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YOUR FIRST SKI OR SNOWBOARD TRIP

The Keep Calm guide to Grandvalira, Andorra: buses, insurance, passes, rental, lockers, lessons and costs

KEEP CALM WINTER SPORTS

Generated 7 November 2026

PLEASE READ THIS FIRST

This guide was written with the help of AI, from our own trip notes and price checks. It is a volunteer effort, not professional travel advice, and it can be wrong or out of date. Prices, timetables, entry rules, insurance cover and resort details all change. **Do your own research on anything that matters to you**, especially passports and entry rules, insurance, medical needs and money, and check the official sources (the coach companies, Grandvalira, your insurer, your hotel) before you book or pay. **Spotted a mistake, or have an improvement?** Please contact Dan, or report it in the Keep Calm ski and snowboard group, and we will fix it. This guide gets better every trip because people do.

HOW A KEEP CALM ANDORRA WEEKEND WORKS, AND WHAT IT COSTS

Our ski and snowboard trips go to Grandvalira in Andorra, two nights from Friday to Sunday, staying in one of the villages along the valley: Encamp, Canillo, El Tarter or Soldeu. Each trip has its own post in the chat with the hotel, the dates and the price. This guide covers everything that stays the same from trip to trip.

Prices and facts were last checked on 7 November 2026. Prices change through the season, so treat every number as a guide and re-check before you book or pay. The trip WhatsApp group always has the latest.

The two ways a trip is booked

	Agency package (group booking)	Book your own room
What you get	A shared room (doubles and triples), usually breakfast, sometimes one dinner, and a 2-day Grandvalira pass for Saturday and Sunday	Room only, or room and breakfast. You buy your own pass
How you pay	We tell you how and when in the trip group. The price for each trip is in its post	Each person or room pays the hotel or booking site directly
Commitment	Once places are held, dropping out can leave you owing your share	Follow the site's cancellation terms

Either way, **nobody at Keep Calm makes any money or kickback from a trip. It is all volunteer run**, and you only ever pay real costs. Our commitment rules apply: https://keepcalm.fit/rules/event-rules.

What the extras cost

These are on top of the room and pass. Most are optional, so your own total depends on what you already have. Rental prices are from Viladomat (https://rental.viladomat.com/en), the shop we recommend, as

quoted last season. For the coach, get a live quote from alsa.com, andbus.es or andorradirectbus.es for your dates.

Extra	Cost per person	Notes
Ski rental, 2 days	About EUR46 to 55 for skis, boots and helmet (Viladomat Bronze or Silver tier)	Pre-book online, gear runs out on busy weekends
Snowboard rental, 2 days	Similar to skis. One of us paid just under EUR100 for two and a half days	Same
Accident insurance, 2 days	About EUR6.50 a day as a lift-pass add-on, or a few euros a day from a travel insurer	Never included. See the insurance section
Coach from Barcelona, return	About EUR60 to 70 last season. Get a quote at alsa.com, andbus.es or andorradirectbus.es	Or share fuel if someone drives
Local buses in Andorra	EUR2 a ride, cash only	Keep coins
Tourist tax	A few euros per person per night, paid at the hotel	Not in the trip price
Lockers at the gondola	EUR8 to 14 each when shared	Optional, see the gear section
Group lessons, about 6 hours	EUR75 to 115	Optional, and worth it for a first-timer
Clothes, if you buy everything new	About EUR168 at Decathlon	One-off, reusable every trip. Borrow what you can
Food and drink	Your own budget	Some packages include breakfast or a dinner. Mountain lunches and drinks are on top

Rough totals of the extras, before food and clothes:

- Rent with a helmet, insure, take the coach and buses, pay the tax: about EUR120 to 135.
- The same with a group lesson: about EUR200 to 250.

Add the trip price from the trip post to get your own total, then food, drinks and any clothes on top.

What we recommend

- **Insurance:** take the accident cover unless your own travel insurance clearly covers skiing in Andorra. Andorra is outside the EU, so an EHIC or GHIC is probably no use here. Read the insurance section.
- **Rental:** rent the hard gear (skis or board, boots, helmet) and buy the soft gear. Pre-book online with Viladomat, our recommended shop, at the branch nearest your gondola.

- **Lessons:** first-timers should take a group lesson on Saturday morning. Book early, they sell out.
- **Coach:** the direct coaches from Barcelona are the usual route. We run a poll in the trip group so people travel together.
- **Rooms:** triples are the cheapest per head. Tell us who you would like to share with.

How a trip runs, step by step

1. **Sign up** through the form in the trip post. Filling it in is a commitment to come, and you get the link to the trip WhatsApp group by email.
2. **Places are held** with the hotel or agency once we have the head count.
3. **Pay** by the dates we give in the group. Once places are final, the cancellation terms apply.
4. **In the group:** polls for roommates, rental, lessons, coach and dietary needs.
5. **The weekend:** coach, gear collection, and the mountain.

THE CHECKLIST

Everything in this guide, in one list, in the order you will need it. Tick as you go.

When the trip is posted

- ☐ Read the trip post: dates, hotel, price, deadline
- ☐ Check your passport is in date (Andorra is outside the EU and it is checked at the coach)
- ☐ Non-EU citizens: check the entry rules for Spain, France and Andorra for your nationality
- ☐ Add up your own cost with the tables above and decide if the weekend works for you
- ☐ Fill in the sign-up form by the deadline and join the trip WhatsApp group from the email

As soon as places are held

- ☐ Pay by the dates given in the group
- ☐ Answer the polls: roommates, rental, lessons, coach, diet
- ☐ Book your coach (open return), and decide your Sunday time
- ☐ Pre-book rental gear (skis or board, boots, helmet), or add it to the trip booking
- ☐ Book a lesson if you want one, morning if possible
- ☐ Sort insurance that covers skiing or snowboarding in Andorra
- ☐ Say yes or no to a locker share

Two to four weeks before

- ☐ Clothes: waterproof jacket and trousers, thermal top and bottoms, ski socks, gloves, hat, goggles, sunscreen

- [ ] eSIM or a data plan that works in Andorra (there is no EU roaming)
- [ ] Install the apps: Grandvalira, the bus timetable, your coach company, a weather app
- [ ] Book Caldea or dinner out if the group is going

The week before

- [ ] Check the weather and snow report
- [ ] Check the news for transport strikes
- [ ] Confirm your coach times and tell the group
- [ ] Get EUR20 to 30 in coins and small notes for local buses and the tourist tax
- [ ] Pack with the list at the end of this guide
- [ ] Charge a power bank, the cold drains phones

On the day

- [ ] Passport, coach ticket, booking confirmation, insurance details on your phone
- [ ] Be at the station 30 minutes before the coach
- [ ] Cash for the local bus, and your swimwear if Caldea is on

START HERE: YOUR FIRST SKI TRIP, STEP BY STEP

First time on snow? You are in good company. In our last interest form roughly 3 in 10 people who said they wanted to come had never skied or boarded before. This guide walks you through everything, in the order you will need it, from the day we post the accommodation in the chat to the moment you check in.

You must be 18 or over to join any Keep Calm trip. By taking part you agree to our policies at https://keepcalm.fit/policies.

What a Keep Calm ski weekend is

- A Friday to Sunday weekend (two nights) at Grandvalira in Andorra, based in one of the valley villages: Encamp, Canillo, El Tarter or Soldeu.
- We find the hotel and the dates. You book your own room share, travel, pass and gear, with help from this guide.
- We ski in ability groups, so complete beginners are never dragged up a red run.
- Some trips are bigger and open to the wider community, some are smaller and private. Either way the steps below are the same.

The timeline

"Day 0" is the day the accommodation is posted in the chat. Dates below are rough, because bookings and prices move.

Day 0 to 2: decide and claim a place

- Read the pinned message in the chat. It has dates, price and the booking link.
- Check the real cost for you in 04 money and budget.
- Say yes or no in the poll. Rooms are mostly triples, so we need to know early.

As soon as booking opens: book your room

- Follow 02 booking your room. There can be a short window, and rooms can sell out.

Right after your room: the things that run out

- Book your bus (part 03).
- Pre-book rental gear (part 06). Gear runs out on busy weekends.
- Book lessons if you want them (part 10). Last season they were hard to find.
- Sort insurance (part 07).

2 to 4 weeks before: the shopping

- Buy your clothes at Decathlon, a little at a time (part 06).
- Sort your eSIM and apps (part 08).

The week before: the final checks

- Lift pass: buy during the week, once the forecast looks fine (part 05). Unless it came with your room package, in which case you collect it at the hotel.
- Weather and snow report (part 09).
- Check the news for transport strikes. A strike made coach travel uncertain on one trip last year.
- Confirm your return bus time.
- Get euro cash for the local bus.
- Pack with the checklist in part 12.

The day

- Meet at the bus station, travel, drop your bags, collect your gear, and you are on the mountain by lunchtime (part 12).

Three rules that save the most trouble

1. **Bring a passport.** One person was refused at the bus station last season and missed the coach.
2. **Carry cash.** The local buses in Andorra take cash only.
3. **Read the chat before asking.** New people kept asking for the same links, so a pinned message holds the essentials. This guide is that message, expanded.

Do this now

- [ ] Join the ski group: https://keepcalm.fit/whatsapp/skiing-snowboarding
- [ ] Read the group rules and policies: https://keepcalm.fit/policies
- [ ] Check your passport is in date
- [ ] Open 04 money and budget and decide if the weekend works for you

BOOKING YOUR ROOM

How booking works

We use one of two routes, and the chat post tells you which.

Route A: you book your room share yourself. We choose the hotel and dates. You form a group of three (rooms are mostly triples), and one of you books the room online through a travel agency website. Each person pays their own share, so nobody at Keep Calm holds your money. This is how some of our earlier trips worked.

Route B: one group booking. One organiser books a block of rooms with the hotel and collects payment from everyone. This needs a firm head count, so the payment deadline is strict. If you pay and then drop out, you may only get back what the hotel actually refunds.

Whichever route it is, **pay by the deadline**. Others are booking based on your yes.

What to expect from the hotel

We use 3-star hotels in the valley villages. Rooms are mostly triples, with some doubles and the odd quadruple. Some hotels are a 15 minute walk from a gondola, others are a short bus ride or a couple of kilometres away, so check the trip post. This is what the hotels we have used were like:

	Check
Check-in	From 14:00 until 22:00 (you can leave bags earlier)
Check-out	By 10:00, luggage can stay in the storage room until your evening bus
Keys	One key per room, hand it back at reception
Tourist tax	A small charge per person per night, paid at the hotel on arrival
Breakfast	Buffet, sometimes included, sometimes paid at the hotel
Dinner	Buffet, same (see part 11)
Card hold	Some hotels ask for a card at check-in, some do not. Ask in writing
ID	Bring your passport, they check it at check-in

Details differ by hotel. The trip post has what applies to you.

Choosing roommates

- Rooms are usually voted on in the chat. Quick polls for gender preference and "I snore" worked well last time.
- Say early if you need a double bed or two singles. The hotel needs a phone call for a specific bed setup.
- If you do not know anyone yet, say so. We will pair you with other solo joiners.

Which room type?

Prices are per person, so a triple (three of you) is the cheapest per head. A double costs a little more each. A quadruple on an agency site was dearer per head than a triple on the weekend we checked, so do not assume more people means cheaper.

Cancellation

Some booking sites show two options at the same room price: "partially refundable" and "free cancellation". Read what each one says on the booking page before you pay. Our own commitment rules are at https://keepcalm.fit/rules/event-rules.

Staying somewhere else

Some people book a nearby hotel if it is cheaper, then simply meet us on the mountain. That is fine. Tell the organisers so we count you for ski groups and dinners.

If your pass is part of the package

If your room came with a lift pass, the passes are collected at the hotel reception, not at a lift ticket office. Ask when you check in.

Late arrivals

The last local bus from Andorra la Vella up the valley is around 22:05, and check-in finishes at 22:00. If you are going to be late, message the hotel and the group. After the last bus the only option is a taxi or Uber.

Do this now

- [ ] Reply to the poll with your roommate preferences
- [ ] Book by the deadline and save the confirmation
- [ ] Add the hotel address from the trip post to your phone
- [ ] Contact the hotel 48 hours before arrival if the voucher asks you to

GETTING THERE AND GETTING AROUND

The short version

Take a coach from Barcelona (about 3 to 3.5 hours). Bring your passport and some euro cash. Book an open return and lock in your Sunday time. Then use the local bus (cash only) between Andorra la Vella and your village.

Barcelona to Andorra by coach

There is no train to Andorra, so most of us take a coach.

Company	From	Typical times	Journey	Notes
Andorra Direct Bus	Barcelona Sants	06:15, 11:15, 13:45, 15:45	About 3 hours	EUR31.50 one way last March. One suitcase in the hold is included.
ALSA	Barcelona Nord	07:00, 13:00, 15:00	3h15 to 4 hours	Seats were not reserved on our tickets
AndBus	Diagonal, Barcelona	Check their site	About 3.5 hours	Some services go direct to the villages (Encamp, Canillo, El Tarter, Soldeu), so no change in Andorra la Vella

- Booking: https://booking.andorradirectbus.es/b2b/selection and https://www.alsa.com/en/coach/barcelona-andorra
- Prices and times are from last season. Check them for your date.
- Book an **open return** for flexibility, but see the Sunday warning below.
- Meet at the bus station about 30 minutes early. For the 06:15 Sants coach that means 05:45.
- An early Friday coach gets you on the slopes the same day. If you leave later, you only ski Saturday and Sunday.

Sunday: choose your return carefully

The 17:15 and 17:45 coaches hit traffic out of Andorra on both trips. A 19:15 left early and arrived on time. Pick your return time before you go, tell the group, and leave extra margin if you have work on Monday.

The border

Andorra is not part of the EU. The coach crosses at the border and passports can be checked. **Bring a passport.** One person last season was refused at the Barcelona station without one and lost their coach. Members who are not EU citizens should check entry rules for their nationality before booking.

If you are driving

- About 2.5 to 3 hours from Barcelona.
- Check whether snow chains are needed for the drive up, especially after fresh snow.
- Fuel is cheaper in Andorra, so fill up there before driving back.
- Coordinate carpooling in the chat and share costs fairly. See our rules at https://keepcalm.fit/policies.

Getting around in Andorra

- **Local bus:** about EUR1.90 to 2 per ride. **Cash only**, so keep coins and small notes. Lines L2 and L4 run up the valley from Andorra la Vella through Encamp and Canillo towards El Tarter, Soldeu and Pas de la Casa. Daytime buses run roughly every 10 to 30 minutes. Timetable: https://bus.ad/
- **Last bus** from Andorra la Vella up the valley was about 22:05. After that, taxis or an Uber.
- **Gondolas:** each village has its own way up. Funicamp in Encamp (about 20 minutes, opened at 8:45), and the gondolas at Canillo, El Tarter and Soldeu. Opening times are on the Grandvalira site.
- **Walking:** hotel to gondola can be anything from 5 minutes to a couple of kilometres. With ski boots and gear it feels longer, which is why many of us rent a locker (part 06) or use the local bus.
- **Shuttles:** some hotels run a free shuttle to the lifts or the rental shop. Ask reception.
- **Strikes:** check the news a few days before. A teachers' strike made coach travel uncertain on one weekend.

Do this now

- [ ] Choose coach company and times, book an open return
- [ ] Put the passport next to your bag
- [ ] Get EUR20 to 30 in coins and small notes for local buses
- [ ] Decide your Sunday return time and tell the group

MONEY AND BUDGET: WHAT A FIRST WEEKEND REALLY COSTS

Skiing is not cheap, so here is the honest breakdown. Every number is from last season's trips, the 2026-27 Grandvalira rate card, or our price check of 2026-10-26. Prices change, so treat these as a guide and re-check before you book.

What a weekend costs, without the room

The room and pass price is different for every trip and is in the trip post. Everything else is in the table near the start of this guide ("What the extras cost"). As a rule of thumb, a first-timer who rents, insures, takes the coach and has a lesson spends about EUR200 to 250 on top of the trip price, before food, drinks and clothes. Someone with their own kit who skips the lesson spends about EUR100 to 130 on top.

One-off, and reusable on future trips: about EUR168 for clothes at Decathlon (see the gear section).

Not in those numbers: breakfast and dinner where they are not included, lunch on the mountain, the Caldea spa (about EUR53), an eSIM, and any apres.

Ways to spend less

- Borrow or share clothes and gloves. Do not buy everything new.
- Travel in March if you can, when rooms are cheaper than February.
- Take the beginner pass if you are staying on easy slopes (part 05).
- Pre-book rental. It is cheaper than walking in.
- Skip the locker and carry gear, if you are close enough.
- Split private lessons with a friend.

What you will need cash for

- Local bus fares (cash only)
- Small shops and cafes
- Tourist tax can usually be paid by card or cash at the hotel. Ask which.

Paying us and settling up

- Pay your share by the deadline in the chat. Others book based on your yes.
- If you drop out after others have booked, you may need to cover your share. Our rules are at https://keepcalm.fit/rules/event-rules.
- Pay for lockers and shared costs up front. Chasing late payments was one of the main pains last season.

Do this now

- [ ] Add up your own total using the table above
- [ ] Decide what you will rent, buy and skip
- [ ] Put the deadline for payment in your calendar

LIFT PASSES

A lift pass (a "forfait") is what lets you ride the gondolas and chairlifts. Without one you cannot get up the mountain. It is your biggest single cost, so it is worth understanding.

The 2026-27 Grandvalira prices (adults)

All Keep Calm trips are 18+, so the adult rate applies to everyone. From the official rate card:

Pass	Price
1 day	EUR72.00
Half day (from 1pm)	EUR58.00
Beginner (per day)	EUR45.50
2 days	EUR139.00
3 days	EUR208.50
4 days	EUR278.00
Pass insurance (per day)	EUR6.50

Last season's actual spend: EUR199 for 3 days booked online in mid-February, EUR205 a week later, and EUR208 at the venue. Prices rise as the date nears, so earlier is cheaper, but see the weather note below.

Which one should I get?

- **A normal weekend (Sat and Sun):** the 2-day pass.
- **Friday arrivals who want to ski that day:** a 3-day pass, or a half day from 1pm on Friday. Pass bundles with a room often cover Saturday and Sunday only, so Friday skiers buy their own day.
- **First timers staying on green slopes:** ask about the beginner pass. Last season someone paid EUR93 for 2 days. It only covers some of the easy slopes. Which ones exactly is not confirmed.
- **Not sure you will like it?** A half day from 1pm is cheaper than a full day.

When and how to buy

- Buy on the Grandvalira website or app. Buying at the ticket office means queues.
- **Do not buy too early.** Check the weather during the week first. If it looks like the lifts will close for wind or storms, there is no point paying early. You can usually buy one day ahead and still get a small discount.
- If your room package includes the pass, you collect it at your hotel's reception.
- The app may offer a "mobile pass" option. One person found a cheaper half-day price by not selecting it, so compare the options before paying.

What is a pass valid for

The 2-day pass sold with a room by the travel agency we used was for Grandvalira, and also gave access to Pal-Arinsal and Ordino-Arcalis, the neighbouring areas. Day passes are for the dates you choose.

Group discount: not for us

Grandvalira gives a 4 percent discount to groups of 25 and over, but it is explicitly not available in late January to February 2027 or over New Year. Treat it as a bonus, not something to count on.

Insurance on the pass

Grandvalira sells a EUR6.50 a day insurance add-on at pass checkout. Check what your own travel insurance already covers first (part 07). Also check whether you are refunded if the resort closes lifts for weather.

Do this now

- [ ] Decide how many days you will ski
- [ ] Download the Grandvalira app
- [ ] Put a reminder in your calendar to buy your pass mid-week, a few days out
- [ ] If you are a complete beginner, ask Grandvalira what the beginner pass covers

GEAR: WHAT TO RENT, WHAT TO BUY, WHAT TO LEAVE AT HOME

The golden rule for a first trip: **rent the hard gear, buy the soft gear.** Skis, boots and a helmet are expensive and easy to rent. Clothes, goggles and socks are cheap at Decathlon, and you will use them again.

Rent these

Every gondola base has rental shops. We recommend **Viladomat** (https://rental.viladomat.com/en), an English-speaking chain with branches at the gondola bases, including Funicamp in Encamp. Pre-book online (free cancellation last time): you skip the queue and usually pay less. If a trip is booked through an agency, rental can sometimes be added to the booking too; we will say in the trip group.

- Book here: https://rental.viladomat.com/en/shops/encamp-funicamp
- You will be asked for your **height, weight and shoe size**. Have them ready.
- Rent: skis (or a snowboard), boots and a helmet. Poles come with skis.
- **Book early.** Gear runs out on busy weekends, so do this when you book your room.

Tier	Skis	Boots	Helmet	Per day	3 days
Bronze	EUR15.34	EUR2.93	EUR4.53	EUR22.80	EUR68.40
Silver	EUR20.27	EUR2.40	EUR4.53	EUR27.20	EUR81.60

These are last season's online prices. Re-check them. One person paid just under EUR100 for a snowboard for two and a half days.

Which tier? Go Silver. Bronze gear is the most used and the most worn. Do not pay for top tier as a beginner: better skis reward skill you do not have yet.

Boots: they should feel snug and a bit strange, like a firm hug, but never painful. Walk around the shop in them. If a boot hurts at the shop it will be worse at 3pm, so ask for another size or a different model.

Buy these

Decathlon has everything in one place. This is what last year's group spent:

Item	Cost
Waterproof jacket	EUR40
Waterproof trousers	EUR40
Ski socks x2	EUR18
Goggles	EUR18
Thermal tops x2	EUR26
Thermal leggings x2	EUR26
Total	**About EUR168**

Buy your own **goggles**. Rental ones are scarce.

Not in last year's list, so price them yourself: gloves or mittens, a thin pair of liner gloves, a neck gaiter (buff), a warm hat, and sunglasses for lunch.

How to dress: three layers

1. **Base layer** next to the skin: thermal top and leggings. Wicking synthetic or merino.
2. **Mid layer:** a fleece or softshell for warmth.
3. **Outer shell:** the waterproof jacket and trousers, which keep wind and snow out.

No cotton anywhere, including socks and jeans. It gets wet, stays wet and makes you cold. Wear one pair of proper ski socks at a time (the Decathlon list has two pairs, one for each day). Do not double up, because thick layers cut off circulation in the boot.

You will get warm climbing and cold on the lift, so choose layers you can open or remove. Pack a spare base layer for the evening. See 09 weather for what the cold is really like.

Protection

- A **helmet** is strongly recommended in our rules (https://keepcalm.fit/rules/activity/skiing-snowboarding). Rent one with your kit.
- **Knee guards** are worth it for a first timer. One of us swears by them. Cycling (MTB) knee pads work as well as ski-specific ones.
- Padded shorts or butt protection help if you are learning to snowboard.

- Wrist guards are commonly used by new snowboarders.

Sun and skin

The sun at altitude is strong, even when it is cold. Pack SPF 50 sunscreen, lip balm with SPF and moisturiser. Cold dry air is hard on skin.

Leave at home

Your own skis, boots and poles (rent them), a heavy ski bag, jeans, cotton hoodies, and anything you cannot carry for 15 minutes.

Lockers at the gondola

If the hotel is a walk or a bus ride from the gondola, lockers at the base let you leave gear overnight so you do not carry it every day. Most gondola bases have them.

- In Encamp we booked the Skicase "Store + Dry & Go" lockers at Funicamp (skilockerfuni.com). Access ran from Friday morning (from 07:45) to Sunday evening (until 18:30).
- List price for 3 days: **EUR69 for a 4 or 5 pair locker, EUR39 for a 2 pair locker**. Our group paid about EUR8.36 each by sharing two big lockers between eleven people.
- It opens with a **PIN**: hold the button, then press validate.
- **Snowboards and helmets do not fit well.** One locker was packed so tight it was hard to open. Boarders should plan to carry boards, and everyone should take helmets back to the hotel.
- **Label your gear.** Someone took a pair of poles by mistake.
- Only people who paid use the locker.

Do this now

- [ ] Book your rental when you book your room
- [ ] Buy goggles, base layers, socks, jacket and trousers (spread the spend over a few weeks)
- [ ] Find gloves and a hat you already own
- [ ] Decide if you want a locker share and tell the organiser

INSURANCE, HEALTH AND SAFETY

Skiing is a risk sport and Andorra is not in the EU. Sort your cover before you go.

What your insurance must cover

When you buy travel insurance, make sure the policy states all of these:

- **On-piste skiing or snowboarding** (many cheap policies exclude it)
- **Mountain rescue**, which can be charged to you if you are not covered

- **Medical treatment and repatriation**
- **Equipment cover**, for rented and borrowed gear

Where to get it

- A **paid Revolut plan** includes winter sports cover. If you have one, check the exact terms.
- Your bank account, credit card or home insurer may already include winter sports. Look at the small print.
- Grandvalira sells a **EUR6.50 a day** insurance add-on with the lift pass. Compare what it covers against what you already have, and do not pay for the same cover twice.
- If you buy a separate travel policy, buy it before you travel and keep the policy number on your phone.

EHIC and GHIC cards: probably not valid here

Our old packing list told people to bring an EHIC or GHIC. **Andorra is not in the EU**, so as far as we know these cards are not accepted there. That is one more reason to have proper insurance and not rely on a health card.

If someone is hurt

1. **Stay calm. Do not move the person if they hurt their head, neck or back.**
2. Mark the spot: cross a pair of skis or poles uphill of them so others see it.
3. Send someone to alert the **piste patrol** (their number is on the piste map). You can also call **112**, the emergency number.
4. Stay with the person until help arrives.
5. Tell the organiser in the chat as soon as it is safe to.
6. **Keep every receipt and report** and call your insurer. They will tell you what to claim and how.

The main hospital for the area is in Andorra la Vella.

Our safety rules

These are short and live at https://keepcalm.fit/rules/activity/skiing-snowboarding. The key points:

- You take part **at your own risk** and you must be **18 or over**. Full wording at https://keepcalm.fit/policies/safety-liability.
- Ski or board within your ability. Keep to runs that match your level.
- Wear a helmet (strongly recommended).
- Follow the mountain's signs and closures.
- Tell someone if you are going off on your own, and keep emergency contacts on your phone.

Our organisers are volunteers, not instructors or mountain guides. We cannot judge your ability for you.

Stay on marked pistes

Do not go off-piste. Avalanche risk is real, even close to the lifts, and you are not covered the way you are inside the marked area. If you want to try powder, go with a guide, not with a group of friends.

Looking after yourself

- **Drink water.** Cold air and altitude dry you out and you will not feel thirsty.
- **Eat lunch.** Tired legs lead to falls, so stop earlier than you think you need to.
- **Warm up first:** a few minutes of leg stretches before you put your boots on.
- **Know your alcohol limit.** Do not ski after drinking. Apres is for after the lifts close.
- **Medication:** bring your own, plus basic painkillers (ibuprofen or paracetamol).
- If you have a medical condition, tell the organiser privately. It could matter in an emergency.

Do this now

- ☐ Buy or check your insurance and screenshot the policy number
- ☐ Put your emergency contact in your phone
- ☐ Read the ski rules: https://keepcalm.fit/rules/activity/skiing-snowboarding

PHONE, DATA AND CASH

No EU roaming in Andorra

Andorra is not in the EU, so your normal "roam like at home" plan will not work there, or will cost a lot. You have three choices.

1. **Buy an Andorra eSIM** (best if your phone supports it).
2. **Use Wi-Fi only.** One of us found free Wi-Fi across Andorra la Vella and in the resort bars, so it can work. Another found a data plan useful on the mountain. It depends how much you want maps and the app on the slopes.
3. **Check with your own network** before you travel. Some give you a day pass for a fixed fee.

eSIM options we know of

Provider	Note
Saily	Has Andorra plans. https://saily.com/de/esim-andorra/
Holafly	Has Andorra plans. https://esim.holafly.com/
Revolut	An Andorra eSIM exists in the Revolut app. Check the price in the app

- Check your phone supports eSIM **before** buying. Look for "eSIM" or "dual SIM" in settings.

- **Install the eSIM before you leave**, while you still have home Wi-Fi.
- Do not switch off your main SIM. Just turn off data roaming on it, so you are not charged by accident.
- A small plan (1 to 3 GB) is plenty for a weekend.

Apps to install before you go

- **Grandvalira app**: piste map, lift status, conditions and pass purchase.
- **Your bank app** and a card that works abroad.
- **Google Maps with the Andorra area downloaded offline**, in case you lose signal.
- **WhatsApp**, to stay in touch with the group.
- **bus.ad** (bookmark https://bus.ad/) for the local bus timetable.
- A taxi or ride app, in case you miss the last bus.

The cold drains batteries

Phones lose charge fast in the cold. Keep yours in an inside pocket, close to your body, not in a jacket pocket facing the wind. Bring a portable battery pack and cable. In the hotel, charge at night.

Take a waterproof bag or a ziplock bag to protect your phone and wallet in snow and in a fall.

Plugs and voltage

Andorra uses the same two-pin plugs and 230V as Spain and France, so a normal European adapter works. UK visitors need an adapter.

Cash

- The currency is the **euro**.
- **The local bus takes cash only.** Fares are about EUR1.90 to 2. Carry coins and small notes. Do not rely on getting change.
- Cards are common in hotels, shops and restaurants, but have some cash for small cafes and tips.
- Tourist tax at the hotel can be paid on arrival. Ask whether card is accepted.
- Withdraw cash before you head up to Encamp, either in Barcelona or in Andorra la Vella.

Do this now

- [ ] Check your phone supports eSIM and pick a plan
- [ ] Install the eSIM and the Grandvalira app at home
- [ ] Download an offline map of Andorra
- [ ] Take EUR20 to 30 in coins and small notes
- [ ] Pack a battery pack and charging cable

WEATHER, SNOW AND READING THE PISTE MAP

What the cold is really like

Here is the practical picture.

- **The villages are in the valley**, at roughly 1,300 metres in Encamp rising to about 1,800 in Soldeu. It is cooler than Barcelona and can be anywhere from just above freezing in the day to well below at night.
- **The ski area is higher.** Grandvalira's lifts go up to well over 2,000 metres. As a rule of thumb, it gets about 6 degrees colder for every 1,000 metres you climb.
- **Wind makes it feel much colder.** A calm day at 0 degrees is pleasant. The same temperature with a wind is bitter on a chairlift.
- **Sun can feel hot.** On a clear day you can be warm on the slope and shivering in the shade or on the lift.

So dress for a range from about minus 10 on a windy morning to plus 5 on a sunny afternoon, in layers (part 06).

- **February:** usually better snow, colder.
- **March:** usually sunnier and a bit quieter, with softer snow in the afternoon.

Please do not treat these as promises. Mountain weather changes fast, which is why you check just before you go.

Where to check

What	Where
Resort weather, snow and open lifts	https://www.grandvalira.com/en/resort/weather
Independent snow report	https://www.infonieve.es/estacion-esqui/grandvalira/
Live piste map and conditions	The Grandvalira app
Webcams and weather forecasts	Grandvalira's website, and agencies such as estiber.com
Your own forecast	Any weather app, set to your village and to a higher place (Soldeu or Pas de la Casa)

Check three times: when you book, the week before, and the evening before.

How to read the snow report

- **Snow depth at the base and at the top.** More at the top is normal. A thin base at the bottom of a run means patchy snow low down.
- **Open lifts and open pistes.** A long list of open lifts and pistes is the number to watch, more than the snow depth.
- **Fresh snow** in the last 24 hours means soft, fun skiing and often more people.
- **Snow type** (powder, packed, wet, artificial). Resorts like Grandvalira groom their pistes and use snow cannons to top up natural snow, which suits beginners.
- **Wind and visibility.** Strong wind closes the higher lifts, which can shut part of the area. It is the main reason a pass can disappoint.

If a storm or heavy wind is forecast for your days, look at the report the night before, and ask in the chat. This is also why we say not to buy the pass too early.

The piste map

The official map is a free PDF: https://www.grandvalira.com/sites/default/files/document/2025-11/MAPA%20GRANDVALIRA%20CAS.pdf You can also use the map in the Grandvalira app. Download both before you travel, as the signal can be poor on the mountain.

Piste colours (Europe)

Colour	Level	What it means
Green	Beginner	Very gentle, wide, usually short
Blue	Easy	Gentle but longer, you need speed control
Red	Intermediate	Steeper, and often narrow or icy in places
Black	Advanced	Steep and difficult. Skip these

Check Grandvalira's own legend on the map to confirm. A run's colour is a guide, not a promise: a busy blue can feel harder than a quiet red.

Lifts on the map

- **Gondolas and cable cars** (closed cabins) are the easiest.
- **Chairlifts** take you sitting down. Lower the bar if there is one.
- **Button lifts and drag lifts** pull you along the snow, and are the hardest for beginners, especially snowboarders. Avoid them on day one if you can.
- Look for the **lift numbers** and see where each starts and finishes. It is easy to ride up and find the only way down is a red.

The areas (sectors) of Grandvalira

- **Encamp (Funicamp):** one of the ways in. A gondola ride of about 20 minutes takes you up. There are green runs near the top.
- **El Tarter:** a main hub with a snowpark and a popular apres bar. Good for beginners.
- **Soldeu:** also a good beginner area.
- **Grau Roig:** snowpark and a central bar. Better once you are more confident.
- **Pas de la Casa:** far away at the other end. Reds are common out there. One of us needed a bus to get back.
- **Canillo:** the next village up the valley from Encamp, with its own lifts.

On earlier trips beginners stayed near the gentle runs by their gondola. Experts went further.

Before you head out each day

1. Plan a route on the map. Know which lift brings you back to the start.
2. Take a photo of the map on your phone.
3. Agree a meeting point and a time with the group.
4. Check the time of the last lift down. Missing it means a long walk or a taxi.

LEARNING TO SKI OR SNOWBOARD

You do not need to be sporty or fit to start, but it is tiring. The first day uses muscles you did not know you had. The good news is that a weekend is enough to get you sliding down a green run, especially with a lesson.

Should I take a lesson?

If you have never been on snow, **yes**. A few hours with an instructor teach you more than a whole weekend of guessing, and they teach you to stop, which matters most.

Option	Cost	Notes
Group lesson, 6 hours over Sat and Sun	About EUR115 (mixed-language groups, English requested)	Booked via the Encamp ski school: https://booking.encamp.ski/
Course bundled with a room through a travel agency	About EUR75 (ski, 6 hours) or EUR78 (snowboard). About EUR105 with two lunches	Added at booking
Private lesson	Dearer, but you can split it with friends	Better for a fast start

- **Book early.** Last season a group lesson was "extremely hard to find". Do not wait until you arrive.
- Book your lesson for the **morning** if you can. You will be tired by the afternoon.

- Tell them honestly that you are a complete beginner. If you are unsure of your level, say the lower one. It is easy to move up and awkward to move down.

Skis or snowboard?

- **Skis** feel more natural at first, because both feet move independently and you face the way you are going.
- **Snowboarding** is harder on day one (lots of falling on your hands, knees and tailbone) and then clicks. Beginner boarders should wear protection (part 06).
- Whichever you choose, you can ride the same lifts and meet the same group.

The first skills

Remember this from one of our group, and you have got 80 percent of day one:

> **Pizza to slow down, French fries to speed up.**

- **Pizza (wedge or snowplough):** point the tips of your skis together in a V, like a slice of pizza. This is how you control speed and stop.
- **French fries:** keep the skis parallel, like two fries. Faster.
- **Skating:** push yourself along on flat ground and in lift queues, like on ice skates.
- **Side-slipping:** across a steeper slope, with the edges of your skis (or board) skidding sideways, to get down a bit that scares you.
- **Snowboarders:** the first skills are sliding on one edge ("falling leaf"), then linking turns.

Falling, and getting up

You will fall. Everyone does.

- Try to fall sideways or onto your bottom, not onto your outstretched hand.
- Let go of your poles if you have them.
- To stand up on skis, bring the skis across the slope, below you, and push up. Ask for help if you struggle.
- A fall is normal. A fall that hurts a lot, or a sore joint, means stop and rest.

Your first day, a simple plan

1. **Pick up your gear early**, and walk in the boots to feel them.
2. **Lesson in the morning.** Learn to stop first.
3. **Lunch and a rest.** Do not skip it.
4. **Practise on a green slope** near the gondola in the afternoon. Repeat the same easy run.
5. **Finish early.** Stop before you are exhausted, because tired legs are when falls happen.

If a beginner pass is cheaper and you only plan to use the easy slopes, ask Grandvalira what it covers (part 05).

How lifts work

- **Gondola:** skis usually go in the outside racks or are carried in with you, depending on the lift. Watch what others do and ask the staff.
- **Chairlift:** line up, wait at the marked spot, sit as the chair arrives, and lower the bar. Look behind you when it comes. At the top, stand up and go straight ahead, away from the chair.
- **Button or drag lift:** keep your skis straight in the track and let it pull you. Do not sit down on it.
- **Fell off a lift?** Keep calm, clear the path and ask the staff. They are used to beginners.
- Say "first time" if you are nervous. Lift staff can slow the lift down for you.

Etiquette on the slope

The short version of the international rules, in plain words:

- **The skier in front (below you) has right of way.** It is your job to avoid them.
- **Look uphill before you start or join a run.**
- **Do not stop** in the middle of a narrow run, just below a bump or around a blind corner. Stop at the side where others can see you.
- **Keep to your ability.** Do not go down a red to impress someone.
- **Keep your skis or board with you.** A loose ski can slide down and hurt someone.
- Stop and help if someone is injured, and alert the patrol (part 07).

Ability groups

On bigger trips we sort into smaller groups by level once we get on the mountain:

- **Beginners and improvers** stay near the gondola and gentle runs.
- **Intermediate and advanced** go further. Last season the experts went to El Tarter and Pas de la Casa.

If you are unsure, say the lower level. You can always move up on day two. No one in a Keep Calm group is expected to keep up with a faster group, and no one should be left alone on a slope.

Do this now

- [ ] Book a lesson (morning if possible)
- [ ] Decide between skis and snowboard
- [ ] Tell the organiser your level for the ability groups

EVENINGS, FOOD AND THE SPA

The slopes close in the afternoon. Here is what the evenings looked like on earlier trips.

Eating at the hotel

At the 3-star hotel we used in Encamp (your hotel will differ, and some packages include breakfast or a dinner):

- **Breakfast:** a buffet.
- **Dinner:** also a self-service buffet (salad bar, hot mains, sides, desserts and fruit). Some of us thought it was poor value, others liked the convenience.
- Both are served from about 7:30 to 10:00 in the morning and in the evening.
- For group breakfasts, **tell reception the headcount the evening before**.
- Neither is included in a room-only booking.

Eating out

- **Book ahead in a group.** On both trips we found it hard to get a table for a large group on the day. Two tables pushed together worked for a party of 11. Google Reserve or a phone call a few days before works.
- Places we used: **Japomex** (Mexican-Japanese) in Andorra la Vella, and **Borda Tipica Xixerella** (buffet and Mexican food). Reservations were needed in both.
- Tell the organisers any dietary needs, so we can book a place that suits everyone.
- Lunch on the mountain is in the restaurants and bars at the lift bases. Expect resort prices, so a packed lunch saves money.

Caldea spa

Caldea is a big thermal spa in Andorra la Vella and a popular first-evening choice.

- About **EUR53.50 per person for an evening visit with a drink** at the pool bar, EUR52.50 and up for some slots, and around EUR65 for others.
- It **books out**. Reserve a slot ahead and choose one that suits the group, as some booked 17:00 and others 21:00.
- Website: https://www.caldea.com/en/
- Bring swimwear, a towel and flip-flops.
- Getting there from your village: local bus, every 10 to 30 minutes in the day. See part 03 and check the **last bus back** up the valley (about 22:05).

Apres-ski and bars

- **El Tarter** was the main apres hub, with a well known bar (El Clos) and a snowpark.

- **Abarset** ran a "Pole Position" apres: free on Friday, EUR20 with a drink on Saturday.
- Grau Roig has a central bar, too.
- Apres is for the end of the day. Please do not ski after drinking (part 07).

Shopping

Andorra is duty-free, so people often buy sports gear, perfume, alcohol and tobacco. Leave space in your bag. Spanish customs have limits when you cross back, so check the allowances before you buy a lot.

A quiet night is fine

After a day of learning, you will be tired. It is totally fine to have dinner, a hot shower and an early night. Nobody counts. Saturday is the big day for most beginners, so rest.

Plan the evenings in the chat

The organisers usually propose one group dinner and one spa slot. Tell us what you want before the booking, since groups can only be booked ahead.

Do this now

- [ ] Tell the organiser if you want Caldea and which slot
- [ ] Say any dietary needs for the group dinner
- [ ] Pack swimwear and evening clothes

ARRIVAL DAY, PACKING LIST AND FIRST-TIMER FAQ

Friday, hour by hour (an example)

This is based on the early coach that most of us took last season. Your times will differ.

Time	What	Notes
05:45	Meet at Barcelona Sants	Bring your passport and ticket
06:15	Coach leaves	About 3 hours. One suitcase in the hold
About 09:30 to 10:15	Arrive at Andorra la Vella bus station	The ALSA 07:00 coach arrives about 10:15
Then	Local bus up the valley to your village	**Cash only**, about EUR1.90 to 2
Morning	Drop bags at the hotel	You can leave them before check-in. Or go straight to the gear shop
Morning	Collect rental gear at the gondola base	Pre-booked, so a shorter queue
From 07:45	Lockers open	If you booked one
From 08:45	Gondola opens	About 20 minutes up on Funicamp
Afternoon	Ski, or a lesson	
14:00 to 22:00	Hotel check-in	Passport at reception. Collect passes here if they came with the room
Evening	Dinner, Caldea, a rest	Last local bus up the valley is about 22:05

Saturday

Breakfast, gear on, lesson (if booked), ski, lunch, ski, the evening you planned. Keep the first day short and the second day longer.

Sunday

- **Check out by 10:00** and hand your key back. You can leave bags in the luggage storage.
- Return gear (and empty the locker).
- Ski until your coach time, leaving plenty of time to get down and to the bus station.
- Coaches back left at 17:15 to 19:15. Roads out of Andorra are slow on Sunday evenings, so do not cut it fine.

Master packing checklist

Documents and money

- [ ] Passport (and any entry papers you need)
- [ ] Bus ticket and hotel booking on your phone
- [ ] Insurance policy number

- [ ] Euro cash in coins and small notes
- [ ] Bank card

On your body

- [ ] Thermal top and leggings, two sets
- [ ] Mid-layer fleece
- [ ] Waterproof jacket and trousers
- [ ] Ski socks (two pairs, no cotton)
- [ ] Gloves or mittens, and thin liner gloves
- [ ] Neck gaiter and a warm hat
- [ ] Goggles and sunglasses

Rented or booked

- [ ] Rental gear confirmation
- [ ] Lesson booking
- [ ] Locker PIN or confirmation
- [ ] Lift pass, or the voucher for it

Sun, skin and health

- [ ] SPF 50 sunscreen and lip balm with SPF
- [ ] Moisturiser
- [ ] Painkillers and any personal medicine
- [ ] Knee guards or padding (optional)

Phone and tech

- [ ] eSIM installed
- [ ] Grandvalira app, offline map
- [ ] Charger, cable and battery pack
- [ ] Ziplock bag for phone and wallet

On the mountain

- [ ] Small daypack
- [ ] Water bottle and snacks

Evening

- [ ] Comfortable, non-slip shoes for icy streets
- [ ] Casual clothes

- [ ] Swimwear for Caldea
- [ ] Space in your bag for duty-free

First-timer FAQ

I have never seen snow. Will I be the only one? No. Roughly 3 in 10 people on our last interest form were complete beginners. You will not be the only one.

Am I fit enough? You do not need to be an athlete, but you will use your legs a lot. A short walk or some squats the week before helps. You can rest any time.

Do I have to ski all day? No. Take breaks, have a long lunch, or finish early. A shorter first day is smart.

Can I come for just one day? Yes, but the coach alone is about three hours each way, so a weekend is much better value.

What if the weather is bad? Strong wind or storms can close lifts. Check the report the night before (part 09). Caldea, the hotel and the town are the backup.

What if I do not like it? Then you have had a weekend in the mountains with friendly people, a spa and good food. You are never obliged to ski. Just tell the organiser so we do not wait for you.

What if I miss the coach, or I am late? Message the group right away and rebook the next coach. The hotel check-in stays open until 22:00, and tell them if you will be later. A missed coach is not a disaster, but not having a passport is.

What if I lose my pass or my gear? Tell the rental shop or Grandvalira immediately. Keep your booking confirmations on your phone.

What if I get injured? See part 07, and tell the organiser.

Can I bring a friend? Yes, if they are 18 or over, and tell the organisers so they can be added to rooms and groups. Our rules and policies apply to everyone: https://keepcalm.fit/policies.

Who do I ask? Start with the ski group: https://keepcalm.fit/whatsapp/skiing-snowboarding. Read the pinned message first.

Do I need to know anyone? No. Meeting people is the point of Keep Calm, and you can tell the organisers you are coming on your own.

Last words

Be early, be warm, drink water, eat lunch, and have fun. You are going to love it.