

How to keep in touch while studying in Spain

A comprehensive guide to saving money on broadband deals and mobile phone costs while you're studying abroad.

Researched and compiled by Ofcom accredited broadband, TV and phone comparison site www.cable.co.uk

As with many large countries, Spain has distinct differences between cities and regions when it comes to broadband and mobile access. But how easy is it to get online or make low cost calls while you're there? Find out with our guide to studying in Spain.

Broadband providers in Spain

Two of the leading providers of broadband in Spain will be familiar to UK consumers: Orange and Vodafone offer both fixed line and mobile broadband in the country. The largest overall provider, however, is the former state-owned Movistar, with Jazztel and Ono completing the line-up.

Average download speeds reach around 6.9Mbps, making Spain the 30th fastest country in the world for broadband.

Mobile providers in Spain

There are four mobile networks in Spain (Movistar, Vodafone, Orange and Yoigo), plus a number of providers, which use these networks to carry their calls, data and texts.

Barcelona, Valencia, Madrid and Zaragoza boast decent 4G coverage, but if you're anywhere else in Spain, you'll struggle to find a consistent and widespread 4G signal. 2G and 3G coverage is generally better, but there are still parts of the country where your mobile signal will probably drop out entirely – especially in the more rural and isolated regions.

International roaming: what you need to know

An EU ruling means that you should soon be able to use your UK mobile in Spain for the same price as at home. This move to scrap international roaming charges within the EU should make it easier for Europeans to keep in touch as they travel from country to country.

In the meantime, many UK mobile providers offer international bolt-on deals to help you save money while you're overseas. Check with your current network for details.

Getting a broadband or phone contract in Spain

You'll probably find that it's difficult to get broadband or a phone contract in Spain without an NIE (Número de Identidad de Extranjero). This tax identification number is usually required to get any kind of service on credit. Applying for a student visa at the Spanish consulate before you travel will help speed up the process, and will allow you to get the second most commonly required form of ID: a Spanish bank account.

Consumer rights in Spain

Spain subscribes to wider EU Consumer Directives to protect the rights of visitors to and residents of the country. This means you'll get broadly the same level of consumer protection in Spain as you already benefit from in the UK.

In addition, Spain also has a General Law for the Defence of Consumers and Users (Ley General para la Defensa de los Consumidores y Usuarios), which further protects your rights when purchasing goods or services in Spain.

Anywhere providing any kind of product or service to consumers has to, by law, have a complaints book – and display a sign telling you they've got one (look for 'fulls de reclamacions a disposicio' which means 'complaint forms are available'). These official documents are taken very seriously in Spain: you get to keep duplicate copies of your complaint while the vendor keeps a third, and all complaints are followed up. You can also complain to the National Institute of Consumers (Instituto Nacional del Consumo) if you're unhappy.

Vodafone and Orange teaming up

Broadband and mobile providers Vodafone and Orange are planning on expanding their joint fibre network to reach 6 million Spanish homes by 2017.

This would provide a major boost to average broadband speeds in the country, where only 14% of consumers achieve downloads of 10Mbps or higher.

The twelve cities to benefit from this fibre optic broadband are: Alcorcon, Alicante, Badalona, Barcelona, Cordoba, Hospitalet de Llobregat, Madrid, Malaga, Seville, Valencia, Valladolid, and Zaragoza.

Local information

Although Spanish telecoms terms are broadly similar to ours (WiFi, 2G, 3G and 4G are all the same), here's some Spain-specific acronyms, phrases and useful information.

00 44: When calling the UK from Spain, dial 00 44 followed by the rest of the number but without the first zero (for example, to call the University of Leeds, dial 00 44 113 243 1751)

Banda Ancha: Broadband

Fibra Óptica: Fibre optic

Hasta 20 megas / 30 megas / 100 megas: Up to 20Mbps / 30 Mbps / 100Mbps

Teléfono móvil: Mobile phone

Manage your data

It's easy to run up large data bills while you're overseas. Here's some steps to avoid this:

Wi-Fi hotspots

Check if your UK network has a deal with a Spanish provider. BT, for example, works with KubiWireless and Swisscom in Spain, so BT customers can access Wi-Fi in the country for free.

Beware autodownloading attachments

Ensure that your mail client doesn't automatically download attachments or check for new messages – this can result in costly data usage.

Download before you fly

Whether you need a map, Spanish language app or files for work, do your downloads at home: it's easier and cheaper.

Switch roaming off

Check that roaming is off on your tablet or smartphone. This will stop you automatically connecting to a (potentially costly) network.

Get an international bolt-on

Taking your mobile to Spain? Check what international add-ons your provider offers to help you cut costs of keeping in touch.

Know what it's costing you

Currency exchange rates can fluctuate during any journey and it's important that you know what you are spending. Use a reputable currency exchange service to check the latest rates. Popular exchange rate services include Oanda, Reuters, XE.

Useful Links

Reuters: <http://www.reuters.com/finance/currencies>

XE: <http://www.xe.com>

Oanda: <http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

Cable.co.uk is a provider of impartial information to increase public awareness in matters of broadband, TV, landline and mobile.