



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Spain occupies most of the Iberian Peninsula in Europe. Covering 195,124 square miles (505,370 square kilometers), it is nearly as large as Nevada and Utah combined. Much of central Spain is a high plateau surrounded by low coastal plains. The famous Pyrenees Mountains are in the north. Other important mountain ranges include the Iberians, in the central part of the country, and the Sierra Nevada, in the south. The Ebro (564 miles, or 910 kilometers) is Spain's longest river.

The northern coasts enjoy a moderate climate with frequent rainfall year-round. The southern and eastern coasts have a more Mediterranean climate, with long, dry summers and mild winters. Central Spain's climate is characterized by long winters and hot summers. Spain's territory also includes the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands (a popular tourist retreat), as well as the cities of Ceuta and Melilla, both located on the northern coast of Morocco.

History

Civilization on the Iberian Peninsula dates to as far back as 2000 BC. Various peoples have migrated to the area over the centuries. Rome began to exercise its influence around 218 BC and controlled the entire peninsula by the time of Christ. In the centuries after the Roman Empire fell, the area now known as Spain was ruled first by the Visigoths, Germanic tribes who invaded in the fifth century, and then by the Muslim Moors, who invaded from North Africa in 711.

Christians fought the Muslim Empire for the next several centuries and gradually regained territory. Two Christian kingdoms, Castile and Aragón, emerged. The marriage of Isabella I (Queen of Castile) to Fernando II (King of Aragón) united the kingdoms in 1469. In 1492, Christopher Columbus sailed under the Spanish flag to the Americas. That same year, most Jews and Muslims were expelled from Spain, and the "reconquest" was completed.

During the 16th century, Spain was one of the largest and most powerful empires in the world. Its territories in the Americas were extensive and wealthy. One of Spain's most famous rulers was Philip II (1556–98), who fought many wars in the name of the Roman Catholic Church. Spain began to lose territory and influence in the 18th century, beginning with the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14) and continuing through the Napoleonic Wars, which ended in 1815. By 1850, Spain had lost most of its overseas possessions. It lost other territory to the United States in 1898.

Conflicts over Spain's governmental system led to battles during the 19th and 20th centuries. Spaniards were divided over the issue of whether the country should have a centralized government or one that recognized the country's strong regional differences. King Alfonso XIII gave up the throne in 1931 when the people called for a republic. However, in 1936 a brutal civil war erupted between the Nationalists (led by General Francisco Franco) and the Republicans. Franco's forces were victorious in 1939. Franco ruled as a dictator until his death in 1975. In 1969, Franco named Juan Carlos de Borbón y Borbón as his eventual successor. Juan Carlos became King Juan Carlos I when he instituted a democratic constitutional monarchy and a system

of autonomous regional governments.

The Spanish Socialist Workers Party, led by Felipe González, won elections in 1982. Spain joined the European Union (EU) in 1986. Around that time, there was hope that the Spanish government could reach an agreement with Basque separatists and drive the terrorist organization called ETA, or Basque Homeland and Freedom, out of business. But negotiations failed, and ETA expanded its hit lists to include not just Spanish security forces but also politicians and academics unsympathetic to the cause of Basque independence. As ETA was killing hundreds of civilians, evidence surfaced that the Spanish Ministry of Interior had illegally armed right-wing vigilante groups and that, in targeting ETA terrorists, the vigilantes had mistakenly killed some innocent civilians. The crisis brought down González's government in 1996. ETA called a cease-fire two years later, but it didn't last.

In March 2004, terrorists believed to be linked to al-Qaeda bombed Madrid train stations, killing nearly two hundred people. ETA declared a "permanent" cease-fire in March 2006 but exploded a bomb that killed two people the following December. It withdrew the cease-fire in June 2007, only to declare a new cease-fire in September 2010. Global recession in 2008 and 2009 has pushed Spain's unemployment rate to 18 percent, resulting in workers' strikes and public protests against budget cuts and increases to the retirement age.

THE PEOPLE

Population

The population of Spain is around 46.5 million, growing at 0.5 percent. The Spanish are a composite of Mediterranean and Nordic ancestry but are considered a homogeneous ethnic group. A small portion of the population is composed of immigrants from Latin America, other European countries, Africa, and Asia. More than 75 percent of the population lives in urban areas. Most Spaniards live near the coast. Low birthrates stem in part from high unemployment and steep housing costs, which make it impossible for most people to buy houses large enough for more than two children.

Language

Spain has four official languages. Castilian Spanish is the main language of business and government. The other official languages include Catalan (spoken by 17 percent of the population), Galician (7 percent), and Basque (2 percent). Catalan is spoken mostly in the northeast corner, down the coast to Valencia, and on the Balearic Islands; Galician is spoken in the northwest; and Basque is common in the Basque provinces in the north (near the border with France). Spanish is the language of instruction throughout the country, except in Catalonia, Galicia, and the Basque region. English is the most common foreign language, followed by French.

Religion

Spain is largely a Roman Catholic nation; 94 percent of the people are baptized members. Catholic traditions (baptisms,

weddings, funerals, and family ties) remain an integral part of society even though many people do not consider themselves religious. Personal devotion often varies by generation. Freedom of religion, granted in the 1970s, opened the way for Spaniards to join other churches. Six percent of the population is involved with other (mostly Christian) religious groups. Some Muslims and Jews also reside in Spain.

General Attitudes

Spaniards place a high value on what others think of them. Peer and family pressure strongly influence behavior. Personal pride and appearance—making a good impression and meeting social conventions and expectations—are extremely important. People seek to project an impression of affluence and social position. Regional identities and devotions are strong.

Personal honor is highly valued; keeping one's word and commitments is an expression of that honor. The Spanish are generally sociable and helpful. Many are quite talkative and uncomfortable with silence. They enjoy giving advice, considering it their duty to correct "errors" they see in others. However, Spaniards tend to interpret rules and punctuality in a relaxed way.

Personal Appearance

Style and quality of clothing are important indicators of a person's status and respectability. Men usually dress conservatively, avoiding flashy or bright colors. Women like to be stylish, and children are dressed as nicely as possible. Spaniards tend to dress up when going out in public. Colorful regional costumes are sometimes worn for festivities.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

Men usually greet each other with a handshake. Good friends often add a pat on the back and, if they have not seen each other for some time, an *abrazo* (hug). Women may greet other women by giving one kiss on each cheek. Such kisses are also very common between a man and a woman when a friend introduces them for the first time, if they haven't seen each other for some time, or if they are bidding farewell. When parting, women give each other a slight embrace and kiss on the cheek.

Typical greetings include *Buenos días* (Good day), *Buenas tardes* (Good afternoon), *Buenas noches* (Good evening), and the more casual *Hola* (Hi). Friends or young people may ask each other *¿Cómo estás?* (How are you?) rather than the more formal *¿Cómo está?*, which is used to show respect for older people. Other local greetings vary according to the language of the region. Spaniards may address professionals or older persons by family name and title, such as *Señor* (Mr.), *Señora* (Mrs.), and *Señorita* (Miss). The titles *Don* and *Doña* are used with the first name to show special respect. Close friends and young people call each other by first name.

Gestures

Social space is quite close. Spaniards stand close and

frequently touch one another on the arm while conversing. Eye contact is also important and often maintained longer than what would be comfortable in other cultures. One indicates “yes” by nodding the head up and down and “no” by moving it side to side. Spaniards often use exaggerated hand gestures and facial expressions to support what they are saying. They may also speak loudly, laugh, and smile a lot. Pointing at others is impolite. Showing emotion in public is acceptable for women but not for men. It is common for men to open doors for women.

Visiting

Spaniards enjoy visiting, often doing so for hours at a time. In some regions, socializing takes place exclusively outside the home. Where appropriate, home visits are arranged in advance, usually by telephone; arriving unannounced is impolite. It is understood that an invitation to visit someone's home, if offered at all, may be given only as a courtesy. Since such invitations are rarely literal, ignoring them is acceptable and sometimes even expected. One may accept if the host insists. However, openly declining an invitation is offensive. Guests are expected to stay at least one to two hours, often longer. It is polite for guests to bring a bottle of wine, flowers, or a special dessert (often cake or ice cream), particularly if they are invited to dinner or if someone is ill. Hosts usually serve coffee or refreshments. Light snacks (cheese, chips, olives, etc.) are common before the main meal. On formal occasions, hosts might give gifts to guests, who open them immediately in the hosts' presence.

Eating

People eat at least three meals a day: *el desayuno* (breakfast), *la comida* (lunch), and *la cena* (dinner). Lunch, the most substantial meal, is eaten at about 2 p.m., while dinner is usually at 9 or 10 p.m. Some Spaniards also enjoy a *merienda* (a small snack) between 5 and 6 p.m. The *merienda* usually consists of a *bocadillo* (sandwich) or sweet bread served with coffee or hot milk. Schedules make it hard for families to eat together, but many still try to gather for lunch on weekends.

Spaniards eat in the continental style, with the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right. The knife (or bread in less formal situations) is used to push food onto the fork. Accepting a second serving is one of the best ways to show appreciation to the cook. Upon finishing the meal, one places the knife and fork side by side on the plate; leaving them crossed or on opposite sides of the plate indicates one wishes to eat more.

During the meal, it is polite to keep one's hands (but not elbows) above the table. If a person enters a home or room when others are eating, he or she will be invited to join in eating. The invitation usually is extended out of courtesy, and the person generally refuses politely, saying *Que aproveche* (Enjoy your meal). It is considered bad manners for adults to eat while walking down the street.

In bars or restaurants, many people enjoy *tapas*, an informal way of eating where guests enjoy finger foods from shared dishes. One summons the server by raising a hand. The bill, which is paid to the server, usually includes a service charge, although it is also customary to leave a small tip

(5–10 percent of the bill). Tips are expected more often in the south than in the north; northern restaurants are somewhat less formal. Compliments or friendly remarks to waiters or other workers are generally appreciated.

LIFESTYLE

Family

The family is important in Spain. Divorce rates are relatively low but are increasing, particularly in urban areas and among young couples. The average family has two children. Both mother and father may take work leave after a child's birth. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins commonly maintain close relations with the nuclear family. Traditionally, the father was the head of the home, though this is changing. Generally the wife is responsible for caring for the house and children, although most women living in urban areas also work outside the home. About one-third of the labor force is female. Children, especially boys, are not expected to help with housework. They usually live with their parents until they finish schooling, get a job, or—in some cases—marry. In the past, men were expected to be strong and “masculine,” while women were expected to be understanding and “feminine.” Such attitudes still play a role in some rural societies, where men enjoy more social freedom than do women.

Housing

Housing in Spanish cities does not vary much, with most people living in brick or stone apartment buildings at least five or six storeys high. These buildings, which are usually bunched close together, often look out over public patios or swimming pools. Apartments tend to be quite small—no more than two or three bedrooms. The living room tends to be the home's focal point, the place where friends are entertained. In and around major cities, a number of houses, even mansions, can be found. Many of these have been in the same family for generations. In most areas of Spain, siblings legally have equal claims to land owned by the family. Rural dwellings vary widely from region to region, although there are two basic patterns. In Castilla-León, Aragón, and the south of Spain people tend to live in built-up neighborhoods and commute to the land they work on. In the north, along the Atlantic coast and in parts of Cataluña, people typically live in farmhouses and work close to home.

Dating and Marriage

Teenagers usually begin dating in groups around age 14 and as couples at age 18. In some areas, couples date only if they plan to marry; otherwise, group activities prevail. Rather than call on a girl at her home, a boy often meets a girl at a prearranged site. Couples normally are engaged for a long time while they work and save money to pay for an apartment. Usually, parents must approve a potential spouse. Most people marry in their late twenties or early thirties. Weddings are followed by a banquet and a dance. Presents of cash are often given to help compensate for expenses.

Life Cycle

After the birth of a child, fathers may celebrate by giving cigars to their friends. Spanish children have two surnames, the first is their father's and the second is their mother's. In many cases, Christian names come from ancestors or Catholic saints. Around half of all Spanish children, including those born to families who rarely attend church, are baptized in their first year. The baptismal ceremony and the meal that traditionally follows it often provide the opportunity for a big family reunion. At around eight or nine years old, many Spanish children take their First Communion. Adulthood, according to Spanish law, begins at 18.

When someone dies, burial usually occurs within two days. Family members and close friends traditionally wear black *luto* (mourning) clothes. Elderly people in rural areas may observe *luto* for the rest of their lives. On the anniversary of a death, it is not uncommon for Catholics to hold a religious ceremony to honor the deceased.

Diet

Spanish cuisine is typically Mediterranean. Fresh vegetables, meat, eggs, chicken, and fish are common foods. Like many other Europeans, Spaniards go grocery shopping every day. Most fried foods are cooked in olive oil. Meals often include two courses: rice or pulse (e.g., lentils, peas, beans), followed by fish or meat, served with potatoes, rice, or vegetables. Each region also has its own specialties, including seafood, ham and pork sausages, lamb stew, roasted meats, *gazpacho* (cold vegetable soup), *paella* (rice with fish, seafood, and/or meat), *arròs negre* (rice with calamari ink), and *cocido* (Castilian soup). Breakfast is generally a light meal of coffee or hot chocolate, bread and jam, or sometimes *churros* (a batter made of flour, salt, and water, deep-fried, and sprinkled with sugar). Lunch is a three-course meal including soup, salad, or vegetables for the first course, meat or fish for the main dish, and fresh fruit or yogurt for dessert. Soup and a *tortilla española* (omelette with potatoes and onions) are common for dinner. Fresh bread, purchased daily from the *panadería* (bread shop), is eaten with every meal. Adults enjoy coffee, wine, and mineral water, while children drink mineral water or soft drinks.

Recreation

Soccer (*fútbol*) is the most popular spectator sport in Spain. Fans often crowd homes and local bars to watch important matches. Bull fighting (*corrida de toros*) is usually considered more an art than a sport; it is popular in only some regions of Spain. Since only larger schools can support team sports, those interested in participating in sports (soccer, tennis, basketball, swimming, etc.) often join private clubs. Hunting, skiing, and fishing are favorite activities in some areas.

Going to movies or watching television is a popular pastime. People also enjoy taking walks, particularly along the seashore, in parks, or on main streets, often stopping to greet acquaintances. *Tertulias* (social clubs) meet regularly in cafés to discuss ideas, events, and politics. Men play dominoes, cards, or other games in bars. Bingo parlors and lotteries are also popular. Spaniards typically vacation for

three to four weeks in July or August. Those living in central Spain go to the beaches or mountains to escape the heat.

The Arts

Music and dance play an important role in the lives of Spaniards. Some common instruments in Spanish music include guitars, *castañuelas* (castanets), tambourines, and *gaitas* (bagpipes). Each region has its own folk dance, music, and dress. Probably originating with the Roma (Gypsies) in southern Spain, flamenco dance is world famous. Many Spaniards enjoy contemporary music and dance as well.

The Spanish appreciate the performing arts and are proud of their international achievements. World-famous opera tenors Plácido Domingo and José Carreras are Spaniards. The visual arts boast such world-renowned painters as Velázquez, Goya, Picasso, and Dalí. Spain is also rich in folktales and legends, one of which is the story of Don Juan. For hundreds of years, the story has been represented in poetry, plays, movies, and music. Women writers have been recognized more recently as making vital contributions to Spanish literature.

Holidays

National holidays include New Year's Day; the Day of the Three Kings (6 Jan.), when Christmas gifts are opened; Holy Week and Easter; Labor Day (1 May); National Day (12 Oct.); All Saints' Day (1 Nov.); Constitution Day (6 Dec.); Immaculate Conception (8 Dec.); and Christmas. Each city and region has its own special *fiesta* (festival), usually in honor of a patron saint. Most are held in the summer. People eagerly await these *fiestas*, planning them well in advance. Activities include processions, fireworks, bullfights, amusement attractions, dances, and the wearing of regional costumes.

SOCIETY

Government

Spain is a parliamentary monarchy. King Juan Carlos I is Spain's chief of state, but the prime minister (currently José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero) is head of government. Spain's bicameral legislature (*Las Cortes Generales*) consists of a 264-seat Senate and a 350-seat Congress of Deputies, the latter having the greater power. Elections are scheduled every four years but can be held earlier. The voting age is 18. The primary political parties are the Popular Party and the Spanish Socialist Workers Party. The judicial system in Spain is governed by the General Council of Judicial Power. The country's highest court is the Supreme Court of Justice. Another important court, the Constitutional Court, monitors compliance with the constitution. Spain is divided into 17 autonomous communities (regions). Each region has its own rights, elected officials, and justice system. The constitution recognizes the Catalan, Galician, and Basque nationalities as having distinct heritages.

Economy

Economic conditions have improved substantially since Spain

joined the EU in 1986. Government austerity measures adopted since 1996 enabled Spain to qualify for the European Monetary Union, which was launched in January 1999. Economic growth has brought down Spain's unemployment rate—which is still one of the highest in the EU—so that most families have a decent income. Efforts to lower unemployment and reduce the deficit are hampered by political opposition to changes in labor laws and pension plans. The economy as a whole slowed as a result of the 2008 global financial crisis.

Major industries in Spain include textiles and apparel, food, metals, chemicals, automobiles, and machine tools. Although industry is vital to the economy, the services sector now employs about two-thirds of the labor force. Tourism is increasingly important to economic development, especially in coastal regions. Tourists enjoy visiting Spain for its climate; it is a popular destination for many other Europeans. Agriculture employs less than one-tenth of the labor force. But the country is a world leader in the production of wine and olive oil. Farm and ranch products include grains, citrus fruits, wine grapes, vegetables, and animals. The country's natural resources include coal, iron ore, uranium, mercury, gypsum, zinc, copper, and potash. Trade and investment in Latin America are also expanding Spain's economy. In 2002, the nation's currency switched from the *peseta* to the euro (EUR).

Transportation and Communications

Efficient air and rail service are available throughout the country. Spain has several airlines. Trains connect most cities; a high-speed train (AVE, short for *alta velocidad*, or “high speed”) connects Madrid to Sevilla and Barcelona. Private bus companies serve rural areas. Buses are also common in large cities, but most Spaniards prefer to use private vehicles. Madrid, Barcelona, Bilbao, and Valencia have subway systems. The telecommunications system is modern. Half of the adult population uses mobile phones regularly. Dozens of radio and television stations serve the country.

Education

School is compulsory for students between the ages of six and sixteen, the legal age for starting work. In many areas, children begin school at age three. Many schools are operated by the Roman Catholic Church or by private organizations. Most students attend school until they are 18; some continue their education through vocational training while others prepare for a university education. Recent educational reforms expanded vocational training, improved the quality of teaching, and increased help for students with special needs. Vocational education is becoming more popular. More women than men are currently enrolled in Spain's universities.

Health

The Spanish enjoy a good system of medical care that is coordinated by the government; private doctors are also available. Spaniards generally enjoy good health, although increasing levels of smoking and drug and alcohol abuse in youth may affect life expectancy in the future. About 40

percent of Spaniards between the ages of 17 and 24 are smokers. Spain has one of Europe's highest rates of AIDS.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

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| POPULATION & AREA | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Population | 46,505,963 (rank=27) |
| Area, sq. mi. | 195,124 (rank=52) |
| Area, sq. km. | 505,370 |
| DEVELOPMENT DATA | |
| Human Dev. Index* rank | 20 of 182 countries |
| Gender inequality rank | 14 of 155 countries |
| Real GDP per capita | \$29,300 |
| Adult literacy rate | 99% (male); 97% (female) |
| Infant mortality rate | 3 per 1,000 births |
| Life expectancy | 78 (male); 84 (female) |

*UN Development Programme, Human Development Report 2010 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

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