

An aerial photograph showing a massive crowd of runners in white shirts and red scarves running down a narrow street in Pamplona, Spain, during the Running of the Bulls. Several large, dark-colored bulls are running alongside the crowd. The scene is chaotic and crowded, with runners running in both directions.

# The Running of the Bulls IN PAMPLONA

YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE







## THE CITY OF PAMPLONA, SPAIN

is undoubtedly best known for its annual tradition of the Running of the Bulls.

If you aren't familiar with this tradition, you might not believe it at first. For eight straight days each July, numerous bulls are set out to run through the streets of the town amongst thousands of humans. Just above the chaos, spectators from all around the world watch as brave individuals test their strength, stamina and bravery in the narrow streets below. It is an age-old tradition that, despite the obvious dangerous repercussions, has stood the test of time.

If you are in Europe during the Summer, do not pass on the opportunity to witness (or participate) in this centuries old tradition. It really is something that you have to see to believe, and here are some reasons why.



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# THE HISTORY OF THE RUN

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On paper, the Running of the Bulls might look like a lot a senseless activity that is meant solely for entertainment value. However, that is not the case, and not how this crazy tradition began years ago.

The run itself began in the late 1500s as part of the Fiesta of San Fermin, the patron saint of Navarra, the region where Pamplona lies. The festival takes place annually from July 6th through the 14th, during which the people celebrate for 8 straight days. The streets are filled with parades, parties, singing as the sangria and kalimotxos (wine and coke mix) flow all day and all night. At any given time, you will find all parts of Pamplona's "old town" occupied by thousands clad in white, that is, except around 8 AM when the runs are let loose. Runs take place every morning and go from the Calle Santo Domingo and end at the famous bullfight arena, the Plaza del Toros. The total distance of the run is exactly 826 meters long from start to finish.





## BEFORE THE RUN

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As the streets are being cleaned in anticipation for the run, thousands of nervous participants wait until 8 AM. Each individual runner likely has a plan of attack, or an area of the course where they plan to begin. You find your spot, stretch a little more, say a quick prayer, and then the chaos begins.

There are many different strategies that can be executed over the 826 meters, each one with its own set of danger and excitement.



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# SANTO DOMINGO

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This is the first leg of the run. It is characterized by a steep terrain that can be quite dangerous considering how narrow the streets are in this part of town. At this point, the bulls are running with a full tank of energy, and there is no way a human is going to be able to keep up with them during this part of the run. There is a red line painted on the road, signifying the first point of contact between man and beast. As the runners wait for the bulls to come charging at them, they have to decide how to avoid being run over. This split second decision means you will either avoid getting run over, or will get run over, it's that simple. A true 50/50 chance.

If you think that you will be able to run along with bulls, don't forget that they will have an easier time running uphill than you will. Oh yeah, and there are also thousands of people in your way, which needs to be considered at all parts of the run. You are more likely to be injured because of a human than because of a bull.







## TOWN HALL

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The next section of the course is Town Hall. At this part of the course, the key to your success is timing and positioning. Inexperienced runners should stay on the left side of the course and keep close to the barricades. More experienced

runners should steer clear of the beginners and watch for an opening on the right. If you time it right, you will have a short but glorious run. Misjudge your timing, and you will run right into a mob of people that will stunt your progress.

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# LA CURVA

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This portion of the course is one of the most dangerous. Also nicknamed “Dead Man’s Curve,” the route takes a sharp 90 degree turn onto Estafeta Street. Considering how hard the bulls are charging, and their unfamiliarity of where they are going, they rarely make the turn without crashing into the wall. If a runner finds themselves between a stone wall and a 2 ton bull running

full speed, it goes without saying that the results are not always good. Novice runners should steer clear of this part of the course and leave it for the more experienced runners to tackle. Experienced runners who are courageous enough to take a shot at La Curva can be successful by using a running technique popularized by seasoned American runner Joe Distler.



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# ESTAFETA

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Estafeta translates to mean “straightaway.” The street itself measures about 300 meters and is the longest stretch of the run. This makes it a popular starting point for a lot of runners for a few reasons. One, there are no twists and turns the runner has to make. Secondly, after running a quarter mile already, the bulls are not moving as fast as the beginning of the run. Lastly, since you are starting more than halfway through the course, you are more likely to reach the bullring. Do keep in mind that Estafeta is also the most crowded portion of the run, so you should not expect to reach a full stride in your run. In fact, the only area where you may find a clear path is in the “wake” created behind the bulls, of course, assuming they stay together.

With people travelling at different speeds and tripping over one another, there are a handful of pileups each morning on Estafeta. Combine that with stone walls and cobblestone roads, that certainly doesn't feel good on the body.





# TEFEFONICA

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At the end of Estafeta is another turn onto Telefonica. As you begin the transition, runners benefit from a widened street width compared to Estafeta, but that benefit is short lived. Telefonica is essentially a large bottle neck that gradually narrows until you reach the arena.



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## INSIDE THE ARENA



Despite the fact that you have just tempted fate and participated in an incredibly dangerous event, you are still not out of harms way. After the conclusion of the run, a handful of baby bulls are released in the bull ring. While their horns are not as threatening as those in the encierro, these bulls do not

hesitate to charge anything in their path. As those sitting safely in the crowd are being entertained by the barbaric action below, there is nothing fun for a runner getting flowed over by an angry bull. If you do not want to be a part of this additional chaos, simply climb over the wall and get the heck out of there!

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## AFTER THE RUN

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It will likely take an hour or two for the adrenaline to even out after completing a run. The feeling of euphoria you will experience after the run is hard to duplicate. We wouldn't be surprised if you wanted to feel that feeling again the next morning...



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## OTHER KEY POINTS TO KNOW

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### Sueltos

Sueltos are lone bulls that have separated from the herd. When a bull is separated from the herd, all bets are off. They often default into attack mode and will consider all runners to be predators. Some of the more serious injuries have occurred when a runner is zeroed in on by a suelto.



### Pastores

Pastores can be identified by their green shirts. Their main objective is to protect the bull, and will not hesitate to use force on a runner to ensure the safety of a bull. Their position is one that is highly regarded by the locals.

### Cameras during the run

As the quality and efficiency of cameras on phones has rapidly increased over the years, more and more people have tried to bring those advancements to the bull run. This has become a very serious safety concern as participants have put others in harm's way in an effort to get a photo of the run.

Needless to say, it is nearly impossible to take a "selfie" with a bull charging behind you while also being aware of what's in front of you. There have been some major pile-ups as a result of this selfishness, and the police are trying to crack down on those wanting to capture such a shot. Last year, a British man was caught on film trying to take the photo,

and the police found him the next day and fined him over \$5,000!

Even mounted GoPros are banned from use, and the police will kick you out of the streets if you are found with one before the run. We have seen it happen, and it can ruin a trip.



## FINAL THOUGHTS ...

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Now that you know the ins and outs of the Running of the Bulls, here are some additional pieces of wisdom that you should know to make your trip successful.

- Book your trip well in advance
- Train for the run - Even though it is only a bit over 1/2 mile in distance, it is physically and mentally taxing.
- Wear the traditional white and red garb, but be prepared for it to become pink with wine, so bring several sets, but don't plan to return home with them.
- Spain is very hot during July, so pack accordingly
- As a spectator, watch the run from various locations and points of view,
- Make a plan for where to start, end and what to do if you get separated from your group.
- Talk to and take the advice of locals.
- Learn about what happens to the bulls and the culture of the run and bull fighting.
- Get into the spirit of the San Fermin festival and participate in the other related events as well.
- Don't run if you are drunk or hungover.
- Don't try to run in flip-flops or with a backpack. These activities are strictly against the rules, and the police will pull you out of the activities.
- Be prepared for the noisy atmosphere. You will not get much



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