

SPAIN & BEYOND

Travel Planning Document

May 13 - 30, 2026

Farnham · Madrid · Toledo · Seville · Granada · Nerja · Altea · Barcelona

Patrick & Amanda

Urgent Booking Checklist

The items below come directly from the latest Trip Tracker. Confirmed bookings are kept here for quick reference; open items remain the priority list.

Attraction / Action	Date / City	Where to Book / Notes	Status
Patrick: Apply for UK ETA	Pre-trip	gov.uk/eta GBP20 ~5 min	Confirmed
Patrick: Obtain International Driving Permit (IDP)	Pre-trip	From AAA before departure ~\$20	Confirmed
Book Alhambra tickets - late afternoon slot	Pre-trip	tickets.alhambra-patronato.es Request 15:00-16:30 slot	Confirmed
Book Sagrada Família tickets	Pre-trip	sagradafamilia.org May 29 - Entry 14:45 - Passion Tower 15:30 EUR36/person Ticket code: 97292721	Confirmed
Book Royal Alcázar of Seville	Pre-trip	alcazarsevilla.org Only 50 walk-up tickets/day	Not Booked
Book Flamenco show, Seville (May 22 evening)	Pre-trip	Casa de la Memoria recommended - book 5-7 days ahead	Not Booked
Book Park Güell - Monumental Zone	Pre-trip	parkguell.barcelona EUR21.90/person	Not Booked
Book Bombay Sapphire Distillery tour (May 16)	Pre-trip	bombaysapphire.com/distillery All tours pre-booked	Confirmed
Book car rental - pick up Seville, drop Valencia or Barcelona	Pre-trip	SIXT at Santa Justa station (24/7) Book 2-3 wks ahead	Confirmed
Check both passports valid until at least 30 Aug 2026	Pre-trip	3-month buffer beyond May 30 departure required	Confirmed
Train: Madrid Atocha -> Toledo (return)	May 20 - Toledo	renfe.com ~30 min ~EUR14-20 return	Not Booked
Royal Alcázar of Seville URGENT	May 21 - Seville	alcazarsevilla.org - book ahead	Not Booked
Flamenco show (evening) URGENT	May 22 - Seville	Casa de la Memoria recommended - book 5-7 days ahead	Not Booked

Entering the UK - May 13

Your first stop is London Heathrow, arriving on UA 930. Patrick's UK ETA is now marked confirmed in the tracker; Amanda should travel on her British passport.

Patrick UK ETA - CONFIRMED

- The UK Electronic Travel Authorisation is mandatory for US citizens. Keep the ETA confirmation available with Patrick's passport details at check-in and boarding.
- Amanda is a UK citizen and should enter using her valid British passport.
- Heathrow ePassport gates are normally available to both eligible US passport holders and UK citizens, subject to normal border operations.

Requirement	Patrick (US Citizen)	Amanda (UK Citizen)
Visa required for UK?	No - visa-free for tourism	No - returning home
UK ETA required?	YES - tracker shows confirmed	No - UK / Irish citizens are exempt
Passport required	Valid US passport for full intended stay	Valid British passport required
Maximum stay	Up to 6 months per visit	No limit - returning home

Entering Spain — Schengen Requirements

After the UK leg, you'll fly into Madrid on May 18. Here's what both Patrick and Amanda need at the Spanish / Schengen border.

⚠️ **New in 2026: EU Entry/Exit System (EES) now active**

The EU's new digital border system launched April 10, 2026. Both US and UK citizens will have fingerprints and facial biometric data recorded at the border on first entry into the Schengen Area. This is automatic — not an application — but expect longer queues at border control. No action required in advance.

Requirement	🇺🇸 US Citizens	🇬🇧 UK Citizens
Visa required for Spain?	No — visa-free for tourism	No — visa-free for tourism
Maximum stay	90 days in any 180-day period (Schengen total)	90 days in any 180-day period (Schengen total)
ETIAS required?	No — launches Q4 2026; not needed for May 2026	No — launches Q4 2026; not needed for May 2026
EES biometrics	Yes — fingerprints & photo taken at first Schengen entry (new April 2026)	Yes — fingerprints & photo taken at first Schengen entry (new April 2026)
Passport validity	Valid for 3+ months beyond departure date; issued within last 10 years	Valid for 3+ months beyond departure date; issued within last 10 years
Proof of funds	May be asked: €122/day (min. €1,099 for stays over 9 days)	May be asked: €122/day (min. €1,099 for stays over 9 days)
Return ticket	Required — carry confirmation	Required — carry confirmation
Travel insurance	Strongly recommended (medical cover €30,000–€100,000)	Strongly recommended (medical cover €30,000–€100,000)

ETIAS — What Is It?

ETIAS (European Travel Information and Authorisation System) is the EU's equivalent of the US ESTA — a pre-travel electronic authorisation for visa-exempt visitors. It will cost €20 per person and be valid for 3 years. It is expected to become mandatory in early 2027, after a mandatory 6-month grace period following its Q4 2026 launch. No action needed for this May 2026 trip.

Returning Home

- UK citizens: Re-entry to the UK from Spain is straightforward with a valid British passport. No visa or authorisation required.
- US citizens: Standard re-entry with your US passport. Have your return flight confirmation handy.

Passport Check — Do This Now

- Verify both passports are valid for at least 3 months beyond May 30 — i.e., valid until at least August 30, 2026.

- US passport must also have been issued within the last 10 years.
- UK photocard licence must be current for driving (see Car Rental section).

Car Rental & Driving in Spain

You'll be behind the wheel from Seville through the Andalusian interior, the Mediterranean coast, Altea, and onward toward Barcelona. The latest tracker moves the Barcelona travel day to May 26, with the car-drop/train-vs-direct-drive decision still shown as open.

Your Driving Route

Leg	Distance / Time	Road	Tolls?
Seville -> Granada	~250 km - 3-3.5 hrs	A-92	None
Granada -> Nerja	~90 km - ~1 hr	A-44 + A-7	None
Nerja -> Altea	~500 km - ~5 hrs	A-7 / AP-7 coastal	Possible AP-7 sections
Altea -> Valencia (drop car option)	~95 km - ~1 hr	AP-7 / N-332	Possible
Valencia -> Barcelona by train	~3 hrs	Euromed / Talgo	N/A
OR Altea -> Barcelona by car	~5-6 hrs	AP-7 north	Likely tolls / parking

Booking Your Car

- Tracker shows car rental confirmed: Costco Travel Confirmation C490712109 / Enterprise Confirmation 2110378690.
- Pick up in Seville on May 23. Ask for the emissions label because Granada and other city centres use restricted zones.
- May 26 is now the Barcelona travel day: either drop in Valencia and take the train, or drive directly to Barcelona and drop the car there.

- Personal accident insurance from the rental company is usually unnecessary if you have travel insurance.

Driving Rules & Speed Limits

Speed Limits

- Urban areas: 50 km/h (30 in residential zones)
- Secondary roads: 90 km/h
- Dual carriageways: 100 km/h
- Motorways (AP/A): 120 km/h

Road Types

- A roads (Autovías): Free motorways — your main roads.
- AP roads (Autopistas): Toll motorways. Most of your route avoids these; some AP-7 coastal sections may apply.

Essentials to Carry

- Valid driving licence + IDP (US) or licence alone (UK)
- Rental agreement and insurance documents
- Passport or photo ID
- Reflective jacket (in the car, not the boot — required by law)

Things to Know

- Speed cameras are common on motorways and in towns. Navigation apps mark them.
- Mobile phone use while driving is illegal without hands-free.
- Drink driving limit: 0.5 mg/ml (stricter than UK at 0.8).

Granada — Low Emission Zone (ZBE)

Granada's city centre is a restricted Low Emission Zone (Zona de Bajas Emisiones), camera-enforced 24/7. Most modern rental cars (2010+) will carry a C or ECO emissions label and are fully permitted. When picking up your car in Seville, ask the rental agent to confirm your car's emissions label. If it's B, C, ECO, or Zero — you're fine. Parking within the old town is effectively impossible anyway; plan to use a paid car park (Parking la Caleta, Avenida Andaluces) on arrival.

Parking in Cities

- Blue zones (Zona Azul): Paid, time-limited (typically 2 hrs max). Pay at meters or via parking app.
- Green zones (Zona Verde): Resident/visitor mix. Non-residents pay during the day; usually free after 8 PM.
- Yellow lines: No parking at any time.
- Orange zones: Residents only during specified hours — do not park here as a visitor.

Recommended Parking Apps

- EasyPark — broadest coverage across Spain; works in all major cities.
- Telpark — widely used across Andalucía (Seville, Granada, southern Spain).

Useful Apps & Navigation

- Google Maps — download offline maps for each region before you leave. Best for highway routing.
- Waze — excellent for real-time traffic alerts and incidents; community-driven.
- TollGuru (tollguru.com) — calculate exact toll costs for your specific route and vehicle.
- Fuelo.net — find the cheapest fuel stations along your route.

At Petrol Stations

- Gasolina 95 (unleaded) is standard for most rental cars. Roughly €1.56/litre in March 2026.
- Unmanned 24-hour stations are card-only — contactless and Visa/Mastercard accepted.
- Motorway stations are 10–15% more expensive. Fill up in towns where possible.

Trip at a Glance

A 17-night journey from England to Spain. The latest tracker is the source of truth: the route now goes Granada -> Nerja -> Altea before continuing onward to Barcelona.

Date	Day	Location	Highlights	Accommodation
May 13	Wed		SFO -> London Heathrow (UA 930)	
May 14	Thu	Farnham, UK		Arrive Farnham - staying with Jacquie & John Farnham, Surrey
May 15	Fri	Farnham, UK	Dinner with the Colletts	
May 16	Sat	Hampshire	Bombay Sapphire Distillery Tour - Laverstoke Mill	
May 17	Sun	Surrey / Farnham, UK	Polesden Lacey; Day at Dominoes	
May 18	Mon	London -> Madrid / Madrid	London -> Madrid (mid-afternoon)	Staying with Chris & Andrea C/ del Alcalde Sainz de Baranda, 43, Retiro, 28009 Madrid, Spain https://maps.app.goo.gl/qM7fjw4ZEZdD3aSKA?g_st=ic There are a few options from the airport but the best way is normally the city taxis. They go from right outside the terminal and it's a fixed price of EUR33 into the city. The normal municipal taxi service very good. Just head out the front door and look for the taxi rank in front of you. You can try Uber but I've found that to be more expensive and you have to walk for ages to the pick up area.
May 19	Tue	Madrid	Historic Core Walk; Eco Tuk Tuk tour	
May 20	Wed	Madrid / Toledo	Train: Madrid Atocha -> Toledo (return); Toledo Day Trip - allow 6 hours	Check in to hotel Círculo Gran Vía, Autograph Collection
May 21	Thu	Seville	AVE high-speed train: Madrid -> Seville; Royal Alcázar of Seville URGENT; Seville Cathedral & La Giralda	Check in to AirBnB, Seville AirBnB - Calle Pajaritos, 12 puerta 26, Seville, Andalucía 41004 Arrive by taxi or Uber, you will be dropped off on Calle Estrella, next to the Estrella Bar, you will have to walk a few meters. When you arrive please buzz 26 WhatsApp +34680743269

Date	Day	Location	Highlights	Accommodation
May 22	Fri	Seville	La Giralda (if not visited May 21); Flamenco show (evening) URGENT	
May 23	Sat	Seville / Granada	Pick up rental car in Seville; Drive Seville -> Granada; Alhambra - late afternoon visit URGENT	Check in to hotel, Granada Reservation Confirmation #74902997 for Hotel Palacio De Santa Paula, Autograph Collection
May 24	Sun	Nerja / Altea	Drive Granada -> Nerja (coastal route stop); Drive Nerja -> Altea	Staying with Sally & Ian Altea, Costa Blanca
May 25	Mon	Altea	Explore Casco Antiguo (Old Town)	
May 26	Tue	Altea / Valencia / Barcelona	Playa de la Roda - beach morning; Old town galleries & artisan shops; Drive Altea -> Valencia, drop car; train to Barcelona	Home Exchange - Sarah Barcelona - Carrer de la Ribera, 6, 08003 Barcelona WhatsApp +34673851806 My neighbor/friend Chris will meet you at the house
May 27	Wed	Barcelona	Tuk Tuk tour	
May 28	Thu	Barcelona	Park Güell - Monumental Zone URGENT; Montjuïc Cable Car ride	Home Exchange
May 29	Fri	Barcelona	Sagrada Família CONFIRMED CONFIRMED; Barceloneta Beach - last beach day; Final dinner in Barcelona	
May 30	Sat		Barcelona -> SFO (UA 673)	

Practical Information — Spain

Currency & Money

Spain uses the Euro (€). Cards are widely accepted in cities; carry some cash for markets and small tapas bars. ATMs are plentiful.

Tipping

Tipping is optional — not the cultural expectation it is in the US. At restaurants, 5–10% for good service is appreciated but not required. Rounding up the bill or leaving a euro or two is common at bars and cafes.

Language

Spanish (Castilian) is spoken across Spain; Catalan in Barcelona, Valencian along the coast. English is widely spoken in hotels and tourist areas. Learning a few Spanish phrases goes a long way in traditional neighbourhoods.

Electricity

220V, 50Hz. European two-pin plug (Type C/F). Bring adapters from the US.

Safety

Spain is very safe overall. The main concern is pickpocketing in tourist-heavy areas — La Rambla, Gothic Quarter, and busy metro cars. Wear your backpack on your chest in crowds. Violent crime is rare.

Tap Water

Safe to drink throughout Spain. Madrid's tap water is considered some of the best in the country.

Dining Times

Lunch is typically 2:00–4:00 PM; dinner rarely before 9:00–10:00 PM. Tapas bars fill up around 8:30 PM. This is real Spain — embrace the schedule.

Farnham & Hampshire

May 14–17, 2026

Surrey, England · Staying with Jacque & John

Overview

Farnham is a handsome Georgian market town in Surrey — England's 'World Craft Town' — sitting about 36 miles southwest of London near the Hampshire border. The surrounding countryside is quintessential England: rolling hills, medieval ruins, and country pubs. It's a relaxed, gentle landing pad before the pace picks up in Spain.

Planned Activities

May 15 · Fri	Dinner with the Colletts — book a table in advance if dining out.
May 16 · Sat	Bombay Sapphire Distillery Tour at Laverstoke Mill — MUST BOOK AHEAD
May 17 · Sun	Polesden Lacey — family walk, National Trust, Surrey Day at Dominoes

Bombay Sapphire Distillery — Laverstoke Mill

One of England's most beautifully designed gin distilleries, housed in a former paper mill on the River Test with Thomas Heatherwick-designed glasshouses that grow the ten botanicals used in Bombay Sapphire.

Getting There

- Address: Laverstoke Mill, London Road, Whitchurch, Hampshire RG28 7NR
- About 45–60 minutes from Farnham by car. Use postcode RG28 7PH for the car park.
- Head toward Basingstoke/Whitchurch via the B3400 (London Road).

The Discovery Experience

- Welcome drink at the Turbine Bar — make your own gin & tonic from three Bombay Sapphire expressions
- Fully guided tour through the distillery and Heatherwick glasshouses
- Learn about the vapour-infusion distillation process and Laverstoke's 900-year history
- Complimentary drink in the Mill Bar at the end (alcohol-free options available)
- Duration: approximately 1.5–2 hours

Booking

- All experiences must be booked in advance: bombaysapphire.com/distillery
- Open Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays year-round, plus selected weekdays
- Wear sensible footwear — no open-toed shoes or high heels

Nearby Highlights (if time allows)

- Winchester (~25 min drive) — stunning medieval cathedral, charming High Street
- Farnham Castle — 900-year-old motte and shell keep with 5 acres of gardens
- Waverley Abbey — England's first Cistercian abbey (1128) with romantic riverside ruins
- South Downs National Landscape — walking trails, chalk downland, panoramic views
- North Downs Way — long-distance walking path starting right in Farnham

Madrid

May 18–20, 2026

Staying with Chris & Andrea (May 18–19) · Hotel (May 20)

Overview

Spain's capital is a city of grand plazas, world-class art, and some of the best late-night tapas culture on earth. It rewards wanderers — the historic core around Sol, La Latina, and the Royal Palace is compact enough to cover on foot, while neighbourhoods like Malasaña and Chueca offer excellent eating and drinking without the tourist crowds.

Top Neighbourhoods

La Latina — The Tapas Heart

The historic medieval core, famous for Calle Cava Baja — 300 metres of approximately 50 tapas bars and restaurants. Also home to Plaza de la Paja and the El Rastro flea market on Sundays. This is where you eat and drink in Madrid.

Barrio de las Letras (Huertas)

Madrid's literary neighbourhood, where the streets bear quotes from Cervantes and Lope de Vega. A lively mix of history, restaurants, and nightlife, positioned near the Thyssen and Prado museums.

Malasaña — Bohemian & Local

A vibrant, artsy neighbourhood loved by locals — colourful street art, indie shops, great coffee, craft beer, and neighbourhood restaurants. Far less touristy than Sol or La Latina.

Retiro

Madrid's great green lung — 118 hectares of park with a beautiful lake (rowboats available), the stunning Crystal Palace, and manicured gardens. Perfect for an afternoon escape.

Salamanca — Upscale

Affluent, elegant, and home to high-end dining. Worth a stroll down Calle Serrano if you enjoy people-watching among Madrid's well-heeled.

Must-See Attractions

Puerta del Sol

Madrid's central square and the symbolic heart of the city. Look for the El Oso y el Madroño (Bear and Strawberry Tree) statue — Madrid's coat of arms — and the Kilometre Zero marker at the base of the Casa de Correos, from which Spain's national road network radiates.

Plaza Mayor

A magnificent 17th-century enclosed square with uniform arcaded architecture. Traffic-free, surrounded by restaurants, and especially beautiful when lit at night. A must for an evening stroll.

Royal Palace of Madrid (Palacio Real)

Europe's third-largest palace with over 3,000 rooms of royal art and furnishings. Allow 1.5–2 hours inside. The terrace offers sweeping views westward over the Manzanares valley.

Parque del Retiro

Rowboats on the lake, the Crystal Palace glasshouse, and beautiful spring gardens make Retiro an ideal afternoon respite. In May, roses and hibiscus are in bloom throughout the park.

Eco Tuk Tuk Tour ✓ CONFIRMED

A fun and eco-friendly way to see Madrid's historic core. Electric tuk tuks depart from near the Royal Palace area and offer guided tours through the city's most iconic streets and plazas — perfect for covering ground on May 19 alongside the Historic Core Walk. Address: C. de Bailén, 4, Centro, 28013 Madrid. Confirmed — no booking required on the day.

Where to Stay — Marriott Bonvoy

As a Marriott Bonvoy Platinum member, you'll have access to room upgrades, late checkout, and lounge access at eligible properties. Book via marriott.com or the Bonvoy app to earn points and guarantee the best rate.

- The Westin Palace Madrid — Grand historic landmark (1912) on the Paseo del Prado Art Walk, steps from the Prado and Retiro Park. One of Madrid's most storied addresses. marriott.com/MADWI
- ✓ YOUR BOOKING: Círculo Gran Vía, Autograph Collection — Confirmed. A stunning 1920s beaux-arts landmark on Gran Vía with spectacular rooftop views. Marriott Bonvoy Platinum perks apply.
- The Madrid EDITION — Boutique luxury near Sol and the Royal Theatre with rooftop pool, spa, and acclaimed dining. marriott.com/MADEB

Food & Restaurants

Essential Madrid Dishes

- Tortilla española — the Spanish potato omelette, elevated to an art form here
- Croquetas — crispy, creamy, often jamón-filled
- Jamón ibérico — the best cured ham in the world
- Cocido madrileño — hearty Madrid chickpea stew (great on cooler evenings)
- Pan con tomate — griddled bread rubbed with tomato and olive oil

Recommended Restaurants & Bars

- Juana La Loca (La Latina) — Madrid's most celebrated tortilla española. A neighbourhood classic.
- Casa Alberto (Barrio de las Letras) — Classic tapas bar since 1827. Torija, squid, and traditional Madrid cooking.

- Bodega de la Ardosa (Malasaña) — Late 19th-century bodega; house-made croquetas and quality cured meats.
- Sobrino de Botín (near Plaza Mayor) — Guinness-certified world's oldest restaurant (1725). Reserve ahead — touristy but genuinely historic.
- Mercado de la Cebada (La Latina) — A 1875 neighbourhood market with 80 stalls; great octopus (pulpo) and tapas at solid prices.
- Mercado de San Antón (Chueca) — Modern market with excellent food stalls and rooftop bar.
- Lamiak (La Latina) — Creative tapas with standout unique options; the mini-lasagna is particularly good. Highly recommended by friends. lamiak.es
- Casa Revuelta (La Latina) — Old-school tapas bar best enjoyed standing outside. Try the pork belly, fish bites, and jamón and cheese croquettes. casarevuelta.com/en/
- Taberna La Concha – Vinos y Tapas — A perfect spot for La hora de vermut, the Madrid tradition of drinking a glass of vermouth at 12:30–1:00 PM before lunch. The vermouth here is aromatic and slightly herbal — not like anything you'd find at home.

Tapas Bar-Hopping Tips

- Head to Calle Cava Baja in La Latina between 6–9 PM — this is the local ritual.
- Many bars in Madrid give a free tapa with each drink. Embrace it.
- Try La hora de vermut — the pre-lunch vermouth tradition. Around 12:30–1:00 PM, locals settle in for a glass of slightly fruity or herbal vermouth before eating. It's a ritual, not a rush. Taberna La Concha in La Latina is a great place to experience it.
- Avoid restaurants immediately surrounding major plazas — walk half a block into the side streets for much better value.

Getting Around Madrid

- Metro: 15 colour-coded lines, runs 6 AM–1:30 AM. Clean, fast, and easy. Single ticket €1.50–€2; 10-trip Metrobús card €12.20.
- Walking: The historic core (Sol, La Latina, Huertas, Retiro) is very walkable. Bring comfortable shoes.
- Taxis: White cars with a red diagonal stripe. Metered, safe, and readily available.

Toledo Day Trip

May 20, 2026

30 minutes by train from Madrid Atocha · Allow 6 hours

Overview

Toledo is Spain's 'City of Three Cultures' — a stunning hilltop medieval city where Christians, Muslims, and Jews coexisted for centuries. The entire old town is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, perched dramatically above the Tagus River on three sides. It's one of the most atmospheric day trips in all of Europe.

Getting There

- Depart from Madrid Atocha Station — easy metro access on Line 1 (Atocha Renfe stop).
- High-speed train to Toledo: approximately 30 minutes. Around €14–20 return.
- Book at renfe.com in advance to secure your preferred departure time.
- From Toledo station to the old town: take Bus 5 (10 min, €1.50), taxi (~€5), or walk 10–15 scenic minutes across the Alcántara Bridge.

Suggested 6-Hour Itinerary

Hour 1	Arrive, take bus or walk to Plaza de Zocodover (main square). Grab a coffee and orient yourself.
Hours 2–3	Primada Cathedral (30–45 min — finest Spanish Gothic architecture) · Alcázar Fortress (views from the city's highest point) · Alcántara and San Martín Bridges for iconic river views.
Hour 4	Toledo lunch. Try a traditional restaurant on or near Plaza de Zocodover.
Hour 5	Cristo de la Luz Mosque (10th-century Moorish architecture) · Jewish Quarter (Judería) · damascene shopping (Toledo's famous inlaid metalwork).
Hour 6	Final wandering, photography, then head back to the station. Allow 30 min before departure.

Practical Notes

- Toledo's old town is hilly with steep cobblestone streets — wear sturdy, comfortable shoes.
- Most shops close 2–5 PM (siesta). Plan museum visits in the morning.
- Cash preferred at smaller restaurants and stalls.

- English is not widely spoken outside the tourist area — basic Spanish phrases are helpful.

Seville

May 21–22, 2026

Arriving by AVE high-speed train · Hotel

Overview

Seville is Andalusia's magnificent capital — the city of Carmen, flamenco, and orange blossom. In May the weather is warm and perfumed, the city alive with festivals and outdoor culture. It's one of Spain's most beautiful cities, built around the extraordinary pairing of the world's largest Gothic cathedral and a Moorish palace that rivals the Alhambra.

Arriving by AVE Train ✓ CONFIRMED

- ✓ Booked: iryo 06116 · Madrid-Puerta de Atocha → Sevilla-Santa Justa · Departs 11:55 · Locator: F9WJGE
- Arrive at Seville Santa Justa station. Take Bus 32 toward Plaza Duque, or Bus 21 toward Plaza de Armas, to reach the city centre (15 min).
- Journey time: approximately 2 hours 20 minutes.

Top Neighbourhoods

Barrio Santa Cruz — Historic Jewish Quarter

Seville's medieval heart and the home of its three UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Romantic, atmospheric, and highly walkable. Expect tourists but don't skip it — the architecture rewards every corner turned.

Triana — Across the River

The authentic working-class neighbourhood on the west bank of the Guadalquivir. Deep flamenco traditions, colourful ceramics, excellent local dining, and the Church of Santa Ana — the 'Cathedral of Triana.' A more local experience than Santa Cruz.

El Arenal

Located between the cathedral and the river, with a mix of historic buildings, good restaurants, and a riverside promenade.

Must-See Attractions

Royal Alcázar of Seville ⚡ BOOK AHEAD

One of the finest royal palaces in Europe and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Intricate Moorish tile work, coffered ceilings, ornate courtyards, and beautifully planted gardens. Plan at least 2–3 hours. Book at

alcazarsevilla.org — only 50 walk-up tickets are sold daily, so advance booking is essential. First entry of the day (morning opening) or late afternoon (after 3 PM) are the best times to visit.

Seville Cathedral & La Giralda

The largest cathedral in the world by area, built on the site of a great Almohad mosque. The tomb of Christopher Columbus is inside. La Giralda — the soaring bell tower originally built as a 12th-century minaret — is the city's most recognisable landmark. Climb it via ramp (no stairs) for rooftop views.

Plaza de España

A breathtaking semicircular Renaissance-Moorish Revival plaza in the María Luisa Park, built for the 1929 Ibero-American Exposition. Beautiful at any time of day, but especially at sunset. You can row a boat in the small canal that curves around the building.

Flamenco Show (May 22 Evening) ✂ BOOK AHEAD

A flamenco show in Seville is not optional — this is the art form's spiritual home. The most authentic experience is in an intimate tablao with no microphones and under 50 people.

Top Venues

- Casa de la Memoria (Santa Cruz) — The top recommendation. Intimate historic courtyard, pure flamenco — no distractions. Book 5–7 days ahead; sells out quickly in spring.
- Teatro Flamenco Triana — In the Triana neighbourhood; intimate and authentic.
- El Arenal — Impressive 17th-century vaulted setting; slightly more theatrical, still high quality.

Booking & Pricing

- Shows: 60–75 minutes, €25–40. With dinner or vermouth included: €45–60.
- Book directly through venue websites. Book as early as possible for Casa de la Memoria.

Where to Stay — Marriott Bonvoy

As a Marriott Bonvoy Platinum member, you'll have access to room upgrades, late checkout, and lounge access at eligible properties. Book via [marriott.com](https://www.marriott.com) or the Bonvoy app to earn points and guarantee the best rate.

- Hotel Alfonso XIII, a Luxury Collection Hotel — Seville's most celebrated hotel, a 1929 Moorish-Renaissance landmark in the historic Santa Cruz quarter, steps from the Alcázar and Cathedral. [marriott.com/SVQLC](https://www.marriott.com/SVQLC)
- Querencia de Sevilla, Autograph Collection — Boutique property directly opposite the Gothic Cathedral, close to the Royal Alcázar and the Triana bridge. [marriott.com/SVQAS](https://www.marriott.com/SVQAS)

Food & Restaurants

Essential Seville Dishes

- Jamón ibérico — always hanging from the rafters in the best bars
- Salmorejo — a thick, creamy cold tomato soup (similar to gazpacho but richer)

- Oxtail stew (Rabo de Toro) — a Seville classic
- Pescaito frito — lightly fried mixed fish; a staple across Andalusia

Recommended Restaurants & Bars

- Las Teresas (Santa Cruz) — Operating since 1870. Jamón legs hanging from the rafters, ceramic-tiled walls. If you visit one tapas bar in Seville, make it this one.
- El Rinconcillo (Historic Centre) — Seville's oldest bar (since 1670). Still writes your bill in chalk on the bar in front of you. Traditional oxtail and pork cheeks.
- Las Golondrinas (Triana) — Unassuming and genuinely local; serves some of the city's most authentic small plates.
- Bar Casa Vizcaíno — Jamón, cold drinks, and electric atmosphere. Draws a standing crowd all day and all night. Awesome vibes.

Dining Tips

- Locals eat dinner at 9:00–10:00 PM; tapas bars fill from around 8:30 PM.
- Head to Triana or Macarena for better prices and more local atmosphere.
- Avoid restaurants directly facing the Cathedral — overpriced and tourist-targeted.

Granada

May 23, 2026

Drive from Seville ~3 hours · Rent car this day · Hotel

Overview

Granada is where Islamic civilisation made its last, most magnificent stand on European soil. The Alhambra palace complex above the city is without question one of the great works of human architecture — and Granada itself is an intensely beautiful city of Moorish alleyways, cave flamenco, and Spain's most generous free tapas tradition.

Getting There — Renting the Car in Seville

- Pick up your rental car at Seville Santa Justa train station (Avis, Europcar, Hertz, SIXT available).
- Drive to Granada: approximately 250 km, 3–3.5 hours via A-92.
- Parking in Granada: The old city centre has restricted access — cameras enforce rules automatically. Use a hotel with parking arrangements, or a paid garage (Parking la Caleta on Avenida Andaluces is one option).
- Once in Granada, a car is more hindrance than help. Park and explore on foot.

Top Neighbourhoods

Albaicín — The Ancient Medina

Granada's oldest neighbourhood and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Narrow, winding Hispano-Muslim streets, white-washed buildings, and breathtaking viewpoints of the Alhambra. The Mirador de San Nicolás offers the most photographed view in Granada — go at sunset. Steep and maze-like; best explored in daylight with comfortable shoes.

Sacromonte — The Cave District

Perched on the hills above the Albaicín, Sacromonte is where Romani cave-dwellers have lived for centuries and where Granada's most authentic flamenco (zambra) is performed. Some caves are now boutique hotels with modern interiors behind ancient rock walls. Worth visiting with a guide, especially in the evening.

Realejo — The Jewish Quarter

South of the centre, with a great local atmosphere, street art, medieval lanes, and the lively Plaza Campo de Príncipe. Safe, well-lit, and popular into the evening.

The Alhambra ✓ BOOKED — CONFIRMED

The Alhambra is Spain's most visited monument. Your tickets are confirmed — late afternoon slot as planned for May 23.

The Three Essential Sections

- Alcazaba — The 9th-century fortress with towers offering panoramic views of the city, Albaicín, and Sierra Nevada.
- Nasrid Palaces — The crown jewel. Intricate tile mosaics, plaster reliefs, and coffered ceilings that represent the pinnacle of Moorish architectural achievement. Timed entry is strictly enforced.
- Generalife Gardens — The 14th-century summer palace with some of the oldest Moorish gardens in existence. Running water, fountains, and fragrant planting.

Late Afternoon Visit — Practical Details

- Request a 15:00–16:30 slot for your Nasrid Palaces entry. This gives good daylight, less crowding, and golden-hour light.
- The time slot only governs Nasrid Palaces entry — you can visit Alcazaba and Generalife at your own pace.
- Allow 3–4 hours total for the full complex.
- Complex opens 8:30 AM, closes 8:00 PM (April–October). Nasrid Palaces last slot typically 17:00–17:30.
- Wear comfortable shoes; bring water and sunscreen.

Where to Stay — Marriott Bonvoy

As a Marriott Bonvoy Platinum member, you'll have access to room upgrades, late checkout, and lounge access at eligible properties. Book via [marriott.com](https://www.marriott.com) or the Bonvoy app to earn points and guarantee the best rate.

- ✓ **YOUR BOOKING:** Hotel Palacio de Santa Paula, Autograph Collection — CONFIRMED. Confirmation #74902997. A restored 16th-century convent in the historic centre, near the Albaicín and a short drive to the Alhambra. Stunning courtyard and rooftop terrace. Marriott Bonvoy Platinum perks apply.

Food & Restaurants — The Free Tapas City

Granada is one of very few places in Spain that still gives you a free tapa with every drink ordered. Budget roughly €2 per drink — and you'll eat very well for very little.

Recommended Restaurants & Bars

- Bodegas Castañeda — Every local knows this place. Hanging jamón, flamenco posters, generous free tapas. The quintessential Granada bar experience.
- Los Diamantes — A local institution since 1942. Excellent fried fish, fried eggplant, and garlic prawns.
- Bar Poë — Vermouth for €3 with extensive free tapas menu (beef stews, cod, curry). Beloved by locals.
- Taberna La Tana — Recommended by Anthony Bourdain. Quality tapas and strong local reputation.

The Coastal Drive to Altea

May 24, 2026 Drive Granada -> Nerja -> Altea - Coastal route day - Staying with Sally & Ian

This is now a through-drive day. You'll leave Granada, route via Nerja on the coast, then continue east/north along the Mediterranean coast to Altea.

Route Notes

- Granada -> Nerja: A-44 to the coast, then A-7; roughly 90 km / about 1 hour from Granada.
- Nerja -> Altea: tracker estimate is approximately 5 hours depending on route and stops.
- Arrival: Altea, Costa Blanca - staying with Sally & Ian.

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Altea

May 24-26, 2026 Costa Blanca - Staying with Sally & Ian

Altea is the trip's slower coastal reset: whitewashed old-town lanes, blue-domed church views, galleries, beach time, and time with Sally & Ian before heading to Barcelona on May 26.

Planned Activities from the Tracker

- May 24: Arrive from Nerja and settle in with Sally & Ian.
- May 25: Explore Casco Antiguo - blue-domed church, artists' galleries, sunset views. Wear comfortable shoes for steep cobbled streets.
- May 26: Playa de la Roda beach morning and/or old-town galleries before the Barcelona travel leg, depending on timing.

Altea Practical Notes

- Casco Antiguo: wander without a strict map; the point is the lanes, galleries, terraces, and church-square views.
- Beaches: Playa de la Roda is the main beach below the old town; La Olla Beach is another local favorite.
- Parking/arrival: coordinate timing with Sally & Ian and confirm the easiest place to stop or park before arriving in the old town.
- Barcelona travel day has moved to May 26; keep the car-drop/train-vs-direct-drive plan confirmed before leaving Altea.

Altea to Barcelona

Day	Plan
May 24	Drive Granada -> Nerja -> Altea; continue to Sally & Ian in Altea.
May 25	Casco Antiguo, church-square views, galleries, and sunset in the old town.
May 26	Playa de la Roda / galleries as time allows, then travel Altea -> Valencia/Barcelona or direct to Barcelona. Home Exchange in Barcelona; La Rambla and Gothic Quarter after arrival if energy allows.
May 27	Barcelona Tuk Tuk tour is confirmed in the updated tracker.

Barcelona

May 27–29, 2026

Drive or train from Altea/Valencia · Home Exchange (Sarah)

Overview

Barcelona is one of Europe's greatest cities — a dazzling collision of medieval Gothic streets, Modernist architecture, a thriving food culture, and Mediterranean beaches. Gaudí's buildings alone justify the visit, but the city's neighbourhoods, markets, and coastline offer as much again. Three full days is a good start.

Getting There

- Option A (Recommended): Drive to Valencia, drop off the rental car, then take a high-speed Euromed or Talgo train to Barcelona Sants. ~3 hours. More than 10 daily departures.
- Option B: Drive directly to Barcelona (~5–6 hours). Drop car in Barcelona. Parking near central neighbourhoods is expensive; confirm arrangements with Sarah's home exchange.
- Train tickets: From ~€27.40. Book at [renfe.com](https://www.renfe.com) or [trainline.com](https://www.trainline.com).

Top Neighbourhoods

Gothic Quarter (Barri Gòtic)

The medieval heart of Barcelona — a labyrinth of narrow alleys, Gothic churches, and Roman ruins. The Cathedral of Barcelona is here. Atmospheric but very crowded; watch your belongings carefully.

El Born

Once Barcelona's medieval trading hub, now an eclectic neighbourhood of excellent restaurants, independent shops, and the Parc de la Ciutadella. Less tourist-heavy than the Gothic Quarter, with a great local scene.

Eixample — Modernisme Central

The 19th-century grid neighbourhood is where you'll find Sagrada Família, Casa Batlló, and La Pedrera. More spacious, safer, and more residential than the old town. A great area to base yourself.

Barceloneta

The former fishermen's district by the sea. Good authentic seafood restaurants (particularly La Cova Fumada), beach access, and a more local feel than the crowds further inland.

Gràcia

A vibrant, arty neighbourhood beloved by locals. Outdoor terraces from 9 PM onward, excellent independent restaurants and bars, and a genuinely neighbourhood feel.

Must-See Attractions

Sagrada Família ✓ BOOKED

Antoni Gaudí's life work and one of the world's most extraordinary buildings. Still under construction after 140+ years, with towers soaring above Eixample. The interior is as astonishing as the exterior — a forest of branching columns in polychrome light. Allow 1.5–2 hours.

- ✓ Tickets confirmed for May 29, 2026. Entrance at 14:45 · Passion facade tower at 15:30. Ticket code: 97292721. Ticket Locators: Patrick 290246057, Amanda 290246056. €36.00/person. Entrance on carrer de la Marina.
- Cancellations allowed up to 48 hours before your visit. Remember to bring official photo ID to enter the Basilica.

Park Güell — Monumental Zone ✗ BOOK AHEAD

Gaudí's colourful hilltop park with the iconic mosaic dragon, terraced colonnade, and panoramic city views. Only the Monumental Zone requires a ticket; the surrounding nature paths are free.

- Book at parkguell.barcelona — €21.90. Timed entry slots.
- Best slots: Early morning (9:30 AM) or late afternoon (5:30 PM+) for fewer crowds and better light.

La Rambla

Barcelona's famous tree-lined boulevard, 1.2 km of flower stalls, cafes, theatres, and the Mercat de la Boqueria food market. Entertaining by day; exercise extra caution at night, particularly at the southern (port) end.

Gothic Quarter

Best explored in the morning before tour groups fill the alleys. The Cathedral of Barcelona (free entry in the afternoon), Plaça Reial, and the Pont del Bisbe bridge are highlights. Keep valuables close — this is the city's highest pickpocket zone.

Montjuïc & the Cable Car

A coastal hill with Montjuïc Castle, the Olympic Stadium, the Miró Foundation, MNAC museum, and the Magic Fountain (illuminated evenings, Thursday–Sunday). The Aeri de Montjuïc cable car ride offers spectacular harbour views.

Barceloneta Beach

A beautiful sandy beach with warm May water, an elegant palm-lined promenade, and authentic seafood restaurants nearby. The last day (May 29) is a natural beach day before your flight home.

Food & Restaurants

Local Dining — Don't Eat on La Rambla

- La Cova Fumada (Barceloneta) — A Barceloneta institution. Fresh seafood tapas on a daily blackboard menu. Unpretentious and genuinely excellent.
- El Quim de la Boqueria (La Rambla market) — Family-run stall inside the Boqueria market since 1987. Inventive market-fresh tapas. Worth the queue.

- Berbena (Gràcia) — Seasonal local ingredients, frequently changing menu. Book well ahead — a neighbourhood favourite.
- Casa Rincón de Gràcia — Traditional Spanish elegance with a legendary socarrat paella. Refined but not pretentious.
- Terrat, Mandarin Oriental — Contemporary Spanish sharing plates with 360-degree rooftop city views. Excellent for a special dinner.

Market Tips

- Mercat de la Boqueria (La Rambla) — Touristy at the front; get past the flower stalls and into the interior stalls for genuine food shopping and eating.
- Mercat de Santa Caterina (El Born) — Less touristic, more local, equally excellent for produce and prepared food.

Getting Around Barcelona

- Metro: 8 colour-coded lines, clean and fast. Runs until after midnight (2 AM Friday/Saturday). Single ticket: €2.90; T-casual (10 trips): €13.00.
- Hola BCN Travel Card: €18.70+ for 2–5 days of unlimited travel — excellent value for three days of sightseeing.
- Walking: Gothic Quarter, El Born, Barceloneta, and El Raval are all very walkable from each other.
- Safety on the metro: Wear your backpack on your chest on Lines 1 and 3 — the highest pickpocket routes. Keep phones in your pocket on trains.

Suggested Day Plans

May 27 (Arrival)	Arrive and settle in · La Rambla walk · Gothic Quarter exploration · Dinner in El Born
May 28	Morning: Park Güell (Monumental Zone) — book ahead · Afternoon: Montjuïc Cable Car · Gothic Quarter · Magic Fountain (Thursday evening, illuminated)
May 29 (Last Day)	Morning: Barceloneta Beach · Afternoon: Sagrada Família ✓ entry 14:45 / Passion tower 15:30 · Evening: Final dinner in Gràcia or El Born

Before You Go - Final Checklist

Booking priorities and document reminders refreshed from the latest Trip Tracker.

Confirmed / Carry With You

- Alhambra, Granada: confirmed for May 23 at 5:30 PM. Nasrid Palaces timed entry is strictly enforced; bring ID and arrive early.
- Sagrada Familia, Barcelona: confirmed for May 29. Entry 14:45, Passion facade tower 15:30, ticket code 97292721. Patrick locator 290246057; Amanda locator 290246056. Bring photo ID.
- Patrick UK ETA: confirmed. Pack ETA confirmation details with passport documents.
- Patrick IDP: confirmed/obtained. Carry IDP plus physical US driver license for Spain driving.

Still Open / Book Soon

- Royal Alcazar of Seville - tracker still shows Not Booked.
- Casa de la Memoria / Flamenco in Seville - tracker still shows Not Booked.
- Park Guell Monumental Zone - tracker still shows Not Booked.
- May 26 car/train decision: Valencia drop + train to Barcelona, or drive directly to Barcelona.
- Final dinner in Barcelona - tracker still shows Not Booked.

- Cross-body bag or belt bag — keeps your valuables secure without thinking about it.
- Light layers — May evenings can be cool, especially in Granada (altitude).
- Sun protection — hat, sunglasses, SPF. May sun in Andalusia is already strong.
- European plug adapters — Type C/F, 220V.

¡Buen viaje — have a wonderful trip!