

## ~ Spain Travel and Destination Information ~

**Airport Arrival and Departure** – Arrive at the airport at least two hours before your scheduled departure time. **Upon arrival in Madrid**, 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 Barcelona**, arrive at the airport at least two hours before your scheduled departure time. At your first point of entry in the US, go through Passport Control. Then retrieve your luggage, go through “Nothing to Declare” Customs, and return your luggage to airline personnel. Finally, go through Security before getting to your departure gate for your final flight home.

**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 and leave the other copy with someone at home who will assist you in the event your cards are misplaced, lost, or stolen.

**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 dinner. A scarf can dress up any casual outfit. “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 Spain and Portugal:

- Short and long-sleeved shirts
- Slacks, skirts, capris
- Lightweight sweater
- Comfortable sandals, walking shoes and socks
- Travel umbrella
- Sunglasses and extra pair of prescription glasses
- Travel alarm clock, watch
- Electrical adapter and converter
- Toiletries
- Medication (i.e., prescription medication, pain reliever, sleep aid)
- Copies of your travel documents (passport, flight itinerary, ATM and credit cards)
- PASSPORT!

**Currency and Exchange Rates** – The official currency is the Euro. ATMs are widespread and are generally the most convenient method of obtaining cash and have the best exchange rate. To obtain up-to-date currency exchange rates, you can check the website [www.oanda.com](http://www.oanda.com).

**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. Spain and Portugal 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 and should inquire about the refund policy where you shop. (See “Shopping” on next page.)

**Electricity** – The electrical current is 220V (instead of the U.S. 110V) and the plug is two 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 hotel rooms have hair dryers. Irons may not be in all the rooms but are available upon request.

**Flight Comfort** – For the overnight flights, you may want to bring a pair of slipper socks, a neck pillow, a lightweight blanket, and a jacket or sweater. Wear loose fitting, comfortable clothing. Set your watch to Spain 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.

**Etiquette and Customs** – Spaniards are rather formal in social matters, addressing each other as Señor or Señora. It is customary to eat late in Spain, at least after 8:00 p.m. It is polite to keep both hands visible during the course of a meal. They place a lot of importance on what others think of them, and appreciate positive comments about their country. In the service business (hotels, shops, and restaurants) they may, at first impression, seem rude by our standards. But it is not personal, it is cultural. Patience, a smile and a friendly greeting can often get you the best service.

**Health** – Spain does not pose any major health hazards. The water is safe to drink, but to be cautious, drink mainly bottled water. Moderate your drinking and eating habits and bring anti-diarrhea medicine as a precaution. 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. Medical evacuation service back to the U.S. is covered by travel insurance and by some AAA memberships. Check with your insurance company.

**Internet** – All hotels have free internet connection.

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

**Safety** – Spain has 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. Wear your purse across the front and hold on to it and keep cash in a wallet attached to the inside of your purse. Don't keep your wallet in your back pocket. Be aware of your surroundings and suspect any disturbance as a distraction for theft.

**Shopping** – Many shops and businesses respect the afternoon siesta. 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.

**Telephones** – Check with your cell phone provider. There are Traveler Calling Plans that you can choose from on your provider's website or by calling your cell phone provider.

**Time** – Spain is 9 hours ahead of California time. Spain uses the 24-hour clock, instead of A.M. and P.M.

**Tipping** – Guidelines for tipping : Hotel porters: 1 euro/bag; Hotel Maids: 1 - 2 euros/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 an extra 5 – 10% if the service was really good. Tip the server personally in cash. Do not over tip. Tipping is not a common practice in Spain, and a service charge (gratuity) is often included on the bill.

**Travel Document Requirements** – You will need a valid passport to enter Spain that is valid for six months from the date of your arrival in the country. Make at least two photocopies of the photo and signature pages of your passport. Bring one copy with you and leave the other copy with someone at home.

**Weather** – September weather is temperate with possibility of light rain. The average high/low temperatures are: Madrid (79°/60°) Almagro (83°/58°) Seville (88°/64°) Granada (83°/59°) Barcelona (79°/69°)

