

Transport

## More people prefer to travel by train instead of plane in Spain, boosted by arrival of new high-speed rail operators

Increased competition from private operators Iryo and Ouigo has help boost passenger numbers by 76%, with four out of every five passengers preferring to let the train take the strain between Madrid and Barcelona





Competition between high-speed rail companies has boosted the number of passengers travelling on trains throughout Spain, new data shows. More people are opting to travel by train instead of by plane as a result of new private operators Ouigo and Iryo, which now offer competitive rail prices, according to Spain's National Markets and Competition Commission (CNMC) in its annual report for 2022.

A total of 23.7 million travellers used high-speed trains last year, 76% more than the previous year and even 6% above the 22.4 million train passengers in 2019, a record year for tourism before the Covid-19 pandemic broke out.

The route benefiting the most is Madrid-Barcelona, where four out of five passengers prefer to go by train (78%) rather than by plane, compared to 2019, where 64% of passengers chose the train over the plane. Of the passengers who travelled by train from Madrid to Barcelona last year, 58% took an AVE service, 26% travelled with Ouigo and 14.2% with Avlo, Renfe's low-cost trains. In the little more than a year and a half since Ouigo started operating along this route, almost half of AVE passengers have switched to trains from other operators, mainly due to the price reduction.

Data provided by the Trainline online platform also showed that prices for the Madrid-Barcelona route plummeted by almost half (-43%) in the last quarter of 2022 compared to the same period in 2019 as a result of the competition, despite bookings growing by almost 70% in the same quarter. According to the agency specialising in the sale and comparison of train tickets, the average price of this route has dropped from 81 euros in 2019 to 46 euros in 2022.

On other routes where new operators are now established, such as the Madrid-Valencia corridor, passenger preference for the train over the plane has increased to

90% in 2022 from 86% in 2021. A total of 2.9 million people travelled by train last year between these two cities, more than double (108%) than in 2021.

### **The conquest of the south**

While in destinations where these competitors had not yet arrived in 2022, the preference of rail compared to air travel remained stable, or fell slightly. While 90% of passengers on the Madrid-Seville route favoured the train in 2015, it fell to 85% in 2022. On the Madrid-Malaga route, 84% preferred the train in 2015 compared to 78% in 2022.

The CNMC's report in 2023 will reveal whether the new operators on these routes (Iryo made its debut on the Madrid-South corridor last March and Avlo did so in June) with the consequent drop in prices manages to increase the preference for the train over the plane.

### **Foreign tourists**

Train travel in Spain has increased this summer by up to eleven times compared to last year. Preliminary data from Trainline shows that coastal tourism has experienced huge growth thanks to new high-speed operators running trains to cities such as Malaga, where tourists arriving by train have grown by no less than 540% in one year; and Valencia, with a 400% increase.

And these trips are not only limited to domestic tourists. The data shows that foreigners are also changing the way they travel around Spain, with a 66% increase in train travel compared to the summer of 2022. The increase in the number of Americans travelling by train in Spain stands out, up 18%, followed by British, French and Italian tourists.



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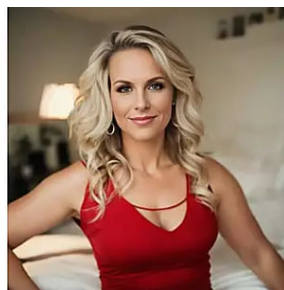
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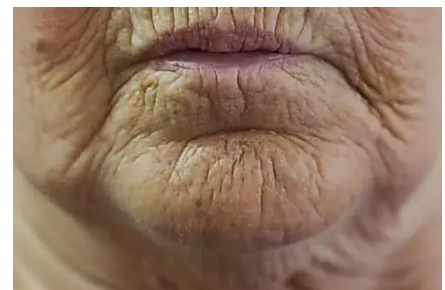
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