



At the entrance of Santiago Bernabeu



Santiago Bernabeu



Before a match at Santiago Bernabeu

Marvellous Madrid

A city with history, art and 'infectious' energy

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After the lifting of the Covid-19 lockdown, in September 2021, my husband and I visited Madrid, a city pulsating with history, art and energy.

The credit for selecting the destination for our first trip after lockdown should go to my husband, a huge Real Madrid fan. And what a decision it was!

In January 2021, amidst the pandemic lockdown, my husband and I made the bold decision to embark on a new chapter of our lives by moving to Copenhagen for my master's degree.

Little did we anticipate the challenges that lay ahead in this cold, unfamiliar Scandinavian city. As we settled into our new home, the biting chill of the Danish winter served as a constant reminder of the harsh realities of our surroundings. But it wasn't just the weather that posed a challenge; it was the coldness of the people too. In a society accustomed to keeping to themselves, the warmth of human connection felt scarce,



A monument in front of Royal Palace



Sea food Paella



Entrance of Plaza Mayor



In front of temple of debod

Leaving us feeling isolated and alone.

So, when the lockdown was lifted and we finally had the opportunity to escape the confines of our cold Danish surroundings, warm and inviting Madrid became our first choice.

As we boarded the plane bound for Madrid, a sense of excitement and anticipation filled the air. It was a journey of discovery, of escape, and ultimately, of finding ourselves amidst the chaos of a world turned upside down by the pandemic.

After landing in Madrid in the evening, the first thing that caught my attention was the weather. While the temperature wasn't drastically higher than Copenhagen, there was a distinct difference in how it felt.

A locked-down, serene and somewhat reserved Copenhagen introduced me to Europe. Madrid, on the other hand, greeted me with lively chaos the moment I left the airport.

Laughter and gossip were in the air, horns blared in the background, and what stood out the most was the sight of people joyfully singing and dancing on the streets. Madrid's energy was infectious, a complete contrast to the calmness of Copenhagen. The vibrant spirit of the Spanish capital absorbed me instantly.

After reaching our Airbnb and settling down, we went out for a stroll through the stone-paved streets. Because of the pandemic, we managed to snag an affordable Airbnb right next to the Royal Palace of Madrid. Do you know why the Royal Palace is so special? It's the largest royal palace in Europe, and it has more than 3,000 rooms. It's like having more than 30 football fields inside the palace! It's not just grand in history; it's also grand in size!

We walked until midnight, soaking in the lively atmosphere of the city. Then, we stumbled upon a tapas shop – a shop that sells small savoury dishes, snacks, or appetisers of Spanish cuisine.

It was midnight, and the shops were bustling with customers, a complete contrast to Copenhagen, where everything tends to close around 9:00pm.

We were hungry, but the language came in the way of trying out some of the dishes. Thankfully, there was a kind waitress there who, despite not knowing English, did her best to help us understand the menu. She used drawings and gestures to communicate. Her hospitality and service amazed me.

The place was vibrating with energy. Teenagers were laughing

tour from Copenhagen. But before that, we had to try some churros. Spanish churros are like long, crispy doughnuts. They're fried until they take on a golden hue and become crispy on the outside but remain soft and fluffy on the inside.

They're usually dusted with sugar and served with a warm chocolate dipping sauce. It was amazing! The fresh churros were incredibly tasty and super cheap. The chocolate dipping sauce was out of this world.

However, Santiago Bernabeu was closed for construction. We could still wander around and check out the

place. We took a stroll and had our lunch on the street with some yummy 'paella' – a Spanish rice dish that tastes like 'khichuri' but is filled with all kinds of seafood.

After that, we visited the Temple of Debod. It's an ancient treasure in Madrid with a fascinating history. It's not originally from Spain but was a gift from Egypt!

The temple, dedicated to the gods Amun and Isis, is over 2,000 years old. Now, it's in this lovely park where you can sit, relax, and enjoy a fantastic view, especially during sunset. It's like stepping back in time while being surrounded by the beauty of modern Madrid.

Later, we headed back to our Airbnb, freshened up, and went out for dinner. Guess what we had? Yep, one last round of paella! Then, we aimlessly wandered through the unknown, lively, warm streets till midnight.

We got a chance to visit Madrid again in November 2023. We watched a game between Real Madrid and Rayo Vallecano. Who says dreams do not come true?

During the game, my husband was ecstatic. He was shouting at the top of his lungs, and I swear, for a moment, I didn't even recognise him! The atmosphere in the stadium was incredible, with the crowd roaring and chanting from start to finish. I've never seen such a massive crowd in my life!

What caught my attention the most was how well-built the stadium was. From the entrances to the exits, the stairs to the slopes, everything was designed with fans in mind. It felt safe, spacious, and incredibly user-friendly, despite the thousands of people packed into the stadium. After the game, as we made our way back to our Airbnb, the streets were overflowing with football fans. People were singing, laughing, and yes, a little bit tipsy, but it felt remarkably safe and enjoyable.

And with that, our Madrid adventure wrapped up, filled with



Royal Palace Madrid



Churros



Tapas

and shouting, while young people were sitting together, drinking, and chatting with enthusiasm. It reminded me of the lively atmosphere we had in Dhaka. Perhaps my senses were overwhelmed by the lovely chaos as it came after months of pandemic-caused isolation.

On the next day, our first destination was Santiago Bernabeu – the home of the Real Madrid football club. We booked two tickets for the

museum. And, oh boy, it was amazing! All the trophies, gloves, and boots – all from the super famous players were right in front of us. My husband was mesmerised. He got so lost; I don't think he'll ever forget that day! He said, 'We have to come back here again to watch a live match.'

Our next stop was Plaza Mayor, which used to be the main market in Madrid. It now hosts some awesome events, making it a popular hang-out

football, historic places, and delicious tapas-churros-paellas. The city that never sleeps, where every street has a story, and every moment feels alive.

Until next time, Madrid, adiós!

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a former The Daily Star employee and now freelance writer for The Copenhagen Post, is passionate about travelling and storytelling.