

# owner mercedes

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# Spanish road trip

**Back in the new year, a plan was brewing.**

**How can I arrange for a Mercedes-Benz road trip around Spain?**

I had longed to take on an epic road trip after reading those articles in magazines of huge drives across Africa, Europe or America. Can I create my own version? First of all, I needed a car and thanks to my friends at Mercedes-Benz Espania in Madrid, I was granted the use of a press car for two weeks. Well that's the first part sorted out I thought.

However, my initial plan of collecting the car from Madrid and driving it around Spain for it to be left in Barcelona, soon became a non-starter. Mercedes-Benz had to have the car returned,

meaning I had to drive further than I had initially thought. Well I did ask for a road trip, so I had better get on with it. As you can imagine the email quickly went back to Mercedes to say, that's fine, many thanks.

Ok, so what car. The choice was an A, C, M, or they did have a E 350 Cabriolet. So I pondered that thought for a second and responded in equally as quick a time. The reply came back to say that I had got the E 350 Cabriolet for the road trip. What a great start to the planning of this trip, now where to go?

As I was heading into Madrid, I decided to travel down to Andalusia to visit Malaga, and Marbella, travel up the coastline to Barcelona and Girona and back across to Madrid. Should make for a few miles on the clock I thought.

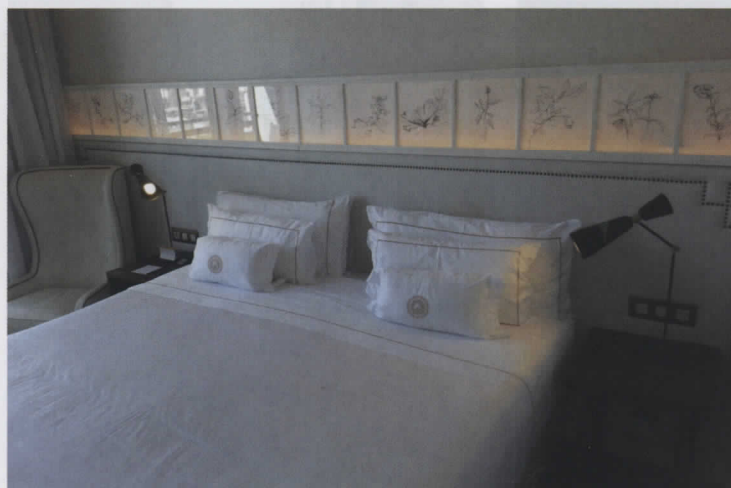
## Arrival

Taking the short flight to Madrid from Gatwick at the end of August I expected Madrid still to be hot, and I was not disappointed - a blistering 42c was announced by the pilot upon touchdown. Once I had collected the suitcase, my wife and I ventured out to get a taxi. As my Spanish is terrible, a true Brit. I pointed at the address on a slip of paper and jumped in the back of the Toyota Prius which hummed along the roads. I could not help but see three or four lanes merging into two, roads splitting off out of nowhere, and roundabouts that had roads running through them. It then hit me, I will be driving these roads soon. It might not be as relaxing a road trip I had thought it would be?

I went into reception and tried to communicate to the lovely receptionist who spoke as much English as my Spanish. She hand signalled for me to go down in the lift to the basement. I gingerly went into the car park bay to see car cleaners polishing an array of cars. A young girl came out of an office and introduced herself to me who thankfully spoke perfect English. Once I had completed the necessary paperwork she handed me the key to the shiny metallic Silver E 350 Cabriolet. I realised my suitcase was not going to fit in the boot. What a mistake and embarrassment! She lowered part of the roof for me to to lift a heavy suitcase over the bodywork







into the back seats. I was adamant I was going to get her to set the command system to English. Thankfully after a few twists and clicks on the system it was set and I slowly drove out of the basement up the driveway and onto the open road.

So, first impressions. Well it's a great looking car for starters and far more aggressive on the road than previous models. The metallic silver now shimmering in the Spanish sun is a splendid choice of colour with red leather interior, a good combination. The power was clearly there for me to use it if I needed to, but for now there were only two things on my mind. Roof down and avoid hitting any cars as they dart in and out of the exit slip road onto the motorway. With this model having the useful feature of going topless at up to 40mpg I flicked the console, pulled the lever and quickly the mechanics were in motion for the sun to fill the car. As we toured up the road and left the sprawling metropolis of Madrid on the motorway heading south, it became apparent that if we kept the roof down I would quickly get a burnt head. Yes, with a haircut like mine I need to consider these dilemmas, so we soon pulled into the layby and covered up.

Driving down to the south of Spain on the E-5 saw a mixture of scenery on the smooth two and three lane roads, surprisingly quiet for late August. Wooded areas, mountainous regions and open plains. At a constant 120kph we took just five hours to reach our first destination outside the foothills of Malaga, staying in Parador de Antequera where one of the famous Paradores were located (1 of 88 in mainland Spain). Mostly castles and converted historic buildings, this one is unusual in being a modern building. We stayed for two days in this white-washed Parador that had a comfortable large room with the necessary facilities for a pleasant stay. The outside pool

was a godsend after a long drive. The restaurant has a superb view across the Antequera Plains. For more information on Parador Hotels please visit [www.keytelinternational.co.uk](http://www.keytelinternational.co.uk) and view my full review via this link:

[www.mercedesclub.org.uk/ParadordeAntequera](http://www.mercedesclub.org.uk/ParadordeAntequera)

As we were located on the north of the mountain range that sits along the Malaga coastline we took the vertical drive up the hills and back down the other side to get into Malaga. Some fantastic scenery can be enjoyed in the hills and several tunnels add to the mix.

One thing I can safely say that when you drive into a town in Spain, it is not easy. Roads seem to merge into one from nowhere and it's rare to see a non-scratched Spanish car. I prayed the Mercedes wouldn't be added to this list. After several attempts of finding the right location and then a parking spot, we stopped close to the marina and found the beach so I quickly jumped in to cool down, bliss. We found a restaurant on the marina and took the drive back up the mountain range to the Parador.

The second day we visited Marbella but went to visit Zoo de Castellar, a rescue zoo that helps animals recuperate and go back to the wild or for those animals that are unwanted by zoos because of medical issues. It is an amazing place and worth a visit [www.zoodecastellar.es](http://www.zoodecastellar.es). We headed into Marbella and decided not to pay £300 for a sunbed on one of "those" beaches where the stars go.

Waving goodbye to Antequera we headed up the coastline via Granada through Parque Nacional de Sierra Nevada (Sierra Nevada National Park) the largest national park in Spain, and what a change in landscape. After a four and a half hour drive we arrived at Torrevieja

where my wife had secured an apartment online.

Torrevieja is a seaside city and located on the Costa Blanca in the province of Alicante, in south-eastern Spain, an ideal location to relax for a while. A bottle of wine some good food and sun is just what we needed. From here, we decided to visit Peniscola. This fortified seaport, built on a rocky headland about 70 metres high, struts proudly out to sea with both of the beaches either side of the castle. Loved by tourists and movie makers, it was recently used in the hit HBO television series, Game of Thrones. The castle is surprisingly high, as the streets that wind its way up to the top seem to disguise its height until you stand on the top and cast your eyes around the peninsula.

After a day of climbing to a castle, we decided to stay in a roadside motel just an hour's drive away in Miami Platja for our next day, driving up the coastline to see a number of the resorts on route such as Cambrils with its large port with long promenade shops and restaurants and close by Salou with its long beaches before we headed into Barcelona.

We drove into the city passing the port on a three lane road which ran along nicely without any hiccups to where we were staying. Be warned that there is a taxi road and you will be fined if you are caught on it. We pulled up outside the elegant Cotton House Hotel, recently renovated from its roots as the former headquarters of the Cotton Textile Foundation. Rated as one of the top hotels in Barcelona it sits proudly in Marriott's Autograph collection. The hotel shows off its splendid classical style with a fabulous Hitchcockian spiral staircase. A roof-top pool, bar and outside gardens to the rear of the property are all exquisite. As is Barcelona, a superb city which is full of interesting







architecture, museums and buzzing cafes and places just to sit and watch the world go by.

For more information visit:

[www.hotelcottonhouse.com](http://www.hotelcottonhouse.com)

or view my full review via this link:

[www.mercedesclub.org.uk/cottonhouse](http://www.mercedesclub.org.uk/cottonhouse)

After a two day break from driving, I was pleased to see the car parked outside at 11am for our drive to Girona for some seaside relaxation as a counter to the walking we had done in the city. S'Agaró (Costa Brava) was just 90 minutes away on some wonderful roads. Upon arrival we were greeted by the guard as the hotel is located in a private gated community on another peninsula between two sandy beaches. The grand Hostal de La Gavina adorned the view with classic magnificence. We were welcomed by the proud management and the porter parked the car for us. Once inside the quality and use of marble, stone and wooden furniture adorns the hotel in classic style. Its refined style of old glamour is charming, and is responsible for drawing guests back year after year. The wonderful coastal pathway that wraps around the hotel enables you to snap some great photographs of the coastline. We were also fortunate to have an amazing sea view room. For more information visit:

[www.lagavina.com](http://www.lagavina.com)

or view my full review via this link:

[www.mercedesclub.org.uk/lagavina](http://www.mercedesclub.org.uk/lagavina)

After two wonderful nights here we said a sad goodbye and headed back to Madrid via Zaragoza in a day. For me this was the most spectacular part of the drive. It was a real drive, just you, the car and open highway. The roads had the occasional car on route but often you drove for 10 minutes without a car to pass. The scenery was adorned by the occasional huge black bull sculpture to remind us that we were in Spain and not driving into a wild west movie set. In stopping off at Zaragoza I did not know what to expect but I was delighted we made the stop over for an hour to see the magnificence of the town with its incredible architecture.

Back on the road and heading into Madrid the car needed a clean. The dust and grime had overtaken the metallic silver shine so in she went for a "Flash Car Wash". Madrid is huge and the comfortable E-90 motorway disappears into the metropolis and back into the scary world of driving in a city. As the Satnav took us to the hotel, we arrived just as Real Madrid's latest football match had ended. Not the best time to turn up but surprisingly, I got a car parking spot outside the hotel which was just up the road from the stadium. I did not know this until I was advised by the receptionist, who had to tell me

twice as I was unsure she understood. You can park in Madrid for the weekend for free.

We were staying at the AC Hotel Aitana situated in the business district of Madrid, and you can clearly tell that this hotel is regularly frequented by those on business. It has a classy business style across the reception, lounge, restaurant and the large bedroom. Good location for a number of the attractions to the city including the Royal Palace. For more information visit:

[www.achotels.marriott.com](http://www.achotels.marriott.com)

or view my full review via this link:

[www.mercedesclub.org.uk/aitana](http://www.mercedesclub.org.uk/aitana)

After two nights in Madrid, it was time to return the car to Mercedes-Benz, and I begrudgingly dropped the keys back to the car park porter. Overall the car was superb to drive and not as thirsty as I had imagined, though keeping the roof up seemed to help with fuel consumption. The boot space was not the largest for a trip like this and in retrospect I should have gone for the standard E-Class so I could easily fit the suitcase in. However, by taking on a road trip like this you do see a lot of a country and see a lot of places that you would never otherwise see. Will I be wanting to do another road trip? Yes, but with longer relaxation time at the end our 1900 mile Spanish road trip.

