



Practical Tips for Day-to-Day Life

DISCLAIMER: While we strive to provide the most accurate and up-to-date information possible, this module serves as a general guide and should not be considered legal or professional advice. Your specific situation may require additional or different steps depending on the region of Spain.

Welcome to Module 10, where we focus on the practical aspects of daily life that will help you thrive in your new Spanish home. Moving to a new country involves more than just legal paperwork and housing—it's about successfully navigating the rhythms and systems of everyday life.

Spain offers an excellent quality of life, but like any country, it has unique approaches to transportation, shopping, dining, and essential services. While sometimes subtle, these differences can be significant adjustment points for newcomers. Understanding them in advance will help you avoid frustration and accelerate your integration into Spanish society.

In this module, we'll explore how to get around efficiently using Spain's excellent public transportation networks and what you need to know if you plan to drive. We'll guide you through Spanish shopping habits, meal times, and entertainment options that might differ significantly from what you're accustomed to. Finally, we'll provide step-by-step instructions for setting up critical utilities and services, from Internet and mobile phones to electricity and water.

Our goal is to equip you with the practical knowledge that most guides don't cover—the kind of insider information that typically takes months or years to discover through trial and error. By the end of this module, you'll be prepared to handle daily tasks with confidence, allowing you to focus on enjoying your new life in Spain rather than struggling with logistics.

Let's begin by exploring how you'll get around in your new home country.



Transportation Options and Driving Rules

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PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION NETWORKS

Spain boasts one of Europe's most comprehensive public transportation systems, varying in scope and efficiency depending on the region. In major cities like Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, and Seville, you'll find:

- Metro systems that are clean, efficient, and extensive
- Urban bus networks covering areas the metro doesn't reach
- Commuter trains (Cercanías) connecting city centers with suburbs
- Trams in select cities like Barcelona and Valencia
- High-speed rail (AVE) connecting major cities at speeds up to 310 km/h

For frequent users, transportation cards offer significant savings:

- In Madrid, the Multi-Card (Tarjeta Multi) can be loaded with various ticket types
- Barcelona offers the T-Casual (10 journeys) and T-Usual (unlimited monthly travel)
- Most cities have similar systems with monthly passes providing the best value

The mobile app Moovit provides real-time information for public transportation across Spain, while city-specific apps like EMT Madrid or TMB Barcelona offer additional local features.

DRIVING IN SPAIN WITH FOREIGN LICENSES

The rules for driving with a foreign license depend on your country of origin:

- Non-EU licenses: Valid for your first 6 months of residency only
- UK licenses: Post-Brexit, these follow non-EU rules (6 months validity)
- US/Canadian licenses: Must be exchanged or replaced with a Spanish license after 6 months

To exchange your license (if your country has a reciprocal agreement with Spain):

1. Request an appointment at the DGT (Dirección General de Tráfico) through their website
2. Submit your valid foreign license, NIE/TIE, passport, residency documentation, and medical certificate (certificado médico)
3. Pay the required fee (approximately €30)
4. Your license will be processed, and you'll receive a temporary permit while waiting

If your country doesn't have an exchange agreement with Spain, you must take theoretical and practical driving tests after your first 6 months.

VEHICLE PURCHASE AND REGISTRATION

If you plan to purchase a vehicle in Spain:

1. New cars: Purchase directly from dealerships with your NIE/TIE
2. Used cars: Available through dealerships or private sellers (check vehicle history through the DGT)
3. Registration process (if buying privately):
 - Complete a transfer application (solicitud de transmisión)
 - Pay transfer tax (approximately 4% of vehicle value)
 - Update registration at the DGT within 30 days
 - Obtain mandatory insurance before driving

IMPORTING YOUR VEHICLE

Bringing your vehicle from abroad involves:

1. Vehicle inspection (ITV) to ensure compliance with Spanish standards
2. Homologation (homologación) process for vehicles from outside the EU
3. Registration tax (impuesto de matriculación) ranges from 0-14.75% depending on emissions

Road tax (impuesto sobre vehículos de tracción mecánica) paid annually

ESSENTIAL TRAFFIC RULES

Key rules to remember:

- Drive on the right side of the road
- Speed limits: 50 km/h in urban areas, 90 km/h on secondary roads, 120 km/h on highways
- Zero tolerance for drinking and driving (legal limit is 0.5 g/l, 0.3 g/l for new drivers)
- Mandatory safety equipment includes reflective vests, warning triangles, and spare bulbs
- Mobile phone use while driving is strictly prohibited, and heavily fined





PARKING AND TOLL ROADS

- In cities, look for blue zones (paid parking, time-limited) and green zones (resident priority)
- Parking apps like EasyPark and ELParking simplify payment in most major cities
- Major highways (autopistas) are often toll roads, indicated with "AP" (e.g., AP-7)
- Toll-free highways are designated with "A" (e.g., A-7)
- Toll payment options include cash, credit card, electronic tags (VIA-T), or smartphone apps

REGIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Islands (Balearics and Canaries) have limited but efficient bus networks
- Rural areas often have reduced public transportation options
- Northern regions (Basque Country, Asturias) feature more mountainous driving conditions
- Tourist areas may have seasonal transportation schedules

Understanding Spain's transportation systems will greatly enhance your mobility and independence as you settle into your new home.



Shopping, Dining, and Entertainment

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SPANISH SHOPPING CULTURE

Spanish shopping habits differ notably from those in North America and the UK, with the most significant distinction being business hours. The traditional workday in Spain includes a midday break, which affects when stores are open. Most shops operate from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM, close for siesta (typically 2:00-5:00 PM), and then reopen until 8:00 or 9:00 PM. While this pattern is evolving in larger cities, it remains common in smaller towns and during summer months.

Sunday shopping is extremely limited in most regions, with only designated "tourist zones" permitting some Sunday operations. Large shopping centers and department stores are typically closed on Sundays. Only small 24-hour shops, restaurants, and some boutique stores may be open.

Spain offers various grocery options catering to different needs. Mercadona, Carrefour, and Dia are among the most popular supermarket chains, each with distinct price points and product selections. Traditional markets (mercados) remain vital institutions in Spanish cities, offering fresh produce, meat, fish, and specialty items, often at competitive prices. The Mercado de San Miguel in Madrid and La Boquería in Barcelona exemplify these vibrant spaces that combine shopping with cultural experiences.

Neighborhood shops specializing in specific goods—bakeries (panaderías), butchers (carnicerías), and fishmongers (pescaderías)—provide high-quality products and personalized service. Building relationships with these local merchants can enhance your shopping experience and integration into the community.

SPANISH DINING CULTURE

Spanish meal times differ significantly from those of other Western countries. Breakfast (desayuno) is typically light, often just coffee and toast, and is consumed between 7:00 and 9:00 AM. Lunch (comida) is the main meal of the day, eaten between 2:00 and 4:00 PM, while dinner (cena) is served late by international standards, usually from 9:00 to 11:00 PM.

The concept of "menú del día" (daily menu) offers exceptional value for lunch. It typically includes three courses, bread, a beverage, and sometimes coffee for €10-15. This fixed-price option is available at most restaurants on weekdays and provides an excellent opportunity to sample Spanish cuisine economically.

Tipping practices in Spain differ from countries like the United States. Service is included in the bill, making tipping optional rather than expected. While leaving small change or rounding up the bill is common practice, the 15-20% tips customary in North America are unnecessary and may even cause confusion.

Dining out in Spain involves understanding a variety of establishments:

- Restaurants (restaurantes) offer full meals with table service
- Bars (bares) serve drinks and tapas throughout the day
- Cafeterías combine elements of bars and restaurants
- Tabernas are traditional taverns focusing on wine and simple food

The tradition of "ir de tapas" (going for tapas) involves visiting multiple establishments and having a small dish and drink at each. This social ritual typically begins around 8:00 PM and serves as a pre-dinner activity and a way to experience diverse culinary offerings. Regional variations abound, from pintxos in the Basque Country to montaditos in Andalusia.

ENTERTAINMENT AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Spain's rich cultural heritage offers diverse entertainment options. Major cities host world-class museums like Madrid's Prado and Reina Sofía or Barcelona's Picasso Museum. Most state museums offer free entry during certain hours or days, typically late afternoons or Sunday mornings.

Theater, opera, and classical music thrive in cultural centers like Madrid's Teatro Real and Barcelona's Liceu. Tickets for these performances vary widely in price, with significant discounts available for residents, students, and seniors. Contemporary music venues and festivals attract international acts throughout the year, with FIB Benicàssim and Primavera Sound among the most renowned events.

Cinema remains popular, with many theaters offering original version (V.O.) films with Spanish subtitles. Cinema chains like Yelmo and Cinesa frequently screen films in English, particularly in expat-heavy areas.

Spain's vibrant festival calendar provides year-round entertainment opportunities. Beyond internationally known events like Pamplona's San Fermín (Running of the Bulls) and Valencia's Las Fallas, every town celebrates its patron saint with local festivities. Regional tourist offices or your city's website typically list upcoming events, allowing you to participate in authentic cultural experiences.

Sports, particularly fútbol (soccer), play a central role in Spanish entertainment. Attending a La Liga match offers insight into Spanish passion and community, with tickets available through team websites or third-party vendors. Other popular sports include basketball, tennis, and cycling, each with professional leagues and public facilities for participation.

Spain's natural landscape provides abundant outdoor recreation opportunities, from Mediterranean beaches to Pyrenees ski resorts. National parks like Doñana in Andalusia and Picos de Europa in northern Spain offer hiking, wildlife viewing, and landscape photography. Many cities maintain extensive networks of bicycle paths, with bike-sharing programs available to residents.

Evening entertainment follows Spain's late schedule, with nightlife typically beginning after 11:00 PM and continuing until early morning. Age restrictions are generally less strictly enforced than in North America, contributing to Spain's intergenerational social culture.





Internet, Phone, and Utilities Setup

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INTERNET SERVICES

Establishing reliable internet connectivity is typically a priority when settling in Spain. Depending on your location, the market offers numerous providers with varying coverage and service quality. The primary internet service providers include Movistar (the former national telecom company), Orange, Vodafone, MásMóvil, and Yoigo, alongside smaller operators like Pepephone and O2.

When selecting an internet provider, consider both fiber optic availability and connection speeds. Spain has impressive fiber optic coverage (FTTH - Fiber to the Home), with over 80% of households having access to high-speed connections. In urban areas, speeds of 300Mbps to 1Gbps are typical and reasonably priced, typically ranging from €30-60 monthly.

The contracting process requires your NIE, a Spanish bank account for direct debit payments, and proof of address. Installation appointments are usually scheduled within 1-2 weeks of signing up, though delays can occur in peak moving seasons (September and January). Most contracts include a 12-month minimum commitment period, with early termination fees ranging from €50-150 depending on the provider and remaining contract duration.

Many providers offer combined packages (packs or combos) that include Internet, mobile phone, landline, and television services. These bundled options often provide better value than contracting services separately. Comparison websites like Kelisto.es and Rastreator.com allow you to analyze available offers based on your postal code. Consider portable WiFi options or mobile data plans for temporary accommodations or immediate connectivity needs until your permanent connection is established.

MOBILE PHONE SERVICES

Spain's mobile phone market offers both contract (contrato) and prepaid (prepago) options. Major providers include the same companies offering internet services and mobile virtual network operators (MVNOs) like Simyo, Lowi, Orange, and Digi, which often provide more competitive pricing.

For new residents, prepaid options offer flexibility without long-term commitments. They require minimal documentation (just your passport) and can be purchased at provider stores, electronics retailers, or even some supermarkets and tobacconists. Prepaid plans typically cost between €10-20 monthly for generous data allowances (10-30GB) and unlimited or high-volume national calls.

Contract plans require your NIE and a Spanish bank account but usually offer better value for longer-term residents. Monthly costs range from €7-25 depending on data allowances and included services. Most contracts have 12-month minimum terms with early termination penalties.

If you're bringing your existing phone from abroad, ensure it's unlocked before arrival. Spain uses GSM networks on standard European frequencies, which are compatible with most international phones. You'll need to request a SIM size appropriate for your device (standard, micro, or nano).

To maintain your foreign number while in Spain, consider porting it to an international service like Google Voice (for US numbers) or using dual-SIM phones to keep your foreign and Spanish numbers active simultaneously.

ELECTRICITY SERVICE

Electricity services in Spain are divided between distributors (who manage the physical infrastructure) and marketers (who bill customers). The distributor for your area is fixed based on your location, while you can choose from numerous marketers.

The two main electricity markets are:

1. Regulated market (mercado regulado) with government-controlled prices
2. Free market (mercado libre) with provider-determined rates

The regulated market offers the PVPC (Precio Voluntario para el Pequeño Consumidor) tariff through reference marketers like Energía XXI (Endesa), Curenergía (Iberdrola), or Comercializadora Regulada (Naturgy). While historically more economical, recent energy price volatility has complicated this comparison.

The free market features numerous providers, including Endesa, Iberdrola, Naturgy, Repsol, and smaller companies like Holaluz and Lucera. These often offer fixed-rate contracts that provide price stability but may include longer commitment periods.

To contract electricity service, you'll need:

- NIE/TIE
- Rental contract or property deed
- Spanish bank account
- CUPS number (a unique identifier for the property's electrical connection)
- Electricity supply point number (found on previous bills or obtainable from the landlord)

Connection or reconnection typically occurs within 5-7 business days. Power in Spain is 230V/50Hz with Type F (Schuko) sockets, so appliances from North America will require transformers or adapters.

Spanish electricity bills include fixed charges (based on contracted power capacity measured in kW) and variable consumption charges (based on kWh used). The contracted power level determines how many high-consumption devices can operate simultaneously, with typical apartments requiring 3.45-5.75kW. Increasing your contracted power raises your fixed monthly costs but prevents circuit breaker trips when multiple appliances run simultaneously.

Time-of-use tariffs (discriminación horaria) offer lower rates during off-peak hours, potentially reducing costs if you can shift consumption to evenings and weekends.

WATER SERVICE

Municipal or regional companies with fixed service areas manage water services. In most rental situations, water service remains under the landlord's name, with costs either included in rent or billed separately based on consumption. For property owners, transferring the water contract to your name requires:

- NIE/TIE
- Property deed or rental contract
- Previous owner's last bill (if available)
- Spanish bank account for direct debit

Water quality is generally excellent throughout Spain, though mineral content varies by region. Some areas have particularly hard water that may affect appliance longevity and require descaling products for kettles and coffee machines.

Water bills typically arrive bi-monthly or quarterly. They include fixed service charges and consumption-based fees with tiered pricing to encourage conservation. The average household spends €20-40 per month on water services.

NATURAL GAS

Natural gas is not universally available in Spain, with many buildings using electricity, bottled butane gas (bombonas), or central propane tanks for heating and cooking. If your property has natural gas connections, the contracting process resembles electricity service, with both regulated and free market options.

Major gas suppliers include Naturgy, Endesa, and Iberdrola, which often offer combined electricity and gas packages at discounted rates. Once documentation is processed, connection typically takes 5-7 business days.

For properties without natural gas infrastructure, bottled butane remains common. These orange cylinders cost approximately €18 and last 1-2 months for cooking purposes or less for heating. They can be delivered to your home by calling the distribution company or purchased directly from authorized distributors and certain gas stations.

TELEVISION AND DIGITAL SERVICES

Spain offers various television options, including:

- Free-to-air digital terrestrial television (TDT) with approximately 30 national channels and additional regional and local stations
- Cable and fiber TV services bundled with internet packages
- Streaming platforms like Netflix, HBO Max, Amazon Prime, and Disney+, all available with Spanish and original language options

Most internet providers offer television packages ranging from basic (€10-15 monthly) to premium, including sports and international channels (€50-80 monthly). Movistar+ provides the most extensive content, including exclusive sports rights, but at premium prices.

To access free-to-air channels, your television must be compatible with Spanish TDT standards or connected to a compatible decoder. Many channels offer dual audio (V.O.) programming, allowing viewers to switch between dubbed Spanish and original language versions.

Spain restricts some international streaming services due to regional content rights. A VPN service can provide access to content from your home country if needed, though this may conflict with service terms.

ESSENTIAL APPS FOR UTILITY MANAGEMENT

Several digital tools simplify utility management in Spain:

- Banking apps with bill payment features (BBVA, CaixaBank, Santander)
- Energy supplier apps for consumption monitoring and bill payment (Endesa, Iberdrola)
- Third-party apps like Fintonic for tracking and analyzing utility expenses
- Splitwise for sharing costs among roommates
- Language assistance apps like Google Translate for navigating Spanish-only service interfaces

Setting up autopay (domiciliación bancaria) for utilities through your Spanish bank account eliminates manual payments and reduces the risk of service interruptions due to missed payments.

Many utility providers communicate primarily through email and SMS, so update your contact information in your accounts to receive important notifications about service changes, billing, or outages.

With your transportation, daily essentials, and utilities established, you'll have the foundation for a comfortable daily life in Spain. These systems may initially seem complex, but they quickly become routine, allowing you to focus on enjoying Spain's rich cultural experiences and high quality of life for its new residents.