

# CRUISE TRAVEL IS A GROWING TOURISM SEGMENT IN SPAIN



The cruise travel sector in Spain has surpassed the pre-pandemic booking levels after overcoming Covid-19 restrictions. Several companies are expected to see billings between 40% and 50% higher than in 2019, with more optimistic projections for the coming years.

2023 is expected to be an exceptionally profitable year. The Spanish tourism sector is projected to break records this year. **Cruise passenger traffic in Spain has grown by 75% year-on-year in 2023, reaching a new historical record of 6.1 million passengers**, surpassing even pre-pandemic levels of 2019. These figures are based on information provided by State Ports.

Due to pandemic restrictions in 2020, the cruise travel sector saw significant growth this year, according to Alfredo Serrano, the national director of the International Association of Cruise Lines (CLIA).

According to Serrano, summer is the preferred time for Spanish travelers to go on a cruise. He asserts that cruise tourism in Spain is highly seasonal compared to other markets like Germany, which has the same number of cruise passengers year-round. Despite the high temperatures, cruise reservations remain unaffected. The reason is because most bookings are done well in advance, and it is a product sold mostly before summer. Serrano also explains that travel agencies already focus on selling 2024 and 2025 cruises.

Companies in the cruise travel sector have experienced significant growth in both their number of customers and revenue. One such example is the Italian-Swiss MSC, which is among the largest cruise companies in the world. According to Fernando Pacheco, the company's general director in Spain, MSC is expecting a growth rate of between 40% and 50% in Spain compared to 2019. Forecasts for MSC's passenger volume in 2023 indicate that it will be a record-breaking year, with the company expecting to reach 80% of its total during the summer season.

Price has been a significant factor in attracting customers to cruise travel. MSC assures that although there was a downward trend in prices due to the need to stimulate demand and regain passenger confidence in the aftermath of the pandemic outbreak, it is natural that prices have adjusted as the situation has improved and demand has increased. However, prices have not yet reached 2019 levels and tend to fluctuate depending on the time of year. For instance, passengers pay the same or more in some months, like July or August. Royal Caribbean maintains that prices have remained stable despite inflationary pressures.

Spain has experienced growth in the cruise travel industry this year, with Tarragona, Alicante, and Ibiza being the fastest-growing ports, primarily due to foreign visitors. The Western Mediterranean (including France, Italy, and Malta) was the most popular destination for Spanish cruise-goers, with around 50% choosing it. The Eastern Mediterranean (Greece, Adriatic) was second with 20%, while Northern Europe (including the United Kingdom) came third with about 15%. Barcelona remained the primary port for Mediterranean cruises, while the Asian area is expected to recover soon, according to CLIA data.

As per the CLIA report on the European cruise market in 2022, the average age of cruise passengers in Spain is 43.6 years, two years lower than during the pre-pandemic age. Moreover, Spanish cruise passengers spend seven days on a cruise, while the rest of the world spends between 8 and 9 days. Additionally, they usually make reservations closer to the travel date than the rest of the world.

**Barcelona is Spain's most popular cruise destination, followed by the Balearic Islands,** Canary Islands, Cádiz, Malaga, and Valencia. The majority of foreign passengers on cruises from Barcelona are Americans (17% of the total), followed by British (14%) and Germans (12%).

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