



Above: CaixaForum, Madrid.
Right: Villa Magna, Madrid.
Above right: *Still Life and Mauve Moonlight* (1926) by Salvador Dalí

CaixaForum Madrid

This post-modern gallery is housed in a masterpiece of a building, designed by Herzog & de Meuron, the Swiss architects responsible for Tate Modern. CaixaForum occupies a converted 1899 power station located on the Paseo del Prado; additional floors, encased in rusted steel, have been built on to the red-brick shell and the removal of the original granite base gives the impression that the building is levitating. Currently showing an exhibition of works by Salvador Dalí, the gallery also hosts exhibitions alongside poetry festivals and concerts (obrasocial.lacaixa.es).

Stay at Villa Magna is well-situated for gallery jaunts, close to the city's Art Triangle, formed by the Prado, the Reina Sofia and the Thyssen-Bornemisza museums. The large luxury hotel's bedrooms are scented with the hotel's own Sierra vanilla fragrance, and there is a Kiara Kare wellness area, with beauty and spa treatments to relax after your culture fix. Double rooms from €230 per night (villamagna.es).

Eat & drink Refuel with tapas in the minimalist Sula bar & restaurant in the Salamanca district, where the Mediterranean menu was created by two-star Michelin chef Quique Dacosta (sula.es). Join chic Madrileños at Hotel Urban's Glass Bar 9, lit by a giant chandelier, for a special sangria, made from wine, Cointreau, egg white and vanilla (derbyhotels.com).

Ashmolean Museum Oxford

The Ashmolean was built in the 17th century, but after a three-year, £61 million renovation and expansion by Rick Mather Architects, it was reopened in December 2009 by the Queen. A fusty museum has been transformed into a showcase of glass and light, to display the Ashmolean's vast collection of paintings and artefacts accumulated over four centuries. Highlights include a ceremonial Arab robe owned by Lawrence of Arabia, Oliver Cromwell's death mask and drawings by Raphael and Da Vinci (ashmolean.org).

Stay at Soak up Oxford's literary history at the Old Parsonage hotel, which once housed an undergraduate Oscar Wilde. Situated five minutes from the city centre, the wisteria-

covered boutique hotel has a rustic interior, with mahogany panelling, piles of books, leather armchairs and wood-burning fires. Standard doubles from £135 (oldparsonage-hotel.co.uk).

Eat & drink With the owner's collection of British Contemporary art adorning the walls, the Quod Brasserie & Bar in the Old Bank Hotel is a hearty bistro on the High Street, perfect for a Sunday roast lunch (quod.co.uk). The Grand Café on the High Street (the first coffee house in England, according to Samuel Pepys' diary) does cream teas and cocktails, and The Eagle and Child on St Giles, the meeting spot of Tolkien and CS Lewis's writing group, The Inklings, is worth stopping at for a pint (01865 302 925).

Below: Old Parsonage. Right: *Study of Two Apostles* (1483-1520) by Raphael

