

I love to travel and talking about trips is one of the best ways to practise Spanish verbs. Travel stories naturally mix completed actions, repeated visits, background information, and ongoing states—perfect for learning the difference between the **preterit** and the **imperfect**. Below you'll find clear explanations, useful example sentences in Spanish and English, a short conjugation cheat sheet, and practice tasks to test your skills.

## Why preterit and imperfect matter when talking about travel

Use the **preterit** to describe actions that were completed at a specific moment or during a defined period in the past. Use the **imperfect** for background descriptions, habitual actions, or ongoing states in the past. English often uses the same past tense for both ideas, but Spanish makes the distinction.

You will also encounter the **present perfect** for past actions that have relevance to the present, such as “I have visited” or “I have been”. Knowing which tense to choose helps you give precise meaning when describing trips.

## Useful travel sentences: Spanish examples with explanations

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**He estado en muchos lugares y países.**

I have been to many places and countries.

(Present perfect: an experience up to now.)

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**He visitado Canadá y México.**

I have visited Canada and Mexico.

(Present perfect or present relevance: no specific time given.)

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**Iba a visitar Argentina en 2020, pero mi viaje se canceló.**

I was going to visit Argentina in 2020, but my trip was cancelled.

(Preterit for completed or specific past events: *se canceló*—it was cancelled.)

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**Cuando era estudiante, vivía cerca de la frontera.**

When I was a student, I lived near the border.

(Imperfect *vivía* describes a past state or background.)

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**He visitado México casi mil veces.**

I have visited Mexico almost a thousand times.

(Present perfect emphasising repeated experience up to now. If you want to emphasise that this happened entirely in the past, you could also say *Visité México casi mil veces.*)

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**He estado en Tailandia cuatro veces.**

I have been to Thailand four times.

(Present perfect for number of experiences with present relevance.)

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**Viví allí cinco años.**

I lived there for five years.

(Preterit *viví* for a completed time span.)

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**Iba a visitar Argentina en 2020, pero mi viaje se canceló por la pandemia.**

I was going to visit Argentina in 2020, but my trip was cancelled because of the

pandemic.

(Imperfect *iba a visitar* to express a plan or intention in the past that never happened; preterit *se canceló* for the completed event of being cancelled.)

## Quick notes on nuance

- **Present perfect** (he + past participle) often translates as “I have ...”, and is used for experiences or actions with present relevance.
- **Preterit** describes actions that started and ended at a specific point in the past: e.g., “Fui a España el año pasado.”
- **Imperfect** describes habitual past actions, background details, or ongoing states: e.g., “Cuando era niño, visitaba a mis abuelos cada verano.”

## Conjugation cheat sheet (regular verbs)

Use these endings as a quick reference for regular verbs. Examples use **viajar** (to travel) and **vivir** (to live).

- **Preterit -ar (viajar):** viajé, viajaste, viajó, viajamos, viajasteis, viajaron
- **Preterit -er/-ir (vivir):** viví, viviste, vivió, vivimos, vivisteis, vivieron
- **Imperfect -ar (viajar):** viajaba, viajabas, viajaba, viajábamos, viajabais, viajaban
- **Imperfect -er/-ir (vivir):** vivía, vivías, vivía, vivíamos, vivíais, vivían

## Common verbs useful for travel stories

- **viajar** — to travel
- **visitar** — to visit
- **estar** — to be (location, temporary state)
- **vivir** — to live
- **pasar** — to spend (time)
- **ir** — to go
- **cancelar / cancelarse** — to cancel / to be cancelled
- **recomendar** — to recommend

## Practice tasks

1. Translate into Spanish using the preterit or imperfect as appropriate:
  1. I lived near the border when I was a student.
  2. I was going to visit Argentina in 2020, but my trip was cancelled.
  3. I have been to Thailand four times.
2. Choose the correct tense and complete the sentence:
  1. Cuando era pequeño, (visitar) \_\_\_\_\_ a mis abuelos cada verano.
  2. Ayer, (visitar) \_\_\_\_\_ el museo y (ver) \_\_\_\_\_ una exposición interesante.
  3. He (estar) \_\_\_\_\_ en Francia varias veces.
3. Fill in the blank with preterit, imperfect, or present perfect:
  1. Antes, yo \_\_\_\_\_ (vivir) en la frontera, pero ahora vivo en la ciudad.
  2. Mi amiga \_\_\_\_\_ (ir) a México tres veces este año.
  3. Iba a visitar Chile, pero mi vuelo \_\_\_\_\_ (cancelarse).
4. Write a short paragraph (3-5 sentences) in Spanish describing a trip. Try to use at least one preterit verb, one imperfect verb, and one present perfect verb.

## Answers and model sentences

1. Translations:
  1. Cuando era estudiante, vivía cerca de la frontera.
  2. Visité Argentina en 2020, pero mi viaje se canceló.
  3. He estado en Tailandia cuatro veces. / He visitado Tailandia cuatro veces.
2. Choose the correct tense:
  1. Cuando era pequeño, visitaba a mis abuelos cada verano. (imperfect habitual)
  2. Ayer, visité el museo y vi una exposición interesante. (preterit for completed actions)
  3. He estado en Francia varias veces. (present perfect for experiences up to now)
3. Fill in the blank:
  1. Antes, yo vivía en la frontera, pero ahora vivo en la ciudad. (imperfect background)
  2. Mi amiga ha ido a México tres veces este año. (present perfect for repeated experiences within a time frame that includes the present)
  3. Iba a visitar Chile, pero mi vuelo se canceló. (imperfect for planned intention; preterit for the cancellation)
4. Model paragraph (example):

El año pasado viajé a España. Cuando era niño, siempre visitábamos a la familia allí, así que conocía muchas ciudades. He aprendido mucho sobre la cultura y he visitado varios museos durante mis viajes.

## Next steps

Keep practising by describing your own trips. Focus on choosing the tense that matches whether you are: giving background (imperfect), telling a completed event (preterit), or talking about experiences that matter now (present perfect). Try recording short travel stories and check which tense feels natural for each sentence.

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