

Since 1972
Xperitas
Nonprofit Immersion Travel

Spain Handbook



CLIMATE

- The climate in Spain varies depending on the region and time of year. Spring is unpredictable and can be warm and sunny or cool and rainy.
- Madrid, which is near mountains, may be snowcapped until April or May and can be quite cool until late spring.
- Southern Spain is warmer and drier than the north and is likely to be very hot and very dry in the summer with the exception of Granada, which is near the mountains and can be quite cool until late spring. The Mediterranean coast can experience impressive storms in late spring and early summer.
- The northern coast is much rainier year-round than the rest of Spain.
- In spring, dress in layers to accommodate for the changes in weather and be prepared for cold evenings. In summer plan for hot, sunny weather in much of the country. Take along a light jacket for cool evenings throughout the country and light rain in the North.
- Apply sunscreen regularly as the sun is stronger in Spain than in most of the United States.

CLOTHING

- Reference the Xperitas Spain packing list for advice on what to bring.
- Dress is more formal in Spain than in much of the United States. Young people wear jeans, shorts, T-shirts, sweatshirts, sweaters, sundresses and skirts.
- In Spain, it's uncommon for people to wear flip-flops unless they are going to the beach or a pool, and athletic wear is generally reserved for the gym or exercise, not for walking around town. While you may see some locals in casual clothes, Spaniards typically dress neatly, even for everyday activities like going out for coffee or running errands.
- It may rain unpredictably in the spring, so bring along a waterproof jacket or rain poncho. Rain in the summer is less likely, particularly in the south but we advise that you bring a light waterproof jacket, poncho or a small umbrella.

ELECTRICITY

- You will always need a European adapter. Check the electrical voltage requirements of appliances you plan to bring to be sure they run on 230 volts. If not, it's best to leave them at home.

CULTURAL TIP

In Spain air conditioning is not as common as in the U.S. Don't be surprised if your host family or hotel does not have A/C. The best way to cool down is to wear lightweight clothing, try to stay out of the sun, bring a small handheld fan, and drink plenty of water to stay hydrated.

MONEY

- Contact your bank to alert them of your travel plans and inquire about any international transaction fees.
- Bring a combination of cash (\$100) and cards. Be sure to bring a debit card with a 4-digit pin number and a chip to get cash from ATM machines. In general, a Caja has cheaper commission fees than a Banco when taking out money from an ATM machine in Spain.
- You may exchange a small amount of dollars for euros (€) (around 50–100 euros) if you would like.
- If you exchange Dollars to Euros in an US bank, they often need to order euros, so be sure to request them at least a couple of weeks before your departure.
- Be sure to carry your cards and most of your money in your money belt or neck pouch while travelling! While in the country, only walk around with the money that you need and a copy of your passport. The rest can be left in your hotel safe.
- Credit cards are widely accepted and are a very easy way to keep track of your purchases.

TIPPING

- Tipping is appreciated, but is not typically as generous as we are used to in the United States. It is customary to leave around 50 cents to 1€ per person at a sit-down restaurant.
- It is not necessary to tip housekeeping at hotels.
- Your group leader might ask you to contribute toward a tip for bus drivers and guides.
- **Taxis:** Cab drivers are not usually tipped unless extra service is provided. (You will probably not ride in any taxis during your stay).
- **Bus driver for larger trips:** A tip of 20 €.
- **Airport transfers:** 10 €
- **Group guides:** Typically 50-100 € depending on the length of the tour and the quality of service.
- **Meals:** 50 cents per person, up to 1 € per person if service it's extraordinary.
- **Museum or monument guides:** Around 10-20 € per tour, depending on the length of the tour and the quality of service.

CULTURAL TIP

Enjoy sobremesa time after meals and don't feel rushed to get up from the table. Sit back, relax and soak up this cultural experience.

FOOD

- Breakfast is included daily, and all meals are included during the family stay. Any other included meals are noted on your itinerary.
- Travelers can find food for every budget! The *menu del día* for lunch for about 15 € - 20 € in Madrid or Barcelona. Menú del día includes 1st plate, 2nd, dessert, coffee, bread and a drink. It's a good option if you're hungry and want a sit-down restaurant.
- You can buy snacks, *bocadillos*, *tapas*, *empanadas*, etc. at a café, supermarket, open market or bakery. This is a very economical – and delicious – way to sample typical Spanish food.
- The water in Spain is perfectly safe to drink.
- Mealtimes are much later than in the United States and lunch is usually the largest meal of the day. Dinner is very late, at 9:30 pm or even later, and is usually very light.

In-Country Lodging

Student hotel sleeping arrangements may involve sharing beds, as some hotels utilize a single large bed for their double rooms or two large beds for their triple/ quadruple rooms. During the family stay, students may share a room with a host sibling (if applicable), but they will have their own bed.

CULTURAL TIPS

Be ready to try new foods and always offer to help in the kitchen during your family stay.

It is common to see babies and small children in restaurants eating with their families until very late at night and into the early morning hours.

In Country Transportation

MADRID METRO

- You will need to purchase a reloadable card before purchasing tickets. Be prepared when you buy your ticket to know where your final stop is. It is more cost effective to buy a book of 10 tickets in Metro Zone A than individual tickets.

BARCELONA METRO

- **Single Ticket:** Valid for 1 trip, 75 min max with transfers.
- **Familiar:** A multi-person, 8-trip ticket (Zone 1). Shareable among multiple users. Valid for one transfer per trip (metro - bus - train within 75 minutes). Not valid for the airport metro (L9).
- **Group:** Designed for larger groups, offering around 70 trips. Also sharable; check availability at machines or ticket offices.
- **Children under 4:** Free.

TRAIN

- Arrive at least 45 minutes to 1 hour before the departure of your train. If you are taking the AVE (high speed train), you will have to go through security and wait inside until they give the platform information.
- Use the departure screens to find your platform. Check your ticket for your train car number and seat number.
- Board the train accordingly. Store your luggage overhead or in the areas designated for larger pieces of luggage. Keep your ticket out and handy because the conductor will be by to check it.
- Gather your belongings and prepare to disembark at least 15 minutes before your stop and use several exits as a group.

METRO GUIDELINES

- Debit cards without a smart chip do not work in the ticket machines (so have cash on hand or have a card with a chip)
- Keep your metro card on hand in an easily accessible pocket so you don't have to rummage through your things inside the metro.
- Do not throw it away until you exit the metro station.
- Always know your route and carry a metro map with you. Alternatively, you can download the Metro app to your smartphone.
- While in the metro keep all valuables in front of you and be aware of pick pocketers. Once you are approaching your stop, move towards the exit door and be prepared to exit quickly.

PROGRAM TIP

If your program has a guide, you will find they are a wonderful support and source of information for the program. We ask that you partner with the guide as you travel and work to support them in their efforts or guidelines set for the group. We encourage you to work as a team with your guide!

Health & Safety

- Be sure to keep your passport (and other visas, green cards, or documentation), most of your money and your cards in your money belt or neck pouch while traveling on the plane and from city to city!
- If there is a safe in your hotel room; lock your valuables in it while you are out. **DON'T FORGET TO CHECK THE SAFE BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE HOTEL.**
- Pickpocketing is common in large cities, and they are very good at what they do. Pay extra close attention to your belongings and be sure to keep your valuables close to you at all times, especially when in crowds of people or walking on the street.
- Always travel in groups of three or more.
- If you have a purse/bag, bring a cross-body purse/bag that zips shut. If you are carrying a backpack, be sure that valuables are not located in easily-accessible pockets. We also recommend wearing your backpack in front of you versus on your back as you may normally do.
- Remember that the Xperitas emergency line is available 24/7, but please only call it when you are experiencing a true emergency.
- Review the travel and vaccine recommendations provided by the [Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC). See Current Health and Safety Updates for information about current world events and illnesses.
- Keep printed insurance card on you at all times.
- Keep in mind that smoking is more common in Spain than in the United States, so be prepared for a higher likelihood of encountering smoking in public spaces.

Communication

- Check with your cell phone provider regarding any international fees. At least one leader needs to have an international phone plan in order to be in touch with Xperitas if needed.
- For students, we advise using WiFi. There is often WiFi (or a computer for public use) available in your hotel, but keep in mind that the connection is often weak. You can download messaging apps, such as WhatsApp, to communicate with people at home for free while connected to WiFi.
- Ask your leader(s) about their policy around technology use while on the program.
- A great way for the entire group to stay in communication with parents back home is via a blog, WhatsApp group chat, private Facebook group, or group email.
- During the family stay, you may or may not have access to internet. You will have the contact information of both the local Family Stay Coordinator, as well as your group leader(s). If you do have internet, please be mindful of the time spent on your phone and try to focus on engaging with your host family.

CULTURAL TIP

Some Spaniards can talk very loudly and use a lot of hand gestures— think Mediterranean-style!

Xperitas-Arranged Family Stay Experience®

- Your family is excited to meet you! The family stay is a great learning experience, so be sure to keep an open mind, do your best at practicing your Spanish language skills, and have fun getting to know your family.
- Try to be proactive and engage with your host family, such as asking to help cook a meal, offering to go with them to the local market or grocery store, playing a game of cards (Spot-it or Phase 10 are good options), bringing a scrapbook of your family at home), asking to go explore a nearby park, etc. These simple actions can go a long way in breaking the ice, helping with the language barrier/facilitating conversation, and learning about the local culture.
- Try to disconnect during the family stay by not using your phone all the time and embrace the time to connect with your host family. Disconnecting and truly being present for the experience will allow you to notice more about your surroundings and be more intentional in your observations. We encourage parents/guardians to allow space for their children to disconnect as well.
- Electricity and gas are much more expensive in Spain than in the United States. Be conscious of how long your showers are and make sure to turn off the lights behind you.
- If you have any questions or concerns while staying with your host family, please contact your group leader(s) as they can best assist you and work with the local Family Stay Coordinator and Xperitas as applicable.
- Your family stay information will be relayed to you as soon as we have it available, which often is shortly before departure. In some cases, it could be two weeks beforehand, in other cases the day before departure. Please know we always work hard on securing the best possible family stay placements..
- Respond as soon as possible when your host family contacts you. Keep your social media profiles clean and try not to judge your host by their profiles – better to get to know your host family through talking to them.
- It is nice to bring your host family a gift from your home state, and a scrapbook or photos to show them what life is like where you live.
- Leave a thank you note for your hosts at your house on the last day of the family stay, as sending it via mail can be complicated.

CULTURAL TIP

Keep an open mind and try not to refer to stereotypes!