

MARIBEL'S EURO-SAVINGS TIPS FOR SPAIN

Even with the shrinking dollar to euro exchange rate, Spain can still be a relatively inexpensive destination if visitors are willing to make some minor adjustments: to their dining habits, their preferred mode of travel, their schedules, their “must have” locations and their time spent in the cities versus countryside.

Here are a few ideas for shaving some costs from your Spain travel budget.

TIPS FOR DINING

Make **lunch your major meal** of the day. The vast majority of restaurants (even a few anointed with a Michelin star) will serve a cost-saving *menu del día* at lunchtime only, usually Monday-Friday especially for local workers. (Thus, these are very rarely found on weekends.) This menu of the day most often consists of 3 courses, a beverage (glass of wine, beer, mineral water) and bread.

Some are set menus with no options, whatever the chef has decided to cook that day prepared with cheaper ingredients, but often it will have 3 choices each of starter, main course and dessert. Some bargain menus even include a half bottle of wine per diner. Some include either dessert or coffee. If a restaurant offers a *menu del día*, you will usually see it posted around noon on a chalkboard outside or posted separately from the regular menu in the window.



EXAMPLES OF GREAT BARGAINS:

Madrid

- €10 (with wine) menu at the downstairs **Txoko of the Basque Cultural Center** (no choice, just whatever the ladies want to cook that day) €10 three- course meal at the restaurants belonging to the **Quinze Nits** group:
- **Ginger, Bazaar, La Glorieta de Montera, La Finca de Susana** €10 vegetarian menu at **Isla del Tesoro**
- €15 menu at the lovely winter garden dining room of the **Cenador del Prado**
- €18 menu at **Barandales**, which includes an *aperitivo* (amuse-bouche), along with a mini bottle of homemade liqueur with dessert.
- €20 menu at gourmet **Sula**, served in the downstairs dining area beyond the bar
- €25 executive-menu at gourmet **Dassa Bassa**, served Monday-Friday

Barcelona

- €10 menu at any of the 14 restaurants belonging to **Les Quinze Nits** group
- Equally competitive price at any of the 4 restaurants of the **Taller de Tapas** group
- €25 menu, served weekdays, at two of the city's best *bistronomics*, **Gresca** and **Ovic**

San Sebastián

- €25 menu including wine at Michelin starred **Kokotxa**, served for lunch, Tuesday - Friday.

Seville

- €12.90 lunch menu at the **Bistro of the Taberna del Alabardero**- offers 5 choices each of starter, meat or fish course, dessert served weekdays (€17.50 on weekends)

MORE EURO SAVING TIPS:

- When having a drink or snack at a café in Spain's cities, **be aware of the 3-tiered price system**: it's cheaper to have that libation while standing (or sitting) at the bar than it is sitting at the inside tables, and that drink will come at its most dear if taken on the outdoor terrace (you pay for the views). This holds true primarily in the major cities. Since every bar is obliged to post its prices, you can check the posted prices to see if the café's prices have 3 categories: *barra – mesa - terraza*.
- Rather than indulge in an expensive buffet breakfast at your hotel, venture out to a nearby bar/café and join the locals for the **typical Spanish breakfast** of coffee, croissant, churros, toast, tomato bread or *pulga* (a mini baguette) and juice. There will often be a lower price for the *desayuno completo*, which Americans know as continental breakfast, which will be served usually until noon, than if ordering these items a la carte. And this breakfast may be less expensive (but not always) when taken at the bar rather than at a table.
- **Avoid Starbucks**, a latte will set you back \$6 – \$7 USD. A more delicious café con leche at a local bar will usually cost €1.50, €2 at the most elegant of tea salons.
- Remember that even if one is lucky to snag a great promotional or early booking rate at a 5-star hotel, the hotel breakfast, if not included in the promo, can run up to €25 or more pp.
- At the Paradors, the buffet breakfast now cost from €14-16 pp, plus vat.
- When taking your main meal of the day at lunch, do a **tapas crawl at night** with the locals in lieu of a formal, sit-down dinner.
- In Madrid the usual haunts get crowded from 9:00 pm on, but in those tapas bars that do have seating. You can go earlier at 8, when they open, to snag a table.
- During your stay **make at least one meal a picnic**, taken in a city park, a *Merendero* (picnic area) in a national forest or along a riverbank, or even in your hotel room on your terrace. Go to a local supermarket and buy cheeses, bread, a 100 gram package of sliced *jamón* or *lomo* or *chorizo*, fresh fruit, yoghurt and a €4-6 bottle of wine. Or buy a filling *bocadillo*, baguette sandwich, with your choice of fillings.
- If you'd like to sample the very best Iberian ham, pata negra, from Jabugo or Guijuelo, go to the La Paz or Antón Martín covered markets in Madrid or to La Boquería or Santa Caterina in Barcelona to buy a small package for €8-12 euros, less expensive than ordering a platter (from €18-26) in a restaurant.
- If you're traveling with children, **pick up snacks/sodas at a discount supermarket** (such as Día, Lidi, Champion, Caprobó, Eroski) or a **hypermarket** on the highway or in a shopping mall (Mercadona, Carrefour, Alcampo) rather than at El Corte Inglés or worse, its 24/7 convenience stores, Open Cor.
- An inexpensive place to feed a family with picky eaters is the all-you-can-eat €7.50 buffets of **FresCo**. See all locations at: www.frescco.com.
- Or for a variety of sandwiches/salads, take the kids to a Cervercería Cien Montaditos, featuring 100 varieties of small sandwiches (www.cerveceria100montaditos.com)

- When dining in a gastronomic restaurant, rather than choose a très cher bottle of Rioja Gran Reserva from the wine list, try to suppress your inner wine snob. *Simply order the house wine, which will be sure to be top-notch.*
- Fine restaurants are guaranteed to serve a fine house label wine.
- The *tinto de la casa* at 2 Michelin-starred, Relais & Chateaux Atrio in Cáceres will set you back only around €26 euros.
- Although Atrio has one of the most extensive wine lists of any gastronomic European restaurant (it's actually a book-order it for €107), with 2,750 labels, and is a regular Wine Spectator Grand Award winner, most regulars simply order the house wine.
- If you're not a wine drinker, **stick to bottled water** or **ask for a glass** (*un vaso de agua*) or **carafe of tap water** (*una jarra de agua natural*) rather than ordering several soft drinks, which can cost as much as a €4 each.
- **Beer** always costs less than soda. You can order half a beer by ordering a *caña* (draft). If you order a *cerveza*, the bartender will give you an imported bottled beer.
- It's perfectly acceptable in a Spanish restaurant for a couple to **share a starter and a dessert.**

DON'T OVER TIP

- At a bar/café, you'll see most locals leaving nothing on the plate that is delivered with their change.
- In an average restaurant, no tip is required or expected, since service is included in your bill. If you must, leave 2 euros.
- In a gastronomic- special occasion restaurant, no more than 5%.
- For a check of €100-120 (easy to spend that for a meal for 2 in Madrid and Barcelona), leave a €5 bill.

TIPS FOR LODGING

1. Rather than base your trip on a series of one-night stays, try to spend **multiple nights** (at least 3) **in one location.** Most hotels offer discounts for a minimum 3 night stay, many will entice with a 3 or 5 or 7-night package, and with them occasionally throw in extras, such as breakfast, a museum ticket or a city tour.
2. Avoid peak season rates and especially "extra season" rates (such as Seville's Holy Week or April Fair, when tariffs double) by traveling outside those dates, during **shoulder or low season.**
3. If your travel schedule is flexible, try **San Sebastián in June**, shoulder season, rather than July/Aug./Sept., high season. The city is every bit as beguiling in June as it is in high season.
4. The **Costa Brava** makes for a delightful **September** vacation, when the Med waters are still warm enough to swim in and crowds have vanished.
5. Ditto to **Seville, Málaga, Valencia or Barcelona as a destination for Xmas to New Year's**, when rates can drop €30 or more per night, and the temperatures are still relatively mild.
6. **Santiago de Compostela** hotel rates drop from Nov. 1-March 31, outside of "pilgrims' season".

7. At resort towns, such as San Sebastián, **forgo a hotel directly on the beach**. Venture just a few blocks off La Concha to a hotel in the lively shopping district, such as the Europa or the Astoria 7, for a better value.
8. Instead of San Sebastián, stay in the neighboring fishing village/beach resort of **Hondarribia** and take the Interbus (30 min. ride) to San Sebastián. Two small boutique hotels there, the Obispo and the Pampinot in the medieval quarter make an atmospheric and less expensive base.
9. Choose to **spend more time in World Heritage cities** and provincial capitals, such as Salamanca, Burgos, Segovia, Cáceres, Mérida, Córdoba and Santiago de Compostela where lodging costs dip significantly.
10. When touring Northern Spain take advantage of the very pleasing rates at **government-sponsored groups of inns** such as...
 - Casonas Asturianas
 - Club de Calidad Cantabria
 - Pazos de Galicia
 - Ascarioja Association of the Rioja
 - Nekatur Association of the Basque Country, called *casas rurales* or *agroturismos*.
 - a. www.casonasasturianas.com
 - b. www.calidadcantabria.com
 - c. www.pazosdegalicia.com
 - d. www.ascarioja.es
 - e. www.nekatur.net
11. Or see all rural homes, with guest reviews at: www.toprural.com
12. If traveling with a family of 4 or more, compare the cost of renting two hotel rooms against an **apartment stay** particularly if staying 3 or more days. For a couple, apartment stays only reap substantial savings when renting for 5+ days.
13. If you'd rather not forgo the 24 hr. front desk, concierge, daily cleaning service and in house bar/cafe/terceria, search for a high quality **Suites Hotel** or **Apartotel**, such as Suites Ramon de la Cruz 41 in Madrid or the Hispano Suite Suiza in Barcelona. These can save some precious euros when rented for a week.
 - a. www.ramondelacruz41.com
 - b. www.hispanos7suiza.com
14. Or families can spend time near the beach in a **rural home rental**. Use the Top Rural search engine to find the perfect size and price for a rural apartment or self-catering house in any region of the country.
15. If you're traveling with young children in the major cities and can make do with one bathroom, look at the **family rooms of the High Tech/Petit Palace group**, which will give a family two twin beds pushed together, or a king, and 2 bunk beds for the kids plus free crib. And the front desk will lend you a stroller upon request (www.hthoteles.com).
16. When booking a Parador, book online at www.parador.es for the best available rate.
17. The Paradors' web-only rate, **Tarifa Unica**, often beats other promotional rates such as the 5-night Plan, Young Escape Plan and Golden Age Passport.
18. When booking your first Parador reservation online, sign up for their frequent guest program, Amigos, which entitles you to a complimentary welcome drink (beer, wine or soda) and free garage parking.

19. You'll also receive a quarterly e-bulletin with special promotions available only to Amigos.
20. If you have many Parador stays throughout the year, you may accrue enough points from your rooms and dining to redeem them for a free night's stay. The number of points required for a free stay is always reduced during the low season.
21. Choose hotels that offer **free Wi-Fi** either in their downstairs lounge or in the guest rooms.
22. Some hotels (Preciados in Madrid, Auditori in Barcelona, Villa Soro in San Sebastián, members of the AC chain) offer **free mini-bars** for bottled water, juices, soda and beer.
23. If your 401 K is now a mere shadow of its former self, and you really must find a room for **under \$100** in the pricey cities of Barcelona, Madrid and San Sebastián or Sevilla during Holy Week or April Fair, consider **an upscale hostel** (not youth hostel) or an up-market **pensión**.
24. Think of it as a kind of urban inn, where a room with a/c, TV, mini fridge, private bath with hair dryer and free Wi-Fi costs €60-80.
25. Here are a few surprisingly comfortable choices, all in buildings with elevator, and not the exclusive domain of backpacking college students:
 - Hostal Adriano, Madrid
 - Hostal Santa Ana, Madrid (no elevator yet)
 - Hostal Don Diego, Madrid
 - Pensión Bellas Artes, San Sebastián
 - Pensión Aida, San Sebastián
 - Pensión Kursaal, San Sebastián
 - Hostal Alemana, San Sebastián
 - Hostal Goya, Barcelona
 - Callejón del Agua, Sevilla
 - Un Patio en Santa Cruz, Sevilla
 - Pensión Doña Trinidad, Sevilla

TIPS FOR SIGHTSEEING

In cities, even Barcelona and Madrid, from a central hotel, most sightseeing can be accomplished by walking. So **plan your day carefully with a city map**. Map out your sightseeing so that you don't have to back track.

1. Take advantage of **free admission times/days** to museums:
 - Prado - Tuesday - Saturday from 6:00 – 8:00 pm and Sunday from 5:00 – 8:00 pm.
 - Reina Sofía - Saturday from 2:30 – 9:00 and Sunday from 10:00 - 2:30.
 - National Archaeological Museum of Madrid, free during renovation.
 - Sorolla Museum, Madrid - Sundays
 - Fundación Lázaro Galidano, Madrid – Sundays.
 - Picasso, Barcelona - Sundays after 3:00 pm and 1st Sunday of each month.
 - Picasso, Málaga - last Sunday of every month.
 - National Museum of Catalan Art (MNAC) – 1st Sunday of each month.
 - Museum of Santa Cruz in Toledo - always free

2. If there are students in your group, they should use their **student I.D.** for free or reduced admission. The same goes to those 65 and over, although discounts are reserved for senior EU citizens only.
3. When in Barcelona, if you plan to visit at least 4 of the 7 museums participating in the **Art Ticket Bcn**, this will be a money saver for you. You can purchase it online at; <http://bcnshop.barcelonaturisme.com>. The tourist board's **Arqueo Ticket** gives holders free entry to the 5 Barcelona museums with archeological collections. Also purchase on line.
4. If you plan to visit all of Madrid's three major art museums, the Prado, Centro de Arte Reina Sofía and the Thyssen-Bornemisza and do not plan to see any of their temporary exhibits or visit during any "free periods", you'll save a few euros with the **Abono Paseo del Arte**, valid for one visit to the permanent collections of all 3.
5. You can purchase the Paseo del Arte card at any of the 3 museum ticket booths for €14.40 and it is valid for one year.
6. General admission to all 3 will add up to €20 if purchased at the ticket booths.
7. Rather than enlist an expensive private guide for a city tour, avail yourself of the very **low cost city tours** run by the tourist offices in Madrid and Barcelona.
8. Madrid's tourist board offers runs several popular guides walks in their Discover Madrid series, for the modest price of €3.90 each or 3 for €9.35. www.esmadrid.com
9. The tourist office of Barcelona promotes 5 themed "Barcelona Walks" via wireless tour guide system, which can be purchased from their online shop for €10.80 and €12.75. www.barcelonaturisme.com
10. Or download the free audio guide-The Art Walk and Hapsburg Madrid-from the Madrid tourist board site, www.esmadrid.com

TIPS FOR ENTERTAINMENT

- In Madrid and Barcelona take advantage of **free exhibits and concerts**. Madrid's Fundación March sponsors a series of free concerts. See www.march.es/musica/ingles/musica.asp
- Madrid's Mapre Foundation on Paseo Recoletos offers free and noteworthy temporary art exhibits. See the current exhibit at: www.mapfre.com/fundacion/es/exposiciones/cultural/Exposiciones_Actuales.shtml
- Barcelona's Caixa Forum hosts quite worthwhile temporary art exhibitions. See what's on now at: http://obrasocial.lacaixa.es/centros/english/caixaforumbcn_en.html
- Buy a one-euro Guia del Ocio magazine (comes out every Friday) at any Madrid or Barcelona newspaper kiosk to find these free events.

TIPS FOR TRANSPORTATION

In Barcelona and Madrid, eschew taxis and embrace the excellent **public transportation system**, buying a **10-ride ticket** (in Madrid, called a *bono metrobús*, and in Barcelona, a T-10) that can be shared among members of your party. It can be used on the buses and metro and represents a considerable savings.

Catch the curbside **Aerobús** (shuttle bus service) for an inexpensive (€4.50 trip from **Barcelona's airport** to city center, Plaça de Catalunya, then catch a taxi (or walk) from there to your hotel. If your hotel lies near the Plaça Universitat, the Aerobús makes an intermediate stop there.

Or if you are carrying just a backpack and have time to spare, **buy a T-10 pass** for €7.70 at the airport's Renfe train station for a 25 min. commuter train ride on line 2 into Barcelona's Sants station or Passeig de Gracia station to connect to the metro to your hotel.

Caveat: pickpockets abound on the metro, so tuck your passport and credit cards very safely into a money pouch before boarding the train.

You can then use the remaining 9 tickets on your T-10 pass to move around the city by metro or bus during your stay.

And this 10-ride ticket can be shared.

Catch the **Airport to Avenida de América bus** (€1) from curbside at Madrid's airport to the Avenida de América transportation hub, then taxi to your hotel from there.

Or if you have only a light roller board, from Terminal 4 or Terminal 2, take the **metro to Nuevos Ministerios** station (€2 euros), then taxi to your hotel.

Or if you have very light luggage or just a backpack and have your wits about you, take the metro from the airport to the closest stop to your hotel.

Caveat: pickpockets abound, the metro ride will take a minimum of 45 min., will require at least 2 line changes, and pulling bags through the long corridors and lifting them up and down the many flights or steps can constitute quite a work out.

When booking an **internal flight** on Iberia or Spanair, the **round trip fare** will most often be cheaper than a one-way fare. Just book a round trip, then discard the return.

If you can meet the very strict luggage size and weight restrictions, fly low cost **Vueling** or **Click Air** (Granada-Barcelona or Barcelona-Bilbao)

When touring Southern Spain, **take a bus or train to/from the major cities:** Sevilla, Córdoba, Granada. You will not want to bring a car into the nightmarish traffic in their maze-like centers.

If you plan to tour the perched Moorish white towns (*pueblos blancos*) from Sevilla, **pick up your rental car upon leaving the city and drop it off before entering Granada.** A car in Granada equals great stress, unless you stay on the Alhambra hill. Even there, you don't need your car, since the system of red mini buses functions extremely well.

Madrid-Zaragoza-Barcelona

Rather than rent a car to the following destinations, take the high-speed train:

- Madrid-Córdoba-Sevilla
- Madrid-Málaga
- Córdoba-Málaga
- Sevilla-Málaga
- Madrid-Alicante
- Madrid-Valencia
- Valencia-Barcelona
- Valencia-Alicante
- Madrid-Segovia-Valladolid
- Madrid-Toledo
- Madrid Logroño
- Madrid-Pamplona

For some inter city routes, the **bus beats the train** in price, schedule and even comfort, with Supra/Vips/Express service-leather seats, 2-1 configuration, attendant who serves refreshments. See schedules and book at: www.movelia.es.

- Madrid to Salamanca: Auto-Res express service
- Madrid to Cáceres or Mérida: Auto-Res express service
- Seville to Granada: Alsina Graells (a division of Alsa)
- Málaga to Granada: Alsina Graells
- Bilbao to San Sebastián: PESA
- San Sebastián to Pamplona: Conda or La Roncalesa
- Bilbao to Pamplona: La Burundesa
- Ronda to Marbella: Autobuses Portillo
- Ronda to Sevilla: Los Amarillos

When purchasing train tickets, reserve 62 days in advance at: <https://wl.renfe.es/voll>, choose a **60% discount WEB or 40% discount Estrella fare**.

Use the tutorial found at <http://tinyurl.com/ctgmr5> to negotiate the Renfe site.

For the high-speed trains, **tourist class** provides a comfortable ride-no need to buy a pricier Preferente (business) class seat.

If you are able to drive a **manual transmission** and request a **diesel engine** you will save at around 40% on fuel costs while driving in Spain.

For lower fuel prices, fill up your tank at a **hypermarket fueling station**.

When arranging your car rental, check the multinationals, Avis, Hertz, National/Atesa, then call the consolidator **Auto Europe** or its sister, **Kemwel**. They will match or beat any of the major players' rates. And loyal renters praise their customer service.