



## Visa and Residency Guide for US Citizens

This guide explains the main long-stay visa options and residency steps for US citizens who plan to move to Spain. It covers visa categories, key residency entities such as the TIE and empadronamiento, and a practical checklist and timeline from the first application to long-term residency. The guide is for general information only and does not replace advice from a qualified immigration professional.

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### Visa and Residency Options for US Citizens

Spain requires a long-stay visa for anyone remaining in the country for more than 90 days. Several visa categories allow US citizens to live in Spain, each with its own income rules, eligibility criteria, and residency pathways.

#### Visa Options for US Citizens Moving to Spain

Visa Type	Best For	Income Requirement	Work Allowed	Key Benefits
Non-Lucrative Visa	Retirees and passive-income applicants	Approx. €30,000 per year for the main applicant, plus extra for dependants	No	Pathway to Spanish residency and later citizenship
Digital Nomad Visa	Remote workers and freelancers	Approx. €2,700–€3,000 per month	Yes	Possible access to Beckham Law tax regime, multi-year validity
Work Visa	Employees with a Spanish job offer	Salary that meets legal thresholds	Yes	Employer manages much of the application

Self-Employment Visa	Entrepreneurs and business owners	Proof of funds and a viable business plan	Yes	Permission to operate a business in Spain
Student Visa	Full-time students	Proof of enrolment and sufficient funds	Limited	Residency for the duration of academic study

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## **Non-Lucrative Visa**

The Non-Lucrative Visa suits retirees and applicants with passive income who intend to live in Spain without working. Applicants must show stable annual income, hold full private health insurance, provide an FBI background check, and show proof of accommodation. The visa provides a pathway to long-term residency and later citizenship.

## **Digital Nomad Visa**

The Digital Nomad Visa suits remote workers and freelancers with income from foreign employers or clients. Applicants must meet the monthly income requirement and show professional experience or a relevant degree. Private health insurance is required, and the visa may grant access to the Beckham Law tax regime.

## **Work Visa**

The Work Visa is for applicants with an approved Spanish job offer. The employer initiates the application, and the applicant finalises the process at the Spanish Consulate in the United States.

## **Self-Employment Visa**

The Self-Employment Visa suits entrepreneurs who wish to operate a business in Spain. Applicants must present a viable business plan, demonstrate financial means, and obtain the required professional licences.

## **Student Visa**

The Student Visa suits applicants enrolled in full-time study for more than 90 days. It allows temporary residency for the length of the academic programme.

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## **ETIAS for Short Visits**

From 2026, US citizens will require an ETIAS travel authorisation for short visits of up to 90 days within a 180-day period. ETIAS is not a visa and does not replace long-stay visas used for residence, work, retirement, or study.

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## **Key Residency Entities in Spain**

### **TIE (Tarjeta de Identidad de Extranjero)**

The TIE is the official residency card issued to non-EU citizens living in Spain. It serves as proof of legal residency, contains the foreigner identification number (NIE), and must be renewed according to the visa category.

### **Empadronamiento (Town Hall Registration)**

Empadronamiento is the mandatory registration at the local Ayuntamiento (town hall) that confirms your address in Spain. It is required for many procedures, including school enrolment, healthcare access, and some immigration appointments.

### **Cita Previa (Appointment System)**

Spain uses an online appointment system called “cita previa” for immigration services such as TIE applications, fingerprints, and renewals. Securing a cita previa is often one of the first tasks after arriving in Spain.

### **Schengen Area Travel Rules**

Long-stay visa holders may travel within the Schengen Area once their residency permit is active. Visitors without residency are limited to 90 days within a 180-day period under Schengen rules.

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# Residency Process Checklist for US Citizens Moving to Spain

Step	Action	Key Documents Required	Notes
1	Choose the correct visa (Non-Lucrative, Digital Nomad, Work, Self-Employment, or Student).	Visa application form, passport, photos	Visa type determines your residency pathway and renewal rules.
2	Prepare financial proof that meets the visa thresholds.	Bank statements, tax returns, employment or contract letters	Amounts vary by visa category (for example, approx. €30,000 per year for the Non-Lucrative).
3	Obtain supporting documents including insurance, background checks, and accommodation proof.	FBI background check (apostilled), private health insurance, rental contract or deed	Many documents must be apostilled and translated into Spanish.
4	Submit your application at the correct Spanish Consulate in the United States.	Full visa file and application fee	Consulates only accept applicants who live within their jurisdiction.
5	Enter Spain with your approved visa within the validity period.	Passport with visa	Your in-country residency steps begin after arrival.
6	Book a <i>cita previa</i> and apply for the TIE residency card.	Passport, visa, empadronamiento (padrón) certificate, EX-17 form, photos	The TIE is your physical residency card and must be collected in person.
7	Register your address via <i>empadronamiento</i> at the local town hall.	Rental contract or deed, passport, utility bill (if required)	The padrón certificate is needed for many procedures including healthcare and schools.

8	Activate healthcare access (private insurance or public system when eligible).	Insurance policy, Spanish social security number (if applicable)	Many new residents start with private cover, especially under Non-Lucrative or Digital Nomad.
9	Prepare residency renewals in advance.	Updated financial proof, insurance, renewal application forms	Most first permits renew after 1 year, then typically in 2-year periods.
10	Apply for long-term residency after 5 years of legal residence in Spain.	Proof of continuous residency, previous TIE cards, renewal history	Spanish citizenship generally requires 10 years of legal residency for many applicants.

## Residency Process Timeline

- 1. Choose your long-stay visa**  
 Decide whether the Non-Lucrative, Digital Nomad, Work, Self-Employment, or Student Visa best matches your plans for living in Spain.
- 2. Prepare financial and supporting evidence**  
 Gather bank statements, income proof, FBI background check, private health insurance, and accommodation details that meet the visa requirements.
- 3. Submit your visa application at the Spanish Consulate**  
 Apply at the correct Spanish Consulate in the United States with all required documents and pay the visa fee. Wait for the official decision on your long-stay visa.
- 4. Travel to Spain with your approved visa**  
 Enter Spain within the validity period printed on your visa and prepare to complete the residency steps in country.
- 5. Book a *cita previa* for your TIE**  
 Use the online *cita previa* system to secure an appointment at the local immigration office for fingerprints and document submission.
- 6. Complete your empadronamiento at the town hall**  
 Register your address at the local Ayuntamiento and obtain the padrón certificate that confirms where you live.
- 7. Collect your TIE residency card**  
 Return to the immigration office to collect your TIE once it is ready; keep it safe as

proof of your legal residency status.

**8. Set up healthcare and local services**

Activate healthcare, open a Spanish bank account, and arrange utilities, mobile, and internet at your new address.

**9. Track visa and TIE renewal dates**

Note the expiry dates for your visa and TIE and prepare renewal documents early so your residency does not lapse.

**10. Move towards long-term residency and citizenship**

After 5 years of legal residency you can apply for long-term residency. After 10 years, many applicants can explore the path to Spanish citizenship.

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Villas al Sol is a licensed estate agent on the Costa Blanca that specialises in exclusive buyer representation for international clients. The team is professionally registered and involved with recognised real-estate bodies in Spain, and focuses on transparent, buyer-side support throughout the property search and purchase process.

### Thinking about relocating to Spain?

Villas al Sol can help with town selection, property search, and buyer-side guidance throughout the transaction.

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