

France & Spain Travel Information

Activity Level – Travelers should be able to walk 2-3 miles at a moderate pace, stand for an extended period of time with no difficulty, and tolerate changing weather conditions. This tour involves walking over difficult and hilly terrain and navigating obstacles (i.e., walking on uneven cobblestones; climbing steep stairs without handrails). Travelers should be able to haul their own luggage with no assistance.

Airport Arrival and Departure – Arrive at the airport about three hours before your scheduled departure time. **Upon arrival in Paris**, get in the Non-European Union line and go through Passport Control. Then retrieve your luggage and proceed through “Nothing to Declare” Customs. Meet your greeter in the Arrivals Hall who will have a sign with your name and will escort you to your driver. **Upon departure in Bilbao or Madrid**, arrive at the airport about three hours before your scheduled departure time. At your first point of entry in the US, go through Passport Control. Then retrieve your luggage and go through “Nothing to Declare” Customs.

ATM and Credit Cards – Contact your bank before the tour to let them know you will be using your ATM and credit cards while traveling. Notify them of your travel dates so that they will anticipate charges being made while traveling outside the U.S. Also, make photocopies of the front and back of your ATM and credit cards, keeping one copy with you, one copy with a traveling companion, and leave one copy with someone at home who will assist you in the event your cards are misplaced, lost, or stolen.

Cell Phone – Check with your cell phone provider regarding their international travel service plan options.

Clothing and Packing – Dress for comfort and convenience with a wardrobe that is flexible and allows for layering. Casual clothing is recommended during the day and dressier clothing for special events. “Packing cubes” are very helpful in organizing your clothing in your luggage. Following is a list of recommended items to pack for your trip to France:

- Short and long-sleeved shirts, dresses
- Slacks, skirts, capris, bathing suit
- Lightweight sweater, jacket, gloves, scarf, hat
- Comfortable sandals, walking shoes, and socks
- Raincoat (or poncho), waterproof shoes, travel umbrella
- Sunglasses and extra pair of prescription glasses
- Travel alarm clock, watch, cell phone
- Electrical adapters and converters
- Toiletries (all products and most brands are available in both countries)
- Medication (i.e., prescriptions, pain reliever, sleep aid, digestive aids, cortisone, neosporin)
- Disinfectant wipes, hand sanitizer, K95 face masks, band aids
- Travel documents + copies: passport, ATM and credit cards

Currency and Exchange Rates – The official currency is the Euro in Portugal. ATMs are widespread and are the most convenient method of obtaining cash and have the best exchange rate. The current rate is 1 EUR = 1.09 USD but this fluctuates daily. It is convenient, but not necessary, to bring some euros with you from the US.

Customs and Tax Free Shopping – Current regulations permit bringing back \$800 worth of items duty-free, as long as you physically bring them with you. France and Spain levy a 16% Value Added Tax (VAT) on most consumer goods and services. As a U.S. citizen, you will be entitled to a VAT refund on more expensive items. Inquire about the refund policy where you shop. (See “Shopping” on next page.)

Electricity – The electrical current in France and Spain is 230V (110V in US). The plug is 2 round prongs. You will need to bring the appropriate current converter and outlet adapters for your appliances. Only an outlet adapter is needed for cell phone charging. All of the accommodations have hair dryers.

Flight Comfort – For the overnight flights, you may want to bring a pair of slipper socks, a neck pillow, and a jacket or sweater. Wear loose fitting, comfortable clothing. Set your watch to France time as soon as you board the plane to adjust to the new time. Walk around the plane periodically and do stretching exercises at your seat. Stay hydrated.

Health – France and Spain follow WHO-recommended COVID protocol: travelers should be fully vaccinated with latest booster, wear face masks at crowded events, wash hands often, and practice social distancing when possible. Medical facilities are among the best in the world. If a medical emergency arises, you will be put in touch with English-speaking medical personnel. You may have to pay medical costs upfront and be reimbursed by your insurance when you return home. The water is safe to drink, but to be cautious, drink bottled water. Moderate your drinking and eating habits and bring digestive medication as a precaution.

Luggage – Try to limit your luggage to one large-sized check-in, one medium-sized carry-on, and one handbag. In your carry-on, pack all important documents, electronics, prescription medication, and an extra set of clothing for 2 – 3 days in the event your check-in luggage is delayed. Be sure to attach luggage tags to each piece of luggage on the outside and the inside. Reminder: in your carry-on luggage, all liquids must be 3 oz. or less and all must fit in a quart size plastic bag.

Safety – France and Spain have a moderate rate of crime, but tourists can be targets for pickpockets. Carry your credit cards, passports, and extra cash in a hidden money belt under your clothes or leave them in the hotel safe. If you use a purse, wear your purse across the front and hold on to the strap. Keep cash in a wallet attached to the inside of your purse. Be aware of your surroundings and suspect any disturbance as a distraction for theft.

Shopping – Many shops and businesses respect the afternoon siesta. Local shops are generally open from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm and from 4:00 to 8:00 pm. If you purchase more than 90 euros worth of goods at a store, you're entitled to get most of the Value Added Tax (16%) back. Have the merchant fill out the necessary document at the store (show your passport), get the document stamped at the airport upon departure, get your refund at the airport (for a fee) or mail the stamped documents in the self-addressed envelope.

Time – France and Spain are 9 hours ahead of California time. France and Spain use the 24-hour clock, instead of A.M. and P.M.

Tipping – Guidelines for tipping: Hotel porters: 1 euro/pound per bag; Hotel Maids: 1 - 2 euros/pounds per day; Taxi drivers: round up and add 5 - 10% of the fare on the meter if they also help with luggage; Restaurants: service is included on the bill so add an extra 5 – 10% if the service was really good. Tip the server personally in cash. Do not overtip. Tipping is not a common practice in Europe and a service charge is often included on the restaurant bill.

Travel Document Requirements – You will need a valid passport to enter France that is valid for six months from the date of your arrival. Make at least two photocopies of the photo and signature pages of your passport and leave one copy at home. (The EU visas will not be required until March 2025.)

Weather – October weather can be cool and changeable with the likely possibility of rain. The average high/low October temperatures are: Paris (63°/50°) San Sebastian (67°/56°) Madrid (67°/51°)

