



TIPS & TRICKS

These pages contain useful information for travelling around Spain and Italy, how to book rail and bus tickets and other helpful information that comes from the experience of frequent visits to both countries and using web sites that may at first appear simple but turn out to be far from that. New pages on various travel tips and tricks will be added whenever I come across a topic that I think will help fellow city travellers.

- [Tips & Tricks for Spain](#)
- [Tips & Tricks for Italy](#)

Spain is without a doubt my favourite country, I love the people, the food, the culture and the variety of places. Most visitors will probably know the beach and resort areas or perhaps the cities of Madrid or Barcelona. There is however so much more to see, from the major sites in the cities in Andalucia such as Seville, Granada and Cordoba to the its third city, Valencia to the beautiful northern provinces including of course the pilgrim city of Santiago, the regenerated city of Bilbao and the culinary capital of San Sebastian.

I have tried to set out some tips about travel and accommodation in the country and hopefully will help the independent travel to plan an enjoyable holiday.

Hotels

Homework in advance about the city you are visiting helps you book the best suited accommodation. I prefer to do the walking and travelling around to visit the sites in a city during the day and make sure that the hotel is within reasonable walking distance at night for good restaurants and tapas bars.

Then check out various hotel sites and the hotel comparison sites when looking for accommodation , also consider apartments. These give you more space for your money and although this may seem daunting the first time more and more people are doing this.

I have pages on 18 cities on Spain on the web site and wherever possible have recommended specific hotels, or apartments companies or hotel booking sites.

Trains

Train services in Spain are reliable, reasonably priced and fairly easy to book on line.

The operator is called RENFE and you can buy tickets on line, these go on sale 60 days in advance and if you book at that time you will find large discounts available.

There are sometimes problems with using foreign credit cards so there are a couple of ways to make the process easier, check out www.seat61.com simply the best rail site for information on rail travel in Spain, also for most countries in the world.

Register on the RENFE site, www.renfe.com/EN/viajeros this may seem a hassle but will save time now and on future occasions. On the first screen you need to input to four fields and it seems reluctant to do this in English.

Type of document - change to passport

Country – UK is Reino Unido

Document no – Passport Number

Correo Electronico – email address

You then have to complete details to set up an account such as user name, password, security question, address etc. It does not accept letters in postcodes therefore input 12345. This part is relatively simple.

There is a new alternative using an American company www.petrabax.com they will book them for you with a small surcharge, unlike some of the UK companies who book European rail travel but with huge mark ups and click on trains.

Buses

Frequently buses are a better option, they can be quicker so definitely compare the two. Alsa are the biggest operator in Spain and on longer distances they run Supra services which have only 3 seats across, more space, snacks and hostess service.

Booking tickets on line can be tricky, they have a good web site and you can check times, prices, routes and in theory book multiple journeys until you get to payment and again non Spanish cards seem to fail. There is now a company where you can book on line for all bus companies and pay with a credit card and amazingly the small fee makes them cheaper than on Alsa. Go to www.movelia.es and change the language to English and you are set. You print the tickets off and they get scanned or checked when you board the bus.

Bus travel is so popular in Spain that the bus stations have all sorts of facilities and it is easy to check which stand is for your bus.

Car Hire

We do not do cars and use public transport when we travel however I know others will use this as their preferred method of travel. I have therefore included the name of a company that has recently been named by Which, the UK consumer association, as the best car hire broker [Zest Car Rental](#). You can see reviews on line and see the benefits of using them.

Happy travelling.

Italy is probably the European country I know best after Spain and I have been lucky enough to visit many of the best known cities Rome, Florence and Venice and have also travelled through lesser known parts in both the north and the south of the country.

Why visit Italy, well of course for the food and the culture, I am sure they should be the other way round but for me Italy is simply the best country for food. I love the passion of the people who will discuss with a total stranger whether a particular wine is really what they should choose if they are cooking rabbit that night.

I have tried to set out some tips about travel and accommodation in the country and hopefully these will help the independent travel to plan an enjoyable holiday.

Hotels

Homework in advance about the city you are visiting helps you book the best suited accommodation. I prefer to do the walking and travelling around to visit the sites in a city during the day and make sure that the hotel is within reasonable walking distance at night for good restaurants and bars and cafes.

Then check out various hotel sites and the hotel comparison sites when looking for accommodation, also consider apartments. These give you more space for your money and although this may seem daunting the first time more and more people are doing this.

I have pages on 9 cities and areas in Italy on the web site and wherever possible have recommended specific Hotels, or apartments companies or Hotel booking sites.

Trains

Train is definitely the way to get around in Italy, Trenitalia www.trenitalia.com runs an excellent, efficient, punctual and well priced train service. I know you may be saying this is not what you would expect but the train network is fantastic and by UK standards inexpensive.

The web site is simple to use, although it helps if you know the Italian version of the towns or cities when you are searching. Such as Firenze for Florence. As usual the web site

www.seat61.com is incredibly helpful and is simply the best rail site. You do not need to register and credit card bookings are simple.

Buses

Unlike Spain buses are not a better way of getting round, trains are faster and cheaper in most cases. Buses can be useful for getting between smaller towns or where the bus station is nearer than the train station, as in Siena. Also in Sicily between Siracusa and Palermo the best option is bus. Information about local buses can be found at most tourist information offices.

In Italy advance booking of buses seems not to exist, particularly the further south you travel. Attempting to book tickets in advance from Siracusa to Palermo was met with astonishment. Why would you want to book the day before, just turn up on the day, well it worked but I would recommend getting there early to be sure you can get on.

Ferries

Italy has great opportunities for travelling by boat particularly in the south to Sicily from Naples and from Sicily to the Aeolian Islands. There is also the chance to take the ferries along the Amalfi coast from Naples and to visit the islands of Capri, Ischia and Procida. Also if you visit the Italian Riviera you can visit Portofino and the Cinque Terre by boat. For day trips booking on the day is usually fine and trying to book in advance for ferries to the Aeolian Islands can be tricky, even finding the correct office at the docks can be tricky, allow plenty of time.

Happy travelling.

