



Spain 2019 Crime & Safety Report



This is an annual report produced in conjunction with the Regional Security Office at the U.S. Embassy in Madrid, Spain.

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses Spain at Level 2, indicating travelers should exercise increased caution due to terrorism.

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Please review OSAC's [Spain-specific page](#) for original OSAC reporting, consular messages, and contact information, some of which may be available only to private-sector representatives with an OSAC password.

Crime Threats

There is minimal risk from crime in Madrid and Barcelona. Spain is generally a safe destination for tourists, students, business travelers, and others. Although violent crime may occur, it is generally uncommon. Foreigners are the targets of choice for pickpockets and thieves who operate in hotel lobbies, restaurants, public transit systems, airports, at car rental counters, and other areas frequented by tourists. Upon arrival at the airport, train station, bus station, hotel, or other areas with large crowds, keep a close eye on your personal belongings.

Common crime tactics include: theft of baggage while visitors check in/out of their hotels, during check-in at the airport, while picking up or dropping off a rental car, or while hailing a taxi; theft of valuables left in vehicles; criminal distractions (e.g. asking for directions, dropping coins/keys and asking for assistance, or "inadvertently" spilling something on the victim and offering to clean it up) to allow a counterpart to pick a victim's pocket; and taking advantage of unsuspecting tourists who hang a purse/backpack on the back of a chair, place their cellphones on a table when at a restaurant, or place their belonging on a bench beside them. Additionally, distraction continues to be a common tactic used by highway robbers in Spain. Thieves will flag down their victim and indicate there is a problem with the victim's vehicle. While one of the assailants distracts the victim's attention, an unseen accomplice robs valuables from the victim's vehicle.

The highest incidence of street crime is during local holiday periods (late November-early January, Easter/Semana Santa, and August) and the busy summer tourist season. There are well-organized pickpocketing gangs who travel throughout Europe following the peak tourist season and major events where large groups of unsuspecting visitors will be present.

Credit card skimming and cloning are a concern for travelers in Spain. Travelers should be wary of skimming devices placed on ATMs, take actions to protect card PINs, and closely monitor bank statements for anomalies. For more information, please review OSAC's Report, [The Overseas Traveler's Guide to ATM Skimmers & Fraud](#).

Residential burglaries primarily occur when security vulnerabilities exist and/or when residents do not implement sound residential security practices. Reports indicate thefts usually occur when occupants are away for an extended period; thieves usually gain access through doors or other entry points that are left unlocked.

The U.S. Embassy and Consulate routinely receive reports of sexual assaults affecting U.S. citizens. U.S. citizen victims of such crimes in Spain can contact the Embassy duty officer for specific guidance and assistance, see Crime Victim Assistance section below. Authorities warn of the availability of so-called "date-rape" drugs and other drugs, including GHB and liquid ecstasy. For more information, please review OSAC's Report [Shaken: The Don'ts of Alcohol Abroad](#).

A number of U.S. citizens have been victims of various scams in Spain. One scheme involves a victim receiving an email/call requesting money to assist a relative or acquaintance who has been arrested, detained, robbed, or injured in Spain. These types of scams prey on emotions and the desire to assist others in need. The recipient of such a message should not send money, and should independently confirm and verify the situation involving the relative or acquaintance. If a U.S. citizen is in distress overseas, please notify the closest Embassy or Consulate.

Other scams include lottery or advance-fee scams in which a person is lured to Spain to finalize a financial transaction. Often, the victims are initially contacted via Internet or fax and informed they have won the Spanish Lottery (El Gordo), inherited money from a distant relative, or are needed to assist in a major financial transaction from one country to another. For more information, please see the Bureau of Consular Affairs' web page on [International Financial Scams](#).

Transportation-Safety Situation

For more information, please review OSAC's Report, [Security in Transit: Airplanes, Public Transport, and Overnights](#).

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Spain has an excellent network of roads and highways. A speed limit of 120 km/h on major highways is enforced unless otherwise posted. The Guardia Civil patrols the highways and uses radar and cameras, both fixed and mobile, to enforce the speed limits. Speed cameras enforce average speed limits in several of the tunnels and other zones along the highways and urban areas throughout Spain. Emergency phones are located on the side of the highways at regular intervals.

Drivers must maintain the following emergency equipment in their vehicle while driving in Spain: a spare tire and tools to replace it, two portable warning triangles, and a reflective vest. For more information on self-driving, please review OSAC's Report [Driving Overseas: Best Practices](#).

Public Transportation Conditions

Spain has extensive and generally safe train, bus, subway, and airport transportation systems. Taxis are also abundantly available, reliable, and safe. The U.S. Embassy in Madrid and Consulate General in Barcelona place no restrictions on their personnel's use of mass transit.

Terrorism Threat

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There is a moderate threat from terrorism in Madrid and Barcelona. Credible information indicates terrorist groups continue to plot potential attacks in Europe, including Spain. All European countries remain vulnerable to attacks from transnational terrorist organizations with little or no warning. Maintain heightened situational awareness and incorporate good personal security practices into your daily activity, including vigilance while in public places.

Spain maintains a national terrorism alert level which consists of five levels: 1 – low; 2 – moderate; 3 – medium; 4 – high; and 5 - very high. Since June 2015, Spain’s terrorism alert level has consistently been held at level 4. According to figures published by the Spanish Ministry of Interior, since 2015, Spanish security forces have arrested more than 250 individuals on terrorism-related charges associated with Islamic extremism. In 2018 and in furtherance of combating the threat of Islamic extremism, Spanish authorities carried out 23 anti-terrorism operations and arrested 29 individuals. These arrests took place throughout different parts of Spain, with the highest numbers of arrests taking place near Barcelona. For further information, see the [Spanish terrorism alert level website](#).

Spanish authorities continue to operate with an increased level of vigilance focused on the threat of those promoting and supporting terrorism and terrorist organizations, individuals radicalized in Spain or other parts of Europe, and returning foreign fighters.

In August 2018, a 29-year old man of Algerian origin brandished a knife in a police station in the Cornellà de Llobregat neighborhood of Barcelona, reportedly shouted “Allahu Akbar” and tried to stab a police officer before being fatally shot. Local security officials consider the incident a terrorist attack.

On August 17-18, 2017, Spain suffered its first major terror attack in 13 years. Vehicular ramming attacks in Barcelona’s Las Ramblas pedestrian zone and in the coastal town of Cambrils claimed 16 lives (including that of one U.S. citizen) and resulted in over 100 injuries. The attacks were linked to a cell of ISIS supporters radicalized by a Moroccan Imam in Spain with an extensive criminal history. The cell’s original attack plans were disrupted on August 16, 2017, when members of the group mishandled explosives in a safe house resulting in an explosion that killed several terror cell members. It is believed that if the original attack plans would have been carried out, the death toll would have been significantly higher.

In 2011, the Basque Separatist Group Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA), declared a “definitive cessation of armed activities” following a decades-long campaign of violence that claimed over 800 victims. Since then, ETA has not carried out any violent activity. In May 2018, ETA formally announced its dissolution.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Civil Unrest

There is minimal threat from civil unrest in Madrid and Barcelona. Public demonstrations in Spain occur often and are normally peaceful. Demonstrations require formal petition to the local government and approval. Large demonstrations are generally well controlled under the supervision of the police.

General strikes can cause disruptions to public transportation, a temporary shutdown in public services, and large street protests. These events typically have the greatest effect on public transportation and the industrial sectors, making travel within areas near the protests difficult.

In October 2017, the Catalan Regional government held an illegal independence referendum that was marred by clashes between security forces and voters. Subsequently, Catalonia experienced numerous large-scale protests both in support of and against the Catalanian independence movement. The majority of these protests were peaceful, but some protest activity blocked roads, disrupted major thoroughfares, and rail operations within Catalonia. In 2018, the region of Catalonia, including the city of Barcelona, was again the scene of demonstrations related to the independence movement. Although, the majority of these demonstrations were nonviolent, some protests did feature confrontations between protesters and members of the security forces. The Consulate issued numerous security alerts advising U.S. citizens to avoid the large gatherings due to their unpredictability and potential for violence. Monitor local political conditions in Catalonia, as they can possibly lead to protest activity in major urban areas.

During the 2018 summer tourist season, an anti-tourism youth group associated with a political party was responsible for orchestrating multiple protests against the tourism industry in Catalonia. Similar actions took place in 2017. The protests were generally peaceful, but some did cause property damage. For more details, please review OSAC's report, [Anti-Tourism Action in Catalonia](#).

Religious/Ethnic Violence

In March 2018, the Madrid neighborhood of Lavapiés saw several days of rioting by the African migrant community after a Senegalese street vendor died of a heart attack while reportedly fleeing from local police.

According to international migration organizations, in 2018, Spain detected 58,525 irregular migrants at its borders. This is more than double from the 22,900 detected in 2017.

Police Response

Crime Victim Assistance

Victims of crime can contact the consular sections at the U.S. Embassy in Madrid, the Consulate General in Barcelona, or the nearest consular agency (located in Las Palmas, Malaga, Mallorca, Seville, and Valencia) for assistance during normal business hours. In an emergency involving an American citizen in Spain, you can reach the duty officer by calling: (34) 91-587-2200.

The number for any emergency in Spain (police, fire, ambulance) is 112. In Madrid, and in most metropolitan areas of Spain, English speakers may be on duty to assist non-Spanish speakers that call the emergency hotline.

To file a complaint via telephone, call the Spanish National Police and reach a dedicated English speaker at (34) 90-210-2112. This service is available Monday-Sunday from 0900-2100.

For local first responders, refer to the Embassy's [Emergency Assistance page](#).

Police/Security Agencies

A variety of professional law enforcement organizations operate in Spain. The Guardia Civil (Civil Guard) is an 80,000-strong national police force with broad policing responsibilities, including coverage of rural areas. The Cuerpo Nacional de Policia (Spanish National Police) is an 85,000-strong national police force with broad policing responsibilities, mainly in urban areas with a population of more than 20,000.

Spain also has several autonomous regions with their own regional police forces: Ertzaintza in the Basque Country; Mossos d'Esquadra in Catalonia; Policia Foral (Foruzaingoa) in Navarre; Brigadas Especiales de Seguridad de la Comunidad Autónoma de Madrid (BESCAM, Special Security Brigades for the Autonomous Community of Madrid) in Madrid; and the Policia Canaria in the Canary Islands.

At the local level, many cities have municipal police called Policia Municipal or Guardia Urbana.

Medical Emergencies

Medical services are comparable to the U.S. Dial 112 from any phone to request assistance in a medical emergency. An English speaker is available to assist non-Spanish speakers.

Contact Information for Available Medical Services

For medical assistance, refer to the Embassy's [Medical Assistance page](#).

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

The CDC offers additional information on vaccines and health guidance for [Spain](#).

OSAC Country Council Information

The Spain Country Council is active and meets on a quarterly basis. Interested private-sector security managers should contact OSAC's [Europe Team](#) with any questions.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Madrid
Calle de Serrano, 75
28006 Madrid, Spain

Hours of Operation: U.S. citizens in need of emergency assistance can come to the Embassy between 0800 and 1300 Monday through Friday without an appointment, except for U.S. and local holidays. For non-emergency assistance, you must make an appointment via our website.

Embassy Contact Numbers

Tel: (+34) 91 587 2200
Website: <https://es.usembassy.gov/>

Nearby Posts

Consulate General Barcelona: <https://es.usembassy.gov/embassy-consulates/barcelona/>

Consular Agency Sevilla: <https://es.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/u-s-consular-offices/consular-agency-seville/>

Consular Agency Valencia: <https://es.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/u-s-consular-offices/consular-agency-valencia/>

Consular Agency Las Palmas: <https://es.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/u-s-consular-offices/consular-agency-las-palmas/>

Consular Agency Malaga: <https://es.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/u-s-consular-offices/consular-agency-malaga/>

Consular Agency Palma de Mallorca: <https://es.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/u-s-consular-offices/consular-agency-palma-de-mallorca/>

Embassy Guidance

U.S. citizens traveling to Spain should register with the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) to ensure they receive pertinent security updates and notices.

Additional Resources

[Spain](#) Country Information Sheet