

SAFETY IN SPAIN

COUNTRY DESCRIPTION: Spain and Andorra are both advanced stable democracies and modern economies. Spain is a member of NATO and the European Union.

ENTRY/EXIT REQUIREMENTS: Spain is a party to the Schengen agreement. As such, U.S. citizens may enter Spain for up to 90 days for tourist or business purposes without a visa. The passport should be valid for at least three months beyond the period of stay.

For further information concerning entry requirements for Spain, travelers should contact the Embassy of Spain at 2375 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20037, telephone (202) 452-0100, or the nearest Spanish Consulate. Spanish government web sites with information about entry requirements (in Spanish) can be found at <http://www.mae.es> and <http://www.mir.es>. Additional information may be obtained from the Tourist Office of Spain in New York, telephone (212) 265-8822, or via the Internet at <http://www.spain.info/>.

SAFETY AND SECURITY: For the latest security information, Americans traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs' web site at <http://travel.state.gov>, where the current Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts, as well as the Worldwide Caution, can be found. Up-to-date information on safety and security can also be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll free in the U.S. and Canada, or for callers outside the U.S. and Canada, a regular toll-line at 1-202-501-4444. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays).

The Department of State urges American citizens to take responsibility for their own personal security while traveling overseas. For general information about appropriate measures travelers can take to protect themselves in an overseas environment, see the Department of State's pamphlet A Safe Trip Abroad.

CRIME: While most of Spain has a moderate rate of crime and most of the estimated one million American tourists have trouble free visits to Spain each year, street crimes against tourists occur in the principal tourist areas. Madrid and Barcelona, in particular, report incidents of pickpocketing, mugging and occasional violent attacks, some of which require the victim to seek medical attention. Although crimes occur at all times of day and night and to people of all ages, older tourists and Asian Americans seem to be particularly at risk. Criminals frequent tourist areas and major attractions such as museums, monuments, restaurants, outdoor cafes, Internet cafes, hotel lobbies, beach resorts, city buses, subways, trains, train stations, airports, and ATMs.

In Madrid, incidents have been reported in all major tourist areas, including the area near the Prado Museum, near Atocha train station, in Retiro Park, in areas of old Madrid including near the Royal Palace and in Plaza Mayor. There has been an increase in the number of passport and bag thefts reported at Madrid's Barajas Airport, local hotels, as well as in El Rastro (Madrid's flea market) and in the Metro.

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In Barcelona, the largest number of incidents reported also occurred in major tourist areas, on Las Ramblas, Barcelona's El Prat airport, Sants train station, Metro stations, in the Sagrada Familia Area, in the Gothic Quarter, in Parc Güell, in Plaza Real, and along Barcelona's beaches. There has been a rise in the number of thefts reported at the Port Olympic Area and nearby beaches.

Travelers should remain alert to their personal security and exercise caution. Travelers are encouraged to carry limited cash, only one credit card, and a copy of their passport; leaving extra cash, extra credit cards, passports and personal documents in a safe location. When carrying documents, credit cards or cash, you are encouraged to secure them in a hard-to-reach place and not to carry all valuables together in a purse or backpack.

Thieves often work in teams of two or more people. In many cases, one person distracts a victim while the accomplices perform the robbery. For example, someone might wave a map in your face and ask for directions, "inadvertently" spill something on you, or help you clean-up bird droppings thrown on by a third unseen accomplice. While your attention is diverted, an accomplice makes off with the valuables. Thieves may drop coins or keys at your feet to distract you and try to take your belongings while you are trying to help. Attacks are sometimes initiated from behind, with the victim being grabbed around the neck and choked by one assailant while others rifle through or grab the belongings. A group of assailants may surround the victim in a crowded popular tourist area or on public transportation, and only after the group has departed does the person discover he/she has been robbed. Purse-snatchers may grab purses or wallets and run away, or immediately pass the stolen item to an accomplice. A passenger on a passing motorcycle sometimes robs pedestrians. There have been increasing reports of thieves posing as plainclothes police officers, beckoning to pedestrians from cars and sometimes confronting them on the street and asking for documents or to inspect their cash for counterfeit bills, which they ultimately "confiscate" as evidence. The U.S. Embassy in Madrid has received several reports of cars on limited access motorways being pulled over by supposed unmarked police cars. The Spanish police do not operate in this fashion. American citizens are encouraged to ask for a uniformed law enforcement officer if approached.

While the incidence of sexual assault is statistically very low, attacks do occur. Spanish authorities have warned of availability of so-called "date-rape" drugs and other drugs, including "GBH" and liquid ecstasy. Americans should not lower their personal security awareness because they are on vacation.

INFORMATION FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME: The loss or theft abroad of a U.S. passport should be reported immediately to the local police and the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. If you are the victim of a crime while overseas, in addition to reporting to local police, please contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate for assistance. The Embassy/Consulate staff can, for example, assist you to find appropriate medical care, contact family members or friends and explain how funds could be transferred. Although the investigation and prosecution of the crime is solely the responsibility of local authorities, consular officers can help you to understand the local criminal justice process and to find an attorney if needed. Spain does have a Crime Victim's Assistance program. More information can be obtained at http://www.mjusticia.es/Directorio/Victimas?menu_activo=1057821035144&lang=es_es. The local equivalent to the "911" emergency line in Spain is 112.

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TRAFFIC SAFETY AND ROAD CONDITIONS: Public transportation in large cities is generally excellent. All major cities have metered taxis, and extra charges must be posted in the vehicle. Travelers are advised to use only clearly identified cabs and to ensure that taxi drivers always switch on the meter. A green light on the roof indicates that the taxi is available. Rail service is comfortable and reliable, but varies in quality and speed. Intercity buses are usually comfortable and inexpensive.

CRIMINAL PENALTIES: While in a foreign country, a U.S. citizen is subject to that country's laws and regulations, which sometimes differ significantly from those in the United States and may not afford the protections available to the individual under U.S. law. Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe than in the United States for similar offences. Persons violating Spain's or Andorra's laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested or imprisoned. Penalties for possession, use, or trafficking in illegal drugs in Spain and Andorra are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines. The cities of Madrid and Barcelona and The Balearics Regional Government have banned the consumption of alcohol in the street, other than in registered street cafes and bars. Visitors to Madrid, Barcelona, Mallorca, Ibiza, and Menorca should be aware that failure to respect this law might result in the imposition of fines. Engaging in sexual conduct with children or using or disseminating child pornography in a foreign country is a crime, prosecutable in the United States. Please see our information on Criminal Penalties.

REGISTRATION / EMBASSY LOCATION: Americans living or traveling in Spain or Andorra are encouraged to register with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate through the State Department's travel registration web site to obtain updated information on travel and security within Spain or Andorra. Americans without Internet access may register directly with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. By registering, American citizens make it easier for the Embassy or Consulate to contact them in case of emergency. The U.S. Embassy is located at Serrano 75; telephone (34) (91) 587-2200, and fax (34) (91) 587-2303. U.S. citizens who register in the Consular Section at the U.S. Embassy, Consulate General, or one of the Consular Agencies listed below can obtain updated information on travel and security within Spain or Andorra. Additional information, and appointments for routine services, are available through the U.S. Embassy's home page at <http://madrid.usembassy.gov>. Appointments are required for routine Consular Services.

The U.S. Consulate in Barcelona is located at Paseo Reina Elisenda 23-25; telephone (34) (93) 280-2227 and fax (34) (93) 205-5206. Visitors to Barcelona can access additional information from the Consulate General's web page at <http://madrid.usembassy.gov/barcelonaen.html>.

This replaces the Country Specific Information for Spain and Andorra dated December 13, 2007, to update sections on Safety and Security and Crime.