

THE GUIDE TO TRAVELING IN SPAIN



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Spain: an insider's note

From coastal runs to mountain passes, Spain has to be at the top of the list for anyone who is planning a trip in Europe. A modern and extensive road network means no stone need be left unturned as adventurers explore from corner to corner.

Sprawling outwards from the ever-beating heart that is Spain's capital city of Madrid, each region (*comunidad*) gives its own unique taste of what makes the country so exciting to travel. The exotic flavours of the *fiestas* in the southern region of Andalucia to the oft-forgotten natural beauty of Galicia and the Basque Country in the north, seeing Spain is made easy due to a superb transport system.

If you're looking to drive around Spain, it might be a good idea to get to know the driving culture. It might not be very dangerous, but foreign drivers should have their wits about them and observe the local laws.

This handy guide provides you with all the information you need to know that makes your adventure in Spain trouble free. Read on to prepare yourself for the trip of a lifetime!

Driving in Spain

Spain has become an incredible deal safer to drive in than in the recent past, with the country making huge investment in infrastructure and road safety improvements.

The driving culture is still fairly 'mediterranean' though, meaning that drivers from North America or Northern Europe may need some time to adjust to a relatively aggressive approach.

Driving in the cities

A combination of heavy traffic, one-way streets and unforgiving locals can make driving in Spanish cities quite testing at first.

The traffic is particularly bad in part due to the Spanish *siesta*, which means there are four rush hours in many parts of Spain, from:

- 08.00 to 09.30
- 12.30 to 14.30
- 15.30 to 17.00
- 18.30 to 20.30

In cities like Madrid and Barcelona the 'rush hour' last almost all day, only getting noticeably less congested during the night. In Madrid, there is even an 'alternate number plate scheme' in place to restrict heavy traffic on days of high pollution.

Parking

It might sound odd, but having a calendar at hand when driving around Spain might be a good idea. Some of Spain's small towns and villages have the quirk of only being allowed to park on a certain side of the street depending on if the date is odd or even - so check the parking signs carefully! Wherever you are in Spain, always park in the same direction as the flow of traffic.

Take care where you park your car if it has foreign registration plates, as they tend to be at higher risk of robberies.

If you need to pay for a parking ticket, you can typically do it at a nearby ticket machine; if you don't see one, look around for a tobacco shop (*estanco*), where you'll likely be able to buy one.

Driving between cities

Spain has put a lot of effort into improving its roads in the past few decades. New roads and bypasses have been built, and existing roads have been widened so that they can cater to the growing number of cars.

You'll be able to drive from city to city along the extensive network of *autopistas* and *autovías* (motorways). Some *autopistas* are toll roads, and are among the most expensive in Europe, plan your trip ahead of time.

While the *autopistas* are purpose-built, the *autovías* are typically old roads that have been improved. It'll usually take longer to travel along an *autovía* as the roads are narrower, and are cheaper than *autopistas* as they have no toll roads. You'll have to keep an eye out for service stations and cafes along the route, as they are less common on these roads.

Road rules

If you're coming to Spain from the EU or North America, there won't be many Spanish road rules that take you by surprise. Standard laws are applied, such as the wearing of seatbelts and no use of mobile phones without a hands-free device.

There are a few rules that are a bit unusual, however, with the following likely to land you a fine for breaking:

- Driving without a shirt or proper shoes
- Driving with your hand or arm out the window
- Biting your nails or kissing a passenger while driving
- Offensive hand gestures to other drivers

Make sure you stick to the law and avoid any unnecessary fines by getting the full info on traffic laws on the [DGT website](http://www.dgt.es/es/seguridad-vial/normativa-y-legislacion/)¹ (in Spanish).

¹ <http://www.dgt.es/es/seguridad-vial/normativa-y-legislacion/>



Speed limits

Breaking the speed limit can result in a fine of between €100 and €600, with up to six points taken off your license. There is generally leeway of 10% over the speed limit, but we advise that you do stick to the following restrictions:

- 120 km/h on motorways
- 100 km/h on dual carriageways
- 90 km/h on single carriageway roads
- 50 km/h in towns

Note that these speed limits are general, and can vary from road to road. Make sure you know the speed limit at all times when driving.

Alcohol limits

There used to be a fairly widespread culture of drink-driving in Spain until stricter alcohol limits and punishments were implemented to tackle the problem, dramatically reducing the number of road accidents as a result.

The current blood alcohol limits are:

- 0.3 g/litre for drivers with less than two years' driving experience
- 0.5 g/litre for all other drivers

Put into context, the upper limit of 0.5g/litre is roughly one glass of wine or a strong beer. With that in mind, young drivers are effectively banned from drinking altogether.

To be as safe as possible, it's advisable to refrain from drinking altogether if you are going to drive. If you do get pulled over, refusing a breathalyser test can result in a fine and a deduction of 6 points from your license.

Traffic violation

Breaking the rules of the road in Spain can result in a fine, points on your license and/or jail time. Fines can be collected on the spot, and the only way a foreigner can avoid paying it then and there is by providing a residence or company address, or by presenting a Spanish bail bond. If you can't pay the fine or provide any of these, your car will be impounded.

No matter the nature of the fine, the police will give you a *boletín de denuncia* which specifies the violation and the amount. If you don't have to pay the fine on the spot, you can get a 50% reduction if you pay for it within 20 days. A fine can also be appealed within the same timeframe, but the reduced fee won't apply.

Fines can be [paid online](#)² by credit or debit card or at any Provincial Traffic Department located in all provinces in Spain, via bank transfer to the [DGT account](#)³, or in cash at any [Caixabank branch](#)⁴ in the country.

To pay a fine, you will need to provide the following:

- Name and surname
- ID, passport or residence permit number
- Date of the traffic violation
- Record number, found on the top-right corner of the *boletín de denuncia*
- Total amount of the fine

² <http://multas.dgt.es/>

³ <https://sede.dgt.gob.es/es/tramites-y-multas/alguna-multa/alguna-multa-en/>

⁴ https://www4.caixabank.es/apl/localizador/caixamaps/index_en.html



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Got a question about a traffic violation?

The DGT is available to answer questions regarding traffic violations, and can be reached at +34 902 508 686. Their opening hours are Monday to Friday, 8am to 10pm, and Saturday, 8am to 3pm.

Alternatively, [Línea Directa's](#)⁵ traffic fine management service can help you deal with fines and appeal unfair ones.

What to have in your car

Before you set off on your travels, make sure you have the following items in your vehicle. Not only are they useful in case of emergencies, but it'll also make things go a lot smoother should you get pulled over as they are mandatory to have in your car:

- ID or residence permit
- Car registration documents
- Driving licence
- Vehicle insurance valid in Spain, such as offered by Línea Directa
- Two hazard triangles
- A headlamp converter if your car is from a country with left-side driving
- A spare tyre and the tools to change it
- If you need glasses for driving, you must have a spare pair in the car
- *Declaración Amistosa de accidente de Automóvil* - a form to be filled in in the event of an accident
- Reflective vest

⁵ <https://www.lineadirecta.com>

— Renting a car

Car rentals in Spain work the same way as they do all over Europe. You'll need to show your driving license, and if you're not from the EU you'll need to have an international driving permit. Drivers under the age of 25 will normally have to pay an insurance surcharge.

The price of renting a car in Spain is a fairly affordable, with the price a little higher for automatic cars. In several cities you can even rent a car for as little as €2 a day, although you will be asked to leave a large deposit of around €1,500.

Regardless of the price, make sure to confirm any extra fees that you might get hit with when you return the car. Some companies have a limit on the distance you can drive per day and restrictions on leaving Spain.



Insurance

Third party insurance (*responsabilidad civil obligatoria*) is mandatory in Spain, and can be expanded to provide third party, fire and theft cover. If opting for the minimum level of insurance, you should be sure you understand the cover provided and that it meets the needs of the driver and passengers.

Drivers and passengers do not count as third parties, so in order to protect yourself and family in the event of an injury on the road, you should consider Driver & Passenger insurance (*seguro de ocupantes*).

Comprehensive insurance (*seguro a todo riesgo*) covers all the risks of third party, fire and theft, plus all other types of damage to your car. Unlike many comprehensive policies, [Línea Directa's](#)⁶ will also provide a courtesy car if yours is written-off or stolen.

Green card insurance

Most insurance companies in the EU will provide you with a 'green card' (*certificado internacional de seguro de automóvil*), which extends your insurance cover from home to Spain and other European countries.

⁶ <https://www.lineadirecta.com>

In case of an accident

If you have an accident where someone gets injured, the first thing you should do is call the paramedics. Wait for them to arrive outside your vehicle, wearing a reflective vest.

Depending on the severity of the accident, you might need to call the police. If anyone has been injured or the accident has caused a road block, you must call the police straight away - the number to call is '112'.

Take note of these numbers and keep them available at all times:

- Ambulance and general emergency number: 112
- National police: 091
- Municipal police: 092
- Guardia Civil: 062



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Calling the police

It's not a legal requirement to call the police if you have a minor accident with another driver and can work it out between each other. You do, however, need to fill out the '*Declaración Amistosa de Accidente de Automóvil*' which you should have in your car.

If you do have to call the police they will make a report, known as an '*atestado policial*', and they may be in further contact with you.

If the other driver is not cooperating, try your best to get as many details as you can. Getting details like the make, model and plate number of their car will help the police draw up a detailed report.

Contacting your insurance company

If your car has been badly damaged and you can't drive it away from the accident, or if you need advice, you should call your insurance company. [Línea Directa's](https://www.lineadirecta.com)⁷ expat insurance includes a roadside assistance service which will send a tow truck (*grúa*) to recover your car and get you home.

Even if you don't need assistance, the law in Spain says that you must contact your insurance company within seven days of a traffic incident to make a claim.

If the accident was the other person's fault, you have 6 months to report the incident to the Spanish authorities. If the court rules against you, you can still take civil action against the other driver, but this must be done within one year of the accident. All victims of a car accident are entitled to indemnity. This can be settled out of court between your lawyer and the insurance company.

⁷ <https://www.lineadirecta.com>

Moving to Spain

If you're moving to Spain from another EU country, you can bring your car with you and drive it for up to 180 days without changing the registration plates. The only conditions are that it is declared as road worthy and legal in the country that the car is registered.

Registering your car

If you are becoming a resident of Spain, you need to register your car within six months of moving.

After becoming a legal resident in Spain, you can register your car at the local traffic office (*Dirección General de Tráfico, DGT*). All bureaucratic matters in Spain require a lot of paperwork, and [this process is no different](#)⁸.

Once your car is registered, you'll get a temporary registration plate, which is valid for 10 days. To get a permanent one, the car needs to pass the *Inspección Técnica de Vehículos* (ITV), which declares whether the car is roadworthy or not.

Once your car has been declared roadworthy, you'll need to pay a registration fee at the [Spanish Tax Agency](#)⁹. You'll have to present the purchase invoice of your car, translated into Spanish, so make sure to get this done beforehand.

⁸ <https://www.justlanded.com/english/Spain/Spain-Guide/Travel-Leisure/Importing-a-car>

⁹ https://www.agenciatributaria.gob.es/AEAT.sede/en_gb/Inicio/Inicio.shtml

Insurance on foreign registered cars in Spain

According to the EU regulation, your car must be insured by a company in the same country as it's registered. This means that if your car is registered in another country, it cannot be covered by a Spanish insurance company. However, it can be insured by the Spanish branch of the same company, even if it's located in another country.

Once you register the car in Spain, you'll need to get a Spanish insurance plan.

Exchanging your drivers licence

If you've already got a valid driving license from an EU/EEA country (or a country with a special agreement), you don't need to exchange it until you've been a resident for two years. When that time does come, you can exchange it for a Spanish one without having to take any tests.

You can exchange it by applying online and filling out an official form at your local *Jefatura de Tráfico* (Provincial Traffic Department). You'll need some form of identification and your original driving licence, as well as additional documentation that proves your fitness status and residency.

Public transport around Spain

If you want to do some sightseeing while you're on the move, public transport might best suit you. Spain boasts an extensive network of buses and trains that'll take you to every corner of the country.

Buses

The cheap and efficient buses in Spain are a great way to discover the smaller, charming towns that aren't connected by national rail. Even if you're just looking to travel around your region, there are buses that will take you from one village to another.

Buses can take you from one side of the country to the other, but it will take a longer time than other public transport options. If you want to plan your sightseeing on the go, the buses often have WiFi, unlike the trains.

People who are looking for an easy way to get around the Spanish cities will find that most have an extensive bus network, with the larger cities running night buses. During the day you can expect to wait up to 10 minutes for a bus, with that stretching to around an hour at night.

Traveling during tourist season in the Spanish cities can be fun thanks to the Hop-on-hop-off buses, which are an easy way to get around while soaking up some culture on the way.

Trains

When locals talk about ‘Renfe’, they’re referring to the Spanish rail network. Renfe run mid- and high-speed trains (known as the AVE), and extensions of local metro networks called the *Cercanías*, which take you to the further reaches of the city.

AVE, Alvia, and Alaria

The high-speed AVE system is the longest high-speed rail network in Europe. Reaching speeds of up to 350km/h, it can get you from Madrid to Barcelona in as little two and a half hours.

The Alvia and Alaria trains take quite a bit longer, with the same trip taking up to 9 hours, but the travel tickets are significantly cheaper. If you’re not going that far, they’re worth considering as a more affordable way of traveling around the country.



Cercanías

The *Cercanías* trains are an extension of most metro networks in Spain. They offer routes to areas around the city that are just out of reach of the metro - the name *Cercanías* is a play on the word 'closeby'. Even though the *Cercanías* are a part of Renfe, you can often travel on the *Cercanías* with a metro pass.

Metro

Most of Spain's bigger cities have great metro networks, including Madrid, Barcelona, Mallorca, Seville, and Málaga. The service is generally good and efficient, making the metro one of the quickest ways of getting around a city.

Even if you're new to the country, the metros in Spain are easy to navigate. You can get a free map at any of the ticket offices, and most networks also have official apps which make planning easy.

Watch out for pickpockets while you're in the metro, especially in Madrid and Barcelona. Foreigners are easily spotted, but if you stay aware of your surroundings and keep an eye on your belongings, you should be fine.

Carsharing

Ideal for small groups or individuals traveling long distances, carsharing is a popular way of traveling around Spain. It's perfect for spontaneous trips as you can book a spare seat at the last minute, and it often works out cheaper than public transport.

There are several websites where you can search for drivers traveling your way, with verified profiles that include ratings and reviews from previous passengers. If you're really picky, some sites will even tell you how chatty the driver is, and if they like to play music while driving!

Travel routes

Now that you know how to get around Spain, the next step is discover some of the best trips to take. Whether you're traveling by car, train, or motorbike, there's an adventure for everyone in this culturally rich country!

Road trip down the Southern UNESCO sites

Andalucía is renowned for its rich culture and traditions, as well as for being an example of Arabic architecture in Europe. The region is home to some of Spain's most historic monuments, as well as stunning natural landscapes and important archeological sites.



Córdoba

What makes Córdoba so special is that its entire historic center was added to the UNESCO World Heritage list. You'll find traces of history that have all contributed to Spain's mixed Southern culture, from the Roman, Arabic, and Catholic eras.

The Great Mosque is the centrepiece of Córdoba, an incredible mosque that was converted into a Catholic cathedral after it was conquered in 1236.

Granada

Arabic times are also still present in Granada. *The Alhambra* has become the world's most popular symbol of Arabic architecture, attracting millions of visitors from all over the world. You can also visit the *Palacio de Generalife*, the summer palace of the rulers of the Emirate of Granada, and stroll through the narrow streets of *El Albaicín* district.

Sevilla

Sevilla's heart beats to the rhythm of flamenco music. The capital of Andalucía has produced some of Spain's best dancers and musicians of what has been listed by UNESCO as piece of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Add to your itinerary the beautiful *Plaza de España* and the *Alcázar*, the royal palace until the *Reconquista*.



Transcantábrico Clásico

Take a step back in time by hopping on the Transcantábrico Clásico, a 1920's train that operates between Santiago de Compostela and León. Wind your way slowly around Spain's Northern region over an eight-day trip, passing through the the Basque Country, Galicia, Asturias and more.

Motorbiking in the Pyrenees

Nestled along the Spanish-French border, the Pyrenees (*Pirineos*) are renowned as one of the best runs in the world for bikers. With almost no traffic, smooth roads and incredible scenery, these mountains are an absolute dream for anyone that loves to roam freely on their motorcycle.

Explore by yourself at your own pace, or take part in one of the many organised tours. Each company has its own specific route, but in general the trips take you from Barcelona, on the Mediterranean coast, to San Sebastián, by the Atlantic, and back. Some routes also take you into France, and cover between 1,500 and 2,000 kilometres of ground.



About Línea Directa

With over 20 years experience and 2,500,000 insured drivers, Línea Directa are an excellent car insurer for expats in Spain. By eliminating intermediaries and agencies, they are able to offer a better price to their drivers and provide a personalised insurance plan to meet each of their needs.

In line with their philosophy of adaptation and personalisation, they offer great options for comprehensive car insurance. Drive in confidence, with roadside assistance, vehicle replacement, fine management and legal assistance all available from Línea Directa when you need it.

Focused on expats, they offer a complete service in English or German.

To get more information visit [Línea Directa](https://www.lineadirecta.com)¹⁰.

¹⁰ <https://www.lineadirecta.com>



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