

EUROPE · BEACHES · FOOD · WINE · CITY BREAKS · HISTORY · ARCHITECTURE



Spain

Barcelona's Sagrada Família has been under construction since 1882 and is astonishing regardless, while Granada's Alhambra is among the finest surviving Moorish palaces anywhere. Between them lie whitewashed Andalusian villages, Basque pintxo bars, the green north and long Mediterranean coasts. Regional identity runs deep, and each area feels genuinely distinct.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Spain and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 12 August 2026.

 CAPITAL Madrid	 CURRENCY Euro (EUR) £1 ≈ €1.19	 LANGUAGE Spanish, Catalan Galician, Basque	 BEST TIME Apr–Jun, Sep–Oct
 DAILY BUDGET £55–£250 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type C, F 230V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 2h 20m direct ~£50–£200 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+1, UTC+0 standard time

Spain rewards choosing a region rather than racing around. A classic first trip pairs Madrid's art museums with a high-speed train to Barcelona, or loops through Andalucía: Seville, Córdoba's Mezquita and Granada's Alhambra, with the white villages and the Costa del Sol close by. The north feels like a different country – green, rainy and food-obsessed – with San Sebastián, Bilbao's Guggenheim, the Picos de Europa and Santiago de Compostela at the end of the Camino. The Balearic and Canary Islands add beaches, the Canaries year-round.

Spain runs late: lunch at 2pm, dinner at 9.30 or 10, and evening strolls that fill squares with families. It is still good value by western European standards, especially for food – a weekday menú del día buys three courses with a drink at a modest fixed price. July and August bring fierce inland heat and packed coasts; spring and autumn are better for cities and walking. Visitors are often surprised by how strongly Catalans, Basques and Galicians assert their own languages and identities.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

ARCHITECTURE

Alhambra, Granada

The Nasrid palaces' carved stucco, tiled courtyards and reflecting pools, set against the Sierra Nevada, are the high point of Moorish Spain. Tickets with timed palace entry sell out weeks ahead in season.
- 2

ARCHITECTURE

Sagrada Família, Barcelona

Gaudí's basilica, begun in 1882 and still rising, has forest-like columns and stained glass that floods the nave with colour. Book a timed ticket and visit in the afternoon for the warm western light.

3

HISTORY

Real Alcázar, Seville

A royal palace still used by the Spanish monarchy, mixing Mudéjar courtyards, Gothic halls and sprawling gardens. Pair it with the vast cathedral next door and a climb up the Giralda bell tower.

4

NATURE

Picos de Europa

Jagged limestone peaks straddling Asturias, Cantabria and Castilla y León, close to the coast. Ride the Fuente Dé cable car, walk the Cares Gorge trail, and see the glacial lakes of Covadonga.

5

FOOD

San Sebastián's Parte Vieja

The Basque city's old quarter packs dozens of bars with pintxos laid out along their counters. Hop between them with a glass of txakoli, then walk it off along the curve of La Concha beach.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Madrid

≈ 6.8 million people

Come for the Prado, Reina Sofía and Thyssen museums, the Retiro park, tapas crawls around La Latina and a late-night energy that rarely lets up.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Barcelona

≈ 5.6 million people

Gaudí's buildings, the Gothic Quarter, the Boqueria market and city beaches make it irresistible, but book major sights ahead and watch for pickpockets on La Rambla and the metro.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Valencia

≈ 1.6 million people

Spain's third city mixes a handsome old town and central market with the futuristic City of Arts and Sciences, the Turia gardens and the home of paella.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

Holiday regions in Spain

These areas have their own season and weather — see their guides for sea temperatures, resorts and flights.

**Balearic Islands**

Spain Best: May–Jun, Sep 2h 20m from London

Sea up to 26°C ~£150/day

**Canary Islands**

Spain Best: Oct–Mar 4h 30m from London

Sea up to 24°C ~£130/day

**Costa del Sol & Andalucía coast**

Spain Best: May–Jun, Sep–Oct 2h 50m from London

Sea up to 24°C ~£130/day

When to go to Spain

Best time: **Apr–Jun, Sep–Oct.**

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

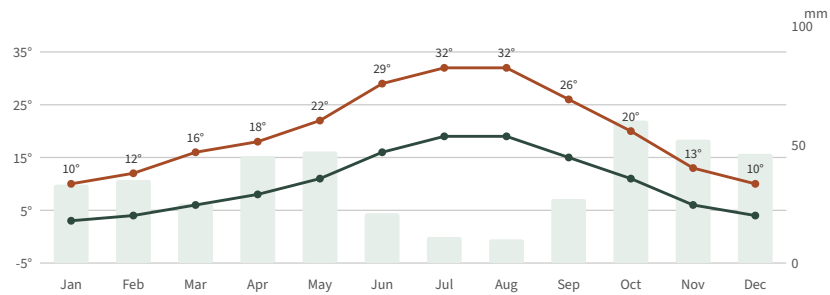
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Madrid

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Mar

Las Fallas

From 15 to 19 March, Valencia fills with giant satirical sculptures, daily firecracker barrages and fireworks, ending when almost all of them are burnt on the final night.

Mar–Apr

Semana Santa

Holy Week brings hooded brotherhoods carrying elaborate religious floats through the streets, most famously in Seville, Málaga and Valladolid; book accommodation well in advance.

Jul

San Fermín

Pamplona's fiesta, from 6 to 14 July, is famed for its morning bull runs, but round-the-clock street parties, parades and music are the real draw for most visitors.

How much does Spain cost?

SHOESTRING

£55

per person / day

≈ €65.47

hostels, street food, buses

MID-RANGE

£115

per person / day

≈ €137

3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis

COMFORTABLE

£250

per person / day

≈ €298

4-star+, guided trips, private transfers

Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Paella

Valencia's rice dish, cooked in a wide, shallow pan; the original uses chicken, rabbit and green beans, and the crisp socarrat on the bottom is prized.

Jamón ibérico

Cured ham from black Iberian pigs, the finest fattened on acorns in the dehesa oak pastures, sliced paper-thin by hand and served at room temperature.

Tortilla de patatas

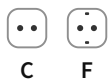
A thick omelette of potatoes and egg, with or without onion – a heated national debate – served by the slice in bars everywhere.

Getting around

High-speed trains are the star: Renfe's AVE and low-cost rivals Ouigo and Iryo link Madrid with Barcelona, Seville, Valencia and Málaga in under three hours. ALSA buses reach smaller towns cheaply. Domestic flights and ferries serve the Balearic and Canary Islands. Hire a car for Andalucía's white villages and the north. Cities have good metro systems, and Cabify and Uber operate in Madrid, Barcelona and other large cities.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



230V — bring a UK-to-C/F adapter

DIALLING CODE

+34

TAP WATER

Generally safe to drink

TIPPING

Not obligatory. Leave small change in bars and around 5–10 per cent in restaurants for good service; locals tip modestly.

ETIQUETTE

Greet shopkeepers with 'hola' or 'buenos días', and friends with two kisses. Eat on Spanish time, cover up away from the beach, and try a word of Catalan or Basque where they are spoken.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Adolfo Suárez Madrid–Barajas Airport (MAD), Madrid; Josep Tarradellas Barcelona–El Prat Airport (BCN), Barcelona; Málaga–Costa del Sol Airport (AGP), Málaga

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Telephone: **112** (ambulance, fire, police)

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

TIME ZONES

UTC+1, UTC+0 (standard time)

DRIVING

On the right

Visas & entry for Spain

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can travel without a visa to the Schengen area, which includes Spain, for up to 90 days in any 180-day period. This applies if you travel: as a tourist; to visit family or friends; to attend business meetings, cultural or sports events; for short-term studies or training.

The requirements for working in Spain are different.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Rabies

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Spain

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Tue 8 Dec 2026	Immaculate Conception
Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Wed 6 Jan 2027	Epiphany
Fri 26 Mar 2027	Good Friday
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Tue 12 Oct 2027	National Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Spanish

ENGLISH	SPANISH	SAY IT
Hello	Hola	OH-lah
Thank you	Gracias	GRAH-thee-ahs
Please	Por favor	por fah-BOR
Excuse me	Disculpe	dees-KOOL-peh
How much is this?	¿Cuánto cuesta?	KWAN-toh KWES-tah

Know before you go

- Book Alhambra and Sagrada Família tickets through the official websites, weeks ahead in spring and summer; resellers charge more and some sell invalid tickets.
- Look for the menú del día at weekday lunchtimes: three courses with bread and a drink for a fixed price, often the best-value meal in Spain.
- Many small shops close from about 2pm to 5pm, and many museums shut on Mondays; plan summer sightseeing for mornings and early evenings.