

Parking

Everyone has strong views about parking, cyclists and roundabouts with expats being particularly vociferous. Each has a view which naturally from their perspective is the only right and proper one

Nothing more shows up the cultural differences between us foreigners and our hosts than parking. In the UK drivers come to blows over parking, especially if you have parked in “their space” which may be outside of their home. Jumping into a spot that someone else had their eye on is sure to get the blood boiling. God forbid the driver that accidentally nudges another vehicle- this is a mortal sin

The Spanish on the other hand seem to park where they like whether on a pavement, pedestrian crossing or yellow line. Bumpers are just that, designed to nudge your way into a tight space; a little scrape here and there adds character to any car. As with roundabouts we have been brought up differently so when the two cultures clash words inevitably follow

I once stopped my Spanish car for a chat at the entrance to a roundabout on an urb'. There was enough room left for a double-decker bus to practice U-turns but this did not stop an expat mouthing “what a f...ing stupid place to park”. Similarly I accidentally touched the car alongside of me with my door whilst getting out; the elderly expat whose car had suffered this indignity went ballistic. Oh dear

The rules

So what are the rules in Spain? Well in reality not much different to those in the UK, but it is how they are applied and adhered to that marks the difference. No: Pedestrian crossings, yellow lines etc should not be parked on and for sure a zealous copper may fine you even if you are using your hazard lights to advise that you are not far away, but hey why stress? Sure pedestrian life can be more hazardous but walkers are used to the system and take additional precautions; they don't expect to be deferred to and act accordingly. Cars are a tool to get you from A to B and if their appearance is blemished, so what? There are far more important things to worry about

Parking laws are rigidly applied where permission has been granted to allow permanent vehicle access. Such permission is shown by the “Vado Permanente” with the predominant colour of yellow: These are not always easy to spot, so take a good look around when parking in front of any vehicle access point. Other areas to be avoided are where parking is for designated purposes, such as post offices and police stations. I have seen a few dischuffed drivers peeling fine notices from their windscreens when parking in loading bays which look like parking spaces but are denoted by a round sign giving the hours of use.

Safe parking

So where can you park with impunity? Anywhere where there are no restrictions of course! However be aware of roads where parking is only allowed on certain days. If

no one else is parked, this is potentially a warning; assumptions can be dangerous. Blue zones are for paid parking, usually through meters. The machine and ticket will show when you have to leave by; overstay your welcome and the fine can often be paid via the same machine.

One very Spanish oddity with blue bays is that the two hour siesta period is normally free. Underground car parks proliferate and are wonderful if you have a rubber coated Smart Car which is what the access and exit ramps were designed for as any normal car leaves its paintwork on the tightly curved walls.

So, parking in Spain is not quote the free-for all we expats imagine it to be, but strict adherence to the rules is not part of the natives' way of life as it is to we more regimented and uptight Brits

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