



Spain

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Best Places to Eat

- » La Cuchara de San Telmo (p1086)
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- » Tickets (p1078)
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Best Places to Stay

- » Hotel Meninas (p1056)
- » Hospedería Alma Andalusi (p1103)
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Why Go?

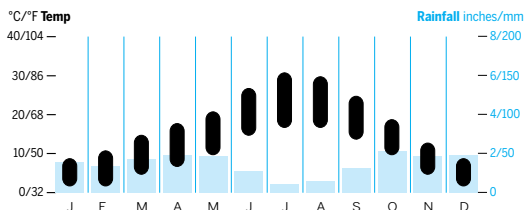
Passionate, sophisticated and devoted to living the good life, Spain is at once a stereotype come to life and a country more diverse than you ever imagined.

Spanish landscapes stir the soul, from the jagged Pyrenees and wildly beautiful cliffs of the Atlantic northwest to charming Mediterranean coves, while astonishing architecture spans the ages at seemingly every turn. Spain's cities march to a beguiling beat, rushing headlong into the 21st century even as timeless villages serve as beautiful signposts to Old Spain. And then there's one of Europe's most celebrated (and varied) gastronomic scenes.

But, above all, Spain lives very much in the present. Perhaps you'll sense it along a crowded after-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. Whenever it happens, you'll find yourself nodding in recognition: *this* is Spain.

When to Go

Madrid



Mar & Apr Spring wildflowers, Semana Santa processions and mild southern temps.

May & Sep Mild and often balmy weather but without the crowds of high summer.

Jun–Aug Spaniards hit the coast in warm weather, but quiet corners still abound.

AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** Euro
- » **Language** Spanish (Castilian), Catalan, Basque, Galician (Gallego)
- » **Money** ATMs everywhere
- » **Visas** Schengen rules apply

Fast Facts

- » **Area** 505,370 sq km
- » **Population** 47 million
- » **Capital** Madrid
- » **Country code** 34
- » **Emergency** 112

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	€0.82
Canada	C\$1	€0.77
Japan	¥100	€0.83
New Zealand	NZ\$1	€0.65
UK	UK£1	€1.18
USA	US\$1	€0.78

Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room** €60
- » **Lunchtime three-course menú del día** €9–13
- » **Museum entrance** €8–10
- » **Beer** €2–3
- » **Madrid metro ticket** €12.20

Resources

- » **Tour Spain** (www.tourspain.org)
- » **Turespaña** (www.spain.info)
- » **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com/spain)

Connections

Spanish airports are among Europe's best connected, while the typical overland route leads many travellers from France over the Pyrenees into Spain. Rather than taking the main road/rail route along the Mediterranean coast (or between Biarritz and San Sebastián), you could follow lesser known, pretty routes over the mountains. There's nothing to stop you carrying on to Portugal: numerous roads and the Madrid–Lisbon rail line connect the two countries.

The most obvious sea journeys lead across the Strait of Gibraltar to Morocco. The most common routes connect Algeciras or Tarifa with Tangier, from where there's plenty of transport deeper into Morocco. Car ferries also connect Barcelona with Italian ports.

There are two main rail lines to Spain from Paris, one to Madrid via the Basque Country, and another to Barcelona; both are to be upgraded to a high-speed service. The latter connects with services to the French Riviera and Switzerland.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Marvel at Barcelona's art nouveau–influenced modernist architecture and seaside style before taking the train to San Sebastián, with a stop in Zaragoza on the way. Head on to Bilbao for the Guggenheim Museum and end the trip living it up in Madrid's legendary night scene.

One Month

Fly into Seville and embark on a route exploring the town and picture-perfect Ronda, Granada and Córdoba. Take the train to Madrid, from where you can check out Toledo, Salamanca and Segovia. Make east for the coast and Valencia, detour northwest into the postcard-perfect villages of Aragón and the Pyrenees, then travel east into Catalonia, spending time in Tarragona before reaching Barcelona. Take a plane or boat for the Balearic Islands, from where you can get a flight home.

Essential Food & Drink

- » **Paella** This signature rice dish comes in infinite varieties, although Valencia is its true home.
- » **Cured meats** Wafer-thin slices of *chorizo*, *lomo*, *salchichón* and *jamón serrano* appear on most Spanish tables.
- » **Tapas** These bite-sized morsels range from uncomplicated Spanish staples to pure gastronomic innovation.
- » **Olive oil** Spain is the world's largest producer of olive oil.
- » **Wine** Spain has the largest area of wine cultivation in the world. La Rioja and Ribera del Duero are the best-known wine-growing regions.