

Shipping Your Belongings to Spain from the US

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Free guide to moving your things from the US to Spain: what's worth shipping, container vs shared freight vs air, duty-free import for new residents, the customs paperwork, cars, restricted items, timelines and costs.

Read the live guide: <https://www.ourmixedpov.com/guides/shipping-belongings-to-spain>

IMPORTANT**Important: this is not professional advice**

This guide is what worked for us and the people we've helped - it is **not legal advice**, and we are not legal professionals. Rules change, every situation is different, and the cost of getting it wrong (denied visas, double taxation, fines, missed deadlines) is real.

Before you act on anything here, speak with a qualified legal professional - an immigration lawyer (abogado de extranjería), a cross-border tax accountant, or a licensed gestor - who can review your specific facts. Use this guide to know what questions to ask, not as a substitute for paid advice.

6 SECTIONS

The guide

SECTION 1

Start here: ship it, sell it or store it?

Often worth shipping: furniture you love, art, books, family items, quality kitchenware and tools, and clothing.

Usually not worth shipping: large US appliances (Spain uses **230V and different plugs**, and fridges and washers are smaller), cheap flat-pack furniture, mattresses (US sizes don't match Spanish bedding) and most cars.

Small electronics like laptops and phone chargers usually handle 230V - check the label for '100-240V'. Lamps and kitchen gadgets often need converters.

Spanish apartments are often smaller than US homes, with narrow stairs and small lifts. Measure before you ship a large sofa.

SECTION 2

Your shipping options

Full container (FCL): a 20-foot container fits a one- to two-bedroom home; a 40-foot fits a three- to four-bedroom home. Best for large moves; your things travel alone and sealed.

Shared container (LCL or groupage): you pay for the space you use in a shared container. Cheaper for smaller moves, but slower because the container waits to fill up.

Air freight: fast (one to two weeks) but expensive. Best for a few boxes you need right away.

Extra luggage: often the cheapest way to bring a few extra boxes. Check your airline's fees for additional bags.

Timing: door-to-door sea freight from the US to Spain usually takes **6-12 weeks**, including customs. Plan to live with what you carry for at least two months.

SECTION 3

Duty-free import for new residents

Spain (following EU rules) lets new residents bring their personal belongings **without paying import duty or VAT** - called the **change-of-residence exemption** (franquicia por traslado de residencia).

The main conditions: you lived **outside the EU for at least 12 months in a row**; the items are **yours and have been used for at least six months**; they are for personal use in your new home; you import them **within 12 months** of moving; and you **don't sell, rent or lend them for 12 months** after import.

Not covered: alcohol, tobacco, commercial goods, and work vehicles or equipment (other than tools for your job).

Missing the conditions? You may have to pay import VAT (21%) and duty on the value of your goods. Ask your moving company before you ship.

SECTION 4

The paperwork customs will ask for

A detailed inventory in Spanish, listing each box and its contents with an estimated value. Your moving company will usually help you prepare it.

Your NIE and passport. See [Getting Your NIE](#).

Proof you now live in Spain: your visa or residence card (TIE), and your [padrón](#) certificate or rental contract.

Proof you lived outside the EU: for example a US lease ending, utility bills or a US tax return.

A signed request for the exemption, filed with Spanish customs (Aduanas, part of the [Agencia Tributaria](#)). Your shipping company's Spanish agent usually files it for you.

Shipping before you have a residence card? Customs may accept your visa and a promise to provide the card later, sometimes with a guarantee. Ask your mover about this early.

SECTION 5

Cars, pets and restricted items

Cars: you can import a car under the same exemption if you owned and used it for six months, but you'll still need technical checks, an ITV inspection and Spanish registration, and possibly registration tax. It's rarely worth it for a US car - see [Driving in Spain](#).

Pets travel separately with their own health papers. See [Bringing Your Pet to Spain](#).

Restricted or banned: guns and ammunition (need special permits), most food, plants and seeds, large amounts of medicine, and anything made from protected animals or plants (ivory, some woods).

Medicine: bring a doctor's letter and only what you need for the first few months; then find a doctor in Spain ([Healthcare in Spain](#)).

SECTION 6

Choosing a mover and what it costs

Get **at least three quotes** from international movers who will visit your home (in person or by video). Ask whether the price is **door to door**, and whether it includes Spanish customs, delivery up stairs and unpacking.

Look for movers who belong to international associations such as [FIDI](#) or IAM, and check whether you need a lift-truck for upper floors.

Rough costs: shared freight for a small move often runs a few thousand dollars; a full 20-foot container is commonly **\$5,000-\$10,000** and a 40-foot more. Prices change with fuel and shipping demand.

Insurance: buy full-value marine insurance and photograph valuable items before packing.

Plan the shipment around your visa: see [Moving to Spain](#) and our [first 30 days checklist](#).

0 ENTRIES

Latest updates

No live updates recorded for this guide yet.

0 CLAIMS REVIEWED

Fact check

No validations recorded.

2 REFERENCES

Verified sources

Agencia Tributaria - Customs

<https://sede.agenciatributaria.gob.es/>

FIDI - International movers

<https://www.fidi.org/>

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

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