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SPAIN

# Pamplona, no bull



Photos by Katherine Rodeghier/Special Contributor

Shops and cafes ring Pamplona's Plaza del Castillo, the site of many events during the city's San Fermin Festival.

## Here's what to do during the city's San Fermin Festival after the bulls have come and gone

By KATHERINE RODEGHIER  
Special Contributor

**P**AMPLONA, Spain — Runners mill about the street below my balcony. Most wear the traditional costume: white pants and shirt, red sash or scarf. Nervous and fidgety, they jump up and down, stretch their legs, anxiously check their shoelaces.

At exactly 8 a.m. a rocket explodes, echoing off buildings on the narrow street, and all heads turn toward the tsunami of humans surging down the street, six fighting bulls at their heels. Runners pick up speed, leap to the side to avoid curved, pointed horns. Some stumble and fall.

The wave passes below my feet, a blur of white and red and the black backs of the bulls. In seconds, they are gone.

The famed running of the bulls that Er-

nest Hemingway described in *The Sun Also Rises* lasts about three minutes, traveling half a mile from corral to bullring through the cordoned-off old-city streets of Pamplona.

Three minutes. That leaves a lot of time to fill.

No problem. The San Fermin Festival is held every July 6-14 and the running of the bulls, on eight of those days, occupies just a



Thin slices of Iberico ham are standard lunch fare at local restaurants.

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# In Pamplona, plenty to do after bulls pass by

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few lines in a program of more than 200 folkloric activities, many of them family-friendly. Some highlights:

## Join the parade

The festival began in the Middle Ages as a simple religious fiesta dedicated to Pamplona's martyred third-century patron saint. San Fermin is honored every July 7, when the faithful remove his bejeweled figure from its chapel in the Church of San Lorenzo and carry it through the streets.

Almost everyone along the parade route wears the festival costume. Some claim the white pants and shirt symbolize the saint's purity and the red scarf the blood of his decapitation. Others say it represents the white apron and bloodstained towel of butchers who once ran with the bulls to judge the quality of their meat.

No bulls are involved in the parade of the Giants and Big-Heads, unless they are cartoon characters joining the family-oriented procession. Parents bring their children in strollers or perched on dad's shoulders to see the giants, 13-foot papier-mâché figures representing the kings and queens of Europe, Asia, Africa and America.

By tradition, toddlers give up their pacifiers to them — like some U.S. tots give theirs to Santa — and by parade's end a giant may have 50 dangling from his wrist.

The Big-Heads circulate through the crowd for comic relief. Wearing oversize heads satirizing local celebrities, they walk the parade route accompanied by men dressed as cartoon characters who bop paradegoers with foam balls.

## Have a churro

After the morning bull runs, spectators line up for churros still warm from the kettle at family-run La Manueta Churreria, a Pamplona institution since 1872.

Because of her age, the grandmother who runs the operation now opens only during the festival, plus a few days in June and October. Her four adult children take time off from their jobs to help out, slicing coils of fried dough, running the cash register and manning kettles of oil set over beechwood fires.

Adults might nibble their churros between sips of apple liqueur, but all ages enjoy them with cups of thick, hot chocolate bought from street vendors.

## Sleep in Hemingway's bed

Early in his career, Hemingway had rooms at the now-closed Hotel Quintana, which he named the Hotel Montoya in his 1926 novel. After he made some money, he moved across Plaza del Castillo to the Gran Hotel La Perla, where from the balcony of Room 217 he'd watch the bulls run.

When the five-star hotel reopened in 2007 after renovations, Hemingway's room, renumbered 201, had an updated bathroom, but the bedroom remained the same as when he occupied it: writing desk, pink loveseat, dial phone, twin beds.

Those who can't book Hemingway's room content themselves with rubbing his nose on a bust in the lobby. The lucky snag tables by the windows of the hotel restaurant to watch the bulls over breakfast.

Hemingway wasn't the only famous person to stay at La Perla. Orson Welles, Charlie Chaplin and the Aga Khan all had rooms here. Celebrities still check in. Charlie Sheen arrived incognito during last year's festival, but was soon spotted.

## Dine like a Spaniard

Between activities, festivalgoers relax over lunch and dinner the way most Spaniards do: long and late. Lunch might last from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m., dinner from 9:30 to 11:30 p.m. Before dinner, they'll meet for drinks at a bar and order a few tapas, or *pintxos* as these appetizers are called in the neighboring Basque region.

Prime restaurant seating is under the umbrella tables on the Plaza del Castillo, where bands and folk musicians perform. Waiters slice slivers of Ibérico ham onto platters for serving. During San Fermin, dishes such as *rabo de toro* (bull's tail) and *estofado de toro* (bull stew) are big sellers.

Cafe Iruna, the city's oldest, occupies prime space on the plaza. This was Hemingway's hangout; a life-size statue of the author leans against a bar.

A folk-singing troupe winds through the crowded lunch tables at Europa, one of Pamplona's three Michelin-star restaurants. At another, Rodero, the atmosphere is a bit more sedate as diners feast on a degustation menu emphasizing products of the Navarre region, the breadbasket of Spain, along with *solomillo de toro*, bull sirloin.

## Watch a bullfight — or not

The bulls that run through the streets every morning die in the bullring every evening. While animal-rights protests put an end to bullfights in some cities in Spain, they have not succeeded here, where Hemingway glamorized bullfighting and made matadors heroes.

During the nightly San Fermin bullfights, three matadors take turns facing two bulls apiece in a highly ritualized and gory spectacle that's not for the squeamish.

Not everyone in Pamplona is a fan. A taxi driver who ran with the bulls as a teen told me he no longer goes to bullfights after seeing blood spurting from a bull when seated at close range.

"We should not do that to animals," he said, shaking his head. "Hemingway should have stayed home."

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## When you go

**Getting there:** Iberia Airlines flies nonstop from Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami and New York to Madrid with connections to Pamplona.

### Where to stay:

■ **Gran Hotel La Perla:** granhotellaperla.com

■ **Hotel AC Ciudad de Pamplona:** Quiet Marriott property about a 10-minute drive from the hubbub of the festival. [marrriott.com/hotels/travel/pnaac-ac-hotel-ciudad-de-pamplona](http://marrriott.com/hotels/travel/pnaac-ac-hotel-ciudad-de-pamplona)

### Other information:

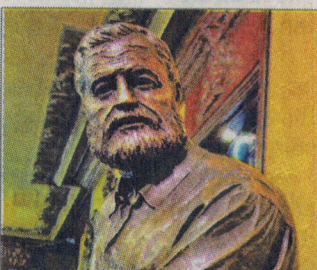
■ San Fermin tours: Novotur offers guided tours and viewings of the running of the bulls from private balconies. [novotur.com/english](http://novotur.com/english)

■ Tourist Office of Spain: [spain.info](http://spain.info)

■ City of Pamplona: [pamplona.es](http://pamplona.es)



**Big-Heads chase parents** and children in the crowds during the children's parade at the San Fermin Festival.



**A statue of Ernest Hemingway** is at the bar in his favorite hangout, Cafe Iruna.



**A boy enjoys** a churro from La Manueta Churreria during the festival.



**Runners are just inches** from fighting bulls as they run through Pamplona's streets during the San Fermin Festival. Hundreds of runners are hurt each year.



**On Children's Day** during their Fermin Festival, a man leaned in so his child could kiss the saint's statue.

## So you want to run with the bulls?

Anyone not content to watch Pamplona's running of the bulls from the sidelines should be mindful of a few particulars before risking life and limb in the street.

There are rules: You must be at least age 18 and not still inebriated from last night's party. No sandals or flip-flops, no backpacks (bulls are drawn to the swaying when its owner runs) and no cameras or phones. Last year a runner stopped to pose for a selfie. Bad idea; it endangers other runners. You'll be fined.

Don't touch a bull; it could cause it to turn and stick someone with those deadly horns. Green shirted shepherds running with the bulls carry long sticks to herd the animals and may whack you if you lay a hand on them.

The more runners crowding the streets, the greater chance you will be pushed or fall and be trampled. Between 2,000 and 5,000 runners join the run each day, with the highest numbers on weekends. Most are inexperienced first-timers.

About 80 percent of the runners are under age 35, 8 percent are women and 60 percent are foreigners, including 22 percent from North America.

Between 200 and 300 people are injured each year. An average of 10 are gored, but because ambulances line the route, there have been just 15 deaths in the past 100 years.

The fighting bulls run at almost 15 miles per hour and weigh around 1,100 pounds each. Eight to 10 steers, at about 1,500 pounds each, run with them to encourage them to stick with the herd. If a bull is separated from the herd, it gets disoriented and can turn on you.

No one runs the entire half-mile route, so you choose the section you wish to run. Each has challenges: steep, narrow or curved, which can cause bulls to careen into buildings or barricades and fall on slick streets. You don't want to be there when they do.

*Katherine Rodeghier*