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# SPANISH

## HEADSTART

### FOR SPAIN



**CULTURAL NOTES**

DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE, FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER





Toledo Spain skyline at sunrise

Photo: DAVID ILIFF  
Date: 28 Dec 2006  
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### Cultural Notes



APRIL 1984

Defense Language Institute, Foreign Language Center

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## Geography

Spain lies between two continents--Europe and Africa--and between two bodies of water--the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. The second largest country in Western Europe occupies five-sixths of the Iberian peninsula, which it shares with Portugal and with the two-square-mile British colony of Gibraltar.

The jagged wall of the Pyrenees Mountains separates northeastern Spain and France and the independent principality of Andorra. To the west is Portugal, and to the south, eight miles across the straits and clearly visible, lies Africa. The Atlantic, with its Bay of Biscay, and the Mediterranean, with its Balearic Sea, border all but the 280-mile-wide isthmus joining Spain to the rest of Europe.

Fifty percent of the area of peninsular Spain consists of an arid tableland, the Meseta, almost totally enclosed by the high Sierras of Guadarrama and Gredos and the mountains of Toledo. Other peaks, rising abruptly from narrow bands of coastal lowlands, encircle the interior of the country.



Tiétar River in the Sierra de Gredos, Ávila

Photo: Nacho  
Date: 11 Dec 2005  
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Like its numerous mountain ranges, Spain's river system, including the four largest rivers--the Tajo, Ebro, Duero and Guadalquivir--divides the country into a number of regions. In one of these distinctive sectors, the austere Castilian highlands, lies Madrid, Spain's capital city.

In addition to the mainland, Spanish territory comprises the Balearic and Canary Islands and the strategic Moroccan enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla.

## Climate

Protective mountain barriers and the warming effects of the northern gulf stream and Mediterranean currents moderate Spain's four climatic zones: the north and northwest; the central plateau; the southernmost region; and the Mediterranean coast.

Abundant year-round rainfall lends a deep-green color to northern pastures and meadowlands. Seasonal temperatures vary only slightly; winters are mild, summers, cool.

The central tableland exhibits wide climatic variations, both during the course of a single day and seasonally. Here, as in other high elevations, raw winters are characterized by snowstorms and penetrating winds. During the dry summers, many Madrileños seek relief on the more temperate coasts.

Ancient olive groves and vineyards thrive in the hot semiaridity of southern summers. Winters are pleasant, with frosts occurring only once or twice a year.

The eastern coast and Balearic Islands enjoy typically Mediterranean weather: semitropical warmth, sunshine and long dry spells. Spring and autumn winds bring localized storms with brief but heavy rains.

In Spain, as in most of the rest of the world, temperatures are measured on the Centigrade-Celsius scale. To convert to Fahrenheit:

- Multiply the Centigrade reading by 9
- Divide the result by 5
- Add 32



## History

From prehistory on, many different peoples--from the Mediterranean's shores, Northern Africa and Europe--have invaded and inhabited Spain.

Early inhabitants, paleolithic hunters (15,000 B.C.) of Altamira, painted nearly life-sized deer and bison on cave walls. Isolated by the mountain ridges of the Pyrenees, a race of mysterious origins, the Basques, has continued to preserve its unique customs and language for thousands of years.



Dolmen Cova d'en Daina (Romanyà de la Selva, Catalonia)

Photo: Mikołaj Kirschke  
Date: 1 Sep 2006  
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Around 3,000 B.C., tribal groups, Iberians after whom the peninsula was named, began arriving from the eastern Mediterranean. Later, fair-skinned Celtic tribesmen migrated across the Pyrenees and fused with the Iberians to form a distinct group of farmers and herders, the Celtiberians.

Also from around the Mediterranean came Phoenician traders who founded Cádiz, the oldest city in western Europe. Subsequently, the Greeks brought their culture to colonies on the eastern and southern coasts, and heirs of the Phoenicians, Carthaginians in search of mineral resources, founded the outposts of Barcelona and Cartagena.



Of all the invaders, only the Romans were able to conquer most of the peninsula, which they named Hispania. In the second century B.C., Rome began a lengthy colonization that transformed local laws, politics and language and established Christianity as the dominant religion. Six hundred years of romanization ended when the monarchs of the semicivilized Visigoths founded a kingdom ruled from Toledo.



Roman bridge, Alava

Photo: TXO  
Date: September 2008  
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In 711, invaders from North Africa, the Moors of mixed Syrian, Egyptian and Berber blood, sailed across the straits and pushed Visigoth warriors north to the Cantabrian Mountains. During the period the Moors ruled from Córdoba, the great medieval civilization of Islamic Spain, Al Andalus, was unmatched in its knowledge of arts, letters and sciences. The Arab transmitters of classical cultures to Western Europe were also skilled farmers who introduced the cultivation of oranges, sugar cane and rice to the peninsula.

Efforts to drive out the Moors, known as the Reconquest, were unified after more than 700 years when, in the thirteenth century, the Catholic kingdoms of Castile and Aragon were united by the marriage of Isabella and Ferdinand. Ruling side-by-side, they directed their armies in the capture of the last Moorish stronghold, Granada, in 1492, the same year in which Christopher Columbus, sailing under Isabella's sponsorship, discovered America.

By the sixteenth century, Spain, exercising the might of the Hapsburg Empire, was the most powerful nation in Europe. Along with that power came the great exploratory expeditions into the New World and the Pacific. The conquistadores' claims for most of South and Central America created immense wealth in precious metals and profits in trade, but no true economic growth. In 1588, less than a century after the discovery of America, violent storms and British galleons swept the supposedly invincible Spanish Armada from the seas.

By the seventeenth century, plagues and unceasing military campaigns had drained Castile's treasury. In 1700, the death of Charles II, last of the Hapsburg rulers, brought about the War of Spanish Succession in which the House of Bourbon eventually came to Madrid from France. It was during this dynastic change that Spain lost nearly all her European possessions.



Statue of El Cid, hero of the Reconquest, Burgos. (Detail)

Photo: Larrea  
Date: 27 July 2008  
cc-by-sa-3.0  
Cropped by: Escarlati

A century later Spain became embroiled in the Napoleonic Wars, and Napoleon's brother, Joseph, was placed on the Spanish throne (1808-1814). The Bourbon monarchy was restored only after the long campaign of the Peninsular War. This century also saw the revolt and independence of the American colonies; three Carlist Wars waged over the issue of succession; the brief ousting of the monarchy and the establishment of the short-lived First Republic; economic stagnation; and finally the Spanish-American War (1898), in which Spain lost Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines to the United States.

Neutral in World War I, Spain subsequently suffered from economic, political and social crises attributed to lack of governmental authority. The Second Republic, dominated by increasing left-right polarization, culminated in the leftist Popular Front electoral victory in 1936.

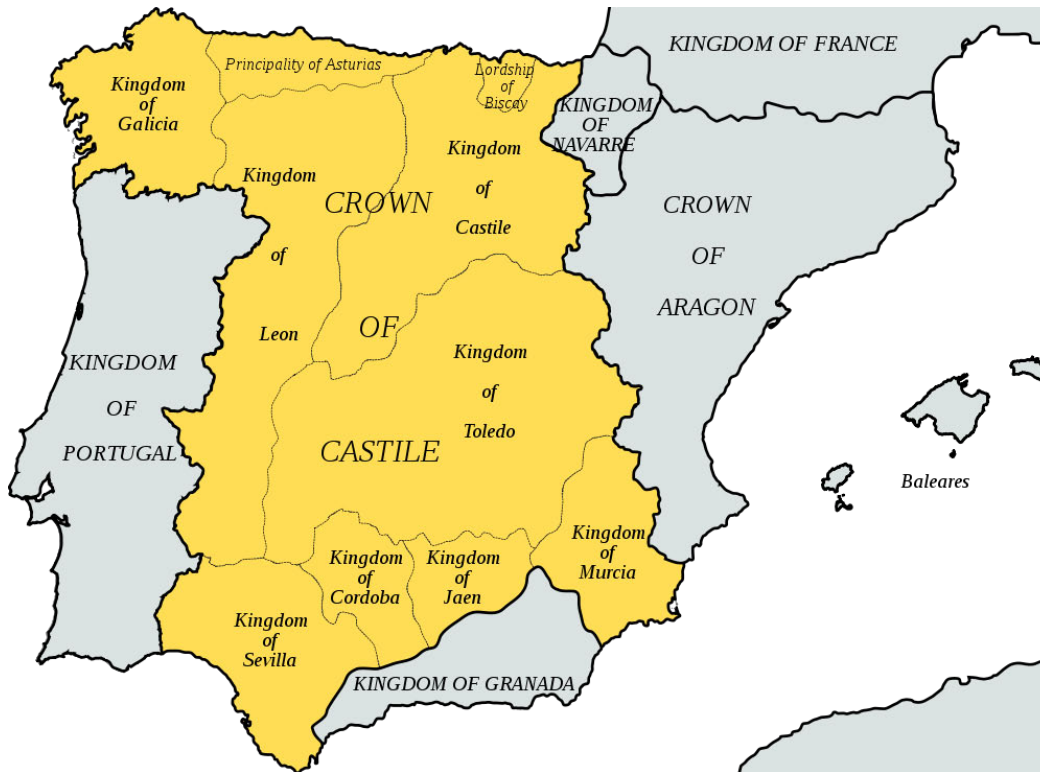
Internal pressures coupled with unchecked violence led to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. Following the victory of his Nationalist forces, General Francisco Franco ruled a nation exhausted politically and economically. Spain's economy did not begin to recover until the late 1940's. In the early 1950's, the Spanish nation opened up a new model of economic progress by agreeing to establish U.S. military bases. Massive modernization and development were postponed until the 1960's.

## Language

The structure of modern Spanish and more than half its vocabulary derive from the Latin spoken during the Roman colonization of the peninsula. Words from Arabic; other European languages, notably French and Italian; and from the Indian languages of colonial settlements further enrich the vocabulary.

In a broad sense, the term "Spanish" is taken to mean three of the four languages native to Spain--Castilian, Catalan and Galician--and their dialects. In a restricted sense, it is synonymous with Castilian, the official idiom used by government offices, courts, most schools and the media. Approximately 70 percent of the total population of Spain now claim Castilian as their mother tongue.





Castile around the year 1400

Image: Tyk and Gabagool  
Date: 26 July 2010  
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With slight modifications in usage, Spanish (Castilian) serves as the official, primary or secondary language of 250 million people in Spain; most of the Antilles; parts of Africa and North America; Mexico; Central America; South America with the exception of Brazil and the Guyanas; and, to some extent, in the Philippines among the upper classes. This important romance language, ranking third in number of speakers worldwide, also serves as one of the five official languages of the United Nations.

Dialects of Castilian include Aragonese, rich in proverbs and songs; Leonese, widely variable from village to village; and Andalusian, source of many slang words incorporated into national speech.

Catalan, native to Catalonia, Valencia and the Balearic Islands, is more akin to Provençal, the language of southwestern France, than to Castilian. Although possessing a strong literary tradition, this supple language is preserved largely through the personal communication of six million speakers. Valencian and Balear are its principal dialects.

## Food

Melodious Galician, with four dialects corresponding to Galicia's four provinces, resembles Portuguese. Used by about two million people in rural areas and primarily within the family, it is not being formally passed on to the next generation.



Fishing Boats, Laxe, Galicia

Photo: Jim Anzalone  
Date: 5 Mar 2009  
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The fourth language of Spain, bearing no similarity to any European tongue but believed to be related to the speech of the Berbers of North Africa, is Basque, presently spoken by some 200,000 people on both sides of the Pyrenees. Thousands of years of isolation have produced eight dialects, 25 subdialects and a primarily folkloric literature.

## Food

The kitchens of Spain produce a pungent and imaginative fare. Substantial and plentifully served, the food is usually not highly seasoned. Olive oil, the basis of Spanish cuisine, imparts a subtle flavor to most ingredients.

A number of dishes, both national and regional, are to be recommended. Variations on rice-based paella, flavored with saffron and

pimentos, are found all over the country. Valencia is known for the tastiest version made with pork, chicken or seafood.

Squid (calamares), at their best in the Basque country and Catalonia, are also eaten in other regions. Cuttlefish are frequently prepared in a dark sauce of their own ink or cut up and fried crisp.

Gazpacho is an uncooked soup of Andalusian origin. Oil and vinegar are combined with finely strained tomatoes, garlic, cucumber, green peppers and onion. Garnished with croutons, the chilled blend makes a refreshing repast on hot days.

Spanish cooks prepare legumes in a variety of ways. Madrid's special stew (cocido), made with chick peas and beef, chicken or bacon, is a meal in itself when eaten with bread and a glass of wine. Asturians favor a simple cassoulet of white beans with salt pork and sausage (fabada) and Basques choose a peppery sausage (chorizo) stewed with red or white beans.



A Manchegan meal (migas)

Photo: Juan Fernández  
Date: 27 Sep 2008  
cc-by-sa-2.0





Mesón de Cándido, en Segovia (Castilla y León, España)

Photo: Zarateman  
Date: 23 Aug 2009  
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The meals of the Basque nation are likely to include several hearty courses. Salt codfish cooked with fresh tomatoes (bacalao a la Vizcaína) is known in other areas of Spain, as is fish soup (sopa de pescada), a traditional favorite of fishermen.

Although enjoyed at most meals, desserts are not varied. Common after-dinner treats are custard (flan) and ice cream (helado). This culinary lapse is more than compensated for by many varieties of fresh fruit: oranges, melons, grapes, dates and peaches. A serving of any of these with a piece of regional cheese, a good mild one being Manchego, marks an indulgent end to any meal.

Coffee may be ordered black (solo), with a dash of milk (cortado), or white (con leche). A large cup is a doble.

## Meals and Between

Spaniards generally eat later than other nationalities. Spaniards in the South of Spain eat even later than those in the North.

In hotels patronized by tourists, it is now possible to order breakfast, usually of the simple continental variety, as early as 8 a.m. (and as late as 11). Most often, lunch, the main meal of the day, is taken between 1 and 4. Restaurants begin serving dinner at 8:30 or 9 p.m. and stop at midnight.

Many cafes offer tempting snacks (tapas) for those who find it hard to hold out until scheduled meal times. Seafood is the most common, but sandwiches and several varieties of sausage can be purchased as well. With all of these, Spaniards drink wine or beer.

## Beverages

### Wine

Wines as varied as the topography and climate of the country enhance the midday and evening meals of most Spaniards. Nowhere else in the world is wine so available, so strong and still so inexpensive.

The majority of wines are regional and are found only in the area of their production. Others of a higher quality are sold throughout Spain, and some, on a par with France's finest, are in demand all over the world.

Many millions of acres are under grapes, with La Mancha being the largest area of cultivation. The region's astringent, light-colored valdapeñas is an extremely popular table wine.

Premier wines (reservas), mostly reds, come from the Rioja district north of Madrid. Here grapes of superior vintage are mellowed in wood for at least two years.

Others among the better known are the golden chacoli of the Basque country, often hard to find because of limited production, and the heavy toro of Zamora, with an alcoholic content of 18 percent. Galicia's tart purple ribeiro, low in alcohol, contains enough natural carbonation to classify as a crackling wine. Málaga

and moscatel, savory after dinner, are produced from sweet grapes grown in Andalusia.

Locally produced wine (vino corriente) is sold inexpensively in wine stores (bodegas), straight from the barrel. The house wine of restaurants (vino de la casa), served from a pitcher, is usually of reliable quality and costs less than its bottled equivalent.

### Sherry

Sherry is made only from vines grown in the chalky soil of the province of Cadiz, chiefly around the town of Jerez de la Frontera. So-called sherries from other countries are imitations.



Brandy de Jerez (Sherry) tasting session in University of Cadiz

Photo: El Pantera  
Date: 26 Nov 2009  
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Matured by the solera system, drawing wine from a barrel for sale and replacing it with younger wine, ensures a quality so consistent that there are no vintage years.

The three main types are finos (dry), amontillados (medium), and olorosos (sweet). Finos and amontillados are generally aperitif wines; olorosos are taken after dinner or with dessert.



### Brandies and Liqueurs

Both domestic firms and companies under license from distilleries in other countries produce brandies (coñac) and liqueurs (licores) in huge quantities.

Brandy, a favorite drink of older Spaniards, is quite sweet. Well-known brands are Fundador, Domecq and Soberano, which is the driest of the three. Esteemed Lepanto and Carlos Primero cost considerably more.



A bar and restaurant in Granada

Photo: Mirko Tobias Schaefer  
Date: 18 May 2009  
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Favorite liqueurs include Anis, served with ice; Calisay, useful as a digestive aide; and Palo, a very sweet Majorcan drink made from figs.

### Beer

Spain's superior water produces excellent, German-type brews. Certain brands (such as San Miguel and Aguila) can be ordered all over the country. Others (Málaga's Vitoria, Seville's Cruz Campo, Granada's Alhambra), only in the locales where they are produced. Taverns called cervceriás specialize in serving all three types--light, medium and dark--ice cold.

### Other Drinks

Sangría is the summer beverage favored by Madrileños. This cooling mixture is prepared with wine, water and slices of orange or lemon sweetened with sugar or liqueur.

Asturians press two grades of cider (sidra) from apples in the orchards of the North. Local cider bars (cedrerías), serve the rough and inexpensive still form by aerating it into glasses from an overhead bottle. Sidra champagne, a more refined, sparkling version, is bottled and sold in restaurants, bars and wine shops throughout the country.

Horchata is an immensely popular nonalcoholic drink. Outdoor cafes called horchaterías specialize in serving this milklike libation made with ground earth almonds (chufas) or real almonds.

Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola and Fanta are widely available in bottles or in cans. Tri-Narajus, in lemon and orange flavors, is a refreshing noncarbonated drink.

Nowadays water in Spain, at least in the larger towns, is perfectly wholesome. Nevertheless, most Spaniards appreciate the tang and freshness of mineral water (agua mineral), which is available with carbonation (con gas) or without (sin gas).

### Bullfighting

Spain has more than 350 bullrings (plazas de toros), most located in small towns and used only once or twice a year during fiestas. Bullfights (corridas) are staged in the rings of larger towns and cities every Sunday afternoon from March through November.

The best view of the fight, which starts in the afternoon punctually at the time announced, is from the tendidos, a section about halfway back. Seats on the sunny side of the ring sell for less than those in the shade.

The spectacle lasts about an hour and a half, or until three toreros each kill two bulls. The first part belongs to the picadores astride their padded horses. After the horesmen have provoked the bull to charge by goading him with

lances, the banderillos further weaken the animal by implanting wooden sticks tipped with steel points in his flesh.

Last comes the matador, dressed in a glittering suit of lights (traje de luces), to dispatch his specially bred opponent. After playing the beast with a red cape (muleta), the matador plunges his short sword (estoque) into the neck. The first thrust, the "moment of truth," should kill.



Bullfight in Barcelona, Spain

Photo: Detroit Publishing Co., under license from Photoglob Zürich  
 Restoration: trialsanderrors  
 Date: 1890-1900  
 Public Domain

The ancient rite of bullfighting is not a sport, nor even a physical contest between matador and bull. The test is how far a man will go to prove his courage is superior to an animal's. Spectators are cautioned not to shout encouragement to the bull.

## Sports

Spaniards are passionately interested in sports, both those common to the rest of Europe and those particularly Spanish.



Hunting and fishing in Spain, better provided with game than any other country in Western Europe, are popular pastimes. Of the big game, deer is the most plentiful. Smaller game, especially red partridge, is often shot by the hundreds in organized drives.



The Quail Shoot - Oil on canvas, 290 x 226 cm Museo del Prado, Madrid  
Francisco de Goya - 1775  
Public Domain

Salmon is found in many streams in the North, and trout in abundance swim the upper reaches of almost every river. Underwater fishing, permitted on all coasts, is most rewarding in the Balearic Islands. Regulations governing this sport are strict. Information on the licenses required for all the activities mentioned can be obtained from any Spanish National Tourist Office.

Several internationally successful players have given an impetus to the already popular game of golf. The country's 80 courses, most located in places of outstanding beauty, welcome visitors. Carts and clubs are available for rental.

Anyone with energy and an appreciation of nature has a choice of gentle or steeper gradients. Seven hundred fifty Spanish clubs, many owning mountain refuges, are devoted to hiking. All of these organizations with memberships open to climbers of any nationality, are

grouped under the Federación Española de Montañismo, an affiliate of the American Alpine Club.

Every year more and more enthusiasts frequent the peninsula's four main ski areas--the Spanish Pyrenees, the Cordillera Cantabrica, the mountains around Madrid and the southern Sierra Nevada. Winter resorts offer all the amenities, usually at modest prices.

Soccer, called fútbol, is avidly enjoyed, both as a recreational activity and as a spectator sport. During the season fans pack Spain's modern stadiums--Madrid's being one of the largest in the world--to watch the skillful plays of the Real Madrid and other teams.



Photo: Adrià garcía  
Date: 30 Oct 2005  
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A soccer stadium in Barcelona. (Camp Nou)

The strenuous Basque game of pelota, or jai alai, is enacted on a cement court called a frontón. The players, two on each side, wear foot-long baskets as extended gloves in which to catch the hard balls and hurl them back against a wall. A wire net protects spectators from the hundred-mile-an-hour impact of misfired balls.

Although not as popular in Spain as in America, horse racing does boast several good tracks. Jumping trials and exhibitions, in which officers in crack cavalry regiments take part, enjoy a larger attendance. Greyhound

racing, a traditional Madrid pastime, attracts many followers, as does the Formula One Grand Prix held at the Jarama track just outside the capital.

Every day Spaniards buy tickets for the national lottery from street vendors. Winners of the Christmas lottery, El Gordo, share in a 550-million-peseta pot to become instant millionaires.

## Festivals

A fiesta is a holiday, in Spain a unique blending of the festive and religious. The calendar shows some 1,500 observed annually in different parts of the country. Each province commemorates its own religious holidays, and most towns and villages hold at least one annual fiesta on the feast day of their patron saint.

Fourteen major festivals offering insight into the Spanish temperament are observed nationwide. On these days, bars and restaurants remain open; shops, offices and banks are closed.



Festival of Moors and Christians, Alicante

Photo: Josemanuel  
cc-by-sa-3.0



- New Year's Day. January 1. The streets are filled with noise and activity on New Year's Eve. The following day, families enjoy a traditional meal at home.

- Epiphany. January 6. This, more than Christmas, is the day on which the Three Kings distribute their gifts to children.

- Saint Joseph's Day. March 19. Processions and bullfights take place during the day. At night costumed celebrants burn fantastic figures. The fallas of Valencia is the most spectacular expression of this holiday.

- Holy Thursday, Good Friday. Variable dates. Holy Week is noted for elaborate processions, especially those in Seville, Valladolid and Burgos, in which penitents bear religious statues through the streets.

- Corpus Christi Day. Variable date. Magnificent processions pass over carpets of flowers laid in the streets. Granada, Barcelona and Toledo pay homage to the Eucharist with particular fervor.

- Labor Day. May 1. Officials recognize contributions made by working people.

- Saint John's Day. June 24. Moors symbolizing bad luck perform burlesques in which they are put to death. The most dramatic presentations are enacted in the villages of the province of Alicante.

- Saint James' Day. July 25. Pilgrims journey to the tomb of Spain's patron saint in Santiago de Compostela.

- Assumption Day. August 15. This ancient festival honors the Virgin Mary with mystery plays and sporting events.

- Columbus Day. October 12. Parades commemorate the discovery of the New World.

- All Saints' Day. November 1. A somber occasion on which tombs are decorated with flowers and candles lit for the dead.

- Immaculate Conception Day. December 8. Men and boys go from house to house singing and ringing bells. Women and girls parade in their new winter finery.

## Sightseeing

- Christmas Day. December 25. On Christmas Eve almost everyone attends midnight mass. Families gather together on Christmas Day to enjoy seasonal foods.

## Sightseeing

For the most part, Spain's many attractions are free or cost very little. Madrid, situated almost squarely in the center of the country, is a good starting point to enjoy the multitude of historic sites, natural landscapes and quiet villages found in every region.

The Puerta del Sol, Madrid's major cross-roads, is named for an early town gate that has since disappeared. Traffic flows along ten intersecting streets, six of which lead into roads that extend to the country's frontiers.

Not far away, royalty once staged bullfights and ceremonial events in the Plaza Mayor. Today pleasant arcaded shops and cafes fill its vast expanse.

To view the art of the Prado Museum, an old and comprehensive picture gallery, takes weeks. Sought-out collections include those of the Spanish painters, especially Velasquez and Goya. Masters from other countries are also represented.



Velasquez' "Las Hilanderas," El Prado. (1657)

Public Domain

Two more landmarks worth visiting are the Plaza de Espana with its Cervantes Monument depicting Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, and the 1800-room Royal Palace, now used by King Don Carlos on state occasions.

A few miles northwest of Madrid lies the austere Royal Monastery of El Escorial, granite burial place of kings and queens of Spain. Nearby the former chief-of-state Generalissimo Francisco Franco is interred at the Valley of the Fallen Monument, dedicated to the victims of the Spanish Civil War.



The walls of Avila at night

Photo: Jorge González González  
cc-by-sa-2.5

Avila's single most memorable sight is its medieval walls incorporating eighty-eight towers and several gates. Depending on the time of day, these perfectly preserved fortifications change from golden grey to deep purple.

The Roman aqueduct of Segovia, constructed eighteen hundred years ago of granite blocks without mortar, still transports water to the town from nearby mountain springs.

Twin filigreed towers dominate the ornately ornamented facade of the Gothic cathedral of Burgos. In the interior Ruy Diaz, the chivalrous mercenary immortalized in The Poem of El Cid, and his wife Ximena lie interred beneath the dome.



## Sightseeing

Two cities front the Bay of Biscay: Santander, site of an international music festival, and Guernica, famous for its destruction in the Civil War.

A highlight of Barcelona is the Gothic Quarter, a warren of narrow streets and old churches. Kings of Aragon once ruled from a palace on the site of the Plaza del Rey.

Nineteenth-century architect Antonio Gaudí and his followers designed many fantastic buildings in the neo-Catalan style. Construction on the complex Church of the Sacred Family, begun in 1882, is still underway.

Book stalls and well-known landmarks line the Ramblas, a succession of colorful avenues running from the waterfront to Barcelona's center. While pedestrians stroll down the tree-shaded middle section, traffic roars by on either side.



Ramblas in Barcelona

Photo: Stefano Mortellaro  
Date: 11 Nov 2004  
cc-by-2.0

The Museum of Modern Art offers an overview of Catalan painting and sculpture, including works by Dalí and Miró. The sole purpose of the Pablo Picasso Museum is the promulgation of the art of the versatile Malagueño.



Cala Bassa beach, Ibiza, Balearics

Photo: Eduardo Pitt  
Date: 11 Jul 2006  
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Ninety miles off the coast of Catalonia lie the four Balearics, each island different from the others. Mallorca, Minorca, Ibiza and Formentera have in common white-sand beaches and blue Mediterranean seas.

Fertile orange groves and rice paddies of La Huerta encircle modern Valencia; hotels and restaurants lend life to the Plaza de Caudillo at the city's center. Pottery from many places and eras, with emphasis on work from Valencia and environs, is on display in the National Museum of Ceramics.

Beyond Valencia appear the lime-washed houses of the southern Mediterranean coast. Guaranteed year-round sunshine attracts more vacationers to the Costa del Sol than to any other area in Spain. International socialites and movie stars find repose in chic Marbella.



## Sightseeing

The character of old Spain is retained in the side streets and cobbled plazas of Málaga. Ancient fortifications on the elevated Gibralfaro offer a magnificent view, on some days as far down the coast as Gibraltar.

The Alhambra of Granada, palace of sultans and **their harems**, displays the honeycombed wood and stucco decorations of Moorish artisans. Gypsies still perform flamenco dances in mansionlike caves situated high on the hill of the Sacromonte.



Gypsy caves in Granada

Isidoro Marín Gares (Granada, 1863-1926)  
Public Domain

Two monuments of Seville are only steps apart: an art-filled cathedral commissioned with the gold of the New World, and the Giralda, a minaret topped with a Christian bell chamber.

Narrow streets and flower bedecked patios retain Córdoba's Moorish air. Not far from La Mezquita Cathedral, once the principal mosque in the western world, winding lanes intertwine with plazas and squares to form the maze of the old Jewish Quarter.

Gothic and Moorish walls ring Toledo's innumerable treasures of art and architecture. The Alcázar, reconstructed after its destruction in the Civil War, displays many grim reminders of the seige waged between Republican and Nationalist armies.





Toledo's walls

Photo: Daderot  
Date: 19 Jun 2009  
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Among the priceless religious objects stored in the cathedral of Toledo, both a Gothic church and a museum, is a vessel fashioned from 500 pounds of gold. Every day, as for hundreds of years, Mozarabic families attend a mass celebrated in the Visigothic manner.

## SHOPPING

### Best Buys

Rivaled but not surpassed by Barcelona, Madrid offers the finest workmanship and best values in Spain. Although no longer extremely inexpensive, top-quality goods still cost less than equivalent items in most other countries.

Among the best buys are art and antiques. Dozens of galleries feature the output, especially paintings and graphics, of a highly professional art scene. Many antique shops specialize in a specific commodity such as glassware or ivory.

Spanish couturiers are recognized for fashionable designs sewn in suede and antelope. Also in demand internationally are high-quality

Shopping

leather goods including gloves, handbags and shoes.



Toledo's damascene.

Photo: Daderot  
Date: 19 Jun 2009  
Public Domain

Toledo is the center for damascened ware-- black steel inlaid with gold, silver and copper threads. Smaller items such as bracelets and pendants make good gifts to take home. Other expert jewelers create distinctive pieces from Majorcan pearls, the finest artificial pearls in the world.



Even though Spain is now the fifth most industrialized nation in Europe, popular handi-crafts are still obtainable. Many stores stock classic Talavera and Muel ceramics, which can also be purchased in the towns of the same names. Valencia produces handcrafted wooden furniture in a variety of modes, and Alicante exports its exquisite handmade toys all over the world.



A shop across the street from the side of the Cathedral in Toledo.

Photo: Nic McPhee  
Date: 31 May 2008  
cc-by-sa-2.0

Shops and boutiques, initially open from 8:30 to 1:30, reopen after lunch and do business until 8 or 9. They are usually closed on Sundays and holidays.

#### **Department Stores**

Department stores offer the convenience of one-stop shopping along with a wide range of reliable goods.



## Shopping

Two chains, Galerías Preciados and El Corte Inglés, each with several stores in Madrid and outlets in other major cities, often sell at prices lower than owner-operated shops. Celso García is the most exclusive of Madrid's department stores.



El Corte Inglés in Vigo

Photo: Dantadd  
Date: 28 Feb 2007  
cc-by-2.5

Unlike some of the smaller shops, department stores maintain regular business hours and sell at fixed prices. Interpreters are generally on hand to aid non-Spanish speakers.

### **The Rastro**

El Rastro, Madrid's flea market, is a Sunday-morning must. Only after several visits is it possible to get the hang of this in-door, out-door emporium offering both the practical and improbable for sale and resale. Although antique dealers and other knowledgeable professionals frequent this institution, less experienced buyers can also pick up bargains from the constant flow of goods.

Buying aside, the fun lies in mingling with the holiday crowd. Vendors start clearing their stalls and locking up early, around 2 p.m.

## Transportation

### Trains

Spain's transportation system, both public and private, operates on a level of comfort and efficiency comparable to those found in other European countries.

Most routes of the national Spanish State Railways (RENFE) radiate from Madrid. The sole exception is the line running from the French frontier through Barcelona to Alicante.

Rail fares are determined not only by the distance traveled, but also by the kind of train traveled on. Three kinds of express trains--diesel TALGOs and TERS and electric ELTs--charge a supplement per kilometer in addition to the regular fare. TALGOs link Madrid with other large cities. ELTs and TERS, which serve smaller cities as well, are slower and make more stops. All three offer first- and second-class seating and sleeping accommodations.



A low-gravity TALGO

Photo: Falk2  
Date: Jun 1993  
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RENFE sells reduced price tickets for extended travel to be completed within a certain period of time. Special Blue Day discounts in effect 306 days a year lower selected fares 25 to 50 percent. Reservations, which can be made 60 days in advance, are usually obligatory.

Most trains are equipped with snack bars or dining cars. By and large, railway personnel speak only Spanish.

### **Buses**

An extensive bus network, less expensive than railways, serves many places not accessible by train. Cities and larger towns usually have depots used by all bus companies. In hamlets without central depots, buses belonging to any of several companies may leave from different locations. Advance reservations are not required.

### **Planes**

Iberia Airlines, offering both international and domestic service, connects Madrid with all the major Spanish cities. This airline, which operates an hourly shuttle between Madrid and Barcelona, also schedules frequent flights to and within the Balearics. Aviaco, a small internal company, duplicates and compliments many of Iberia's routes.

### **Telephone Service**

Spaniards who have telephones in their homes, and not all of them do, pay a charge for each call in addition to a monthly rate.

Both local and long-distance calls can be made from phone booths found in almost every street, restaurant and hotel. To call locally, place a five-peseta piece in the slot and dial the number. The money will not drop into the box until the person being called answers. If there is no answer, hang up and retrieve the coin.

Instructions for placing long-distance calls are posted in several languages, including English, on public telephones.

Connections between Spain and the United States are usually clear.



## Currency

The basic monetary unit of Spain is the peseta (pta[s]). Bills circulate in denominations of 100, 500, 1000 and 5000 pesetas. Coins are minted in amounts of 1 peseta, 5 pesetas (called a duro), 25, 50 and 100 pesetas.

The Euro entered circulation on Jan 1 2002



Spanish currency

Author: Robert Kalina  
Permission: See: ECB/2003/4 and ECB/2003/5  
of 20 March 2003

Always check the exchange rate before making a conversion. Banks, which furnish current figures on currency fluctuations, offer the most advantageous trade. In cities exchange offices (cambios) are open long hours but deal on unfavorable terms. Hotels usually pay less than banks but more than cambios.

Most businesses accept traveler's checks and credit cards. Oil company credit cards, a notable exception, are not negotiable in Spain.

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