

DESTINATION REPORT

YOUR TRAVEL SPECIALIST

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YOUR TRAVEL SNAPSHOT: Destinations included in this guide

Spain

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INTRODUCTION

Spain offers visitors a richness and complexity that may surprise. All the tempting postcard fantasy pictures are there in reality, side-by-side with other, less-expected ones.

You may come across fiesta dancers in a village square, a young man practicing flamenco guitar, a medieval Arab fortress or windmills so enormous Don Quixote could be forgiven for thinking they were giants.

But there's also the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, its mind-bending shapes like those of no other museum in the world, just as the exuberant architecture of Gaudi's Sagrada Familia in Barcelona makes it like no other church in the world.

You may see ultracool young Madrilenos togged out in urban chic, talking endlessly on their cell phones; international businesspeople hurrying to appointments; and tourists and golfers of many nations flocking to Spain's spectacular countryside and balmy beaches. There are super-fast trains, and there are villages where life goes at a pace that has changed little for centuries.

Spain today is an engaged member of the European Union that has transformed itself from a remote backwater to a modern nation, all within living memory. The contrasts, the colors and the vibrant spirit of the place will stay with you for a long time.

GEOGRAPHY

Spain is Europe's second-most mountainous country (only Switzerland has a higher terrain), and the climate varies dramatically according to altitude as well as latitude. In the province of Granada, it is possible to ski in the mountains and lounge on a beach, both in the same day.

True alpine conditions prevail in many of Spain's mountains, from the Pyrenees along the border with France to the Sierra Nevada above Granada in the south, and the central two-fifths of the country is primarily high plains crossed by mountain ranges and rivers. Besides the mainland peninsula, Spanish possessions include the Mediterranean Balearic Islands, the Canary Archipelago (in the Atlantic off the coast of Africa) and the Moroccan coastal enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla.

Mainland Spain can be divided into three climatic zones: the Oceanic in the north (the rainiest and greenest part along the Bay of Biscay and in Galicia); the Mediterranean Zone (sunny and semiarid); and central Spain (hot in summer, cold in winter, relatively dry).

Spain is also divided into distinctive, politically autonomous regions, each with its own culture and history, and several with their own languages (including Catalonia, Valencia, Galicia and the Basque region). Hot, arid Andalusia, to the south, is the home of flamenco, bullfighting and spectacular Moorish architecture.

HISTORY

Spain's history was shaped by many forces—the Celts, Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans and Germanic tribes (Visigoths, Vandals) all had a strong hand in influencing the people of the Iberian Peninsula, of which Spain is a part. Perhaps the greatest artistic and intellectual ferment in Spain, though, was under the Islamic conquerors, the Moors (Arabs and Berbers), who ruled parts of the peninsula from 711 to 1492. This period of history in al-Andalus was characterized by a diffusion of culture among Jews, Christians and Muslims, and Europe, North Africa and the Middle East.

Periods of peace and cooperation were interspersed with spells of fierce fighting. Universities, unique architecture and an age of religious toleration were all fostered by many of the Islamic rulers, most notably those of the Caliphate of Cordoba in the late 10th and early 11th centuries. After a protracted struggle with Christian forces, the Moors were finally defeated in 1492. That same year, all Jews were expelled from Spain, and Columbus crossed the Atlantic under the Spanish flag to reveal the New World to Europe.

The next century saw the apogee of Spain's power and influence throughout the world: Theirs was the first worldwide empire. In addition to their adventures far afield, Spanish kings controlled all or parts of what are now Portugal, the Netherlands, Italy and France. By the early 1600s, most Muslims had been forced to convert or were expelled from the peninsula. Imperial ambitions brought on imperial excess, however, and adventurism finally sapped the strength of Spain. The country went into a decline that saw it lose nearly all of its colonial possessions by the late 1800s.

In the early part of the 20th century, Spain was in turmoil as its traditional culture and economy clashed with modern political and social forces. The breaking point was reached in 1936 with the first shots of the horrific Spanish Civil War. Fascist dictator Gen. Francisco Franco, with the help of Hitler and Mussolini, emerged victorious from the civil war and ruled until his death in 1975. He left Spain in the care of King Juan Carlos I, who helped transform Spain into a modern democracy.

With its new freedoms, the country enjoyed a cultural renaissance in the 1980s and 1990s, and joined the European Union in 1986. The country held the world's attention in 1992 as host of the Summer Olympics (in Barcelona) and Expo '92 (in Seville). It is fully integrated into the EU and uses the euro as its currency.

SNAPSHOT

Spain's main attractions are historical sites, lively cities, some of the finest art in the world, castles, cathedrals, the Alhambra, shopping, the White Villages, traditional fiestas, cultural events, beaches, museums, caves, hiking, watersports and great food and wine.

Anyone who likes to travel will enjoy Spain. From its art museums and its tapas bars to its beaches, Spain's appeal is so broad that it's truly a country with something for everyone.

POTPOURRI

Menorca's port city of Mahon was the birthplace of mayonnaise.

At 2,133 ft/650 m, Madrid is the highest capital city in Europe. It became the capital in 1561 when Philip II moved his court from Toledo to be closer to his beloved palace, El Escorial.

Point Tarifa is the southernmost spot in Europe. It is considered the best spot in Europe for windsurfing and kitesurfing.

Morocco is only 8 mi/13 km from Spain's southern shore across the Strait of Gibraltar. There are ferries and excursions from Algeciras and Tarifa.

After Italy, Spain has the second-highest number of UNESCO World Heritage sites of any country in the world.

The Torre de Hercules in La Coruna on the Galician coast is claimed as the oldest lighthouse in the world, dating from 20 BC.

Christopher Columbus brought the first cocoa beans to Spain on his return from his last voyage to the Caribbean in 1502. The Spanish explorer Hernan Cortes drank a bitter chocolate drink with Aztecs in 1519. He added cane sugar and spices to make it more palatable. Back home, the Spanish served it piping hot and created the world's first hot chocolate.

Don Quixote by Miguel de Cervantes, published in 1615, is considered the world's first novel in the modern sense of the word.

SIGHTSEEING

Spain's sights encompass a huge variety of interests.

For history buffs, Spain is second in the world with UNESCO-designated World Heritage Cultural sites. It also has 13 World Heritage cities—Avila, Alcala de Henares, Caceres, Cordoba, Cuenca, Eivissa, Merida, Salamanca, San Cristobal de la Laguna, Santiago de Compostela, Segovia, Tarragona and Toledo. For sightseers, each of these cities is filled with monuments and buildings steeped in centuries of history and ethnic diversity.

Cultural aficionados will enjoy visits to Spain's churches, palaces or museums, such as the Gothic La Catedral (La Seu) in Barcelona, the grandiose Alhambra complex in Granada, the mosque in Cordoba, the futuristic-looking Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, the modern art museum Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid or Pablo Picasso's birth home in Malaga. Also popular are visits to Spain's opera houses and theaters.

Other popular sightseeing trips include tours of wineries and wine centers where you can partake in wine tastings and, in some cases, take gastronomy classes.

For those more interested in out-of-the-way experiences, explore one of Spain's White Villages in Andalusia, where time seems to stand still. Or visit the Canary Islands for lots of beaches, volcanoes and lush scenery.

Spain has an extraordinary number and variety of traditional fiestas, many of them with clear medieval or even prehistoric roots. The most spectacular include the bull running in Pamplona, burning huge *ninots* (satirical effigies) at the *fallas* in Valencia, mock battles between Moors and Christians on the Costa Blanca, and Easter Week processions of hooded "penitents" in Seville and elsewhere.

Spain has many attractions specifically for children. Two of the most popular are the theme parks of Port Aventura, near Tarragona in Catalonia, and Parque Warner Madrid.

RECREATION

Outdoor activities include walking and hiking, especially in one of Spain's 14 national parks. Of these, four are in the Canary Islands and one in the Balearics. Two of the mainland parks are in the Pyrenees: Aigüestortes i Estany (in Catalonia) and Ordesa y Monte Perdido (north of Zaragoza).

The Picos de Europa (in the extreme north) and Sierra Nevada (in the extreme south) are also magnificent areas of mountain. Donana (southwest of Seville) and Tablas de Daimiel (in La Mancha), meanwhile, are wetlands of scientific importance.

For additional information, contact the National Park Offices. Phone 34-97-369-6189.
<http://reddeparquesnacionales.mma.es/parques/index.htm>.

For locals and tourists, windsurfing is a popular pastime, with Tarifa being one of the busiest spots in Spain for wind- and kitesurfing. While there, you can rent equipment and/or take classes on how to wind- and kitesurf. For additional information, contact one of the area's professional sports centers such as Dragon Kite School. Phone 34-66-088-2710. <http://www.dragonkiteschool.com>.

Indoor time can be spent in one of the many local wellness centers and spas, where relaxation is the top priority, especially for a busy traveler on the go.

SPECTATOR SPORTS

Spain's national sport is undeniably *fútbol* (soccer). The crowds at games can be massive, noisy and festive, depending on how the teams are faring. The season runs September-June. The two top teams are the eternal rivals Real Madrid and Barca (Barcelona). Other successful teams are Valencia, Atletico Madrid and Bilbao Atletico. All these compete in a national league and in an annual tournament, the Copa del Rey.

Another major sport, although less significant in the numbers of spectators it attracts, is basketball. The sporting calendar also includes golf and tennis tournaments, and car, motorbike and yacht races. All sports events are advertised in the daily press and in the weekly supplements offered by most daily newspapers.

Spain's trademark outdoor spectacle is *la corrida* (bullfighting), which combines elements of a sporting and a cultural event but is in a category of its own. The major events in the bullfighting calendar draw huge numbers of die-hard fans who consider it an inviolable part of their country's culture, an elaborately choreographed showdown between man and fierce animal.

A sizeable number of Spaniards regard *la corrida* with disapproval as an outdated, ritualized form of animal cruelty—Catalonia even went so far as to ban it in 2012—but most of the country is indifferent to its continuation. For the foreign visitor, it is best to suspend judgment and accept it as it is. If you want to attend a bullfight, try to go with someone who can explain what is happening and you will get much more out of the experience.

SHOPPING

Shopping in Spain is no longer the bargain it used to be. Nevertheless, the country offers unique handcrafted items: contemporary and antique paintings and sculpture, knotted rugs, guitars, ornate handmade shawls, decorative pottery, handmade furniture, and ornamental combs and fans.

Other items found in Spain are Lladro (Spanish porcelain), copper and steel wares, leather goods (purses, shoes, wallets), North African goods from Morocco and Algeria, and Spanish antiques (especially on Calle del Prado in Madrid).

Also popular is to visit unique shopping areas that offer specialty Spanish goods. Regional specialties include various local liqueurs and wines; swords and knives in Toledo; exquisite lace embroideries in the towns of Torrijos, Oropesa and Lagartera; and ceramics in Talavera, Illescas, Cuenca, Numancia de la Sagra and Manises (Valencia).

Many shops in Spain also double as art and antique galleries, worth visiting for their displays of historical pieces and other collectibles.

Shopping Hours: Monday-Saturday 9:30 am-1:30 pm and 4:30-8 pm. Larger department stores and malls are open Monday-Saturday 10 am-9 or 10 pm, with occasional openings on Sunday.

DINING OVERVIEW

We think Spanish cooking is reason enough for a trip to Spain. Part of the pleasure of dining on the Iberian Peninsula is variety—each region has a distinctive style.

Galicia is known for its wonderful seafood (octopus is one of our favorites); the Basque country for its *bacalao* (a preserved salt cod that tastes better than it sounds, often cooked in delicious *pil pil* sauce); Castile for its cheese, grilled meats and *cochinillo* (roast suckling pig); Extremadura for Iberian or Serrano ham (a dry-cured spiced ham similar to Italy's Prosciutto di Parma); Navarra for trout and chorizo (a spicy sausage); Andalusia for gazpacho, *salmorejo* and *ajo blanco* (delicious chilled soups) and tapas; Catalonia for grilled rabbit, *romesco* (a sweet pepper sauce traditionally eaten with grilled spring onions) and *butifarra* (blood sausage).

Paella (a delicious saffron-flavored rice dish with artichokes, green beans, poultry and rabbit, or fish and shellfish) is found throughout Spain, but the most authentic version comes from Valencia, where the dish originated.

Other dishes to try include *sopa de pescado* (fish soup), *parrillada* (a mixture of various fried fish and shellfish) and grilled lamb and rabbit. *Cocido* (pronounced *co-THEE-do*) is a traditional Madrilenian dish made from sausage, bacon, garbanzo beans, cabbage and boiled meat—it's especially popular in winter.

Desserts include flan (baked egg custard), *turrón* (marzipan, chocolate or nougat), *crema Catalana* (egg custard with a crunchy glazed top), *tarta de Santiago* (a cake made with almonds) and *pijama* (a silky combination of peaches, flan and whipped cream).

One of the best ways to sample Spanish cooking is at a tapas bar. Tapas are small portions of just about anything: cheese, olives, squid, smoked shrimp, sausage, fried potatoes in a paprika sauce (*patatas bravas*) and marinated vegetables, just to name a few. Order enough little plates, and you will have a meal.

Of course, no meal is complete without a bottle of good Spanish wine. In supermarkets and restaurants there is always a good selection of *tinto* (red), *blanco* (white) and *rosado* (rose) wines, often at bargain prices. Rioja is considered by many to be the best wine-growing region. The outputs of many other Spanish wine regions (*denominacion de origen* or DO)—Rias Baixas, Ribeiro, Penedes, Rueda and Ribera del Duero, to name but a handful—are worth exploring, as well.

Sherry, a fortified white wine, comes from the Andalusian city of Jerez. A drier version, manzanilla, comes from the coastal town of Sanlúcar de Barrameda, where it accompanies to perfection the locally caught prawns. Spanish brandies are also worth a try. *Cava*, a bubbly wine similar to champagne, comes from Catalonia. It is best sampled in one of the cava bars or bodegas (wine cellars), which range from expensive to downright homey.

Coffee is another favorite, and it comes in several different ways: *café solo* (espresso), *cortado* (an espresso with a drop of milk), *café con leche* (an espresso with a lot of milk) or *carajillo* (an espresso with a shot of brandy or rum). Spanish coffee is very strong. If you want a weaker cup, ask for *un americano*.

At the outdoor cafes, you may think that an awful lot of people are drinking milk. It's probably *horchata*, a cool, refreshing, nonalcoholic beverage made from a sweet root that comes from Valencia. And Spanish hot chocolate (*chocolate*) will surprise you—it's so sweet and thick you could almost eat it with a spoon.

In Spain, lunch starts at 1:30 pm, and dinner often begins at 9 pm or later, especially in summer.

ETIQUETTE

Spain has made steady economic progress and is a vital member of the European Union. Business travelers will find a moderately affluent country, in step with the age of high technology but still maintaining many of its traditions.

Appointments—You may find it valuable to have a local intermediary who can assist in establishing appointments. Schedule meetings well in advance. As a visitor, you should be punctual but anticipate that your hosts may be less prompt. This can vary by region, however. Catalonians (from the region near Barcelona and Girona) and Basques (from the northern region around Bilbao and San Sebastian) pride themselves on their efficiency and timeliness.

Personal Introductions—Handshakes are the typical greeting. Last names with the appropriate Spanish title are used. If your acquaintance has a professional title, you will learn it when introduced; if not, *senor* (male), *senora* (married female) and *senorita* (unmarried female) are appropriate. The title and the person's last name should be used until you are instructed otherwise.

Note that it is typical for Spanish people to have two surnames, one from their father and one from their mother. The father's surname will be given first during the introduction, and that's the name that is used to address or speak of the person. Thus, "Senor Federico Garcia Lorca " would be addressed as "Senor Garcia." Dual-sided business cards—one side in Spanish, one in English—are appropriate.

Negotiating—Business is typically preceded by small talk and pleasantries. Negotiations can be a more extended process than in northern European countries. Companies tend to be hierarchical, so focus on those people of your equal rank or higher. At the same time, the opinion of everyone in the company is important. You are an outsider and must ingratiate yourself. Thus, expect many questions about your business, background and family. Intuition as much as objective fact is important in their impression of you, so remain warm and friendly in your demeanor. Anticipate that many of the people important to a decision may not be present in any given meeting.

Business Entertaining—Lunch and dinner are the meals most commonly attended by business associates. Lunch is usually the more productive for deal-making, but the business discussions should be saved for the very end of the meal, during coffee. Know that dinner is usually served quite late—9 or 10 pm. Spaniards often fill the gap between lunch and dinner by snacking on tapas (appetizers) at cafes and taverns.

Body Language—Conversations take place at close quarters, and polite conversational touching may be practiced. Even in some business environments it is common to greet and say goodbye to women by kissing them on both cheeks, but a man should allow the woman to initiate this.

Gift Giving—In business contexts, gifts are typically given at the conclusion of successful negotiations. Gifts should be opened and appreciated immediately. Appropriate personal gifts when visiting a home include flowers or chocolate, but avoid chrysanthemums, dahlias or 13 of anything.

Conversation—If you don't speak Spanish, try to learn at least a few phrases well. Spanish culture is always a good topic, as is Spanish literature if you are knowledgeable. Sports and travel are good topics. Do not criticize bullfighting should the topic arise. Be aware that, in many regards, Spain is still a country of regions: Many people will identify more strongly with their local area than with the country as a whole.

PERSONAL SAFETY

In general, Spain is no more dangerous than other countries in western Europe, though travelers should exercise common sense and remain aware of their surroundings. Petty thievery is the most common threat for visitors. Pickpockets and purse snatchers are as common in Spain as in any other modern Western country, especially in

crowded areas and in large cities such as Madrid, Barcelona, Malaga and Seville. Always keep a hand on your purse or travel bag, especially at outdoor cafes. Never leave valuables in your car, and take a lock to secure your belongings if you're traveling by train.

For five decades the Basque Country has had its own home-grown terrorist group, ETA, which has exported its campaigns to the rest of the country. In January 2011 the ETA declared a permanent ceasefire, and there have been no incidents since. Security advisers still urge caution, however, as the group has broken ceasefires before, and there is always the possibility of a split in the movement with a renegade faction returning to violent tactics.

In an emergency, dial 112 and ask for *policia* (police), *ambulancia* (ambulance) or *bomberos* (firefighters). This number can be dialed free of charge from any telephone, including mobiles.

For the latest information, contact your country's travel-advisory agency.

HEALTH

Spain has modern medical and dental facilities, but take along all prescription and nonprescription drugs you'll need for your trip—your brand names might be unfamiliar to some pharmacies in Spain.

In general, you can eat the food and drink the tap water throughout the country. The sun is quite strong, so take sunglasses, a hat and plenty of sunscreen. Be sure to take along a comfortable pair of walking shoes.

For more information, contact your country's health-advisory agency.

DOS & DON'TS

Do be careful where you light up. Spain's antismoking law bans smoking in enclosed public spaces, which includes bars, restaurants, hotel lobbies, casinos, clubs, cinemas, theaters, office buildings, open-decked tourist buses and airports.

Don't expect the language to sound the same as it does in Mexico or many other Spanish-speaking countries. For instance, the letter *z* and the letter *c* within a word are pronounced as *th*. (For example, Ibiza is pronounced *e-BEETH-a*). In Andalusia, the letter *s* is seldom pronounced, especially when it falls at the end of a word.

Do expect to get a lot of male attention if you're a woman traveling alone, especially in Andalusia or on the southern Mediterranean coast. The best response is no response at all—any attention given is likely to be misinterpreted.

Don't wear shorts in churches. In fact, it's best to save them for the beach. Spanish people generally dress well, especially in cities, and you will stand out as a tourist by wearing shorts, skimpy tops or other too-casual clothes.

Do take a siesta. Outside the large cities (and in some cases, even within cities), museums, shops and businesses shut down for the afternoon siesta, generally 1-4 pm. It's an opportunity to refresh and recharge yourself, as well as to avoid the hottest part of the day. If you must be out, wander quietly through residential streets during those hours.

Geostats

Passport/Visa Requirements: Passport needed by citizens of the U.S. and Canada. A tourist visa is not required for a visit of up to three months. Reconfirm travel document requirements with your carrier before departure.

Population: 46,464,053.

Languages: Castilian Spanish (official). Catalan, Gallego, Basque and Valenciano have joint-official status in their respective regions.

Predominant Religions: Christian (Roman Catholic).

Time Zone: 1 hour ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (+1 GMT). Daylight Saving Time is observed from the end of March to the end of October.

Voltage Requirements: 220 volts. 50 Hz.

Telephone Codes: 34, country code; 91, city code for Madrid; 93, city code for Barcelona;

Currency Exchange

The currency in Spain is the euro, which is divided into 100 cents.

ATMs—most with instructions in English—are located in all cities and most small towns, usually in or outside banks. Outside of normal banking hours, you gain access to ATMs by inserting your credit or cash card into a slot in the door. You can lock the door from inside.

Most banks will change traveler's checks, but the commissions vary. Exchanging money is more streamlined at the big banks in city centers than at small local branches. Private exchange bureaus are located in the city centers, and most stay open until midnight or later. Although private bureaus generally don't charge commission, they tend to give a less favorable rate of exchange.

Taxes

A value-added tax (called IVA) of 21% is added to the price of most goods and services. With a little paperwork, nonresidents from outside the European Union can obtain a tax refund for purchases made in Spain. To obtain the refund, you must spend more than 90 euros in a single store displaying a "tax-free" sticker. You won't get all the tax back, because part of it is retained as a commission.

You need to present three things to the VAT refund officer at the airport before departure to get a refund: the article you purchased, the receipt and a refund form (which must be picked up at the place of purchase). Note that only unused articles are eligible for a refund. If everything is in order, the VAT refund officer will give you a final form to be mailed in for your refund. (For your own convenience, see the VAT officer before checking your bags and have your purchases in an easy-to-reach place.)

Some larger stores have a streamlined process: They handle most of the paperwork and then mail the refund to you, sometimes minus a fee. Private VAT refund services, located at the airport, will give you an immediate refund minus a fee, which is usually a percentage of the refund.

If you are traveling to other countries in the European Union, you can claim your refunds only at your exit point from the EU. In other words, if you buy goods in Spain, then travel on to Portugal and France, and later depart the EU from Paris, you have to claim the VAT refunds from all three countries at the airport in Paris.

Tipping

Although a service charge is usually included in the bill, for good service in a restaurant you can tip 5%-10% of the total amount. Taxi drivers expect a tip of 10% of the fare.

Weather

The months April-June and September-October are the best times to visit. July and August are generally very hot, and it can be a bit cool in October in the higher elevations and in the north. Sweaters are often needed for evenings.

Winter, though generally mild, can be rainy, foggy and windy. We think winter, even on the Costa del Sol, is on the cool side—much too cool to sunbathe and swim. It rains more on the Bay of Biscay coast and in the northwest (Galicia) than on the southern Mediterranean coast. The temperature cools dramatically at high altitudes.

What to Wear

Spain is a conservative country. In the cities, people dress stylishly and neatly. It's best to save shorts for the beach, and wear skirts, cropped trousers, fashionable long shorts or lightweight slacks in towns and cities. Never wear shorts in a church.

The summer sun is intense, so take a hat, sunglasses and sunscreen to avoid overexposure. Take a light jacket or sweater with you for mornings and evenings in autumn and spring, and warmer clothes for the mountains or in the winter months. Above all, pack comfortable walking shoes.

For business, men should wear plain, conservative business suits and ties—dark colors in winter, lighter in summer. Women should dress conservatively in a business environment.

Telephone

Public pay phones accept coins, phone cards issued by Telefonica (Spanish Telecom) and credit cards. The phones have clear instructions in English. You can also find pay phones in many bars and cafes, although they tend to cost more. You can buy Telefonica phone cards at post offices, tobacco shops (*estancos*) and newsstands.

In most cities you can make cheap international calls at phone centers, called *locutorios*, which offer discounted international connections. You make your call in a private booth and pay in cash when you're through. International or national calls from your hotel room are very expensive.

Using your cell (mobile) phone abroad can also be expensive. Before traveling abroad, check with your cell phone provider regarding connectivity issues and usage rates.

Regular Spanish phone numbers contain nine digits: The area code must be dialed for all calls, even if you are calling from within the same city or region. The area code for Madrid is 91, Barcelona is 93, Seville is 95 and Valencia is 96. Some other cities' area codes may have three digits.

For international calls, first dial 00, then the country code, then the area code and number. Call 1004 for assistance.

Spanish cell phone numbers begin with 6, toll-free lines with 900 and special-rate services with 902. For directory assistance, dial 11822 for Spain or 11825 for international directory enquiries.

Internet Access

Internet access is available at cybercafes in the larger towns and cities. In metro areas, rates can be as low as 1 or 2 euros per hour. Many hotels, cafes and bars also offer free Wi-Fi access.

WORKcenter is a chain of office-supply and support shops that also offers access to the Internet. It has multiple locations throughout Spain, including in Barcelona, Madrid, Seville and Valencia. For more information, see <http://www.workcenter.es>.

Mail & Package Services

The postal service is generally reliable. Post offices (*correos*) can be found in most town centers with working hours that vary from office to office. In Madrid, larger post offices are typically open Monday-Friday 8:30 am-8:30 pm and Saturday 9:30 am-1 pm. Smaller offices may be closed on Saturday.

Western Union services are also available through the post offices. For additional information, see <http://www.correos.es>.

Newspapers & Magazines

The major Spanish national newspaper is *El Pais*. It produces an English insert for the *International Herald Tribune*. Other widely distributed dailies include *ABC*, *El Mundo*, *La Vanguardia* and *La Razon*. Each region also has its own newspaper.

In large cities and tourist resorts, you can find a good selection of international newspapers as well as local English-language publications that have entertainment, dining and nightlife information. These include *Costa Blanca News*, *Sur in English* and *Majorca Daily Bulletin*. There are also many informative Web sites run by expatriate residents, particularly in Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia and on the Costa Blanca and Costa del Sol.

Air

Spain's two principal international airports are Madrid's Barajas Airport (MAD), which is 10 mi/16 km northeast of the city (<http://www.madrid-mad.com>), and Barcelona Airport (BCN), which is 6 mi/10 km southwest of Barcelona (<http://www.barcelona-airport.com>). European flights winging travelers to the Costa del Sol make use of Malaga Airport (AGP). <http://www.aena.es>.

Spain also has 46 additional airports. Taxis are available at the major airports, and the fares are usually fixed according to destination, so don't be surprised if the driver doesn't turn on the meter.

Bus

Intercity buses serve many of the same major cities that trains do and for about the same cost. They are more popular than trains among Spaniards and are usually of a high standard—comfortable and reliable.

If you're traveling to smaller towns, a bus may be the only option (other than driving). <http://www.alsa.es>.

Car

Roads are good, and major international car rental agencies are readily available throughout the country. The downside to driving is the traffic—it can be horrible, especially in and around Madrid and Barcelona.

Driving is on the right side of the road. When driving, talking on a cell phone is prohibited. By law, you must carry a spare set of light bulbs, a warning triangle and a yellow reflective jacket—to be worn in the event of roadside emergency—in the passenger compartment, not the trunk.

Citizens of the U.S. and Canada are required to have an International Driver's License (available in your home country through AAA or a similar automobile association).

Ferry

Ferries cross the Strait of Gibraltar to several towns in North Africa. Algeciras is the main departure point for ferries crossing to Tangier, Morocco (the most interesting of arrival points) and Ceuta. There is also daily catamaran service to Tangier from Tarifa. Melilla is served from Malaga and Almeria.

Ferries also connect mainland Spain to the Balearic Islands and Canary Islands, but we'd recommend flying to those destinations. <http://www.trasmediterranea.es>.

Ship

Several cruise lines include stops in Barcelona, Cadiz, Algeciras, Malaga, and the Balearic Islands and Canary Islands.

Train

There's excellent domestic and international rail service, though you'll want to be careful to take the faster trains. Look for the high-speed AVE trains (<http://www.renfe.es>) or the speedy Talgo trains (<http://www.raileurope.com>). Many of the Talgos offer berths for overnight runs, as well as a dining car and bar.

There are also several sightseeing trains. The Transcantabrico, a luxury narrow-gauge train, offers one-week trips (with escorted bus tours at each stop) between Santiago de Compostela and Leon. Regular service runs April-October. <http://www.railspain.net>.

For More Information

Tourist Offices

Madrid: Centro de Turismo Colon, Plaza de Colon, 28046 Madrid. Phone 34-91-701-2210. <http://www.esmadrid.com>.

Barcelona: Oficina de Turismo de Barcelona, Placa Catalunya 17, 08002 Barcelona. Phone 34-93-285-3834. <http://www.barcelonaturisme.com>.

Canada: Spanish National Tourist Office, 2 Bloor St. W., 34th Floor, Toronto, ON M4W 3E2. Phone 416-961-3131. Fax 416-961-1992.

U.S.: Spanish National Tourist Office, 666 5th Ave., 53rd Floor, New York, NY 10103. Phone 212-265-8822. Offices also located in Chicago, Miami and Beverly Hills, California.

Spanish Embassies

Canada: Embassy of the Kingdom of Spain, 74 Stanley St., Ottawa, ON K1M 1P4. Phone 613-747-2252. <http://www.maec.es/subwebs/embajadas/ottawa>.

U.S.: Embassy of Spain, 2375 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20037. Phone 202-452-0100. <http://www.maec.es/subwebs/Embajadas/Washington>.

Foreign Embassies in Spain

Canada: Canadian Embassy, Goya Building, 35 Nunez de Balboa, 28001 Madrid. Phone 34-914-233-250. <http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/spain-espagne>.

U.S.: U.S. Embassy, Serrano 75, 28006 Madrid. Phone 34-91-587-2200. <http://madrid.usembassy.gov>.

Recommended Guidebooks

Spain... A Culinary Road Trip by Mario Batali and Gwyneth Paltrow (Ecco).

Additional Reading

Barcelona by Robert Hughes. A wonderful book that captures the spirit of the city.

Homage to Catalonia by George Orwell. The writer's interesting account of his service in the Spanish Civil War.

Blood of Spain by Ronald Fraser. A collected oral history of the war. Moving and powerful.

The New Spaniards by John Hooper. Classic account of Spain's modern history.

Driving Over Lemons: An Optimist in Andalucia by Chris Stewart. The author's first-person account of settling in the Alpujarras, south of Granada.

The Art of Flamenco by DE Pohren. A classic study of the subject by an American who went to Spain in the 1950s and fell in love with flamenco.

Travellers in Spain by David Mitchell. An anthology presenting the history of Spain through the eyes of its foreign visitors, pen in hand.