

# Welcome to Spain

Officially known as the Kingdom of Spain, the country is not just the mainland popular holiday destination but also includes a number of Island groups including the Balearics in the Mediterranean and the Canaries in the Atlantic Ocean. Spain is so full of opportunities it's no wonder this well loved country is flowing with tourists all year round. With its endless amounts of culture, architecture, art and food as well as beautiful Mediterranean beaches and plenty of wildlife, there is something for everyone whether it's on the mainland or in the stunning little islands that lie peacefully out to sea.

## Know your History

Spain has some of the world's richest and most extensive history that has immensely influenced histories of other countries too. It's amazing to think that this relatively small part of the world has been such a powerful influence over the rest of Europe and beyond for many centuries. Spanish history is full of grandeur, power and beauty, parts of which are kept alive today through the country's many traditions, cultural practices, art and architecture.

### Union of Spain, 1479-1516

Before this date Spain was split into many weak and confused territories including Castille and Aragon. The Monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella united the many sovereignties that made up the area into one Kingdom which eventually led to the formation of the Spain we know today.

### Columbus Conquers South America

In 1492 Columbus accidentally stumbled upon the New World which today we know as South America. He was actually trying to locate a passage to the Orient but sailed in the wrong direction. Little did he know this unintentional discovery would change the world forever. Believing this new set of Islands today known as the Bahamas were the Indies, the conquerors named the natives 'Indians'. Columbus returned to Spain to announce his triumph and set sail again but this time with a larger fleet enabling him to cover more land. However, suspicions soon grew over whether this elusive land that Columbus had arrived on was the Orient at all and soon the Spanish learnt that they had discovered an entirely new World on the opposite side of the Atlantic. By 1500, six thousand Spaniards had emigrated to this new land, overthrowing and taking control of the indigenous populations. When Portugal became a part of Spanish domination in 1580 they too gained power over their own Empire, now known as Brazil. South America remained under Spanish and Portuguese control until the 19th Century when countries began to fight for independence. Ecuador was one of the first countries to gain liberation in 1809.

### Peninsula War

The Spanish peninsula war took place between 1808 and 1814 during the Napoleonic battles. This was the Spanish attempt at keeping the Iberian Peninsula and resisting Napoleon's invasion. Spain drove out the invading army but this led to severe political and economical unrest enabling the American colonies to take advantage of a weakened Spain and fight for their own independence.

### Spanish Civil War

Between 1936 and 1939 civil war in Spain erupted. Conservative groups broke out in protest against the new Republican Government. Conservative groups were led by Franco and successfully won the battle leading Spain into a dictatorship under Franco's rule that lasted 39 years until the country

returned to a Monarchy in 1975.

## **Political Stability**

Upon Spain's return to a constitutional monarchy in 1975, Juan Carlos became the King and head of state. Parliament still made the important decisions but controlled Spanish affairs through an elected democracy. This Government was a compromise between those who preferred a republican agenda and those who preferred to be led by a Monarchy and as a result this allowed Spain to increase in its political stability and constantly reform its Government and policies.

## **Eco-tourism**

During the 1990s Spain first introduced eco-tourism as a way of protecting its environment. Spain is now ranked as the world's fourth largest producer of wind power as enormous turbines stand strong across numerous Spanish regions. Solar power is also on the increase as rural areas such as Sanlúcar la Major boast huge commercial solar power stations and La Rioja is home to the creation of one of the world's largest carbon-neutral cities, Logron Montevorvo. Eco-tourism activities that are becoming increasingly popular in Spain include cycling through the beautiful Andalusian villages, birding in the swamps and wetlands as well as volunteering on organic farms or with the endangered bearded vulture in the Pyrenees.

# **Money Talks**

Spain has the thirteenth largest economy in the world and fifth largest in the European Union. The Spanish economy began to develop in the late eighteenth century but development was slow as it was limited to the textile manufacturing of Catalonia and the production of iron and steel in the Basque Country. For centuries Spain was considered under developed compared to its other European neighbours and this lack of growth remained until the late 1950s when measures were enforced to stabilize the economy. This stabilization led to a dramatic increase in growth and saw agriculture fall from the highest source of employment to the lowest within a few decades.

Spain is a strong business and ICT hub with many people employed in these areas. The country is also a popular tourist destination and is recognised by the second most popular holiday destination in the world after France. As this is the case more than 2 million people (11.3% of the working population) are employed in the tourism sector. Other strong areas of the Spanish economy include transport and logistics, pharmaceuticals and agricultural-food employing a high percentage of the Spanish workforce.

However, Spain does have a problem with unemployment with 22.8% of the population unemployed as of late 2011. This is worse for Spain's youths with 46.2% of young people in Spain without a job.

## **Exports**

Spain's main exports are largely those that are heavy duty goods such as cars, vehicle parts, and delivery trucks as well as refined petroleum, packaged medicaments, wine and citrus contributing to a net export total of \$270 billion per year.

## **Money**

As of 2002 Spain adopted the Euro as a replacement for its own currency, the Peseta. Money is easily exchanged and withdrawn all over the country from widespread banks and ATMs.

# Get Culture Savvy

Flamenco dancing, bull fights, sangria and lots of beaches is what Spain is famous for, but the country has so much more culture to offer than just that.

## Ethnicity/Religion

The Spanish population is a mix of Mediterranean and Nordic types with Catholicism being the predominant religion. 94% of the population are Catholics with only 6% other religions.

## Bull fighting

This famous but controversial tradition in Spain is kept alive by the Toro Bravo, an ancient variety of bull that is only preserved today in Spain. Bulls have been an important part of Spanish culture ever since pre-historic times when they were used in important Iberian religious ceremonies. In the Middle Ages Bull fighting on horseback was a popular past time amongst the aristocracy but it was the poorer population of the eighteenth century who introduced fighting on foot, Francisco Romero being a key figure in setting the rules for the sport.

## Flamenco

Flamenco is considered a Spanish art and originated from the traveler populations of Andalucía in southern Spain. Flamenco's golden age was between 1869 and 1910 being showcased widely in cafes, theatres and festivals. As well as its entertainment value, flamenco is also a form of expression allowing the performers to tell a story, usually one of romance, through dance.

## Food

Spanish food is very varied and consists of a large amount of meat, fish, vegetables and fruits. Cuisine is influenced by the many regions of Spain all of which have varying signature dishes. Popular dishes in Spain include Paella, Jamon Serrano, Tapas, Tortilla, Gazpacho and Chorizo.

## Holidays

Spain is notorious for celebrating its traditional and religious holidays in with the most emotional processions and elaborate ceremonies. Civic events take a backseat to religious celebrations in this highly Catholic country and in a land where local and regional holidays are popular there is barely a week in the year without a celebration going on somewhere. One of the most lavish celebrations is the day of Corpus Christi, celebrated 64 days after Easter with festivities stretching across the country. However, the city of Toledo sees one of the largest parties as it was here that Queen Isabella fashioned the event in the 15th century out of gold and silver from South America. So this festival is as much about Spain's conquests of the New World as much as it is about celebrating the Transubstantiation of Christ. The Day of the Canary Islands is a holiday celebrated in Tenerife and the other Canary Islands. This celebrates Canarian culture and parliament which began on 30th May 1983. Many local businesses close for the day and special events are held in schools and churches followed by parties in the evening.

Other Spanish holidays include:

January 1st – New Years Day and Feast of the Holy Family

January 6th – Epiphany, Three Kings Day

February 28th – Day of Andalusia

March 1st – Day of the Balearic Islands

March 19th – San Jose

Varies – Easter

April 23rd – Day of Aragon and Castille and Leon Day

May 2nd – Day of Madrid

May 30th – Day of the Canary Islands

May 31st – Day of Castille-La Mancha

June 9th – Day of Murcia and Day of La Rioja

June 19th – Corpus Christi

June 24th – St John the Baptist Day

August 5th – Day of Our Lady of Africa

August 15th – Assumption of Mary

September 8th – Virgin of the Victory

September 11th – Day of Catalonia

October 9th – Day of the Valencian Community

October 12th – Hispanic Day

December 3rd – Day of Navarre

December 8th – Immaculate Conception

December 25th – Christmas Day

December 26th – St Stephen's Day

December 31st – New Years Eve

Customs

Some interesting Spanish customs include:

- When meeting someone a physical embrace is expected
- When dining at another person's home, a small gift of wine, cheese or pastries is expected as well as something for their children
- The Spanish much prefer face to face contact over emails or telephone calls
- Dirty floors in bars are common and considered a good thing. The dirtier the floor, the better the bar as more people have been there and thrown things on the floor!

- Dinner is eaten late in the evening, often not until 10 or 11 at night. Lunch is around 2-3pm and the Spanish will enjoy a light tapas at midday as a snack
- Spain is the home of the world's largest tomato fight. La Tomatina is celebrated every year in a village of Valencia
- It is common to go on a walk after dinner. The Spanish love their food and often have big meals so a walk is necessary to digest all that food!
- The Spanish claim that they invented fried fish! The British had strong links to the coastal city of Cadiz in the eighteenth century and so the Spanish claim that we stole the idea of fish and chips from there!
- Arriving at a party before midnight is considered socially strange! Unless stated otherwise you should aim to arrive between midnight and 2am

## **Fashion**

The Spanish fashion industry is one that is worth billions with Madrid fashion week and the Gaudi Catwalk in Barcelona both important events in the fashion calendar and on a level with shows in London, Paris and Milan. Popular high street brands such as Pull & Bear and Zara are in fact Spanish! Even back in the sixteenth century Spain's fashion styles influenced many other cultures and were known for its attention to detail and elegance. Early styles were heavily influenced by the Moorish populations, often involved a lot of the colour black with heavy gold jewellery and were a nightmare for Renaissance women to wear, often taking hours to put on. Traditional Spanish dress for women is a black, red or white dress and for men the costume is very flamboyant with sequins and intricate embroidery.

## **Wildlife**

Out of all the countries in the European Union, Spain is considered the most dedicated to wildlife protection. Spain is home to many national parks and even the tiny little Canary Islands have their fair share. Species such as the Iberian wolf, Iberian wild boar, Iberian lynx, Cantabrian brown bear and Iberian fox were on the verge of extinction a century ago but the Spanish conservation attempts have proved invaluable and these species are now highly protected.

## **Learn the Lingo**

The official language of Spain is Spanish, also known as Castilian. This is the first language of 72% of the population. Spain also has several regional dialects such as Galician spoken in Galicia, Catalan in Catalonia and the Balearic Islands and Valencian in Valencia. In the Canary Islands the official language is Spanish, however, English and German are also widely spoken.

## **Lay of the Land**

Spain is located in the South West of Europe on the Iberian Peninsula. It has coastlines on the Mediterranean and the Bay of Biscay. Spain is a well spread out country with territories in the Atlantic Ocean such as the Canaries, the Balearics in the Mediterranean and the cities of Ceuta and Melilla in North Africa. Spain covers the largest amount of land in Europe after France. The Spanish countryside largely consists of a combination of flat plains and rugged hillsides, however, the north is dominated by the Pyrenees and the highest peak is that of Mount Teide in Tenerife. Spanish landscapes are extremely varied. Some are desert like plains whilst others are lush, green, fertile

grasslands. Spain also has a lot of rivers with over 1500 bodies of water draining the landscape, the largest of which include the Douro, Ebro, Jucar, Tagus, Guadiana and Guadalquivir.

## What's the Weather like?

Due to its large size, Spain has not one but three climate zones. Spain is generally known for its hot, dry summers and mild winters making it the perfect destination all year round but certain areas do not follow that pattern. The large central plateau receives more continental weather with hot summers and cold winters; in fact the mountains can even see some snow in winter. In the north there is more of a maritime climate with mild winters and cool summers as well as heavy rainfall and cloudy skies. In the south the climate is very similar to that of North Africa with low rainfall and heat haze in summer is common. In the Canary Islands the climate varies between 18 and 24 degrees all year round making it a never ending spring. The climate of these islands is sub-tropical and can sometimes experience tropical rainstorms. Water temperatures are also high ranging from 19-22 degrees.

## Biodiversity

Spain has some of the richest biodiversity in the European Union and is credited for being in the top 25 biodiversity hotspots in the world. Its geographical location, history, geology and climate all contribute to the reason behind such wildlife diversity. Spain has varying wildlife as it has so many different climate zones giving it a wide variety of flora and fauna. Just over 26% of Spanish land is forest and 27% is protected. However, Spain is so full of wildlife it is impossible to know which species are endangered and which are not so only 1% of habitats and 12% of species are known enough to implement conservation measures.

In the last few decades, Spain has suffered a 40-60% decrease in biodiversity. This is due to varying reasons. Plants are the least endangered at only 15% but this figure increases to 31% for vertebrates and amphibians and 55% for continental fish species. In addition, Spain also suffers from a high risk of desertification with as much as a third of its land surface susceptible.

There are many reasons for this increasing rate of biodiversity loss including Intense human activity, erosion, introduction of invasive species, extreme natural events, over-exploitation of species of economic advantage, desertification, soil degradation, forest fires and climate change. Due to the ever increasing tourist numbers, marine species are particularly endangered as tourist resorts grow around coastal areas and activities such as fishing, jet-skiing and speedboat trips invade and pollute habitats. The Canary and Balearic Islands are popular tourist resorts and much of the Islands' economy depends on overseas visitors, therefore, causing a major decrease in marine life.

As a response to the threats to wildlife in Spain, there have been numerous conservation agendas and initiatives implemented by protection agencies and the Spanish government. The Strategic Plan on Natural Heritage and Biodiversity outlines goals, objectives and actions for improving knowledge and education about the need to protect species sustainably develop Spain's economy whilst protecting and conserving species and promote the participation of people and businesses in conservation attempts.

## Good Books

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Call us on 020 7613 2422 (UK) / 1 949 336 8178 (US)

Mail us on [info@frontier.ac.uk](mailto:info@frontier.ac.uk)

Check out our social media here: