



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

▶ EUROPE

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate. Spain occupies most of the Iberian Peninsula in Europe. Covering 194,897 square miles (504,782 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 has many natural resources, including coal, iron ore, uranium, mercury, gypsum, zinc, copper, and potash. About 32 percent of the land is forested. 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 B.C. Various peoples have migrated to the area over the centuries. Rome began to exercise its influence around 218 B.C. and controlled the entire peninsula by the time of Christ. In the centuries after the Roman Empire fell, Spain was first ruled 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 began to fight the Muslim Empire and finally defeated the Moorish king. The area gradually emerged into two Christian kingdoms: Castile and Aragón. 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.

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, including the Philippines and Cuba. It lost other territory to the United States in 1898.

Two 19th-century wars marked the beginning of conflicts over Spain's governmental system. Spaniards were divided over the issue of whether the country should have a centralized government or a decentralized one that recognized the country's strong regional differences. King Alfonso XIII abdicated his throne in 1931 when the people called for a republic. However, in 1936 a brutal civil war erupted between the Nationalists (led by 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, came to power after elections in 1982. Despite

Spain

numerous political and economic problems, González remained in office until 1996. Spain joined the European Union (EU) in 1986. Relations with Europe and the United States were stormy during the 1980s but improved in the 1990s. Spain also struggled with the Basque separatists' drive for independence in northern Spain. Violent terrorist attacks by the ETA (Basque Homeland and Freedom) escalated. About eight hundred people have been killed since 1968 as a result of the conflict. Allegations that the government had killed Basques during the 1980s sparked a political crisis in 1994. Already under pressure from many fronts, González lost a majority in parliament and was forced to call early elections; some of his ministers resigned or were arrested. González was defeated in the March 1996 elections.

The ETA called a voluntary cease-fire in September 1998 but ended the cease-fire in December 1999 and renewed its bombing attacks in 2000. No peaceful resolution has been made.

THE PEOPLE

Population. The population of Spain is around 40 million and is growing annually at 0.1 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 American nations, other European countries, Africa, and Asia. More than three-fourths 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 and the Basque region. English is the most common foreign language, followed by French.

Religion. Spain is largely a Roman Catholic nation; 99 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. One 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 individual 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 and increasingly expressed. Personal honor is highly valued: keeping one's word and commitments is an expression of that honor.

The Spanish are generally sociable and helpful people. Many are quite talkative and uncomfortable with silence. They enjoy giving advice, considering it their duty to correct

“errors” they see in others. However, rules and punctuality tend to be interpreted 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. People 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 *¿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.

People 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; a guest would never take back what is left over. 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 difficult for families to eat together, but many still try to gather for lunch, particularly 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, people always keep their 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 restaurants, many people enjoy *tapas*, a typically informal meal where guests take small bites 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. The father is traditionally the undisputed head of the home. Generally the wife is responsible for caring for the house and children, although many 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 marry, regardless of age, and they do not contribute financially for their keep. Men are expected to be strong and "masculine," while women are expected to be understanding and "feminine." These attitudes are changing in urban areas but still play a key role in rural societies, where men enjoy more social freedom than do women.

Dating and Marriage. The youth 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.

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. 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), *arros 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 is the most popular spectator sport. Fans often crowd homes and local bars to watch important matches. Bull fighting (*corrida de torros*), a popular attraction, is usually considered more an art than a sport. 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 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. People 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 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, dancing, and wearing regional costumes.

Commerce. Businesses are traditionally open six days a week from about 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and from 5 to 8 p.m. Banks are open from 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. From May to October, banks do

Spain

not open on Saturdays. The midday break traditionally allowed families to be together for the main meal and take a *siesta* (afternoon rest). However, this practice is disappearing, particularly in urban areas. Many businesses stay open all day or have a shorter meal break. Business is not conducted as usual during July and August because many people are away on vacation. Supermarkets and malls are gradually replacing many traditional markets and small family shops. Laws intended to protect small businesses prevent large stores from opening on Sundays.

SOCIETY

Government. Spain is a parliamentary monarchy. King Juan Carlos I is Spain's chief of state, but the prime minister (currently conservative José María Aznar) is head of government. Spain's bicameral legislature (*Las Cortes Generales*) consists of a 256-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 historic and cultural heritages.

Economy. Economic conditions have improved substantially since Spain joined the EU. Economic opportunities are now available to the majority of the population and most people earn a decent income. Government austerity measures adopted since 1996 enabled Spain to qualify for the European Monetary Union launched in January 1999. Economic growth has brought down Spain's unemployment rate, which is still one of the highest in the EU. Efforts to lower unemployment and reduce the deficit are hampered by political opposition to changes in labor laws and pension plans.

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 64 percent 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 about 8 percent of the labor force. Agricultural products include grains, citrus and other fruits, vegetables, and wine grapes. The country exports some food as well as live animals. Spain is a world leader in the production of wine and olive oil. Trade and investment in Latin America are also expanding Spain's economy. As of 2002, the currency is the euro.

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 and

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	21 of 173 countries
Adjusted for women	21 of 146 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$19,472
Adult literacy rate	99 percent (male); 97 (female)
Infant mortality rate	5 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	75 (male); 82 (female)

Sevilla. Private bus companies serve rural areas. Buses are also common in large cities, but most people 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. Middle- and higher-income families spend a good share of their income on private education. 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 since its job placement rates are higher than among university graduates. 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

Events and Trends.

- The Basques and Catalonians continue to demand greater autonomy. As the Spanish government refuses to negotiate, the Basques are threatening to call a referendum for national sovereignty. Catalonia wants only shared sovereignty with Spain.
- Prime Minister Aznar's Popular Party was reelected in March 2000, winning an absolute majority. The margin of victory means that the prime minister can govern without depending on the support of regional parties. The government's primary concerns are dealing with the troubled Basque region, fighting terrorism, and creating jobs.

Contact Information. Embassy of Spain, 2375 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20037; phone (202) 452-0100; web site www.spainemb.org. Tourist Office of Spain, 666 Fifth Avenue, 35th Floor, New York, NY 10103; phone (212) 265-8822; web site www.okspain.org.

CultureGrams™
People. The World. You.

Axiom Press, Inc.
333 South 520 West, Suite 360
London, Utah 84042 USA
1.800.528.6279; 801.932.6459
fax 801.847.0127
www.culturegrams.com

