- **Calle de la Cava Baja** and the parallel **Cava Alta** are lined with tapas bars and old taverns. Have one or two plates in each bar and move on, as Madrileños do.
- Dishes to look for: *huevos rotos* (fried eggs broken over chips, often with ham), *croquetas*, *tortilla de patatas*, *gambas al ajillo* (garlic prawns), *pimientos de padrón* and good *jamón ibérico*.

- The long-established **Casa Lucio** on Cava Baja is famous for its huevos rotos, but it is a sit-down restaurant, so book if you want it.
- End the night in **Plaza de la Paja** or around the church of San Andrés. Both are lovely after dark.

If you would like a local to lead the way on your first night, a guided tapas walk is a good way to learn how to order and what to try: Book tours (Klook).

Food near the route

- **Gràcia breakfast:** the cafés on and around Plaça de la Virreina and Carrer de Verdi do good coffee with a *pa amb tomàquet* (bread rubbed with tomato) or a pastry. You could also pick up a *bocadillo* for the train.
- **On the train:** there is usually a café-bar carriage, but it is basic. Bakery sandwiches from Gràcia or Sants are better.
- **Dinner:** a tapas crawl in La Latina costs about €25–45 per person with a glass or two of wine.

Getting around

- In Barcelona, Metro line L3 (green) runs from Fontana in Gràcia directly to Sants Estació in about 15 minutes, so there is no change with bags.
- In Madrid, Barrio de las Letras and La Latina are close enough to walk everywhere. Madrid's Metro is cheap and efficient for longer hops. You load single or ten-journey trips onto a rechargeable card bought from station machines, and a single journey costs about €1.50–2.

Day 8: The Prado and Retiro Park

Morning

Today is a short walk from your base. Barrio de las Letras is about 5 to 10 minutes on foot from the **Museo del Prado**, one of the great art museums of the world. Book a timed entry for early in the day so you see the main rooms before they get busy. Entry is about €15 each: Book tickets (Trip.com).

The Prado is enormous, so pick your highlights. Allow about three hours.

- **Velázquez:** *Las Meninas* is the painting most people come for, and it deserves time. His royal portraits and *The Surrender of Breda* hang nearby.
- **Goya:** see his court portraits, *The Third of May 1808*, and then the startling **Black Paintings** on the lower floor. They make a powerful contrast.
- **Bosch:** *The Garden of Earthly Delights* rewards a close look at its tiny details.
- **El Greco, Titian and Rubens:** these are worth a detour if you still have energy.

Pick up a floor plan at the entrance, or use the museum's own app or audio guide. Bags above a certain size must go into the cloakroom, so travel light.

Afternoon

Have lunch nearby. Then walk up behind the Prado, past the church of **San Jerónimo el Real**, and into the **Parque del Retiro**, about 10 minutes away. Mid-April is a lovely time here. The chestnut trees are coming into leaf, and on a weekday it is mostly locals jogging, reading and walking dogs.

- Walk to the **Estanque Grande**, the big boating lake beneath the colonnaded monument to Alfonso XII. Hiring a rowing boat for half an hour is a classic Madrid couple's afternoon.
- Continue south to the **Palacio de Cristal**, a glass-and-iron pavilion by a small lake. It often hosts contemporary art installations run by the Reina Sofía, so it can be open, closed between shows or partly screened off.
- Find the nearby **Palacio de Velázquez**, which is also used for exhibitions, and the **Fallen Angel** statue, a rare monument to the devil.
- In the southern corner, the **Rosaleda** rose garden is usually only coming into bloom in mid-April and is at its best from May, but it is pleasant to walk through.

If you would rather keep the afternoon gentler, the **Real Jardín Botánico** sits beside the Prado. It is a quieter, more formal garden with a small entry fee, and spring bulbs are usually out in April.

Evening

Leave the park by the **Puerta de Alcalá**, the grand stone gateway on Plaza de la Independencia. Then stroll back down towards **Calle de Alcalá** and **Cibeles**, where the fountain and the wedding-cake Palacio de Cibeles are lit up at dusk. For a view over the rooftops, the **Círculo de Bellas Artes** on Calle de Alcalá has a rooftop terrace with a small entry fee, and it is one of the best sunset spots in the city.

Then head back into Barrio de las Letras for dinner. A vermouth before dinner is a Madrid ritual. Order a *vermut de grifo* (vermouth on tap) with an olive or two in one of the old bars around Calle de las Huertas or Calle de Echegaray, then settle into a restaurant from about 9pm.

Food near the route

- **Lunch near the Prado:** the streets between the museum and Plaza de Santa Ana, especially **Calle de las Huertas**, **Calle del León** and **Calle de Moratín**, have plenty of places offering a weekday *menú del día*. This is a set lunch of two courses, bread and a drink, for about €14–22 each, and it is the best-value meal in Spain.
- **In the Retiro:** there are kiosk cafés by the lake for an ice cream or a drink. They are fine for a sit-down but not for a meal.

- **Dinner in Las Letras:** look for classic Madrid dishes such as *callos* (tripe stew), *rabo de toro* (oxtail) and fried fresh anchovies. A mid-range dinner costs about €30–50 per person with wine.

Getting around

- Today is entirely on foot. The Prado, the Retiro and Barrio de las Letras form a tight triangle, and a full loop is about 5 to 7 km including the park.
- If your feet need a break, Retiro and Banco de España Metro stations (both on line 2) are on the park's edge and on Calle de Alcalá.

Day 9: The Reina Sofía, the Royal Palace and a last big dinner

Morning

Walk south to the **Museo Reina Sofía**, about 10 minutes from your base and opposite Atocha station. It is Spain's national museum of modern and contemporary art. Book a timed entry for the morning. Entry is about €12 each: Book tickets (Trip.com).

- The star is Picasso's ***Guernica***. It hangs with the preparatory sketches that show how he built up the painting, and the rooms around it explain the Spanish Civil War context.
- The collection also has strong rooms of **Dalí**, **Miró** and **Juan Gris**. These tie in nicely with the Picasso Museum you saw in Barcelona.
- Step into the inner courtyard garden, and take the glass lifts on the outside of the old hospital building for a view over the rooftops.

Allow about two to two and a half hours. That is enough to see the main collection without museum fatigue after yesterday.

Afternoon

Head west across the old centre, about 30 minutes on foot, or ride the Metro if you prefer. Walk up **Calle de Atocha** to the arcaded **Plaza Mayor** for lunch, then continue along **Calle Mayor** to the **Palacio Real** (Royal Palace).

- The palace is one of the largest in Europe. Its state rooms, including the Throne Room, the Gasparini Room and the Royal Armoury, take about 1½ to 2 hours. Entry is about €14–15 each. Book ahead to skip the ticket queue: Book tickets (Trip.com).
- The palace is sometimes closed at short notice for official state events. Check the official site the day before.

- Across the square stands the **Almudena Cathedral**. From the terrace between the two buildings, you look out over the **Campo del Moro** gardens and Casa de Campo to the hills beyond.
- Walk north through the formal **Sabatini Gardens** beside the palace. Then continue about 10 to 15 minutes into **Parque del Oeste** for the **Templo de Debod**, a genuine ancient Egyptian temple given to Spain and rebuilt here. Its viewpoint is Madrid's favourite place to watch the sunset.

Today is 23 April, **World Book Day**, which honours Cervantes. Madrid often marks it with readings, book stalls and literary events, many of them around Barrio de las Letras. Keep an eye on local listings, as you may stumble on something on your way home.

Evening

Book something special for your last night. Restaurants fill up on Friday evenings, so reserve a few days ahead. Three good options, all within walking distance of the palace or your hotel:

- **Traditional roast: Sobrino de Botín**, just off Plaza Mayor, is often described as the world's oldest restaurant. It is known for roast suckling pig and lamb cooked in a wood-fired oven. It is touristy, but the atmosphere of its old cellar rooms is hard to beat.
- **Madrid's signature stew:** *cocido madrileño* is a rich, slow-cooked stew of chickpeas, meats and vegetables, served in courses. Places such as **La Bola** near the Royal Palace and the historic **Lhardy** on Carrera de San Jerónimo are famous for it. Cocido is traditionally a lunch dish, so check it is served in the evening.
- **Modern Spanish:** if you would prefer something contemporary, the streets around Barrio de las Letras and Lavapiés have plenty of creative small-plate restaurants with good Spanish wine lists.

Expect about €45–80 per person for a celebratory dinner with wine. Finish with *chocolate con churros* at one of the old chocolaterías near Calle del Arenal, which traditionally stay open late, and then take a slow walk home past the Puerta del Sol.

Before bed, sort out tomorrow's journey to the airport. Barajas is about 20 to 30 minutes by taxi from the centre, or a little longer by the airport express bus from Atocha or by Metro. If you would rather have it pre-arranged, you can book a private transfer: Book an airport transfer (Welcome Pickups).

Food near the route

- **Coffee before the Reina Sofía:** the cafés along Calle de Atocha and the edge of **Lavapiés**, just behind the museum, are cheaper and more local than those facing the station.

- **Lunch at Plaza Mayor:** skip the restaurants on the square itself, which charge a premium for the view. Instead, have a *bocadillo de calamares* (a fried squid roll and a Madrid institution) from one of the small bars in the streets just off the arcades, for about €4–7. If you prefer, the **Mercado de San Miguel** next to the square is a handsome iron-framed market hall serving tapas. It is pricier and busier than a normal market, so treat it as a grazing stop rather than a full lunch.
- **Sunset drink:** there are a couple of kiosk terraces in Parque del Oeste near the Templo de Debod.

Getting around

- The full walk from the Reina Sofía via Plaza Mayor to the Royal Palace and the Templo de Debod is about 4 to 5 km. To save your legs, take Metro line 1 from Estación del Arte (beside the Reina Sofía) to Sol, then walk the last stretch along Calle Mayor.
- From the Templo de Debod, Plaza de España Metro station is a few minutes away, and it is about a 20 minute walk back to Plaza Mayor and Botín. You can walk everywhere tonight.
- Friday evenings around Sol and Plaza Mayor are very crowded. Keep phones and wallets in zipped pockets, as pickpockets work this area just as they do in Barcelona.

Day 10: An easy last morning, a market lunch and the flight home

Your flight time will shape today. The plan below suits an afternoon or evening flight. If you fly in the morning, skip the museum and the market. Have breakfast near your hotel and head straight to the airport. Whatever your flight time, check out after breakfast and ask your hotel to keep your bags. Most mid-range hotels in Madrid will do this.

Morning

Start slowly with coffee and a *tostada con tomate* (toast rubbed with tomato and olive oil) at a café in Barrio de las Letras. If you stayed in La Latina or Malasaña, the walk across to this side of the centre takes about 15 to 25 minutes.

You have now seen two of Madrid's three great art museums. If your flight leaves late enough, the third is a short walk away. The **Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza** faces the Prado across Paseo del Prado. It runs from early Italian painting through the Impressionists to Hopper and Pop Art, so it neatly fills the gaps between the Prado and the Reina Sofía. Two hours is enough to see the highlights without rushing.

If you would rather be outdoors after nine busy days, try the **Real Jardín Botánico**, next to the Prado, for a quiet hour. Another option is a gentle walk along Paseo del Prado to the vertical garden on the outside wall of CaixaForum.

Afternoon

Walk about 10 minutes uphill to the **Mercado de Antón Martín** on Calle de Santa Isabel, on the edge of Lavapiés. It is a working neighbourhood market. You will find stalls selling ham, cheese and fruit alongside small counters cooking Japanese, Mexican and Spanish food, and it is far more local than the Mercado de San Miguel near Plaza Mayor. Graze for lunch and pick up some vacuum-packed jamón, Manchego or a tin of good Spanish olive oil to take home. Packed this way, they travel well in checked luggage.

If you would like one more look at old Madrid, the **Mercado de San Fernando** on Calle de Embajadores is another relaxed option, about 10 minutes' walk from Antón Martín.

After lunch, collect your bags and head to Madrid-Barajas airport. Aim to arrive about 2 to 2½ hours before an international flight. Check your terminal before you leave, because T4 is a long way from T1, T2 and T3, and the transfer between them takes time.

Evening

Fly home to the UK. The flight takes about 2½ hours. If you want a last Spanish snack, airport cafés sell bocadillos and tortilla, though prices are higher than in town. If your flight is badly delayed, our flight delay compensation calculator shows whether you might be owed money.

Food near the route

- **Breakfast:** any café in Barrio de las Letras or around Plaza de Santa Ana. If you missed churros earlier in the trip, the classic chocolate-and-churros places near Sol are about 10 minutes' walk away.
- **Lunch:** the counters at Mercado de Antón Martín or Mercado de San Fernando. Allow about €15–25 a head with a drink.
- **Before the museum:** the Thyssen has its own café if you need a mid-morning break.

Getting around

- **Airport express bus:** it runs from Atocha and Cibeles to the airport terminals and takes about 40 minutes, depending on traffic. The fare is about €5 per person.
- **Cercanías train:** line C1 runs from Atocha to T4 in about 25 to 30 minutes. It is easy with luggage if you are flying from T4.

- **Metro:** line 8 runs from Nuevos Ministerios to all terminals, but you will need to change trains to get there from the centre. Expect a small airport supplement on top of the normal fare.
- **Taxi:** taxis charge a fixed fare between the city centre and the airport of about €35. This is the easiest option with heavy bags. Allow about 25 to 40 minutes.
- **Pre-booked transfer:** if you would rather have a car waiting at your hotel, see Book an airport transfer (Welcome Pickups).

Book ahead

Spring is busy in all three cities. The items below either sell out or cost much more on the day, so book them as soon as your dates are fixed.

- **Eurostar, London to Paris (Day 1):** fares rise sharply as the date gets closer, so book early. Book trains (Trip.com)
- **Paris to Barcelona train (Day 4):** there are only a few direct departures a day, so book soon. See the link in the trip summary above.
- **Barcelona to Madrid train (Day 7):** compare the different operators for the best fare. See the link in the trip summary above.
- **The Louvre (Day 2):** book a timed-entry slot. An early morning slot is the calmest. Book tickets (Trip.com)
- **Musée d'Orsay (Day 3):** timed tickets save you a long queue on a Saturday. Book tickets (Trip.com)
- **Sagrada Família (Day 5):** this is the ticket most likely to sell out. A ticket with a tower visit is worth it if you have a head for heights. Book tickets (Trip.com)
- **Picasso Museum (Day 6):** buy timed tickets online, because walk-up queues can be long.
- **The Prado (Day 8):** book a timed entry for the morning, before the tour groups build up. Book tickets (Trip.com)
- **A guided tapas walk in Madrid:** this is a good way to spend your first or last evening if you want a local to choose the bars. Book tours (Klook)
- **Mobile data:** an eSIM that covers both France and Spain saves you from roaming worries. Get an eSIM (Airalo)

Budget

These are rough mid-range costs for the two of you together. They do not include hotels, which are covered in "Where to stay" above.

Item	Paris (per day, for two)	Barcelona (per day, for two)	Madrid (per day, for two)
Breakfast and coffee	about €20–35	about €15–25	about €12–22
Lunch	about €35–60	about €30–50 (a set-menu *menú del día* is good value)	about €25–45 (*menú del día*)
Dinner with wine	about €70–130	about €60–110	about €50–100
Local transport	about €8–15	about €6–12	about €5–10
Sights and museums	about €40–70	about €50–90	about €30–60
Rough daily total	**about €175–310**	**about €160–285**	**about €120–235**

One-off travel costs per person, all rough:

- Eurostar, London to Paris: about £60–200 one way.
- Paris to Barcelona train: about €60–180.
- Barcelona to Madrid train: about €20–90.
- Flight from Madrid to the UK: about €60–200.

In all cases, booking early keeps you at the lower end.

Practical tips

Money

- Both countries use the euro. Contactless card payment is accepted almost everywhere, including on most public transport. A card with no foreign transaction fees will save you money.
- Carry a little cash, about €30–50, for small market stalls, older tapas bars and the odd café that has a card minimum.
- If a card machine asks whether to pay in pounds or euros, always choose euros. You will get a better exchange rate.

Tipping

- **France:** service is included in the bill by law (*service compris*). Rounding up or leaving a few euros for good service is appreciated but not expected.

- **Spain:** tipping is modest. Leave the small change at tapas bars, and about 5–10% at a sit-down dinner if you were well looked after.

Eating times

- Parisians eat lunch from about 12 to 2pm and dinner from about 7.30pm.
- In Spain, lunch is the main meal and runs from about 2 to 4pm. Dinner rarely starts before 9pm. If you are hungry earlier, tapas bars fill the gap nicely.
- Book dinner for Friday and Saturday nights in Paris, and for your last big dinner in Madrid.

Safety

- All three cities are generally safe for couples, but pickpocketing is common.
- In Paris, watch out on Metro line 1, around Sacré-Cœur and near the Louvre. Ignore anyone asking you to sign a petition or offering a "found" gold ring.
- In Barcelona, take most care on Las Ramblas, in the Gothic Quarter, on the Metro and at the beach. Never leave phones on café tables.
- In Madrid, take care around Sol and on crowded Metro trains.
- Wear a cross-body bag zipped and in front of you, and keep phones in front pockets.

Trains

- Allow plenty of time at St Pancras for the Eurostar.
- Spanish high-speed trains scan your luggage before boarding, so arrive about 30 to 45 minutes early at Gare de Lyon, Sants and Atocha.
- Take food and water for the long Paris to Barcelona journey. The café car is handy but pricey.

Packing

- Mid-April is spring, not summer. Expect roughly 8–17°C in Paris, often with showers. Barcelona is milder at about 12–20°C. Madrid can be sunny by day, about 10–20°C, but chilly in the evenings.
- Pack layers, a light waterproof, a compact umbrella and broken-in walking shoes. You will walk 15,000 to 20,000 steps on most days.
- Bring something that covers your shoulders and knees for church visits, including the Sagrada Família.
- Check your bags against your airline's rules for the flight home with our hand luggage size checker, especially if you plan to bring food or wine back.

Plugs and phones

- France and Spain use two-pin European sockets at 230V. Bring at least two UK-to-EU adapters, or one adapter and a multi-socket extension. You can confirm the details with our plug adapter

checker.

- Check your UK mobile plan's roaming terms before you go, or use an eSIM for data.
- Download offline maps of all three cities and the Paris, Barcelona and Madrid transport apps before you leave.

Opening times, prices and entry rules change. Check them before you go, and book directly with the provider.

Written by our AI trip planner using our travel guides, and sent to you automatically. Some booking links are affiliate links: we may earn a commission at no extra cost to you. Online version: https://lifestylemetro.com/trip/e5d76b73f63c4d31c1231a60c5a00327/