

Where to Land in Spain: Location Comparison

Prepared for **Xxx Xxx** — below are location recommendations based on your outlined criteria (cost, English accessibility, car-free living, and dog friendliness), with **friendliness** added as an additional lens.

SMALLER RESORT TOWNS

Car-free-friendly and English-language-friendly coastal towns — compact, walkable, and easier to settle into quickly.

1 Torrevieja

CHEAPEST OVERALL

A salt-lake town built around one of the most established, affordable expat communities on the Spanish coast — practical rather than boutique, with big supermarkets, a modern hospital, and a well-loved Friday market.

Cheapest option on the list and genuinely walkable, with reliable buses to Alicante and Murcia. English is a non-issue given the large British, Scandinavian, and German community — but that also makes it the least immersive choice for Spanish culture.

2 Nerja

MOST WALKABLE

Known for the clifftop Balcón de Europa and the nearby Nerja Caves, this small, low-rise town has intentionally stayed compact rather than growing into a city.

Everything sits within a 15-minute walk, and roughly a quarter of the population is expats. The catch is mobility beyond town — the hourly bus to Málaga is over an hour and not always reliable, and rising popularity has pushed rent up.

3 Estepona

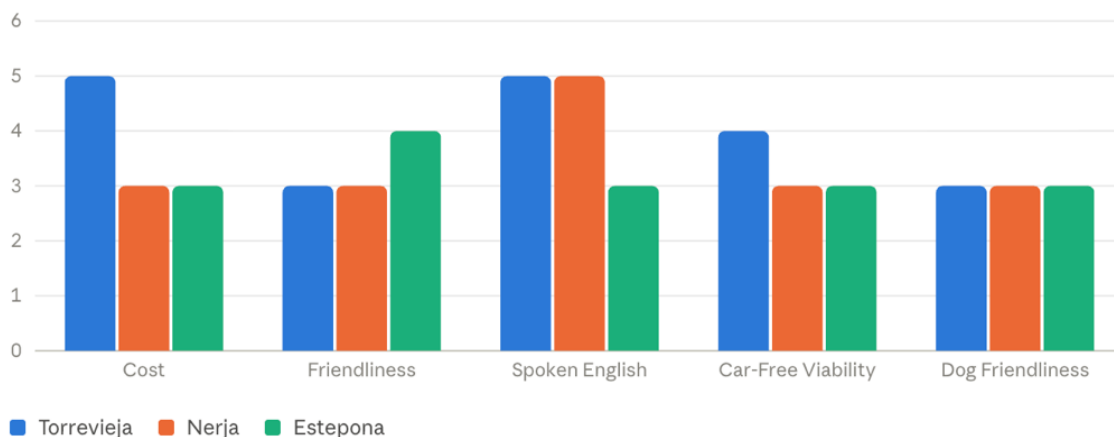
MOST SPANISH FLAVOR

The “Garden of the Costa del Sol” — a flower-filled old town with murals, a working fishing port, and a larger year-round Spanish population than its glossier neighbors.

That authenticity likely explains its higher friendliness rating, but rent runs higher and the town is more spread out (~77,000 people). Car-free living works in the old town/seafront core, less so in the outlying developments.

Smaller Resort Towns: Rated Factors (1-5)

Rating (5 = best)



LARGER CITIES

Car-free-friendly and English-language-friendly larger communities — more infrastructure and culture, with a wider range of costs.

Valencia

STRONGEST ALL-AROUND

Home to the Turia Gardens and the City of Arts and Sciences — the birthplace of paella, with a beach-town rhythm.

Best dog infrastructure & transit on the list; English strong in Ruzafa. Weak points: rising cost and only moderate warmth.

Alicante

SAFE MIDDLE CHOICE

Centered on Santa Bárbara Castle and the Hogueras de San Juan festival — a real working port city, quieter than Valencia.

Cheaper, walkable, decent tram/bus — but English drops off outside tourist zones and no standout on any single criterion.

Málaga

BEST TRANSIT & ENGLISH

Picasso's birthplace, transformed over the last decade into one of Spain's leading digital-nomad and expat hubs.

Strong on warmth, transit, and English — but rents are climbing fastest of the six, in tension with a modest budget.

Granada

CHEAPEST & FRIENDLIEST

The Alhambra, a large university population, and a concretely-earned reputation as the friendliest city on this list.

Wins decisively on cost and friendliness; trade-off is the weakest English presence and cold winter nights.

Murcia

MOST CAR-DEPENDENT

A university city with a baroque cathedral and a lively bar scene, set inland from the Costa Cálida.

Affordable with real local character, and downtown living is walkable — but the region overall is Spain's most car-dependent.

Seville

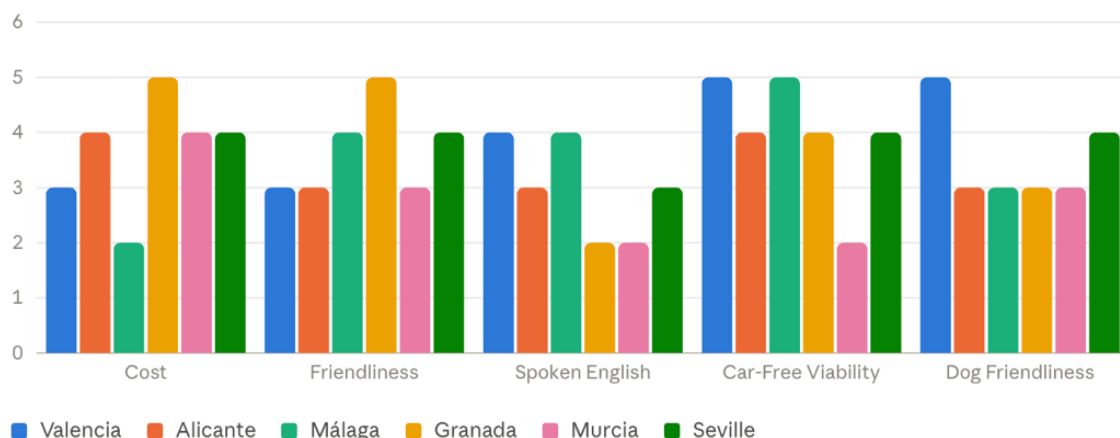
STRONGEST SURPRISE

Inseparable from flamenco, Semana Santa, and the Plaza de España — landlocked on a river, rich with past wealth.

Genuinely dog-friendly, affordable for its size, and warmly Andalusian — but summers regularly top 100°F.

Larger Cities: Rated Factors (1-5)

Rating (5 = best)



SMALLER RESORT TOWNS — IN FULL

Torre Vieja

Torre Vieja is known first as a salt-lake town — its pink-tinged Las Salinas lagoons (a protected nature reserve) sit right next to the city, and it's built its identity around being one of the most established, affordable expat magnets on the entire Spanish coast rather than a boutique or “undiscovered” destination. It's a practical, unpretentious place: big supermarkets, a modern university hospital, and a Friday market that's become a local institution.

On the criteria that matters to you: it's easily the cheapest option on our whole list, cheaper than every city compared here including Granada, and the town center is genuinely walkable with reliable intercity buses to Alicante and Murcia for anything beyond it. English is a non-issue here given the large, well-established British, Scandinavian, and German expat population — pharmacies and services are used to non-Spanish speakers. The trade-off is authenticity: this is the town where you'd be least likely to feel immersed in Spanish culture or meet primarily Spanish neighbors, and “friendliness” here is more about a comfortable international community.

Nerja

Nerja's claim to fame is the Balcón de Europa, a clifftop promenade with sweeping Mediterranean views that's been a magnet for both tourists and long-term expats for decades, plus the Nerja Caves nearby, a prehistoric site with some of the world's largest stalactites. It's a small, low-rise town that has intentionally stayed compact rather than growing into a city. I have not been here, but by all accounts (and photos), it's gorgeous.

This is the most walkable of the three within its own borders. One longtime resident described it as a place where everything is within a 15-minute walk and very pedestrian-friendly — and English is easy given roughly a quarter of the population is expats. The real catch is mobility beyond the town: without a car, you'd be relying on an hourly bus to Málaga that takes over an hour and was described by one resident as never quite reliable. Rent has also crept up as the town's popularity turned into overcrowding, so it's no longer the bargain it once was. If you want a self-contained daily life and don't mind rarely leaving town without help, Nerja works; if you want to explore the region regularly, the transit gap becomes a real limitation.

Estepona

Estepona brands itself as the “Garden of the Costa del Sol,” known for a flower-filled old town covered in murals and hanging planters, plus a working fishing port that gives it a more lived-in feel than some of its glossier Costa del Sol neighbors like Marbella. Notably, it's also described by people who've lived in both as having more Spanish flavor than Nerja, with a larger year-round Spanish population living in its taller residential neighborhoods rather than being dominated by expat enclaves. Personally, I love visiting this beachside town.

That authenticity is its strongest selling point relative to Torre Vieja and Nerja, and it likely explains the higher friendliness rating. But it comes at a cost: rent runs higher than the other two, and the town is more spread out. The historic center and seafront promenade are walkable on their own, but Estepona is a genuinely bigger town (around 77,000 people versus Nerja's 22,000), and many of its residential and golf-adjacent developments outside the old town are explicitly car-dependent. If you lived specifically in the old town or seafront core, car-free living is plausible; if you moved to one of the newer outlying developments, it likely wouldn't be.

LARGER CITIES — IN FULL (1 OF 2)

Valencia

Valencia's defining feature is the Turia Gardens, a former riverbed converted into a nine-kilometer ribbon of parkland that loops through the entire city, anchored by the futuristic City of Arts and Sciences at one end. It's also the birthplace of paella and Las Fallas, the explosive March festival where the whole city builds and burns giant sculptures — a place that balances serious cultural weight with an easygoing, beach-town rhythm.

Considering your criteria, Valencia is the strongest all-around performer on this list: it has the best-documented dog infrastructure of any city we've looked at (dedicated dog beaches, a pet transit pass, park space connecting to a natural reserve) and the most complete public transit system, making a car genuinely unnecessary. English is solid in expat-heavy neighborhoods like Ruzafa. Its weak points are its cost, which sits mid-pack and keeps climbing, and friendliness, which is pleasant but isn't as warm as some other areas like Andalucía.

Alicante

Alicante's identity centers on Santa Bárbara Castle, a Moorish-era fortress looming over the city from a hilltop, and Las Hogueras de San Juan, a June festival of bonfires and fireworks that rivals Valencia's Fallas in scale. It's also the quieter, more workaday counterpart to its flashier northern neighbor — a real port city with a functioning economy rather than a pure tourist stage.

It's the clearest "solid but unremarkable" option in the set: noticeably cheaper than Valencia, walkable with a decent tram and bus network, and home to a large expat community — though that community skews British and German rather than American, and English drops off quickly outside tourist zones. It doesn't have a standout dog-friendly reputation or a particular warmth factor, which is why it consistently reads as the safe middle choice rather than the top pick on any single criterion.

Málaga

Málaga's calling card is being Picasso's birthplace, home to a museum dedicated to him, layered onto a city that's transformed in the last decade from a transit-airport town into one of Spain's most active digital-nomad and expat hubs. It pairs Costa del Sol beaches with genuine cultural depth and a fast-growing tech sector.

This is the city riding Andalusia's reputation for hospitality, and it delivers on transit (metro, extensive bus network, regional rail) and English presence, both among the strongest on the list. The real problem is cost: rents have been climbing sharply as Málaga's popularity surges, putting it in tension with a preference for staying affordable and modest. It's a great fit on warmth and infrastructure, but the least likely of the six to stay comfortably within a modest budget over time.

LARGER CITIES — IN FULL (2 OF 2)

Granada

Granada's signature landmark is the Alhambra, the Moorish palace-fortress complex overlooking the city, paired with a large university population that gives it a youthful, café-and-tapas-bar energy despite its small size. It's also the city that specifically earned a "friendliest people we met" endorsement from American expats profiled earlier, making its Andalusian hospitality reputation the most concretely backed of any city here. This city is gorgeous on multiple levels, from its mix of historic Christian and Muslim architecture, old Muslim quarter and market, river walk, and flamenco dancing and guitar performances in the street. The local cuisine is decent too, again with Arab influences. It's a charming, winding city to walk through and would feel comparably sized to Chattanooga. There is a rail connection to Málaga and its nice beaches that is a 40-minute ride.

Granada wins decisively on cost — it's the cheapest city on the list by a wide margin — and on friendliness. The trade-off is real: English presence is the weakest of the six, since its international community is smaller and less English-fluent than the coastal cities (although tourist areas are fluent), and while it has workable light rail and bus transit, its mountain-adjacent geography and cold winter nights (dropping near freezing) are worth flagging against a climate that otherwise reads as consistently mild.

Murcia

Murcia is a university city with a baroque cathedral and a lively, youthful bar scene, situated inland from the Costa Cálida rather than directly on the coast — which already sets it apart from every other city on this list. It's affordable and has real local character, but it's built around car ownership in a way none of the others are. If living downtown, a car would not be necessary, and there is a rail connection to nearby Cartagena and high speed to Madrid.

This is Spain's most car-dependent region, with the vast majority of residents relying on a car daily, and English presence is limited outside the university crowd. We had no problems with English in the downtown area and walked to everything, including markets. It's not a bad place to live, but on two criteria you mentioned — no car, and some English accessibility — it's not the best performer. The people are lively and entertaining to engage with, but sometimes only in Spanish.

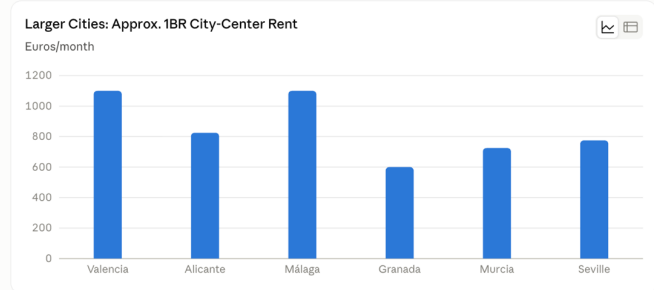
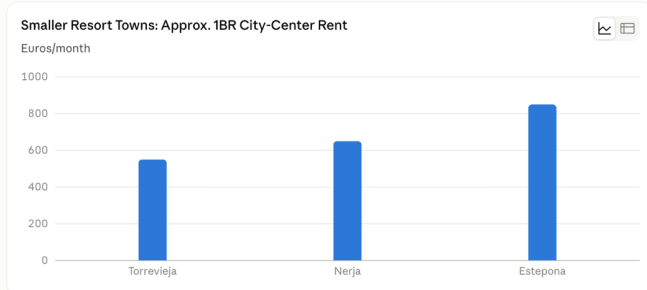
Seville

Seville's identity is inseparable from flamenco, Semana Santa's elaborate religious processions, and the Plaza de España, a monumental semicircular building and plaza that's one of the most photographed spots in Spain. It's also landlocked on a large river rather than coastal. It shows the influence of past wealth from being the departure and landing point of the Spanish ships full of gold from the Americas.

Seville is the strongest surprise option here: genuinely dog-friendly with dedicated parks and 24-hour vet clinics, affordable relative to its size, and carrying real Andalusian friendliness. Transit is solid, if less extensive than Valencia's or Málaga's. Its clearest downside is climate — summers here run hotter than anywhere else on the list, regularly exceeding 100°F. There are plenty of shady spots in the downtown, however. People walk along singing outside of bars, the flamenco culture is pervasive, and the architecture and quiet streets are beautiful. The local food is excellent, it's safe, and it feels comparable in size to Knoxville, Tennessee, without the traffic.

APPROX. MONTHLY RENT (1BR, CITY CENTER)

Torrevieja is at the low end of the range, while Valencia and Málaga sit at the top — a reminder that “bigger city” and “better infrastructure” both tend to come with a higher price tag.



APPROX. SEASONAL TEMPERATURES

Coastal towns and cities stay milder year-round; Granada and Seville show the widest swing between winter nights and summer highs.

Larger Cities: Approx. Seasonal Temperatures
°F

Category	Winter Avg High (°F)	Summer Avg High (°F)
Valencia	66	88
Alicante	62	87
Málaga	61	87
Granada	55	92
Murcia	65	90

■ Winter Avg High (°F) ■ Summer Avg High (°F)

Smaller Resort Towns: Approx. Seasonal Temperatures
°F

Category	Winter Avg High (°F)	Summer Avg High (°F)
Torrevieja	60	86
Nerja	61	85
Estepona	56	80

■ Winter Avg High (°F) ■ Summer Avg High (°F)

MORE CITIES, DOWN THE ROAD

There are other cities that are great future options as your comfort with Spanish improves — worth revisiting once the first move is underway.

Ready to talk through your shortlist?

Book a follow-up consultation with your Soft Landings in Spain contact.

spainsupport.as.me