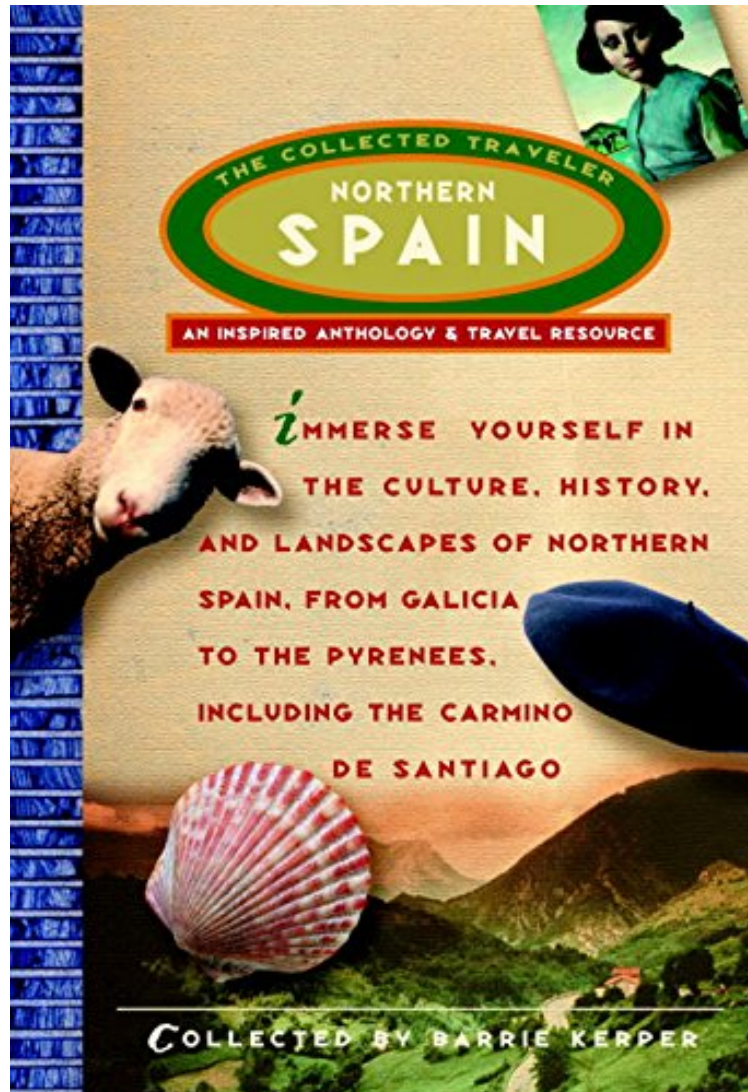


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## Northern Spain: The Collected Traveler (An Inspired Anthology and Travel Resource)

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**From Brand: Fodor's : Northern Spain: The Collected Traveler (An Inspired Anthology and Travel Resource)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Northern Spain: The Collected Traveler (An Inspired Anthology and Travel Resource):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy zarantondon't travel without it17 of 17 people found the following review helpful. ESSENTIAL travel readingBy RICHARD THOMASAs in my (rave) review for Ms. Kerper's PARIS book, I cannot say too much how much I love this series, and this title, in particular, is spectacular, in

that it makes a region that is off-the-beaten-path so entirely enticing. I am planning an upcoming trip to Northern Spain, and unlike other the other (standard) travel guides for this area that I've seen, this book has TRULY helped shape how I wish to spend my time, all the while introducing me to a culture and history I am unfamiliar with (e.g. the long history of pilgrimage in Santiago di Compostela, and the endless seafood offerings of La Coruna and culinary indulgences to be found in San Sebastian). This is not the Spain of arid plains and bullfight arenas. Its a whole new world...to me! I feel this book is the PERFECT starting point for travellers, ESPECIALLY those who enjoy planning, for it leads one in so many interesting directions. The different voices of the varied collected authors (along with Ms. Kerper's insights) offer a much richer perspective than most typical travel books, by virtue of the diversity (and careful choosing). The excellent bibliography will have you running to the library or bookstore to explore more, all in a much more focussed way. This book is truly a resource (as titled) and a guide and companion in the fullest sense of these words. You are the beneficiary of insider knowledge from an avid traveller, and it all seems so personalized. Without hesitation I say BUY THIS BOOK, and while you're at it check out the others in this series...honestly PARIS was indispensable to my last trip, and I can't wait to get my hands on VENICE! 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Great way to get a picture of the region. By Shagbark Ridge This isn't a travel guide, per se, but an excellent descriptive collection of the regions, landscape, and culture of Northern Spain. While it does include some good practical info and some (limited) lodging and restaurant recommendations, what it does best is paint a picture of the region that isn't overly promotional. Just tells it like it is....you feel like you get a good idea of what it would like to be there. And the picture it paints will make you want to travel to Northern Spain -- it worked for us!

Each edition of this unique series marries a collection of previously published essays with detailed practical information, creating a colorful and deeply absorbing pastiche of opinions and advice. Each book is a valuable resource—a compass of sorts—pointing vacationers, business travelers, and readers in many directions. Going abroad with a Collected Traveler edition is like being accompanied by a group of savvy and observant friends who are intimately familiar with your destination. This Edition on Northern Spain Features: • Distinguished writers, such as Calvin Trillin, Penelope Casas, Tom Brokaw, Alistair Reid, Sally Schneider, Bruce Schoenfeld, Anya Von Bremzen, and Florence Fabricant, who share seductive insights into Northern Spain's outstanding restaurants, unique landscape, and cultural treasures, including the Camino de Santiago; the Guggenheim Bilbao; the tapas bars and cafés of San Sebastián, a city where cuisine is taken very seriously; the shrine of Covadonga, considered the birthplace of Spain; the wine-growing district of La Rioja; and the less-traveled routes through the mountains and valleys of the Picos de Europa. • Annotated bibliographies for each section with recommendations for related readings. • An A–Z “informaciones prácticas” (practical information) section covering everything from accommodations, hiking, and museum tours to the significance of the horeo, Basque language and culture, local foods and drink, car rentals, airfares and airlines, travel insurance, and packing. Whether it's your first trip or your tenth, the Collected Traveler books are indispensable, and meant to be the first volumes you turn to when planning your journeys. Also in the Collected Traveler series: Central Italy—Tuscany Umbria, Paris, Provence, Morocco, Venice, and the forthcoming Southwestern France.

About the Author BARRIE KERPER is an avid traveler and reader who has lived abroad. She previously worked for the travel book division of the original Banana Republic. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Chapter 1 Informaciones Prácticas (Practical Information) "Spanish courtesy decrees that a negative answer to your question 'When can you come?' is unacceptable. The electrician or plumber hates to disappoint you. Perhaps he really does mean to try and squeeze a visit to your house into his already overcrowded schedule, but experience will show that you really cannot rely on his mañana. If you are used to punctuality, this can be really frustrating. You sit at home waiting and no one appears; so you get fed up and venture out. When you come home, you find a note saying the equivalent of 'We came! Where were you?' Getting angry with the fellow in question is a waste of time. He will agree with everything you say, smile and tell you he'll come 'mañana- seguro' (tomorrow for sure) only to repeat the whole cycle. You simply have to learn to be extremely patient. Besides, giving way to anger or frustration will not endear you to the workman in question. If you want to make your stay in Spain a success, the first thing to get used to is mañana." -Marie Louise Graff, Culture Shock!: Spain A-Z Informaciones Prácticas A Accommodations If you arrive in any town in Northern Spain without having booked a room in advance, the local tourist office staff can assist you in finding accommodations. This assistance is more thorough and professional in the larger cities, but judging from my experience, the staff at even the smallest tourist office in the smallest comunidad autónoma in Spain will be happy to assist you in finding a place to stay. They may not place telephone calls for you or make reservations (especially if it's high season and they are busy), but they will tell you what choices are available, give directions, and generally help in any way they can. Unless you are traveling for an extended period of time throughout the region or throughout Spain, I don't recommend showing up without a room, especially during the summer months and especially in August, the month when all Europeans take their vacations. That said, Northern Spain is one of the few areas of the world where reservations are not essential in the off-season, and I have traveled there without making advance reservations for

every night of my trip, with success. Still, keep in mind that many of the most wonderful lodgings are quite small, with only a few rooms, and can fill up fast during the so-named shoulder seasons, fall and spring. (During the winter months, don't be surprised if some places are closed entirely.) We all have a limited number of precious vacation days, and searching for a place to stay can be a most time-consuming and frustrating experience and certainly not what you came to Spain to do. Unless you're traveling around by train and a backpack and are going from youth hostel to youth hostel, you will probably want to carefully select the places you'll call home for a few days or longer. Some might argue that the choice of a lodging isn't important, since we won't be spending much time in our room anyway; but I disagree. Meeting the owners of a family-run hotel or turismo rural property, getting to know the front desk clerk at a posh parador, or simply returning to a nicely kept room for an afternoon siesta are all parts of a memorable and enjoyable trip. I can find no reason not to devote some time to researching where you will stay—the only problem may be narrowing your choices in certain areas because of the many great available options. (Travelers seeking luxury, however, should note that this type of accommodation is not thick on the ground, so to speak, in the north, so you will have fewer choices, making your task much simpler.) You should keep in mind that the Spanish government's star rating system for lodging establishments awards stars based on the number and range of amenities available and that it pays special attention to the availability of air conditioning, elevators, banquet rooms, hair dryers, and the like. But stars have nothing at all to do with charm or quality of hospitality. All of Spain's lodgings display a blue plaque near the entrance with a large white H (for hotel), P (for pensión), Hs (for hostel), F (fonda), or CH (casa de huéspedes) and the gold stars (from one to five) it has been awarded just beneath the letter. Generally speaking, a pensión, fonda, or casa de huéspedes is a budget accommodation. Some hotels too may be budget accommodations (if the letter R, for residencia, appears after an H, no meal service is offered), especially if they are one-star establishments. Again, speaking generally, most one-star establishments are equated with simple accommodations and usually offer shared bathroom facilities. Two- and three-star establishments can be bed-and-breakfast or regular hotel accommodations, usually with a private bath. Four- and five-star hotels represent the highest standards of service and can be quite luxurious or less so. You may, in your research and travels, discover places that are not classified and therefore have no rating; this is not because the tourist board has rejected them but rather because their owners have not requested to be reviewed. I have stayed in a number of places with no rating, in Spain and elsewhere around the Mediterranean, and they were all perfectly fine and clean, some even quite deserving of two or three stars. All of this is to say that you cannot depend on Spain's star rating system alone. The only amenity standing between a three-star place and one awarded four stars may be a swimming pool, or a bigger bathtub, or a ceiling fan. Penelope Casas, in her excellent book *Discovering Spain*, notes that "a small luxury hotel that lacks dining facilities may receive only four stars, and yet its prices may be super-deluxe . . . a five-star hotel that has not been renovated in twenty years and is drab, musty, and outdated may retain its original rating. You can, however, trust those hotels (there are very few of them) designated Gran Lujo. They take great care with every detail, and are often decorated with antiques or costly furnishings, and like to pamper their clients. Generally they are very expensive—but not all of them are." Far better is to ignore the stars and read a thorough description of a place so you know exactly what you're paying for. Following are the types of accommodations you'll find in this part of Spain: Albergues juveniles (youth hostels) are one of the most popular choices for those seeking budget accommodations (and if it's been a while since your salad days, keep in mind that hostels are not just for the under-thirty crowd). I would take back in a minute my summer of vagabonding around Europe, meeting young people from all over the world, and feeling that my life was one endless possibility. I now prefer to share a room with my husband rather than five twentysomethings, but hostelng remains a fun and exciting experience. Younger budget travelers need no convincing that hostelng is the way to go, but older budget travelers should bear in mind that some hostels do offer individual rooms, reserved mostly for couples or small families. Do compare costs, as sometimes hostel rates are the same as those for a room in a real (albeit inexpensive) hotel, where you can reserve in advance and comfortably keep your luggage. (When hostelng, you must pack up your luggage every day, and you can't make a reservation.) Additionally, most hostels have an eleven p.m. curfew. Petty theft—of the T-shirts-stolen-off-the-clothesline variety—seems to be more prevalent than it once was, and it would be wise to sleep and shower with your money belt close at hand. There are no age limits or advance bookings, but many hostels require membership in Hostelling International, whose national headquarters are located at 733 Fifteenth Street NW, Suite 840, Washington, DC 20005; 202-783-6161; fax: -6171; [www.hiayh.org](http://www.hiayh.org). Hours are 8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, with customer service staff available until 7:00 p.m. An HI membership card is free for anyone up to his or her eighteenth birthday. Annual fees are \$25 for anyone over eighteen and \$15 for those fifty-five and over. HI also publishes several guidebooks, one of which is *Europe and the Mediterranean*. Its price is either \$10.95 or \$13.95, depending on whether you purchase it from the main office or from one of its council affiliates around the country. (HI staff can give you the addresses and phone numbers for the affiliates nearest you.) The organization that oversees hostels in Spain is the Red Española de Albergues Juveniles (Spanish Network of Youth Hostels), and there are a number of hostels in Northern Spain. Additionally, during the summer months, student dormitory accommodations are often available in towns and cities with colleges and universities. The best resource for learning about these rooms is the local tourist office, and the staff at the North American Spanish tourist offices should be able to put you in touch

with any of the local offices in Northern Spain (see the entry for Tourist Offices). Bed and breakfast accommodations in Spain may be either simple or fancy, and they are offered in *casas rurales* or in small inns and hotels. Note that bed and breakfast establishments and *casas rurales* are not interchangeable: While *casas rurales* properties may be classified as bed and breakfasts, bed and breakfast places are often not *casas rurales* properties. The best guide, in my opinion, for seeking out BB accommodations is Alastair Sawday's *Special Places to Stay: Spain* (Alastair Sawday Publishing, Bristol, U.K.; distributed in North America by Globe Pequot Press, Guilford, CT). I'm a big fan of this series (I've used the Paris, France, and Italy editions with great success), and it seems to me that the majority of these places do not appear in other accommodation guides. Subtitled *A Feast of Over 300 Wonderful Places All Over Mainland Spain and Its Islands*, the book actually features small hotels and inns in addition to BBs, so it is a worthwhile resource in both categories. Each entry is described, with two color photographs, on one page, and entries range from *casonas*, vineyard estates, farmhouses, *fincas*, hostals, and *pazos*. The Sawday authors "look for owners, homes and hotels that we like-and we are fiercely subjective in our choices. 'Special' for us is not a measure of the number of creature comforts you get but relates to many different elements that make a place 'work.' Certainly the way guests are treated comes as high on our list as the setting, the architecture and the food. We are not necessarily impressed by high star ratings. Expect this book to lead you to places that are original, individual and welcoming." It contains eighteen listings for Galicia, thirty-three for Asturias and Cantabria, and thirteen for the Basque Country, Navarre, and La Rioja. Included are also two pages of useful vocabulary, travel tips, twenty-five pages of color road maps, and a Spanish-English reservation form. *Camas* (beds) are unclassified lodgings, typically offered as rooms over a bar or restaurant (or some other business) or in a regular apartment building. I have met travelers who frequent such places all the time, but I have shied away from them myself because I think the noise of a bar or restaurant would keep me from enjoying a good night's sleep, and I've read that these rooms can be downright dreary in urban locales. Also, I think that most of the time youth hostels provide equally affordable accommodations and are more lively and fun. But as another budget choice, I would definitely recommend considering these. Camping (commonly known as *campings*) can be a viable option for those who have a car and a lot of time. The thing to understand about the European conception of camping is that it is about as different from the American as possible. Europeans do not go camping to seek a wilderness experience, and European campgrounds are designed without much privacy in mind, offering amenities ranging from hot water showers, facilities for washing clothes and dishes, electrical outlets, croissants and café for breakfast, and flush toilets; to tiled bathrooms with heat, swimming pools, cafés, bars, restaurants, telephones, televisions, and general stores. If you find yourself at a campground during the summer months, you may notice that entire families have literally moved in (having reserved their spaces many months in advance) and that they return every year to spend time with their friends, the way we might return every year to a ski cabin or a house at the beach. It's quite an entertaining and lively spectacle, and camping like this is not really roughing it! I have camped fairly extensively in Spain but mostly in Andalusia and along the Costa Brava, where my husband and I once stayed at a seaside campground that was nothing short of luxurious. I have an aversion to camping in the rain (ask my husband about the rainy night we spent in our tent at Lake Maggiore in Italy), so the only camping I've done in Northern Spain has been in Navarre and Andorra. For complete information about camping in Spain, readers should consult the annual *Guía Oficial de Campings* published by Turespaña and available at the Spanish tourist offices. It's been my experience that at municipal campings during the off-season, no one ever comes around to collect fees. The campgrounds are still open and have running water, but the thinking seems to be that it just isn't worth it to collect money from so few campers. (This will not hold true at privately run campgrounds.) If you plan to camp for even a few nights, I recommend that you join Family Campers and R'Vers (FCRV). Annual membership (valid for one year from the time you join) is \$25. The FCRV is a member of the *Fédération Internationale de Camping et de Caravanning* (FICC) and is the only organization in America authorized to issue the International Camping Carnet for camping in Europe. Only FCRV members are eligible to purchase the carnet-you cannot purchase it separately-and the fee is \$10. The carnet is like a camping passport and provides entry into the many privately owned members-only campsites. It offers campers priority status and occasionally discounts. An additional benefit is that instead of keeping your passport overnight-which hotels and campgrounds are often required to do-the campground staff keep your carnet, allowing you to hold on to your passport. One FICC membership is good for the entire family: parents and all children under the age of eighteen. To receive an application and information, contact FCRV at 4804 Transit Road, Building 2, Depew, NY 14043; 800-245-9755; phone/fax: 716-668-6242; [www.fcrv.org](http://www.fcrv.org). ~By the way, an outstanding catalog for a most thorough selection of camping gear and accoutrements-including four pages of rainwear, good for Northern Spain, and lots of items for kids-is Campmor (P.O. Box 700-G, Saddle River, NJ 07458; 800-CAMPMOR; [www.campmor.com](http://www.campmor.com)).