



# SPAIN

TOP SIGHTS, AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES



## Welcome to Spain

*Passionate, sophisticated and devoted to living the good life, Spain is both a stereotype come to life and a country more diverse than you ever imagined.*

Poignantly windswept Roman ruins, cathedrals of rare power and incomparable jewels of Islamic architecture speak of a country where the great civilisations of history have risen, fallen and left behind their indelible mark. More recently, what other country could produce such rebellious and relentlessly creative spirits as Salvador Dalí, Pablo Picasso and Antoni Gaudí? Here, grand monuments to the past coexist alongside architectural creations of such daring that it becomes clear Spain's future will be every bit as original as its past.

But for all the talk of Spain's history, this is a country that lives very much in the present and there's a reason 'fiesta' is one of the best-known words in the Spanish language – life itself is a fiesta here and everyone seems to be invited. Perhaps you'll sense it along a crowded, post-midnight street when all the world has come out to play. Or maybe that moment will come when a flamenco performer touches something deep in your soul.

Food and wine are national obsessions in Spain, and with good reason. The touchstones of Spanish cooking are deceptively simple: incalculable variety, traditional recipes handed down through the generations, and an innate willingness to experiment and see what comes out of the kitchen laboratory.

*There's a reason 'fiesta' is one of the best-known words in the Spanish language*

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## Salamanca

*Stunning architecture, storied history and constant clamour*

Luminous when floodlit, the elegant central square of Salamanca (p207), the Plaza Mayor (p212; pictured right), is possibly the most attractive in all of Spain. It is just one of many highlights in a city whose architectural splendour has few peers in the country. Salamanca is home to one of Europe's oldest and most prestigious universities, so student revelry also lights up the nights. It's this combination of grandeur and energy that makes so many people call Salamanca their favourite city in Spain.





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## Basque Country

### *Fine food and cultural excellence*

The Basque Country (p221) has its own unique flavour. Chefs here have turned bar snacks into an art form. Sometimes called 'high cuisine in miniature', *pintxos* (Basque tapas; pictured left) are piles of flavour and the choice lined up along the counter in any San Sebastián bar will leave first-time visitors gasping: this is Spain's most memorable eating experience. But this is also a relentlessly dynamic cultural region with visitors drawn to Bilbao's shimmering titanium fish, the Museo Guggenheim Bilbao, as well as riverside promenades, clanky funicular railways, an iconic football team and quality museums.

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## Northwest Coast

### *Dramatic coastal scenery and the Camino*

From Cantabria in the east to Asturias and Galicia in the west, Spain's northern shore (p253) is a succession of stunning beaches, postcard-pretty villages and wild Atlantic cliffs. These are also some of Spain's most celebrated foodie destinations, while the hinterland is a rugged spine of mountains and one of the world's most popular sacred walks, the Camino de Santiago all the way into Santiago de Compostela. Top and bottom right: Cudillero (p266)

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## La Rioja Wine Region

*Spain's premier wine region bar none*

La Rioja (p273) is the sort of place where you could spend weeks meandering along quiet roads in search of the finest drop. Bodegas (pictured above) offering wine tastings and picturesque villages that shelter excellent wine museums are the mainstay in this region. The Frank Gehry–designed Hotel Marqués de Riscal, close to Elciego, has been likened to Bilbao's museum in architectural scale and ambition, and has become the elite centre for wine tourism in the region.

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## The Pyrenees

*Spectacular mountains and Spain's best hiking*

Spain is a walker's destination of exceptional variety, but we reckon the Pyrenees (p287) in Navarra, Aragón and Catalonia offer the most special hiking country. Aragón's Parque Nacional de Ordesa y Monte Perdido is one of the high points (pun intended), while its glories are mirrored across the provincial frontier of Parc Nacional d'Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici in Catalonia.

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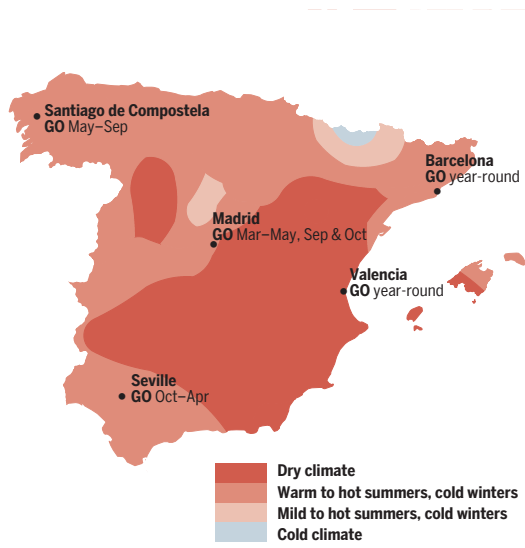


# Plan Your Trip

## Need to Know



### When to Go



### High Season (Jun–Aug, public holidays)

- Accommodation books out and prices increase up to 50%.
- Low season in parts of inland Spain.
- Warm, dry and sunny; more humid in coastal areas.

### Shoulder (Mar–May, Sep & Oct)

- A good time with mild, clear weather and fewer crowds.
- Local festivals can send prices soaring.

### Low Season (Nov–Feb)

- Cold in central Spain; rain in the north and northwest. This is high season in ski resorts.
- Mild temperatures in Andalucía and the Mediterranean coast.
- Many hotels are closed in beach areas, elsewhere prices plummet.

### Currency

Euro (€)

### Language

Spanish (Castilian). Also Catalan, Basque and Galician.

### Visas

Generally not required for stays up to 90 days; some nationalities need a Schengen visa.

### Money

ATMs widely available. Visa and Mastercard are generally accepted; American Express is less common.

### Mobile Phones

Local SIM cards widely available and can be used in European and Australian mobile phones.

### Time

GMT/UTC plus one hour during winter and GMT/UTC plus two hours during daylight saving.

## Daily Costs

### Budget: Less than €80

- Dorm bed: €20 to €30
- Double room in *hostal*: €55 to €65 (more in Madrid and Barcelona)
- Self-catering and lunch *menú del día*: €10 to €15
- Use museum and gallery 'free admission' afternoons

### Midrange: €80–175

- Double room in midrange hotel: €65–140
- Lunch and/or dinner in local restaurant: €20–40
- Car rental: per day from €25

### Top End: More than €175

- Double room in top-end hotel: from €140 (€200 in Madrid, Barcelona and the Balearics)
- Fine dining for lunch and dinner: €150–250
- Regularly stay in *paradores* (luxurious state-owned hotels): €120–200

## Useful Websites

**Fiestas.net** ([www.fiestas.net](http://www.fiestas.net)) Festivals around the country.

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com/spain](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/spain)) Destination information, hotel bookings, traveller forums and more.

**Renfe** ([www.renfe.com](http://www.renfe.com)) Spain's rail network.

**Tour Spain** ([www.tourspain.org](http://www.tourspain.org)) Culture, food and links to hotels and transport.

**Turespaña** ([www.spain.info](http://www.spain.info)) Spanish tourist office's site.

## Arriving in Spain

### Adolfo Suárez Madrid-Barajas Airport, Madrid (p65)

**Metro** (€4.50, 30 minutes to the centre) Runs from 6.05am to 1.30am

**Exprés Aeropuerto bus** (€5; 40 minutes) Runs 24 hours between the airport and Puerta de Atocha train station or Plaza de Cibeles

**Private minibuses** (€30)

**Taxis** (€30)

### El Prat Airport, Barcelona (p107)

**Buses** (€5.90, 30 to 40 minutes to the centre) Run every five to 10 minutes from 6.10am to 1.05am

**Trains** (€4.10, 25 to 30 minutes to the centre) Run half-hourly from 5.42am to 11.38pm

**Taxis** (€30, 30 minutes to the centre)

## Getting Around

Spain's public transport system is one of the best in Europe.

**Train** Extremely efficient, from slow inter-city regional trains to some of the fastest trains on the planet. More routes are added yearly.

**Car** Vast network of motorways radiating from Madrid, shadowed by smaller but often more picturesque minor roads.

**Bus** The workhorses of the Spanish roads, from slick express coaches to stop-everywhere village-to-village buses.