

# SPAIN



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**"Try not to turn your life into a race, least of all an obstacle race," José Bergamín (1895–1983), Spanish writer. *La cabeza a pájaros (Head in the Clouds)*, p. 77, Madrid, Cruz y Raya (1934).**

Few countries can boast a business culture as rich and old as Spain's. It is an environment that has bred a certain kind of aristocratic business executive whose commitment to being honourable is as important as being successful.

## **Overview**

The Kingdom of Spain is a land of crossroads. It is a bridge between Africa and Europe, the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea; making it a land of cultural richness and diversity. In addition to its cultural diversity, the land itself is quite diverse.

Within the last decade or so, **Madrid**, the capital of Spain, has grown by leaps and bounds. The population is now around four million and the city spreads over an area of 607 square kilometres (234 square miles).

This modern and cosmopolitan city has many faces. Characterized today by tall, modern buildings and wide, traffic filled boulevards, the city still retains some of its history in the old buildings and narrow streets in its center. It has magnificent museums dedicated to arts and sciences, including many other areas. Madrid is also the country's largest urban center and the hub of commerce, finance and transportation.

The Province of Catalonia, with **Barcelona** as its capital, stretches between the Pyrenees, the French border and the Mediterranean Sea to the south of Tarragona. It is, in itself, made up of four provinces. Barcelona is located in the heart of Catalonia and has become a vital center for commerce.

The region has always been considered a great commercial center concentrating on textiles, steel, construction, chemicals, paper and other high-tech industries. It is also famous for its artistic heritage, Mediterranean cuisine and its production of *cava*, Spanish sparkling wine.

The Spanish government today has shown a strong commitment to social and economic industrialization. The encouragement of foreign investment from the government has greatly improved the lives of many Spaniards. Spain is a member of the European Union and boasts a stable economy. Modern Spain has been able to synthesize its vast heritage into a vibrant society which can offer the best of everything, old and new. Spain uses the Euro(€) as its official currency.

## **History**

After 36 years of Generalissimo Francisco Franco's dictatorial rule, Spain has transformed itself into a thriving capitalist country. Until his death in 1975, Franco had implemented harsh censorship laws regarding the press and political expression, stifling the growth of Spain and its residents. In essence, Franco cut off his country from the international marketplace, did little to alleviate the extreme division between the poor and the rich, and nearly stagnated the economy of Spain. His rule left an indelible mark on Spain and its constituents, which has been diminished with a booming business arena, but can still be seen in many aspects of the Spanish culture.

## **Climate**

Overall, spring, early summer and autumn host ideal weather conditions in Spain, though the weather varies enormously from region to region. The high central plains suffer from fierce extremes, stiflingly hot in summer, bitterly cold and swept by freezing winds in winter. The Atlantic coast, in contrast, has a tendency to damp and mist, and a relatively brief, humid summer. The Mediterranean south is warm virtually all year round, and in parts of Andalucía positively subtropical. Occasionally during the summer, the interior of Spain can experience annual "Sahara rains," which covers everything with a pinkish hue.

In high summer the other factor worth considering is tourism itself. Spain plays host to some thirty million tourists a year, almost one for every resident. All of the beach and mountain resorts are packed in July and August, as are the major sights.

Madrid has a dry, climate with some extremes during the summer months. Barcelona has a temperate climate, with hot and humid summers and somewhat rainier, but mild winters with temperatures staying above the freezing point.

## **The Culture**

The Spanish are a cultured and hospitable people, proud of their culture and customs. You will find that people take great delight in showing you the best Spain has to offer and many Spaniards will expect foreign nationals to show an interest in learning something about Spain.

The family is of great importance to all Spaniards. Relatives often live in the same city, and frequently within walking distance, if not within the same house. The relationships within the family dynamic often provide social and economic support. Labor laws allow women with babies up to nine months old to leave work early every day and men are given paternity leave. Spaniards often delight in the knowledge that they are able to balance family, work and leisure to the degree that they are able, and often look down on those cultures that do not make accommodations for family duties.

Nationalism runs deep in Spain. However, most Spaniards identify first with one of their 17 autonomous regions and then with the country as a whole. Regional governments tend to encourage this by emphasizing their particular arts, language and traditions.

Traditionally, religion has played an important role in the lives of most Spaniards. Approximately 95 percent of the Spanish population is Roman Catholic, and the observance of holy days remains an important aspect of Spanish life.

One of the most popular phrases used in modern Spanish society is *mañana*, or literally translated, tomorrow. *Mañana* can be used to answer any question rather than imposing any discomfort or disappointment upon another individual. Therefore, instead of answering the question straightaway, someone will give you the answer of "mañana." Spaniards are also fond of using various forms of body language. You may learn more about an individual by watching their body movements than by listening to what they have to say.

### **Language**

Although, English is now the primary foreign language taught in schools, the average person in Spain does not speak English. Since expatriates should show signs of consideration and interest in their new land, one may want to learn to speak some Spanish prior to arriving in Spain. Even though English is now critical for professional advancement in Spain, any attempt to speak Spanish will generally be met with appreciation. However, many Spanish colleagues will also hope to practice their English when possible.

Younger generation Spaniards in large cities have a reasonable knowledge of English, but the official language of Spain is Castilian Spanish (known as *Castellano*). You may find that many people also speak French or Portuguese. You should not depend on the language skills of others to help you get around. Expatriates are bound to encounter language difficulties in their new locations, so being prepared can be a great help. If you know the region in which you will live, you should become familiar with local linguistic characteristics before your arrival.

The Catalan language has become increasingly important in the business arena. Spain's second largest city, Barcelona is located in the heart of Catalonia and has become a vital center for commerce.

### **Local Cuisine**

While most Spanish people sit down to enjoy their meals, Spain is one of the few countries that has made an institution out of the "snack," or *tapas*, and can be found at local tapas bars and restaurants throughout the city.

Other Spanish specialties include *gazpacho* (cold soup), *Empanada* (meat or tuna pie), *Paella* (rice with either seafood or meat and vegetables) and *Fideua* (noodles and seafood). For dessert you may find *Crema Catalana* (rich custard made many eggs) or *Churros* (deep fried twists of bread dough, often eaten with thick hot chocolate).

The Spanish, like many Europeans, take dining seriously; it is a social engagement as well as a means of nourishment and pleasure. Wine is also considered an essential part of Mediterranean dining.

## **Business Customs & Etiquette**

Conducting business in a foreign language can put you at a disadvantage, but if you translate your presentation materials into Spanish, your Spanish colleagues will be impressed and appreciative. There are many international companies represented in Spain, therefore, most businesses are accustomed to dealing with foreigners to some extent. Rather than conducting business in the traditional meeting format, Spaniards prefer to extend their meetings over lunch in restaurants. Such business encounters are to be treated as important and a requirement.

Most foreign nationals will be appreciative of their Spaniard colleague's straightforwardness and complete interest in the matter at hand. A Spanish colleague might inadvertently forget about a scheduled appointment. However, if the meeting is vital, your Spanish colleagues will generally be on time. Subordinates will usually not keep their superiors waiting as this is seen as a lack of respect.

Life in Spain is unhurried, loud and smoke-filled. It may take a few days to adapt, especially for North Americans or Northern Europeans, but it is by far the best policy to go with it and enjoy the leisurely pace.