

SPAIN

25 of Spain's coolest coastal hotels

From stays in hidden harbours to family-friendly boutiques by the sea
our expert has the underrated spots worth exploring



Hostal de La Gavina, S'Agaro

Annabelle Thorpe | Thursday March 21 2024, 12.01am, The Times

Everyone thinks they know Spain. More than 17 million Britons visited last year — the expression of an ongoing love affair that began 75 years ago when British European Airways carried the first package tourists to the unspoilt beaches of the Costa Blanca. The area's sun-drenched coastline is built into our consciousness: *Benidorm*, *Eldorado*, Ronnie Biggs, *The Only Way Is Marbs*. Yet most of us — and until recently, I'd include myself in this — rarely stray beyond the Catalonian coast, Andalucia or the Balearic and Canary Islands, in spite of the fact there's so much more of this vast country to explore.

The coastline stretches more than 3,000 miles in total, and in some parts is wholly unknown to most tourists. On either side of the best-known Mediterranean beaches, worlds of sand and stone are waiting to be discovered, from the wind-lashed Atlantic shores of the Costa de la Luz, fringed with surf schools and steeped in seafaring history, to Asturias and Galicia, where unspoilt fishing villages and mountain landscapes offer a spectacular backdrop to the cerulean seas.

In recent years, I've pintxo bar-hopped in San Sebastian, discovered small resorts like Almuñecar — where there's barely an English voice to be heard despite its proximity to Malaga — and soaked up the surfy vibe of hippy-chic Tarifa. All along the coast are wildly diverse landscapes and culture. And everywhere, of course, there are great places to eat, serving fish straight off the boat — crispy sardines and succulent sea bass, rose-tinted octopus gleaming with oil, with ice-cold beers and good local wine, enjoyed in breezy beachfront bars or on leafy hotel terraces that are tucked away above quiet, unspoilt coves.

Even on the most built-up of the costas there are fantastic little places to stay while enjoying all this; hip haciendas and eco retreats, paradors and Michelin-starred restaurants with rooms. There'll always be the grandiose golf resorts and the classic fly-and-flop stays, but you're never too far from a quieter corner of the extraordinary coastline, where you'll find Spain's true heart.

4. Hostal de La Gavina, S'Agaro



Old-school glamour and watersports

Contemporary style is all very well, but sometimes there's nothing cooler than a touch of old-school glamour, which this hotel, in the upmarket beach resort of S'Agaro, delivers in spades. It's run by the fourth generation of the Enesea family, and pristine marble floors, potted palms and warm lighting usher guests into a gentler world, where dinner might be Escoffier-style dishes in the Candlelight restaurant, with cocktails at the bar, El Barco, styled as the interior of a vintage yacht. Embossed wallpapers, chandeliers and gilt-edged mirrors keep the vintage feel going in the bedrooms, with yoga and fitness classes on offer as well as tennis coaching and watersports tuition at the sports club.

Details [B&B doubles](https://lagavina.com) from £304 (lagavina.com). Fly to Girona