

EXPLORE!

TRIP NOTES



Northern Spain by Rail (RSP 2018 PREMIUM 05SEP)



TRIP DURATION
12
DAYS



Tour Style: Premium
Tour Pace: Moderate

Tour Type: Small Groups
Accommodation
Grade: Premium

Trip Code: RSP

Trip Highlights - Northern Spain by Rail

- ✓ Rail Journeys - Travel by rail throughout northern Spain including the unique Basque country
- ✓ Picos de Europa - Walking amongst the beautiful landscapes of Spain's oldest national park
- ✓ Bilbao - Sample txakoli wine and admire the coastal views in the Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve
- ✓ Leon and Santiago de Compostela - Two of Spain's most historic holy cities

Trip Essentials

Accommodation: 9 nights Premium Hotel
2 nights Standard Hotel

Included Meals: 11 breakfasts, 0 lunches, 1 dinner

Start Point: Join trip: Bilbao

End Point: Trip ends: Bilbao

Transport: Bus, Train, Taxi

Countries: Spain



Northern Spain By Rail

On this holiday we have the opportunity to experience the sights and sounds of Northern Spain as we travel by rail along its spectacular coast. Our journey takes us through a number of regions including the unique Basque area and Spain's oldest national park, the Picos de Europa mountain range. Along the way we'll stay in a variety of historical cities, including Santiago de Compostela, Leon, Bilbao and Oviedo. It's the ideal way to see the highlights of the lesser-visited north of Spain.

Why Book this trip

If you're looking to ride the rails along northern Spain's spectacular coastline and through the Picos de Europa mountain range then this is the trip for you. As well as seeing some of the country's most captivating scenery, on this tour you also have the option of upgrading your stay by travelling on one of our Premium departures, where you can unwind after a busy day exploring in comfortable hotels for the majority of nights of your holiday. Please select the 'RSP PREMIUM' itinerary on the drop down menu for further details.



Suitability

We've given each of our tours a comfort rating and a tour pace, walking or cycling grade to give you a general idea about the level of activity on each tour and the standard of accommodation you will be staying in at the end of your day's adventure.

Often you'll stay in different styles of accommodation during your tour; so we make an average rating across the entire tour. For more information on where you'll stay each night, please refer to the day by day tour itinerary.

Accommodation Grade: Premium

Our comfortable accommodation is hand-picked and chosen for its character, location or local importance. These properties have excellent facilities and a higher level of comfort and service.

Tour Style: Premium

These tours are perfect if you want to combine an original, off-beat classic adventure with the added comfort of hand-picked accommodation chosen for its character, location or local importance. Revel in adventurous days followed by relaxing nights.

Tour Pace: Moderate

These moderately paced tours provide some busy days with plenty of experiences to enjoy, as well as time to relax along the way.

Your trip itinerary

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

DAY 1 Join trip in Bilbao

Arrive in Bilbao and check-in at the hotel. Situated on the banks of the Nervion River, on the northern edge of the Iberian Peninsula, Bilbao is home to the iconic magnificence of the Guggenheim, one of the world's most famous museums and one of its most spectacular architectural creations. Lying amongst the verdant



landscapes of Vizcaya Province, the city is the largest and most culturally dynamic in the Basque region, providing us with the perfect start to this incredible journey.

Sercotel Coliseo

The hotel was formerly an opera house and still retains its historical facade whilst offering a contemporary interior. It's in the centre of Bilbao and just a short walk from the train station. Facilities include free Wi-Fi access, a terrace, reading room, lounge and gym. All rooms are air conditioned with a television, safe and mini bar.

Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 2 Train to Puente San Miguel; free afternoon in Santillana del Mar

Heading west this morning, we take a taxi to Bilbao railway station and board a train towards the mountainous landscapes of Cantabria. The journey will take us to Puente San Miguel and from here we travel by road the short distance to Santillana del Mar. This afternoon is free for you to discover the town's many historical buildings including the Gothic architecture of the Merino and Don Borja Towers. You may also wish to visit the Collegiate Church of Santa Juliana, which is considered to be one of the best examples of Romanesque architecture in Cantabria and has now been declared a National Monument.

Parador Santillana

Located in the main town square this attractive hotel is newer than many of the other paradors used on this trip and is in an ideal location. Facilities include a courtyard and bar and a restaurant serving traditional local cuisine. Free Wi-Fi access is available throughout. Rooms are equipped with a mini bar, television, telephone, hairdryer and safe.

Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 3 Funicular and scenic walk in the Picos de Europa Mountains

Today we take a taxi back to Puente San Miguel rail station and continue west by train, following the coast of the fertile Costa Verde towards the old fortified port of Llanes. On arrival in the small village of Unquera we will travel by bus up into the Picos de Europa, the beautiful mountain landscapes that lie to the south, whose towering peaks were the first comforting sight beheld by returning sailors to the European mainland. Arriving in the small village of Poncebos we take the funicular railway up towards the remote community of Bulnes, where we can bask in the expansive grandeur of these mountains and take in the dominating heights of the Naranjo de Bulnes, at 2,519 metres high, it's one of the highest peaks in the national park. Spain's first national park, the Picos are made up of three distinct massifs that extend across Cantabria, Asturias, and Castile and Leon, offering a grand expanse of mountains and canyons that are home to a wealth of flora and fauna, including wolves, the last remaining brown bears in Western Europe and the ever-present chamois. We'll take an easy walk through this spectacular setting before returning down to Poncebos on the funicular. Alternatively there is the chance to walk down into the valley through the dramatic Canal de Tejo Gorge (2 hours duration covering six kilometres, 400 metre descent). Later in the afternoon we drive to our hotel in Llanes.

Hotel Don Paco

This hotel is a restored convent dating back to the 17th century. It's located beside the old town walls in the beautiful village of Llanes and is a short walk from the seafront promenade. Facilities include a lounge, bar and terrace and a restaurant set in the impressive old chapel building. Rooms have a television, hairdryer, safe and telephone.

Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 4 Train to Oviedo; afternoon free to explore Cider Street

This morning we have some free time to relax in Llanes before walking the short distance (5-10 minutes) to the station to board the train to the university town of Oviedo. The rail journey takes us across the fertile plains of Asturias and onto Oviedo, the cultural and economic centre of the region. This was one of the few regions of Spain that didn't fall under the influence of the Moors and its medieval heart is still littered with examples of Pre-Romanesque architecture that dates back to the 8th-10th centuries. We arrive in the early evening and take a taxi to our hotel. Tonight you may choose to discover the old town and to sample the local tapas, such as cebolla rellena - baked onion stuffed with minced meat, olive oil and egg, and in Cider Street you can sample the local tippie, which is poured from a height into your glass, in order to aerate the liquid and bring out the fullest flavour of the cider.

Hotel Princesa Munia

This contemporary small hotel is located in the centre of Oviedo, just 5 minutes' walk from the cathedral and an even shorter distance from the university and San Francisco Park. The hotel has a restaurant, bar and spa with a hot tub, sauna, treatment rooms, hydrotherapy pool and Turkish bath. All rooms are en suite with Wi-Fi access, television, safe, hairdryer, air-conditioning and mini bar.

Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 5 Free day in Oviedo; chance to visit the Asturias Railway Museum

A free day gives us the opportunity to explore the city and admire its past grandeur, especially around the grand Plaza Alfonso, which includes finely preserved palaces and the Gothic facades of its cathedral. In the cathedral's exquisite interior are the tombs of the Asturian nobility, as well as a superb 9th century chapel, the Camara Santa, which contains a wealth of Asturian art and golden relics. The city also has an excellent art gallery and archaeological museum and its outskirts are dotted with superb Pre-Romanesque churches, including the magnificent Santa Maria des Naranco and the 9th century church of San Julian de los Prados, which is believed to be the largest of its kind left in Spain. Perhaps you might prefer to board a train and discover further afield. You could visit Colanzo or Laviana in the Rio Nalon Basin or take the train to Gijon and visit the Asturias Railway Museum, built on the site of the old Renfe (Spanish railways) station that dates back to the 1870's. The museum was conceived to preserve the railways unique local history and its permanent exhibition provides a fascinating insight into the relationship between the railways and the development of Asturias over the past century and a half.

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Single Room Available



Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6 Train to Galicia and visit to Cathedrals Beach; arrive in Santiago

Leaving our hotel early this morning we take a taxi to Oviedo station and board the train to Ribadeo, as we head into Spain's remote north-western corner and the fertile landscapes of Galicia, a region whose inhabitants are fiercely proud of their Celtic origins and whose traditions and language offer an interesting contrast to much of the rest of mainland Spain. Arriving in Ribadeo this afternoon we then continue our journey by bus to nearby Cathedral Beach. Here the force of the ocean has carved out arches, columns and caves in the rock cliffs that line the sandy beach. Standing beneath these during low tide it feels as though you're beneath the eaves of a cathedral. We drive on to Santiago de Compostela, a city that during the Middle Ages was one of the most important places of pilgrimage anywhere in the Christian world. After arriving at our hotel this evening is free for you to explore the city and sample Galician cuisine. Fresh seafood is especially popular, so perhaps try the vieiras - scallops, which are the symbol of the Camino pilgrimage route; scallops are normally served plain or cooked with onions and peppers and coated in breadcrumbs.

Hotel San Francisco

The hotel is housed in the UNESCO-listed 18th century Convent of San Francisco and has a contemporary four star interior while still preserving its original Franciscan style. It's located in the historic city centre, just a short walk from the cathedral. Facilities include free Wi-Fi access, a garden, reading room, restaurant, bar, a swimming pool and Jacuzzi with views of Monte Pedroso, and the historic glass courtyard and monumental dining hall. The Convent also features a Holy Land Museum. All rooms have air-conditioning, a mini bar, safe and hairdryer.

Single Room Available



Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 7 Free day to explore Santiago and perhaps visit the cathedral

Today is free for you to discover this enigmatic city at your own pace, its historic centre is small enough to explore on foot. In the majestic main square of Praza do Obradoiro is the 12th century Baroque cathedral, which is one of Christendom's holiest of shrines. Lying at the end of the famous pilgrim route of the Camino de Santiago, its crypt is believed to hold the tomb of Saint James himself and the building's rich fusion of Romanesque, Gothic and Baroque styles is truly a work of the most exceptional architectural craftsmanship. Alternatively, you may prefer to wander the narrow streets and visit more of the architectural treasures that are dotted around the city such as the Monastery of San Martino Pinario and the Gelmirez Palace. There are also a number of good museums like the Museum of Galician Culture, Pilgrims Museum and the Cathedral Museum. And, at the end of the day, what's better than to relax with a reviving drink on the Praza das Praterias and watch the world pass by.

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Single Room Available



Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 8 Train to Ponferrada; chance to see the Las Medulas rock formations

Taking a taxi to the railway station we will board the morning train to Ponferrada in the Castile and Leon region, a landscape of expansive plains and rolling hills dotted with historic castles. On arrival this afternoon we take a taxi to our hotel and you are then free to discover Ponferrada. The city's name stems from pons ferrata, a medieval bridge (reinforced with iron) that was constructed to aid the passage of pilgrims travelling along the Camino de Santiago towards the sacred city. You might choose to visit its imposing fortress, which was constructed by the Knights Templar between the 12th and 14th centuries to protect the pilgrims, and in its time was considered one of the largest citadels in northwest Spain. Alternatively you might like to take a taxi to Villa Franca to walk along part of the pilgrim route, enjoying something of the idyllic landscape and quiet villages as you walk in the footsteps of the countless devotees whose feet have trodden these trails for centuries. Or perhaps to travel by taxi to nearby Las Medulas to view the UNESCO-listed rock formations. The red rock towers and sheer mountain faces found here aren't a naturally occurring phenomenon; in the 1st century AD the Romans carved out this ancient quarry in search of gold and this process left us with the unique landscape that we see today.

Hotel Bierzo Plazana

The hotel is in the centre of town. Rooms are en suite and equipped with air conditioning and a mini bar. Free Wi-Fi access is available. Facilities include a bar/cafe and two restaurants.

Single Room Available



Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 9 Train to Leon; opportunity to visit the cathedral and historic centre

After a little more free time this morning in Ponferrada we take a taxi to the railway station and board the train to Leon, a city that once lay at the heart of the region's Reconquista from the Moors during the 11th century. On arrival we take a taxi to our hotel and you have the rest of the day free to explore. The central buildings of the city are its great Gothic cathedral and the equally superb Romanesque Basilica de San Isidoro, both of which are without doubt two of the finest examples of their kind to be found anywhere in Spain. The cathedral is unique for the quality and magnificence of its stained-glass windows, which span seven centuries of history and cover subjects as diverse as religion, mythology and even medieval life, whilst San Isidoro is the final resting place of dozens of Christian kings and noble families, buried over centuries, beneath the stunning 12th century frescoes. Radiating out from the Plaza Mayor, the narrow streets are filled with cafes, churches and old houses that provide a range of options for an afternoon of fascinating sightseeing.

Hotel La Posada Regia Leon

This characterful three star hotel is located in the heart of the city and consists of two historic buildings which have been restored whilst still maintaining their traditional Leonese charm and creating a homely atmosphere. Each room is unique in both layout and decor and the majority have air-conditioning. All rooms have a television, mini bar, safe and hairdryer. Facilities include free Wi-Fi access and a restaurant and bar.

Single Room Available



Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 10 Free morning in Leon before taking the train to Bilbao

We have a free morning in Leon for you to discover more of the sights. You might like to take a stroll and stop to sample a range of tapas and wine in the Barrio Humedo, which is an area of the city concentrated within the old Roman city walls. Admire the exterior of the Casa Botines, which was designed by Gaudi, and the Renaissance facade of the Guzmanes Palace. Later this afternoon we return to the station by taxi and embark on our rail journey (taking around five hours) through the spectacular mountainous scenery of the Basque region to Bilbao. We arrive in the city in the evening and take a taxi to our hotel.

Sercotel Coliseo

The hotel was formerly an opera house and still retains its historical facade whilst offering a contemporary interior. It's in the centre of Bilbao and just a short walk from the train station. Facilities include free Wi-Fi access, a terrace, reading room, lounge and gym. All rooms are air conditioned with a television, safe and mini bar.

Single Room Available



Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 11 Taste txakoli wine and explore the dramatic coastline

Today we drive out of the city to explore the nearby stunning coastal scenery. We start with a stop in San Juan where we can take in the views over the Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve. This wide river estuary is home to extensive wetlands where it's possible to spot fish eagles, spoonbills and other birds that are scarcely seen elsewhere on the Iberian Peninsula. We continue to Mundaka, which is a quaint fishing village that is popular with local surfers as the wave's crash into the small sandy beach front. In Guernica we'll stop off at a traditional bodega to sample the delicious slightly sparkling dry white wine, txakoli, and to see the Assembly House and Tree of Guernica. This old oak tree trunk has become a symbol of freedom for the Biscayan people and is an important monument. On

the way back to Bilbao we'll stop off at the UNESCO-listed Bizkaia Bridge, known as the hanging bridge, it connects the two banks of the Nervion Estuary and looms high above the waters below. Time permitting they'll be the opportunity to take the panoramic lift 50 metres high and then stroll across the high walkway of the bridge or to take the gondola that hangs underneath it across the river to admire the views. We arrive back to Bilbao in the late afternoon and you are free to explore. Perhaps this afternoon or tomorrow morning (depending on the time of your flight home) you might like to visit the famed Guggenheim Museum, stroll in the old town, take the funicular railway up Mount Artxanda to admire the city below, or visit the Arts Museum.

Sercotel Coliseo

The hotel was formerly an opera house and still retains its historical facade whilst offering a contemporary interior. It's in the centre of Bilbao and just a short walk from the train station. Facilities include free Wi-Fi access, a terrace, reading room, lounge and gym. All rooms are air conditioned with a television, safe and mini bar.

Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY **12** Trip ends in Bilbao

Trip ends after breakfast at our hotel in Bilbao.

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

Included Activities

On this trip we will take a number of long train journeys, so as well as enjoying the ever-changing views we'd recommend taking snacks and drinks and entertainment such as a book, audio books or an electronic book reader, games device or tablet, pack of cards or a quiz book.

Accommodation and Meals

Food & Drink

Included meals: 11 breakfasts, 0 lunches, 1 dinner included in the price of this trip. Please be prepared to pay for non-included meals. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location.

Budgeting for your Trip

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the trip price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Spain

Lunch £: 6.00 - 10.00

Dinner £: 12.00 - 16.00

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Spain

Bottle of Beer £: 1.50 - 2.50 (depending on the region/area in Spain)

Water £: 1.40

Other Sightseeing & Activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations.

Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Optional Excursions

Santillana del Mar: Collegiate Church of Santa Juliana entrance €3.00; Altamira Cave Museum entrance €3.00 plus a taxi journey at approximately €8.00 per vehicle per way.

Oviedo: Asturias Railway Museum in Gijon entrance €2.40; train journeys to Laviana, Colanzo or Gijon approximately from €3.50 to €12.00.

Santiago de Compostela: Museum of Galician Culture entrance €3.00, Pilgrims Museum entrance €2.40, Cathedral Museum entrance €6.00; guided walking tour of Santiago Cathedral and surrounding squares €120.00 per group.

Ponferrada: Templar Castle entrance €6.00; return taxi to Villa Franca approximately €90.00 per vehicle for a return trip (maximum 8 persons per vehicle); return taxi to Las Medulas €100.00 per vehicle for a return trip (maximum 8 persons per vehicle).

Leon: Cathedral entrance €6.00 or a guided visit (including entrance) is €12.00; San Isidoro entrance €5.00.

Guernica: Peace Museum entrance €4.50.

Gexto: Bizkaia Bridge walkway from €8.00 or gondola from €0.40 per way.

Bilbao: Guggenheim Museum entrance €13.00; Arxanda Funicular €1.50 per way; Art Museum entrance €7.00.

Tipping - Tour Leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Explore Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Tipping - Local Crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly, you should allow approximately €10-20 for tipping.

In order to make things easier for you, the Explore Leader may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the trip.

Foreign Exchange

Spain

ATM Availability: In cities and most major towns.

Credit Card Acceptance: Visa and Mastercard are generally accepted in larger restaurants and some shops.

Travellers Cheques: Not recommended.

Local Currency: Euros

Recommended Currency for Exchange: We recommend you take the majority of your spending money in Euros cash.

Where to Exchange: We recommend that you change any currency into Euros prior to arrival. Bureau de Change are generally only found in major cities and large airports.

Joining your Trip

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found on our website at www.explore.co.uk, in the tour specific dates and prices section.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer. For more information please refer to <https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers>.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer please refer to <https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers>.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Important Information

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

EXPLORE!
The Adventure Travel Experts

CAMPBELL IRVINE
DIRECT TRAVEL INSURANCE



Travel Insurance is essential. If you have not already arranged cover, please contact our recommended Travel Insurance providers www.campbellirvinedirect.com/Explore who offer Travel Insurance specifically designed to cover travel with Explore or call **Campbell Irvine Direct** on Tel: 020 7938 1734

Explore Worldwide is an Introducing Appointed Representative of Campbell Irvine Ltd who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Travel Aware

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice follow the link at www.explore.co.uk/travel-safety

We strongly advise that you register with the FCO to receive updates to the travel advice for your chosen destination. A hard copy of the current FCO Travel Advice for your chosen destination is available by contacting cr@explore.co.uk or 01252 379438.

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Visa Information

Spain: Visas are not required by UK, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

Vaccinations & Protection

Spain

Nothing compulsory but Tetanus is usually recommended as a precaution. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider. Vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.

Preparing for your Trip

Climate

Spain

Overall, spring, early summer and autumn are ideal times for a Spanish trip - though the weather varies enormously from region to region. The high central plains suffer from fierce extremes, stiflingly hot in summer, bitterly cold and swept by freezing winds in

winter. The Atlantic coast, in contrast, has a tendency to damp and mist, and a relatively brief, humid summer. The Mediterranean south is warm virtually all year round. Spain's Islands the Canaries and Balaerics experience very mild winters and warm summers making them ideal year round destinations.

Clothing

Lightweight cotton clothing is best from June to September, light rainwear may be needed at any time of year, but especially after the start of September, and a warm fleece/light jacket is recommended for cooler evenings and nights at the beginning and end of the season. Don't forget a swimming costume.

Equipment

A water bottle, sunhat and high factor sunscreen are all essential. A head torch (for use on day 4 of the trip) may be useful to bring, however is not essential.

Footwear

Good comfortable trainers or lightweight walking shoes. Sandals for relaxing.

Luggage: On Tour

One main piece of baggage and daypack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

It's very important that you pack light and are able to lift your case. There is limited storage on the trains and the steps to board can be steep. A soft sided bag is best and the smaller bag you can use then the easier this will be for you to lift it on board and to store it.

Luggage allowance on trip: 20kg

General Information

Country details

Spain

Population: 46,030,109

Size of Country: 504,782 sq km

Major Language: Castilian Spanish, Catalan, Galician, Basque

Religion: Roman Catholic

Time Difference to GMT: +1

Electric Supply & Plugs

Spain

2 Pin Round

Why Choose Explore

We've been creating award-winning pioneering adventure holidays for over 30 years, earning the trust of thousands of delighted customers, who feel safe in our hands. Our tour leaders have expert local knowledge and our tours are designed to take you off the beaten track to see the most exotic, inspiring and dramatic places in the world.

- With over 30 years' experience, we are passionate about what we do.
- Pioneering small group adventures, self-guided, private journeys & tailor-made holidays.
- Award winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one of the driving principles of Explore.

Our adventure holidays are full of exciting things to see and do, exploring in small groups travelling by bus, boat, plane, rickshaw, camel, or any number of unusual forms of transport. Often you will stay in family run hotels and village houses and enjoy authentic local cuisine. In this way, it's easy to discover the true heart of the people and the place you travel to – and make some new friends along the way. Each tour is uniquely different, so please feel free to browse through our tours to see what may whet your appetite.

Cool Earth

Explore are proud to support Cool Earth in their effort to reduce global carbon dioxide levels through the prevention of deforestation in the South America rainforest. Cool Earth focus on areas in immediate danger of deforestation, supporting local communities to be forest guardians. To date 350,000 acres of rainforest has been protected. Saving rainforest also protects rare animals and plants, allows local forest communities to maintain their way of life, and protects a major source of oxygen and fresh water. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year.

Earth Matters

We are passionate about sustainable travel and work hard to create tours where your holiday delivers real benefits to the local communities. We minimise our impact by travelling in small groups, respecting local cultures, reducing waste and offsetting 100% of the CO2 from our flights.

When you travel with Explore, you are directly contributing to local economies and helping empower the people you meet. We currently support a range of charities and good causes, including: Toilet Twinning (helping to flush away poverty), Lone Buffalo Foundation (a community project based in Laos providing creative skills for young people) and have recently supported women's cooperatives in Borneo and Morocco. We are a member of Tourism Concern's Ethical Tour Operator Group (www.tourismconcern.org.uk) and support their campaign for fair and ethical tourism. We also care passionately about the world's wildlife and actively support and promote the Born Free Organisation and Mahouts Elephant Foundation.

Booking Your Holiday

Peace of mind - book with confidence

You can book your Explore holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected. Explore is a fully bonded tour operator licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and by ABTOT.

The air holiday packages (Tours including flights) that we advertise are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's Licence granted by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 2595. In addition, As a member of the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT), Explore has provided a bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. Please note that packages booked outside the UK are only protected when purchased directly with Explore.

Reserving your place

To reserve your place on this tour you will need to check availability on the Explore website or through our dedicated call centre based in the UK where you can. Our tours can fill up quickly so you are advised to book as early as possible. If your chosen date is 'Available' or 'Guaranteed' we will be able to provisionally hold you a space for up to 48 hours.

For Self-Guided holidays and Private Journeys simply choose your date of travel and let us know so we can confirm all ground services.

The easiest way to confirm your booking is through our website. When you are ready to book, we normally require a 10% non-refundable deposit, but for some holidays this may be more to cover such items as permit fees, internal flights or other non-refundable services. If your travel starts within 60 days of booking, full payment will be required at the time of booking

100% No Surcharge Guarantee

The price paid for our holidays is no longer subject to change. Once booked and confirmed we will guarantee the price you pay will not increase, whatever the circumstances. You will not be approached to pay fuel surcharges unlike the vast majority of other adventure tour operators. The price guarantee applies to all new bookings departing between 1st January 2016 and 31st December 2017.

Trip Itinerary Versions

Itinerary details may vary depending on departure date and alternative itineraries for this tour may exist. Please refer to the dates and prices page on our website to check which itinerary operates on each departure date.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes.

Please note: 2018 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2018. 2019/20 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2019.

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